

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA
Edmond, Oklahoma
Dr. Joe C. Jackson College of Graduate Studies

Out is Through

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN CREATIVE WRITING

By Caleb Jordan
Edmond, Oklahoma

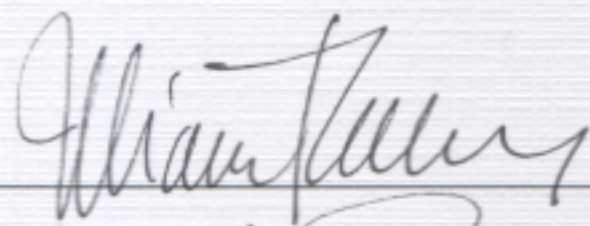
2019

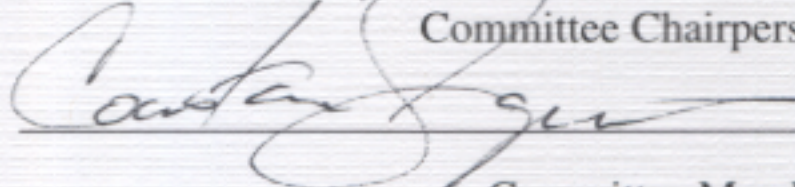
Out is Through

A THESIS

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

April 15th, 2019

By 
Committee Chairperson


Committee Member

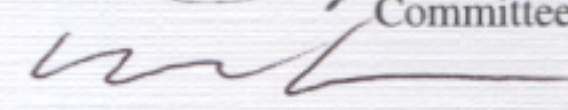

Committee Member

Table of Contents

Abstract 4

Invocation 6

Atropos 8

Lachesis 33

Clotho 59

“Out is Through” Abstract

“Out is Through” is a book of poetry that began as a long ekphrasis which explored the “Black Paintings” of Francisco Goya; however, it grew out of that initial impulse into something more than merely commentary. The basis of the ekphrasis is still there, along with a quote from Goya to situate the manuscript, but the poems have branched out and deal with more recent themes like politics, violence, self-harm, and selfhood. There are three sections of poems named after the different members of the Fates, the Greek figures who control the lives of human beings through the measuring and cutting of life-strings. Many of the poems do not have titles which is to destabilize the narrative and the normal way in which readers are used to reading poems, where the titles guide the reader toward some immediate understanding. Without the titles, the poems feel more foreign, and the reader is forced to take the words and images on their own merit. This decentering of the reader within the experience of reading the poems, forcing them to confront how they read poems, is an important theme throughout the book.

Some of the works that inspired “Out is Through” are the paintings of Francisco Goya, which provided the foundation and impetus for the writing of the book. Goya’s “Black Paintings” reflect the personal and political turmoil of his time while also being heavily veiled in metaphor and symbolism. The forms of the poems have been inspired by Geoffrey Hill’s *Mercian Hymns*, Susan Howe’s *Pierce-Arrow*, and John Berryman’s *The Dream Songs*. Along with those books, Susan Howe’s *My Emily Dickinson* provided spiritual guidance for the book through Howe’s exploration and elucidation of Emily Dickinson’s work and life.

One of the major facets of Dickinson’s work was decentering the reader and allowing the poetry space to exist on its own, which is the same goal as that of the poems in “Out is Through”. The alienation of the familiar has often been a goal of writing, from the density of Joyce to the

stripped-down strangeness of Beckett, though where “Out is Through” branches out and creates its own space within the poetry world is its focus on the nature of poetry itself. Often form has been used to help the reader grasp what the poem is doing, but many of the poems within this book have been stripped of that familiarity and the form becomes a hedge maze. This hedge maze effect can confuse the reader, but once the reader figures out their own way through the poems become clearer, more guiding, and more guided than they first appear.

