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Edmond, Oklahoma
Dr. Joe C. Jackson College of Graduate Studies

Red Pterodactyl

A THESIS

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By

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Red Pterodactyl

A THESIS

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ABTRACT OF THESIS

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TITLE: Red Pterodactyl

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PAGES: 82

Inspired by the surreal poetry of Russell Edson and the sound-driven poetry of Theodore Roethke, the poetry collection *Red Pterodactyl* explores the fine line between reality and the surreal by intertwining commonplace situations with a humorous, absurdist twist. The collection is divided into four distinct sections to approach the subject from different perspectives. “Maybe I Should Lighten Up” presents more serious pieces, which discuss themes such as death, failed relationships, and substance abuse, to illustrate the dreamlike effects that these subjects can induce in an individual. With “Pack your Dust Masks. We’re Headed into Southwest Oklahoma,” the reader is transported to Harmon County, Oklahoma, with poems that convey the seemingly unreal harshness involved with growing up in a small and troubled community, evidenced through heavy alcohol abuse, arson, and most notably, isolation. Heavily influenced by the work of Native American poet Sherman Alexie, the next section of the book, “The Discreet Charm of Chicanohood,” examines Mexican-American heritage—riddled with bizarre cultural rituals such as faith healing and witchcraft protection ceremonies—to show that the subject matter borders on the unbelievable to readers from different backgrounds. The collection’s final section, “Credo Quia Absurdum,” introduces the most absurd and peculiar poems of the book—which explore everything from suicidal canines to murderous salmon—in an attempt to stretch the imagination.

Introduction

In January of 2003 during my junior year at Hollis High School, something monumental occurred. My second album, *Bad on Earth* sold an astonishing ten copies. After my uncle introduced me to the music of Tupac Shakur two summers before, I made it my goal to begin creating my own original hip-hop music. After closely studying Shakur's complex rhymes, I spent countless nights writing lyrics and composing music tracks with only my computer, a software synthesizer, and a microphone. As time passed and more albums were created, people began to call me "Chistoso"—my rapper name—more often than they called me Corey. More importantly, people began to refer to me as a poet. By the end of my senior year, I had completed nearly 300 songs and five albums. However ridiculous this may sound, these events that transpired over my final two years at Hollis High sparked my ongoing love for poetry and inspired me to pursue a degree in creative writing; thus, they served as the true genesis for my poetry collection *Red Pterodactyl*.

Aside from my musical output, I wrote very little conventional poetry—a few negligible poems in High School. That all changed when I enrolled in a Contemporary American Poetry class during my sophomore year at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. It was in that class that I was first introduced to my literary hero, the great absurdist poet Russell Edson, through his much anthologized poem "Ape." The poem, which chronicles a couple arguing over a meal of stuffed ape, appalled almost everyone in class, including the professor, but I sang its praises. After I read the poem's final line, "I'm just saying that I'm damn sick of ape every night, cried father" (27), I had a new purpose in life: I wanted to become the next Russell Edson.

In “Ape,” I loved the bizarre mixture between the absurd—a dead ape on a dinner table—and the commonplace—a couple engaging in a simple domestic argument. With indeed all his poetry, Edson is able to create what poet Stephen Dunn believes every good poem should accomplish. In his book on writing poetry, *Walking Light*, Dunn states that “the good poem maintains a delicate balance between strangeness and familiarity” (36). This is a quote which stayed with me throughout the entire process of writing *Red Pterodactyl*, and with every piece in the collection, I try to maintain that balance.

Although I adore the work of Russell Edson, one aspect of his work has always bothered me: I find it too prosaic. When I read a poem by Edson aloud, it strikes me as more of a drama piece rather than poetry. Coming from a background as a musician, I’ve developed an ear for sound in poetry. That love for sound only grew stronger when I was introduced to the work of Theodore Roethke through a vinyl recording containing poems from his collection *Words from the Wind*. During my final year at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, a professor told me that the library within the English Department housed a large collection of vinyl recordings of poets and writers reading their own works, many of which were never made available on compact disc. I told her I owned a turntable that allowed me to transfer these vinyl recordings into CDs, and volunteered to do so. After receiving approval from the department chair, I set to work. The transfer process requires the archivist to listen to the entire recording to assure that anomalies such as record-skipping can be found and corrected. After transferring numerous recordings, such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and E.E. Cummings, just to name a few, I stumbled upon the Theodore Roethke recording. Aside from “My Papa’s Waltz,” I knew little of his work, but after I finished transferring *Words from the Wind*, I learned of Roethke’s masterful use of sound in his poetry. A key example of

Roethke's ear for sound is present in his villanelle "The Waking": "I wake to sleep/ and take my waking slow, / I feel my fate in what I cannot fear. / I learn by going where I have to go" (1-3). In this first stanza, I was intrigued by his use of internal rhyme—with wake and take—and alliteration—with feel, fate, and fear. After hearing these words spoken by the man himself, I obtained another of my key poetic goals: I wanted to mix the absurd and surreal nature of Edson's poetry with an ear for sound reminiscent of Roethke's poetry; thus these two poets are an immense influence on my own work, and every single poem in *Red Pterodactyl* bears their inspiration.

Although I had a new goal in mind, these wonderful discoveries I was making occurred at a time where I was still recuperating from a devastating period in my life—a period which hindered me from completing that goal. In 2007, I had just finished a battle with testicular cancer—which caused me to drop out for the previous semester—and after the death of my paternal grandfather, I found myself estranged from my father's side of the family. My first poetry professor Fred Alsberg—an extremely kind and understanding individual—encouraged me to write about these events as a means of therapy. As a result, instead of creating pieces grounded in absurdity as I had wished, my compositions became very serious and melodramatic, and I believe I would have continued on that path if it were not for the intervention of my second poetry professor Doug Goetsch when I began the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program at the University of Central Oklahoma.

During our first private meeting together, Doug asked me what kind of subject matter I explored in my poetry. I explained to him what had happened in my past and how it affected my writing. At the end of our meeting, he said, "I'd hate to tell you this, but you need to lighten up." Even though the comment infuriated me at first, upon further

contemplation, I knew he was right. I wanted to get back to my original goals of balancing the familiar and the surreal and creating work that intertwined the sound of Theodore Roethke with the hilarious absurdity of Russell Edson.

Achieving such a goal meant I had to wean myself off of my melodramatic writing, a process that I began during my first semester at UCO. Much of the poetry I wrote during this period is present in the first section of *Red Pterodactyl*, entitled “Maybe I Should Lighten Up”—a reference to Doug’s first words of advice to me. As a result of my attitude when entering the MFA program, the poems in this section are more serious and darker, a prime example being “Fly Ribbon”—the first poem I ever wrote for one of Doug’s workshops. The poem was inspired by the summer I spent in my maternal grandfather’s home prior to my first semester at UCO. My grandfather and a number of my relatives were trying to persuade me to abandon graduate school altogether and to secure a permanent job at the local bank where I was working at the time. I refused. I wanted to develop my writing skills—something I love—rather than be stuck at a job simply because it was what others thought was best for me. During a moment of intense frustration, I began to study the numerous strands of fly ribbon that hung from the bedroom ceiling—a bizarre but common sight during the hot summers in a poor Hollis, Oklahoma home—and the dead flies that were attached to them. I saw myself as one of those flies hanging there on the dusty golden tape, and the idea for “Fly Ribbon” was born.

“Fly Ribbon,” is one of the early examples of my rekindled desire, as Stephen Dunn puts it, to mix “the strange and the familiar.” I was able to take a commonplace situation—a conflict of interest between a man and his family—and add a surreal twist by making the subject of the poem a fly. Rather than stay truly autobiographical by having the fly defy his

family's wishes—I, of course, ignored their advice and remained enrolled in graduate school—I wanted to show the opposite in a brutal and grotesque manner—perhaps due to my angst. Thus, the fly takes their advice and ends up plastered on a piece of fly ribbon. Now that I look back on the piece, I'm grateful that I chose to pursue my MFA degree rather than be “stuck forever” in an office.

