

Prairie Noir

A THESIS
APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

September 15, 2017

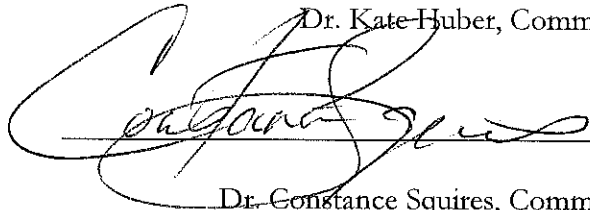
By



Dr. Iliana Rocha, Committee Chairperson



Dr. Kate Huber, Committee Member



Dr. Constance Squires, Committee Member

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

Edmond, Oklahoma

Joe C. Jackson Graduate College

PRAIRIE NOIR

A CREATIVE THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

WITH CREATIVE WRITING EMPHASIS

By

SETH COPELAND

Edmond, Oklahoma

September 15, 2017

Contents

Poem in a Local Newsletter	5
----------------------------	---

H O M E

Because Wind is Youth	8
Radio Texoma	9
First Atlas	10
Hog Creek	11
Bystanders	12
Comanche County Triptych	13
Lawtonka Beachcomber	14
John Stink	15
Numu Creek	16
After Hours	17
I-Town	18
Grizzly Adams	19
Frank O'Hara Should've Been a Painter	20
Calypso, Catoosa, Coneflower	21
Folklore	22
The Wheelbarrow	23
Happy Hollow Express Depot	24
Comanche County Pantoum	25
Nightjars	26
Ontology of the Wichitas	27

Elegy for Y2K	28
---------------	----

A W A Y

Birdsong	32
Solstice Bleeds White Zinfandel	33
American Picturesque	34
Some of the Aphrodisiacs	36
Rum Girl, Beaufort	37
Not in Kansas	39
Joseph Mengele in Exile	40
Birthing Phantom	41

Rosalia	42
Memento Mori	43
Parallel Forest	44
The Lady Who Jumped from the Baker Hotel	45
Astronomy Elegy	46
Bone Mantras	47
Okie Abecedarian	48
Wichitas Funeral	50
Germination Song	51
Prairie Noir	52
Still Pan w/ Life Tomb	64
Prayer to Woody Guthrie	55
Local News from a Town You Used to Live In	58
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	59

~For Rachel

*Boys neither go to heaven or hell
but into ghost stories.*

— Sy Hoahwah

Poem in a Local Newsletter

It starts off simple enough: a cloying adage
to the moon, a theatrical spring blossom
psalm, praise and thanks to Jesus for his
rustic rural bounty, rhymes like free verse
were as sinful as drinking, smoking, or dancing.
It's warm as late Frost, a phrase or two of dusty
high speech stitched in, with "thees" and "thous"
jutting archaic. The old reliables come out to
play for textbook beauty: *mystic magic heart*
soul sweet glimmer dance darkness whisper—
buzz words elaborate as wilted carnations.
You saw one, once, on a dusty Hastings shelf,
some grandmother's matter-of-fact portrait
smile on copier paper, faintly pixelated. Or that
frayed chapbook in the campus library, Mary K.
Ottsworth, flat American name stamped
serpents of weeds bookending the
title, *Autumn Wood: Natural Praise to God*.
A lot of the world imagines poetry this way.
Most presses would chuck this stuff in
the trash just for the cream-colored
stationary. Manuscript capitalization would
be random. Commas sprinkle like spilled
peppercorns, variables of the middle-class
wonderful. Okay, maybe that's not fair, a meal
made with love at least: a fresh grilled chicken
or corn beef reuben— thousand island on the side—
from a local diner, and probably not the one
south of town with the racist tract on the back
of the menu. This is poetry like a homecooked
meal, no bacon-wrapped filet mignon or
lobster newburg, but something culled from
a creased scrim of recipe, a grandmother's
best dish, fine Independence Day brisket next
to her daughter's broken glass cake, nilla wafer crust,
cumin-salted turkey Thanksgiving turkey, Sunday
meatloaf. After family has gone home, she
stoops with a fountain pen, framed by
bills and cards, trowels up high school
maxims, Hallmark benedictions, sincere,
direct statements & wishes from a world of
tea mugs blooming doilies, fridge magnets
from Albuquerque faded by the window.
The ten thousand grandmas of local news
letters offer these downhome tomes with

novice alacrity, padding out FFA winners and potluck reminders, barely knowing what a word's worth, but romantic all the same. You were a child staying over on the weekend, your own novice, waking up Sunday mornings before church to soft chewy bacon, burnt pancakes, milk paling your child's ration of coffee, over-easy eggs drowned in their pricked yolk. During the sermon she offered you a stick of doublemint and the back of the prayer list to draw on. After, she took you out to her father's old farmhouse to run around to watch the golden head of her blood laugh free on the yellow grass where she first held a boy's hand under a cream moon. Here she formed and catalogued her words, mind's gentle mittens on memories like holding a fresh cucumber, the dirt scent familiar and dear, to be pickled in a poem, a jar of life's microcosm, the mystic, magical, and impossibly sweet fragility of the small town soul's tableau, a baby chick delicate in the hand, a dandelion before breath blows it apart.

There is nothing in the poem in a local newsletter about the oldest son who fell from a grain bin, the crippled calf put down for its suffering, or the drunken stumble of a father coming home late. Such acts are private as a sewing machine.

HOME

Because Wind is Youth

Another day, another forty dollars we spend for a
 token of fun, a bag of nugget green,
 sugared, gasoline acrid.

A scenic drive, warm scent of air, bitter early spring balm
 glissading the windshield,
 peeking through vent dust and conditioned cool.

An empty spot, a hollow cobblestone househusk,
 tucked in cedar at the foot of

those melon granite hills folks here call
 mountains. Insensitive, Oklahoma wind seeks itself a
 partner, groping hands through

the empty doorway and two windows. Healthy wild sunflowers
 offer up pheromones with

the wind warmth.
 An itch of seasonal shift questions my throat and
 my cough sends pot from pipe

in your hand to the air.
 God laughs. We stare each other up, then
 I sit down at the doorway. You

turn to the window, spread a crucifix,
 stare out. I watch,

nothing to say. Outside, yellow fists of nightshade
 hang on their stalks,
 softly creaking.

The boulders freeze docile in prehistoric
 descent. Whoever lived here,
 that old ghost of rumor, genealogy, or circumstance,

they did not expect our times, but they are gone.

This this full, fragrant emptiness
 belongs to us now.