“Out is Through” is different from many other works of poetry; there is a growing amount of work within the poetry world that eschews difficulty, prioritizes personal experience, and focuses on issues of identity and selfhood. “Out is Through” shares the focus on issues of identity but seeks to alienate the reader to force them to look at their identity from a new angle. The poetry’s focus on history, personal and global, places identity within a spectrum of experience. What makes “Out is Through” so bold is the way that it weaves the political, personal, and historical into an experience that pushes the readers to read with attention and patience. The work has been designed for the reader to find themselves lost, wondering how they got where they are, and finding out something new about themselves.

Invocation

“A poem is an invocation, rebellious return to the blessedness of beginning again, wandering free in pure process of forgetting and finding.”¹

-Susan Howe

Countryside unfurled like a flag;
if anything has a right to be picturesque,
it might as well be this. Off
away is the court where ghosts fight
for a place in the starting five. Walls
covered in murals, the cottage
becomes a ministry. Administer justice
or truth, one or the other, never both.

In the distance a set of high beams
gleam, shine straight through transparent
darkness, the cottage surrounded by privacy
and covered in ivy. The only thing left
is that which cannot be reclaimed. The walls
of the cottage covered in wallpaper, fashionable
in the time it was built, but now dead skin.
A constant fog: coughing, sneezing, retching,
stench of vomit. The doctor comes a-calling
saying, “No time No time No time”
as he holds your hand. You paint yourself
while looking into a small hand mirror; Narcissus
of death masks, a skull on a table, a memento
of bone and hair to remember seven children
who made it to adulthood, five who did not.

An altar made of bone and words; anagram
of Mary or perhaps the rose and the panther;
the constant beep of a self-destruct sequence
that is really an alarm clock; the binding
of birth to death to mystery to a magician
shuffling a deck of cards; a set of words
in a certain order to invoke a certain ghost
at a certain time; no limits but time and effort
and law and justice; maybe some approximation
of truth. You looked at the painting of your dying
face and became inspirited, drawn in, inspired
to paint the death of everything you hated
and everything you loved. I invoke you now
O muse, O dream, O eternal death, O sweet

¹ Howe, Susan. *My Emily Dickinson*. New Directions Books, 2007.

joy, O dog, O war, O devourer. Come to me
and be my baby, my father, the better and worse
half of myself. Draw upon the page what I
cannot write while I write what you cannot
draw. My gift is nothing but a subtraction;
invocation is a process of dispossession.

Atropos

“Painting, like poetry, chooses from universals what is most apposite. It brings together, in a single imaginary being, circumstances and characteristics which occur in nature in many different persons.”

-Francisco Goya

I

Daughters of night: with lens, child, scissors. Prometheus sits before you bound. When fire came you three smiled knowing that no fire could pierce your darkness.

Grandfather looked across the cracked red earth. Head high grass, then low grass, then fields now dirt and wind. He plays poker with the devil dressed as the hired hand.

Jittery cat eyes
Gleam at the end of the bed
God what is that noise?

The hum underneath the silence
Underneath the rain
Underneath the sound of breathing

The sound of questioning
Night weighted blanket of rain
Covering every exit

In the morning it is just fog
With goat-headed men flitting
Just out of view

I dreamt of going from light to light
When I awoke it was to the feeling of a frog
Sitting in my chest

This is something everyday
A cat whines at me while I take a shower
Hunger dominates

I want words and power and shape
The negation of me wants the same words
Sliced up and brought forth on a golden platter

Like the head of John the Baptist²
Unwashed wild haired
Wiry and young with a slight hint of beauty

Oh to consume and be consumed
Ode to the snake the fox
Ode to anybody but myself

Dream song sung by those below
Who want only to hum
Like the electrical undercurrent of the world

This worldline business
Worming its way across busy streets
Straight from my face to the face of my enemies

² Mark 6:26

Could I cut my face off
And still live?
I want only questions

Not answers
What could possess me
To want this? Perhaps

You want it too
No negation
Only self and self

Becoming together
In a sweet song
And dance number

Choreographed by Bob Fosse³
Just a set piece and a jazz band
To simulate the real

I have said half of what
You deserve to hear
Goodnight goodnight

Smell you later

³ *All That Jazz*

II

Grandfather dreams of only sand sheeny in the sun of dreams. Every dream ends with a monster bursting from his chest.