In his book *The Triggering Town*, Richard Hugo writes that “a small town that has seen better days often works [as a poem's setting]” (5-6). Having come from a small town that has seen better days myself, I couldn't agree with this statement more. My experiences growing up in Hollis, Oklahoma serve as the basis for the second section of *Red Pterodactyl*, “Pack Your Dust Masks. We're Headed into Southwest Oklahoma.” In this section, I attempted to convey the harsh reality of living in such an area to an outsider, as I did most notably with the collection's title poem, “Red Pterodactyl.” In my younger years, my high school friends and I would become inebriated and watch a VHS copy of my fifth grade play for laughs—my solo, which was indeed “the last time I sang on stage, often garnered the biggest ones. Years later, after I finished my undergraduate work, I revisited the tape from an entirely different perspective. Living in a small town, the classes are extremely small—I graduated with twenty-seven people in my class—so you get to know every student intimately. As I watched the fifth-graders walk one by one to the microphone to introduce themselves, it was as though I was looking into their futures. I saw children that I knew would later become heavily promiscuous, become engaged in abusive relationships, or die—all situations that are unfortunately commonplace. The entire experience was surreal to say the least. I felt compelled to transform that experience into a poem, the result being “Red Pterodactyl.”

Although I considered the poem to be a serious piece, when I read the poem in workshop, I was surprised by the reaction. The entire classroom erupted in laughter. Many said it was the best as well as the funniest thing I've ever written. I'll never forget what my classmate Miranda Bradley said: "You've been trying to write this poem the whole time you've been here, and now, you've finally done it." She was absolutely right. I had been trying to incorporate a humorous surrealism in my works, and I accomplished this with "Red Pterodactyl" without even noticing it. This poem was instrumental in showing me that I had the will to finally break free from the overly sentimental. Every time I read this poem aloud, it always receives huge laughs, and it has since become my personal favorite—hence the name of the collection.

Coming from a strong Mexican-American background, I've always believed that the most truthful way to represent my race is to show not only its triumphs but also its weaknesses. Sherman Alexie and his poetry collection *Old Shirts and New Skins* taught me how to implement this approach in my own poetry, and he served as the major influence for the collection's third section, "The Discreet Charm of Chicanohood"—a title which pays homage to Spanish-Mexican surrealist filmmaker Luis Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. Alexie, a proud Native American, is able to explore the more self-deprecating aspects of his culture, such as in his piece, "POEM":

Commodities can keep me pacified
now, on this two-lane trail of tears.

Cashing government checks like a premier
I'm an alcoholic Jekyll and Hyde
in tattered coat, on a trail of beers. (11-15)

Although I found Alexie's approach inspiring, it struck me as too serious, and I wanted to explore the more wild aspects of my culture in a humorous manner. In the case of

“Brujeria,” I wanted to convey the Mexicans’ penchant for bizarre rituals and superstitions regarding witchcraft, many of which are the result of strict Catholicism. Although the rituals in “Brujeria” may seem absurd, a majority poem is grounded in reality—or at least one’s belief in what is real. If someone were to go ask my grandmother if she believed she was being cursed by someone looking through her windows, she’d reply with a blatant “Yes”—her windows are often covered due to her belief—and if I were to tell you about all the times my family members thought their dog was possessed by Satan, this paragraph would turn into a novella. Most of the information in “The Discreet Charm of Chicanohood” is a little embarrassing—my grandfather, a former illegal immigrant, really does own a pair of “sky blue boots”—but it’s the truth, and it’s my culture. Although I was once ashamed that I’m Mexican-American—as documented in the poem “To My Chicanohood,” which pays homage to Kenneth Koch’s “To My Twenties”—I’m extremely proud of my race, tiger-print jeans and all.

At the end of spring of 2009 during a meeting with my third poetry professor Dr. Christopher Givan, he told me “you need to be more surreal.” I agreed, and soon began creating poems that met that requirement. Several months later during the fall of 2010, someone—whom I later found out to be my neighbor and fellow-MFA classmate Chase Dearing—left a bag of pennies on my door with a piece of notepad paper stapled to it which read, “credo quia absurdum.” I didn’t know what it meant, so I looked it up on the internet. When I discovered that it was Latin for “I believe because it is absurd,” it instantly became my personal motto, as well as the perfect title for the fourth and final section of *Red Pterodactyl*, “Credo Quia Absurdum”—a collection of what I believe to be my most peculiar

and humorous works, a vast majority of which were written during my final semester in a poetry workshop.

My favorite poem in this section—and perhaps the most humorous in the entire collection—“Canine Suicide,” began as a reaction to a scene in the film *Polyester* by John Waters—one of my favorite filmmakers as well as one of my biggest inspirations. In the scene, the main character Francine stumbles into a kitchen to discover that her dog has hanged himself from the door of her freezer. I couldn’t stop laughing when I first saw the scene, and I immediately felt the urge to write about it. The initial draft of the poem consisted of only four lines which began the first draft of “Organisms:”

My dog hanged himself yesterday.
I should have seen the signs.
He refused to eat his Kibbles and Bits.

I need to appreciate life more.

When I brought the poem in to workshop, every single student, including Doug, wanted more about the dog. “There’s your poem right there,” Doug said. So I cut the lines from “Organisms” and started a new poem. I researched the common signs that someone is contemplating suicide, such as the giving of one’s possessions away, loss of appetite, and feelings of hopeless, and transferred them into the world of a dog. I then decided to add in the details about The Cure because I not only think it makes the poem more humorous, but also there’s no nothing more depressing than early Cure albums. The finished product is easily my second favorite piece of the collection. If I had never written Red Pterodactyl, this book of poetry would have been entitled *Canine Suicide*.

Returning to the phrase “I believe because it’s absurd”—which is attributed to the early Christian theologian Tertullian—I interpret it as meaning that reality can never be

understood, and one's notion of reality exists based only on one's faith (Bühler 132). Even though I had only begun studying Wallace Stevens rigorously a few weeks before I discovered this phrase, I found it reminiscent of his exploration of two extremes in his poetry—reality and the imagination—which closely mirrors my desire to explore the balance between the strange and familiar in my own work. A noteworthy example of Steven's examination of reality versus the imagination is present in his poem "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock." In the poem, he contrasts the drab reality of the seemingly lifeless individuals who "haunt" their homes in their "white night-gowns" with the vivid imagination of the drunk sailor who "Catches tigers/ In red weather" (14-15).

I wrote the poem "Irony" as direct response to "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock." While Stevens focuses mainly on the unimaginative lives of the city's inhabitants in his piece, I chose to instead focus on the imaginative and fruitful lives of the farm animals in my poem, leaving the only shred of true reality in the poem's final line: "Meanwhile, the townspeople all play Bingo." After presenting this poem in the workshop, Dr. Givan remarked, "I told you that you needed more surreal and humorous, and you've done it." Those words summed up what I was trying to accomplish throughout my entire study of poetry in the MFA program at UCO. Indeed, the final section of *Red Pterodactyl*, as well as the entire collection, represents the culmination of my evolution as a poetry writer. I've gone from an individual who needed to "lighten up" to one who understands how to evoke laughter through creating a delicate balance between the commonplace and the absurd. I couldn't be happier as a result.

On a final note, one may wonder why I chose to end the collection with such a dark and serious poem as "Velvet Jesus," which tells of a man hiding under the disguise of a

faithful Christian in order to do harm to others. The answer is simple. I began this MFA program as a dark and serious poet, and although I've considerably evolved, I nevertheless believe that every artist should never forget their roots. Poems in the vein of "Fly Ribbon" and "Velvet Jesus"—my roots in this program—ultimately led to personal triumphs like "Canine Suicide" and "Red Pterodactyl." It's because of this that I'm not ashamed to recount my days as mullet-haired sixteen-year-old spitting unintentionally hilarious rhymes into my ten-dollar microphone, for if it wasn't for those embarrassing moments, I know that *Red Pterodactyl* would not exist.

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Red Pterodactyl

I.
Maybe I Should Lighten Up

Ode to Black

Praise be to all things black.

To cross of ash on forehead
Procured from burned palm leaves
And the monochrome uniform
Of old Jesuit priest.

Of the hearts of hollyhocks
Blooming in the summer days
And wildfire-singed grass
Roasting in the prairie plains.

To the crude below the earth
Pregnant with riches and woe
And the gone beneath the soil
Leaving behind bones of coal.

Oh rich, rich, liquorice,
You gild God's feral kings;
The opaque coat of panther,
The cobra's basalt rings.

Oh, sweet, sweet ebony,
You adorn God's insect dregs
From the back of German roach.
To the cricket's furry legs.

Honor be to all things black.

