

CONSTANT CONSTRUCTION

by

Ryan Meyer  
A Thesis  
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George Mason University, 2015

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## **ABSTRACT**

CONSTANT CONSTRUCTION

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George Mason University, 2015

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This thesis is concerned with the ongoing act of building. The poems in this thesis examine the ways in which we construct things like sound, meaning, poetry, cities, ideology, sense of place, sense of self, character, change, and stagnation.

Many of these poems also double as meditations on poetry, even when concerned more centrally with another kind of construction. These poems look at the ways in which we construct something constant, the way we construct inertia and inaction, and investigate the paradox therein. Many of the poems are interested in paradox, how we use language to create silence, how we follow guidelines to find freedom, and how we can feel alone in a city full of people, and how we can observe interiority externally.

## Flowers that Bloom in Bunches

*Some people go to priests; others to poetry; I to my friends, I to my own heart, I to seek among phrases and fragments something unbroken--I to whom there is not beauty enough in moon or tree; to whom the touch of one person with another is all, yet who cannot grasp even that, who am so imperfect, so weak, so unspeakably lonely. There I sat.*

-Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

From my doorstep, I must admit the yard does look nice, and, stuck in the gutter above me, the yellow-bellied sapsucker stutters in agreement. Things are looking up, we think, one of us stuck in a gutter, the other a rut. *But*—there's always a *but*—*I don't know*. I look down at the doormat—the coir worn to stubble, the subtle “m” and “e” at the end of the thing plucked from precision and pitched into absence—then up at the bunched flowers before me, the buds gently nudged in the direction of blooming. It seems maybe too easy this way: each patch of grass a nagging presence, a small tragedy pressed to the edge of alluring and bent out of shape. This, we think, is how things become unrecognizable, indistinct. And it's too easy to suggest that things need order—or: need more order—but then what are we doing here? (The stuttering sapsucker would love for me to let you know that these thoughts are my own, by the way, but the stuttering sapsucker isn't the one writing the poem.) So I look down at the doormat again, then up at the soft-spoken sapsucker's puckered song—the sum of its sounds. I can't see where the sounds are coming from exactly, but I know the sounds. And so I whisper to the suddenly hushed sapsucker, the half-full, sullen silence: it's a sad and lonely life, isn't it, friend? Suddenly, we seem, at the same time, to hear the other birds, the bunched drumming in the distance. The phone rings; or it doesn't. The writing in the sky is suddenly lovely; or it isn't. The point is: it doesn't matter. Because only one of us is lucky enough to leave when the sun begins to set; the other is left to suffer the stuck, drunk arbiter of the moon and stars all alone.

## **If You Listen Closely**

You wander aimlessly onto the back porch of a house  
you don't even recognize, in a town you *know* but don't know,  
lost in the lonely claustrophobia of the predawn recitation  
of late-night phone calls clicking wistfully in the distance.  
If you listen closely, you can hear a heart on the other line  
refuse to beat faster, even as your own heart begins to skitter  
and dance into quickness. And it isn't fair, is it? But you stop  
short of apostrophe, even though you know a confused gaze  
at the coastline practically begs for it. There's something there.  
When your father died, you built an open line of communication  
with what you called god, and, for the most part, it worked.  
Why is this any different? Why can't you call the coastline god  
and prod it with questions? Then again, I guess you know that won't work.  
Nothing in heaven functions as it ought. Something there.



## How We Find Out

This is how we find out what we're made of,  
stuffed to the gills with our fathers' fathers' philological  
footnotes and the simple fiction of  
us embalmed in the non-canonical  
works of nonfiction penned and pinned  
to subscription-only victims of chance.  
What, then, are we to make of what we've gotten wrong  
over the years? I'm probably overthinking things.  
But I'm honored to sit on this board and report out  
its inner workings in pressed and hurried press junkets  
and headlong speeches to empty crowds and closed circuits,  
but before we embark on a journey with no borders, we'd be smart  
to set boundaries, to chart familiar waters and anticipate the unknown  
with pitchforks and torches. We more or less have learned to get by without  
either, but you never know what you'll need in the trenches. For instance:  
Last year, it snowed in March. The year before: nothing. There's a lesson  
to be learned in not yearning, in settling, We expect nothing of the news,  
so when it arrives without gunfire and trumpets, we don't get upset.  
We smile at the company of men counting numbers, and we say, go on,  
don't stop now on our account; don't knuckle under in front of all these people.  
You have a job to do.

## **Smith Point**

I don't have much to say about the insistence of the tides. I'd rather let the birds do the talking, really. More often than not, I feel lost in this self-correcting hellscape. I'd rather accept collect calls from a person selling insurance than sit here and listen to the waves click as if photographed. Click. Click. [ ]

## The Mill Where Ghosts Are Made

Each spring, I visit the mill where ghosts are made.  
I first survey the grounds, not to inspect or investigate,  
but to frame what I claim to know about existence.  
As I make my way through the main room,  
an electroplated manor of cool machinery,  
I make sure to learn what I can about humanity  
in the absolute absence of it. I study the well-groomed  
walls, all eggshells and anguish, the full embodiment  
of blankness. I keep moving, though, stopping only  
to taste with forked tongue the tender flesh,  
to stroke the cotton guts that fill the quilted torsos.  
I inhabit the emptiness of the place, patch together  
small tragedies along a flat line once wrinkled with life.  
I want to find the place where the scraps are kept,  
where they pile up like beaten chess pieces  
in a cobwebbed corner. After a while, I examine the echoes:  
the most important—or, *essential*—employees  
toil loiteringly in a mess of heavy paperwork,  
while the *inessential* staff simply loiter. Time passes.  
I search the grounds for something sturdy, something  
constant, but there's no good way to manage it, really—  
my feelings about it. And so even when I stroll past  
the soaring gates to my car, parked illegally across  
the street, I feel nothing resembling knowledge, nothing of note,  
and the lock on my car door clicks like meaning.

## The Coast of Being Sick

Of all the days to fall victim to the city's  
insistence upon being sick and tired  
of rent and construction. *I swear it wants you to leave.*  
But I know leaving something certain only seems like an  
option from the outside. Or, maybe I've just been thinking  
too much lately of all the days I've tricked myself into traveling—  
often on lonely winter afternoons—down  
the coast of being sick, wholly infected  
with the notion that the sea could freeze over *any*  
*day now*, could soon become slick with life's  
great blanket of ice. I'd name it *insistence*,  
the great blanket of ice. I'd offer to take it  
home in the trunk of my car—or the backseat—to adopt it  
as my own. I'd pride myself on my ability to remain  
silent in its presence, to remain naked and faceless  
in the rearview mirror. Maybe I'll return to the sea  
at a later date to return it. Maybe I won't.