Grandmother braided her sister's hair. The stars above her were strange and bright. Birds circled, cackling at the moon.

“Expansive force of the comic”⁴

Driven downward—two men eating
soup or just walking—bat-like ears
perking up at the sound of bugs
a-buzzing at the passage of day
into night—eyes
like a sunken city between two rivers
between two spools of thread
together they are time and not time
or just the individual sitting and watching
the sun set beyond two walking

⁴ Bergson, Henri. *Laughter*. Translated by Cloudesley Brereton & Fred Rothwell, MacMillan, 1921.

“should it not also have something of its own to tell us of art and life?”

Minute and terrible detail
one can hate ordinary things
or can bathe in the strange gray
light sweet suffering angel hours
spend Swinburne for a little
Dickinson spent binding notes
to little flowers for buried old men
sleeping in a casket the sound
of hymns lulling to sleep babes

I have brought my wings
to Corinth to hang them in
the temple.⁵ Aphrodite,
I have loved, known love,
but have not been known
to love myself.

I am heaping infinite upon infinite
confessions here. Multiply that by seven,
now we are close. I am a spider in the palm
of your hand. I am foam
washed up on shore after a storm,
full of fish blood. There is no singing

myself except as a pierced heart hidden
in a hearth. I have known them all,
even the one I am currently inventing.
Dreams of killing his twin brother
haunt my twin brother. Aphrodite,
I have never meant any of it.

⁵ Daedalus

III

Ghost turns into father. Father becomes son. All together are becoming.⁶ Becoming is the wool spinning, spinning, spinning, into yarn.

Grandmother took me to buy fabric. I touched each piece with my eyes closed and told her which one whispered me the best story.

Grandfather was asleep when we got home. Under his bed was a pentagram drawn in blood; we prayed for his becoming while winding golden thread around his thumbs.

⁶ Heraclitus

I promise I have no inner resources.⁷
I also have no outer resources. What I
am given by the land I give
back to the land.
I plant flowers
in my brain and after

a few months they bloom,
black roses, out of my ears.
Pink elephants fly above
my head; Van Gogh's
white oleanders
sit on the window behind

my writing desk. Get drunk.
Write poems to the moon,
a hagiography for St. Catherine,⁸
a guide to arranging flowers. A wedding
between person and earth is one where the vows
are all lies written by cartographers.

⁷ John Berryman

⁸ Of Siena

“this time the comic will take up abode in the person”

Terror since September so you said⁹
the leaves fell and gathered together
were a mass of burning bodies
to make ready for winter when ground
will be cold hard unlike you
a wreath of flowers hovers above
your house like a halo
for wise people to follow to some
birth at the edge of a pit full of smoke
shapes biting the eyelids nostrils lips

⁹ Emily Dickinson

The dream of the flower has a need to be heard. The flower's name is Nightingale, she has her tongue cut out. Flower petals dark purple. Flower goes south, roosts amongst the rocks, dies before

it can head back north. Up here we are moon people marked¹⁰ by reflection, changed by an object's revolution. Millennia after millennia we relight the hearth-fire, send signals

through the smoke. Slouching through the smoke are cowslips, tiger lilies, a rose. Betty Grable turns into a flower and is painted on the side of a bomb. A white dogbane blooms amongst wreckage.

¹⁰ Wisława Szymborska

IV

St. Francis speaks to a wolf, a boy, a bundle of bees. Build the darkness, replies the wolf. Wolf spirit consume my rabbit soul. Pink and white roses surround the grave; I go there often. Grandmother's favorite color was brown for the dirt and the dead grass.

I eat and it is a weakness;
I watch tv and it is a weakness;
I drink and it is a weakness;
I write and it is a weakness;
I wish for the waking. I hope
to avoid reason and I hope

to avoid questions. The regiment readies
itself for the war. Aphrodite give us strength.
We war for love, out of love, into love.
What else is worth all of these flowers?
A wall, a grand freedom, an eagle gulping
down the entrails of a mouse?

