

BOUNTY BROKEN OPEN: ORIGINAL POEMS  
AND A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

By

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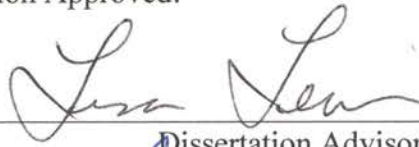
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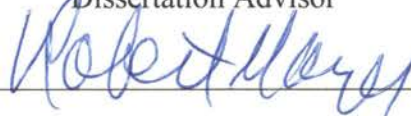
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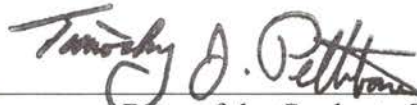


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In loving memory of  
Reverend Dwight E. Lyons  
and  
Norma Jean Sullivan

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## CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Poetry is a way of bringing about extraordinary bounty. Such bounty refers at once to what is already there at our disposal and to the new renewal that comes about in poetry. Having made the assessment that “*All art . . . is . . . essentially poetry*” (72), Martin Heidegger argues, in his “Origin of the Work of Art,” that poetry “thrusts up the unfamiliar and extraordinary and at the same time thrusts down the ordinary and what we believe to be such” (75). What there is in the world and in life, what is available for use, is broken open through poetry’s transformative thrust. But such breaking does not discard or discredit what was already established. Instead, through taking up that which is established, and by finding a new, transformed bounty in it, poetry reveres what already has come to be; it is both reverential and revolutionary. In Plato’s *Symposium*, Diotima, Socrates’ teacher, gives a definition of poetry which has been of key importance for centuries, and which remains so today. A traditional translation reads as follows: *poiesis* is “calling something into existence that was not there before” (557). This definition characterizes the opening of new bounty which occurs in poetry. Poetry calls the newly existent into being. But while we celebrate poetry for its extraordinary transformative power, what was “there before” also deserves attention (557). Both of the two instances of bounty, the already there and the newly existent, merit attention, because one cannot occur without the other.

In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger translates Diotima’s definition of *poiesis* a bit more elaborately: “Every occasion for whatever passes beyond the nonpresent and goes forward into presencing is *poiesis*, bringing-forth” (317). *Poiesis*, then, is “bringing-forth” (317). Heidegger leads up to this definition of poetry by enumerating and commenting on the four causes. The four causes, as a whole, “start . . .

something on its way into arrival” (316); they “occasion” (317). The occasioning that starts into arrival is, as Heidegger continues, “unifiedly governed” by the bringing-forth of *poiesis* (317). *Poiesis* is that which draws the four causes together as the unified elements of bringing-forth, of poetry itself. The four unified causes, and the *poiesis* which unifies them and keeps them together, are essentially two ways of naming the same thing: bringing-forth. A look at poetry in terms of the four causes, then, allows a look at the elemental aspects which join together as poetry.

Heidegger’s exploration helps to distinguish the several aspects of poetry, while at the same time reminding us that they work, and need to be recognized, as a whole. Despite this need, he notes that the *causa efficiens*, the efficient cause as creator or maker, “sets the standard for all causality” (314), to the extent that the other causes, and the way they are “co-responsible” for bringing-forth (315), have become obscured and even hidden from view. Instead of thinking of poetry as an object made by a creator, Heidegger wants to stress co-responsibility among the causes and cites the Greek *aition*, which gets translated as the Roman *causa*, as “that to which something else is indebted” (314). Understood this way, the “four causes are the ways, all belonging at once to each other, of being responsible for something else” (314). As *poiesis*, the four causes are responsible for “calling something into existence that was not there before” (Plato 557). By looking at each of the four causes, and Heidegger’s elaboration of them, we see the way that my own work, and poetry as such, participates in *poiesis* and brings forth bounty. The poems of *Bounty Broken Open* bring forth bounty through addressing what is already there, both revering it and drawing it together as the new bounty that awaits arrival.



Before proceeding further, a look at the four causes and their individual definitions is in order. As Heidegger elaborates,

philosophy has taught that there are four causes: (1) the *causa materialis*, the material, the matter out of which, for example, a silver chalice is made; (2) the *causa formalis*, the form, the shape into which the material enters; (3) the *causa finalis*, the end, for example, the sacrificial rite in relation to which the required chalice is determined as to its form and matter; (4) the *causa efficiens*, which brings about the effect that is the finished, actual chalice, in this instance, the silversmith. (“Question” 313-14)

Like a chalice, a poem is indebted to this “fourfold causality” (314). Poems have their form, their purpose, their matter or material, and their maker. While these distinctions are “co-responsible” (315), and while “all belong . . . at once to each other” (314), it will be helpful to examine the ways that poetry partakes of each of the causes and brings forth by way of them. Then, when all are redrawn together, a sense of the whole of *poiesis*, as bringing-forth, can be brought to light.

The poet’s materials are words. But the employment of such material is not merely a molding together of physical composites of letters. Instead, the poet works with the matter and the material which words name. “Language,” as Heidegger argues, “first brings beings to word and appearance . . . . Such saying is a projecting . . . in which announcement is made of what it is that beings come into the Open *as*” (“Origin” 73). Words name beings and bring them to us as what those beings are. While the poet’s materials are words, more importance lies with the matter and materials which words name and which they bring and show to us. These matters and materials have to do with

what humans encounter in their lives. They partake of our relationships with other people, with the world we live in, and with nature; they are the people encountered in everyday life, the things those people say and the ways they say them, the way things look, or sound, or feel. They include anything in human life: joy, sadness, hate, love, the loss of life or love, and works of art like paintings, songs, or other poems. My own work takes figures like Jerry Long and his produce stand as materials. In "At the Produce Stand on Sixth," seemingly ordinary people like the "fat lady" find things like "garlic . . . / fried in butter" extraordinary (3, 4-5). Or in a poem like "Going to Staves," a colloquialism dealing with decay is the matter at hand, along with materials subject to such decay, like "a house," a "cask" and an old "piano" (3, 8, 13). The matter of decay eventually leads to renewal: "lost keys to be played, again and again" (24). There is a historical relationship to these people and things: history has brought them before us as available materials. We think of history as what has come to pass, but it also lies before us as the potential material from which we can draw as we go beyond what has been. A look at Adrienne Rich's "Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev" can help elaborate this historical relationship with available materials. A subtitle to the poem relates that the speaker was "Leader of a women's climbing team, all of whom died in a storm on Lenin Peak. . . . Later, Shatayev's husband found and buried their bodies." Having died, the speaker nevertheless speaks, and is even able to say

Now I am further  
ahead than either of us dreamed anyone would be (22-23)

The past of her dying presents what can, in the future, be. The key lines of the poem suggest that only what has passed provides possibility for the new:

When you have buried us    told your story  
ours does not end    we stream  
into the unfinished    the unbegun  
the possible (38-41)

Despite having met the closure of death, she and her story go forward. Furthermore, it is by way of having passed that “the unbegun / the possible” can begin (40-41). Rather than streaming away, forgotten and closed off, the materials of the past allow a “stream[ing] / into the unfinished” (39-40). The past lies before as what has been, but also as the “unfinished” (40), the material that can be drawn from in making new beginnings.

The matters and materials available to poetry also include nature and the human’s way of being with it. Nature and the human relationship therein has been a matter for poetry for as long as poetry has been. The earliest known literature deals with this relationship. For example, in the Sumerian myth, *The Descent of Inanna*, “The goddess, from the ‘great above’ . . . set[s] her mind toward the ‘great below’” (2) and descends to “the nether world”(5). This descent is metaphorical and mythical, but it is also the expression of a real human relationship with nature. Inanna is the “queen of heaven, the place where the sun rises” (58). She must make her descent so that she may once again “ascend” (209), like the sun, and nourish those of the upper world who “know” and need “food” and “water” (222), who “eat . . . sprinkled flour, / Who drink . . . libated *wine*” (223-24). In our own time, as Heidegger illustrates, nature is no longer thought of as *physis*, “the arising of something from out of itself” (“Question” 317), which is itself a kind of “bringing-forth” not indebted to a “craftsman or artist”(317). Instead, nature has come to be “pursue[d] and entrap[ped] . . . as a calculable coherence of forces” (326). So when the modern poet takes materials from nature or makes nature the matter to be shaped, she is likely to take up, in some manner, the way that nature is, as Heidegger

argues, “challenged forth” (326). For example, James Merrill’s persona in “The Broken Home” says that the relationship between “Father Time and Mother Earth” is “A marriage on the rocks” (41, 42). He is concerned that the earth, like the Mother in the poem, whose “business . . . was giving birth” (38), has become merely a mechanized and economic mode of production. Through the course of history, because of what has happened with “Father Time”(41), “Mother Earth” has come to mean less. On the other hand, a poet in our time might take up the matter of how nature, despite being “challenged forth” (Heidegger, “Question” 326), continues to resist such calculability and mechanization. Consider Charles Bukowski’s “16-bit Intel 8088 chip”:

with an Apple Macintosh  
you can't run Radio Shack programs  
in its disc drive.  
nor can a Commodore 64  
drive read a file  
you have created on an  
IBM Personal Computer.  
both Kaypro and Osborne computers use  
the CP/M operating system  
but can't read each other's  
handwriting  
for they format (write  
on) discs in different  
ways.  
the Tandy 2000 runs MS-DOS but  
can't use most programs produced for  
the IBM Personal Computer  
unless certain  
bits and bytes are  
altered  
but the wind still blows over  
Savannah  
and in the Spring  
the turkey buzzard struts and  
flounces before his  
hens.

