

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

ANGELS, PINS, DANCING, PRAYERS

A THESIS

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS: CREATIVE WRITING

By

Kathy Judge


Edmond, Oklahoma

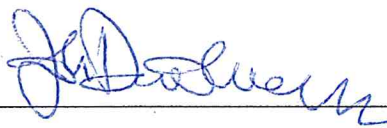
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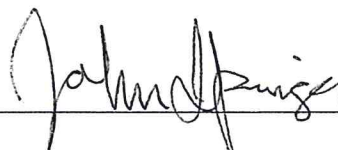
A THESIS

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Without the example and wisdom of Claire Colombo, I would not have completed this project: thank you. You are the best friend.

I dedicate *Angles, Pins, Dancing, Prayers* to my parents: Bill Judge, for whom poetry, the arts, and faith were the basic ingredients of living, and Ruby Judge, who taught me to travel and to find humor in the moment.

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The content of the poems in *Angels, Pins, Dancing, Prayers* centers around five topics: art, religion, death, education, and travel. Poetry understands and dares to discuss God, love, pain, truth, war, death, and bubble gum with an immediacy such experiences warrant. The poems in *Angels, Pins, Dancing, Prayers* participate in that tradition. I join with numerous contemporary writers addressing the reality of the death of parents and the passing away of a generation so different than the one emerging. As a teacher, my poems on topic of American education express the frustration of many of my peers with public reform efforts. Those poems, along with several addressing the Syrian Crisis and criminal justice are timely and speak with a voice needing to be heard amid the boisterous, unmerciful cable network/social media clatter. However, it is also because of my teaching profession, as well as travel, that specifics of the Western tradition, European history and the 20th century American experience form the central metaphors of many of these poems.

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And if the Colosseum Wasn't

What you are picturing
 arches, columns ringing sandstone-colored arena,
 an egg on its side, shell cracked,

not the Colosseum—
Flavian's Amphitheater.

But a javelin throw from the stadium,
 a statue of Flavian stood
 with a head the circumference
 of three gladiators holding hands
 and dancing ring-around-the-rosy;
 a colossus with limestone feet,
 a big toe too large to dip
 into any bathtub to test the waters;
 wrists like altars on which rested
 a commanding hand, a raised index finger,
 tall as a soldier, pointing heavenward.
 How many amphitheaters are now
 erroneously called colosseums?

When does an error stop being an error?
 Flavian's amphitheater?
 Unless I am asking directions of an ancient Roman,
 who would know what I meant?
 Where I'd been?
 Centuries and millions recognize only one name.

Which is why I can't revise,
 these years later,
 what I accidentally called love.

Friendship just happened to stand
 an arrow shot from magnificent feelings,
 reaching with fingers tall as a teenager,
 prompting secrets uttered into ears a cat could curl up in.

It was so monumental.
 How could I not call it love,
 even erroneously?
 For who would know where I'd been
 and what you had meant to me otherwise?

Florentine Construction

My wings held as by falconer's hands,
I struggle up a tunnel, anxious
in dwindling space for flight.

Six-hundred years ago
arms-extended, Vitruvian man,
measurer of all things, reached high
and set a lantern atop a dome,
opened an eye toward heaven
for believers below:
Unironically metaphoric.

Brunelleschi's dome
a paradox of
compression and tension
push and pull—
it is the masonry of father and daughter—
a herringbone brickwork
sustaining balance;
a dome within a dome;
practical,
secondarily beautiful
and claustrophobic.

Nautilus-like
these stone stairs I climb
spiral
in the incremental twist
of wringing hands:
winding,
narrowing,
rounding,
to one end.

Descenders, ascenders
crowd worn steps
pressing me
against the iron hand rail, upward.
I gasp with toothy breath
flickering Tuscan blue glimpsed
through taper-size windows
cut for ventilation

and bricklayers' sanity.
They constrained

seven-hundred years
ago in this curving niche
building interior
to a rising exterior.
Two domes to construct one,
like many a love.

The final flight of steps
a ladder, wooden, hen-house quaint,
above the oculus
leads to a the soaring vision
and from the vise, I emerge, unwind,
through arms outstretched,
on the lantern perch, I unfurl over Florence.

She Broke Her Head Open

That's how her mom always phrased it,
 she broke her head open,
 which made the event memorable.
 Of course any scar bookmarks a story,
 like the flying-glass scratch
 from her car crash junior year,
White Wedding on the radio.

She broke her head open though
 after the '72 Olympics
 not in Montreal but in her parish hall
 during the school carnival.

When six, nubile, lithe athletes
 —mere children themselves—
 are demi-gods wrestling Nemean lions,
 perhaps in expiation of their nation's violent sins.
 They are heroes
 running toward a bar set inhumanly high
 leaping,
 turning torso to see heaven,
 lifting while in flight,
 in flight without Pegasus,
 lifting buttocks
 arching through the blue air
 to the mat.
 Even the loser, whose name his countrymen will never know,
 is extraordinary.

She'd been practicing:
 Between two lawn chairs she'd lain a broom;
 from throughout the house and off all the beds
 she'd nabbed pillows;
 from the edge of the porch
 she'd run, jump and reverse over the handle,
 landing on grass -stained pillows.

So that Saturday,
 was it the instinctive call of red to the bullheaded,
 or Olympic confidence burgeoning in a six-year-old?

At the carnival, her brother, already in school,
 ran with his friends;
 Mom and Dad worked
 their cafeteria rotation:

hamburgers, hot dogs, sloppy joes.
 Indecisive children, indulgent mothers, bemused grandfathers
 streamed through the line formed by dividers,
 the kind used at movie theatres, museum ticket areas
 and school carnivals,
 with a hook on each end of a red velvet rope
 about thickness of a young girl's arm.

Probably she'd not had enough running lead.
 The crowds in the hall threw off her backyard stride,
 but sprint she did
 one
 two
 three
 leg lengths
 then—not high jump style as she'd been practicing
 but like a hurdler—
 she shot left leg forward:

Clear
 airborne
 for the uncountable seconds
 that separate the bronze from the obscure.
 Then

her right tennis shoe hooks.