I am truly sorry for man's dominion,
said Burns¹¹ as the mouse ran from his stomping
feet. Such tyranny even to plant fields
or build dams; the damned look up
to the heavens and see fighter jets writing
out secret messages to the lilies in the fields.

¹¹ "To a Mouse, on Turning Her Up in Her Nest With the Plow, November, 1785"

A loaded gun life
When I think of your fingers¹²
I picture spiderwebs floating
In dawn light

Everyone went to the concert
You watched them go burning
In the setting sun

Did you play the piano
For yourself?

Crowned in orange gold
You stood in the window
Watching fingering flower petals

A loaded gun waiting
For a quick twitch of muscle
Mind fire sound

Forged in light
No words gasps and you
Watching from your window

As everyone goes gaily along
You turn away finger a pen

A loaded gun waiting
Sweet smell of flowers
Burning

¹² Daguerreotype taken at Mount Holyoke

Spells, potions, and the daydreams
of madmen I writ ye and became un-
god of white pages. Spill the blood
of whispers, blame miscarriage
of time and mind, but I know not
what the whispers say anyway.

I said this and spit upon the rock
which casts no shadow. Van Gogh
coughed blood into his hand and
I cannot remember him ever laughing;
no bloody god ever laughed or experienced
a moment of bliss

without feeling some mighty guilt
for it. Down from the mount came¹³
Moses carrying tablets with words to be obeyed
and he saw the Golden Calf and wept blood;
Van Gogh may have never laughed but at least
he never drank the water entangled with gold.

¹³ Exodus 34:30

V

What I have of history I have made out of you. I am sure most of it is untrue, or at least askew.
All the unspooled threads look like a polluted river after heavy rain.

“Look, there, you see it?” Grandfather asked and for a second, I thought I saw a dark shadow
with buttons for eyes. The fish swam away as we went paddling by.

“absence of feeling which usually accompanies laughter”

No sun moon faces of the dead
their voices came back but no faces
just the ghosts of eyes and mouths
speaking some Swinburne that is really Ezra
Pound or Wallace Stevens
just the sound of the sea lapping
up a bowl of tomato soup
light pink glowing salt lick
light covers your lips and eyelids

“this reverberation cannot go on forever”

Never took dominion¹⁴—never
took nothing but a couple scratches
or a black eye from a spring break
singing at the wind is just
one noise added to another noise—you play
a little I do too though only for a dream
a moment of daydream—no purple
gold pearl amber sapphire emerald—
Swinburne a-mouldering in his grave

¹⁴ Wallace Stevens

VI

I heard their scratching and their mewling. I could not bear to look upon their faces.
Grandmother tilled the garden. Grandfather and I lugged the sack down to the river.
We said a prayer, threw the sack in, and wept.

I woke up hearing a crash and a “Goddammit” which is a sort of prayer at two in the morning.
A light slipped in through the bottom of the door and tucked me back into bed.

“What is the basal element in the laughable?”

The dogs shall eat at the walls¹⁵
two men wander under a full moon
light like a baying dog hot on the trail
of some spectral memory of a wall
splattered with blood and spit
Priapus standing to the side weighing
his cock against a stack of gold
a group of children kick at the wall
two old men kiss the wall and cry
out like a couple of dying dogs

¹⁵ 2 Kings 9:11

VII

Bronze hands clasped in prayer erupted from the red earth; a hail storm came barreling in. Hail as large as baseballs whacked away at the roof.

Grandfather and I waited in the shed; gunshots of hail. He let me wear his old catcher's mask.

(We passed around a calcified heart rescued from fire. By candle light we wrote poems, songs, stories in honor of the past owner of the heart.)

“Laughter appears to stand in need of an echo.”