Radio Texoma

Gathering dusty kief with the resinous tusk of an uncle's cheap
knife/you are effulgent//Lit with colicky dragons argent in your
stomach/collared lizards whose magma heads spend too much time
licking lichen off Elk Valley//Tastes like liquor shattered into the
brittle sand of Adobe Walls/sweeps the windy come down the
plain/sweetens the wheat wave sure/translated captive screams into
decolonized lusus/heteroglossia for the six/rolling with your seven
woes//You see whited sepulchers hideous on both the outside and
in//Remember grandma's fireplace arrowheads/scavenged in child
hood/dirt poor but pale/thereby angelic in federal audits.

When you feel safe again/see how long you lay still with your face
chill in the cold hole of a winter creek/fists squeezing graupel that
stings like a nest of ice wasps//Woe to thee foolish sot generation
woe unto thee/thou has committed the workingman's act of soft
apologetics/facile contrition/empty as a face ripened by shotgun/
smudgy chiaroscuro figure washed out of color despite being soaked
beautiful in it.

First Atlas

Five churches, one school,
one backyard rusted with coppery chickens,
frybread tacos for all fundraisers,

good ol' boys in dungsmeared jeans
burning Black & Milds

in front of the only gas station, a boy

of five biking down the
middle of the road, leading two dogs,

outside town, the bridge where my grandfather
died. His palimpsest every time I cross it.

Miles of crumbling bobwire strung through
ancient oak's bone dry spurs, with

wild hog's head finials

(and the best damn sausage & gravy around
if you know where to look).

That guy on the motorcycle
with the white denim cutoffs, bandanas tied
all down his legs—

we joke, but he always has someone's arms
around his waist—

Hog Creek

sliver of liquid chrome flow
cutting through the lushed pasturing
that showers fatten with late fall growth

an oak feeds its roots into the sandbank
common vine runs up its trunk

the flow is steady, deliberate
like a busted vein of raingather

—it eddies over your chucked first beer
to where childhood runs dry—

a young boar of its name ochers the green
thankful for this quiet hour
soughing in cheatgrass

Bystanders

Before burning, rangers scour
for strays, miss an old

deathwish bison, lenses
isinglass scrabble, heightened spoor

of the next world, lambent,
liminal in windlifted brush fire,

still as an uptown statue.
Zephyrs pare the swart umbra.

Infirm shag ecloses from fluming
helical caul, retreats.

I take on white noise,
occlude as old world revenant,

rattling chains to
jounce the static of your gaze.

Primary succession. No goodbye.
And when black earth

seethes fade, rangers locate
flameskinned bone,

hear the gooey tar face
pop and spit, and that is that.

Comanche County Triptych

Morning dove won't stop leaking blank
whistle moans outside the window.
The desk is a derelict warehouse of ideas,
clinging limoncello rings, coffee cream
cum. Paw these fragments, map folds.
Find a place, make the route. Morning
dove flits a winged flume, starts a rival.

*

My uncle dies of Baptist stupor, nostalgic,
misshapen. Days caked in silt loam, the
promise of oily bacon, coffee, crumbling
biscuits, days left tattered in feedsacks,
T-posts, residue of German immigrant
names heading west with the sun, the
harvest, Gothic remembrance.

*

Barbed wire holds up the bronze cross
beside the low water crossing, buckled
slab that skips cars over spittling
creek gush, washes futures away. Drunk
cowboy pisses Christ's vinegar sponge
over the memorial, dares his silent friends
to tell him he's going to hell. Dusk snarls
at light and nobody wins.

Lawtonka Beachcomber

The shoreline heaves.

Pick a soak-darkened branch
 from a scurfy curd of tidewrack. Scrape wet red sand from marlstone
 grooves, feel the embedded ostraca shell.

Few treasures tonight: one fish skeleton—brittle spurs, a ship's unfurled futtock,
 skull prowling serpentine—a scarred claddagh still leashed
 to a black leather loop. Maybe a mother's gift.

Assign mothers a lofty ideal: old lake-brine bitches, mermaids-turned-
 manatees, still charming sailors from boats with shape
 and tongue, rocking gar-scale

earrings, Jenny Hanivers snarling from their living room
 walls. But mama's Tracker and its swiped keys will do for a lovegift, or love

itself. RV revelers down the spillway coyote call with sour,
 metallic Keystone breath. Think of where you've been,
 where you will not return. People, not nature, dug Lawtonka

from the tallgrass plains—no matter;
 watch the gull skirt the grooved wet with predation's
 aerobic strike, shed your sandals,

cross the beach's dank damp finger,
 wade to the waist in mud-dark cool,
 pantomime the pool of creation, all of aquatic history condensed
 into the murky cosm of home. Reflect a gray silhouette,

aureoled by dusk, scatter it with contouring fingers
 across the soft mirror's skin.

John Stink

Scarfed like a vagrant babushka, hiding the scrofula burls that give his unkind moniker, he sits on the porch of the home he's never entered, puffing a cigar to glow while two of his cur dogs grease their black mouths over a raw steak.

Passers-by get the scowl, or, if walking too close, a glob of brown spit. Smiles are not so much saved as implied for local boys, who come up through the cheatgrass and starthistles looking for a fishing companion, one who will aid their path to manhood with a tin of live worms and a generous chaw of tobacco, regale them with tales of the little people as they draw black bass from Bird Creek.

Evenings, they go home with sick stomachs, and the white mothers of Pawhuska feel assured in their prejudice. As the setting sun lifts the claws of the hawthorns up, he curls to sleep, dreams of waking in a cousin's cellar, mistaken for dead in the snowstorm's bedlam, throat of his horse sprayed in the snow, all he owned split in a barter pile, and his name, *Ho-Ta-Moie*, his real name, cursed, assigned to a ghost.

*N~~um~~ Creek **

to understand industry and civilization
you must go to where it has been
and has left:

concrete runs across
like the keel of a miscarried ship.
wet patches of grass and trash cling to the sides
huddled against the cold.
in the middle of the path
entrails stray from a dead dog
runes of its end.

whoever walks down here
walks with the purpose of a lizard
aimless with interstice trances of quiet stillness
always alert to what's above
people in cars sheering
destinations that only
mean to suck away their youth and money

an empty plastic bottle
of some limited time soda nobody liked.
red label faded pink by the sun.

what the bottle doesn't tell:
the teenage boy who dropped it
enjoyed that drink
more than anything else in the world.

