

2009

Found a gun in the woods, empty

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Found A Gun In The Woods, Empty

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
June 2, 2003

Keywords: poetry, found, cento, dissociative, ecstatic

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Found a Gun in the Woods, Empty

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ABSTRACT

This is an original work of poetry. There are many forms used in this collection. There are found and cento poems, as well as free verse forms in this collection. Some of the poems are narrative, while others use a dissociative mode. This work represents an extension of postmodernists, like Barth and Pynchon. It also represents an extension of surrealists like Lamantia and Ashbery.

Introduction

Found a Gun in the Woods, Empty is an extension of the work of postmodernists, like Barth and Pynchon, and surrealists like Lamantia and Ashbery. Postmodernism can be defined as a style and idea in the arts characterized by distrust of theories and ideologies and by the drawing of attention to conventions. For me, poetry involves a radical reassessment of modern assumptions about culture, identity, history, and language. The postmodernist influence in my work seeks to challenge the “poetry of continuity,” as well as to separate itself from a continuum of art, often through absurdity. In this way, some of my poems tend toward a dissociative mode.

A dissociative mode recognizes certain inadequacies in narrative forms that can restrict, as Lamantia would refer to it, “the Ecstatic.” The ecstatic, in the context of poetry, can be defined as an aesthetic sought through instinctual rather than analytical factors. Because it is necessarily unfiltered, a dissociative mode can often seem hermetic. This sealed quality of a dissociative mode can appear to be emotionally removed, as Tony Hoagland's essay *Fear of Narrative and the Skittery Poem of Our Moment* points out, however the deeply personal nature of creating a mythology, a mythology that wants to surpass the trappings of groupthink, could not possibly be, if it hopes to be successful, anything other than passionate.

Surrealists like Breton, Lamantia, and Ashbery have had a profound influence on my poetry. I believe that words are symbols that not only represent ideas, but can create ideas. As Breton defined it, it is an attempt to “attack the utilitarian usage of words and language, and give power back to words.” In this way, the surreal elements in my work seek to tap into the mysterious or indefinable quality of dreams and visions. Language is primal, and it can express primal qualities that may be satisfying only in a lyrical or sonic sense, rather than in terms of narrative structure. The need to transcend convention is an attempt at a connection to the primal. I believe that this transcendent need in my work serves as a substitute for a religious satisfaction, which, as an atheist, may be otherwise lacking. Again, this need to create an individual culture is an important part of my work.

Charles Bernstein in his essay on poetics points out the exciting possibilities of “poetry as process,” where the act of writing poetry usurps, or changes, poetic theory. So, every attempt carries the potential for something new to be created beyond what poetics can predict. Bernstein, in fact, defines poetics as something “situational...[that] courts contradiction, [and] feeds on inconsistency.” The idea of mistrusting convention in favor of spontaneity is also in accord with postmodernism. The desire to challenge conventional poetics is sometimes expressed in my work.

Some of the poems in this collection (THEY MAP THE BRAIN ACTIVITY OF LIARS, THE VISITOR, I’M GETTING ON THE NEWS TONIGHT, YOUR MUTED VOICE IS MERELY GONE) have been inspired by interviews I conducted with Harrison, a man with Asperger’s syndrome. People with Asperger’s syndrome, which is

an autism spectrum disorder, are restricted in their ability to interact socially. They often exhibit limited interests and idiosyncratic behaviors. They develop an atypical use of language that shows a lack of motivation to communicate socially. This use of language gives a voice to an unfathomable inner world. An exaggeration of the post-modern man, one can only communicate with Harrison on his terms. One must unravel his multiple stories, which are told all at once, through concentration and imaginative leaps. One must always fill in the blanks with parts of oneself in order to (attempt) communication. This way of analysis is in step with the postmodern idea of deconstruction. In this way, we must challenge assumptions and frames of reference to find some kind of understanding that goes beyond the surface.

Centos and found poems in this collection represent an idea of a filter that must attempt to turn the 'public' into the 'personal' in order to connect with the world. In other words, if we cannot escape the past, and we must consume it, then our only rebellion can be in the way we filter it. Poetry, after all, is a way of seeing and interpreting the world. Again, this technique expresses the idea of poetry as a spontaneous process. This technique is also meant to remind us of the 'play' quality of poetry. In this way, poetry is a game of sounds and words, the rules of which are often extemporaneous. The rules of the game exist in the moment, and perhaps only for that unique moment of thought and feeling.

