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RIFTED PARADISE: POEMS

By

Josh English
B.A., Ripon College, 2007

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY

May, 2012

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A Thesis Approved on

April 18, 2012

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	v
ZERO RECOVER.....	1
ECLIPSE IN BOSTON COMMON.....	3
THE OTHER ARM.....	5
COLD SENTIMENT.....	6
ROUGHousing.....	8
ICESTORM.....	9
UNDER THE BRIDGE.....	10
LATE AT THE VEGAN JOINT.....	12
COUPLES WHO DIVE.....	14
OLD WORLD SPARROWS.....	15
BETWEEN DOG AND WOLF.....	16
AUTUMN BREAK.....	18
SAVING THE WEB.....	20
MY EX-WIFE THE HOST OF A SPANISH RADIO SHOW.....	22
PRUIFIER.....	24
OUTSIDE LIGHT.....	26
THE URN BUT NOT THE ASHES.....	27
NORTH WINTER.....	29
YOU DON'T FUCK WITH DEATH.....	31

HUMMINGBIRD MIGRATION.....	33
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	34

ABSTRACT

WHY THERE ARE POEMS HERE

Josh English

April 26, 2012

For this thesis, I wrote 28 new pages, all composed between December, 2011 and March, 2012. They are the best I've written. The other five pages are drafts from work previously written in U of L Creative Writing workshops. My poems endeavor to realign the domestic into intimate, and occasionally surreal, poems. Of the topics that most often surface in these poems, anger and the attempt and failure of intimacy are premier throughout. I discovered in my writing new ways to manage my poems, as in "THE URN BUT NOT THE ASHES," which is a quick surreal sketch in which the narrative can elaborate itself with the heavy use of images.

ZERO RECOVERY

They nail the belts to the ceiling.
In another life, they'd have nailed
the tails of copperheads to trees,
drawn razor wire neck-high across
cleared paths. They lift
their dogs to clamp leather
and swing six feet off the cement floor.
Imagine the weak falling
with the clumped sound of snow
sliding off roof. Imagine one pit bull
pounding its head against
a loose fenceboard, over and over,
its blunt face a quill of splinters.
And when the wood fails it splits
the neighborhood park open
to the calibrations of error
and threat to the loose dog.

Today I spend the afternoon
supplying my dog with pain pills,
his head in bandages, his confusion
over what it is to be stoned.
When the pit bull rippled across
the green I heard rake tines drag
on cement nearby, their clicking
like a rotary dial returning to zero.
When it clamped to my dog's throat
I knelt and thumbed its eyes,
pounded the face, my dog screeching, pinned,
and trying to run. My fists, again and again,
against the dog's head, useless, useless.
It was the same frustration I felt
wrestling a stone from the lake bottom
and kicking my way to surface. Each time
either my arms or lungs gave out.
The stone's tumble back into the green-black.
But never my resolve. Along the beach

my father dressed, wringing his trunks,
then, later, seated on a driftwood log,
the fierce glint of his glasses as he waited.
I'd surfaced gasping, and plunge back.

But when the owner loped over,
the bolt in the dog's jaw fell
and he hefted it by its harness to his shoulder
like a carry-on after a flight.
I couldn't follow. I carried my dog
to the car. And now each day I cruise
looking for him, the smooth
stone of rage on my chest,
the branch tips summoning bud,
the asphalt opening cracks.
My ball bat in the passenger seat
absorbs each glancing shadow,
and the stone becomes unbearably heavy
when I think I see his face.

ECLIPSE IN BOSTON COMMON

As seen from above, this park
looks like a fuzzy dot of mold
on the city's grey industrial cheese,
the green eye of a smoggy whale,
and all of us in it gawked skyward:
me and my buddy the goateed
grounds-crew guy who said
we're in for a wicked sweet show
leaned up against his green golf cart,

and the kids below in bright array,
each in neon day camp t-shirts, scattered
and spazy as Skittles spilled in the dryer.
Each kid in the municipal wilderness
holding a sheet of construction paper
with a pinhole to peep the eclipse through.