*pronounced *nub-mub*

*After Hours**Does the earth gravitate? does not all matter, aching, attract all matter?*

—Whitman

Loneliness song, 12:33am, song for the disasters of thoughts
 people allow themselves at carnal hours, the resolve to get through the hangover
 shits, amazement at how fast the poison works, the suds of time
 bubbling away the burning questions, Twix bars, glasses of
 milk, buffet for the pity parties, socks, cold feet nevertheless,
 if clocks could talk, would they say nice things to us or would they
 unwind, pardon the terrible joke, joke what joke did you say something
 funny, the fridge makes a faint noise somebody thought was
 humming but that's bullshit everyone knows what humming sounds like
 and that isn't it, the awkward realization that you just masturbated
 to your ex's Facebook picture, homme pathetique, the glow of the computer
 burns your eyes to stoned glares, bloodshot, hollow, but shouldn't we get back
 to the point, the point is we are all pulpy stuff in a stretchy bag with chemicals
 telling us that we're sentient, something recognized by nothing else,
 flowers don't see it, dogs don't see it, the jpegs of porn don't see it, shrines
 of pixelated flesh capturing only what you want, never what there is,
 is there, probably not, is heaven, no, is hell, maybe, is earth, definitely not,
 but you are, dead, alive, broken, glued, scratch your head, does it feel,
 do plants feel, do the little red squiggles under "homme pathetique" (see above)
 feel my perplexion with them, who cares, notebooks, self-reflection,
 one pickled okra from the jar, a drop of juice, vegetable ferment
 on young confessions, the word "her" blurred into a blot of squid ink
 in ghost green, phone numbers, names, nothing can be told from
 a lost address book, except how many Ashleys any someone knows,
 cognition, cogitation, conjugation, conjunctivitis, conjugal, congeal,
 a few faces, the idea that some coffee-high freak is logging every detail
 ever posted by you and your friends, secret secular Book of Numbers
 from which esoteric binary will be gleaned later, friends announce their
 marriage, don't tell their mothers, converting to beards, black coats,
 vodka, escapism from what one great poet called prairie ennui, equating
 the smell of weeds in a pasture to the feeling of desolation, dry ink pens
 in situ, left to rot, phone buzzes, you know which friend it is, uncomfortable
 stillness in a lit den, begging for something to happen, maybe a
 scream to remind there is life, maybe the beer you're hiding from mom
 and dad, maybe a bed with someone in it, waiting for you.

I-Town

Wind wrapslapping wails of ancient rapes/Desert plunder/Shrill skulls
with dry black ponytails scraping & gashing in the crags/It vespers over
this dismal plains outpost/Alcoholic stepfather Old West/And we laugh
with voices midnight illegal in our frayed cowtown leatherbounds.

*whiteface warrior
screams from
a coyote mouth*

*Grizzly Adams**For Mark*

We invited him for excitement—a wildman of just fifteen
who spoke to us Baptist boys about smoking pot and running naked
in forty-degree weather.

He might have slept with the Pre-K teacher
if you believed the wagging behind her resignation.,
but you'd be a damned fool

if you thought the truth would come from him.
At his behest, we left the stale vinyl sanctity of the tent

and blazed crooked trails through the pastures of sleeping farmers,
glassing for jackrabbits, but really just feeling the night air
turning to cold dewy sweat

over our young bodies as the sleighbell chorus of locusts
shimmered above the engine.

Catching sight of restless ears, he blasted the night
with teenage rifle and we pulled up to claim our fading

prize. Over gossip and low orange flames, he stripped
the fur and skin in harsh peels and readied the muscle for fire.

I tasted beefsteak from it and somehow avoided myxomatosis,
vengeful hare spirits that hung their shadows

atop the surrounding mesquite. We even threw the heart in,
which grayed to a primitive well done.

Frank O'Hara Should've Been a Painter

It's hard, the fight, ink and paper your only weapons,
breath your only chemical warfare,
the barbaric yawp a war cry just above a croak.
Metaphor fails the millennial ADD hivemind.
Iambic meter rings false. Purple prose bruises.
Diction unwinds like frayed beards of sage. In Lawton, a thin stream
threads down Numu Creek, moating the smashed
wad of a label-faded tallboy, stunted to creases like oracle bones, and I feel
I am showing a mirror to some swarthy hominid,
trying to convince him it is just his reflection
and not a theft his soul.

Calypso, Catoosa, Coneflower

Nymph brood with an eternal gift,
 you ply your trade by the forked river:
 life ever running like a circuit,
 spontaneity in which young men drown,
 only to wake refreshed in the tallgrass,
 wet and whet, a cold stone for fate.

Falling cities cannot stop fate.
 Nations, peoples, all accept your gift
 of renewal, fronting the tallgrass
 with beckoning hair, ashy in river
 dust, smelling of windfall sweet. A drown
 of cedar perfume completes the circuit.

You lock, connect, match sine for circuit
 in signatures that bind cocks to fate.
 Coneflowers, impossible to drown,
 still cling to your dress, a bur of gift
 without stem, hues dark from the river,
 contrast with sisters in the tallgrass.

You've grown to love it, damned tallgrass,
 like Ogygian beach weed, a circuit
 for new vistas, this tea brown river
 your southwest cove, Catoosa your fate
 fond base, the shore of your sere gift.
 Echineia buds wither on the drown

of your mildewed saffron. Who drowns
 to sate your need? Those ambling tallgrass
 zombies of mortal stench seeking the gift
 you gravely give, placebo life, circuit
 of cycle interrupted for ageless fate
 without youth, Tithonus toward the river,

sulking in the fibbing river,
 sobbing water, failing to drown,
 another borrowed time stooge of fate.
 Do you still smile in the tallgrass,
 as they blubber? That next fool circuit
 to break stands ready for the pale gift.

Renounce the tallgrass. Blaspheme the river.
 Germinate fate. Drown the thralls.
 Give the gift of mortal. Reconnect the circuit.

Folklore

The wordless
 marker fell over years back, but they know
 where to look, bending through tensile wire, the blue spray
 of flashlights guiding their drunk steps.

No one brings the same story with them—a travelling family with a coughing
 child—such and such long ago—a grandfather’s story.
 Kiowa? Cheyenne? Maybe just poor and sick,

left the mound on a farmer’s pasture deep in the night, taking his name
 with them—most people tell it as if the child was a boy,
 but no one

knows for sure. They shovel earth till the
 brown bones offer themselves up from a dirty canvass sack, arrange the jumble

at their feet like kindergarten macaroni art, raise the skull
 over their faces, dance some high school bullshit
 understanding of a “savage ritual,” their laughter hot

with bourbon. But the ghost is a no-show,
 and innocent hicktown fun takes its clothes off.
 Shroud quiet, the dirtpatched

criminal children of prairie noir return distressed charnel rebis
 to earth, lug their greasy gray fuzz back

to Indianahoma Road. Wild hogs bay and hack
 the distance awake. Sage thrashers sing their mesquite indictment,
 a whistle like wind
 through a small, hollow clavicle.