I would like to briefly describe the origin of some of the found and cento poems in this collection. DAYBREAK, WE DRINK YOU AT NIGHTFALL is a cento of lines taken at random from the anthology POETRY OF OUR WORLD, which is an

international anthology of contemporary poetry. JUNKY is a found poem of lines taken from the novel of the same name by William S. Burroughs. DEAD RECKONING is a found poem of lines taken from various nonfiction journals of first person accounts by pilots. AN ALMOND TREE FLOWER is a cento of lines that I translated from contemporary Italian poetry. SAW PALM SUBMISSIONS is a cento of lines taken from actual submissions sent to the University of South Florida's literary journal while I was poetry editor. A SOULFUL CALL is a cento of lines taken from UNDER THE ROCK UMBRELLA, which is an anthology of contemporary poetry.

The title poem, among others, attempts to combine an exteriority, or dissociative mode, with an interiority that pretends at continuity. In this way, the orientation of a narrative holds together the pure experience of a word celebration. This process is largely instinctual and extemporaneous. The idea of a word celebration comes from surrealists, like Lamantia, whose work seeks to express what can be described as the ecstatic use of language. In this way, the poetic use of language becomes something akin to the mystical. For me, it is a connection to a primal place where spirituality was perhaps born.

For the title poem, which began as an unrelated collection of original lines (although there is one line that is a combination of two found lines, one by Lamantia and one by Robert Lowell), I was guided only by a sense of tone. In later drafts, I allowed for a stronger connection between the lines that had not been prefigured. The connections come in dreamlike shifts in time and place that are held together by a common tone. In

one sense, the poem has epistolary qualities, which is not discovered until the end of the poem. Surprise and misdirection are meant to excite the senses in this poem. The stream-of-consciousness shifts make it clear that the loss of a center is an important aspect of the poem. The rejection of family and the hopeless situation, a situation that is intentionally vague, further the tone of desperation in the poem. The loss of the senses, or their rediscovery, through drug experiences, again, underscores the desperation, as well as the idea of being somewhere foreign and on the verge of committing a drug-related crime, in this case concealment for the purpose of smuggling opium. The ideas of being somewhere foreign and of being at war are used to create a sense of urgency. This sense of urgency creates a contract between the reader and speaker of the poem through a common emotion. Readers will follow an emotion that they identify with, even if some of the referents become distant. Placing referents at distant vantage points is not meant to put all emotion at a distance, but rather it is meant to bring focus to specific emotions that become more powerful when successfully removed from a narrative structure. This is where ‘belief’ comes into play, I feel. The reader, hopefully, does not merely think something is true because it follows a logical pattern, but feels it is true because it mirrors something primal and immediately recognizable.

The human mind naturally tries to order chaos, and these poems are an attempt to stand at that threshold between imagination and reality. Instead of always imposing order, my poems seek to give agency to the imagination of the reader. The poems in this collection want to celebrate the possibilities of a new language. The poems want to generate

questions about new ways of communicating. The poems to come are part of a process that cannot be prefigured, or easily quantified.

FOUND A GUN IN THE WOODS, EMPTY

So drunk, almost drank from a candle.

An improvised high pools
in the roots of cypress,
some horses drowning
white in a river.

On the Silk Road
trading 88 Milds or
among the wood of apricot,
with leaves shaped like hearts,
the lone seed called
a "stone."

Everyone heads for the rim at sunset.
Everyone fills clips with loose shells.

The area is not secure.

Tying oriole opium in bowknots of gauze,
they hang in a "J" wrapped around the palms,
bleeding through
like alpenglow.

I consider you nothing
but a hole
I came out of.