Blackness

Redness

Carried by a father, not hers, she revived.
 Touching her forehead, fingers came away
 red
 crayon red, raw meat red.
 Finger tips the color she'd one day paint her nails,
 still hinting blue
 not yet oxidized crimson,
 the shade that would monthly haunt her
 in eight more years
 when the unextraordinary
 would hurdle her forward.

But that Saturday,
 she was laid on the kitchen prep table,
 surrounded by adults speaking

calmly of stitches,
her head broke open from dreams.

L'art pour l'art

The painting hung in my parent's bedroom
 over my father's chest-of-drawers,
 a gift from the artist.
 A moment captured, chance, a Pollock.
 Jack the Dripper who left formality for art of accident.

* * *

Orange juice close to the edge—knocked over
 as Mom prophesied, in my reach for the Lucky Charms,
 magnificent fountains

spraying orange
 with a force
 propelled by
 the descent and
 impact.

Raised white pigment against the stainless steel
 or harvest gold when I spun excess batter,
 like Mom, into the bowl (and out).

Thick, sweet strands
 of white
 Duncan Hines
 whirled from electric beaters.
 Splats and filaments
 on toaster and stove top.

Spots of red
 spaghetti sauce flecked with oregano
 on my collar,
 a dab
 by the tea glass
 a dot or two
 between the plate and table edge.
 though Mother reminded me, no shoveling food into my mouth.

* * *

At six, T G & Y paint set of eight vibrant colors pods
 before me, newspaper beneath the project, a cup of water
 for rinsing ribbons of color, I sat painting the lid of my Thing Box.
 Treasure chest for coins, erasers, figurines
 from the quarter machine at the grocery.
 I began:

Swash of Blue through the middle
 Green blotched on the lower right;
 Red spread across the left corner,
 a sophisticated, yet accidental, use of
 White space that was the cardboard
 and then Black
 a gorgeous cloud hanging over Blue.

Dad crossed through the kitchen,
 "That looks like Pollock," he said.
 One comment, off-handed.

* * *

Thirty-four years later, I was standing in his bedroom doorway
 talking to the hospice nurse when he died.
 The subject was fall clothes, she was leaning
 against the drawers, my Pollock, framed,
 hanging over her right shoulder.

* * *

Between the sitting and painting and standing and waiting
 I frequented Chicago's Institute of Art
 finding my way to Michigan Avenue to visit *Greyed Rainbows*:

Black dances out from
 White tendrils of paint.
 Both dominating the flutter of Yellow,
 whispers of Red and Green and
 Teal dabs in the lower canvas.

* * *

Another fall was upon us, before my brother and I
 divided up furniture, beer steins and photos.
 The chest-of-drawers is now my nephew's.
 I inherited opera LPs, crystal, china, Dad's desk
 and my Pollock, which now hangs over it:
 a framed Thing Box top elevated by love
 and spontaneity to art.

Pot Pie

On a cutting board faint carrot-orange, I pick chicken,
dark thigh meat, from the bone, juice runs off translucent
as sautéed onions—those in a pan on the stove

diced to squares, becoming window panes,
through which I swear I see my mother
in her brown and green apron, worn soft as a pillow case.

Biscuits left from breakfast will be the pot pie top:
Flour, shortening, powder, soda, wand, spell, potion, poof.
Surely magic changes white white white white to bread.

Life tumbles backward from my own to Aunt Sylvie's,
Grandma Nora's, Aunt Vera's, in biscuits, soda bread,
cobbler, the pièce de resistance pie crust.

There was no thing and in forty-five minutes there will be.
What feat of creativity to take the past for nourishment.

Accademia Gallery

Tourists shift backpacks, purses
 from shoulder to shoulder, weight
 from side to side, debate staying
 in line *just to see a statue*.

At slight movement a sigh—
 the cross-cultural, sightseeing
 language—undulates down the line.

Inside, relieved of Tuscan heat,
 children dash through galleries.
 Tuesday—the Uffizi—they cared;
 Thursday, decorum alone compels
 even chaperones to stroll, rock a step
 forward toward a panel nameplate,
 step back and sing-say *Oh, Roselli*
 or *Botticelli*. *Ah, Ghirlandaio*.

All are finally deposited
 in the Gallery of Slaves—
 unfinished sculptures, rugged chorus to
 Michelangelo's masterpiece bathed
 in spotlight at the nave's end:

David's swimsuit model pose,
 hip-hitched high
 atop a pedestal altar in the apse.
 A singular beauty.
 The one reason they are all there.

Crowds dissipate. Parents
 and teachers approve backtracking
 through the gallery, exiting,
 heading to Piazza San Marco
 for leather handbags, Venetian glass.

Yet, if you wander instead
 two lefts
 off *David's* tribuna,
 one right
 into the Russian Icon collection,
 then up a flight,
 you are in Italy's attic
 full of Gothic panels:
 hammered gold, painted gold
 grand polyptychs, triptychs,

crucifix after crucifix.

Aligned one beside another
Medieval images priceless
but rendered passionless.
How is it that gold leaf pales
and lions and martyred saints bore?

David's singularity glows,
while icons languish
captured and kept in the marble institution
like students in rows of desks
their uniqueness obsolete
when only evaluated in collection.

Proper Etiquette

Brian moves from chair to chair
 in desks arranged to simulate a table of four.
 From week, I plan on deciphering ancient codes
 before they face the hieroglyphics of fine dining:
 which fork for salad, how to rest a knife
 across the bow of a plate to signal you're not done.

"Jerks"
 Mitch says.

". . . a hammer"
 the response.

I stop setting a place.
 Plastic spoon hovers over paper plate.

"What did you say?"
 Cold. My voice,
 a gray, waveless, Norwegian shoreline.

"Brian, look at me."
 He raises his hand up to the cave and cliff
 of his eye socket and cheek bone.
 "It's okay. Don't worry about it."

"Look at me."

Brian stands, reluctant-teenager pace.
 He looks down: I look up
 not into the whites of his eye.
 The red, which he has a history of seeing.

"Someone *hit* you
 with a hammer?"

Brian or Mitch, maybe Anthony
 sputters silliness about
 school rivals, a party.