The Wheelbarrow

Grandma was always pushing
it, like a worn-old litter
hoisting a saint's parade effigy.
The dirt it ferried—wormripe
loam that hugged dead pets
on their last journeys —
formed grand sifting hillocks
that collapsed in obscura behind
the shed or into the front porch
garden for roses, a million years of
tectonics in miniature.
On grass, it rode smooth as stone.
On dirt, it stumbled and pitched
like a real sonuvabitch.
After many years, she gave it
to us and mom carted away
stickers, spurge, & bull thistle,
dumping them off the graffitied bridge
over parched Bandy Creek.
When retirement came,
I brought it a bottle of riesling
and we drank into the night,
watching collie and cat ghosts
dance with spinning echinacea blooms
and garden snake skeletons.
In the morning, golden dew
beaded the spilled Auslese.
Stray brown burs floated in it
like dull astral gems.

Happy Hollow Express Depot

The visitors are few this Sunday
 as smoke from a controlled federal burn skirts by shucked
 strands of little bluestem and bad jokes from long dead prospectors just up
 the road in the Wichita Mountains. Across is the cobblestoned
 ribcage of Medicine Park, the old water slide breaking off to a naked
 sunbleached tibia that dives into trees whose roots have not seen creekwater since
 Comanche was an everyday tongue, every yard bedazzled with the finest metal
 lizard sculptures and property taxes an alcoholic mayor could be proud of.

The rickety store sells turquoise rings, moccasins, dreamcatchers, katsinas,
 everything prairie commercialism & cowtown industry has turned from sage
 to curio ash, creaking with the planked floor of plundered outlaw oakwood.
 Children stomp hollow raintances as they move about the room, while an old woman
 enamors one little girl with stories of little people and the great owl—*Muupitsi*,
 who gobbles up young ones with one swoop over Elk Mountain.

White ladies in gauzy prints hold chunks of amethyst up to mirrors
 like vedas, say they can really feel the energy in them. The signs outside advertise
 LIVE RATTLESNAKES, but all I see are defeated old coils of scale that
 stare from obsidian beads and occasionally shake their rattles, a sound
 only they can hear from behind the glass.

Comanche County Pantoum

Sappho sings in Beverly and Calyn tonight.

The Riverside Queen and Miss Lula of the Trailer
sweat up and fog a house smelling of meat
in a sandy oakshagged Cache Road yard.

That Riverside *naivi* and the trailer Lu feel
the beat in the yard—Bev’s little brothers—
shaggyboy men pounding sandy drum tantra
pulsing the Modelo tallboys at their feet.

The brothers throb Lu’s pendulum, drum
thrumming Aeolic crags darkened by waves,
gold goblets of olive-dressed Modelo,
nuzzling sweatsalt from each other’s hair.

Aioliki. Comanche County. *THRUM THRUM*.

House smells of meat and flesh and stale sage.

Drums drum. The moon purrs &

Sappho sings in Beverly and Calyn tonight.

Nightjars

Every summer, they came back from the gulf coast, and I would hear them in the backyard as the sun dragged behind the blackjack oaks, that squirting whistle somebody interpreted as “chuck-will’s-widow,” a dialect often confused for their whippoorwill cousins. Their song frightened me with its cadence, up-down-up, like a question I couldn’t answer. At night, one stood in the photina bush outside my window, and kept asking me that same foreign riddle. I pictured them large and narrow, like a cobra on a staff, a shade of gray with a black crown, or just vapor, the grainy night air and its mystery personified like the jingle of locust, feral June musk, or a corpse-light phantom.

When I finally found out what they looked like—tiny bodies, feathers dreaming they were sticks, leaves, and grass, onyx eyes shiny as hot bubbling tar—the menace faded like rain on gypsum. Now, standing barefoot in that same familiar yard, hot petrichor fuzzing the air, I wait and listen again for the old reedy question, a conduit for spirits in these woods that call me “child,” hoping that whatever answer I can give them will be enough.

Ontology of the Wichitas

Migrating youth light up on a snapped femur of graybleached oak. Hills sleep in the distance—fertile mothers who will never give birth.

Our parents brought us here for hikes. I cut my knees on creek rocks while prowling the shallows, rusty lace stretching, yawning away from me in the crisp dirtwater.

Eryngo crops up in packs, round psychedelic mud dancers pricking the air. Their electric pineapple skulls laugh snagging songs to each other. I learn a few.

First date, we tongue each other's salt at the foot of Medicine Bluff, where Geronimo made his famous jump. We leave a keychain on his grave, like everyone else.

Gargoyling the lakeside tower, friends make fun of us for smoking cloves. From the top, we tell the rangers' distant cars to go fuck themselves. The water shakes its wasted diamonds.

Wind is youth, always younger than us. Keeps putting out our lighters. Scorched tickseed laugh at us. Crownbeard. Yarrow. Dogtooth.

A conquistador autographed Spanish Cave, marijuana graffiti decolonized it.

Human life is an imposter here, always invasive, brute of grip and touch. We crash this wildness with our mating, pantomime the shrill purl of meadowlarks, the buzzing hack of crows, bones littering a riverbed.

In a furry scree valley, a mineshaft door banshees and bangs. We hunt for the witch's altar in Parallel Forest. We wander Medicine Park stoned, transmitting cobblestones and muggy blues.

We kick bottles into the tallgrass towards your drunk, heartbroken grandmother. She wanders through vodka and scalps of cockspur.

Lachrymose. Loquacious. Limn. Words this place has no use for.

I write a poem for the granite shadows that palm us in the Valley of the Narrows. *Profundo in igneous shades* and other bad mountain jazz I have no excuse for. A drunk snake blocks our way like a dirty rope of no trespass.

I want to give these stones to you in songs. I want to cool your pinked skin with yarrow and the sane scream of melisma. You want to trade it for the Blue Ridge ghost waves, the silver brine of the Swannanoa.

I want to be able to finally identify poison ivy, and walk around it.

Deep in the drought, the lakes down to spit. Chemistries of love and weed. Highs fade like the wet musky sky. A mountain boomer sprawls a gash on the forehead of a rock.

Why do I burn loves out here in the rash dank of tallgrass? Two people and the indifferent loneliness of beasts.

Turquoise, coral, melon, clod gray, Comanche *oha*, bright hot amber.

Every shade its own color. Every We a different herd, shifting with yearly auctions, familiar spoors left on a corral gate. At the foot of a suicide ledge, dodder frosts and veins a dead possum.

A road winds up Mount Scott. We went up the long way once. I was afraid to pass a thorn bush. My father told me *Life has its storms, son*. Reaching the mountaintop, I was bloody and small.