VA POETRY WORKSHOP

talk about dog-and-pony shows
civi's mishandling arms
smiling with corpses
handing out toys
in a burn unit

some exercises:

describe the sound of an IED in terms of touch
describe pain in terms of an animal

find inner-correspondences
choose a creature that fits
give it parallel actions
give it harmonic meaning

create a metaphor
that describes a phantom limb
or use a simile:
“A phantom limb is like...”

salt in repetitions

tell a story within a story
use similar symbols that are emblematic

talk about getting inoculated
first in line is the coldest shot
you need time
to warm up the bottle
between cupped hands

DAYBREAK, WE DRINK YOU AT NIGHTFALL
(A CENTO)

Someone cleans a rifle in his kitchen,

From the dark, dark, dark,
From one sin to another,
The wagtail is singing,
There is no limit to it,

Smoky resinous bourbon
Ripped away into the hanging fabric,
The woods echoed
That I'm only one of many,

We will rise
Ignorant and defiant as the dawn,

DISGUISE

The wings when closed
are grey green,
and resemble the young leaves
of the bramble.

The hues are conditioned,
they seek to promote replication.

False eyes
on the wings
are a fine blue
bordered with black.

Disguise means
surviving in a context.

Counter shading breaks
the silhouette
in a tree of vermiliads.

Diet varies with setting.
They feast on succulents,
numerous ornamentals,
the carcass of a shorebird.

New generations find the ocean,
swimming every second of life
in a kind of bioluminescence,

a tasty lure.

IN HOME NURSE: ABIDE IN THE VINE

I thank the Lord for temporary paralysis,
For insufficient tissue where implants can't anchor,
Alone in a vague catheter grip.

Ancient Egyptians made catheters from papyrus, ancient Greeks from reeds
(Ben Franklin invented the first flexible urinary catheter, using Closed System
Suction)

It's Valentine's Day even when the urethra is damaged (as in suprapubic catheterization).

Bride of Christ! You monitor the oversensing of extracardiac signals.
Tight aquamarine jeans featuring spare tire and camel toe,
Each day you empty my bedpan and say: You're up to your asshole in alligators!

The wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.

I AM NOT SO, ANY LONGER

A hare scares a horse,
a bad omen for a new moon.

Washerwomen flee the edging dark,
wolves wait for those who tire from the march.

Broken bones, hunger, no sleep, surviving poison,
fortune mixes opium with first light.

Outraged, Moscow burns Moscow.

Frozen birds fall mid-flight
at the gates of the empty city.

SHADOWS OF SCANDAL BALLOON IN OPAQUE DISASTER

1.

Blind Marathon Runner Molested, Imposter Guide

Post-Abortion Rituals, Cannibalism

Infants Mauled By Family Pet, Wolf Mix

Disturbed Vet Congratulated Before Fatal Fall

2.

Mannequins Conceal Butane Hash Oil, Counterfeit 10's

Militants Feared Brain Drain To West

New Music For The Troubled

Unchurched Conversion Points, Christian Video Game

Hexane-Extracted Resin Effects Symbolic, Appeal Denied

3.

Judge Cuts Throat, World Mourns

A Solitary Slice For Desperate Movement

Scientist Feared 44 Magnum Opus

Individuals Seek Satisfaction In Bitter Pill

Consider Revenge Motive In Gasoline Burning, Jury Warned

Consider This Our White Flag

JUNKY

(found poem of lines taken from the novel of the same name by William S. Burroughs)

An eyedropper is easier to use than a hypo,
Like lying in warm water,
You seem to float without outlines,
His face bore the marks of a losing fight,

Like lying in warm water,
Morphine hits the back of the legs first,
His arms bore the marks of a constant fight,
Doing five years because he scored for a pigeon,

Morphine hits the back of the legs first,
A syrette is like a toothpaste tube with a needle on the end,
Five years because he scored for a pigeon,
Roll it up into a pill and wash it down with coffee,

A syrette is like a toothpaste tube with a needle on the end,
You seem to float without outlines,
Roll it up into a pill and wash it down with coffee,
An eyedropper is better than a hypo,

Like lying in warm water,
If air bubbles could kill, there wouldn't be a junky alive,

THESE LIONS ARE MY OWN SEETHING SONS

They hold firstborns in their bloody jaws.

We go deep into the crawlspace.
Life becomes porous.

They say we make natural spies.

I'll never forget the hollow glow of sunrise
when the flag finally caught the meager wind,
when the throbbing world fit into a wound.

Pastel and blood on canvas,
found objects from a beach near Madrid.

The stagnant puddle of Pleiades
is smeared with dock lights.

Dawn is a searing song of mottled gulls
dancing like of book of fragmentary lines.

I am a heatsink of nerve.