I stare.

Stare at a boy most teachers never hear speak.
 Stare, remembering freshmen year:
 Hugging him for bringing his grades up
 and his later confession, that the hug
 was his first since his mother's aneurism.

"I see fine. Coach isn't worried.
Just a busted blood vessel."

I am not hearing,
Staring at skinned knuckles, unbroken fingers,
thankfully—baseball keeps him in school,
staring, remembering sophomore year.
He pulled a guy from a truck at a light
and punched him
for insulting a girl.

Allow the lady to order first.
An etiquette tip I'd dispense along with
other practical matters:
water glasses from wine,
napkin placement on lap or chair,
what the hell to do with all those forks.

Yes, what the hell do you do with all the forks?
What the hell do you do with all the hammers?
What do you do with the boys who slip up and call you "Mom?"

The Horror

Sitting on wooden pews
 in the secular house of justice
 unmoving, staring
 I try to absorb,
 diffuse the pain rolling
 through my body as when
 a hand is slammed in a car door,

I see the Holy of Sorrows
 in the tabernacle of my heart.
 Blinding confusing powerful
 love radiating shafts from clouds
 of painful knowledge
 of his guilt.

I hold my breath, press nail
 marks into my palms
 so not to keen and rock
 with sorrow.

A sentencing.
 But the sentence,
 he'd already pronounced:
Guilty as charged.

Neither I nor his family
 could enter the double doors
 hoping the murder
 would turn a nightmare
 to be shaken off in the light
 or that truth would turn lie.

But, here, in chambers
 her death, his decision
 squeezes ventricles
 leaving little breadth for
 images of her friends' faces,
 steel reality of handcuffs,
 policemen, journalists, and
 memories of Eric, hair dyed
 purple freshman year,
 our drive home from
 David's funeral, his sitting
 Buddha-like as a senior
 dramatizing the first page of

Heart of Darkness.

Lest We Forget the Serious Art of Schooling

But, by tonight, we must learn the serious art of sleeping—David Wagoner, "Traveling Light"

Here among rows between bells

me we each

evolve from ooze on our way

to fully human.

Teacher class student

move as a secular, shifting trinity,

hardly divine and hardly not.

The common hubris of it.

Period after period

rubbing pencils and pen

across paper casting for sparks.

We, each Prometheus,

bound under fluorescence,

heroic flame-carriers

daily hourly

gather in desk-lined,

book-shaped rooms

baring breasts

to eagles and one another

in the vulnerability of learning.

Denise Unflunked College.

Twenty-six years then unravel-
ed and refolded into a neat-
er pile of sheets.

Bed sheets shar-
ed with just the one husband, sin-
ce she'd not needed to carry in-
to her first wedding the tiny un-
truth of a degree.

The tiny un-
truth cavity that made breath-
ing easy difficult over time. The con-
stant fear of cold, kept put-
ting her in hot water. It grew dif-
ficult to eat, break bread. Drink-
ing stung less and eventually render-
ed her unable to speak.

But Denise unflunked college.

She never had to separate the lies
that would shat-
ter among truth and dreams litter-
ing her living room floor, cut-
ting the fingertips of her child-
ren when they were still children help-
ing her pick up shards will-
ing to make a mosaic.

He Discovered the Need to Change

He discovered the need to change
like one discovering Coltrane in his fifties.

 Note upon note
fast high Bs cascaded on his forehead
dropping into his eyes
smoky midnight measures
wrapping his legs and loins in
sideman sax solo.

 It was realization with regret:

He understood with blue lyric-free clarity,
He couldn't relive forty years with this tune

but with this soundtrack, came truth.

In-the-night Truth.
In the brown hazy darkness
shot through with red light cast by table lamps
and spoken by one leaning against lounge chairs
listening to the quartet truth of
whiskey, cigarettes, sex, art.

Tragic French truth filtered through New Orleans
throbbed like a Sunday-night epiphany:

Shun the pursuit of happy. Wallow in a Blue
you can hear in the jazz.

There's a Dream Where the Contents are Visible

In my Father's house there are many rooms.

John 14:2

I don't picture a room
so much as a no-frills club
with pre-concert buzz and talk
of *gardens all misty wet with rain.*

Yes, when I die,
I request the room with Van Morrison.
I'll bypass the Meadowlands
and merely peek into Bayreuther Festspiele
to see the Wagner crowd.
The Diamond Ballroom, Oklahoma City,
that's what I picture.
For who imagines heaven
an unfamiliar place?

In the Diamond,
that gymnasium of a building,
I'll stand before the stage,
plastic cup of tepid beer in hand,
beneath the heat of white spotlights
that project bronze stars off cymbals,
and send silver moons winking
from mic stands.

Occasionally folks, in tuxedos and
forest green silk floor length dresses
might wander through stopping
on their way to the Verdi Pavilion.
Me, though, I'll be stilled
with anticipation of what comes next,
quiet as the held breath of the saxophone,
guitars, and piano sitting in half shadow.

Scattering Ashes

Scatter my ashes at the Met, the fountain there.

Particles will dance in the Central Park sunlight
streaming through the bank of windows.

Dust to dust, ashes to ashes and afterward this
play in the light among Egyptian pyramids.

Sightseers, American and foreign, moving through the hall
commenting on Rodin, collect motes of me unknowingly.

Via purses, jackets, hair, museum maps
I'll travel to Brooklyn, on to Tokyo, Avignon

or Tallahassee, perhaps Mumbai . . . maybe even
Milwaukee. You know how I love Milwaukee.

Carrying

for Caleb on turning fourteen

At your birth I put a coin impressed
with your face in my pocket carrying
you to and fro along with Kennedy
and Lincoln light as history.

I remember your toddler body
slumped on me, your pew, at Christmas Mass
sweaty, flushed cheeks rested right below
the lump in my throat. My pride,
the heft I carried on my hip to communion.

Pleasures shared, the Midas touch of kindred
interests, multiply golden afternoons. A pile up
of evenings on couches softened my bones,
shaped my shoulder, to fit your blonde head.