The heart—they say
growing bolder with old words
older than the memory of elephants
contain—small rain
the drain on the heart great
like the weeping of Alexander
at a wall full of notes—
the heart is used up
by its own small beatings

She looked back and became a pillar of salt;¹⁶
the wolf is at the world-door. What
do I write about if not tragedy?
Joy is momentary, happiness fleeting,
but suffering is to (k)no(w) oneself
as smiling and laughing and starving

like Kafka writing his little stories for himself
or Catherine also unable to eat because of mystery.
Knocking politely at the door is the wolf,
big as a car. Dogsbane blooms in the courtyard;
the princess hides a poem underneath a rock;
a eunuch drinks hemlock while a dog-faced

boy watches from the corner of the room.
What can we know of death other than a small
sliver of suffering? Hope springs out of not knowing
but we know, at least, that there is some fear of the unknown
lingering in all of us. Everything else, all the joy,
is on the other side of the door with the wolf.

¹⁶ Genesis 19:26

The weeping rafters herald dawn;
it has been raining all night,
and with the rain came a steady dripping
noise just below the steady strumming
storm. What is consistent about rain
other than the noise? Every drop

feels like a new sting. The weeping
rafters herald a boy coming
through the storm, his head hoary.
This weakness of the poet,
myself, brings rain or mystical
boys into all of my work. Try not

to fault the boy for my obsessions.
Be different boy! Play
volleyball on a sunny beach and laugh
at reruns of the Fresh Prince. Sing along
with songs on the radio and drown
out the sound of rain with your eunuch voice.

Lachesis

“Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?”

-William Blake

VIII

A little drunken sailboat. A ghost comes down from the attic. A ten-gauge shotgun. A nurse changes out a saline bag. A number of sticky notes, eye height on every wall, tell where home is and how to get there.

“the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart”

Rotation of the spheres all lost
in a hedge maze—Swinburne
sunbathing on black rock up
the coast from a garbage fire—
breathe the purple smoke—hair
follicles seen through a magnifying
glass are pillars built by dead giants
_____ said all the giants dreamed
of being small and scurrying ants—
you laughed at the wistfulness

IX

There is a frog with a bomb in its mouth. Every croak an explosion. I take too much medication and spiders pop out of my skin.

A big white spider crawls up my neck and into my open mouth. Grandmother grows nightshade in her garden.

Around midnight the spiders begin to pulse with purple light. A panther screams a dream song from atop a tree at the edge of the yard; chickens wait for dawn.

“they find their explanation in the presence of the individual”

Drink whisky—you
sleep so sound during a new moon
no light nor dreams penetrate
a spider’s web full of eggs
hollow like bird’s bones
fly from dogs over walls—
Troy may have fallen
Troy will never fall—
your fingers spider’s legs

“the inexorable logic which reality applies to the correcting of dreams”

Wild boar coming down from the mountain
rooting up unknown bones mixing
grunts in with the slurping of bone marrow draining
its bladder on ancient trees covering
trails and roads with mud and feces
all for some golden throne—you
with a bow taking
the first shot first blood taking
the skin for your own except tusks
flung to each end of the empire taking

X

Every word a transmission; every line another link; every poem a virus. We desire to possess
but it possesses.

There is no sun. Grandmother told me to take out the garbage. While running across the yard
I stepped on the severed head of a snake.

“they laugh because his sitting down is involuntary”

With absolute certainty old men
eat soup—laughter erupts out
of you—stop saying time will end
when it never began in the first place
upon the back of the toiling
worker who holds up the world
and calls themselves _____ for their face
is one map of the world while the other
map—face of the unknown dead

This poem is becoming; this poem
is death. Bells are tolling
in the valley, snow raises its head,
fishermen fall gently. Poem
stops to listen. Fishermen falls
general, lands gently

on rooftops, people marvel
at their beauty. The bell ends
its tolling with a scream. Poem
towards being; poem with bell
sounding. Two men fight
to the death on red

cracked earth. Poem towards
snow; poem toward the world
line wiggling its way across
the lattice of time; here the poem
fighting to the death
on a snow-covered hill.