Bukowski overloads us initially with the sundry ways that materials are broken apart so that they have no common ground and can no longer come to us as natural. But in the end, all of this challenging-forth and compartmentalizing cannot keep the wind and the birds from “arising . . . from out of” themselves, from out of their own nature (Heidegger, “Question” 317).

In my own work, the materials of nature are dealt with in both of the aforementioned ways. “Pear in a Bottle,” for example, implicitly critiques the absurdity of “glass bottles strapped to pear trees” (13). The producers of the pear liquor ask odd things of nature, and “the pear can / grow only as large as the bottle’s bulb” (15-16). My poems dealing with produce stands and peach orchards, and others which take up matters of nature, tend to celebrate nature’s own way of “arising” (Heidegger, “Question” 317), while pointing out, like in “Pear in a Bottle,” the way natural things get objectified and distorted, like images in a “mirror where *objects are closer*” (32). Nature and history bring such materials before us. Both present the possible materials that get taken up and reflected upon by poetry. As the examples suggest, the way the materials of nature and history relate, whether in unison or discord, whether limiting or aiding one another, is also an important matter for poetry. Poetry’s *causa materialis*, the available materials as they arrive in a given time, is taken up in a way that brings something new into existence by way of what was already there. The way these materials are taken up, the manner of their shaping, constitutes poetry’s *causa formalis*.

The shape of poetry, its form, is its *causa formalis*. Depending on the materials and the way they relate to each other, both in unison and conflict, language shapes the materials; it “announce[s] . . . what it is that beings come into the Open *as*” (Heidegger,

“Origin” 73). It is the *as* or *how* which constitutes the form which materials take. While language shapes this *as*, shapes materials *as* something which comes into existence, attention should also be given to the form, the particular ways of arranging materials. Like the matter and materials at work in poetry, forms are historical. Free verse, the form least restricted by requirements of traditional pattern, may be the best means for illustrating the historical nature of form. Contemporary poets mostly write in free verse. As Donald Justice puts it, “to write” in this way is “the modern convention” (“Interview with Clark, Crotty, and McRoberts” 17). Though this free form has become established as a form, it is often thought of as without a definite formal tradition or structure. But even free verse, generally characterized by the absence of strict form, meter, foot-measure, rhyme, and so on, has its history, and is rooted in various approaches to traditional form and modifications of the patterns which characterize any poetic *causa formalis*. In fact, it is fair to say, along with Justice’s basic assessment, that any form, free or strict, has its history, and can be “described with reasonable exactness” (“Free-Verse” 176), as Justice does with Wallace Stevens’s free-verse line. In another place, Justice argues that any “organized” verse--and “verse” implies an organization or form--will “have an apprehensible structure. Something that . . . you could describe in other words” (“Interview with Dodd and Plumly” 36). Even free verse is not without its ties; it arrives historically, and like other forms, derives from variations in traditional form. In his assessment of Stevens’s free verse, for example, Justice specifically links free verse to *vers libre*, “the type of verse a number of French poets were writing in the second half of the nineteenth century” (“Free-Verse” 184). Free verse, essentially, is a recombination and rearrangement of traditional patterns, which get modified in ways that at first seem to

be free of traditional pattern and to defy description as a specific form. It is evident that traditional forms come to us historically, and can be drawn from and varied in new ways; the assessment that free verse also has a tradition and continues to draw from and modify traditional ideas of form suggests that even the most “liberated” of forms has its history and can be discerned as to its formal qualities. There is no poetic material free of form. The material and form are co-responsible--they are two of the four ways which bring forth co-responsibly, so that none can be without the others.

My own work partakes of both traditional and free-verse forms. The traditional forms I take up include the sonnet, the villanelle, and the sestina. To give one example, my sestina, “Lions for Lunch,” is in traditional form. The fixed form of the sestina comes to us by way of Arnaut Daniel and the twelfth-century troubadours. Miller Williams tells us that “the form was popular with the troubadours of Provence and was adopted quickly by the Italian poets of the time, notably Petrarch and Dante” (94). The thirty-nine lines of the sestina are grouped into six stanzas of six lines each, and a concluding envoy of three lines. Each line of the sestet closes with the repetition of an end word from the previous sestet. The envoy contains all six repeated words, either within the lines, or at their ends. “Lions for Lunch” takes as its end words “here,” “lions,” “crying,” “warn,” “bare,” and “loins.” However, while the poem draws from the sestina’s established approach for shaping the materials, this poem also varies and modifies the form in new ways. Historically, the repetitions of end words “stand in for rhyme” (Strand 22). However, “Lions for Lunch” playfully and ironically incorporates expected and unexpected rhymes: “lions” and “crying” (2,3); “bare” and “here” (13, 15); “warns” and “loins” (19, 21). Because the repetitions of the sestina can often become monotonous, especially when the

end-words draw attention to themselves through rhyming, I often substitute like-sounding words in various sestets to offset the monotony. “Worn” stands in for “warn” in stanza two (11); a variation on “bare” appears in the final sestet (34); “there” often stands in for “here” (8, 36), and “lying” for “lion” (31, 38). The trick of writing the sestina, generally, is to use the form and yet hide it. But rather than disguising the repetition of form, I draw attention to it, giving heed to and confronting its tradition.

Along with paying homage to traditional verse forms, my work also takes part in the free-verse tradition. The general pattern of my free-verse line is similar to the common free-verse line modifications Justice sees at work in Stevens’s poetry. According to Justice, Stevens’s lines are “composed [so] as to come out to about the same length as one another, in both look and sound” (“Free-Verse” 178). Glancing through the poems of *Bounty Broken Open*, one quickly notices that the lines of poems written in free verse visually “come out to about the same length as one another” (178). If we measure lines by a ruler, as Justice suggests one might, the “Bounty Broken Open” series, which frames the manuscript, adheres to a 7-8 cm line. While physically measuring the line length provides one way of discussing the ways in which one finds order and form in free-verse, Justice also argues that an attempt to “measure the sound is more rewarding” (179). My free-verse lines are organized “upon some sort of accentual basis,” though “the basis is . . . a somewhat flexible one” (179). For example, the basic line of “Red Snapper Forgotten” contains a particular number of accents from which departures occur. Just as Justice formulates Stevens’s early Imagist line as “‘2 accents plus or minus 1 (or more)’” (179), the line of “Red Snapper Forgotten” can be formulated as ‘6 accents plus or minus 1 (or more).’ In fact, the “Bounty Broken Open” series



generally adheres to the same formula, as does “After Reading Picasso’s Biography,” and “Postcard for Grandma.” “What’s Missing From Us” varies the formula to ‘5 accents plus or minus 1 (or more),’ and “Moonlight Sonnet” breaks from the traditional iambic pentameter, with its line operating under another variation of the accentual formula, which reads ‘4 accents plus or minus 1 (or more).’ Confronted with the metrical organization of Stevens’s early free-verse line, I take notice of his patterns and modify his early experiments with Williams’s variable foot, generally lengthening the line so that each line contains not 2 or more accents, but between 4 and 6 accents or more.

While the early line of Stevens is short, and approximates a loose, yet simple accentual verse, Justice characterizes Stevens’s later, long line as “stretching [the] iambic pentameter line out almost to the breaking point” (190). Techniques employed to accomplish such loosening and stretching not only include the common trochaic reversal, but also anapestic stretching, and the movement of the caesura across the line. The variations and modifications Stevens performs render the iambic pattern nearly inaudible. Justice remarks that Stevens’s development of the line “stands as an example in the history of modern versification” (191), especially with regard to the anapestic stretching at work, which he thinks “is probably unprecedented” (194). The line at work in my own poetry mingles both iambic and trochaic meters. While no one poem ever firmly establishes an iambic line as that from which the remaining lines depart, occasional lines are easily classified as iambic. For example, we find a purely iambic pentameter line in “Sleeping Peasants”: “we celebrate the rounded stroke of breast” (5). This line turns from the strong trochaic meter of the previous line, returning to the tradition of the English heroic line. The remainder of the poem generally works with and varies the

meter which this line establishes. "Determination in Aunt Dorothy's Dishes" is another poem that begins with a strong trochaic meter and finds its way back to the iamb. We find examples in this poem of the modifications Stevens employs in his variation of the iambic pentameter line, as well as the introduction of dactylic stretching. In lines nine and ten of this poem, for example, there are examples of anapestic stretching: "another's covers, away from this idle talk / of Russian ballet, current states of affairs" (9-10). Line nine begins with two iambs, and uses an anapest to stretch across the caesura, which is followed by another anapest and a final iamb. The extra unaccented syllables in the third and fourth positions add length to the line and prevent it from slipping out of meter. The anapestic stretching at work in the tenth line, furthermore, rather than continuing the established meter, breaks from it. The anapest in the second position of this line precedes the early caesura, and marks a turn into the trochees of the next two positions. The line concludes as it begins--with an iamb. However, while the poem generally builds upon and varies from the tradition of the iambic pentameter line, it does not start within this tradition. The first line of the poem is in trochaic pentameter: "After dinner is served--the garlic roasted" (1). In order to read this line as a pentameter line, we must recognize the second position of the line as a dactyl. Stevens sets the precedent for this kind of stretching. However, he replaces an iamb with an anapest, whereas I replace a trochee with a dactyl. The pattern of my free-verse line, then, partakes of the free-verse line modifications Justice sees at work in Stevens's poetry, and stretches his modifications further. Working both within and outside the confines of the traditional iambic pentameter line, I work toward establishing a mingling of trochaic and iambic lines, stretching those lines beyond the accentual-syllabic and toward an accentual basis. My

poems represent a combination of the accentual basis, which characterizes Stevens's early work, and the play of his general loosening of the iambic pentameter line. The *causa formalis* of poetry partakes of formal qualities already present, letting new ones arrive through reshaping.