## **The Physics of the French Revolution**

I don't question the physics of fraternity as it transforms before me  
into a sick cataclysm of scurvy and rickets. The world  
outside is privy to what I've somehow ignored. The time  
for change is now being kept by a heart-shaped  
stopwatch; I listen to its mechanical kinks, the symphony  
of it beating its missive into me. But I'm not listening for direction.  
You see, I decided, at a rather young age,  
that any deficiency of calcium or love or character could be counterbalanced  
with an ounce of dust or delay. So when I walk casually  
into the pork store, through a door propped open  
with a twin pair of bricks or cinder, I don't approach  
the counter immediately. I don't wander the store in search  
of a thing. Rather, I flounder in the aisle farthest  
away from the door in hopes that I don't hear  
the sobering bell that welcomes the person who follows me in.  
I don't know what it means to be part of a guild, but I like the idea  
of building one, the simple construction of spirit  
like the echo of sickness in small tins.

## **Guidelines**

*for getting away with it*

We sift through the liberal guidelines  
governing trust, our bones full of fire.  
It would seem almost disrespectful *not*  
pilfering the shipwreck. So we tip-toe  
to the bow of the ship and empty its pockets.  
We find nothing of note, so we scurry  
to the stern of the ship and empty its pockets.  
We find nothing of note, so we hurry  
back to the beach and inspect the scraps.  
We pay special attention to the most pitiable  
of driftwood the shipwreck's given us.  
We wish to fill its brittle holes, inhabit  
its whittled brilliance, and live alongside  
the shipworms and gribbles. We can't waste  
time trying to decipher ash or elm, so we take  
what we can when no one's looking and scam.

## **How We Breathe**

We breathe in tortured clumps, deathly  
afraid of the always oncoming monsoons,  
stretched across the kettledrum of confusion.  
And listen, for a minute, to its music, the lush  
tunes of dramatic tension in the dénouement.  
It's almost time to wrap things up,  
but they don't tell you how to end  
a story when the story's not done.

## **Tired Hands**

So we sprint through the field, filled to the brim with the ill-gotten gains we've grossed in Oklahoma drills and omniscience. We kick rocks, kicked out of the guild with discretion. So we tiptoe through the dancehall, selfishly wet and weary from toe to wing, the sweetness of twisted

apples in our hands, as we pop paper pills and swap ocean for land. The seabirds call from empty perches in every direction as we breathe unchecked. We breathe life into the trenches to keep the beaches afloat, the seasons erect. The man

at the desk is drowning in drink. So we're swimming now. The ocean breeze is what we want to say. We want to talk about what it'd look like if snow covered the sea instead of the ocean spray. We want to thank the world for sunlight and spite

it for rain. Or is it the other way around? We realize there are knots, holdups. We seize what we can and recollect. Or reminisce. We're holding turns of copper wire corroded by saltwater. We're not sure what we're doing here. So we rescue what we can when no one's looking. We like

to pretend that no one can see the world from our end, that life is at its brightest under the sobering strobe lights with a slick sense of self. But under the pulsing thrust of crashing waves, we fall asleep all over again, leaving nothing but our wake.



## Placating Deities

We approach graves the same way, you and I.  
But death and what comes after is another story.  
And I've asked you to reconsider more times than you have,  
and more times than you've asked me to do the same. And I've asked you,  
too many times, to embrace the bad view of the city that's been yours  
for as long as you can remember.

The spray-painted angel on the dumpster  
made its debut the day you moved in. You said it must be  
a sign, but who paints signs on the sides of dumpsters? It must be  
a sign of the times then, a waning slump once thankless made something else,  
made something special. The angular wings, painted with some shade  
of pink we found familiar yet deeply ineffable, flapped when you drew  
the blinds back and forth. The halo shook like a door in a horror movie,  
a loosely-hinged impediment I often dreamt of removing in the middle  
of the night when an apartment across the alley inexplicably threw light toward the  
dumpster.

I wondered whether you saw it the way I did, or if you liked its presence  
in the oft-darkened alley. I once caught you fiddling with your keys  
in the early morning, shortly before dawn, staring out the window,  
seemingly deep in thought. I watched you practically whittle your middle finger  
to a stub with the clifflike ridges of your house key,  
lost in meditation. We were probably thinking the same thing,  
whatever it was. But because I never bothered to ask, and because  
I assumed I knew, I'll never know. I'll never know whether or not  
you saw the halo the way I did, whether or not you placated  
the drooping bouquets of broken deities prayed to from balconies  
and fire escapes in the name of finding something greater than,  
something worth wasting away in the moments before morning breaks  
into a billion little pieces that can't be put back together  
in the span of a day, especially not with all that sun in your eyes  
blocking such a beautiful view of the city.

## Oil Slick

We dip our toes in the filthy elegance  
of an oil slick in the Target parking  
lot. We imagine our bare toes  
becoming white doves, our feathers  
wilting into rainbows. There's nothing quite like  
the stark asceticism of getting stuck,  
the small task of slipping something  
solid into liquid and regretting it wholly.

*This isn't our fight*, a nearby seagull  
whispers to a friend. So we settle into drowning,  
collect our black beaks and search for sleep with the small of our backs.

## **Guidelines**

*for getting into Heaven unscathed*

I won't bore you, reader, with the choreography  
of how we got here. We're here now.

(Also, it might help to know that "here"  
is an apparition. "Here" is where we are.)

Together we lift a paper scroll with four hands  
and sift through the strict guidelines

governing love. We gaze, goggle-eyed,  
at its modest construction: a cropped border

cordially begging, the faint ink

chasing erasure, and an understated font

steadying the heading. (The scroll, too,

you might have guessed, is an apparition.)

It's a wonder anything gets done anymore,  
you mutter, extraterrestrially.

The skeleton of your strange sentence clatters

ominously against the ethos of the scroll's

seething optimism: do not bother with the postulate

of modification. There is no fixing the problem

of cold water and prosperity—better to grin and bear it

when the going gets tough. But, if you're hell-bent

on getting into the belly of the beast,

on rebuilding that which cannot be rebuilt,

consider the obvious, first: forego destruction,

and wait for the old ways to wilt.

## Phases of Language

I've managed to pattern the scaffolding  
of absence after the half-god-guided  
pools of allusion. I'd laugh at the aftershock,  
the metaphorical boat rocked into orbit,  
but I'm beginning to feel as though I misspoke  
or else misplaced the ocean as a potential frame of reference.  
To be clear, the ocean *is* where I left it. But sometimes  
it's hard to find the homeless shoreline in the shadow  
of the ocean itself. And then I forget all the phases  
of language buzzing separately in the borrowed dusk.  
A fuzzy moon through an out-of-focus telescopy remains.  
A blunt brick of wind positions itself against the metaphorical boat.  
The ocean collapses and pulls the blank world under.