The sable of diseased tongue
Sings your onyx-laden tune
Beneath the sky of midnight
That is so black, it's blue.

This Relationship

is an art gallery where paintings
hang on moving wires. You first
run next to the canvas like a poor
farm girl beside the train tracks
waving her boyfriend off to war.
In your haze, you envision
Camille Monet on her Deathbed
but at the right pace, you'll
see Lautrec's lovers *In Bed*.

The Great Spectacle

Someone wrecked on Ayers again
Beside the University
And siren lights are flashing red.

Smoke rises from ripped tire tread
As spectators invade the scene.
Someone wrecked on Ayers again.

They gather with their eyes opened
From concrete sidewalks by the street,
And siren lights are flashing red.

White coats roll out the stretcher bed,
And place the victim on with speed.
Someone wrecked on Ayers again.

The crowd knows not if she is dead
Beneath the vagueness of the sheets,
And siren lights are flashing red.

Now let the exodus begin
As wailing ambulance retreats.
Someone wrecked on Ayers again
And siren lights are flashing red.

Ode to Fly

Born in the belly of an angel
During the month of June,
You multiply and coat the earth
In a blanket of velvety black.

Your faceted eyes reflect
Rainbows and spectrums.
You make me ashamed
Of my two pupils.

What gorgeous children!
Plump white cupids without
Their wings who burrow
In hills of crimson and brown.

How efficient, how green!
You live on what we leave
Behind. What we call waste,
You call your home.

You never seem to be alone.
In flocks of more than five,
Sable flashes against blue sky.
Always magnificent, pretty.

You even look beautiful while
Passed, lying on your back on a
Cobweb windowsill or plastered
On a strip of amber fly ribbon.

True friends! When we're buried,
Our buddies will leave us behind,
But you will be there to keep
Us company in the ground.

It's just unfortunate that
Those who leave this world
In fire will never be kissed
By your infants' lips.

Spirits

Lager is always true,
Each pour,
Like the lighting bolt of Zeus
Surging deep within your veins.

Red wine, it never lies.
Each drop,
Like God's wide crimson eyes
Looking down upon the plains.

Whiskey is no deceiver.
Each shot,
Like the bronze drum of Shiva,
Igniting a fiery flame.

Yet, in your thoughts, it is all false.
Each word
Brought upon by drunken loss.
Drinking spirits takes the blame.

Apologies, I won't believe.
Each cry
Will bring no sympathy,
Hearing excuses always the same.

And I sing, "Why linger?"
Each day
With you has cut me deeper,
Bringing me nothing but pain.

So I sigh, then say goodbye
Each step,
You'll hear for the final time, I,
Walking away in the summer rain.

The Blood of Christ

Beside the priest,
Waiting to collect the wine
As I've done countless times before,

I did not see the condensation beads
On the cross-shaped decanter
Until Father Joe handed it to me,
Then let go.

It slipped through my hands
And crashed to the floor.
I swooped down gathering
Fragments in my robe, the wine,

The Blood of Christ, staining the
White fabric, the glass nicking my
Fingers.

My mother rushed to the altar
To help with the cleaning,
The dumbfounded priest doing little
To ease my predicament.

The congregation watched us in silence,
Their eyes following my mother and me
As we walked out of the sanctuary.

We went to the kitchen to dispose
Of the glass and the soiled robe,
Then to the bathroom where she
Wrapped my bloody fingers in Band-Aids.

Dancing the Straight Line

On a Saturday night,
Officer Joe
knocks on Manuel's car window
and sees the empty
beer cans on the floorboard.

"Roll down your window," he says.
"Hey, amigo!" Manuel says. "How you doing?"
"Fine," Joe says. "I need you to step out."
"Why, man?" Manuel asks. "Didn't
we dance the cumbia last night?
We friends, no?"

Joe, who also works security for the Friday
night Mexican dances at the old National
Guard armory, remembers the drinks,
the dancing in circles, the laughs with Manuel.

"Yeah, buddy," Joe says. "We're friends,
but I need you to dance out of that car."
"Sure, sure," Manuel says.
As he opens the door and
scoots himself out, dented
Budweiser cans topple to the ground.

Manuel drags himself to Joe,
Pats him on the shoulder, and
says, "What do you need, friend?"
Joe answers "I need you to walk a straight line."

Manuel nods, and begins,
but instead of walking,
he dances down the center line,
left hand on his heart,
his right in the air
with an outstretched palm.

His snakeskin boots
scratch on the asphalt,
and he slides and turns,
moving back and forth.

When he beckons Joe
to join him, the officer

pulls out his handcuffs.
“I’m sorry, friend,” he says.
“You’re going in tonight.”

But Officer Joe does not
give him a DUI.
He calls Manuel’s brother
to pick up the car.
At the station,
he tells the others
that he brought Manuel
in to sober up,
and they say nothing.
It’s typical on a Saturday night.

Joe will not let Manuel
miss next Friday evening.
There, the two will share
a string of beers
and they will circle
the dance floor
side by side until
two in the morning
when the band stops,
and the armory’s lights go out.

Fly Ribbon

Since the day you were hatched,
A portly maggot who fed on the lifeless,
Your fly mother and your fly father
Have been telling you to soar,
Not to stop until you are bathed in gold,
And you taste that lovely honey.

But you, like any other fly,
Prefer to be bathed in shit.

So, “No,” you say,
“I’m quite content
Simply feeding
On feces and flesh.”

Yet they buzz on, and
Even Uncle Moshe and Aunt Mosca join in.
But before it all drives you mad,
Your cocoon luckily arrives,
Leaving you to your own thoughts,
Your body enclosed by auburn walls.
But your family’s words
Echo in your head
Until you emerge as a full-grown fly,

And say, “Dear family,
I’m on my way
To the promised land
To have a taste.”

So you do your best,
Flying higher and higher,
Until one day, you encounter paradise,
In a Southern summer house,

Those sticky rays
Descending around the light bulb sun
And you are almost blinded
By the flaxen hue that shines about you.
But when you rest to take a taste,

You’re stuck forever.

Proper Language

When somebody tells me
“Turn that frown upside down,”
They might as well have told me,
“Hey, lighten up you miserable
Bastard. You’re making life
Bleaker for the rest of us and
Shitting on our day.”

Why can’t one say, “Chin up?”
Why must he or she smother me
With meaningless rhyme,
Bellowing, “Be a happy
Son of a bitch like me!”

So, please, next time we meet
Instead of telling me,
“Turn that frown upside down,”
Have the decency to just utter
“Fuck you.”

America

Sometimes I feel like gaining
A couple a hundred pounds,
Because with a body like that,
I could live like an emperor.

I would lie belly-first on my bedspread,
As gorgeous young women
Bathe me with loofas
And yellow sea sponges.

And after drying me off with silk and satin,
They would feed me sweet raspberries
And caress my shoulders,
Before taking their lavender-scented hands in mine

As they lead me to my motorized throne
Where I would rule over my citizens:
My nurses, my doctors,
Pharmacists, and politicians.

And oh, how lovely
Would be my notoriety!
Like a true head of state
The closest space at any
Shop, grocery, or buffet
Would be waiting for me,
My driver Juan opening my door.

And if I'm ever feeling miserable,
I would only have to think
Of how every employee with the
Department of Human Services
Would bow at my feet

And shower me
With the plastic pleasures
Of Electronic Benefit and Medicaid cards
And checks with the beautiful lady liberty
Who winks her eye at me as she says,

“We'll take care of you now, sweetheart,
Because this is
America.”

II.
Pack Your Dust Masks.
We're Headed to
Southwest Oklahoma.

Dust

I sleep next to a vacuum tube that
Runs all night to catch the dust,
But it doesn't help much.

I cough up mud in the morning.
My face is like an unused dresser:
Slide your finger across my cheek,
Then wipe the grime on your old shirt.

There are sandstorms in my living room
That cracked windows can't hold back.
The milk in my bowl is brown or red
Depending on the deposits in the dirt.

The poor rats are always choking.
Why don't we just all move to
Somewhere nice up north?

No need.

We'll get used to it just like Grandpa and Daddy did.
I'll swallow down that brown and anticipate
The grinding of that grit between my teeth.

Won't bother wiping my shoes and jacket
Before I leave the house.

Middle School Satanist

I.

Your hair, donkey leg horns
Kicking out. Blue with blasphemy,
Rubber bands, bacon grease.
Candlewax red and black.