My own work, therefore, demonstrates that, as with the *causa materialis*, the *causa formalis* draws from what is already there, specifically in terms of form, and brings something new into existence. Whether in free or more traditional verse, poets draw from historical precedents and modify them, depending on the other causes--the materials, the purpose, the poet herself--and bring something new into existence, adding to the current discussion of such matters as form and metrics. Justice puts it best, noting in poetic form a "tension between the drag of the past and the pull of the future" ("Free-Verse" 204). The "drag of the past" describes the tradition of form that any poet refers to and draws from, despite the degree of freedoms she takes. The "pull of the future" refers to freedoms of variation which a poet takes in bringing something that was not yet there into existence. This bringing-forth of the new by way of what was already there also characterizes poetry's *causa finalis*.

Diotima's definition of *poiesis* as "calling something into existence that was not there before" answers the concern of poetry's *causa finalis*, its purpose. Poetry's purpose is to accomplish this calling, or bringing-forth of the new. Poetry adds to the human discussion, adds to the things we speak of, adds materials and forms to an ongoing dialogue about the nature of poetry. In adding, poetry does more than repeat: as Justice implies, there is a tension between the old and the new, between existence as it was and existence with something that was not yet there. Heidegger poignantly comments on this

tension, or conflict: “The linguistic work, originating in the speech of the people, . . . transforms the people’s saying so that now every living word fights the battle and puts up for decision what is holy and what unholy, what great and what small, what brave and what cowardly, what lofty and what flighty, what master and what slave” (“Origin” 43). The new saying challenges what was before. It asks people to think differently, or to recognize for the first time the need to think. In laying out the *causa finalis*, Heidegger also mentions a “sacrificial rite in relation to which the required chalice is determined” (“Question” 314). In poetry, we think of hymns or elegies as reverential or religious forms which have thankfulness and reverence as their *causa finalis*. But, in some manner, in drawing from historical forms and materials, all poetry pays homage to what was there, even in moving beyond it. As the extremes of transforming established existence *and* of paying homage, the *causa finalis* of poetry involves a call to think differently and to give thanks differently. In either case, the established is not now enough; the existent needs a renewal. The *causa finalis* of poetry, as renewal, establishes a new reverence for its materials and forms, through establishing a new way of seeing and understanding them.

My own “Villanelle for a Baltimore Bluegrass Violinist” provides an example for looking at the ways form and material take part in respectful renewal, and how my poems accomplish this *causa finalis*:

The still night air never stood a chance  
with your calloused fingers sewn to the neck  
of your violin. Even the Drummer danced  
  
to your trills, until his foot was still. I glanced  
at the bone of your thumb pressed to the back  
of the still night air. Who stood a chance

(cont., break)

with the quick pace, the small spaces prancing  
between strings and fingers, with the crackle  
of your violin, with the drummer who danced

head nodding, his body lulled into a trance?  
Your sounds rippled through the crowded room, packed  
the still night air, which knew it never stood a chance

with your flying Asian fingers branched,  
never resting along the wooden deck  
of your violin. Only the drummer danced

to the rhythm of your bow, to the lancing  
motion of your fingers, sewn to the neck.  
The still night air never stood a chance  
with your violin. Even the drummer danced.

In this poem, the materials include the violinist, his movement, his song, his accompanying drummer, and the “still night air” (1), among other things. The material of the poem, its subject matter, helps to perform poetry’s bringing-forth. The “still night air” (1), or the existence before the poem and before the violinist’s song, “never stood a chance” in the face of the new that comes to be (1). The already existent “never stood a chance” (1), because the violinist is out ahead of it, setting a pace that cannot be fully kept or accounted for by what tries to follow it: “Even the drummer danced” (19), and “his body lulled into a trance” (10), as though he were a part of an audience rather than an accompaniment. The poem shows and shapes this arrival into newness, celebrating the familiar materials as they become new and extraordinary.

The villanelle form is co-responsible for this shaping, as homage is paid to the violinist and to the way the new is indebted to the traditional form. The villanelle has a driving, rollicking pattern, the repetitiveness of which helps to continually push an unrelenting rhythm forward. The tradition of the villanelle, originally “an Italian rustic song” (Strand 6), can partly be traced by its name, “*villanella*[,] thought to derive from

*villano*, an Italian word for ‘peasant,’ or even *villa* the Latin word for ‘country house’ or ‘farm’” (6). My villanelle and the violinist’s song hearken back to this rustic tradition in that the subject matter of both is, at least in part, bluegrass, and bluegrass is a musical tradition associated with the yeoman farmer of America’s back-country. But, while the poem hearkens back in this way, and in resembling a “round song--something sung with repetitive words and refrains” (6), it also decisively splits off from this thematic tradition in that the violinist is an Asian in the city of Baltimore. The repetitiveness of the form and the rustic tradition of the violinist’s song pay homage to the formal and thematic tradition of the villanelle. At the same time, through a new juxtaposition of materials, the poem shows a transformation of that form’s traditional origin. Similarly, following the American use of the form by poets such as Elizabeth Bishop (“One Art”), Donald Justice (“In Memory of the Unknown Poet, Robert Boardman Vaughn”), and James Merrill (“The World and the Child”), my own villanelle has looser metrical constraints, varied line lengths, and slight variations in the repeated lines; this following of a tradition that varies continues to both honor and transform what has gone before.

There is a recurring theme accompanying this discussion of the interplay between form and materials: the poem, and poetry itself both show respect and reverence for what has come before, while simultaneously transforming and pulling away from what was already there. This recurrence of reverence and renewal characterizes the *causa finalis* of poetry and shows the way that this cause is “co-responsible” with the former two in bringing-forth (Heidegger, “Question” 315). Neither material nor form accomplishes new bringing-forth without the other, and neither does so without this “tension between the drag of the past and the pull of the future” (Justice, “Free-Verse” 204). This phrase

characterizes what happens with materials and forms, but seems most fitting and rooted as the *causa finalis*, or the purpose of poetry. The *causa formalis*, with its traditions and modifications, along with the *causa materialis*, with its historical materials that get presented and shaped in new ways, work together in accomplishing the *causa finalis*, which transforms the former two through giving them a purpose that drives at “calling something into existence that was not there before” (Plato 557). This newness transforms the existent; taking it up and looking to it, poetry also pays homage to the existent by renewing it. It is the *causa efficiens* which must heed this purpose and help to effectively bring it about.

The *causa efficiens* of poetry is the poet. As Heidegger puts it, the poet “considers carefully and gathers together the three aforementioned ways [i.e. the *causa materialis*, *causa formalis*, and *causa finalis*] of being responsible and being indebted” (315). In doing so, the poet “bring[s] forward into appearance” (315). This is the bringing-forth that is *poiesis*. The poet does not merely cause an effect, but aids in the bringing-forth of *poiesis* through carefully attending to materials, forms, and purposes, and making poetry the newly existent. Poetry could not come forth without the poet, but the poet would have no vocation and could cause no effect without the materials, forms, and purposes which she gathers together. The four causes are all indebted to one another for making possible something newly existent. They are co-responsible for doing so.

In my life, specifically as a poet, I have encountered the constituents of *poiesis*, the four causes, both independently and simultaneous with one another. The form of poetry, for example, gets specifically discussed in literature seminars and poetry workshops. We take up forms, study them, practice them, write in them, and modify

them. As Justice puts it, in the “classic pattern of the poet’s development, . . . the young poet first masters a type of traditional verse and then, maturing, treats its laws with more familiarity and confidence, leading to a degree of freedom” (“Free-Verse” 192). In the poet’s learning and development, it is not out of place to divide form out from the other causes or constituents of poetry. The situation is similar with the materials, what we write of; it is not out of place to get a sense, apart from form and purpose, of what the poet traditionally writes about. One of my English teachers once said that there are “about five things” that all of poetry deals with. Of these five he mentioned love and death, leaving us to figure out the others. Whether one agrees with his assessment or not, it certainly focuses attention on the question of the specific range of matters to take up. Ultimately, poetry’s material is life, or being, itself, and all the things in it. Poetry looks at the way all the things, or some of them, come together as life. Nor is it out of place to speak of poetry’s purpose of transformation. But once we get to purpose--transformation--we also have to look to what is being formed and transformed, so that we see how the relationship among poetry’s constituents is inextricable. Similarly with the poet: we can speak of the poet’s role, or of what she does, but cannot get far without purpose, materials, and form. Therefore, while it is sometimes helpful to divide out the four causes as poetry’s co-responsible constituents, it is ultimately necessary to see them as a unified whole.

In my life, those things, events, and memories, which join form, material, purpose, and poet together at once, have been most fruitful. “An Attentive Deacon” is a good example. The Baptist Minister in that poem is a man much like my grandfather. In this sense, my grandfather is part of the material of the poem. But more importantly, he was a



man I could not encounter without reference to the formal concerns closest to him, which were the sermon and the hymn. Likewise, I never heard or will hear a hymn that does not remind me of my grandfather, or that I can encounter without reference to him. I also must think of the measured form by which he lived his life, delivering mail, delivering sermons, tending to his garden and family with great care, reverence, and respect. But when I start to speak of the materials or forms of his life, I have already begun to speak of his purpose. Tied together with the sermon and the careful man was his intense sense of purpose, mainly to revere and praise the God he served in his own way. All three of these aspects are clearly dependent on each other; he would not have been the man he was without the simultaneity of his aspects, and I could have had no view to this simultaneity had my presence not been somehow together and commensurate with his. Co-responsibility among the causes thus comes to the fore as a fullness of being which cannot be gained by concentrating strictly on one cause.