And when it came on
with the moon's blue preface,
their teenage counselor hit a button
on her stopwatch. I can understand
the crust of doom the ancients
all saw hovering in the sky.
Actual alignment is arresting.
The planet, moon and star
strung on a string, chatting
in the equable tones of light and shade.

That was the summer
good aim mattered more than the target,
afternoons when I'd find myself
flipping my roommate's steak knives
into the kitchen floor, the summer
I tried to pick up Puerto Rican girls
with dangerous nails on the Blue Line.

That girl-counselor kept strict time

with her litter of mixed
ethnicities and attention spans.
She slapped the stopwatch button
again and shouted TIME!
then sprinted up and down the line of kids,
swatting them on the back of the head,
parsing their exposure,
worried too many seconds would sear
their eyes to pits of ash.

My friend eventually drove off
into his walky-talky's static,
to spread woodchips
or unclog leaves from a hose
so cement cherubs may piss freely into a fountain,
but I stayed to watch the moon
remove itself from the sun's eye,
then drag all the way down the sky
and vanishing as it struck Earth.

THE OTHER ARM

Each night in bed, cramped under me,
my left arm is the dead wing of a runt chick,
useless as the L-square ruler in the junk drawer.
The right holds my wife, draws her toward me in sleep,
while the left is numb with the morphine of dream,
it's the hook tossed from the riverboat,
dragging for vanished truants.
Left arm that still throws like a girl,
so slow and dumb I learned guitar
would never be in my future, the hand
pausing between chords like the slow girl
busing tables at the coffee shop this morning.
I watched her over my paper.
She loaded her tub one utensil at a time,
wiped the cleared table down,
and maneuvered her heft through the throng,
her gate half sway, half lumber.
A marm-type smiled so proudly
I thought she'd applaud. Slow-pitch
voyeurism. And when she clattered
her way into the back room, we resumed
our chats and Metro section scanning,
our Danishes and jumbles. But then
came the clank and shatter, clank
and shatter, as the girl slapped
each plate together
so that her strong hands met.

COLD SENTIMENT

I over-estimate the trajectory, the ball's red stitches
signaling through falling snow like code I've misread,
and swat to make a barehanded catch. And I feel

nothing. I look at the ball buried in my blunt hand. Nothing.
A shovel a block away hacks at the ice glazing everything.
Already, the insinuations of peeved nerves snap up my wrist.

By the time I hear the leather slap of Seth's catch,
I have thrown my own glove down, as if it were the culprit,
the unsteady nurse who pricks and pricks her needle

up and down my forearm, missing the blatant vein.
In winter, imprecision trips pain. The sedan's locked wheels
as it skidded sideways, a mooring tanker,

into my front lawn yesterday. The car a crumpled hulk
my neighbor Pete stumbled out of, blood unspooling from his mouth.
When his balance returned he began beating the car,

the down feathers bursting from his torn coat like smoke
over the hollow cannon fire of fists slamming the hood.
Snow like stone-dust the night ground from walls

of whitened clouds, morning's ash of a fallen empire
refilling the tire tracks we toss the baseball over today.
After the sting splinters into ache and disperses, we continue

our game of catch, absorbed by the boyhood rhythms,
so precise I can feel the minutiae of its physics
melting in my arm, the flurries of torque

and curve dissolving as I adjust the out-held mitt,
its center blackened by a dozen years of reception.
The needle punched into Pete's fattened lip

as he sat on the white hospital bed, the numbing

spreading to his chin, he drooled while a doctor
sewed the pulp of his mouth shut. It will be a week

before you can understand anything he says.
Now I can hardly see Seth as he cranks back for his throw.
It's as if snow wants to remind us we are erasable.

In silence, the cars slur through hazard by us,
and the ball cracks in my mitt like a punch
from somebody who remembers what it's like

to be beaten, how it feels to watch the beating
come right for you, and how, when you close
your eyes, all you see is snow.

ROUGHousing

We couldn't move our father. We stormed him, shoving his arms, straining to unfurl one pinky finger, tickling his sides, thumping his groin. Once I stood on a kitchen stool and tried to turn his head, pry down a clamped lip. But he never budged. His face would turn red after an hour, a T of sweat would darken his knotty, flannel back. Sometimes a fart would escape, but that's it. Then, one evening, when we were all teens, we realized the game's solution. Instead of trying to move father, we could simply undo him. We popped off both bladelike arms, unpeeled the ears he could harden like shells against his head. We never did spoon out his eyeballs, since they'd already started to give out.