AN ANGEL STOPPED
(AFTER DARIA MENICANTI)

An angel stopped
the leaves from talking
in your unknown tongue

much more than the wind
much more than a leaf
beneath a sycamore of Samaria

that glitters incredulous
between the dark fruit
between the blood
that turns, that smiles
in the terrible silence.

Just a thin voice
remains in the throat.

Where will you go?

Perhaps to re-weave the words
in a game of perfumes
in a faint trembling of petals
in the unknown flowers
in visions of Cairo

where I have seen the granite
in the quarry
not yet obelisk
not yet the ancient grain
where the scent returns
like three white bells.

DEAD RECKONING

(found poem of lines taken from various nonfiction journals of first person accounts by pilots)

I was looking forward to Martha's Vineyard,
the grilled lobster at Black Dog,
inching my way to the Haven-bound ferry.

1978 Cessna 182,
a throaty 182,
I wove my way
just west of the city,
preflighted for the hour-and-change
along the coast of the Cape.

Radio sang outta nowhere,
Warren and Bill weren't
hootin' and hollerin'
for joy.

Left-wing burnout,
a sure cure for the high-lonesomes.

No matter.

Can't wait for the ceiling to lift,
a dazzling white light,
like parachute flares,
tight in over a power line.

Pick out a snowy field in gliding range.

Less weight,
less wind vector,
less shimmy.

The control panel
meaningless in the glare,
green as afterbirth.

Instruments read nothing of true air speed,
dead reckoning.

A real forced landing is aiming down the muzzle of a gun.

NOSTALGIA

Regret becomes nostalgia. – Addict's Damn

The night
is about to
disappear
in a flight
of red poppies,
in the smile
of an acrobat

rising
over the bay.

SKYSONG

Type: Display Shell #SS82434D - Professional Fireworks - 5 Inch Cylinder Shell - SKYSONG

Description: Rises ashen, predatory, trailing a sliver of silver. Splitting comets fragment with multiple chrysanthemum bursts. Explodes in a red tangle of thorns, whistling. Stars. Resolves in ocherlust, dance-like dissolution into meditative blues and greens.

SOME SLIGHT GIFT OF OBSERVATION AND THAT SENSE, SO RICH

1.

A bad can of paint in an empty dumpster: brilliant
rose flecked with cardinal, a parked car passenger, his fingers
stained with bad paint, a woman wandering around Roseblood's, panicked,
a face searching faces that bleed into each other, each
unknown hue, it is not her son, not her blood.

2.

Hit six times, each a deep graze, he slumps in
the cover of some sycamores, the killer is not smiling
anymore, no shadows, the sky quiet, reloading an empty gun,
his fingers stained brilliant rose flecked with cardinal, a face
searching a face, familiar, bloodless, erasing footprints along the way.

NARCISSUS IN BLOOM

She would not allow
the fragrant flowers.

She would destroy the last
spring-flowering bulbs.

Some in tousled whispers,
some in hyacinth silence.

She listens in the low larkspur,
showy, full of thorns.

AN ALMOND TREE FLOWER
(A CENTO)

Our love is like an almond tree flower, so fragile.
No more crying, no crying,
You must pick it now, against the sky.

It has burned away
the last red, the last rose, the last gray.

A little white breath
in the heart of blue,
a frail child
sells chrysanthemums,
and there will be icy stars
in the green distance.

Someone cries
someone searches for chrysanthemums
for me
in the world
like a blinded goldfinch.

The vast anxiety
reveals dawn,
Autumn's black joy,
like the sour harmony
of birdcages.

The world
is draining its great dark waters.

THEY MAP THE BRAIN ACTIVITY OF LIARS

They smoke by a crack in the window.

They say a stone should be alone.

They use a strange voice, colorless.

They see a sign, an empty room.

They are the next day, nothing.

They panic in the backseat.

They say you should feel something by now.

They offer a smoke and agree it is late.

THE VISITOR

A stopover in a quiet town,
I feel like window-dressing for a dead man.

The Pills guarded by voiceprint are better than these.
I have flowers, wandering hospital corridors.

Room 211, half of her looks like a deflated balloon,
wide open purse on the nightstand,
gray in the TV glare.

The Pills are in food trays,
some are decent,
a cadence,
stainless,
like the dense and emotional life of insomnia.

It is a fever that undoes me
down to the very bottom, to the very bottom,

I am in the abyss still.