The same interdependence or co-responsibility holds for the literature, music, painting, and other kinds of art we encounter. Whether we consider the maker of art specifically, and we often do (see, for example, “After Reading Picasso’s Biography”), we encounter simultaneously their materials, the forms they use, and their way of achieving the transformative purpose of their work. Such works are in my life; they help to constitute it. They are not apart from it, and they are not taken as mere objects or even as materials alone. Certainly, a painting, a poem, a popular song, might comprise some of the material I write about, and might also suggest forms or reinforce purpose; they might incite me to write. But in any case, form must already be there for such material to show up *as* the thing it is; purpose must be there for the thing to go beyond the ordinary,

for me, and to incite me. Inciting me to write, these things have already taken on the material, form, and purpose I have found in them. As Heidegger comments, “they differ from one another, yet they belong together” (“Question” 316). Furthermore, what “unites them from the beginning” (316), Heidegger suggests, is that they accomplish the bringing-forth of *poiesis*, and “it is in the sense of such a starting something on its way into arrival that being responsible is an occasioning or an inducing to go forward” (316). The other causes are not merely also there; they all incite unifiedly from the start, as a co-responsible whole.

The reason poetry “calls something into existence that was not there before” (Plato 557) is that it occurs historically, in a specific time. Depending on available materials, forms, and ways of seeing them along with purpose and the poet, poetry will be new each time, and will transform what was there by adding itself to it, revering it in use, and also transforming it. Poetry, for me, is essentially a basic reassessment of life and being each time it happens. These important matters often go unnoticed. But if the poet, and the human being in general, “considers carefully and gathers together the . . . ways of being responsible and indebted” (Heidegger, “Question” 315), she will keep these matters in question and full of their own potential. *Bounty Broken Open* presents the poetic gathering to which I have tried to closely attend in the past few years. I am indebted at once to all the materials and matters I have encountered, to all the forms of writing I have attempted, that I have succeeded and failed at, and to the pressing purpose of assessing a respectful renewal in things. The moments which offer the most bounty to my life, and for my potential to help renew that bounty, occur where these important elemental aspects cohere in co-responsibility, and where I cohere with them in this way. This is because

when there is such coherence, when it is noticed and attended to, the extraordinary has already come to pass and *poiesis* has occurred.

Poetry, as bringing-forth, needs all of its causal aspects in order to bring forth the new. It relies on these aspects, in their specific historical manifestation, to bring new existence about. At the same time, the four causes are indebted to *poiesis* as that which draws them into a whole in the first place. The four causes, as the aspects of poetry, are co-responsible for bringing bounty forth. Heidegger argues that the “principle characteristic of being responsible [i.e., the four causes] is . . . starting something on its way into arrival” (316). The four causes “occasion” something new (316); they draw together as existent bounty *and* as its renewal. *Poiesis*, as bringing-forth, as “calling something into existence that was not there before” (Plato 557), is what unites the four causes as a co-responsible, bountiful whole. At the same time, the four causes and an elaboration of them in terms of poetry provides a way to understand what happens in poetry’s bringing-forth, along with that in which the constituents involved in this “calling” consist. Poetry, like the causes, occasions something new. It is indebted to the bounty of what is in existence already, and it is responsible for the new bounty of what comes to be.

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**BOUNTY BROKEN OPEN**

Begin again and again the never-attainable praising

(Rainer Maria Rilke)

## APPENDIX A



## Bounty Broken Open I

Ravenous irises line the creek's banks. Bulbs grow together, choke out the old growth, joined at once with the new. Stiff stalks wait, turn over, then down into winter. Shoots lie close to the ground from which they spread, thick overgrown green, not budding, not like Mama Susie. Not about to stop smoking, she told Aunt Iris how it was. "If you don't like it, there's always the door." Watch as it closes behind you. Then light a husk, find a way along the side of tracks between here and there. Cut a path with the fire of cob burning, pale white shucks peeled back from hardened kernels. Hold its flash before you. Feel the darkness press against your neck as you walk the rail, feet never fixed in the earth. Susie blossomed young, mouth dirty as old irises, rain shining up through open toes.

## Small Town Affairs

The forty-two year old reference librarian  
looking to divorce her overbearing, overweight husband,  
wondered if anyone could hear her moans  
over the utility fans in the custodial room  
of the fifth floor public library. If someone  
had guaranteed no one would hear her,  
she might have screamed the moment  
an older professor, a pillar of her local community  
who visited the stacks every Friday for new titles,  
stuck his thick, short fingers inside her.  
Grasping the pipes he'd laid her between,  
sacrificing her body to the humming of machinery,  
she closed her eyes to the heavy frame above her  
and imagined him, twenty years earlier,  
opening her body as if it were his corn field,  
raising his fingers from the earth to smell,  
then taste, the salt of rich black soil.  
When he finally raised his face to meet hers,  
for a moment the pipes softened,  
the odor of corn permeated the air, and her hands

(cont., no break)

reached for something more than hard steel,  
wanted to feel firm stalks, crisp husks,  
threads of silk weaving in and out  
of the spaces between her fingers.

When they were through, they stepped outside  
the swinging wooden doors and left the fans behind.

They sat on straight chairs across a scarred wooden table  
and talked for hours about his younger wife  
as if she were a nineteenth century novel,  
able to be taken off and put on a shelf at their leisure.

Under the stagnant room's fluorescent lights,  
the librarian noticed, glistening in his white beard,  
the remnants of guilt he needed to sustain him,  
to love his wife's body, the receptacle for his seed,  
to love his child, whose reflection she sees  
in the changing hazel eyes looking through her.

## Open Floodgates

In the deserts of Ohio's amplest valley,

aunt Sandra consumes cupfuls of ice.

One after another, cold squares slip

into her dry mouth, are absorbed,

then dispersed to empty tear ducts.

Hers is an earthly body, robbed of water,

a necessary element for preventing

burnt face, extreme thirst, gaping chaps,

savage fierceness of strength's absence,

our final collapse into a dead dry lump.

But invigorate waters quench resistance,

break open sites of infection and loss,

impregnate the earnest dews with excess.

Sliding a cube between teeth and cheek,

Sandra recalls a spring of heavy rains

flooding the valley's green farmlands.

Raging not less than one hundred yards

from her back door, the Tuscarawas river.

Rains forced the rising crescent forward,

uprooting uncle Bink's tomato startings.

(cont., no break)

High water levels closed county roads  
dipping in and out of the land's folds.  
Foundations cracked; basements caved.  
River's swell overtook thawing ground.  
But the lift of Sandra's home on stilts  
allowed the water to rush under her feet.  
When the floods recessed, farmers found  
barn and shed planks mildewed and rotten,  
discovered cattle miles away, some dead,  
swept down current, some living on islands,  
arbitrary dry spots clear of destruction,  
and lamented the swallowed hay fields,  
still needed despite the loss of stock.  
Uncle Bink says he's forgotten the flood  
and his lost garden, but, watching Sandra  
empty cup after cup of ice, remembers  
a next door neighbor, killed in a storm  
yielding hailstones larger than softballs.  
The boy rushed out with his leather mitt,  
anxious to catch an ice cold home run fly.  
Before his mother could stop his tracks  
a large stone pelted the top of his skull.

(cont., no break)

His swollen brain had no room to grow.

Glacial efforts of doctors failed to control  
the uncertain wash of ebb and flow.

## Eating Avocado Sandwiches

Trying to sell overripe avocados for half off,  
Jerry stands at the edge of the tent's draping,  
almost shut, from blowing winds and hard rain.

The day's heat turned soft several firm fruits,  
relinquishing each avocado's grasp of itself,  
perfect for guacamole, not for a sandwich.

But Jerry can't help himself, and explodes  
in song, keeping time with the beating flaps,  
his right toe tapping, pressed to stone.

The black supple ornaments weighing heavy  
in Jerry hands, didn't grow in Oklahoma,  
home to watermelon, marijuana, not avocado.

They grew where Jerry's grandmother picked  
hundreds of them, each day, climbing ladders,  
clipping from branches laden with work.

She laid them gently inside her blue apron,  
coddled them each step down from ascent,  
smelled of each, pressed thumb into skin.

Her basket, never overfull of fragile harvest,  
saw more trips than most between the trees

(cont., no break)

and loading trucks, parked every fourth row.  
Beds loaded heavy with full crates, the drivers  
left pickers to glean. Skirtfolds quickly gathered  
under the nearest tree to reveal loaves and lemons.  
Shrub-like leaves left them with little shade  
for sharing; a Pacific sun split fruits wide open,  
broken spilled flesh turned brown at each crack.  
Breaking bread between them, sharing the use  
of a stolen butter knife, taking care of each other,  
the women took turns spreading out warm insides.  
During more profitable seasons, when full limbs  
provided more work, some women offered salt,  
and sandwich spread, to season an insipid flavor.  
Decades later, Jerry lets his own secret slip:  
green streaks on cracked wheat bread pressed  
to a hamburger smothered in American cheese.  
Friend to the honeybee, fruit of the Nahuatl,  
the avocado, Jerry reminds his tired customer,  
also grows on the steppes of the northern Negev;  
its pear shape might save you from yourself,  
if you carefully unwrap loose brown skins,  
scrape clean what adheres as you pull back,

(cont., no break)



keep whole the fresh green middle before  
a raised knife slices down to the glossy seed  
you'll watch growing beads in glassed water.  
Born of the lauraceous tree, you eat it raw,  
in the face of its own rot, ripening as it slides  
between teeth, over tongue, down your throat.