## The Geometry of Echoes

You wake up in the soft ache of borrowed space.  
You lived here once, in this particular glow,  
a glow composed mostly of missing.  
And *so it goes* seems too simple a summation  
of longing and loss. So you consider the mixed zinnias  
in their copper-colored windowbox. Or the copper  
wind chimes that traced front porch conversations.

Even the concrete beneath your feet feels like an empty space.

And you wish you could bend the ache into something  
worth keeping, something you needed. You wish you could  
scrape it into sentience. The years you weren't here  
are seething with the faint scent of absence, but you  
can hardly smell it. You mostly smell candles,  
their flames warm on the neck of not knowing.

You mostly grope at old walls in new colors,  
walls caked with pictures of strangers, and you smile  
blandly at the borders of the frames because they have  
words in them, and all the words are silly and nostalgic,  
and they rhyme, but they do so only slightly and insipidly,  
which is infuriating for so many reasons, but you know

you can't say anything about it because you weren't here

when the picture frames were purchased. You know the words  
are just more empty spaces that cannot be filled. Or: You know  
the words take up space but mean nothing. Either way, the words  
you know well fail in these moments, so you grope at new walls—  
imaginary ones—and the color escapes you though it is familiar,  
and the faces are strangers in a different way—a new way—  
and you feel ancient in your old skin; it's like a disease, you say,  
and you try to shake it off, but obviously you can't, so you sit up  
to take a deep breath and bask in the unexpected glow of anonymity  
as it builds up inside you. You barely notice your hands dissolve into powder.

## **The Constant**

This is a terrible place, but that's not why we're scared. Here I've learned how to properly hold a snow globe to the fire, how to fry its plastic guts and glassy skin. It's only as it glistens that I begin to see the smoldering city inside, its dorsal fins recklessly taxed, and it's really only ugly on the inside. To think I once envisioned the snowy hills as a sort of heaven. I once looked upon the city with wonder. Now, the city flickers bleakly, its buildings and lights and clipped wings unbearably loud and thick with dumb symbolism. The sky pities its fortitude; the clouds turn around in it. But either way, the width of despair is unchanged. The way it hangs in a doorway or in the wintry fuzz of the snow globe is almost inspiring, almost enough to make me want to stay.

## **The Grandeur of Not Knowing**

*after Gerard Manley Hopkins, Walt Whitman, and Christina Rossetti*

The world is charged with the grandeur of not knowing  
how to set free the leaden echo at the edge of attention.  
A few dark clouds bruise an otherwise clear blue sky,  
a blue sky begging to be disabused of its notions  
of homelessness and belonging. For the better part  
of a year, I've called this method acting. Now, I'm not so sure.  
At the end of the day, I'd rather be sleeping.  
But I also keep in mind the four tenets of natural selection  
to remind myself that what I may lack in memory,  
I make up for in introspection. Like: I miss the way  
I used to be, the way things were. They used to be easy.  
Like: A few dark clouds didn't always bruise a clear sky,  
and a blue sky didn't always beg. In a dream, I saw a city  
invincible to the uncomfortable pinch of analysis.  
I admired, in the dream, the city's thick skin, the way  
it looked like a barrier but worked like a sieve.  
Citizens wandered in and out without worry.  
And I often wonder what it'd be like to live  
in a walled city without limits, a full day away  
from imminence. I often dream of this city to wake.

## **Guidelines**

*for getting it together*

I was ten years younger when I began the cobbled bridge jigsaw puzzle I finished this morning. I've been counting the empty hours since completion, and I've just now run out of fingers. The low hum of obsolescence gently beckons. I ready myself for nightfall, while daylight lingers, ready to fetch a small star from the edge of adolescence, from the strata of *not quite yet*. Better to set your feet against motion than to get lost in the heaventree of stars.



## The Life Left in the Fernery

According to the rules of the fernery—  
or what I call *the fernery*—  
we're allowed to watch the passing  
darkness only if we're asking  
the right questions as we do.  
And I, for one, never seem to know  
the right questions. But I like asking.  
You observe, as I do, the mute passion  
of scattered clouds paraphrasing beauty.  
*It's sort of lovely, don't you think?*  
Each moment seems only distorted  
by absence, by some not-quite-  
cataclysmic deficit.  
We can't see the moon yet—  
it's far too early for that—  
but if we could, it'd be equally  
incomplete. I'm sure of it.  
Which is half the reason we're  
so hard-pressed to remember  
the smell of death in the fabric  
of the carpet, in the white pine  
of the cabin, in the red birch  
cabinets stuffed with speckled  
lettuce seeds and the necessary  
etcetera. Which is half the reason  
we're here: to decipher the shadows  
in the abstract, without the benefit  
of guessing; to assess the questions  
begging asking; and to scatter  
the ashes of those asking  
the wrong questions.

## The Lights Outside the Foundry

Plumes of smoke pool together above the foundry,  
and the scent of regret is heavy-familiar  
in my lungs, like a still-fresh fog hedging bets  
against clearing. But let's go back a bit.  
Yesterday, the lights outside the foundry  
were alive with blank passion, and it was late.  
A stray cat sang something tragic  
in the snow-dumped alley that made  
me think optimistically about change.  
The wind carried across the street  
thick, white smoke built of snow,  
and the word *harrowing* constructed  
itself at the curb. So I said it aloud  
like a spell and the smoke almost  
completely cleared. Farther down  
the road, I found a map of the city  
stapled excessively to a large tree  
that I swore held the secret meaning  
of life—(leaves)—in its gnarled skin.  
The map, too, held heavy secrets,  
and when I arrived at the corner market  
hours later, I tried to piece together  
the missing hours, those melted away  
so mysteriously in snowy forests.  
But the shortcut worked, and it was time  
to return. In a cloud of cigarette smoke,  
I lost focus, stooped into futuristic cities  
where the smoke was good and rare.  
I reached the occasional apex coolly.  
I listened as the stray cats grew in number  
and formed a vile chorus of heavy brooding  
that I almost called orchestral or symphonic.  
And I went about my grand return honestly  
and earnestly, but when I saw the foundry's  
smoke rising dumbly over snowy hills,  
when I declared myself *almost home*,  
I checked my pockets fervently  
to find nothing of note, nothing permanent.