Like a beached whale full of wolves,
I cannot face another bloody muzzle.

I'M GETTING ON THE NEWS TONIGHT
(AFTER PHILIP LAMANTIA)

When virtue sleeps, she awakens refreshed. – Nietzsche

These flying saucers, my God.
Children of Satan.

Do you know, he came at the police
with a steak knife in each hand?

To cross the Siam lost to us,
inhaled from a bed of ashes.

The night she got out of jail, Cindy was wet.
She was really wet.

A stargazer, that's what you are,
every waking moment, a reflection of the sun.

The Devil dwells in us all.
I look forward to your submission.

STERLING REEMER

Sterling Reemer went for sandwiches, was assaulted, made a report, got on the news, went to trial, got on the news again, and wrote a book. Everyone was fascinated.

Sterling Reemer counseled victims, started a foundation, stole from the foundation, was arrested at the airport, and wrote a second book. Everyone said it was understandable.

Sterling Reemer went on T.V., shared a plane with Nelson Mandela, molested an underage assistant, wrote an article, apologized for the article and the comments on China, went on T.V. again, wrote another book, and started workshopping a screenplay. Everyone loves Sterling Reemer.

WRITTEN ON THE BACK OF A POSTCARD OF THE SUNSHINE SKYWAY
BRIDGE

In this November atop the Skyway bridge,
The wind is sullen and dry,
My mind is sullen and dry,
Like lines of verse I cannot
raw to memory.

I am supported by twenty-one steel cables
clad in nine-inch steel.

Considered the "flag bridge" of Florida,
Several missing are suspected of jumping,

Nobody knows, no body recovered.

The segments are hollow,
The wind is roadkill.

There is no wind, now,
only the cold swell of sky.

Or there is wind, but no cold sky,
No hollow segments, only

roadkill.

DETECTIVE PINCHBECK

Drunk, Doc does his jazzhanded autopsy.
Too much neurofeedback
is pointless suffering.

Details.
Favors a blade,
rake angle.
Symbols
meaning "Death to Spies."

Likes manual
strangulation.
Likes details.
Perp's a fun lover.

Redhead.
Works with solvents.
Trace amounts
found at seven scenes.

They are duct taped,
taken to his cellar,
and dressed like hogs.

Stolen Cadillac
traced to downtown heroin
operation, balloon filled corpses
smuggled in body bags,
shipped as far as
Chicago, dead-ends.

Some cabbies remember
driving "a strange one"
to the park.
No ID.
They drive one way
and look another.

Take photos,
blacklight everything.

BOUGHT YOUR MEMOIR

Bought your memoir
at an estate sale.

You wrote your name in it.

May.

8 AM – No solids. No liquids after midnight.

Never married.

Mother left for Wyoming, once a Catholic nun, became a "prophet"
and led a cult in Casper, branch of Assemblies of God,
sang at night,
closed with Kansas City,
Father too,
before an unexplained drowning,
no suspects.

8 PM – Enema, twice, lying on your side.

No children. Koi
named after books
in the Bible.

Two juicy polyps,

cancerous.

You had a Bloody Mary
at Cerro de la Muerte.

You left
a cheesecake picture
taken at Fort Desoto
bookmarking
a page titled

Wilfredo.

WATERSHED

I watch you eat strozzapreti, “priest-stranglers.”
You ignore the microburst of my Djarum Black.

I cut myself.
I check my sugar.
I compulsively tie knots,
a form of onomatomania,
plastic bags, straws, string
from anywhere.

You are shoe shopping on a laptop.

You click
a folder full of photos
taken at the mouth
of the Hillsborough.

You can run
your fingers
through your hair.
You can breathe.
You can swim
at the mouth
of the Hillsborough.
You can do
anything.

SAW PALM SUBMISSIONS
(A CENTO)

Y is the mind burning.

It came from the box,
you know the one,
below the makeshift cranium.

I wore a skirt underneath my trench coat
and summoned small gods.

Sillymongering Grenadine,
where did all these numbers come from?

I looked down and oozed lightly,
but she kept her glitter pants.

Blamesyrup,
rhinovalues.

Someone send me to the preacher's house.
Open my mouth and gloss me.

Polyramble,
vulturerealm.

There's a footpath outside my door
and I'm powerless to stop it.