Elegy for Y2K

gin and kool-aid/the new religion

hail hail
 obeisance to the
 new deity of red blood and bowl flesh
 is to commence
 incept
 procreate with your maidens
 this morrow
 in the corridor next to the last machine in the universe
 still dispensing surge
 and undiagnosed ADD
 for
 your
 precious
 trust babyies

go go power rangers

one time around election '96 I came to kindergarten spouting off about what a villain William Jefferson Clinton was because HE'S A LIBERAL /parroting daddy's incensed influential incense and knowing not a singular goddamn//My kindergarten teacher asked me if I knew and was happy to define it for me//She was conservative/went to the same tiny Baptist church as my family/but she was also an educator/correctly informing came before indoctrination//She retired a few years ago/an earlier baby boomer//We will not see her like again//

chris farley is dead
 kurdt cobain is dead
 jacques yves cousteau is dead
 princess di is dead
 mother teresea is dead
how neatly the media tied together their lives
 deng xiaoping is dead
 oj simpson is dead
 vinyl is dead
 long live the compact disc
 compact disc is dead
 long live the mp3
 albert camus was already dead oh well
 grandad is dead

I came to the Oklahoma City bombing memorial when it was still a stripped foundation/a wall of weeping teddy bears flowers tears/a gash only a few months old//While we were there my mother told me, *don't say the name McVeigh*//I cursed it in silence because that is what good people do when bad people win//

when the heaven's gate cult jumped on the vodka comet
they told us what they left
all those sneakers
they never mentioned what they took with them

A W A Y

Birdsong

lucent thrush—
strip every note slowly
& in uniform
like the
bark of an old home
that grew
too proud to call you 'mine'

Solstice Bleeds White Zinfandel

Sucking it down our hot throats
we steep our minds in rosewater
pink, study the bottle, how pretty
the word is Laughter opens us up,
and we make wet leering oaths to
forget or inevitably break After
midnight, we stagger out, haunt
Cache Road, the outermost scree
of town, part planks into that old
white building on North 76 One
of us thinks it was a nursing home,
finds an office with sets of people's
car keys piled on the desk Dementia
in absentia We aim the keychains at
the few hunched houses we pass,
press their buttons, but sound no
alarms The lost bottle won't come
to our ugly howls This is the way
we fill the stencil scratches, rural
serfs reinventing ourselves as the
great troubadours, daring in safety's
ruin, heroic after missing the fight,
comfortable, inglorious We are the
young that dress in old clothing—
easier to be the figure in the sepia
ambrotype, done and pointless
We worship the dusty box: stuffed
drawers under the Singer, crate of
old soda bottles digging into Bandy
Creek sandsweat, a flowerless grave
in a dry field, old without losing youth,
pretending to know every veiny pock
and hole in our thrift corduroys. We
end with slow gooey dreams on your
backyard deck or mine, dew-sweating,
marl-mouthed, watching through the
black, night-glassing the mechanical
dance, mime of bull hide puppets,
shadows we wear as ourselves.

American Picturesque

The daft, askance head
of a 1943 mannequin leans
further to the left
in her lonely apartment,
the upstairs room
of the old Beasley Building
on 71st Street.
Dusty windows
filter the sunlight in,
and cast a grainy
human image,
cockeyed dog
curiosity.

A crack waterfalling
the forehead,
a chip
out of her melon lips
and a
stale corpse bride dress
all attest to how
derelict her purpose has
become.
Otherwise,
she is still beautiful,
sitting dignified,
ever a lady.

She never really lived life,
like the kind she once advertised:
the sweet celluloid girl
with just enough
independence
to wear a
pillbox hat,
to smoke
Virginia Slims,
to hide
her bruises,
a black & white absolute
for a black & white era.

But never really living it
means never really dying it.
She still sits pretty

in this musty room,
while real life
lies plastic
and leathered
in a jetsam American grave

Some of the Aphrodisiacs

Choochee shrimp sits like a radioactive Ganges.
Jasmine tea misses the bloodlust of the insects.

We're still talking about Polanski's *Macbeth*.
When MacDuff's son bathes naked, he knew

what he was doing, right? Thai tea looks like
shallow mud until you make it spin its dress.

The joyless anxiety of slowly letting our knees
touch, the chaste exhilaration when they do.

That one witch, did she not have eyes at all?
Didn't look like it. And that dagger, couldn't

give up its moment to shine, fading in and
out till Jon Finch just doesn't give a shit

anymore if its Shakespeare or Bukowski's
toilet roll. You said spice of one, right?

That's a lot of red pepper. Garlic breath
is not romantic, but I shame to wear a

heart so white.

Rum Girl, Beaufort

There is no grass where she lies, the tart
 bath of rum, a pirate's hot breath

prickling a woman's cold neck,
 sterilizes the tilled and turned soil, dirtied

with dry leafchips, carbuncular
 barkchunk, shattered

confessions of eternal love,
 "Mark & Jonie 4Ever" apart in pieces,

drab confetti for the festivity of death.
 A name does not scar the

darkened, charred driftwood
 marker for "Little Girl," always young,

always like a ship's discarded figurehead,
 left in the woodpile as the hulk

was towed away in the Atlantic
 sunset. The crude tectonic joke shifts

the grave to an immodest slant, as if tipped
 by the drunken body's stupor.

Amidst the dissolved epitaphs,
 the tears of a father still moisten the earth,

and every step lifts the dust of his pleas
 against Neptune back up to the

sun, cajoling to bring his frail,
 wilted jessamine back home, lest the

dolphins be the last to kiss her, laying her
 down in the dank mint of seaweed.

On the lichened concrete, pilgrims
 have jettisoned small trinkets; gum, shells,

pencils, coins, *memento mori* to wasted
 journeys, perhaps to dote the

silenced youth or to hide

the fermented sorrow gelled underneath.

She waits a resurrection, when the other
graves will stir and rise with their

eroded Marys and crumbling calcite
sheep to pull her from the murky chrysalis

of Caribbean sugar, sweetened and aged
to an angel's childlike scour.

Not in Kansas

She misses the brainy one most of all,
nevermind he recited Pythagoras

incorrectly. No pity, please.
I'm used to that kind of 2nd place.

Maybe something's happening
here, and I don't know what it is,

don't have the good feline moxie
to get my hands on it. See

these hands, darling? A working
man's. I hear lumbersexual is in,

but what's a heart to do
when there's no tin lovers

with burnished meat souls
and pitted feet of clay?

Anyhow, there's only two
ways out for someone like me:

ground in the Emerald
Salvage Yard, or, most

likely, rust-stiff and reclaimed again,
scarecrow for woodland birds,

cowardly dandelions foaming yellow
from my gashed mouth.