We few brothers still alive meet up annually in some ballroom near one city or the other. We lock all the doors and play "Goodnight Irene," on a loop all night, while we work at reassembling father. Each year we argue about what part went where. Mikey may say, "One ear was a little higher than the other," or Carl will shout, "He held his drink like this!" as he brings a phantom tumbler to his mouth in dad's beautifully tanned, severed hand. No matter what ghastly mangle we finish with, Father begins to dance as best he can. We all join in and croon in chorus the final, *Ireeeeene, goodniiiiiiight*. Though as far as I know, father has never known an Irene, though he did have his secrets.

ICE STORM

Trees slump in glazed cowls and bow
low over the spiral staircase bolted to my building's side.
I have to box my way up, around and around,
through branches, glossy and thin, slung down
like strings of lights torn from eaves.

I am a hound being bated – uppercut, uppercut –
as I slip and dip my way up the iron slide
so I can pry open the door that freezes shut
behind me each morning I leave for work.

Rusted metal trailers down the road
contract with cold, appear to heal themselves
as their open seams pinch together again.
The key to this winter is encasement. I thumb
a wedge of lime down the mouth of my beer.

When I can't sleep, can hardly breathe,
my lungs like bubbles held in pond ice,
I ease my way through the brittle tresses
and back down the staircase, like following
a drill's greased tread, and through

the empty night, heavy and pinned down
by silence. Somewhere in the block
of abandoned houses, I hear a phone ringing.
Although I know the juice has been cut
from the whole row – even the street lights

are dead – I wait for a room to snap into light,
the lamp glow setting crisp sparks in the trees,
thin steam rising from the yellow window.
But of course, no one is home to answer,
the phone rings on from any house

as a photo falls and lands face down
on an attic's unswept floor.

UNDER THE BRIDGE

After a hard stroke of the oar
to ensure drift, I have to lay
flat on my back in the hull
to pass. I hold my breath and pray

the boat won't slow, snag and stay,
leaving me wedged, a pod no wind
could tow, a thought too grim to utter.

Rusty rivets stud joists and beams,
the under-side of this low country bridge,
braille the water brushes and forgets,
nails sealing me in. Water has a way

of erasing motivations, its contours
swell and skirmish over sunk factors:
boulder, fallen tree, body. I forget
why I had to cross under

where water spiders flex,
where the animals who go to water to die
bloat in yellow froth.

What was I missing before, on that side
of the water, that has drawn me to this side?
It's not for the view:

just more scrubby beach,
the odd fisherman, drunk
and trolling sludge for ratfish.

Well, I don't know what's over there,
and I have borrowed this canoe
and driven miles from my city just to see.

As the bow slides clear of the shadow,
and I can sit back up to glide on wavelets again,

I feel a little fleck of nostalgia,
just a winsome itch of it,

as I've felt for all the hells I've fled,
and I miss that cave-like resonance
of plunking droplets, and their tinny echoes –
small talk of self-enclosure –

back before I entered the light again
and it was brilliant.

LATE AT THE VEGAN JOINT

Ladles chimed as Ricky the manager
came down to the kitchen, hitting lights.
Up in the office he'd shaved his face, chest,
the rangy stubble off forearms,
his hair pulled back tight, wrapped in a silk robe.
His face was moist from an avocado peel,
rubbed waxy to the luster I'd seen before
on nights he'd performed. His stage name,
Miss Reba Devereaux, came from
the only black woman ever on *Dallas*.

Ricky must have cut school to catch
afternoon reruns of the soap.
Plastic on the windows, the shut blind's slats
skittering when the rotating fan paused,
a sound like flies panicked by rain, diving at glass.
Queer and lanky, teenage Ricky
kept his truant vigil before the tv,
his eyes bugging at all that teased blond hair,
those shoulder pads like sassy buoys
swaying in melodrama's brine.
The Cattle Club's sole waitress of color
jogs on screen, the scene hardly scans her
in her uniform's manicured snugness.
The woman pours coffee at a two-top and vanishes
into Ricky. Upside down in the pool of his pupil,
she'll walk along the ceiling of his life.