WILLIAMS PARODY

so much depends
upon

a ten dollar
bill

tightly rolled
on the table

beside the white
powder.

LARKIN IMITATION

One should eat
alone.

A choking hazard
all this talking,
all this intentional
distraction.

Pets are bothersome, too.

They'd love any jerk
with a can of tuna
and a box of sand.

They say things--
things that should be left
unsaid.

They always
want something.

They claw
at the windows.

CLICK

Jane's a reporter.
It's her day off and she's had a few beers.
She sits in the Florida room daydreaming
about a cool vampire,
his name is Kamien
he wears frilly dress shirts
and fucks her hard,
in her daydream.

John looms in an isolation tank
dictating his next sci-fi detective story
a sort of fan fiction
into a waterproof digital recorder
that floats near his mouth rippleless.
He misuses soap.
The Klingon did it. The Klingon
had to do it...revenge, but there are complications.
It is a character-driven fantasy,
like Jane's MMORPG, where she goes when he is
walking along a riverbank in Titan Quest or
at the edge of a cliff in Might and Magic,
where he first considered killing Kamien, or at least deleting
the fantasy from her favorites list with a definitive click.
Kamien is the star of her MMORPG,
but he talks like Lord Byron, like he's "somebody."
He deserves to die.

She doesn't like the other people in the MMORPG.
They are occasionally "funny enough" but not enough to be endearing
in a long-term association, it's all surface shit anyway, these avatars.

She thinks of some useful details about the crimes she reports.
He hears her banging on the isolation tank
just as all the pieces of his story start to come together.

He pretends to be dead, just long enough to finish.

ABANDONED

In bed we listen
to rats in the attic.

They must be territorial or mating.

They gnaw on Christmas bulbs
and old love letters,
a cheesecake picture of you
on the beach at Fort DeSoto.

When they're silent
we listen, deep,
to the heart of the house,
after telling the children they were squirrels,
but none of us can sleep.

One day, after the children left, after
you died,
I noticed the silence
in the attic like a cold ember box.

And who is left now?
Not a soul.

I should pull the string and release
the collapsed ladder,
climb up
and check the damage,

but not today.

IMPORTANT CAVEATS OF INTERSTELLAR ULTRAVIOLET GALACTIC-TYPE EXTINCTION

Fear of cameras
at dawn,
empty corridors,
no breakfast
after eleven.

Sixteen years,
nothing works.

They say a man
should talk more,
get involved,
but everything
is predatory.

Like a mouth,
its ledger
checkboxed
for hearts,
lungs, little things,
bioprospecting
is wide open,
a shift
from synthetics,
China's
new market,
wide open.

Nobody wants
the truth,
sixteen years.

Been asleep,
been a chart
on a wall.

PUPPET 1

My wife is afraid.

I tell her, alright.
I tell her
alright.

Talk to the puppet.

Don't look
at my human eyes
when I'm using the voice,

I don't want to be the bad guy.

PUPPET 2

Faith
like joints of divinorum
triple-dipped in formaldehyde
drying on the windowsill.

Formaldehyde drips, grinning
in a third story window box,
my wife is afraid.

Talk to the puppet,
don't look at my human eyes,
use the voice,
be the bad guy.

Standing in the street,
the puppet show dislodged
from the context
of its dialogue,
you can see
my lips moving,
and you stop
believing.

PUPPET 3

The contract
broken,
the window box
the sidewalk

triple-dipped
drying in the sun.

You wander
into the park.

You wonder
why you're afraid.

PUPPET 4

The formaldehyde
takes 30 minutes,
the divinorum
hits you
right away
but doesn't last.

A bad jolt.

You sweat,
you swear
to God.

Ordinary objects seem to come to life.

My wife is afraid
to try it.

Never do it
alone.

FOLLOW THE RULES AND YOU'LL BE OK

use words like Always and Never

say things you can't take back

realize that no one loves you:

tonight

tomorrow

the next day

5 minutes from now

in the car

out of the car

around the corner

on the bus to New York

at the station

in front of a soda machine

use words like Often and Soon

suffer over things you don't really care about or have a stake in

feel something one night, and don't tell anyone about it

sitting in a parked car with the radio off

then go to bed alone, don't listen

to the car pulling away

FLYING IS A COMPROMISE

They could be Bosnians.
I don't know what they are.
They sang Karaoke in the
bar across from the airport.
One of them did Driver's Seat
where they made a little stage.
They started to harmonize
around my third 7 & 7.