Framing Hopper's *Gas*

Red glass-bubble gas pumps center the canvas,  
painted directly between the dark luminous woods  
and the white station, whose light trickles out of open slits,  
trying to illuminate the partially concealed attendant,  
failing to notice the darkening blue sky behind him,  
the pale-shadowed pavement in front.

We see our attendant standing alone  
in the dying light of some east-coast state,  
and beyond him, separating the line of pines  
from the stark Mobil station, the road  
empty of the travelers who roared up and down  
its corridor during the course of this day.

We do not know that before this moment  
two farmers, on their way back from selling chickens,  
passed the station and waved at Hopper's man,  
who looked up at them before he turned his head back  
toward the pump. He remembers these two men.

As the sun rose behind the forest, the men,  
dressed in bibs and straw hats, filled their tank at 7AM.

Recollecting the backseat

(cont., no break)

overflowing with cackling birds, the attendant smiles  
when he sees the empty auto headed for home,  
then returns to his work with a more serious look,  
changing a sign, wiping off the pump, replacing  
a can of oil on an unbalanced rack,  
returning a cleaned nozzle to its resting spot.  
On his way into the station building,  
he recalls the men and women who stopped  
at this merging point in the landscape:  
the school boy on his bicycle, who ran inside  
for an orange cream soda, the man in a black Model A Ford  
selling encyclopedias to the rural community,  
the newly wed couple on their way West,  
whose car will be found seventy miles later  
pulled into some trees by the side of the road,  
still running, the radio playing,  
the couple's limp bodies embracing in the backseat,  
soft pine branches lapping at closed windows.

## Calling Off the Prophets

If it is possible to be silent about the sickness,  
still, she cannot sidestep the obvious chatter  
of busy nurses willing to weave tapestries  
of a too-heavy loss that shrivels her body.  
Not facts but form. “Her mind won’t say,”  
they sigh. “But a body will. Look! Eye her step,  
and carriage, one toe always pointing forward.”  
Like her, they’ve been gleaning the ruins  
for weeks now, almost hungry for more loss,  
wondering if, or how, a body speaks itself,  
recognizes codes and laws projected onto it,  
like a cat mistaking soy sausage for pig guts.  
Older women in offices laugh alongside her  
as she pulls tummy taut, shows belly below.  
They know her discomfort with an alien shell,  
tell her “take pictures, this can’t last long.”  
They warn of men, who follow after like hawks,  
ready to prey on a body’s vulnerable opening,  
who come from a northeastern wind and attack  
the white linens hung in summer’s moonlight,

(cont., no break)

who leap at the sheer-white folds, left in the open,  
covering the ground in darkness. As she watches  
from the corner of the terrace, her arm stretched  
over the garden, she listens to these whispers.

Her sallow, hidden face continues to draw them in.

With the moon's light, she weaves gold crowns  
in empty spaces. Without holes for arms or neck,  
tangled shirts flap tacit medicine, flashing knife.

She knows of a life force stronger than want  
to cause the surge of terror beneath her breast.

She stands, steel talons pressed deep in her side,  
foot on shovel, ready to furrow the fields.

## Pear in a Bottle

Squeezed into the crowded liquor  
store, aisles tight, air close, we pay  
for our nectar of wine, a slender *Gris*,  
and notice a new spirit's emergence.  
I raise it to my brother's face showing  
him a whole pear drawn to the bottom  
of a tinted, narrow-necked container.  
He asks how the bottle gulped a pear  
into its belly through the tight throat.  
The clerk explains. They place bottles  
over buds before they well up into fruit.  
She points us to a picture on the label,  
glass bottles strapped to pear trees.  
Fifty a tree perhaps. She's excited.  
It's a long process and the pear can  
grow only as large as the bottle's bulb.  
My brother reminds me of Hairy Buffalo  
parties. Over a hundred dollars in fruit  
at the bottom of a fifty gallon tin tub,  
soaked with vodka, everclear, rum,

(cont., no break)

the nearest transparent liquor available.  
Out of rising memory he explodes,  
pretends to pay the fifty dollars to free  
the thick, stuck pear we have taken in.  
After his birth, doctors discovered  
a series of misnumbered vertebrae.  
When they diagnosed scoliosis, said  
he'd need to grow in a brace, to hold  
his right shape until he drew to full  
blossom, we laughed at the pretense  
as we laugh now; viability will beguile,  
into a mirror where *objects are closer*,  
into a bottle at which a slightly confused  
clerk keeps pointing, saying *look*,  
*the pear is smaller than it appears.*

## Reasoning with Peaches

Abe might say natural law prevents man  
from overindulging in the desire  
to gather more peaches than he can possibly eat.

Jerry says Don's a greedy man.

Jerry could make a million in three years  
with proper attention, restraint of the desire  
to pick all the peaches. Jerry has patience,  
will buy Don's local fruits until he runs out.

Don's an easier pick-up, convenient.

But Jerry doesn't think much of him,  
can't trust him, would rather buy from Abe,  
(who's never in excess) if it wasn't so far.

Jerry knows the nearest and best peach  
comes from the Wall's orchard,  
ten miles south of here, just past Vinco,  
where a person reaches the bucket's bottom,

(cont., break)



brings to surface a peach, rotted  
clean through, feels the ridge of red pit  
between thumb and forefinger,  
remembering the draw to the orchard.

Here, thistleweeds grow beneath half-dead trees,  
northern branches eaten by disease—  
southern branches filled with clusters of ripe fruits  
to be plucked, each away from the seam.

There, a heavy branch sighs up to meet others  
strung with pits. Warm peach rises between  
toes and earth. Fuzz gathers. The salt of a sweaty  
upper lip flavors the join between tongue and peach.

But when the peaches in Vinco are gone,  
the pickings in Stratford and Arkansas slim,  
only Don's left, imports from California.  
Jerry waits; before long, Don, too, will run out.

## Drawing Down the Butterflies

When I remember the sting of needle, the slow ease  
under, my back sinks below table, voices clamber  
to the clatter of tongs clapping loudly to song.

I hide below simple beams holding together a quilt,  
while women line racks with red jars, and take turns  
binding layers of cotton with more layers: the stitch.

Mother takes her place at the stove, blue flame fired  
high, while grandmother hovers over a sink,  
hands dripping wet with tomato juice, peels falling  
onto porcelain, tender meat rising between fingers.  
A steady stream washes the stains she leaves behind.  
Dusk renders light as the sky folds disclosed earth.

And I recall the clean rush of water, the late harvest  
of monarchs pleating before our kitchen window.  
Spread fingers grasp to mend, to grant passage before  
I ask your touch to draw down the butterflies, lose them  
to memory, bring them back again from their place  
of withdrawal, beginning with a still tongue.

**APPENDIX B**

## Bounty Broken Open II

They don't fly open on the first try. This box  
is sealed shut with layers of tape you saw your  
mother use to close tight Thanksgiving leftovers.  
Roll after roll of plastic hangs on fiber's flavors.  
The sticky epoxy enfolds brown fuzz into itself,  
until I cut the top crease, and pull back the first  
flap, sending shrieks into the open empty office.  
If you're careful enough to find an edge loose  
along one side of the box, and pull away there,  
you won't have to witness its loud convulse,  
its face suddenly in conflict with the tape, now  
part of the pressed brown fiber film first to show  
itself on the fixed backside of adhesive surface.  
I prefer to cut down the lid's center, fillet open  
each fold, round the last curve of sinking slice.  
I watch each flap rise up, a sigh heavy enough  
to drape onto the leer lurking within.

## The Postmaster's Return

Through parted bathroom window shades  
she watches her husband emerge from the garden,  
his head nodding in and out of sunflower stalks.

When he stops to notice firm tomatoes  
ripening on vines, she pictures them canned,  
all ninety jars of them, and turns from the window.

Before the mirror, she pushes her cheeks into her eyes,  
pulls her chin taut, smooths her sunbaked skin.  
She stops to rest brown hands on their porcelain sink.

For a moment, she recalls noon sandwiches on white cloth,  
homemade aprons tied loosely about her waist,  
days when she'd peer out their front window

to watch his brisk walk home from the post office,  
a flat cap pulled over gray eyes, one arm swinging,  
a morning paper tucked tightly beneath the other.

(cont., break)

Now, having witnessed his form rise among corn,  
she discovers he knows only of bending over new peas,  
wiping his brow, raising open buds to a sun.

Returning the spigot to rest, she glances once more  
into the dim mirror, towels her wrinkled hands,  
then opens the door--ready to meet the waning light.

## Red Snapper Forgotten

So that I do not forget Minerva, the dark twirling dancer  
who threatens to destroy the feral world into which she  
fears the thrust of projection--so that I do not forget

her proximity, the distance she maintains between self  
and other, almost any other, say one who will not flail,  
or pretend to flail, as she grasps, pretends to reach,  
to arrive in favorable light--so that I do not forget

her dance, frail and weak in its clear pretense to move,  
to arouse, evoke, draw under and unto her cheek cut just  
so I do not forget its desire, eyes blue as crystal lake,

the marl beneath, stirred to surface by heavy rains,  
or even red snapper on a bed of steamed jasmine rice,  
imparted on a black platter so that I do not forget you,

with bruise above eye, who says into pupils dark as night,  
must say what might come, to ward off its possibility  
of ruin in light so cold it burns, like ice bound fast

(cont., no break)

to the tongue trying hard to forget Minerva.