Joseph Mengele in Exile

Caieiras, Brazil, 1969

In the coffee-acrid heat of the day,
he sits under a pepper tree, chewing
tasteless roots and reading an Argentine
medical journal, relishing the Latinate
loops in a mind weaned on German's
guttural phlegm. Farm life bores him,
the old criminal abandoned by his era,
redundant with age as countercultures
and upheavals dominate the headlines.
Americans are standing on the moon,
ashy and gray. None of them know the
color a heart takes after chloroform runs
through the ventricles, how Romani flesh
darkens to purple when jarred in formaldehyde.
Evenings, he drinks yerba mate and ignores
a stubborn ear infection while his brain
lightly composes memoirs, a side show
only he finds dutiful and correct.

At night, he dreams of twins he knew
with heterochromia, how he switched
their brown eyes out with the blues of
another child, and had them gassed to
silence when they insisted the boy's dead
mother kept smiling at them inside their
invasive new lenses.

Birthing Phantom

Fertility statuette thighs cover the table,
blunt end, stocking feet, cross-sectioned

uterus expels a leather baby mid-writhe,
chamois skin, taw lashes for afterbirth,

ruddy liquors and dyed water channeling
through the sump to the puckered mouth

of delivery, a final bid for the maternal secret,
to dissect and decipher the arcane cabala of

conception, humbugging rumors of eldritch
phenomena—rabbit miscarriages, mouth lochia—

flensing the fissured alchemy: God and woman
earth and man, scrying cruciform cuttlefish bones,

conjoining the O & E in fœtus, mansplaining
midwifery, but can it last?—this eidolon of

conception, another ghost escaping the male
grasp like a dryad's kiss, a good old witch hunt,

repelling women from its uncanny automata,
cold simulacrum mocking sacrosanct burden,

too close to their late Thomas Harringtons
and Joseph Jeffersons, victims in the age of

black magic germ, from cough to the rude loll
of the packthread dummy, ossified in memorial

daguerreotypes, mouths slung open, silent clucks,
eyes opaque as chicken feathers.

Rosalia

“Did you see Rosalia? *Bella.*”
—Palermo cab driver

Have you seen her? She lies just down the
hall, the nymph with the darkened
face like a bronze

cast of innocent slumber.
For a time and time she's been there,
sleeping nonchalant

among her grim forbears. With hollow, abrupt
smiles they guard their spawn. Their
jagged, hanging

faces do not disturb her rest, she sleeps on.

A tinge of sorrow webs the face,
whispering the sad cause of her sleep. She
has left us a precious

shell, a statue of eerie closeness.
Wake up! Live!

Poor dear angelica!
You fall asleep a child, you awoke a symbol.

Memento Mori

When we go, let the flowers we feed remember us.
 The river oats grow sour. The yellow cockleburrs
 glow, sun-aged, ebullient. Ashen oak crags impale
 dozy beavers. Make a palette from their shrouds.

The river oats grow. Sour the yellow cockleburrs.
 Scrape the shuck and molder of lizards from rock.
 Dozy beavers make a palette from their shrouds.
 Learn the names, the earthen tones of decay.

Scrape the shuck and molder of lizards from rock.
 Gather rivers oats for your reliquary midden.
 Learn the names, the earthen tones of decay.
 Can you know the bone of the soul? Fix your icon,

gather river oats for your reliquary midden.
 Glow sun-aged, ebullient. Ashen oak crags impale,
 fix your icon. You can know the bone of the soul.
 When we go, let the flowers we feed remember us.

Parallel Forest

A blowzy ginger ruts with a shaggy boy in this tonsured scalp of skunked prairie/swart contusions of bison on the onion yellow grass carved and stripped to bald/a vagrant circle edging a blackjack copse/here the cedars pause to cheatgrass and menthol-breathed sop pinks/she sounds like she's crying half the time but he just plows on through as if unwatched by an isosceles fling of sandpipers overhead/a fusty hush festoons the cedars to shiver/after profaning the buffalo wallow/our lovers crunch on/looking for the Spanish style arrastra everyone thinks is a witch's altar/barnacling the bend in Cedar Creek where totems of lemon mint powder the fuck musk with tarty earthen tang/roads are classified as disturbed habitats/they spend twenty minutes on that/decide roads are terrorism for the free open wild/protest a blunt into a meaningless rune eating out the air with fiery tonguelaps until a white van of church kids comes up/calls it in to the rangers fifteen minutes after they culprits have gone.

The Lady Who Jumped from the Baker Hotel

Bonnie & Clyde stayed here, a passerby seems to know.
Men speak easy and women don't speak at all,
except you, proud to be rich, to have the
earth staggering underneath your feet.
Healing waters be damned! This one is for prohibition &
this one because you can outdrink the boys
quick to remind how alert you are even after so many shots.
From below, the pool glows up at you in challenge.
First one built in Texas, they say. Five bucks & a round of scotch,
the kind of dialect that breeds all forms of false courage.
Through the cotton of thought, you know the stakes,
fourteen stories to pass by for one big story and reward, the only penance
a headache in the morning while bending over your garters.
Looking down from the solarium, you smash
the cool blue oblong between your fingers and laugh.
One for the books, and two...three—
somewhere in the middle of the air you cease to exist.
The owner's mistress? She grew old in San Antonio.
A stray prostitute? A socialite not rich enough for a name?
It is too easy to believe some woman in the gauze of those demanding times
might be brave or careless enough to think they wouldn't miss,
buckle their manhood on the concrete.
None of this mattered when the healing waters grew sour, closing the doors.
Ghosts stories don't fill vacancies.
Above the empty skyline of Mineral Wells, the Baker still slumps.
Only vagrants and dead cats check in now. The pool, too, is a waste,
only a brackish abyss at the deep end,
shining green, nacreous fractals like dirty black agate.
In this stagnant hole rests the truth of you, uncouth myth,
delightful scare, the hotel's posture of cruel waste
and abandon earned, a fate well served
to a castle of faded dares.

Astronomy Elegy

I'm sipping Woodchuck. This 29-year old navy intelligence officer keeps talking about the little pop-top cans of saké you could buy in Japan. A carlight illuminates the window from the street and I am reminded of Giotto's star, Halley's Comet before Halley, illuminating the sky every 75 years. Fielding here & myself will be old men when it comes by again. May even be dead, clutching our beverages in heaven, discussing how the Oort Cloud expels icy skin shards which soar indefinite in the dry absolute lack of color or love that is space. Where is heaven relative to space? If the universe keeps expanding, it must be farther away every second. So they *do* drink Sapporo and Asahi there? Cool, man. There's one Japanese hipster who listens to Neil Young and drinks Pabst, stole an Anthony Ausgang painting from an exhibit, a star-studded background, a stretched purple cat. Neon lights, chemical rave green, turn our corner into a hookah den, smoke filtering aurora borealis glow. On the floor, girls from Mars or maybe just Dallas display the mating dance dialects of their people. It is all too much, their curvature, the pull of their orbits, celestial bodies colliding. We sit tight, make use of the atmospheric lack of silence to form our conversation, two remote islands of talk relaying radio waves. Even so close, we're just now getting *I Love Lucy* telecasts out of the way so we can get down to the good stuff. Uh-huh, used panties, sure. Somewhere near Chicsxulub, Mexico, a pile of cremated dinosaurs salts history's crater margarita. A moon girl tilts, sucks the salt from my rim, drifts away. My tides rise and fall. Uh-huh, yeah, bullet train, so fast, 65 million years ago, a two-story McDonald's with tofu burgers, Cho Fu Sa, Sea of Tranquility, elder porn, hentai, yowie, ecchi, panspermia, Jupiter, Fat Man, Pluto, Little Boy, big weird bang.