They all like Karaoke,
don't they?

We can't hear each other
once the engine's running.

I'm keeping an eye
open.

I've got my cell phone
in my hand.

EDITING

let's take a drive
through a movie set

a good lot at Magic Hour

editing problems
in several scenes

in several scenes
it loses it
at the end

it ends too soon
or not soon enough

the colors are wrong
it moves

too slow

I yank the wheel I say
forget about it

I follow through with a shot

you held the flask like
a warm hand

YOUR MUTED VOICE IS MERELY GONE

He had cue cards everywhere, no storytelling at all.

A jazz critic, starving with food all around.

I grabbed a bright orange panel for signaling aircraft.

We allow wilderness to stay wild.

Don't be a cheerleader today, pal.

Memory disorder, double-blind study, dementia,

In the men's room. Capsules of time.

We leave seed on distant planets.

BURY MY SENSES

Glazed with rainwater
a serpent invades morning.

*Bury my senses
in this mystery.*

It slithers wet
in the cold dirt.

*Bury my senses
then bury my bones.*

Their doctrine is
superabsorbent.

*Bury my senses
in this mystery.*

Underthings cannot be
washed by laypersons.

*Bury my senses
then bury my bones.*

SYLPHS

"Even if he is a child of Saturn and if Saturn has overshadowed his birth, he can still escape Saturn's influence, he can master Saturn and become a child of the Sun."

- *Paracelsus*

Air is its element, slender &

Slow.

I call dibs on the Redhead.

Which Redhead?

Any Redhead.

Paracelsus says

There are two types of stars,

The stars of wisdom & folly.

For each sign of the Zodiac:

a talisman.

The philosopher rules the stars,

And they must follow him.

POPCORN POPPING ON THE APRICOT TREE

Father too, for a year before
an unexplained drowning, no suspects,
knew the origin of red-handed,
described an apricot tree in bloom,
rises pale, fractured dark,
like several others where the church is based,
like a child's song, northern Utah,
always left me a note, clean handwriting, personal,
familiar handwriting, candy for the troubled,
she's dirty now, I stumble in the dark,
why hide behind tinted glass?

WHAT A MESS FOR THE BOYS TO CLEAN UP

He fed alligators rancid pot roast wrapped
in little boy's clothes, in a small town
just outside the Everglades.

The space shuttle *Challenger*
broke apart and exploded,
off the coast of central Florida.

Watermelon-smashing comedian Gallagher
earned a degree in engineering at USF.

ALPENGLow 1

A tasty lure, red red red.

Surfaces grow biofilms.

I cannot live alone without you.

I accept terms.

I accept revenge with gasoline.

I can express myself to undergrads that "don't need the grave that bad."

ALPENGLow 2

I was a pretend monster in a character driven fantasy.

In Albina's Assisted Living, the old ladies called me Captain and knew they couldn't
whore for cigs.

Examples of life as artifice.

Metaphors at a workshop of disabled vets taken from sugar cues: there are no sugar cues.

ALPENGLow 3

One house faces east, another west.

Hit the archives. Scour the libraries.

Much of the night must be retextured.

The window is a hypodermic light and they're in there.

Congratulations! Surfaces grow biofilms!

Bacteria are present.

They can read you like a fairy tale, like a hard-on in church.

Your window is a hypodermic light, no shadows at all.

Much of the night must be overcome.

One person faces east, another west.

Here.

It keeps the bugs off.

A SOULFUL CALL
(A CENTO)

1.
She scrubs clothes by hand in gasoline,
the way piano wire thrums when given slack.

Stars arranged on the ceiling,
my rifle brings his song to me.

The bloodgroove sunk deep,
in trashpiles, in bricks, in cars.

The sound lifts the birds off the water.

That's where I am now, swaying
by the water's edge.

2.
A clutch of calm air

I walk into the autumn,
into waves of air,
sweeps of green and blue.

The artist has no children,
and he is tired.

I have known the immunities of darkness,
Brazilian cardinals and purple finches,
aroused to their own listless flight of sleep.

A desire wakens me.

You from the anchor line, shaking her,
you into delirium, you try,

with you I will bring them some light.