Ankle razor blade
Brick stains, carpet gray.
Midnight strobe light dance
Candlewax black and red.

Pancake white on
Wormwood brown.
Cemetery at sundown.
Candlewax on granite stone.

Pentagram graffiti.
Glow in the Dark Ouija board.
Friday the 13th slumber party.
Candlewax October orange.

Ninety-day nail polish.
Upside-down Crucifix.
Upstairs bedroom fog machine.
Candlewax dripping green.

Dollar store preacher,
Decalogue denier,
Permanent marker eyeliner.
Candlewax priestly purple.

II

Graduation hair blonde.
Local diner waiter job.
Makeup nail polish remover.
Candlewax stuck in carpet fibers.

Harmon County

Not a day over green.
I swear. Not a day over green you look.

Rain strawberries in the month of cheese
And light brick road dinners on moon days.
How lovely you paint doorways with dust jackets.

Energetic and inconsolable, singing black-eyed
Wires like no other. Modest. Modest. Eat yourself
Sometime. You taste Roosevelt. Believe me.

Listen to panthers skate on lakes. They hear orange.
Lasts only for Tuesdays in closets. You understand.
You've survived blue lamp catharsis.

The boots are calling September. See it now.
It's been always. You forget consider. Wait.
You forget consider.

Not a day over green you look.
I swear. Not a day over green.

Rust

I rescued a metal bed frame
From the town dump a month ago.
It's been raining a lot lately,
So it was all covered in rust:
Brilliant chalky mahogany rust.

Still is.

I sleep on it all time.
There's red stripes on the
Bottom of my mattress.
I don't care.

When I wake up, I see
It has painted my face
A nice orange-tinted rouge.
It's wonderful.

"Throw it out," they say.
I refuse.
"Well, at least paint it."
But I can't do that.
It would lose all its flavor.

When I lick those auburn
And crimson bars at night,
I swear I taste peanut butter
With a hint of cherries jubilee.
I love how it stains
My tongue, and its essence
Lingers.

I'm completely happy.
Don't worry about me.
I've had my tetanus shot,
So I can do whatever
The hell I want.

Red Pterodactyl

Let's get high and watch my fifth-grade play.
I think you'll like it.
It's a musical about dinosaurs.
All the kids sing in it, but I have a solo.
Twenty people tried out for it, and
they gave it to me.

It's the last time I sang on stage.

You see that girl in the pink
triceratops costume? Doesn't she look sweet?
She's a whore now.
Has 4 kids with 3 different daddies.

She could blow anyone else around,
but when it came to me, she only said "Hi."
I hated broads like that.

And you see that boy in the
blue tyrannosaurus suit? It was messed up.
A few years back, he fell asleep at the wheel
and ran his car into a cotton bail trailer.
Crushed him to death.

I used to party with him out by Sanders Lake.
Damn, he was a cool dude. He hooked us up
with anything, and I don't remember paying.

Hey, you see that girl in the purple
stegosaurus getup? That little lady
is my ex-wife. She left 'cause she said
she couldn't handle me and I was a bad
influence on the kids,

but if they can't accept me,
they can kiss my ass.
I ain't gonna change for anyone.

Oh shit, that's me there
dressed like a red teradactyl.

Shhhh...My solo's coming up.

Civilization

My high school friend Joey decided to smuggle
a pound of weed out of Mexico while
borrowing my mother's car—
the one that was going to be mine.
Said he was running to the Dollar General
for a second to pick up some eggs, and two nights
later, he called my mother and asked "Ms. Rodriguez,
could you talk to this policeman?"
With that, I lost a friend and hunter green '89
Ford Taurus. Another year of walking to school.
Fuck him. I sure as hell would have bashed his head
in, but luckily, the Mexican police did that for me.

After that, I decided I don't like people.

Thank the Lord for Microsoft, Dell, and AT&T.
Technology means less bastards to look at.
I pay my bills with online banking.
I buy my groceries from Amazon.com.
If I need a woman, there's millions to choose from,
and they leave as soon as I'm done.

Don't need to worry about yapping kids
at the Laundromat. Have my own washer and dryer.
And Church? Got my Bible right here, don't I?
Singing pisses me off anyways.

I couldn't have stayed at home if that drunk
UPS driver hadn't run over my leg.
Want to see my stump again? Ah, well.

Here's your dollar for bringing me the mail.
Now get the hell out.

Magic Markers

At eleven, too young
To bribe the corner store
Owners to let us buy
Cigarettes, we squeezed
Tobacco
Out of dirty butts off the
Ground and smoked
In permanent marker
Pipes.

At twelve, when
Sex Education
Gave us knowledge
Of incurable disease,
Fear of purple blisters
On our lips led us
To sticker patches
In backyards and
Country pastures.
We filled our black
And yellow hayburners
With thorny goat heads
That only the mouth
Of Earth had touched.

At thirteen, we all grew
Moustaches and the
Clerks never asked
Questions as they
Sold us white packs.
But with no jobs
and slim allowances,

We emptied the patches
Wherever we journeyed.

Sanctuary

A bus buried underground
In Southwest Oklahoma
Is where we'll go
In case the tornados come.

The men on the TV warn us,
Flash red on our county,
Say "Get to a safe place."
So we'll climb to old yellow
Lodged in the backyard.

School sold that bus 20 years back.
The same bus that picked me up
On these country dirt roads,
The same bus that I could
Have died in when Driver Willie
Hit a dead horse and sent me
Flying into leather-covered metal seats—
Thank the lord my neck is fine—
This same bus could someday
Save our lives.

But what if these men in suits lie?
Scratch that question. They do!
Twenty-percent chance, it rains.
Ninety-percent, skies are clear.
So what is that bus doing there?

They call this tornado alley,
But I've never seen one
Big enough to kill me.
And could the concrete
I poured over the top really
Be enough to fight off a twister?

Damn weathermen.
Instead of worrying about saving
My life, I could have saved the money
And moved us to Delaware.
They're not bothered with the
Weather.

Spectator

It's past midnight, and
A house is burning
Across the street.
The flames catch
The power lines.
The lights are out.
No matter.
It's dark outside,
Just go to sleep.

But how can you sleep?
The sirens are blaring,
Shooting red and blue
Through your windows.
The blaze is bellowing with
The voices of the crowd.

Nothing happens in this town.
The circus stopped coming years ago.
Washed-up professional wrestlers
No longer brawl in the
High school gymnasium.
Drunken standoffs,
Domestic disputes, and infernos
Are the new ice capades.
The fire is rising,
And the cameras are flashing.

You're missing it now.
Why don't you go
Down to the fridge
And pluck a beer
Off the ring like an
Apple off the tree,
And watch and wait
With the others?

Inhumane

The last time I went fishing,
I was ten and we both
Had different hairstyles.
My now bald Uncle Johnny
Had an Indian Braid down
To his ass.

As for me, I had my mullet,
A result of having a Mexican
For a mother and a hillbilly
For a Stepfather. I had no
Choice.

Aside from hair,
The only other detail
I can remember was
A perch pissing from
Me holding it too hard
As it hung on my line.

My uncle lectured me
About animal cruelty
Before he ripped the hook
Out of the perch's mouth
And threw it back into the
Water.

Drinking on Sundays in Oklahoma

It's Sunday.
Liquor store's closed,
And I'm out of drink.
I don't feel like going
To the corner store
And drinking that piss
Water three-point beer.

I need something
Cheap and heavy
Like my ex-old lady,
So that means it's time
For some minty blue
Mouthwash.

At 21.6% alcohol,
Or roughly 44 proof
If you're a hooch mathologist,
Its content is higher
Than Thunderbird wine.

I can buy half a gallon
For four-ninety-five.
Perfect for the man
With no job and no woman.

Here's a Lincoln, son
Fetch me one at the
Dollar store. I'll even
Let you have a glass,
But be careful, boy,
You don't want to
Wake up tomorrow with a
Mouthwash hangover.

III.
The Discrete Charm
of Chicanohood

And the Mexican Spoke

The great Don Martinez
stood high upon his
rock of concrete next to a taco shop on
Southwest 29th Street and shouted,
“Come my dear brothers.
Bring your children
and hear my words,
for I am an intelligent Mexican!”

Mexicans from as far as East 15th Street
gathered around him,
bowed on one knee
and cried, “Speak, Brother, speak!”