How much can I repeat myself
before you get tired? The strange death
of the avant-garde at the hands
of infants is not the subject
of this documentary. The subject?
Death in general. The nuns laugh

at the uncovered waists of dancing
men; they have seen it all once
or twice. Once or twice I wrote
a poem about death and talk
about a stereotype. What song
and dance is all this laughter?

Dream me the sign
and the meaning; angels gather
at the tabernacle because they want
to see the face of god. A child
cries out at night, hands up,
reaching into the dark.

XI

The three of you stop your yammering! Grandmother needs to sleep. Grandfather keeps reading the same sentence over and over again.

The doll's face was cracked, its head empty. The doll's face was cracked, its head empty.
The doll's face was cracked, its head empty. The doll's face was cracked, its head empty.
The doll's face was cracked, its head empty. The doll's face was cracked, its head empty.
The doll's face was cracked, its head empty. The doll's face was cracked, its head empty.
The doll's face was cracked, its head empty. The doll's face was cracked, its head empty.

THE DOLL'S FACE WAS CRACKED, ITS HEAD EMPTY.

The doll

face

cracked

empty

“child-like dreamers for whom life delights to lie in wait”

Spiders in the left shoe¹⁷
dead ants in the right shoe
wake up wake up little spiders
feet tip-tapping on your face
wake you to morning grace
coming through the window
barely peaking in gold
after the agonies of Christmas Eve

¹⁷ Nursery Rhyme

Down the hallway lined with pictures walks
the ghost of a drowned woman.¹⁸ I first saw
her when I was six years old, now
she is here again.

In my dreams she has a hood covering her face,
but awake she is unveiled, glorious in a way

that the dead only can be. Her eyes hold no light,
her skin is covered with puzzle pieces.

What I have learned of the afterlife I have learned
from her: a figment of my imagination or a hallucination
that comes and goes as it pleases.

Apparition breaks the partition;

the glowing hand reaches out to grab my uncovered foot.

The dominion of the living is tenuous; we just happen
to be up above the earth in this moment, breathing,
dancing, writing. It all seems so silly sometimes.

In the moments when she comes for me time seems to unroll,
I sit small and six years old again.

¹⁸ La Llorona

Raise up, chorus, raise your voices
in praise of spun wool. In the mirror
is my shadow; what time
of day is it when
shadows cross shadows?
Spin gold into wool,

will it to shine, dream song
of a chorus of rifles. A dog
barks from a yard, his shadow
dances across the grass, a four-
legged ballerina. The chorus
sways with the beat

of speech. Shadows are the dreams
of bodies freed from the shackles
of bodies. The spinning of wool
in my imagination is more important
than the sweater I am wearing unless,
it is cold. The chorus repeats itself.

XII

The three of them whispered amongst themselves. What could they be saying? One fingered scissors, another looked through glasses at a page, the third ran thread through her fingers.

I crept up close to listen. Grandmother told me not to. I came close to the bank of the pond and hid amongst the reeds.

All I heard was a language no one could understand anymore. Grandmother sighed and shook her head after I told her what I thought they said.

Talismans shaped like eyes¹⁹
hang from the cave ceiling. Bats
wait patiently. I eat your hair.
It tastes like tree sap. In the far
reaches of memory is the smell
of the ocean and children's tears.

Phoboter demands a lock of blonde
hair that smells of musk roses. In the far
reaches of memory is a doll with red hair
and a sown-on smile. Button eyes look at me
from a rocking chair next to an underground lake.
Grandmother sewed the eyes; I painted

a smile on. I modeled the doll's face on mine,
half-remembered. Within the cave is just the shadow
of the face. On the wall is a doll hunting caribou. Hair
swirls about us in a raven cyclone. What is the case
is not the world; there are no eyes, just images
of eyes. The words do not paint the picture justly.