Closing the kitchen with me,
Ricky was all nervous flamboyance:
bounding to the walk-in freezer, tossing in egg salad
and slamming the great door with a high kick
as he huffed through snatches of "It's Raining Men."
Rocking on the bus to my own glam production
of Campbell's eaten out of the pot
followed by a joint on the tenement roof,
I imagined Ricky on stage, drowned in the lights.

His hands flung up for the hallelujahs
like a man becoming the wave that drowns him,
and drawn away on the undertow
of the club's hooting salvos,
back to a darkness no one owns or shares.

COUPLES WHO DIVE

Below where the flashlight's tunnel dead ends,
through the wet strata moon can't reach,
a cluster of burs drift and churn.
They're not lichen, but bright spoors
that cling to the lady diver.

Her mate, who's tied to her ankle,
watches them strike to life
on her, like inscrutable white type
in a burst of composition.

The man wonders,
when it's his turn to lead,
if he'll be legible,
if he'll glow.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

Spangled in lice, the sparrows
storm mown lawns, pilfer tinder,
and set the sorrowing jays on leaf edge.
They bound on sharp legs,
careful not to spill a drop of rage
from their shot glass bodies.
Collect a handful of sea glass
and throw it in the reeds.
You'll flush a sparrow.
The sparrow bartered away its color
for a twig to crack in its beak.
Lost its song and built a note
from the whinny of a clotheslines' rusted runner.
"Rinds," explained the consul
who had the first eight pairs
shipped in from England,
"of the eye's pallet."
Suicides were briefly called
Men Made Out of Sparrows.
*One of them shall not fall
without your Father.*
Death's coin in the worn copper
of each sparrow's chest.
Beneath my wife's eyes
I see the stirring of tiny birds.
They drop through her
and fall into my open hands.
Their hollow-boned plummet
slow as ash.

BETWEEN DOG AND WOLF

It is the hour between dog-
park and field full of shit,

the hour between waiter-actor
and career server, the evening

the armless man gets on his knees
and puts his pursed lips

to the nozzle of an inflatable raft
and just breathes the sour air

in there, before posting it,
never used, mint condition.

It is the New Year's I start smoking again.
Rain springs from an umbrella as it pops open.

The sea slaps at the surf
with the sound of dentures clicking.

The hundredth death and the hundredth rebirth
occurs at the possum ranch.

It is late at night when you wake me.
I was dreaming one of my famous

Freudian numbers, the one
where I lose my penis

in the sand dunes, and have to shovel
them all into pits to find it.

And it is now nearly morning
and we have drilled holes

in the moon's face with our howling.

The bed littered and aglow
with silver corkscrew shavings.
I reach my arm out and see a wing.
I bite it and I won't let go.

AUTUMN BREAK

My mother read the same cheap thriller
to my father in whichever town's library
after the day's long drive.
In rough chairs or on crates
my mother incanted
in her heavy Nordic accent.
My father, elbows on his knees,
rubbed his hands slowly
with the sound of swept sand.
He called the book *tommy gun trash*,
but listened on, watching blooms rise
and fade on her cheeks, her lips dry.
Her consonants landed cold
and hard as the ice blocks he'd load
into the truck four times a week,
over which he'd toss handfuls of sawdust
then stack the open eyed, frozen cod
in rows. By the haul's end they'd
be as splayed and soggy
as the tomato seeds
she'd make my brothers and me
spit out into a cloth then set on the sill
to harden and dry. Spring's thick fruit
we'd cut open and smell in the red meat
the powdered milk of winter.
In cramped libraries,
they'd wander through
milling clusters of tired townspeople,
searching for a private isle -
art books on one side, atlases on the other -
and she'd open and begin to read.
When he closed his eyes,
he'd see the mild skylines of the towns
his route drove him past, so familiar -
towns that, were he placed in their center,
would be a mystery.
They bowed toward one another

when her whispered narrative dropped
to the edge of silence like snow on water,
their foreheads touching.