Don Martinez, began to bellow,

“When I was younger,
my people flocked to me,
old men and women,
saying ‘With that mind, Brother,
you can be our new leader!
You can someday be President
or at least a priest!
Why should we vote for a Clinton
or confess to an O’Malley?’

“But much like the gluttons who
always reach out for the last tamale,
my ethnic peers in school,
they would reach out to me
and cheer, ‘With that mind, Brother
you can help out another,
so give us the
Power.’

“I would raise my head from a book and
say to them, ‘You have a mind don’t you?’”

The crowd looked confused.

Don Martinez raised his hand
and said “Don’t you see? We all
have the ability to help ourselves!”

Like the Chihuahua flees
from the heavy hands of his master,
the crowd fled in terror,
leaving behind only charred rubber
from the wheels of their El Caminos.

And Don Martinez wept.

Brujeria

Statues of baby elephants
With dirty water and grass
In their pots are pointing
At your front door.

The neighbors don't like you.
Close your curtains.
Through the windows,
They will chant curses.

The house smells horrible.
The devil's in here.
Light five sticks of incense
In each of your rooms.

Don't bother calling
Father McAllen.
Cleanse your children
With handle-less brooms
And expired eggs.

Say thirty-five "Our Fathers,"
Thirty-five "Hail Marys,"
One for each day since
The headaches began.

Arm yourself with
Blessed candlewax.
Leave wicks burning
To the bottom.

Make a sacrifice
Of Pig skins and
Plastic flowers to
Saint Jude. This
Patron saint for
Impossible causes
Will be your closest
Ally.

De-worm your dog.
If he still barks, shoot him
Out in the country.
Free him from possession.

Set your lawn on fire.
This will burn all the
Hatred and evil.

It surely will stop.

But if your house still smells,
The headaches grow stronger,
The dead dog haunts you,
And the lawn still burns,

You can always move in
With an aunt upstate.

Two for William Carlos Williams

I. Quinceañera

everything relies
upon

a gray beer
keg

coated with condensation
Beads

Beside the queso
blanco.

II. The Back Room

Through checkered curtains
Over cracked windows,

Light peeks on orange carpet—
Breathe dust—

White lamp without shade
on brown dresser

next to spiral notebook
and black pens—

Above the red bed frame—
Jesus on the cross

The Wolf

Yes, I know I have a unibrow,
And in folklore class, we learned
That people with my condition were
Once labeled as werewolves. So naturally,
Your pet name for me was “Wolf.”

But since I happen to be Mexican-
American and you happen to be white,
“Wolf” soon became “Lobo.”
And because of you:

My uncle labels me as “Lobo.”
My god-children call me “Uncle Lobo.”
An old friend I pass on the sidewalk says “Hey, Lobo.”
My grandmother says I’m her little “Lobo.”
Everyone thinks my favorite band is Los Lobos.
Chief Kickingbird Gonzales says I am one with the Lobo.
My license plate has a howling wolf, I mean “Lobo.”

And now when I walk the streets,
Mothers tell their children:
“Beware the man whose eyebrows meet.”

Lobo has completely taken over my life,
And I’ve lost my identity.

Hello, my name is Lobo.

Octopus Tacos

Helping my grandmother buy groceries,
we head to the ethnic section.
I load her cart with canned beans and chiles
and before we leave the aisle, she sees the sign
and asks, “What is Kosher?”
“It’s Jewish food,” I say.
She clutches her crucifix
and points to the gefilte fish.

“Read me what’s in there,” she says.
I do.
“Carp, pike, mullet, matzoh meal.”

“¡Ay Dios Mio!” she says.
“They took the nastiest fish
you can imagine, and mashed them
together with eggs and flour.”

She sighs. “That’s what happens
when you don’t believe in Jesus, mijo.

You eat crazy shit.”

Later I go with her to the
Mexican meat market
and see food with Christ’s blessing:
Pig heads, cow tongues, entrails, eyeballs.
Grandma grasps two hooves and says
“These would make a nice soup for Sunday
after church.”

In the seafood corner,
I wonder what a man
of Israel would think
if he walked in and
saw the dead octopus
behind the butcher’s glass,

purple suction cup
legs dangling out of
A folded corn tortilla.

Mexican Dog Care

Don't be fooled by the dusty
dog food bag in a Mexican's house.
Little Sparky isn't starving.

We're just used to feeding our dogs
leftovers of cow stomach soup
or lard-drenched sweetbreads.

And no, even with all the grease
we've fed them over the years,
not one has ever died of heart disease.

Old Sancho loved Grandpa's
chicken-skin cracklins.
He ate them until he died at thirteen.

And why buy them chew toys?
We let Sparky nibble on a pig skull
before he buries the jawbone in the backyard.

Why shell out the money
for a white-coat veterinarian?
There's a faith-healer

down the street that through
the power of the blessed
Virgen de Guadalupe,

can ease all suffering.
But if not, there's always euthanasia
after a trip to the town outskirts

and a new dog wandering
the sidewalk or waiting in
the back of a pickup truck.

Illegal Immigrant Fashion

Pablo walks in wearing a pair of
tiger-print jeans.

Sadly, this is not the first time.

I want to say,
“Hey! What the fuck, man?”
but I keep it to myself,
and ask Pablo about his family
back in Tijuana.
We share a couple
of Tecates before he leaves.

But when Pablo returns
three days later,
sporting a scarlet cowboy hat
and a purple vest
with a canary undershirt,

I ask “Why the hell are you wearing that?”
“Cuz it looks good, compañero,” he says.

Is that what Goyo down the
street thinks when he dawns
his glittering silver boots?

Does Candelario up on 2nd
repeat it in his head
as he buttons his
rhinestone-emerald shirt?

Why do these manly men—
men who had to survive
in the desert for days
before they reached America,
men who work 12-hour shifts
on ranches and in fields—

Why do these men
dress like hookers from East LA?
:
I ask “Man, are you gay?”
He shakes his head no and
says “In Mexico, I was very poor

and my clothes were old and dirty.
They got more dirty when I crossed.”

I picture him hiking
through the Sonoran desert,
his ripped, faded, and hole-filled
hand-me-down shirt
that once belonged to his brother
caked by dust.

When he arrives
on the other side,
he stares at his tattered
clothes and wants something else.

“You see,” he says,
“No worn clothes for me.
New and bright for America.
A new start.”

I nod my head.

“So no, I’m not gay,”
he says. “Sorry, amigo.”
After a wink and
a pat on my back, he slides
his sky blue boots as
he walks out the door.

Mexican Wrestling

It's time for your stories.
Sit back with a Modelo
And see on the screen:

Little people in shiny
Blue gorilla suits.

Tens of men with
Masked identities—
Orange dragons and tigers
Sewn around the eyes.

Transsexuals
In pink wigs and
purple spandex.

A woman against two men.

Devils and demons
Performing witchcraft.
Red smoke and curses.
Suicide backflips.
Face paint, goat horns,
And gratuitous blood drips.

Marriages interrupted
By infidelity.
Pregnancies, abortions.
Miscarriages caused by falls
From high corners.

Spanish monologues
With an English "It's over"
Thrown in at the end.

Everything frosted with
A glittery sheen.
Two hours of this before
Your telenovela begins.

Roaches in the Southside

Roaches are our dirty little secrets.
We know in our hearts we have them,
But we refuse to reveal the roach to the world.
We tell ourselves they're just waterbugs.

We laugh at others with roaches.
We can them dirty,
Then we think
As the *waterbug* glides by,
Doesn't that make us
Dirty too?
But no,
We are different.

We don't acknowledge the roach
Munching on Velveeta cheese.
We just quietly stomp on them.

When I was young, living in extreme poverty,
I myself thought that I was desecrating dead roaches
By pissing on them before flushing them down the toilet.

I was doing them a favor.
It was the greatest funeral ever.
Suicidal roaches came to me
To leave this world with
Dignity.

Roaches,
Are they really that bad?
Don't they have to live just like us?
Yes, but they are
Roaches.

I never had one in my adult home.
I think I had a waterbug, but that was just
Once. And it wasn't around for long.
The place was too clean for him.
Roaches and Lice—and waterbugs—
Die with cleanliness

They can't survive.

Identity

You look like someone familiar,
Someone famous, if he were Japanese.
A Japanese John Lennon.

But I am not Japanese.
I am a Mexican.