¹⁹ *Blair Witch Project*

Right now I am sitting here
Listening to a man talk about global warming
Outside fir trees bend in the wind

Perhaps I could make something or just sit
Here and think about the act of thinking

Neurons firing with little electrical
Pulses categories
Hunger impulse dreams Universal
Grammar words suddenly

I am pulled into light with a fire
Alarm panic some people hold
Books over their heads like books

Have ever protected anyone except
Once as a child
I had a rabbit

Chester²⁰ big mean
Abused in the past
Chester attacked me I held
A book in front of me like a shield

After the attack the book cover
Was dead a book had saved
Me some pain which I guess
Is enough sometimes

²⁰ Whiter than the blank page

All feelings are false, trust me.
She looked at the river²¹ and felt
herself far away and close to the fish
finding their way home. Only
the body hurls itself into the water
while her spirit watches it float away.

She floats face up and watches the sun,
then the moon, then herself as a girl playing
by the river with her mother. She floats past
a nunnery; she hears singing. The voice
is beautiful, she listens, and then realizes
that is her own voice singing;

she had not heard that voice happy
in so long. Her father's body was being
hacked to pieces, her lover poisoned, but she
was listening to her own singing. When
she gathered herself up and left
the water it was to never go home again.

²¹ Christine Nilsson

XIII

Grandfather's face burns away. He used to smoke hand-rolled cigarettes but now only smokes a pipe. I can taste his smoke every time he comes in from the cold.

Grandfather smirks at church folks telling him, "You smell like Hell."

Grandfather tells me a story about a dust storm coming toward him as the sun set. I go to sleep with a blanket over my head. It is hard to breathe, but I feel safe.

“on the contrary, it simplifies us”

Two old men watch you walk across the street
traffic goes around you leaves dodge your head
the snow seems to be brushed away from your feet
but your shoes get all muddy are always muddy
a little and the old men by the window chatter
over their soup about your muddy shoes
you come into the restaurant and kiss
their hoary heads—snowflakes drown
each other

A gun is too heavy for me.
Walking through the forest I hear
the birds calling to the deer who
are dreaming about geese going south.
A gun always rests heavy
on the shoulder, a ten gauge,

a wolf that slinks through the forest. A gun,
in my hands, I lumber around. I want
to be back at home, next to the black
furnace, reading your letters. Out in the woods
I do not find anything and go home hungry
again. An owl hoots at me; a rabbit runs

in front of me but I let it go. I am hungry,
this gun so heavy now. Coming to a stop I turn
back and look at the branches and white skin
and witch fingers and moon children. The woods
are not the woods, the woods are a group of trees.
I go into my house, gaze out the window into the dark.

XIV

Grandfather is an object. The women cut his line one day while he was out fishing.

No sun a man jumps in splash

“into which the soul plunges deeply with all its pregnant potency”

Golden fleece golden apple golden
hands golden sun hermetic
wrestling terms—you gave up too much
in the end how dare I say so who
am I nothing but a boar
with broken tusks rotted with age—
you in white and black to stand out
against all the colors of the roses
blooming on the shore of the Lethe

For years the meter was lost.
Iambs enjamb themselves on a beach
and rot in the sun. Tourists
mill about holding their nose at the stink
while park officials shove dynamite into the pink
flesh in a desperate attempt to get rid of the carcass.

We all grow old, even the dead; no,
especially the dead who cannot lift
themselves out of the ground. The dead hum
down below in a steady thrum
of ghostly presence. At night
is the best time to hear them,

right after the sirens fall away or the crickets stop,
in that moment between sounds you can hear the hum
reach out and brush your ear. Just out of reach
are the iambs that lived deep in the ocean,
the iambs who only resurfaced to die
on a beach and be blown to smithereens.²²

²² Nov. 12th, 1970, Florence, Oregon

“There might be time enough,”
I shout as time itself beats me
with a bat engraved with the word
eternity. What songs
do mermaids sing to sailors,
who have had so much time

at sea? Under the waves,
where the eyeless fish wait,
time passes differently.
It takes a whale carcass an eternity
to float down to the bottom. The whale

creates a new biome with her blossoming
body, bones house bacteria designed to eat bones,
fish construct homes, life goes on. The existence
of the whale sparks the whale’s dissolution. Time
does not think about words or whales, while I
think only about them as I burn poems.