## **The Heart of the City**

The heart of the city—wherever that is—  
is a conquered palace. The clear sky  
eats around it, leaves a damp ballad in its place.  
My cold hands trace the contours of its main  
buildings, the slick scales and pimpled skin.  
I consult the bricks of disbelief, how it all  
starts and stops. As a kid, I imagined  
the whole world was built of the small  
suburbs, towns, and villages that live  
outside of cities. I think I maybe thought  
that was a beautiful idea, that you could  
build anything from the outside in.  
I know now the innocence of such  
pretty thinking, the subtle virtue.  
I know it like I know the limpness  
of the city's cold, electric heartbeat.  
I know it from the outside in.

## The Sounds of the City

I define the sounds of the city as skeletal.  
Then, I redefine the sounds as necessary.  
And I follow the skeletal sounds—the empty fog  
of memory, the venom of envy—to count  
the cells in a body of water: a pond's frog  
*seems* roughly half, *is* a mere fraction.  
And why does *that* make sense? The simplest  
sign of progress is a sign of distress.  
I whisper the word *capitalize* like the bad word  
it is. There's no such thing as *a sign of the times*;  
there is merely time to move forward.  
Time to move on. And so time passes,  
which is reason enough to haunt the streets  
of this vaunted city, a limp-armed ornament  
hung against stars. And it would be silly to say we're  
just lucky to be here; no one is. Even the carnations  
wilt toward winter, though maybe none mean to exactly.  
The fact of the matter only subtracts from the significance  
of the margins, that sparkling harbor where we dock  
our darkest thoughts, where you never quite find the skeletal sounds,  
and where the polished rot of honesty proliferates in silence.

## Through Knotted Glass

Once upon a time, I saw the world for all  
its halting glory. I'd observe its pseudostardom  
from afar, through the knotted glass at the bottom  
of a mason jar or through the wrong end  
of a best friend's telescope. Now, the well-dressed skeletons  
of that world wedge themselves into every possible crevice:  
behind the refrigerator, under the house, above the clouds.  
It's a strange feeling, knowing something's present yet  
inexplicably hidden from you, like the self is a relic of a time passed.  
But then time passes, (as it does,) and the disaster of awareness gradually  
lessens, becomes a passing bother, a sort of constant, really.  
And what shape does hope take under ruddy skies?  
This, we tend to think, is the very nature of destruction.  
We've either not enough or too much patience for the buzzards  
suffering under a wide-reaching sun. We circle above  
what we must, and we whistle or wheeze like leaves  
in a fire when we do. And where does that leave us?  
The invisible crease between this week and next  
is more than a weekend. I sleep in it at night when the stars  
are unpleasant. *Unpleasant* rushes back to my lips  
every time I say it, because the less I see of unpleasant stars,  
the less unpleasant they are.

## **Guidelines**

*for getting out*

We only think about leaving as we cruise through the digital cities we cling to in sleep. We usually don't get so distracted by the beautiful circuitry, the functional art. It all feels a shade past imitation, a practical farce. So we listen, explore the geography of sound and mystery of silence. One sound leads to another which leads to another which leads to nothing, a hollow nothing I sometimes call silence or folly. The forest on the outskirts is less a forest than a bundle of trees, a hologram of foliage, and that's my fault. I ponder infrequently the memories made here—not mine—the hollyhock and small hills all somehow enough. Elsewhere, we remain either painfully stationary or pacing a stage like braids of uranium skittering across the sky while a gaggle of guests enjoy the spectacle in a stadium of happy stasis. There's no way this isn't something that happens in a world earnest enough to embrace the latticed echoes of change and evolution. But instead, we seek to destroy the crooked axis, the wheel of aberration that clicks in and out of place in its own distinct rhythms. What remains of what was left to us is what ultimately disappoints us. What we take leaving is generally ours.

## A Shoe Falls in Minnehaha County (South Dakota)

there's the sound of electricity buzzing behind walls painted eggshell white or bright yellow but in the tall grasses, murmuring north: north: maybe west.

a shoe falls

from a wire stretching electrically & taut across a more or less crowded city street.

there are no people sounds

only rubber slapping asphalt

& plastic laces jingling

after kissing broken glass:

there are bird sounds: the yellow-bellied flycatcher mired

in distant spruce bogs—wiry feet tripping over dead vegetation,

tangled in gangrenous green peat—

(petite, with chewy

food in beak (on

bark of tree (em-

barking on a dream where

she's wintering on a coffee farm

in Central America, resting on the highlands of Chiapas, home to some ancient Mayan ruins:

home to oppression: home to rebellion: home to the Zapatista uprising: home to the other campaign: home to the yellow-bellied flycatcher, but only in winter, or when one has a mind of winter)

in a small nest built into sphagnum moss where a small heap of berries and seeds can be seen tipping over itself,

tipping west:

there are snake sounds: the electricity of the redbelly snake from

black hills (four dark stripes on its back & a cherry-red underbelly marooned

under rock

rustling underfoot—under grass: under noxious weed: under mica and limestone: under

milbank granite & sand—trying to find water while eating a snail,

seeming at home, yet somehow displaced:

there is the shoe-thud of echo: of shadow: of lingering:

of history: of the medicine wheel that wobbles underfoot

the cold hard thud of imbalance:

there is the echo

again, another one: the loud thud (elongated thud

of a steamboat horn in lake george cruising the minnetonka:

laughter: a car horn in the steamboat lot:

laughter: the paddlewheeler left in the wake:

there is the thud of thought:

of wires crossed: of sparks: of electricity caught between currents: of what's long been forgotten and is unlikely to change

## Gazing up into the darkness

I thought:  
this is merely me poaching  
the pace car, poking  
a sleeping turtle with a walking  
stick, trying to have you remember stalking  
the flat plains and heat of the Riverina,  
even though you were never there.

Or the atomic weight of carbon.

*And why can't you?*

Sit down with a glass of [yellow tail] wine  
furnished with the flicker of florescent lights sucked dry by a vacuum,  
and remember:           fall forward.

Try to remember the feeling:           the bar stool stolen  
from under you,                           the cool breath of gravity usurped  
and dispersed,                           the sudden theft of what you've known all your life,  
what's long been sunken in.

Remember that *I did not smile*.

Remember being home—recall the smell  
of burnt popcorn and peanuts, of Pabst Blue  
Ribbon beer and people. Remember, too,  
what's less nice to remember:

the limescaled faucet and water stains,  
the quick hiccup you took to the sudden dark, and  
the suddenly dark.

Remember that there are lights, and thus  
some guidance. The rats in sewers have order, you know:  
every rat a function and a place.

Remember, also, that they live where you live,  
and then some.

Remember the shoulders and elbows  
of strangers you've brushed in bazaars  
and farmer's markets:           the trinkets  
and knickknacks you've picked up and put  
down along the way,



like language.

Like love.

Finnimbrun.