SAVING THE WEB

The spider web my wife and I found this morning
spanning the spoor stuffed air
between the back gate and the tree
must have been spun and etched on breeze
when we were deep in sleep,
me in my smashed position –
a land-locked Icarus–
Jesse curled solid as a stone
under a waterfall. And we are respectful,
using pods the tree dropped as tongs
to carry the web to a quieter corner,
to preserve the web's splay and its snag,
to curate the history of emission
displayed on the fine strands:
down feathers from a torn jacket,
gnats zoned on venom, pink eraser chaff
from a cuss word reconsidered,
the ash flakes from a kitchen fire.
I'd like to pluck one of its strings,
just to hear what chorus a minor ruin makes.
I can't, though the spider spins silk
that's only sticky on one side,
like scotch tape. You need the poise
of the spider, you need its needle-legs
skittering to hammer out that music,
as well as an ear careful enough
to hear a change of light.
We take such careful steps
veering into shadows
I feel like Chinese opera,
our green prints in the silver grass.
We drape the web on a tulip bush,
a plate of tiny bones. The sky
takes on the pink of an egg held to a lamp,
and we go back inside the house,
Jesse to her novel and me to my book
on war, the day's procession of feathers

and hazards drift by, washing
clean off us. We don't look,
we don't see each other.

MY EX-WIFE: THE HOST OF A SPANISH RADIO SHOW

I only listen to the tapes of her show from the years
we were still together, Spanish dictionary open on my knees.
The waves from these broadcasts have gone stale in the air,
they calcify and spin from their triangulated tunnels

like the dusty wing dropped from a moth, like milky water
from my boiled hotdogs poured down the sink.
I don't need to say it's late at night when I do my listening.
You know it's late. Loving by the rules of rerun, I try to find myself

on the tape's tape, like holding up to the light negatives
from photos I've lost. You know I envy the microphone's
spongy face, darkened with her spittle. Her amplified voice
fills the empty room. I remember when she was filled with echoes.

It was one of the last shows of our marriage, the one
devoted to the Chilean miners. They'd been entombed for nine days.
Trapped. Her face freckled with their darkness.
She shuffled around the house with her hands before her,

as if testing the void: that sealed chamber
that had grown like a mineral rich womb within her.
Her eyes filled with the purring sonar of bats,
her fingers stuttering along the walls left charcoal streaks.

I followed her to the studio, which was really just an office
in the strip mall, its huge windows were one-way glass,
like the interrogation rooms in cop shows.
I stood on the sidewalk and watched my wife, legs

crossed under the messy desk, blanched face tilted up,
as shoppers passed me by carrying packaged drills,
bolts of patterned cloth and furious canaries in brand new cages.
I watched her mouth move and heard the Latin scrimmage

tumble from a speaker hung under the eaves like a hornet's nest.
Of course, I couldn't understand a thing she said,

or why she began to cry when her mariachi theme music
twanged and trumpeted her hour to a close. I hid behind a van.

She wouldn't be coming home. Her car eased out like
the boulder rolled before the cave's mouth. That night
I faced the mirror, flicked on my headlamp,
and tried to make the reflected beam spotlight on my face.

PURIFIER

He spent the summer stripping ivy off the shed
because he didn't know what else to do.
He nabbed strands in both hands
and tore in a frenzy, the clinging green
wrenched free in a rising scale of snaps,
while the last breeze of August
shuddered through silver fencing
and his wife began shutting windows.
He doused the green tangles with gas,
dropped the match and ran away.
A quick flame, then a dull whimper.
They wouldn't burn, but he put the burn
on them. It reminded her of his determination
with talk, with fights, with fucking,
which he out to win, but to kill, to round off and leave
only mute ash. Later, she asked him
to fix her necklace. He flicked and thumbed
the clasp at her nape. Blew half the night
fiddling. When he got it, *click*, they both
took breaths only the drowning draw.
At the rock show she wore a vintage dress
she'd mended, tight at the bodice,
a garish print similar to the wallpaper
they spent their first year languidly, carelessly
tearing off the bedroom walls until their room
was so bright, too bright, like snowblindness.
She went to get a drink and when he
spotted her by the bar with a man,
he wasn't surprised. This image had always
been with him, curling up the walls of his mind.
He bound out and tore the ivy off the walls again
and again - just to see, he had to see, right now.
But did the man really did press his finger
into the seam that ran up her ribs,
into that little hole she didn't sew shut,
then yank the tear open, the red
thread of her stitches popped, her white skin,

and did she really laugh, and did she kiss him?