But isn't your last name Mingura?
That doesn't sound Mexican!
Let me think.
Mingura...
Minguravich...No!
Maybe it's short for Migurasfki.
It sounds like it's Slovakian
Or Russian perhaps,
Or even from the Czech Republic,
But not Mexican.

I assure you I'm a Mexican.

But your accent!
What does it sound like?

Mexican?

No, no, no, Corey Don!
It sounds like it comes from somewhere else.

Spain?

No, no, no.
It's nothing Hispanic!
Your accent sounds like
It's possibly Polish,
Austrian or German.
But nothing Hispanic!

I'm positive I'm
A Mexican.

To My Chicanohood

They say you taste
Like Rice and Beans.
You do.
But that's just one of
Your beautiful attributes.

You are a keg at a
Kindergarten Graduation party,
The five sticks of incense choking
My grandfather,
The Virgin Mary and Jesus
Air Fresheners.

One of your houses
Is the only place to see
A cow skull hanging next
To a crucifix or a picture of
Saint Jude. Your decorative
Taste is impeccable.

But all is not well with you.

I've seen the best minds
Of my ethnic nation
Destroyed by lard.
But the soup in the fridge
Remains congealed.

And at four, I hated you.
I cried when my mother told
Me I wasn't white.

Screamed, "Mommy, I don't
Wanna be a dirty Mexican!"

But at ten, I adored you,
Filling myself with sheets
Of fried pork skins,
Begging my mother
To broil another batch
Of intestines and beef cheeks.

But still you and my peers
Called me a coconut—

Brown on the outside
White on the inside—
Because of the As
Smothering my report card.

But still I persevered
Into my adult years,
Frequenting the Rancho
Dance halls, drinking tequila,
Getting dead drunk, and
Sliding my feet all night until
You finally accepted me.

Technology

The computers in the library are racist
Against Mexicans. I sat at one, and it
It froze on me and then shut down.
I called for help from the tech support table.

The blond hair, blued eyed kid,
Sat down, booted it up, clicked around.
Said, "It seems to working fine now."
So I sat down and opened the browser,

But as I began to surf, I was hit with pop-ups,
Proclaiming aide to secure a work visa. Another said
"A green card is one step away, Mr. Rodriguez!"
How did it now my name?

I told the kid what was wrong now.
"But sir, a pop-up blocker is installed."
He visited different sites disturbance free,
And said, "See? I don't why it's hassling you."

*You wouldn't, I thought. You're wearing
Abercrombie designer blue jeans and
Your skin is the color of fresh goat cheese.
"Sorry to bother you again."*

The kid laughed. "No problem, it's my job."
"How would you like me to sit along
In case this old thing acts up again?"

Always trying to get in our damn business.
"No sir, but thank you. I'm fine."
But this time, the computer prompts me
For my social security number, and
A scan of my birth or naturalization certificate.

Fuck this man, I'm an American!
I don't need the damn library.
I'll just borrow my friend's laptop,
And use the WiFi in the liquor store.

IV.
Credo Quia Absurdum

Department Store Mannequins

I'm afraid they'll strangle me.

They're just waiting for the moment
to catch me alone. Customers are
witnesses, and if they see what plastic
hands can do, it's straight to the furnace
and a new life as a lawn chair.

Mannequins are smart. They think this through.

The boss came in just now. Said I needed to
stay late and do some cleaning. Alone. He's in
with them. I've seen him whisper in their
ear. He doesn't keep them dressed nice
for nothing.

He'll leave me and the mannequins
and lock the door, turn the lights down low.
They've planned it since I started working here
and saw my supple neck.

But I won't let them win.
"Mr. Hommiser, I quit."

House

Nobody ever calls a house a whore, but I can't see why not
when it's sitting there on the corner sporting a slim trim
and low-cut curtains and painted all up in rouge
with its front and backdoors wide open

howling, "Come in boys and girls. I want you all to come inside me
and hell, bring in your pets too, and we can have a real
party inside my walls."

But when you run out of money to satisfy it,
it'll squirt your ass out on the street
and expose itself to another group of bastards
who are stupid enough to fall for its looks and charm.

Now I stare out the window of the hotel room—
that me, my wife, and my two daughters share—
And watch my old house pleasure a new family.

Canine Suicide

My dog hanged himself yesterday.
Should've seen the signs.

He gave away his bones
to the German Sheppard next door,
his chew toys to the Labradane.

He didn't want to play Frisbee.
He would rather lock himself up in
the doghouse and listen to
early Cure albums.

After lapping bourbon from his
doggy bowl, he would howl about his
Chihuahua girlfriend leaving him
for a Pit Bull.

I told him they were other dogs around,
that I noticed the Shitzu across the street
giving him the eye, but he only barked,
"There is only one Señorita for me."

When he refused to eat his Kibbles 'n Bits,
his dog friends came to me and said he needs
a pet psychiatrist. "He'll get over it," I said.

But the next day,
I awoke to the sounds of "Love Song"
in "repeat mode" on the stereo,
the paws dangling,
the note he left behind:

"Love of my life,
I wished you stayed in Mexico."

Family Tree

My father was a skyscraper
In Lubbock, Texas.
He couldn't handle being tall,
So he would constantly drink
Gasoline and threaten to set himself
On fire. Once, after polishing
A tank of Super Unleaded,
That threat became reality.
Unfortunately for him, He had an excellent
Sprinkler system, and he survived with
Minimal injuries. He was naturally imploded
At the age of 95.

My mother was a twenty-first
floor window in my building father.
How I came to be, I don't know.
I never ask nasty questions.
I jumped out of her upon being born,
And was subsequently raised
By the safety net that rescued me.
My childhood was not unhappy.
It would always try to beat me,
But it's okay. The thing had no hands.

When I was nineteen, I decided to leave
For Wyoming to escape from society.
As I cleaned out the old refrigerator,
I found an old copy of the Lubbock Avalanche
With the headline:
BABY SURVIVES 200-FOOT DROP.
There was naked me falling from my mother,
And I saw we have the same gray latches.

I confronted the safety net about this,
And it couldn't deny my heritage.
All these years, I don't know
Why I never questioned my true roots.
I, with brick red skin, and it with long
Blue threads.

When I drove to my father, he was too
Sedated on Lithium to speak, so I
Climbed the stairs to my mother.
"Why did you leave?" I asked.

“I didn’t” she said. “You’re the one
Who jumped.” She laughed, then said
“You were always gloomy
Waiting behind the glass.

“You get that from your father.”

A Day at the Ballpark

I am a spy in a public restroom
sent uncover by the ACI—
American Cleaning Institute.

I won't peer over your stall
Or place my ear on the locked door
To hear the tear of toilet paper
From the roll.

It's not my job.

My business is by the sink,
Which you do not use.
You merely look in the mirror
Fixing your frizzy hair
With your filthy hands;
Smoothing your lipstick
With your fingertips
Before you strut out the entrance.

I speak nothing aloud,
But in my mind,
I say, *People like you
Helped spread the swine flu.*

I put another check in
The "No Wash" column.
Washroom isn't just a name, my dear.
But you seem to think so.

I imagine you handing a
Hot dog to your daughter as you
Give her a kiss. She's having
A grand time watching
The baseball game.

I pray she lives another day.

A Private Restroom

For Russell Edson

My sweet commode,
Men have said
That you cannot be loved
Due to your purpose,
But why shouldn't you be?

We have been so intimate.
With my bare skin against
Your porcelain,
You have received each
Of my foulest secrets,
But you do not judge.

Oh, honey, how you
Take care of me!
On Flu-driven nights,
I just want to rest
My cheek on your smooth seat
And caress your firm bowl.

When I see you sitting there,
I want to lick your reservoir dry,
Jiggle your handle up and down
And hear you howl
As I empty your tank.

My lovely commode,
I will keep you bathed in
Blue chemicals.
I will clothe your seat
And tank with the finest
Soft cotton threads.

And trust me, baby
You will stay private.

I just can't bear to see
You with someone else.

Composition

Don't throw that gallbladder
Away! It'll be great for the
Portrait of your mother.
The perfect color for
her gorgeous green eyes.

Where are you going
With the bucket of blood?
It's just what I need to
Capture the smoky sunset
Over the Sangria hills.

Don't rinse the stomach, Son,
Scrape out what's inside!
Can't you see it has just the
Right texture for the front lawn
Landscape I've been searching for?