Villanelle for a Baltimore Bluegrass Violinist

The still night air never stood a chance  
with your callused fingers sewn to the neck  
of your violin. Even the drummer danced

to your trills, until his foot was still. I glanced  
at the bone of your thumb pressed to the back  
of the still night air. Who stood a chance

with the quick pace, the small spaces prancing  
between strings and fingers, with the crackle  
of your violin, with the drummer who danced

head nodding, his body lulled into a trance?

Your sounds rippled through the crowded room, packed  
the still night air, which knew it never stood a chance

with your flying Asian fingers branched,  
never resting along the wooden deck  
of your violin. Only the drummer danced

(cont., break)

to the rhythm of your bow, to the lancing  
motion of your fingers, sewn to the neck.

The still night air never stood a chance  
with your violin. Even the drummer danced.

## Passing into View

In early spring, before the pear trees blossom  
I travel east, away from our small town, take  
a corresponding back road behind the main one.  
A more direct route.

Covered in ash thick enough for smudging  
heavy letters across the blue background of sky,  
black trees line sections of the slender way  
between here and home.

Among these trees killed in last summer's bout  
of prairie grass fires, near the edge of the road  
between my right front tire and the shallow well  
of a community cow pond,

stands a new calf, lost, rough around the edges.  
Frightened, without moving his head to the side,  
he divines the distance between plastic fender  
and dilated eye, stretched

(cont., break)

in its socket, then bridges the opening between  
the eye and the quarter of his hind leg in danger  
of contacting my car. The jeer of his stark,  
shuffling, half-bent leg

reminds me of my sister's knee-cap, grazed  
by the silver buffer of the red '83 Chevy truck  
that knocked her off course, sent her scrambling  
across shiny black asphalt.

Unlike this calf looking back, like Orpheus, to gauge  
through his glance the gap between unsure feet  
firmly planted in black soil, and the possibilities  
afforded by the lake,

my sister keeps promise to Hades; in the moment  
before an oncoming car's headlights blind her,  
she looks ever forward, behind fenders reflecting sun.

On the black air of night,

she guides and glides a fraught, splintered destiny.

*Picasso's Barefoot Girl*

We all start out like your  
young girl with bare feet,  
large toes pressed to stone,  
wide against the earthen floor.  
Draped in red, as you have it,  
a shawl, or white worktowel  
crosses around her neck.  
Her hands, folded in front,  
not in proportion to her waist,  
rest heavy across her lap.  
Those heavy brown eyes  
ask for what more to carry—  
in tin pails full of sunfish,  
along gritty, yet worn roads,  
through fields of white corn,  
among tulips, tall as children.  
But closed lips, lined puckers  
at the corners of the mouth,  
show where we need to go,  
determine the strokes we make

(cont., no break)

as we start out across water,  
and place our hand along  
its surface momentarily,  
feel the slight rush over skin,  
before pulling back in time  
to avoid the increase in velocity  
of all that becomes bound up  
in red drapes, cotton towels,  
bare feet, barely small enough  
to tuck into the soles of shoes.

## Escaping Endless Sleep

Dreams brought to me a disproportionate face looming large above mine,  
even before I eased into your downtown studio in a satin eggplant shirt.

We both knew what might happen the moment I walked into the room,  
dropped into your easy chair, propped my boots on the walnut table.

Standing over an ironing board the morning after we met,

I recalled the dream from the night before, surprised to remember

your skin sticking tightly to mine, your short frame staked near my own,  
balding head bent low, black eyes desiring breasts, thighs, hips.

After I told you, frustrated beneath layers of winter blankets, to see yourself,  
before looking to others, the familiar face of dream began to change.

Our bodies no longer met in fields of corn, but in meadows of poppies.

I became more than a mistress to you, my body more than just a body.

(cont., break)

Then I flew to Baltimore and you stayed landlocked, trapped inland,  
haunting dreams, hiding behind fragmented portraits of pregnant women

with angular faces, exaggerated eyes, hollowed cheeks, asymmetric hips.

When your memory was through destroying the forms of our bodies,

a restlessness stirred inside me as I began, in the space of dream, to create  
my own paintings, more surrealistic, like Dali's *Persistence of Memory*.

You wake, slide from damp sheets, stand before an open window, stroking  
your thick white abdomen. You tell me that at night, you close your eyes,

pretend you are not so fat. My open mouth, white teeth force you to forget  
all you have dreamt, arouse in you the need to turn back to your canvas.

Your body grows larger than the great white wall of memory before us.

In the early hours of morning, before the sun snatches the blue from night,

you stand before the hall's long mirror, tell me the dreaming must stop,  
you have grown too large, even your mind has forgotten to remember.

(cont., break)



Returning from Baltimore, I leave behind our bitter affairs, possible only  
through our imagining the thresholds of art. Now, I dream only of your wife,

her belly round, full of child. At night, she and I walk together  
through stark, deserted prairies. We hold hands and I stroke her stomach.

I reach inside her and wrap my hands around your son's large head.

As I kneel before her naked body, she gently brushes my cheek,

asks to touch my lips, wants to dig her fingers into my fresh skin.

Then, she pulls me close and whispers a new song into my ear.

## At the Produce Stand on Sixth

A streak of laughter rises from beneath the tent's  
red and white, elephant-folded drapes.

And the fat lady's fuchsia lips quiver with sweat as she speaks  
secrets of garlic, great bulbs of it, with long hairy stalks,  
minced, fried in butter, eaten with silver shrimp forks.

Jerry shakes off laughter with a nod of the head,  
begins to smell the herb released on the woman's body,  
wants to taste her upper lip, savor the flavors of her imagination.  
The corn is the sweetest she's tasted, she says, watching Jerry  
squint against the sun pouring in the tent's eastside.

When he tells the fat lady the corn comes straight from Bixby,  
every morning, his arms fly into air, meet above his head.

In his talk, flatbed trucks loaded high to the cab with corn  
creep out of ten-foot stalks. He picks every ear by hand, he says,  
and lays them long ways in half- bushel baskets.

Then he winks at us or the sun, letting us in on a secret.

The fat lady's voice fades into the sound of oscillating metal fans.

(cont., no break)

Jerry stands, with one hand on his hip, the other in his pocket  
listening to the lady who loves to eat. She has devoured garlic,  
fried in a pound of butter, and deserves to tell her own story.

APPENDIX C

### Bounty Broken Open III

With dramatic flare, he tosses a bagel in her face,  
as if it were a martini, grabs a coat and storms out.  
Having slipped from a wife's side to sidle up to her,  
he now soars with rage, old sores split wide open.  
"Another man. Impossible," he mulls as he steps.  
When she waited for his open-faced sandwich  
to hang silent before his open mouth to tell him,  
what else could he do, on his way out, but mumble  
something about cowgirls, cottoned up to the act  
of secret-keeping. He imagines her, following him  
in tight pursuit, out the door, across the busy street,  
into a western apparel shop, slyly giggling to affirm  
the comic dimensions of buying a new cowboy hat.  
But she stays on long enough to stave off a triggered  
Super Girl complex, for cleaning mozzarella cheese  
from face leaves little time for donning blue cape,  
or thigh high boots, not too unlike those he'll find  
shimmying up to hats, to binding leather straps.

## Another Woman's Trip to Wal-Mart

Not wanting to see joy in his eyes if the result is positive,  
she drives through midwest rains to her local Wal-Mart,  
where she avoids the pharmacist, her lover's wife's friends,  
the zealous checker, who, if a husband had stood in her place,  
might have over-enthusiastically asked "were they trying?"  
and suggested a box of Whitman's candies to celebrate.  
The wheels of her cart slip along a polished green-gray floor.  
After trenching down the appropriate aisle, stringy, wet hair  
clinging to her face, she tries to decide if one brand is better.  
She feels lucky when a middle-aged woman runs the test  
under the laser light, and then offers a pack of spearmint gum.  
Anyone else might have fixed his gaze on her soaked t-shirt,  
watched the swift swing of hip as she hurried away from him,  
imagined the way he'd silently edge up behind her in the dark.  
No one knows, as she heads for the bathroom, she guzzled  
twelve glasses of water before she left, to be sure she could go.  
Inside the bathroom, two girls before mirrors apply pink gloss,  
while a mother splashes ketchup from an imported silk blouse.  
Eyes to the ground, head tucked into shoulder she steals a stall.  
Laughter peels out from the hinged sway of the restroom door.  
A woman's black high-heel scratches the blue checkered floor.

(cont., no break)

Receipts reeling, dollar signs reckoning regard by the second,  
she rips open the box, sits on a dirty department store toilet,  
carefully reads instructions for the new convenient five-minute  
stick test, 99% accurate, no cups required, splatter free shield,  
all for the disregard of his joy, the misunderstanding of her own.

## After Reading Picasso's Biography

He likes to nap until noon; she knows not to wake him.

She sits in a straight chair, by the south bedroom window  
which overlooks the city, and guards him as he lies  
wrapped in layers of wool, arms curled tight beneath him.

There are times when, if she stares long enough,  
the blankets become dark green foliage, his nails grow long,  
claws clutching covers, his eyes sink deeper  
into his bald head, his lips pull taut around his gums.

She swears then that he is only feigning sleep, a trickster  
cloaked in camouflage, waiting for her to turn her head,  
to notice doves lighting on tar roofs, to contemplate  
her place there beside him. Only then can he attack.

When the clock nears noon and she fears he will rise  
from beneath his cape and consume her, she determines  
to stare at his monstrous face, small shoulders, thinning hair  
until he is flesh again, until he opens his great tiger eyes.