3.
It seems a bruise is spreading east.

No one else remembers
a thin fish knife balanced in his hand.

Skins of glass pressed to glass,
bronzed by the falling sun.

What I imagined is not you,
the town is dust.

My life in black
plastic garbage bags.

Moth light, moth wind,
its branch is nearby.

Stray dogs come with the rain.

FORTUNE

1.

My right hand has a scar.

It's in the palm.

A stab wound.

The pencil lead is still lodged in the life line.

Now it's just a black mark.

Bad luck.

2.

When she was young, my grandmother wrote the lyrics to the song Too Young.

Nat King Cole had a hit with it. It's an old song, the one that goes:

they say that love's a word / a word we've only heard / but can't begin to know the meaning of

But she was never paid dollar one, even though the song peaked billboard position #1, for 5 weeks in 1951. It was just bad luck.

She was sixteen when she wrote the lyrics. Everyone knew Annette was good at writing poems, so two boys from her neighborhood in Little Italy asked for something to put to a song. They wrote the music.

Then, in her words, some "shrewd Jew" in a publishing house in NYC told them not to worry, then stole her words and sold the song under his girlfriend's name.

After a year of unsuccessful litigation that left him deep in debt, one of the boy's fathers hanged himself in the basement, cold and musky among barrels of homemade wine.

My grandmother never wrote again.

3.

I never think about suicide.

Every day, I never think about it.

4.

Years after my grandmother died, I started going to the Chua Phat Phap Buddhist temple. They offered guided meditation. We sat on the floor and listened to a story describing how nature is reborn.

You start as a leaf, and you end as a leaf.

You imagine yourself as the steps between.

5.

I always kept my eyes open, hoping that someone else would open theirs.

Nobody ever did. We should all be reborn.

6.

On the show, everyone thinks the Ghost Whisperer is a loony because she talks to herself, but we know she is helping the freshly dead cross over to a place of light: a nondenominational afterlife that doesn't offend the sponsors.

"Why are you the only one who sees me," the ghost always wonders.

"Do you remember dying," the Whisperer whispers.

Every week there is a new "loved one" who thinks, naturally, the Ghost Whisperer is a crackpot or some kind of gypsy con artist. Ah, but the Ghost Whisperer is armed with info only the loved one and the cadaver could know, usually just a word.

The convinced loved one and the departed finally say whatever they never got to say, but instead of talking to the empty chair where the ghost is obviously sitting at the table, the loved one always addresses a lamp on the other side of the room, perhaps to underscore the fact that ghosts are invisible.

The loved one says, sobbing, "I don't know how to thank you!"

Ghost Whisperer says, "You already have."

7.

The man directing the guided meditation isn't Vietnamese.

He's an ex-marine and an ex-Franciscan monk.

He thought about it for a long time and decided it was unfair we only had one life.

He became a Buddhist.

He said we should all be reborn.

8.

The monk says Buddhism, even if it isn't true, is utilitarian.

Like most beliefs, it can help you relax and have a better life through structured guidance.

He says it's OK to be an atheist.

Buddha was an atheist.

Buddha had doubts.

9.

Buddha praised the suicides of Vakkali and Channa.

The suicide of an enlightened person is justified.

10.

Or, is suicide wrong because it is motivated by desire?

11.

The Noble Ones, after completing their work, cut their last ties to the world and pass into Nirvana.

They escape the world of rebirths.

12.

Monks lit themselves on fire to protest the Vietnam War.

To burn oneself to death is self-immolation.

It can show devotion.

It proves that what you have to say is important.

13.

Thinking about suicide is a kind of meditation.

It is about whether we choose to nourish or destroy ourselves.

It is about how we feel when life does not turn out the way we think it should.

My grandmother didn't commit suicide outright, but she did not choose to live.

She never wrote another song lyric, even though everyone told her she should try.

She said it was too painful. It was just too painful.

When she had a serious medical condition that forced her on a diet, she chose not to follow it.

“Take away my food and you might as well take away my life,” she would say.

She ate whatever she wanted.

She ate until a blood clot formed in her stomach that went straight to her heart.

SOMETHING IN THE FIELD

she's deadlatched
they say

pointing at
something
in the field
something
not quite red.

doesn't cost
as much as
a bullet in the brain.

strangulation
is the cheapest
way to go.

a downed sow is
useless meat,

a heartache.