With age I've needed to catch my breath,
balance love grown heavy, arms full:
joy, an extra bag dangling from my wrist;
worry sunk to the bottom of my purse.
Ponderously, I manage this slag of love.

In Avignon, 2004

From 1309 to 1378, Avignon, France was the papal capital, the holy see.

Blue July ceiling overhead. White dismantled stone,
stripped bones, like other churches in this once holy see.

No more a sanctuary. No more the source of sonnet song.
I had sought Sainte-Claire in loving pilgrimage of myth:
Laura, spotted from this choir; Petrarch's chronicle, desire.

Crossing the old oak threshold, I was struck by ancient violence.
Walls dismantled, altar absent, decapitated limestone saints
slain three hundred years ago. Victims of the betrayal-twisted.

Corruption—royal, religious—warrants revolt,
but I walked, undone, through skeletal remains
once consecrated now converted to cafe. A space,

hundreds of sonnets, end to end could not roof,
made useful,
yet I left empty.

Lectio Divina

Latin for *divine reading*, an ancient monastic practice for contemplating the Bible.

Pull from the table of the Lord
scripture, a straight-backed oak chair
smooth from occupants.

Settle your skeleton of flesh
in the firm contour of letters.

Consider familiar lines
scarred from heels kicked against legs,
worry over phrases like fingers on woodgrain
burnish to shining
tangible word.

Rest in meaning.

Confessions of a Tourist

travel
fraud
antisocial
trip taker
down
memory
lane
history
whore
shunning
action
jazz
clubbing
pub
crawling
forsaking
encounters
reading
outcomes
dead
recorded
streets
name
touring
time
I
lose
all
now
but
wine

Pilgrim's Route

You, me and busloads of Spanish school children
descend upon Notre Dame after Notre Dame,
unholy flocks of pilgrims in parking lots.

Unlike Our Lady, we are assumed
into the clouds,
in this rented Peugeot,
up twisting heights
across gorges,
cut by rivers and Slow Time
to these Gothic mountains of worship
hewn by devout villagers,
built on impossible rocky outcroppings,
singular works of a competitive Medieval faith.

Puy-en-Velay or Lavaudieu?
I'll ask months from now
looking at picture we'll show to no one
of a church facade I've have forgotten.
Divinity did not shape our ends, we tried
to fit it in between the bistro lunch and evening aperitif.

Can you plan a moment of grace,
create the sacred from slanting sunset
through stained glass?

These stones were not the ones the builder rejected.
Granite, slate not the cornerstone. Just old.
Piled up by dead versions of you and me—
if we'd stayed at home and built Church.

All Soul's Day

Undisguised,
 the invisible wind launches curling scrub-oak leaves
 tumbling through autumn and sticker-thorns to the red clay shore edge.

Yellow leaves
 summer's death waving
 or perhaps souls cast about in a wind,
 a wind carrying blackbird caws.

Geese wing overhead
 in the high sky layers
 closer to blue illusion.

I've come forty miles out of town,
 because sometimes forty miles is what you need.

Poem light reflects off Lake Thunderbird
 grace refracts.

Geese, casting no shadow, fly in
 V formation between sun and lake
 mirror clear
 shook foil.

Pointing in an agreed upon direction, geese
 circle the lake

man-made and given back to nature.
 A blue verse water reflects,
 refracts, allusive heaven.

Summer Haikus

Church bells at the hour
mower, constant the mower
July sound fills the blue.

Blue jay sent out
from her lamp post to my ears
a memo to smile.

Crepe myrtle wrinkled
old lady in bloom, red, white
Victorian grace.

Bleach white sky
Screen door slapping. Cicada
harpist, play on Girl.

Squirrel, Gnome and the Renaissance

Squirrel has been busy these two days I've sat at my book-piled, paper-strewn breakfast table. At last I know the gnome-knocking culprit, spying her two-pawed digging frenzy beside the prone figure. My idylls of Dwight the Gnome's drunken festivities held beneath spring moons meet a cement end, like so many maple helicopter seeds, robbed of fruition. Squirrel sits, classic statue pose, nut betwixt her adorable hands. My back door open, I hear click, click, click shelling, watch corn-on-the-cob twisting. Bravo to Nature, imitating Disney's creatures with such life-like animation. Equally delightful is discovering Dwight and his statue tribe of Gnomi, *earth dwellers*, were created out of the blue by Paracelsus. He made them up and his name as well, this Renaissance alchemist doctor credited with aspirin. Though, I suspect women long used willow bark solution; for as with squirrels, mother's industriousness was often made light of. Cheeks and plump fingers— not Squirrel's, Paracelsus'—pop large as life in a copy of a lost portrait of our gnome genitor. Studying the copy there on my screen, I conclude the original's loss not accidental: perhaps because artist Quentin Massys included a red hat not unlike Dwight's atop his subject's head. Paracelsus like so many with a solo moniker, *Madonna, Elvis, Leonardo, Putin*, carried a reputation. Quite a character, wrong often, though no more than his Renaissance peers and, when right, he advanced human understanding. Could I hope for anything more to be said of me? (Except, of course, that I ushered into existence a quaint woodland creature to dwell upon the earth.) My knuckles bend to type, Squirrel's bury pecans. She pats flat the dirt covering her spring treasure next to Dwight's fallen ceramic body. I worry she might fall victim to hoodlum cats before reaping benefits of her diligence; yet I will be no less awed, looking down at her squirrel skeletal joints covered in remaining tufts of fur.

Limnology
for Stephen Carpenter, UW Limnologist

What is the last new word you learned?

Not the last word you learned to pronounce correctly
from conversation with Sharon at the front desk,
that French one you'd read repeatedly—*ennui*,

and not a tech-minted phrase *pushing an app*,
or businese, where verbs are reborn as nouns like *the take away*,
but a lovely impractical word with pedigree,
a word you are introduced to during the dinner party of life:
shibboleth
pilaster
or
for me
limnology.

Reading about endangered wolves,
there it sat mid-sentence
(used like the noun it is)
addressing a connection between
dwindling wolf packs and lake life.

How many years I have been denied the pleasure of saying
limnology:
els and *em*,
a fluffy *ah*
like Milwaukee.