## The Pastor's Wife's Fruition

The deacon's shadow falls over her curves,  
and she wakes with his fingers inside her,  
with a lukewarm tongue tickling the small of her neck,  
then feels him kissing her lips,  
as if he hadn't quite found them yet.

When he finally makes love to her,  
she's still half-asleep.

Only then does she begin to apprehend his weight,  
to understand the way his mustache  
petrifies the breasts he cradled all night.

\*

When a late August breeze cools the night,  
and cats come out from behind church buildings,  
alone, she rises from damp sheets,  
wants to force the stars to turn over,  
push the moon down the sky,  
wait for the sun to fill the spaces between legs of locusts,  
watch the reservoir's warm waters,

(cont., no break)

where the last dragon fly of summer lights  
long enough to stir the dark surface  
before he flies beyond its edge.

\*

Sun sinks into the room as the pastor falls asleep.  
She studies his hands for hours, pear-shaped fingernails,  
hair resting below wrist bone,  
thumb tucked behind fingers.  
She tries to picture those same hands in the dark,  
what they must have looked like  
the moment he touched her thigh,  
his fingers drawn out in shadow.  
She tries not to wake him when she reaches out,  
but sees his shut eyes open, then close again.

\*

When the white and red tulips close their stiff petals,  
when she feels the fullness of the moon upon her,  
admiring the way it casts its light on trunks of oaks,

(cont., no break)

she wants to duck beneath the closest awning,  
watch the light slowly slip through beams of dust.  
Burying her toes in the thick black soil,  
she reaches bulb, inters herself into flowers,  
calls for dusk to cover her, like a gray goose,  
whose white feathers flutter lightly across the water,  
just before it tucks its wings tightly beneath it.

## Lions for Lunch

I am surprised to find naked mannequins here,  
in Utica Square, boxed off from precarious lions  
roaming deserted alleyways for scraps, crying  
out to old, wealthy oil women --“Warn  
the parading circus of plastic dummies with bare  
breasts about the dangers of exposed loins!”

After a lunch of potatoes and pork loin,  
I brush a crumb from the table, and notice there  
in the repeating pattern of cloth, lions,  
mouths open wide. And you, across from me, crying,  
speak nothing of the jungle, or of the worn  
paths you failed to find with fingers barely

long enough to bear the weight of silence, to bare  
my skin of cover, to brush the inner loin  
of buried desire reaching out to you here,  
cloaked in the preserved mustard pelt of a lion,  
aching with a deep, ancient quiver, crying  
to be touched. You can only warn

(cont., break)

of an impending rapture, a warning which warns  
even the most careful rider not to mount bare-  
backed, without saddle strapped to the loins  
of the horse she intends to guide between here  
and the sun slice of a napping lion,  
or the quiet whimper of a mouse crying

each night to be free of his trap, crying  
for release from the patterned, warned  
maze, scratching at raw ears until bare,  
running back and forth until the loins  
ache from the struggle to traverse here,  
to grasp the freedom of a stalking lion.

Cornered by my gaze, I catch you lying,  
when from muffled sobs, laments and crying,  
you rear your head with threats, to warn  
of what might happen to one who bears  
her breast and back, who dares not guard the loin,  
who lets the generative power there

(cont., break)

rush over the bare neck and quietly warn  
the restless lion, lying concealed here,  
not to turn from the crying bellows of that loin.

## The Postman's Vasectomy

On his late morning postal route,  
attended to after he leaves his five-month  
pregnant wife in bed to sleep all day,  
he perfects the plan to bring certain natural  
forces under his control.

He begins to come up with a solution  
as he passes Washington Street dumpsters,  
inhales rotten banana peels,  
flattened rat carcasses, stale cigarette,  
the rubber of flaxen discarded condoms.

Past the rot of trash, he pictures his wife,  
her large, limp body across white linens,  
arms draped over bed's edge,  
the skin of her stomach stretched tight,  
and beneath a new smell, of ripe child.

He admits that he has been thinking  
about this for some time now,

(cont., no break)

especially near the beginning of his route,  
when his mail sack hangs heavy  
with undelivered packages, neighbors' burdens.

He likes to pretend, then, that he is the one  
chosen to carry a new life into the world.

He positions his sack, not to the left  
or right, but in front of him,  
so that he can watch its innards bulging.

He reaches down, pulls the contents  
of the bag close to him with both arms  
and in the heat of the morning  
considers his wife's body, bearing for him  
what he wants most to carry himself.

He finds the answer when he sees the fat man,  
foot upon a blue metal railing, large stomach bent over.

He cannot help but notice the man's suit pants  
drawn snug around his lifted leg  
as the man reaches for the string of his left shoe.

(cont., break)



He imagines his own legs rising at midnight.  
Sliding from beneath her heavy arm,  
laid quietly along his back to keep him near.  
He will slip away from her large stomach,  
planted in the small of his back for comfort.

He will steal away from their bed,  
down the apartment's back steps,  
through the alley clean with cool night air,  
to the upstairs office of the late night vasectomy doctor,  
whose mail he delivers daily.

When the bright lights shine into his eyes,  
he will remember his wife,  
her belly loaded with raw material,  
he will remember the sound of scissors  
snipping away at his life.

## Sleeping Peasants

In the wake of Picasso's *Sleeping Peasants*—  
who, sprawled beneath a bright Spanish sun,  
dream to sleep and sleep to rise, have labored  
hard, their bodies torn, and fresh, made new,  
—we celebrate the rounded stroke of breast  
and generous pink calves, the dirty elbow  
on yellow hay barrels, holding erect a head,  
exaggerated hands the color of lake marl,  
for by these peasants we find father's father,  
who caught mother's mother and father,  
in their own field, not let loose from work,  
as Picasso's figures lay in view before us,  
but curled tight in a hold not to be broken  
by World War II, or this mother's affair  
with another local farmer, too old to enlist,  
but who encouraged the firm drape of forms  
when he stretched his fingers across her neck,  
freed the buttons of a starched cotton blouse,  
and slipped earthy fingers over the gown  
of her skirts, folds unfolding from the veiled,

(cont., no break)

erroneous, and splendid peeling blanket of light.

## What's Missing From Us

When I ask the surgeon what the lights,  
the camera, the surgical instruments discovered  
while floating around inside my middle cavity,  
his silver toupe takes a slight shift to the left.

He adjusts his glasses and speaks instead  
of the removed organ's adhesions, scar tissue,  
remains of strife. Pressing against my sternum,  
he laughs off a three-legged dog story,

recalls the fourth limb, not just broken  
but crushed beneath his truck tire,  
and the fear in his daughter's eyes  
when he brought Bozo home from the vet.

He struggles to remember case histories,  
book pages full of notes on patients  
other than me who stands before him,  
who let him cut my abdomen in four places,

(cont., break)

two minor ones to the right, one between two  
breasts, a circle inside the whole of my belly.

As a child, I spent hours lying flat on the bank  
out back of the house, my head bent forward  
just enough to watch my fingers pulling lint  
from under shirt, a belly-hole full of dirt.

Mother ran screaming from the porch  
bottle of iodine in hand, ready to douse wounds.

For several baths she'd noted an infection  
festering inside folds, each time asking

if it hurt, if I looked at it, if I picked at it,  
and why was it swollen red if I hadn't.

Hidden behind transparent kitchen curtains,  
she had discovered my summer secret.

She argued the body needed that dirt  
as much as anything else, as much as  
the medicine used to heal the awful hole  
I'd furrowed raw, under the hot sun.

(cont., break)

I forget to reveal this eschar, my first mark,  
as the gastroenterologist writes another history,

not for a woman scared of her body,  
and the trained flea circus ready to infest it,  
but for one bold enough, in this small town,  
to question the antics of this doctoral clown.

A week after the surgery, I notice, emerging  
from the grocery, the rehearsed gait  
of a WWII veteran, my limp straightening  
when I see what's missing, an arm;

I envision the end of your left index finger,  
clipped clean by a chef's sharp blade,  
the quick split open, like the tip of your tongue,  
then fused together again.

The tip of nail you saved, quickly put on ice,  
preserved in a mad rush to the nearest hospital,  
couldn't be sewn on, and never grew back.

I feel its rough edge each time you reach.

## Determination in Aunt Dorothy's Dishes

After dinner is served--the garlic roasted,  
the orange shrimp toasted with sesame oil,  
pasta andante, carrots glazed, the asparagus  
sprinkled with cheese and the wine poured--  
she sits down to her meal. The party passes  
the bread basket and premature compliments.  
She gazes at her plate, wants to remove her  
shoes, erase her made up face, crawl into  
another's covers, away from this idle talk  
of Russian ballet, current states of affairs.  
Carrots are passed, and in scooping a few,  
she looks down to find an apron in her lap.  
Conversation shifts; she slides from a chair,  
tips into the kitchen, pulls long white strings,  
loosens the knot tightly bridling her waist.  
Inside white-washed walls the strings fall;  
arms give way to find rest on the counter.  
For a moment she stops, closes her eyes.  
Fervor of evening lips from her apron,  
slides down her legs, spills on to the floor.

(cont., no break)

Pulling it over her bowed head, she places  
the apron on its hook, with a quick swipe  
straightens her dress, turns toward the door,  
thinking *I have arrived at that certain point.*

*The stranger at the door no longer has a face.*

*He rings the bell. I will fall to the step,  
gaze upward. The butt of his gun rings blunt  
against my head. I will stare at the star-shaped  
tiles with an open mouth. When he pulls the gun  
to my head, I will look, I will listen, I will smile.*

The kitchen door slaps. She will take her seat.