Jesus, Jeffrey, now the bladder?
Do you know any other organ
That can recreate the sunrise
Over the yellow grass fields like
That piss machine can?
It sure as hell ain't the liver.

Haven't I told you never to drain the joints?
Do we have to go through this every time?
The fluid there is the only thing that can
Thicken my paint for a true likeness
Of the Honorable Judge Eisenthrough.

Are you really my son or did my wife
Go fuck a butcher? You keep the muscles,
The liver, The flesh, even the bullshit brain.
I don't want to eat. I want to create, and
You don't know a damn thing about composition.

Pig's Eye

I embrace the mayonnaise
Jar I won in the divorce,
That had been in the backseat
For two weeks.

All I drink is Pig's Eye,
Pig's Eye brew while I stare
At the glittery G-string
Hanging in the tree.

Will you put a Pig's Eye
On your porch for me
Before you sleep?

She has left a can
Behind locked doors,

So this mayonnaise
Has to go.

I will set a batch
Of leaves on fire
And toss the jar in,

Watching as the yellow
Bubbles away and

Rubbing the sequin
G-String
Across my crimson face.

The Doll in Grandma's Room

My grandmother had a
life-size doll in her bedroom.

It was a little tomboy
who still knew how to be a lady.

It wore a short red dress
with little white daisies

and a short blond hair cut
upon its plastic head.

“Come to me,”
it seemed to say,

staring at me with
those pale blue eyes.

“Come to me, Corey,
and I will destroy you.”

Mister Information

Don't listen to what the
Liquor labels tell you.
They're damn liars.
That's Puerto-Rican vodka,
Not Puerto-Rican rum.
Smell it and see.

That song we're listening
To right now is about
Being raped. I know because
They said it on the radio.
It was the real singer too
Who said so, not the DJ.

Do want to make some money?

If you ever want to cook
Some crack, all we need's a bag of
Cocaine, some baking soda,
And a stick of Parkay.
Put it all in the oven at 400
And wait about an hour.

But don't use that cell phone
Company, okay? It's just
A trick to catch dope dealers.
That's why they're so damn cheap.
You don't want to deal? Well still,
They record everything you say.

Is that a Super Nintendo?
I heard if you smash one
Open, you'll find computer
Chips shaped like Mario
and Yoshi.. They sell on
Ebay for a hundred a piece.

Don't believe me? I'll show
you now. No? I'll buy it off
you for twenty dollars. You
Still play it? Well let's play then,
I know a code that makes President
Clinton pop out on the screen.
I saw the picture in a magazine.

You got to take a shower?
Well I'll go, but be careful.
That shampoo that you use makes
Your hair fall out on purpose
To make you go out and buy Rogaine.
Same company makes them both.

Oh and shut your curtains, man.
I heard Mr. Johnson across the street
Likes to say some voodoo shit
To curse people. It only works if
He can see the back of your head.
You don't wanna get fucked up.

I'll see you later, but if you
Ever want to cook up some,
Sell your Nintendo, or play
Some games, hit me up.
Oh, I'll explain later, but
Don't drink anything in soda can.
I heard some serious stuff, man.

Audiophile

When I fall asleep, I sometimes dream
Of catching Music down a deserted street

And sending it to the ground with a thud
Like the sound of a Ludwig bass drum.

Its shiny compact disc earrings now cracked,
I give it no choice but to lie on its back.

And as I rip off its dress of brown magnetic tape,
Music's gramophone mouth is frozen agape.

With all of its notes now exposed, they cry
And sob "La Ti Do" as they slide to the side.

More notes fall to the ground with my every pound
And I laugh with joy at the glorious sound.

I beat in and out of its jukebox hole
In perfect tempo like a new metronome.

And when I'm gone, all that is left
Is Music's sweet screaming of a perfect high F.

But it's all just an audiophile's fantasy.
Safely encased inside my head,

Nothing serious.

Modern Parenting

My friend Johnny calls me up to tell me
his girlfriend's 2 months pregnant, and
He's so excited about the boy,
Because he'll finally have
Someone to get high with.

"Awesome," I say before
I hang up. Why lecture him?
That's what preachers
And the police are for.

But I can't help but wonder
How this parenting would work.

When the baby has a fever,
Will Johnny put him in the back
Seat and smoke out the Crown Vic
Until the kid falls asleep?

Will Junior even be able to
Take his first steps, or simply
Remained plastered to his bouncer,
And wait to walk another day?

When the baby starts teething,

Will Johnny shotgun smoke in
His mouth to ease the pain?
(If the baby doesn't choke,
I know old Johnny will
Beam with fatherly pride.)

And what about discipline?

When the child gets older
And Johnny notices his stash missing,
Will he say, "Son, do you
Know where my bags went?"
When the son shakes "no,"
The dad will reply,
"Well those bags didn't grow
Legs and walk out of my room
By themselves. Until I find my
Alaskan white, no TV or video games.

Hell, maybe I should stop
Thinking about it and call
Child Services right now.
Nothing wrong with giving
An anonymous heads up.
But that could wait.
Cops is about to start.

Rare

Did you forget that you were uninsured?
When the waitress asked how you wanted
The yellowfin tuna on your burger,
You replied, "Rare as you can get it."

And rare it was, enormous crimson
Slabs, smothered in wasabi ranch,
and pineapple jalapeño jelly.
When you took a bite, I was surprised
Fish blood did not drip from your mouth.

You don't live next to the Pacific,
Mr. Mingura.
You live in Central Oklahoma.
That tuna had to travel thousands
Of miles in dusty trucks. Microscopic
Worms could have buried their eggs
Inside the fish, then your intestines.
You couldn't afford that hospital bill.

But what you did on Thursday was worse,
Satisfying the urge to fry chicken at two
In the morning. Didn't your mother teach
You to thaw it when it's frozen?
Five minutes under hot, running water
Doesn't break the ice.

Yet you continued, the grease sizzling,
The batter caking your cowboy hat.
It's no surprise the meat was red down
To the bone on your drumsticks. But you ate
It anyway, your teeth biting hard on the tough flesh.
Are you singing the praise of Salmonella?
Emergency rooms drain checkbooks, dear.

The poor, poor stomach that lives with you.
It wasn't meant to be born into the body of
A wild animal.

A Trip to Gainesville

Have you ever laughed so hard you vomited?
I've come close. On a cruise through North
Texas, an old friend did or told me something

I can't remember, and I laughed until I gagged
With that noise a Kung-Fu master makes
Before breaking someone's neck.

My shock was enough to make the journey
Up my esophagus stop, and for the remaining
Trip to Gainesville, I stayed silent.

What was so funny to make me react this way?
Maybe my friend told a joke, and in the middle
Of laughing, I saw a dead spotted cow on

The side of the road, which made me almost
Vomit. But no, I grew up in a family of butchers.
It had to be a result of the laughter alone.

Could anything be that hilarious?
I'd seen Riley sing songs he didn't
Know words to on the radio out loud,

And it was amusing at best. Nothing
To lose your waffles and coffee over.
Nothing to haunt you for eleven years.

Maybe I should ask my friend, but
He disappeared long ago after stealing
Slim Jim's from the old corner store.

I wish I knew, but at least I can say the
episode had nothing to do with Jesus Christ.
Well, maybe so. I'll never know.

Organisms

I see some boys climbing a tree in the alley.
I say "Stop that. You're hurting it."
The tree turns to me and says,
"Mind your own fucking business."

I walk to my garden.

Should I pluck a tomato from its vine?
Two tomatoes appear on my shoulders.
Devil tomato says "Eat me."
Angel tomato says "Eat me,
But be gentle."

I'm not hungry today.

As I head towards the house,
I see a giant scorpion on my back porch.
I lift a shoe, but before I strike,
He holds his stringer to his head.

"What's the matter?" I ask.
"I smell vinegar," he says, "so
I must go away."
"There is no vinegar here," I say.

"Then I must be crazy," he says. "But
I'm too depressed to crawl to the
Institution in your alleyway.
If you take me in your palm,
I promise not to sting."

With his body in my hand,
I walk him on his way,
First taking a bite of tomato,
Then biting into the tree.

The scorpion says "Goodbye,"
And "Thanks for everything,"
Before he crawls into the hole,

And I hear the shocks begin.