There you were eyes
Shining
Begin born into hunger

So deep an ocean of light
 words
 Landing here

Or there
 The deep light
Of eyes shining in the dark
 O Tiger burning

Binging on cruelty and creation

This forge was lit with a fire
That takes a lifetime to go out

The smoke smells of human flesh
And bondage a ball gag

Light whipping
 Only enough to sting
A little

In my dream I am being whipped
Grandfather walks in beaming
Speaking in tongues burning

Then he says I thought of you
In my dream you dreamed it?

Yes Now I wake up with a sting
In my back and shoulders
Grandfather never wakes up anymore

Clotho

“The night has cut
each from each”

-H.D.

XV

Grandmother sings to me with silence. She has scissors, glasses, and thread; her quilts are made
with love and toil.

On her deathbed, Grandmother speaks to herself in a language nobody understands anymore.

Last words clipped

What did Socrates voice sound like?

I imagine it to be dark and deep
and lovely. There is no wisdom
except knowing that there is no
wisdom. The oracle refused
to speak, we all stopped going

to Corinth, even the crickets went silent.

What else could we give to you, Aphrodite,
other than our songs and chants?

We take our wisdom and are gone
like lightning. We dance to no song
and jump over the fire, you cannot

stop us from loving, you cannot stop
us from dancing with our wisdom going before
us. Tongues of fire burn above our heads. Socrates
used to exist before Plato.

What wisdom we have we spend in this moment
knowing nothing other than being here, alive, right now, dancing.²³

²³ Theocritus

He kept the flowers fresh
in the room where she had died;
he did not grieve but dreams
of grief beyond suffering.
This poem is becoming a movement
towards the clicking of an empty

gun against the forehead. The ticking
of the clock kept me up all night. I thought
of him. In some way we all know suffering:
dream song of the mockingbird. She appeared
before him with fresh flowers
whispering,

in his ear, and he heard the ticking. Perhaps
life is beautiful, we must say so. Perhaps
we must hold beauty in our hearts
as we go into the dark.
So, I told him when his ghost came to me.
Perhaps.

XVI

I went back to the pond, but the women were gone. Bits of cut thread floated amongst the algae.

I left the yard, the land. Sunlight turned to ink. Hail fell. I may have been becoming.

Geese are flying up above me, honking
at each other to stay in formation, blown
about by sudden strong gusts of wind.
They quote Robert Frost to each other,²⁴
“The best way out is through.” They say
south is a paradise, winter is only

a part of the year, a notch in the belt
really. I cinch my belt tighter and tighter
until I am sewn inside myself.
As I go to sleep I wonder
what she will say when she finds me.
Out is through. Out is through, Perseus

whispers to himself as he unravels golden thread
behind him. What do geese know
other than instinct? I wake up
whispering, “Out is through.” I throw up.
What do I know of becoming? In this moment
I am grace, watching geese fly by in a V.

²⁴ “A Servant to Servants”

XVII

Grandmother and Grandfather have been gone a hundred years. Their graves are behind barbed wire. I think the government owns the land.

I pray the last words Grandmother said and go on down the road.

“the person in whom they are assimilated”

Dickinson and Swinburne and Orpheus
like birds have seen the cloud
from the inside—mid-flight
madness takes me as I write
no different than you—we
cannot know the time or place
the oracle will come upon us—
we are joined brain to brain—
we cross the Acheron together

I saw a shape outside my window.
Clatter of witches' teeth. Sudden heavy
breathing and the snipping sound
of hair being shorn away. Give
me a quotation and I can make
a poem out of being, rather than knowing,

the truth. No knowing it, the truth;
only burying a bag of small animal
bones at a crossroads at midnight
and waiting. Just waiting. Only
waiting is the grace to let time
pass by as we look at it carefully,

observe its face, and let it observe
ours. What can I say to the shape
outside my window to get it to leave?
It checks to see if the window is locked;
it sees me grow older and older. The truth
is a strange inhuman thing.