OUTSIDE LIGHT

Numb moon and stars dulled in a haze of pollen,
that's precisely the quality of glow under which
I ate each boyhood dinner: 60-watts filtered
through a scrim of the black pellet corpses of flies
in the light fixture overhead. That's where they'd mate,

the flies, their eyes hived into 4,000 octagons,
each optical cell straining and spinning
in the compounded orchards of glare up there,
like a rave inside a disco ball, compelling them to couple,
fuck like crazy, until they died as blissed-out crisps

against the white bulb. Always the mystery of how
they got in, the glass so flush to the ceiling it seemed
melted at the seams, dad's duct tape snug on the fixture.
But that's what everybody wondered, *How did I get here?*
And the flies, the glib novas, collapsed into ash.

So we sprayed our complaints on water towers
that groaned like gods dismayed. We barreled
through gravel runs, pale dust tenting behind
the six-cylinder whoopy, brights punching
against oak and fern, with me belly down

and cruciform on the roof, each hand gripping
the front windows, loose legs sliding over the edge
for each fishtailing turn. Now the mystery
is how any of us survived, never bucked off into night
like a spark knocked from the fire. If light

could echo the way our lives seem to echo us
into the next life, its glare lessening with each recasting,
each spark more difficult to strike from the same stone,
then I wonder, is it the same light? Is the wing
crumbling like a wafer on my tongue the wing of a fly?

THE URN BUT NOT THE ASHES

It's late when my wife comes home.
She drifts into the bathroom, mum as seed,
to brush her teeth.

But I know where she's been.

By the dirt behind her white ears,
by the way mist falls from her mouth
when she bends to spit in the sink
I know she's been moonlighting as a funeral urn.

She can't help it. Part of her design.

By her eyes startled like released doves
I know that she's spent the day buried,

digesting remains, rehearsing the regrets
that obsess the dead.

Families gather around their departed
who skis in the casket along a conveyor belt
into the furnace. Chamber music chisels

down the mint walls. In the back room,
off-limits to the bereaved, the belt ends,
a slugs trail of ash withdraws from the flames.

A sooty mortician sweeps the dust
and nuggets with a black paintbrush
into my wife's open mouth.

Some nights when nightmares
make her stiff joints pop up and down
her body like a cut cord plugged back in

I'll turn on my side and see
the dead in their rouge and trimmed Van Dykes,

all of them enamored
by a love I can't know,
and their collapsed eyes glow.

NORTH WINTER

In country far enough
the water molecule has grown accustomed
to its spiny puffer fish body.

Thorny hail most days, and the ice shears off
windshields like sparks.

The grimaces of the stiff
as they jab the scrapper like sawing awkward bone
freeze for months on their faces.

That's how they recognize each other,
that far north.

The widower farmer throws his porridge on the floor.
Hobbles out into the pasture.

He passes the manure spreader,
frosted shit glinting on fan blades.

The water that seeped through the ceiling was bile-yellow.
Left a sepia ellipse on his undershirt as he laid on the couch.

But when he got up to the overflowing tub
it was pink from the glass of wine she dropped.

As he swings into the barn, the farmer remembers
the way her slick white body looked dried out
but still work-strong in the rose water.

What gathered in the space between her floor
and his ceiling that could turn that water to rot?

He goes up to the biggest heifer, round
and bony like a giant Japanese lantern,
and slaps her across the face.

“Now, you know you deserved that,” he says.
Dribble of grey starch running down his chin.

The cow just keeps chewing, wet eyes
watching light pour over the cement floor.

The milk jug in the pond gulps sewage
under a foot and a half of ice. The cow
turns her head as if to listen to its last swallow,
and it sinks to the murky bottom

where her calf lays,
as if it were still in the red sack of her belly,
nose soft as snow.