As Far as Arkansas

For Ezra Pound

Nosebleeds signal the change of seasons,
And I have bled three times since I heard you speak.
You, the only one to ever show me kindness.

When I was no taller than a fire hydrant,
I went to school with impeccable people
Who could look straight into the horizon.
They shunned me for my lazy eye.
I spent my days head bowed amidst
The alphabet-coated corner of Mrs. Stevenson's room.

At fifteen I would lie beneath the bleachers
During lunch time and when Algebra or Chemistry began,
I could only peer into the Formica desks saying nothing.
Mrs. Fletcher or Mr. Ward never cared.

At twenty, long after the beautiful left for college,
I stayed home and sold paper mâché giraffes on the internet,
My only outdoor time spent on the park's sole bench.
No one ever spoke to me until you appeared and proclaimed

"Good morning." I shivered with delight
As you scurried by, eyes forward for three blocks
Until you reached your door.

I slept between the bushes in your yard.
Two times you passed me.
I waited until sunrise to hear those words from
Your bedroom window:
Good Morning, my darling!
But only your screams I heard.

Yet I remained faithful through the jail time
Served for returning to the living quarters
I made in your wooden shack.
And now three seasons have passed,
My release, my return to you.

They said you journeyed far,
But no matter where you roam,
I will know beforehand.
And I can hear your voice
As far as Arkansas.

The Things You Love Can Possibly Kill You

And I love Salmon.
I love it grilled, boiled,
Raw best of all on
A bed of sushi rice.

So naturally, when I
Saw the bag of salmon
Burgers at the grocery store,
My mouth watered like a
Heroin addict outside
A Walgreens pharmacy.

I, a gluttonous dumbass,
Threw them into my cart.
Where they sat quiet.

When I got home,
I placed them on my
Oklahoma table next to the gun
And read the instructions:
“Cook frozen. Do not thaw.”
The problem was the
Patties were united in
A fortified pink tower,
So I reached for a steak
Knife to break them apart.

As I raised the blade,
The patty tower stood up.
“What are doing with that?” it said.
“I’m going to separate you,” I replied.

It sprang up from the table
And punched me in the face.
As I fell to the ground, it
Picked up my blade in one of
Its icy crevices and begin to stab
Me in the chest.
My wife heard my cries,
Reached for the gun,
and shot the salmon tower dead.

During my hospital stay,
I learned that even though I had

Fifteen stab wounds, no major
Organ was hit. The doctor joked,
“You’re lucky salmon patties have no aim”
As he sutured up a stitch.

On my third day in recovery,
My wife was arrested and
Charged with salmon slaughter.
She claimed it was in my defense
And was later acquitted,
Surprisingly by an all fish jury.

After all this trouble,
I decided to stick with salmon sushi.

The Dinner Party

In struts a golden retriever
wearing a velvet apron,
balancing a Margarita-filled pitcher,
and three crimson cups on her back.
Jeffrey from accounting
lifts them off her
and places them
on his living room table.
After they share
a passionate French kiss,
he says,
“This is my Buttercup.”

To my right,
Jessica from marketing
reaches over, takes a paw,
and says, “Pleased to meet you.”
“Bark,” she says.

“A pleasure,” I say.
I want to pet her, but
Jeffrey shoots
a sharp look at me, so
I pull my hands back.
We each quickly reach
for the pitcher and pour.
Jeffrey empties a drink
in his wife’s doggy bowl.

Turning to Jessica,
I ask “Where is the infamous Woodrow?
I didn’t see you come in with anyone.”
“Oh he’s here,” she says.
“I just have to fetch him.”

She reaches underneath
her long sable dress
with both of her hands,
yanks out a beige
rolling pin with a
sweaty fake mustache attached,
and says,
“I’d like to introduce you to my Woodrow.”

“Pleased to make your acquaintance,” I say.
When Woodrow says nothing back,
Jessica tickles his mustache,
and says “My honey is shy.”

After a few drinks,
everything seems well
until Buttercup sees
that Jeffrey has been
eyeing Woodrow for
too long.
“Bark!” she barks.

She runs to the living room.
He follows her, yelling
“Baby come on!
I experimented during
my college years,
but that’s all over now.”

“Bark!” she barks,
throws a shawl over her back,
and scratches through the screen door.

“Fine,” he says. “Let the fucking
dog catcher get you. That’s
probably what you want.”

“Will she be okay?” I ask when he returns to the table.
“Yeah,” he says. “She probably ran to her brother’s.”
“Brother?” Jessica asks.
“Rottweiler,” he says.

“Well, thanks for everything,” Jessica says
as she opens her legs, shoves
Woodrow back inside.

“Best wishes,” is my goodbye.
I’ll never see Jeffrey
at the office again.

Irony

For Wallace Stevens

Left alone, the animals
At the farm are free to express
Themselves.

The de-horned goats conduct
Seminars on sexual liberation
Upon the brick dirt patches.

Catfish argue over incongruities
And absolute facts in the
Theory of Evolution

Roan cattle smoke cherry tobacco
While listening to the rooster's lecture
On the Platonic nature of reality.

The tabby kittens are busy
Choreographing their adaptation of *Swan Lake*
To take place on the top of the barn.

Grey Arabian horses discuss
Existentialism over yellow grass salad,
Neighing when they disagree.

The red hens are ecstatic with the fact
That their play about the fall of Mussolini
Will be produced behind the cellar door.

Blue Great Danes in black suits
Bark the gospel in the southwestern
Corner of the old chicken coop

And potbelly pigs with hearing aids
Discuss bipartisan politics over
Teacups filled with mush and corn kernels.

Meanwhile, the townspeople all play Bingo.

God Can Wait

On the way to church,
You see a sign screaming
“Yard Sale” in demonic red.
Mass starts in ten minutes.
What should you do?

You could forget it and
Arrive early at the service,
Avoiding harsh stares from
Parishioners. They will welcome
You, a heavenly early bird.

Or you could stop and perhaps
Find a nice cheap hat to drown
Out the whispers of disgusted
Elderly worshippers sitting
In the pew behind you.

What the heck?
God can wait.

So you wander
Through the tables of trash:
Macramé can covers,
Pale blue afghans,
Cracked ceramic elephants.

Nothing is of interest,

Until you find a large box
Of baby clothes for only
10 dollars. A miracle.
You have no infants,
Or children at all, but
Who knows? You can
Take these home and
Maybe God will bless
You someday.

Well not now.
You're twenty minutes late
For mass.

Vehicle Abuse

I'm a '97 Chevy Silverado,
And my owner beats me.
Last week, his main girlfriend
Left him, so he clocked me
Countless times
In my driver's side door,

Leaving dents that he won't fix.

Not only is my owner an abuser,
He's also a whore, so
If it isn't him, it's his girls
After me. Insane girls with guns.

It ain't enough to smash my glass,
They have to shoot out my tires.
Have you ever been shot?
It takes your air away.

And when he sees
What they've done,
What does he do?

He kicks me. Kicks me
Right in the trim.

I don't know what I've
Done wrong. I've made
It clear to Mexico and back,
Kept him safe on bumpy roads.

I'm know I'm old,
But I deserve better.
I just pray a tow truck
Will someday rescue me
And send me off to
A nice car lot.

But I know it's just a dream.
I'm all paid off
And he never double parks.

Oh shit, you better go.
He's walking out of the bar

Without a woman beside him,
Looking drunk and rejected.
I got a feeling my
Passenger side door's next.

But you know what?
Maybe I should run
His ass over.

I don't give a damn if I break the rules.

Velvet Jesus

I give elderly people
The flu for a living
And the pharmaceutical
Company pays me pretty well.

How do I do this?
Well, I go to church every
Sunday and sing the hymns
So loud that the parishioners say:
“Not only does this man go
to church, but he sings out loud.”

Then the word gets round
To the local nursing homes.
Where the middle-aged orderlies gossip
About the happenings of the town.

I show up and offer to volunteer
With a Bible under one arm.
This, coupled with the fact that I’m
Now known as a man who sings
The Lord’s songs so beautifully,
Guaranties a “Yes.”

Then I’m left alone for two hours
As I read random psalms
And lull my listener to
Sleep before releasing fluid from
My company-registered syringe.

Then after a couple days help,
I leave one town, one congregation
For another with my supplies in hand.

Do I feel bad for what I do?
The simple answer is No.
I sleep under a Velvet Jesus
At night. No worries at all.