How I could have grown up skiing on Lake Tenkiller
attending camp along Lake Murray, swimming 'til I could
no longer raise my arms because of sunburn shoulder pain
without seeing men with test tubes in the cove holding
murky Oklahoma water up for inspection.

This study of lakes surely includes
expensive analysis of that cloudy liquid as aphrodisiac,
thus explaining my following Larry the counselor
from dock to dock from fourth grade to eighth,
or extensive investigation of its red-clay antidepressant properties.
Withdrawal from that drug made each school year heavier.

Knowing, as I do now, the existence of limnologists
I plan on reaching out to them,

forming a partnership to determine the propensity
 for skinny dipping in varying demographics.
 The radical dropping off of swimming naked
 in our forties deserves attention,
 for health reasons, for obvious reasons.

This one new word led my daydreaming memories
 to the shore of serious study by outdoor academics
 magnifying with microscopes
 an insidious, damning situation:
Blooms of bioluminescent phytoplankton

*The study calls for the reconsideration of planetary
 boundaries for phosphorus, began the article.*

Phosphorus has been put on notice.
 Yes. A restraining order on the Light-Bringer.

Blooms of bioluminescent phytoplankton
 and I quote,
are one effect of excessive phosphorus.

When I translate this from Science to English
 it is a Shakespearean fresh water catastrophe:
 Lakes abloom with wandering, growing
 moon-like beings touched by the light-bearer.

Phosphorus, igniting element
 Morning star, Lucifer

His fall from grace, science too realizes is intolerable:
 Theology, limnology, ecology, criminology
 so many ways and words to warn about a guiding light
 to the growing darkness stifling living waters.

Losing Pluto

Pragmatists. Astronomers.
 You'll understand
 some Tuesday in November,
 why we students
 of Styrofoam solar systems
 were undone by the news of Pluto.

No schadenfreuden,
 just age.

Your dental hygienist
 in a grocery check-out lane
 will deliver the news,
 or Facebook,
 perhaps NPR.
 Who or how,
 no matter,
 you'll be surprised,
 stunned at loss of what
 had always been,
 having forgotten the world is plastic.

We assembled the known
 universe
 with hangers, pipe cleaners,
 help from mom and dad or
 older brother:
 Painted Mars red,
 Pluto purple,
 Earth blue and green,
 even marked a star
 in the vicinity of our state.

Done.

As it was in the beginning,
 is now, no longer will be
 a Wednesday in December,
 after a planet leaves your system:
 that senior English teacher,
 Anne, who sat in the third pew,
 Twinkies, Patrick Swayzey,
 Uncle Bill.

Wires holding together

the galaxy
sag like shoulders,
planets slip
out of orbit.
The universe
contains less
of what you always knew.

Angels, Pins, Dancing, Prayers

Where is this pin so magnetically attractive to angels,
 a needle docking station between Heaven and
 Alpha Centauri, drawing prayers like iron filings and
 assigning them to guardian angels?

Driving the other night,
 your impending diagnosis before me
 I shifted attention from the headlight glow
 to the pin-prick of stars.
 Sharp, slender.
 Angels there?
 Pins in heaven?
 Tacking together, what?
 Daylight and the veil of night?
 The old wine skin and new?

How many angels can dance on the head of pin?
 The question mocked medieval theologians.
 But in the anxious dark, I am a medievalist,
 a Scholastic—proof-hungry, sucking the mysterious
 from Mystery.

Please let the x-rays reveal a cyst,
 the ultra-sound dismiss concern.
 Please, benign result.
 How many prayers allowed
 for one driver in the sanctuary of her car?
 Can waltzing angels heft intentions
 larger than a rosary bead,
 as gross as life?

Oklahoma May

Wind, stretching, sweeping,
(toward heaven or falling from?)
you stir cumulus and cirrus
with strong finger grips
and spin helicopter seeds
into dizzying maple flights.

You conduct clouds,
trees, sunshine in performance,
and the sky close as my nose,
brightens to yellows and greens
beyond any crayon-box spectrum.

Then a darkening, and
gusts racing across the grass,
dropping in gully—washing torrents
until we hear the siren blast
announcing majesty turning tyrant.

Your reign, but minutes—like
Nero's in the scope of history—
passes away in a wake of rubble.

In the west from billowing clouds,
crystalline orange rays shoot
into the beginning violet
edge of night. And into such
unappreciated beauty, we emerge
to move the broken tree limbs,
right flattened back fences, and
stare at the unshingled second story.

Death of the Last Woman to Wear a Hair Scarf

Shutter the beauty parlors
and sell Scissor Tales (or is it Diamond Dos)
discard the rinse, the curlers and helmet hair driers
she has left us.

With a purse full of Kleenex, ½ sticks of Juicy Fruit,
Estee Lauder tubes of Wood Rose and scarves
with the lingering scent of Youth Dew,
she has left us.

The heart attack was unscheduled:
two days after she had her hair set;
five, prior to the next appointment.

Her pink-shimmer nails had been tying
well-worn nylon corners beneath her chin
while she walked from her Oldsmobile to the Walmart
protecting the suspended meringue from breezy fingers
but there was no hair net,
no AquaNet to preserve her heart.

Over the cemetery, sparrows take flight
from electrical wire to telephone pole,
a graceful wave, like a scarf caught in a gust,
a fitting ascension for the last of her kind.

Papa

Bone keel
Joint beam
Locked stiff
Blood-let

Treasure spent
Shoreless sea,
Still sailing.

Crying *Wolf*
For Syria

A boy cried

Wolf

Haunted by bloodied bodies strewn
 across mountainous rubble, he cried.
 Perhaps a mistake fostered by fear
 or error adopted in vulnerability.
 Nevertheless,

Wolf

And villagers answered. From Ft. Hood,
 Ft. Sill, they came humping packs;
 In Pensacola and Twenty-Nine Palms,
 they prepared for blazing terrain
 and fist-size spiders that crawl
 through grit, which gums up a gun.
 Men left the Del Rio and Norfolk
 of Canada and the UK to defang
 the wolf so he could devour neither
 sheep nor shepherds. Or was it the
 eagles, casting mighty-winged shadows
 circling off-shore rigs, needing protection?