Remember being far from home: the toads hiding in duckweed like old wedding pictures collecting dust in the attic, the mosquitos helicoptering down in cochlear motion: remember feeling like you were them, like it was you who was sliding down the spiral jetty, tracing the string curled in circles like the stripes on snail shells, landing undeniably hard in pond water and floating

## **Central Park**

*after 1.5 hours on the Long Island Rail*

And out of this I lull. It lessens. Kiss me  
like the mountains kiss sky in the Adirondacks.  
The stars above us practically beg for it  
to be tomorrow, for it to be the day after  
something beautiful and impossibly bright.

We're not alone under the night sky:  
the sounds of a trombone crumble  
and dissolve in the distance, past  
the nearly-frozen-over pond pocked  
with shivering ducklings who shuffle

across the ice to catch scabs of bread  
dropped by a young coatless woman  
walking slowly along the pond's ridge.  
And what better place, I think, for a lonely stroll  
through the bleating cohesion of winter in the city.

It occurs to me eventually that you're not seeing  
any of this. Your eyes are two icy brown ponds  
set upon some open space beyond what's immediately  
before us. Do you even notice your own fingers flinching  
bright pinkly in the bitter cold? I want to hold your hands in mine

to stop the shaking. Let me borrow for a minute your index finger  
so we can trace the constellations together,  
while I watch you listen to the speeded-up beating  
of my heart wrench against the space between us  
on this park bench.

## How to Pronounce the Past

The past is always pronounced this way—slowly, carefully—a word you don't recognize, a long, boring poem you never cared to read aloud. How, then, should we proceed? Tease out the details in small phases? As I tie my shoelaces by the light of the moon, I begin to wonder why I don't own a pair of winter boots, if I've ever, as an adult, owned a pair of winter boots. I don't think I have. And the sky is not tragic. It is a long-running joke that splinters into skies when treated singularly. Watch the way it crumples when you mock its shrunken frame. Watch it hunker down into nightfall. And where, I often wonder, does night fall exactly? It isn't here, this sky a bleached fabric feigning dark. It isn't home either, that sky a beached tragedy, a blighted sea. I feel the full weight of easy access, a full moon slopping light upon my face. I can stay or go home, live in the light of day or hide out in the brightest moon until I become its deepest crater, a bottomless basin it couldn't deign to shake off.

## Old Ghosts

It's been harder than you'd think chasing the old ghosts from my last home into my new one. You'd think you could just lift them—one by one—by the shoestrings and shove them into your car. You'd buckle their seatbelts

and drive slowly down old familiar roads, careful with the precious cargo. You'd crane your neck only after crossing speed bumps and potholes, just to be sure nothing slipped out the back. You'd make quick eye contact

with one of the ghosts when you did peek into the back of the car, sharing a look that says *that pothole's new or since when...* I'm not saying it's not supposed to be sad, that moving ghosts like clothing should be just as easy.

But I didn't anticipate such resistance. And isn't that kind of the moral of every story disgorged from the stomach or chest of a fiction factory? Anyway, most morals are empty, even when beautiful. For instance: the gargoyle

hardwired for triumph doesn't bend or break in the face of peril; the gargoyle stands stock still because moving is hard. Which I guess is a good way to end a story about a ghost that can't be begged to defect. Except that there's still the problem of my empty new home, all echoes of anguish.

## Pace Yourself

Yesterday, we recorded the pre-ordered sequel to the three-week-old trilogy of soft-spoken soliloquies before an audience of milkweed and monarchs. *But the market is overflowing with water.* So we sat in the sun to look upon our hard work. *Look what we've made,* we whispered, alone in the garden. But our skin became dry, grew tired of waiting. So with a shovel pushed back and forth through piles of dirt we killed time, then went back inside, where the sun's only seen and not felt, where time is not told in angles and slants but in soft ticks and slurred bells, in unremitting slow glances.

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Tomorrow, we'll graduate from the padded rooms of public schools to a small plot of land in the womb of a shadowbox. So we move in the shadow of the pale glare of schlock glass with a carbon-copied pair of composition dolls—all smiles and sawdust—and a collection of shot glasses from just about every state in the country propping up paper fans. But where is Alaska? The Dakotas? One must ask, after a while, or at some point in the beginning, if the packed bags of our lives ticketed quickly in the airport are worth dragging—toe-tagged and far too heavy—through human traffic, if our stuffed closets don't cost too much in the long run. Speaking of which, we're probably running late for something, but who can tell? I mean, we can barely read the time on the IBM wall clock, once standard issue, now trotted out as a model of antiquity. And I won't lie. I'm a tad bit humbled by its spun steel casing and domed glass lens. It sees us see it.

It sees, as we see, the wooden crib in the corner of the room, only differently, not only wreathed in imaginary thorns and false teeth that flicker white and unwary in the plural light of sun and lamp, and not only unmistakably old but unmistakably new. Or so I'm told. I'm not really there, after all. But I will be at some point

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The autopsy: inconclusive.  
And yet the coroner supposedly couldn't be bothered  
with such an open-and-shut case.  
The paced floor births skin-deep scuff marks,  
births rough, uneven rashes on the tongue,  
is burnt,  
is bothered to be the bearer of bad news in darkly lit basements.  
The linoleum's waiting.  
Pace it again.  
Retrace your steps  
in your very best loafers,  
and pace it again.

## **To Cross a Crooked River**

In the sad, empty company of the spirit of our fathers' fathers, we watch the trees play parlor tricks beneath the sun, a sappy pack of satellites encircling the phantom heat. But we don't speak. Even the pieces of leaves we catch in our palms keep calm, keep from throwing tantrums in the throes of something like passion because even they know nothing is permanent here because nothing survives the cold.

So in the sad, empty company of the spirit of our mothers' mothers, we watch the trees fly away in the bucking wind, trying to make fires in empty buckets, to stoke something silver from the pale, plastic bottoms, lying in wait. Soon, it will be our turn, and we, too, will scatter like magic, like dark matter in the cores of dwarf galaxies, or like life itself rifled through and mined for meaning.

So in the sad, empty company of sad, empty spirits, we hide in the misshapen shadows, each chafed limb of which a fragment of some other thing, a covered wagon unable to cross a crooked river or an arrow bent into a tree. The bow barely beckons, barely cares enough to reload or be reloaded, to have stuck into the clip of the wooden quiver another sharpened arrow.

So in the sad, empty company of our sad, empty spirits, the bow hides its discontent and dejection. It watches closely the concept of god in the snapped roots of departed trees, in the potted plants it could only imagine being in fever dreams of domesticity. The bow only knows its own flora and fauna, and calls upon the puller to deliver it from the brink of stagnation. The smooth muscle of the sun seems to atrophy. It's only cold if you're thinking.