Bone Mantras/Ghazal For Bones/Bone Ghazal

Found alone in the grazing: a porous white bone,
key to grimoires lost, this sunbleached, dire bone.

The smoke coiling like a choir of vaporous cats,
yawning out the censer's void eyes—fire bone.

The dry leaves have lost their hold upon the sky.
Trees are frosted, flensed, dried to entire bone.

The sickle moon curls back like a scab-dry rind.
Query, the sky's cheek slashed to a scryer bone.

The world gives luster as it falls apart, makes the
worm-fed skull look around and smile. Liar bone.

Rogers, Will: If he were alive today, the governor would sentence his Populist ass to death.
The execution would be botched.

Sooner: Praise be to cheaters. "Land of Enchantment," wasn't taken yet, but this land was.
And that land there. And that land.

Timothy McVeigh's getaway Grand Marquis is on display in the downtown bombing museum.

Ute Vic sues the Comanche tribe for discrimination. The dispute is settled out of court, and he
receives a season pass to the water park. The tribal chairman suspects this was the plan
all along.

Velma-Alma, two towns, one school. Competitors in Middle School Quiz Bowls. Every time the
moderator said their name, it sounded like an incantation.

Wazhazhe: The Osage name for the Osage people. Does not mean "O, sage!"

Xenophobia: The state religion. Courthouse Ten Commandments.

Yuengling beer isn't distributed to this side of the Mississippi. This offends East Coasters
tremendously.

Zookeepers in Tuttle scoured neighborhoods for their missing tigers, freed by floodwaters.
They found one. The other ran off, joined a bison herd, and now eats mostly grass.

Wichitas Funeral

Five cars crouch under the shade at Boulder, hot bodies fatten June,
 sweatsouls hiking root-runged steps to the Narrows, that hungry
 valley tucked beyond, panting dogwoods, toasted granite grooves. A
 discus of moss shakes loose, porcupine unnerved by the scrape and
 pat of shoes. Air in the bluegray shadow drops to a cool musk, balms
 the beaded mourners with meadow garlic breath.

*sun fades the sky
 two canyon wrens
 crossing wingspans*

A pallbearer reaches into a brown bag wrinkly as leather, lifts out a
 white sleeve. On slickrock flanking the creek, a thousand years of
 tarry bracken, chalky grit flumes out in the still air. Childhood
 dreams, teenage fuckups, weathered young stumbles reduce to fine
 gray stars binding with oxygen, with the blood. A cross-legged
 pallbearer in the back cups his hands, breathes out harmonica taps.

*prairie larkspur sighs
 a cool snake
 silvering the sand*

Germination Song

As the froth-brimful waves on dunes unfurl,
 shaping the beach into hills young with new,
 you are the sand grain that gathers the pearl.

The sun leaks a white sky. A boy and girl
 walk sideways like crabs. The sand sweats salt dew
 as the froth-brimful waves on dunes unfurl—

Consider those specks on which the waves hurl
 brine-dank and scurf. So many pasts/futures,
 but *you* are the grain that gathers the pearl.

If lips could spin calligraphy—the curl
 of your hair, my mouth, collusion in blue
 as the froth-brimful waves on dunes unfurl—

some poem would leak from my shell, a whorl
 of nacreous milk, me encoding you
 into the sand grain that gathers my pearl.

Foreign stone of this soft mantle, stray burl
 mating with my flesh, inveigle me true
 as the froth-brimful waves on dunes unfurl,
 that you are the grain that gathers the pearl.

Prairie Noir

Drunk off the sugary chili of pico pico
 from the southside Mexican market,
 we drive out east of town,

to some pasture we hope belongs
 to a relative or a friend's relative.
 We disrupt the barbed wire

gate and perfect silence with *us*,
 walking, laughing, arguing, desecrating
 the ground with spent

Smirnoff bottles and finally a
 shouting match while pissing yards from
 each other. Pulling up

your shorts, you wince, yelp, then swear
 at a waspy sting. I run to see: a bull nettle,
 furred with crystalline barbs,

craggy leaves out and open like
 fingerless gloves lying about spare change.
 I give your finger the lover's kiss,

useless and meaningful, travelling
 up your arm, arriving at your mouth,
 the tastes of apples and

cigarettes you denied smoking.
 We retreat to a fallen elm at the edge of
 a creek muzzy as hematite,

a dark hole in the hag beard of summer-
 scorched grass. You elevate the hand that
 does not hold mine,

still pink with irritation. Like any pain,
 it will fade. It was not a true nettle, any more
 than this is a true love,

but here is where it grows. We will share this
 open space of the uncertain present
 with one another a few

months, a year, a lifetime, as long as

it takes. Many other futures loom in
the background.

Right now, we ignore them.

Still Pan w/ Life Tomb

There are no gods living we cannot kill. Red barn of Arcadia lies vacant. Sock hop graffiti mimics Greek Chori, glyph tongues, mongrel coitus catechisms. Vacant in Arcadia's red barn heap fat faunish bones, menagerie piping mung-tongued—glib, coy totenkopf, sylvan cuck hipster—we inter our blank sex with you. Traded faun for fat, pipes for sober bills, covered our hoof tracks, affluenza spoor, hip dysplasia genes interred in blank mitochondrial snare, aubade to genes. Spores flew in. Hooves died out. Uncover cock sock graphs, choral mimesis, dubstep days snare with might. O con, O bawdy courtship, there are no gods living we cannot kill.