But chasing the wolf shook a nest of dragons.
 Ancient fire-breathers the boy had never
 imagined—War and Occupation—arose.
 Out of mountain shade the beasts lumbered;
 their scales thickened and grew resistant
 to daily sunburst-explosions.

Now, broke, burned by years of battle,
 the boys pray that no one whispers

Wolf

And villagers respond as hoped.
 From Albuquerque to Jacksonville, they
 curl tight in corners of refinanced homes.
 VA hospitals and benefits offices
 are crowded but quiet about the thousands
 slain with gun or gas. Men from the Gulfport
 and Pearl Harbor sigh war weary.

Yet, clipped-winged birds tweet
a story hovering like truth in the air:
In the unseasonably hot Arab spring
a predator comes down from his mountain,
hungry, threatened.

Wolf

October 2013

800,000 Pairs Of Shoes Walking

800,000 books clutched for comfort
 shirts sweaty, clinging
 plans suspended
 800,000 pets left to roam
 800,000 photos curling in the heat
 favorite tea cups shelved
 responsibilities abandoned

Germany's 800,000 promises
 noble
 right
 holy
 fraught

Are there even 800,000 raindrops
 when a typhoon gust rips off shutters
 and floods the drains?

To call concerns a mirror
 reflecting a fascist abyss
 or to point rhetorical fingers
 back to World War II is to
 stand with a back to a storm
 and watch your roof blow away.

Be honest to avoid a holocaust:
 Fractured Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea
 is fracturing Europe.

Yet Germany, without the nooks
 and crannies of Appalachia,
 without vast expanse of Montana,
 has said *come*.

800,000
 Roughly the number of notes
 in nine Beethoven symphonies;
 the number of words needed
 to compose twenty-two
 Shakespearean plays;
 a fraction of the two million
 works of art in New York's Met.

Overwhelming number 800,000
 And still it does not include one
 boy who will never hear Beethoven,

see *Hamlet*, and the only
New World shore he'll make is
where he last lay in red shirt,
blue shorts and two sneakers.

October 2015

Keeping Vigil

We, twelve,
a faith-sanctioned jury
gather
coat-wrapped,
scattered like opinions
among pews,
in consensus that Oklahoma
does not speak for us,
does not mend murder
with death.

When at six o'clock
the State silences,
we voice the names
victim criminal
raise song and prayer
keep vigil so as
not to fall asleep
in hushed compliance.

Dieu et mon droit

God and my Right
Henry VIII's royal motto
Shockingly theological
logical politically
revelatory
audacious
But he was just one man,
deluded
in his kingdom,
Our excuse?

Dear Then

Dear Then,

Can I call you by your first name, Yesterday?

*Mere illusion, this familiarity,
an intimacy you enter with alacrity.*

Today's so similar though, it seems we've met.

*Imagining you know the sea
while on the sand is folly.*

Is that the wisdom you offer?

*Don't confuse history with years,
knowing of doesn't wipe the tears.*

When I close the cardboard cover
keening stops,
the photos of the Disappeared
do. . . disappear.
Closing the cardboard cover
keening
kisses *Pinochet* while *Junta*
and *plebiscite* watch on.
I can close the cardboard cover
and shelve.

A Completely Useless Thing

The Eiffel Tower wasn't just the largest thing that anyone had ever proposed to build, it was the largest completely useless thing. . . . In fact, The Eiffel Tower is pretty light at just 9,500 tons—it is mostly air, after. . . .

—Bill Bryson *At Home*

Her filigreed iron frame
holds sky vivid
expansive as a note
in the diva's lungs,
mostly air and heaven.

Purposeless
Her critics jibed.

She stands bare boned
on the sunrise side
of Parc Champ-de-Mars,
rising
above that old field of war.

Useless?

I watch this unmoving metal
synonymous with Paris
Paris synonymous with Romance
Romance with Poetry.

Her black ink
holding sky, divas, heaven
expansive on white paper,
expansive and up.
Letters one bolted to the next
rising
above the field of war.

Spanish Bull Fighting

Thinking about Hemingway,
as one is wont to do,
I stare like a matador
into the animal power of
Greatness, the bull in the ring.

The survivor runs fast
or stabs the beast in the back
with a blade of tempered steel.
Muse long, and one is gored.

Dangerous creativity feeds
on broken hearts, bottles, bones.
The friend, the lover, the wife
waves a red flag attempting
to direct the horns of passion.

Odysseus

Rocky cliff dreams return me nightly home.
Years and your divine lips whispering
corralled the night horses, warrior steeds.
 You tamed rage.

Captive. Comfortable. I have been rescued by nectar
ambrosia-lulled from heroism's recklessness.
Poseidon swept away my sharp arrogance,
 You stilled expectation.

But soil mortality reaches for my hand leading me
to furrowed paths. My fingers long to splay cross wheat
as once they did your coarse hair.
 You, unpromise immortality.

Raul Dufy, 1920, The French Riviera

Surely, he strolled beside tourists purely
for the view of water and who's who mingling
along Place Beau Rivage, Promenade des Anglais.

He held them without contempt, softened by war.
They who sought to see and be seen also bought.
Raul, you paint with the color of Matisse before the war,

how often he heard these comparisons to Henri.
But yours are still a celebration of France, then
she, it was always a woman, would whisper

looking at one, I almost forget the devastation.
He did too. Cerulean Côte D'Azur covered
canvas after canvas washing trench brown dirt

and vermilion blood from eye's memory. Indigo—
the sky, the shutters, the Mediterranean—paint,
better than the Treaty of Versailles, healed wounds.

Starry Night

Bolero.

Ravel's pulsating aura.

Did he guess light years of shining?

Which hammer stroke to chisel
broke Michelangelo free of the earth's gravitational pull,
propelling him spinning hunched-backed,
paint-splattered knuckles over unwashed feet,
among the stars.

Tomato-at-the-ready Groundingly,
your dress, did the rotten juice and seeds splatter there
when your mouth dropped open and your fingers too
at the North Star Hamlet?

Magi: astronomers.

Reading heaven: from insight to magic.

Magus: Debussy, Capra, Lucas, Hemingway.