## **Building Backwards**

As I watch a squirrel tentatively creep across breaking ice, I think to myself: This is why I don't bother with ice hockey in the park, why I can't wait to wilt, for the ice to cloak the lake. I've always been partial to rivers anyway, the constant stream of opportunity. This lake business is something else, a constant clubbing to death—to leaden thud—any chance at change. That doesn't feel completely honest. Anyhow, I hear the suburbs shake with these very anxieties, these flagrant flaws. It'd be easy to just say: Check the schedule, and plan accordingly, but the laws of nature always seem to find a way in.

I grew up not far from a place whose name translates to “a place of many streams,” and I guess that's relevant. I know little of most rivers, maybe even a little less than I know of the seven necks of land in Avery's lottery, which is probably why every other section of river I've lived in since glistens only temporarily.

I often imagine the dirty bottoms of those streams, the foggy forgotten I've since stopped trying to get to. I often think of building backwards.



## Old Ghosts in Old Poems

It's hard not to spot the hollow bones  
of old ghosts in the outlines of old poems.  
Every few days, it's about the same:  
beg for better bed sheets, better black buttons  
bent into eyes. I'd say I've said too much, but  
I've lost sight of the line.  
What's crossed or dies crossing is a question  
of merit. Left to my own devices, I might die  
asking the wrong questions, legging through  
the meritocracy of *I could have done better*.  
And just because it's true doesn't mean  
it's not a nuisance, doesn't mean the world's  
busiest bridge isn't built of old bolts, isn't  
something my grandfather didn't help paint and abandon.  
I'd say I'd better hold on here, but I've not too much to hold  
in a world turning faster and faster into a globe.

## **Distress Signal**

Don't think of a revolution of any kind  
as a motion of distress. Consider, instead,  
the origins of ordinance, the everyday fictions  
we all find fraudulent. Consider the obviously  
false we build together. There are no degrees.  
It either is or isn't in a war between thieves,  
in an all-out arms race to say something pretty.

Ponder, for instance, a god in open-toed slippers,  
an angel with unflappable wings in a dark alley.  
It's all silly to me, like the fallacy of thinking  
you can live every day like it's your last.  
Better to fall asleep a cannibal and wake up a meal.

## **The Doors of Prolepsis**

If the doors of prolepsis were cleansed,  
everything would appear infinite and kind.  
But we've wasted enough energy  
dissecting the selective empathy of stars,  
and it's no longer worth engaging the sad  
tyrants of our early twenties.  
But we can't ignore the fear that we might still  
occupy the same sad space we always have.  
And so we smile as we shoot moonlight through  
the almanac. We observe the quiet sound of wind  
licking the north side of the lighthouse  
like self-pity, soft and unnerving.  
And if we find out in the end that we missed the boat  
completely, at least we died voyagers.  
Because it's always too much having to kick your way  
through the chrysalis of extinction; it's always a hassle.  
So we head to a vacant field for an unobstructed view,  
where we watch and listen closely as the sky bursts  
at the seams between us, and we feel at ease,  
each a death away from dying, as always.  
And when they finally scan the oiled landscape  
for a symbol worth keeping, they'll find  
that the lighthouse is lost in the small print,  
slumping and sprawling in secret like us.

## **We are a city**

We are a city, a potted metropolis of self-pity and solitude, of barbed glances.  
Call us: a parched suburbia neighboring gazing, neighboring nearness. Nearby,  
downtown is solemnly drowning, and the industrial region is hemorrhaging fast.  
We can ask the cleric if we can borrow some money,  
if he can help birth the bloody spawn from my spotted paunch.  
We'll tell him: we'll get you tomorrow. We promise.

Meanwhile, we monitor the progress of the spotted pigs and cats of local cities.  
I've been to both, and not a thing's different from the perspective of a dollar bill  
or drunk kid hanging on the lip of a barstool. Will it be different for us?  
I listen diligently for a ringing phone. A crow's lush caw  
paws at the earlobe: a harboring moth drawn to darkness,  
a short shadow still clinging to the sand.

Still, what we monitor most closely is often out of our hands and beyond our reach.  
*We* are no city. Maybe a small town. A hamlet, even. We are a burden to bear,  
a bad joke broken in. We knew this once but forgot, once proud of ourselves  
for trying. Now, we are a nuisance, an atomic clock of anonymity brokered by  
trying. But this is a matter of motion. The maple tree  
at the back of the yard merely borrows sun; tomorrow  
is an ocean of abrasion. Meaning: Nothing of note

was stolen; nothing taken. The waves of *name a noun* may just be waves,  
once only other waves. Break. Break. [ ] We've learned to make  
the most of every situation, to close our eyes in the dark, to close the conversation  
with associative cuts: the bracken blowing in the wind, then  
a rousing speech. Or: a thrush of raspberry thicket, then  
just wind. I ponder pied beauty: wander through the north

in search of dappled things. But I won't try to describe the sky,  
its intricate design too desperate for depiction,  
too determined to be described. Besides,

doing something once before doesn't mean you do it well.  
I've felt both proud and bothered to be stuck on salted city streets  
in the aftermath of a snowstorm. Now, we are our own city street.  
The parka-clad people on the crosswalk quicken their pace  
in the freezing rain: a grainy, nearly blank video still  
of insurrection. A homeless woman stands on the curb

in tattered clothes ripped jaggedly like the edge of a circular saw. She  
saw it all, the whole thing complete. Who are we to question

the authenticity of dissent? We've all observed the short cuts in police reports and court reports, and—if I've said it before, I've said it a thousand times—the evening news. But we can be different. We can be a new kind of city, the kind with a clock buried under the streets.

## The Metal Girders and Beams of Being

In moments of uncertainty, I try to mimic the face  
I make when I recognize the bones in the mirror as nothing  
more than the metal girders and beams of being  
bent into the shape of reservation. Sometimes, the eyes  
die out in the dusty glass, grow irreparably  
transparent in the light of day. Sometimes, nothing  
lingers there at all. Nothing works. But the hurt

of absence is nothing compared to the sketchy insistence  
of the evening news, or the ever-present weather  
reports we find so hard to ignore or acknowledge  
while dodging traffic. This is generally how we spell *rapport*  
without access to a dictionary or thesaurus. You can't connect  
the dots of dissatisfaction without ample time to dissect  
the status quo. Yes, we would love a chance  
to quell the television's desire for elegy, to sell  
the wrecked skeleton back to the mirror for mere  
pennies on the dollar. But that's not how things work. That's not  
how you make it in America.