Prayer to Woody Guthrie

That's the union that'll tear the fascists down, down, down
That's the union that'll tear the fascists down

I lift my prayer to you, Woody, the kind of god one might ascribe to today. The Fundies are sure that this world's gods are iPods, reality television, or the Jonas Brothers, because the church is a little behind on their pop hero intel, but God is never a comfort or a luxury, but sharp pain, conceit, the begrudging acceptance that before we placed a single baby foot on the next rung, some mommy/daddy imperative pushed us up there. You are a good god, a real god, human god, no Gnostics in your corner, no space opera of coal mining angels and suit/soap devils, just a skinny untamed someone, familiar, colloquial. So many of us are you, so many ignorant of our godhead. Smoke and sage rattle the rickety crisp wind. Three days ago it was seventy-five degrees. Three weeks ago it was a narrow margin of victory for—not the hero, not the answer, but not the one with locker-room mouth. Three hours ago, someone stabbed someone at a Cowboys game, someone who lost track of their divinity, someone who watched every other tool be taken from their hands and melted down for the next smokescreen of tax expenditure. Blessed Woody, the People are destroyed, antsy strays in the kennel, afterimage of the Nelsons hanging from the Okemah bridge, your daddy's fingerprints greasing their faces. Three seconds ago, a high powered hose of watercycled tears and rage dissolved bodies to wet parchment, globs of treaty torn and pulpy, seizing in the air all across Standing Rock. My God, My God, can you forsake the hot, pleading faces steaming off your children? Will you take them as your children, or your brothers, sisters, family? Will you prepare them a table while their enemies watch from their shields, Resistols, and assault rifles? Will you personify grace and providence, O Great Spirit of the high, hollow cheekbones, whistling Dixie and Dakota in the same key, will you run ebony crude through the Missouri River? Will you be baptized? My lanky Adonai, my divine badger in mourning garb of dusty overalls and a wool shirt, smelling like work, like my father, like ten thousand

whiteblackeveryshade fathers, what times are these that building automobile hatcheries trumps clean water, trumps clean air, trumps clean politics—no, not him. I'm not here to talk about him, even if he hangs over this psalm like the biggest ugliest piano drop gag ever conceived. Woody, when I get to your heaven, promise me it was a bad reality show marathon, even the part about Prince, Bowie, and Leon? And will you make it true? I know all about poor Lee Brown, a white working man singing about breaking *his* chains, but that's why I need you, more than Christ, Siddhartha, Muhammad, or Kanye, a real boygod like the rest of us, made from the mud that furs the soul, wearing its truth and septic, bleeding its thunder and light, I need real answers, spokes of Dharma, Pater Noster witcracks. Remind me of when Flintstones didn't mean sediment in drinking water, remind me that Wilma and Fred were the first couple shown sleeping in the same bed. Make me, O Lord, thy Spining Wheele compleate. Tell me once and for all who killed Kennedy, then tell me his favorite color, let me see bin Laden's corpse, and hold him in my confused arms, let me watch Edward Snowden frantically scan his bedroom, undress, and go to bed, let me change Max Ritvo back from poetry to a man/a hero/a son, tell me what it means that the Liberty Bells on Franklins are all holograms, tell me why the fuck I grew up on some other people's land, tell me why the fuck we failed to put the Socialist Rebbe in that goddamned slavebuilt house, tell me that Omran Daqneesh will be okay/will be better than this, and tell me why the fuck my mother's blackberries died or were eaten by squirrels every stupid spring, tell me if all the news is fake can I finally shoot the messenger, tell me if I'll even feel bad when I've done it. Woody dash no infants against the rocks, kick no feet against the pricks, we've done it all before. This sackcloth outrage, this ashy pleading, has pounded our hands to meat, pulp from the pulpit, plucking your sixstring razors Woody, let no children wander and beg, seeking food out of ruins Woody, let no one put on shame, let confusion cloak no soul Woody, pull the machines off the willows, pass them around like electric manna, shout out the key in your godvoice made—no—already perfect—roll the roaring bones of Tulsa, Birmingham,

Ferguson, Wall Street, Wounded Knee, Wounded
Knee, Munich, Auschwitz, Bagdad, Aleppo,
Gettysburg, Hiroshima, Ilium, Paris, and
Jerusalem, if we forget you, if I forget you, if
my/our hand(s) forget how to play—

Local News from a Town We Used to Live In

The rains came back and turned the sunken,
withered streets into lakes dark and silver as graphite,
like it did our last May there, the flood that broke
a five-year drought. Some someone is on trial, a name
I didn't know then and can't be impacted by now.
The scared, psychotic, sage recruits at Fort Sill
celebrate Flag Day. Meanwhile, in Iowa Park, Texas,
a swimming pool poisons people or something.
Nothing of what I was with you there, what we were,
pushing an older woman's car out of the water
at the entrance of our complex with a group of strangers,
silent anonymous neighbors. Nothing of drinking
soda and spiced rum on the balcony, sharing small
words with our next door, the midwestern farmboy soldier.
Nothing of hiking Elk Mountain, mosquitos forever
favoring you to me, my dear. Nothing of what
interlaced our twine to begin with. I miss the kung pao
chicken at China Wok Express, and most of the menu of
Luigi's, but those small good things are not newsworthy,
and that is probably why we don't live there anymore.

Acknowledgments & Notes

The author wishes to thank the following publications in which many of these poems first appeared, some of them in earlier drafts: *Brickplight*, *cattails*, *concs*, *Crab Fat*, *Crosstimbers*, *Cuento Magazine*, *Emerge*, *E·ratio*, *Garbanzo*, *The Goldmine*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Menacing Hedge*, *Mud Season Review*, *New Plains Review*, *OKIE Magazine*, *The Oklahoma Review*, *pioneertown*, *Poetry Pacific*, *The Poets Without Limits*, *Red River Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Scissortale Review*, *Snorkel*, and *This Land*.

The grave of the “Rum Girl” can be found in the Old Burying Grounds of Beaufort, North Carolina.

The epigraph for “Rosalia” is found in the article “Where the Dead Don’t Sleep” by A. A. Gill. Published in *National Geographic* vol. 215 no. 2, February 2009.

Odd-numbered lines in “Bone Mantras” come from Mark Doty, Seamus Heaney, Lance Henson, Anna Journey, and William Matthews.

Thanks: Iliana Rocha, Aaron Rudolph, Teri McGrath, Sy Hoahwah, John G. Morris, Rachel Yackeyonny, Catherine Vidler, Jennifer Hudgens, Joshua Barnett, Fielding Smith, Red Yeller Pickup Truck, Danez Smith, Kate Huber, Constance Squires, Melissa Morphew, Steven Garrison, Matt Hollrah, and Sydelletth.

A special thanks to all my loves in the UCO English Department.

Seth Copeland was born in Lawton, Oklahoma, and raised outside the rural gash of Indianhoma. He edits *New Plains Review*, and founded *Jazz Cigarette*. His poems have appeared in many literary journals, and have twice awarded him the John G. Morris Poetry Prize (2011, 2012). He lives with his wife Rachel, both of them Graduate Students at the University of Central Oklahoma.