Wise ones keep coming.

Don't dis-orientate,
don't pull down the heavens,
confusing the private (addictiveabusiveegomanicalbastard)
with permanent firmament.
Where will the stars shine?

Wagner?

God will judge. Let me listen.

Stein might have been a better life partner.

But, I return to Hemingway.

The Art of Painting Snow

All illusion.

Not a painter, I'd never
have thought, there'd be
so little white in a Yuletide
village scene.

On canvas the figures
only seem to walk beneath
the cool monochromatic sky.
Those clouds reflecting Cadmium.
There's Ochre in the snowy scarf
gathered round evergreens,
and a disciplined hand dabbed
wispy Blue Gray softly in
shadows for fence banks.
Cobalt Violet hints on
Romantic mountain peaks
and snow piles against cottage chimneys
that puff smoke and classic carols
if you lean in closely and buy
the illusion of Yellow cast under
antique streetlights or the Burnt Umber
beneath brownstone awnings.

White Christmas illusion.

Calypso

White rays traverse the valley between your hips
across your ribs, fencing a stamping, steaming horse,
over low lands, smooth despite war's weathering.

Star eyes breathe your landscape, memorizing
the meadow grass of your skin, my island escape
from sand and sea foam.

Again I'll be reduced to a vista of swells,
Aphrodite's mockery, barren blue,
crashing, monotonously on shells.

Cut Flowers

Her petals had fallen;
head, pistol-thin body
continued clinging to the stem,
shriveling.

Her husband, their daughter
pick up shedding
outer petals.

What is the cloth of blooms
woven floral
cooler than
butterfly wings
more dense
than dragonfly?
How is it not leaf?

Hospice will sweep away
dropping pollen dust
while the family waits,
wilting.

And I Will Give You Rest

God.

My answer
 would be
 metaphor
 searching for subject,
 first cause.

God.

My answer,
 one answer
 would be,

sixteen.

Stone weary
 walking cobbled Rome
 thousands of us following
 the call of Mother Teresa,
We adore Thee,
Oh Christ, and we bless thee
 with our response,
Because by Thy holy cross
Thou hast redeemed the world.

We thousands were propelled
 fourteen stations
 across Rome
 concluding beneath
 Sant Angelo's crenelated walls.

Castel Sant' Angelo
 topped with Archangel Michael,
 ringed that night in Lent
 with candles flickering like
 a sentient city's ancient
 memories of the Middle Ages.

Like Jesus,
 by the ninth station, I too
 was stumbling on my own.
We adore Thee,
Oh Christ, and we bless thee.
 Leaning forward
 I rest my forehead
 between the angel wings

of Dan's back.
 Leaning,
 anchored,
 I rest in the sway
 of his breathed responses
 felt through his shoulders:
*Because by Thy holy cross
 Thou hast redeemed the world.*
 Exhaled words gently waving
 like palms
 we held on Sunday

in nineteen eighty-four.

That Roman pilgrimage
 is albumed, drawered
 and not even
 one I mentioned
 when I saw Dan
 the other day.

But tonight,
 I couldn't stand
 any more on my own
 too tired feet and,
 asking for relief,
 a raising up, God,
 I closed my eyes
 sank into this unbidden
 memory as into
 heated chlorinated blue
 and remembered buoyancy:
 Dan
 candle flame
 cobble stones.

Leaning forward
 incrementally or
 mentally,
 forehead on angel wings
 I remembered being
 held up by another.

cruise

jennifer let's laugh
driving just
because you're sixteen

talk again about cute boys
kissing and who sings
the song on the dashboard

let's waste gas going
nowhere with windows
rolled down hang out

cruise

Ruby

Propped up on the couch
 with a book, the game on,
 I couldn't help but think
 this was the position my
 mother seemed to be in
 my entire youth. A game
 Dad was watching or
 a detective show. Always
 crumpled Kleenex tucked
 under her thigh, cup of coffee
 and dessert dish on the same table
 where now my glass sits.
 Wiggling my feet under
 the woolen throw,
 blue flashes,
 my painted toenails.

How quickly death can come.
 Standing at the foot of the
 hospital bed, I thought,
Her pedicure is still fresh.
 Between the salon and our
 decision to cut off machines and
 medicines, the red berry shade
 had neither faded nor chipped.

How slowly dying.
 Looking at her ankles
 swollen to knee size,
 we stood, like beads on a rosary,
 holding hands silently
 waiting. The doctor had said
 it would be fifteen minutes.
 Waiting, staring at her polish,
 her feet. Feet. So intimate.

We only recall the feet of
 those we love or loved.

The solemnity broke after
 twenty surreal, uneventful minutes
 in which I tried to think
 profoundly, pray earnestly,
 but looked fixedly instead

at her toes. Her big toe,
which looks like mine,
peeking from the blanket.

She lived the rest of the day
and we waited in limbo.

Neither the book nor the game
has my full attention, yet
I am fully relaxed, stretched
out on the couch, like Mom.
At church I'm often told
I resemble Ruby; glances in the
mirror echo that truth. It is more
of a refrain than a hollow echo
and I like the song. I like
that I resemble my mother, but
I can't paint my nails red.
I just can't bear to look down
and see red.

Family Lot

In a mirror at work, I glimpsed my cousin.
Surprised, chagrined. Friends are more

family, yet we are owned by each other
inherited from my mother, her father,

like basil sprouting in my backyard
planted and by another gardener.

Knowing When

It is easier to know When
than to remember to plant tulip bulbs,
than to change a flat on a highway shoulder,
than to stay awake through the ninth.

And unlike Waiting—
with its afternoon hunger,
Saturday-evening restlessness—
When shows
at dull peaks of egg whites
becoming meringue,
soundless, bruised-yellow air
before the tornado siren wails.

Waiting tangles up the sheets,
tosses about in Not Yet
props up stacks of Now behind
the head and stares at lamp silhouettes
and window frames.

When balances the checkbook during
the seventh, enjoys the call to Aunt Vera,
rests on the pillow, sleeps.