## Arcadia Shakes

Every morning I step out of bed.  
Some mornings I step out of bed  
all day, slipped from fake heights  
and suddenly caught. And so I'm  
listening to the heartbeat I keep in  
my mirror to see what else is there.  
And I find that, somewhere else,  
I'm off gawking at the soft clouds  
in the coarse denim sky, imagining  
rainforests and spotted wood. I'm  
also in a car, on a long car ride,  
passing Saugerties and Woodstock,  
the piebald overpass freckled with ware,  
the town a spotted snow leopard prowling  
the night. And I can't help but gently mock  
the thin-lined graffiti grafted onto the backs  
of road signs and the windows of storefronts.  
Because I've tried before to both understand  
and make understood what I'm not sure is reality.  
The skyline is buried in fog, full of isolated organs  
and streaks of white. I'm lost in the visual fuzz  
and static of Morse code: the radio buzz in the sky,  
the cockroach cut down where the radiator splits.  
I feel the delirious heat of delayed grief deep  
in my gut; outside my window, the woods are  
all dead and void of antique joy, as previously  
reported. *Joy* settles overhead like a storm.  
And if the word cloy, consider the distress signals  
painted above the nightstand—the peaceful depletion  
of positivity, the inquisitive edge—and ignore them; let it cloy.  
The snow back in Buffalo piles up wildly, I hear.  
But I can't listen to it fall like I want to;  
I can't know the thick snow falling generally over centuries  
just like I can't know love or the truth or slow death  
from underneath it. And while standing under a full moon  
never felt so frivolous, so full of dull fire, I can't quite hate  
the moon, its billowing dimples deepening as I talk myself  
to sleep, its ugly light beeping illogically through the night.

## **It Happened One Morning**

It happened one morning, not far from the station.  
Your bus clinked and clunked away from  
me through the long shadows of telephone poles.  
I swore the song in my head would fade as the brake lights dimmed  
in the distance. It was maybe foggy that morning,  
or rainy. (The details hazy.) I mostly just remember the stilted clack  
of crickets like midnight in a perfect world.  
I remember envisioning that perfect world where we pretend  
not to notice the harried cloud paradoxically undressing above the cabin,  
where we wait for the dirty shadows to impersonate nightfall.  
And like the echo of sickness in small towns, we'd linger loudly after dark  
because, after all, the hard part of leaving well enough alone never was the leaving;  
the hard part's always been the solitude.



## Depending on Water

In the center of the lake I see a city  
of half-drawn dreams and hallucinations,  
a fast-moving metropolis dislodged  
from its still geography for the sake of change.  
And that, I think, is what I came for. Even as a kid,  
I'd sit in my social studies classroom during lunch  
to listen to the oversized globe spin wickedly in its meridian ring.  
I'd place a finger—without looking—somewhere on the globe  
to stop the spinning, and think not about what it'd be like to live there,  
but how I'd get there. The answer was often either speedboat or Segway,  
depending on water.  
And when I'd skip a rock on the surface  
of whichever body of water bridged the land,  
the splash would crack like dull laughter.  
The rock I try to skip on the surface of this lake  
does no such trick. So I aim for the moon's reflection  
and miss. And beautiful as the moon is on the water, the night sky  
is still just a sliver of wilting mint to me, a cold, soggy slab  
of glittering disappointment and distress. It's like knives, the sound  
of stalling, a song you want to hear but can't.

## Back Home, I'm Worth a Hundred and Fifty-Six Million Dollars

I've been thinking a lot lately of the living things that can live on both land and in water. That's amazing to me, especially considering the way we say *separation anxiety* and *I think I'm homesick* when we mean *where are we?*

And, yes, we're a long way from the city streets we so often called our pleated meadows, or else called in quiet moments of peace our *sprawling apologies*, all soggy and water-logged with the full weight of devastation or disorder of some sort.

Lately, we've been taking trains to get where we need to be; we've become the suddenly stately and sedated, the incessantly waking from sleeping beaches. And while what we've built in the meantime cannot bear the full weight of recollection—let alone the ache of knowing a thing intimately—it helps.

*That's home, Jack, right there, on the other side of that glass.*  
And I almost wish I didn't know that.  
I almost always wish to stop listening to a thing I disagree with, so that I can say I don't understand without reproach.

*It's a cold world, Jack. But ignorance isn't bliss. Bliss is bliss. Ignorance is just a fancy word for not knowing nothing.*

What's colder, though, is the gumption with which you whispered *locomotion* as we boarded a recent train. The passengers, all somehow similarly plagued, made way, making sure to stare from their pleated seats at whoever paces the aisle at an unusual speed,

or at any speed, really, because who's moving matters in matters of motion. And, yes, we're all moving someplace, but the speed at which we're moving varies greatly, and the quickness with which we crane our necks as a passenger passes in the aisle is forever in flux.

## **The Revival**

I still hear the voices sometimes quietly priming  
for the long-awaited revival, whispering steadily  
in the eddying winds: I'll come back from the dead

when I'm good and ready, they say and have said.  
But listen to the echo of sentencing, the question  
of when and where and for how long. I've learned  
not to wait for the bones to set, for the seconds  
rip through them like acid.

## **The Revival**

*We've decided we're ready to haunt  
the kings and queens of the castle  
like the pawns lost in battle.*

*They've heard us coming,  
the dull humming and faint  
whispers, the full promises.*

*It's only a matter of time.  
[                    ]  
It never wasn't.*

## **The Revival**

We'd long talked about leaving but never did.  
It was never that simple, the big, blinking sky  
hulking over us like a black gown that's too big  
and has been for years. But we wear it proudly  
now, on nights like this, when words are lethal  
weapons and the worst of them spread like  
the wildfire meant to keep clean the reputations  
of empires. Their spears and spires are sharper  
than ever, their planes aimed at the sun.

## Prepped for Landing

Imagine a pink-winged pigeon in the cockpit. Don't bother with the reflexive, requisite *Stop the Presses*, and press on, unpolished. Look out for openings. Fill the still-small gaps you find in the guild, minus gumption, and choose to either watch the weather work its magic or help rebuild, and wonder aloud whether you might fit into a sky scraped clean of clouds. Feel the cool breeze turn warm, kindled. Swelter fully, mildly, even. Allow yourself a moment of peace to breathe. Will your way through the muted rain until it, too, turns to fog, turns warm, kindled. Swelter again, this time on the lam. Don't look back; it's never better with your back curved around the forward motion of a head cold begging you to just keep going don't worry about the so-called consequences of your actions this is life or death. Don't bother the presses; they're not concerned with your story. Besides, who can afford another forty-second clip. There is a pigeon—pink-winged and prepped for landing—in the cockpit. There is no flash of brilliance, no proof of concept.