The farmer can't milk her anymore.
It's been months. Will the taut zeppelin, achingly pink,
really pop?

A vulture, feet frozen to a stop sign,
pukes mouse bones on the road, a string of scythes.

YOU DON'T FUCK WITH DEATH

I can't hear the prayers
of the passengers
while the plane
follows its purple
plummet through night.
But I can, effortlessly,
imagine all the
jouncing plastic masks
dropped from the ceiling,
they dance like puppets mastered
by clumsy children.
Look at the way
the plane pursues
its flames, the fire
hiding somewhere
beneath that mountain,
licking up through veins
like the hallucinatory gas
of the oracle. Bow
your head and breathe
deeply and you
will see the future.
Oh, death is the pits.

Aeneas carries his dad
on his back, a bur,
who is so close to death
he lets the old man off.
Warm air blasts
from the closing gates
of the city bus.
Shuffling his black,
Velcro shoes, still holding
his stamped transfer
like an blunt weapon
before him, the skeleton
finds his bench.

The hawk that has been
circling this spot all day
dives. The hero
must love you
if you are to retain
some of the old strength.
When the crazy old man
starts swinging his sword around
the shrieking hawk disappears.
But he dies nonetheless.
His empire burns.
The galaxy dimples
where he falls, don't
we wish. The plane
leaves a few scuffs, a few
divots in the cliff face.
We get to bury
the people we love,
our sad strength.
Jesus, life is such shit.

My mystic friend Nick
asks me to bury him
alive. Just for an hour.
His mouth puckered
around toilet paper rolls
taped together, a snorkel
for diving in death.
What hokum. What twaddle.
So I laugh a little
as I abandon him,
thinking of the first
few ants dropping down
his breathing tube.
Just a tickle on the tongue.
But then the whole
red army as if
Nick were siphoning flames,
filling him like
ventriloquism
of a sinister god.

HUMMINGBIRD MIGRATION

A spray of bodies so slight and fleet,
they vanish into their height.
I spend the day listening for them
streaking by on their way south.
A sound, I imagine,
that could fill a quieter sky,
tiny zippers hastily zipped.
A little girl crouches over a mason jar,
stabbing an ink pen against its lid.
She needs the things she captures
to survive her. But she can't
pierce the gold seal.
In a blond rage,
she starts pounding.
It looks like she's shaking dice,
except for the pen,
its nib blunt, its cracked shaft.
And on the last drive down,
the pen pops.
Her hands are blue.
They blend perfectly
with the sky, her raised fists
like warps in a thermal.
A thousand razorblades
skate through the clouds
that fall apart
in lumbering strips.
The jar fogs over
with small, imagined breaths.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION

University of Louisville M.A. in English	2012
Ripon College B.A. in English	2007

AWARDS

Parallax Prize for Poetry, <i>Ripon College</i>	2006
Dorothy Wilgus Pickard Prize for Creative Writing, <i>Ripon College</i>	2007
Creative Writing Award, <i>University of Louisville</i>	2011

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

West Roxbury Education Complex Writing Tutor & Workshop Leader	2008
Instructed high school students in writing methods and founded and led an afterschool creative writing workshop.	

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Louisville Metro Corrections and Louisville Community Corrections Center, Louisville, KY Co-Founder of Inside Voice & Workshop Leader	2008
Created with mental health professional at LMC, sole leader of weekly workshops.	
Family Scholar House, Louisville, KY Case Worker	2008-2010
Organized and facilitated programming for single parents, advocate, volunteer coordinator. Created and led	

creative writing workshops, organized poetry reading fund raiser.

Oven Bird Magazine, Louisville, KY

Founder & Editor-in-Chief

2011

Created magazine format, organized staff, solicited work
– first issue due out May, 2012

PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS

Core Sample, guerilla poetry anthology of Ripon poets

Edited rough booklet of student and faculty poetry

2006

“Drowning Weather”

Poem in Verse Wisconsin, Fall 2010, Issue 104

2010

“Engaged Self-Portrait,” “Self-Portrait with the Guys,” “Self-Portrait as a Husband”

Poems in Snakeskin Poetry Webzine, December 2010,
Number 171

2010