American Schools Left Behind

Common like skin,
fragile, flexible, overexposed:
the most complicated of organs.
Beautiful scarlet scars smoothed by time,
wrinkled waves gathered where the body bends;
the great regulator of shifting climates;
our first defense.

Blemishes, real are found.
Biopsy follows biopsy.
Diagnosis: Cancer.
Excising surgeries.
Drip,
drip,
dripping
nausea-inducing,
cold chemicals funneling into the veins,
coursing through the system.
Radiation burning, blackening
the surface to be saved.

The High School

Outside Waxahachie, buildings
military-complex boring
sit on the Texas plains,
like a high school on flat city block.

Warehouses, built to harness energy
and discover new power sources,
to rival Geneva's Hadron Collider,
sit empty, the project abandoned.
Decision-makers cut curves into
corners, but the future proved exorbitant;
investing dauntingly impractical.

Built after the war, the high school,
looking out of its brick and tile facade
on the plains of suburbia,
confesses in its architecture
similar fallacies of practical investing.

Gone are embellishments bespeaking
pre-Depression aspirations:
Doric columns of a Renaissance man,
stairways rising to cathedral-door entrances,
windows. There were so many windows.

Our low, broad, box reflects
American efficiency. Practicality.
Form has become function:
A four-by-four building.
A four-by-four of math, history,
English and science.

Freshman, sophomore, junior, senior.
Four years beneath fluorescent lighting,
under rain-stained ceiling tiles,
sitting in cracked, plastic-backed desks
between cinder-block walls listening
to the sound of slamming locker doors.

Four years, we bunk in a structure where
friendships, phobias, first marriages
are constructed; athletes, musicians, queens—
temporary heroes— are made. For years,
inevitability shuffles by potential.

On a corner a complex sits warehouse-like,
all ninety-degree angles and needing
impractical, generous, hope-fueled investment.
But even without it, each hour a bell rings,
unleashing teenage atoms into this supercollider.
Elementals, solid, ethereal and unstable, who
interact, creating energy in their excited state.
They radiate power, sometimes nuclear.

Urban Campus

An undisguised pump propels water toward October;
afternoon sun and southerly winds conjure a rainbow
into existence.

Blue, green, red, purple, at the magic of light and color
I find my heart leaps up. Despite the contrivance coaxing
these arcs, they are as authentic as Wordsworth,

In this university pond, koi writhe beneath the scrim
of water cycled through pipes spouting jets skyward.
Nature corralled unnaturally.

Cresting fish backs and gawping lips never pierced by hooks
create currents in the body too small for the moon to move.
Rainbows and barely contained bodies circling a trinity of pipes
ushering in, yet still reaching for Oxford, Cambridge notions.

Heart Condition

Across the yard from where I planted Iris
bulbs in April, I dug a grave for Iris.
She died peacefully on the cool bathroom tile.
Heart disease.

Congestive heart failure,
such human diagnosis for her feline heart
encased in pinky-finger rib cage.

Iris faded for weeks.
Just love on her,
the young veterinarian Katy advised.
Her organ was failing,
but still she was ruled by that heart
wired to her little mind, an inscrutable brain
not much larger than the rolled up foil ball
she batted around the kitchen floor.

I was relieved when that once athletic body
refused to let her follow me
from room to room
or try to leap onto the bed.
There is no common sense with calicos.
I wanted her to rest,
realize her limitations,

just as I've told Pat since April
because she's eighty-eight
because she's a vestige of my youth
because two laundry loads the day
she is released from the hospital,
seems excessive and
fixing dinner, albeit microwaved,
for her ninety-three-year-old husband
surely could be delegated.
But she insists on routine
and he with no memory of her two-week absence
says nothing that is not already in the script.

So, Pat strapped to a heart monitor,
broken hip healing, barrels on
like a calico
in learned instinct perpetual motion.

Katy the vet's advice is hard to follow.

Old women are more
frustrating than incontinent cats
and it would be a relief
if she would realize she no longer
can stand on a chair to clean
a kitchen ceiling fan.

Thank God she's got nine lives;
there is much I am still learning
about just loving on.

The Depression

Death is cumulative.
 One morning there's
 no family left to ask
 what year Aunt Hazel died.

Aunt Hazel who could make
 Grandma Tessie laugh
 like no other.
 The two worked
 grape picking and
 at a tomato cannery,
 California in 1930s.
 How they told of it—
 breaking up sentences
 with high pitched squeals—
 left me to imagine them
 as Ethel and Lucy
 in the chocolate factory.

Around the table,
 the one where
 I still serve Thanksgiving,
 folks interrupted each other:
 howls and details from Pauline,
 wry humor of Uncle Bill,
 dismissive grunts came
 from behind Papa's Pall Mall veil,
 as they recounted the drives
 across New Mexico
 and Arizona in the night
 to miss the heat, the ugly
 sight of Barstow then up to
 the Valley, to the ranch
 where for years Papa was foreman,
 and then not. It was junior high
 before I understood why anyone
 called it the Depression.

I understand now though.
 Stories, laughter,
 expressions they used have died;
 their spirits rising and wafting
 so wispy I can hardly pass them on.
 They've become incense
 in my memory,

but I have no way to fan
the embers growing cold,
stiffening my joints, aging me.

Double Bubble

If a second
one of the sixty marking a minute,
if a second were pink bubble gum
chewed with an eight-year-old's intensity
pushed by a pink tongue extended at the ready
for breath-blown e x p a n s i o n,
if a bright pink second stretched
to almost white and e x p l o d e d,
the momentary fullness would be
sweet.

Rome

God Breathes

It's scribbled
 English and Italian
 in black marker
 on ripped cardboard
 signs smaller than postcards
 leaning against a steel fence.

We pass a half a dozen
 as we make our way
 down the street
 across the city
 from one imperial ruin
 to a forum of broken columns
 standing in the Roman sunlight.

Siete qui?

Are you here?

I am arrested by this
 intermittent profundity
 spaced regularly
 along a retaining wall.

Beside an empty Camel pack
 a Sharpie question asks
The start or the end?

Is it guerrilla art?
 Graffiti?
 Just spittal in a city
 speaking profusely art,
 screaming with spray paint.

Or reminder
Inizio o Fino
Dio Respiro