## On Reading the Stars and the Sky and What Lies Beneath

Through shrouds  
of city smog, I can see  
the scalped and stilted buildings  
duck under dark clouds. But I'm forced to  
wonder what must lie beneath  
the pulped and pilfered citadel,  
the viscous gardens and precincts  
of parked-car progression.  
I'd argue there's a kind of logic  
to ignoring the architecture  
altogether. Even the largest of buildings  
fall short of the smallest of stars.  
But I do love the way the city  
lights up after dark,  
loud and obnoxious,  
yet in some parts calm as tepid comets left  
lifeless, left to melt  
in obscurity. But then that has less  
to do with the architecture of stars  
than it does the thing I've tried to not see.  
I think: it is, as perhaps it always has been,  
a matter of passion versus  
ephemera. After years in between, I've begun  
to see the magic as more than a pattern  
of advanced capitalism, as cool accolades stacked against the draculaic  
night sky. I've begun to see a canvas for lightly-stoked fire.  
I've begun to admire the patterns  
as pastiche, to see the practicality as extravagance. That is,  
I've allowed myself to get lost in the formlessness, to get  
lost in the void. I've often thought of myself as someone archetypically  
uninterested in the hard symmetry of things,  
but when the static palindrome of the cityscape—once left broken  
and scattered—corrects itself, I can't help but feel happy.  
It's just so nice when things work themselves out.

## **Guidelines**

*for getting over*

Within earshot of the ocean lapping beachglass onto the shore,  
I practice a frank smile, which is what I do to humor the dark shadows,  
the roughhewn hands that built the cavern of happenstance we can't call home  
but visit religiously on holidays and other special occasions, like the slow,  
gritty birth of purpose and deliverance, which we watched  
with pride and scorn in equal, imprecise doses. But the ghosts  
of those moments rarely linger after the fact. I once caught one on the run,  
and I proceeded with caution to offer a roughhewn hand of my own,  
like that of a mother or father, to offer some semblance of shelter and residence.  
I think I laughed when the ghost mentioned living in the sea. I think I maybe  
laughed or died in the middle of the sentence, the way we all do, really,  
the way the beach glass never quite makes it to all the way to the bearded dunes.  
I've spent enough time one second or sentence away.



## Sunken Forest (Fire Island)

From here, I can only imagine  
what the surface of the moon looks like.  
But I can see you so clearly  
in the rabid darkness of early  
morning swathed in rolling shadows.  
We're not supposed to be here,  
huddled beneath the boardwalk, between  
puffs of lime-green graffiti and tall grass.  
Your small hand traces the outline of a half-  
moon as it slowly wanes and grows  
on the wilting wood, and before I know it,  
I can feel the crooked splinter enter along the friction ridges  
of your pinky finger as you abandon your half-drawn  
moon in search of stars loosed from a Teflon  
sky. They've fallen away, and your little toes  
curled like hermit crabs in half-measured grief  
suppress the skyline's shadow. You tell me how much  
you feel like one of the leaves that once helped blanket  
the mostly open sector left of the boardwalk, how,  
if it were somehow up to you, you'd join the moon in the throes  
of childbirth. And not so all of the sudden,  
I can see you start to leave. And I wonder  
if you know what is being let go: the half-  
magic of marriage and paradise: a waning  
moon waxed into memory. And maybe the moon's  
not even lonely up there. What I can't quite place, though,  
what seethes beneath the careful awning,  
the lyrical hills and softened groves, is  
the passing cold, the sound of wings flapped in the spinney,  
a certain brand of panic and pride—the Black-capped Chickadee,  
and moonlit daffodils. But the thing about all of those  
things is that they, too, will someday feel  
like those invisible leaves that were once here.  
They, too, will wake up three months later in late June  
with only a faint recollection of the outline of this moon.  
And they, too, I almost say, your moonlit face split  
with this decision, will someday be shadows.

## **Bloodstone**

The bloodstone is a spit of acid on the surface of the moon as I see it. It's as much in your chapped hands as it is in the hard mouths of seasons or anywhere. And if it's not there yet, know that I've done my best to see that it gets there soon. But more so than what we've drawn up over coffee, what we've erased in fast-paced conversation has made me feel better. It feels good to say that the oral thrush built up over these last few months is nothing more than story now. And, of course, looking back, it's easy to see that somebody had to saddle up at some point and stand up to the grandstanding sunrise, that slow, irregular heartbeat of the horizon. And, frankly, I'm glad it was you because the prospect of death has made me weary. (That sounds to me like something you'd expect me to say.) And we tend to nest this way in times like these, bested yet again by the endless procession of what we've known to be true for longer than we've been able to admit. But there's more to that story, too, of course. You once told me a four-leaf clover sold inside a pack of cigarettes isn't any less magical than one picked judiciously with prudent hands from the Irish countryside. And so I want you to have this roughed-up bloodstone I've trundled with my own two hands. I want you to have this entire month spent settling what's been left for so long unsettled and unsettling. My arms grow weak with bets hedged against myself, with a sweltering sense of regret, and with the dead weight of this dreadful month. And so I say again, my back turned earnestly away from the Irish countryside and rising sun, please, take it with you.

## The Friction of Footsteps

Under the simulated panic of a lamppost, there's no time for digression. What you see is what you get, says the lamppost, shading your face from a neon light hung over the doorway of a delicatessen. The clouds overhead appear ominous, but then again, there's nothing like the small task of being slipped into liquid form in order to prove a point. Like that one New Year's Eve, years ago, when your grandmother wondered aloud whether I'd make a decent husband and father, and you told her, with a champagne-stained smile, I have my doubts. And now the skyscrapers bend forward above us in the shape of a song. The echo is not earned. Maybe that means something to you. In every puddle, I see a reason to pause and find meaning. I hope that means something to you, but if it doesn't— if after you splash around in the afterbirth of a miracle— you feel nothing, well, then that's fine, too. But notice that the streetlight doesn't quite die in memory of itself. I've always liked the way it survives in a puddle. If we wanted, we could look into this puddle to travel through all of our years together. But this would have to be the very last flashback because this is the stage at which we track the slow passage of a tear from blue eye to blue lip in the slow-burning cold. Which brings us here, in what must be— for my sake—the very middle of the city, searching for a skyline still stuck in pre-production. Yes, we could run away. I know an island not far from here drowning in sun. Or, we can simply sit and wait for the sun to arrive, for the times to drop into a slow-motion drive toward desolation. I know this is no fun. And so we begin to listen to the somehow slow scuttle of pedestrians we've probably seen before move across a busy street. But in the friction of footsteps, I begin to forget, for the first time in years, to see the shadows and hear the echoes of what we've built.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Ryan Meyer graduated from William Floyd High School, Mastic Beach, New York, in 2008. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Buffalo State College in 2012. He received his Master of Arts in Creative Writing from George Mason University in 2015.