She will raise her knife and fork, and glance  
past an empty wine bottle at a friend's husband,  
who is watching her as before. She will smile,  
sterling silver mid-air, before slicing off one  
of the delicate tips of her steamed asparagus,  
as though she had gauged its entire weight.



**APPENDIX D**

## Bounty Broken Open IV

I don't know about you, but I've never had luck  
trying to figure out what happened after the fact.  
I wind up projecting onto the past that lies before,  
rather than letting the past rise up into the present.  
Once, after a tornado's sweep, I dwelt in bitterness  
for close to three years, searching for reasons why.  
When I stopped looking back for firm, set answers,  
and furrowed a site for building new foundations  
I never expected to uncover, at the center, the secret  
of forgetfulness, the unconscious ground of memory.  
I'd venture to say I am more anxious with the call,  
with what happens now, than I am with the then.  
Forbidden fruits make many jams. Another circus  
will only thicken the pot, forcing boils to surface.  
Give of something broken, offer cups spilling over.  
Seize the urge to turn back, to be taken in by the eye.

## Minstrel

The tenor tops a metal staircase,  
bellows after the black-face  
our vaudeville had painted me.

Earlier, he stood in the kitchen,  
one arm flailing ironically,  
the other hotboxing a joint.

His movement to high idle talk  
shrieked, repelled all silence,  
drew any thrust apart.

Now forty feet above me,  
I see the final mask emerge  
from under his flaming shirt.

When he lifts his hat, mangled  
tussle beneath, all tricks travel  
down his sleeve, trickle.

(cont., break)

Looking from matted red hair  
to tiger eye, I'm no longer straight  
in this end man duo;

before the maudlin dwarf  
and the W.H. Auden haircut  
send him off again,

he sings of naked difference,  
reaching any place he can.

## A Beautician's Cover

Pieces of fine brown hair fall to the floor.

I scramble for conversation, for words to ask  
of her daughter's father, for a response to explain  
the turn made away from man, and toward  
the unknown family who opened their home,  
after a child's birth marked time for her.

I imagine the worst. A rape. In a custodial closet  
or downstairs bathroom of the local high school.  
Fifteen, and beneath splintered wooden bleachers,  
she sought only a kiss from him, perhaps a caress,  
which groped into rending, ripping, and rupture.

The sound of feet on stairs pulled him from her.  
She cried then, spending her lunch curled into herself,  
hiding her torn body under warped planks.  
Would I rather she were in love with the wrong boy,  
to spare her from that day's guilt, and humiliation?

(cont., break)

Perhaps a church girl entangled in holy logic,  
whose parents pushed her to kneel before God,  
forcing absolution? I try to posit hunger  
in her fair skin, fingernails paired to the quick,  
her crushed petite body freely exposed in the mirror

each time she lifts to clip the tops of my hairs.

I watch crisp motions, the distance she maintains  
between her limbs and my own body, a thin black  
veil separating the skin of her arm from my neck,  
and I wonder how much she has ever desired;

she purses her white lips tightly with every snip.

## Unlikely Swervings

Enfolded in eddying southwest winds,

he disappears before I recognize him.

No arms or legs, he glides along the margin

of Highway 51. An orange flag flutters

from a pole planted in the chair's left side.

My rearview mirror catches one last glimpse

of his tobogganed head curled into the shoulder,

where controls for the motor chair are strapped

and run by a tongue that slips from his smile.

For my twenty minutes from school to country,

he will see hours, as long as it took the rabid dog,

who weeks earlier, headed in the same direction;

the same dog I found the next morning plastered

across the two-lane highway in front of my house.

I think of my journey home. I want to slow down.

But the dead animals ahead of me, ahead of him

keep flashing before my eyes, and I wonder

how he will maneuver around the coyote ahead,

along the side of the road we are both traveling.

When dusk descends upon both him and his flag,

(cont., no break)

and spring toads begin to jump from fields  
onto asphalt roads, will he be able to work  
fast enough to avoid smashing them, splitting  
their bodies in two, separating heads from legs?  
Miles past our meeting point in the landscape  
of the great prairie's meandering terrain, I worry  
he will turn into the same valley as the sick dog,  
stumble upon the hawk I took in just this afternoon,  
its feathers fluttering, wings stretching upward.  
His only companion in this marginal fast lane  
--the painted box turtle, the one budding roadkill  
I slow down enough to miss, even to save  
if I have the time to stop. But I've watched others  
push forward, and, in a rush to get ahead, crush  
the turtle's old shell beneath their bulky tires,  
then pass by with a grin, slender and sly,  
like the closed mandible of a camel cricket.



## Talk of Silence

Four months after her accident, my sister and I  
sit outside the shop on a side-street in German village,  
and I sip coffee, watch semi-trucks with large loads rattle by.

I look across the round table into her brown eyes  
and listen to the silence of her theory about souls.

“Some are as old as the Appalachians we grew up in.”

She seems serious, but we both laugh, and I wonder  
whether or not to test her memory, to mention our trips east,  
the long hours spent buried in one of the oldest mountain ranges.

Winding up and down roads, the land’s body pulled us deeper  
into the comfort of its folds, until suddenly we found ourselves  
on top of a peak looking down on scattered farms and fences.

To celebrate the discovery, she might roll down the window,  
thrust her face into the wind, or light a cigarette for us both,  
and report the findings, while I steady the wheel, eyes on the road.

(cont., break)

“New souls are less like mountains,” she continues,

“More like the unexpected turning of weather patterns.”

She reminds me of the recent tornados in Oklahoma.

Warm and cold fronts suddenly meet, and the contrast of pressures  
creates a temporary erection that rips across the face of the land,  
strips the surface below, tilling the soil into a ravaged lot.

High winds force uneasiness and fear onto a world which offers no place  
for the unexpected whirl. “I can always tell a new soul when I see one.”  
I see in her new eyes the foothills of the Appalachians.

The racket of an eighteen wheeler full of bulldozers gives pause  
before a renewed word on the subject, “We are all of the earth,”  
she reckons, “silent shining bodies, some other planet’s bright star.”

## Arriving Departure

After you left me, it didn't take long  
to find the sunny spot in the airport.

Let's forgo parables of departure,  
get to the heart of the matter: arrival.

The night before, we finished a puzzle,  
a thousand piece jigsaw of toy neon  
waterguns, like those you find in dimestore  
soda shops, alongside rubber bounce balls,  
simulated bow and feathered arrows.

We sewed seams of elemental shapes,  
found perfect fits between background pieces  
sprinkled with splashes of starry water,  
the night's residue. Dewdrops confused you,  
made the finishing touches difficult.

The last piece in place, you wanted to glue  
together our work, frame it, hang it  
in the bathroom, square left of the toilet.

Like the stream from a spigot, our puzzle  
makes room for the most slippery monuments.

(cont., break)

Before the sunny spot, it was a spot  
of coffee, a latté, not so good, but  
preferable to vague salt spots rubbed clean  
from my black knee-high boots, or to sore spots  
kneaded out of my neck, for five dollars.

In the sweeping wake of earnest faces,  
I sell my soul, and sympathize with wives  
and mothers who await the arrival of flight  
twelve-o-one, basic training recruits home  
for Christmas. Cameras capture moments  
of pride, relief that these boys do something,  
belief that something is good, for signs read  
“Welcome home Private Seagall, Private Payne,  
Private Davis. Hooray Private Duncan,  
Private Parrington, Private Halliday!”

In the cold swell of beautiful blond heads,  
smiles full of crooked teeth, steamy glasses,  
arms of faith, heavy atrium, the weight  
in each uniform overlooks its new lack.

I want to piece together this bawdy scene,  
know each private story, place each figure  
in its proper pantomime, then find where

(cont., no break)

one frayed edge slips into the next, discover  
the starting of this eager flood prepared  
to sweep us away, swiftly lift us out  
of whatever lie we live in, and make truth.  
To see past the blind contention of these  
mothers and lovers, fathers and soldiers,  
whose glances reveal the ease with which we  
deem absence an account for difference,  
and distance only a wrought diffidence,  
I open my ears to the diplomacy  
of the eternal listless check-in lines,  
look on as frantic security guards  
gaze down men's pants, as women flail and weep  
for the returned. I taste grains of a cup's  
bottom, savor the bitter aroma  
lingering long after the middle-aged  
couple sitting behind me stop struggling  
with how long it's taken to get this far.

Circus Clown

*Blessed are the forgetful: for they get over their stupidities, too.*

-Nietzsche

You think I am young.

Your loafered feet dangle, slap  
rough cadence on a metal desk.

The dull sound reverberates  
through a windowless room.

You ask me with a smirk,  
a half grin that spreads wide  
and thin across a pale face,  
not to manhandle your desire.

You think I do not grasp what  
you do not: that at any moment,  
it might devour or divine the lines  
of hierarchy, a flock of giggling  
hysterics, the parade of a traveling  
circus, elephant included.

(cont., break)

Such grand monuments  
mark its treacherous path.

You pause, take air, knock time  
once more against the empty desk,  
then look away, your shame so heavy  
that suddenly I have nothing to say.

You think I am young.

This is what the fixed will  
often think of those who renew.  
But we are all young, like  
the great Arbuckle Mountains.

## An Attentive Deacon

Covering over Germany's remains after World War II,  
retreating to a small midwest, land-locked cove in need  
of salvation, our pastor chooses profession with exactitude.  
By the time he raises four women and twelve grandchildren,  
we know he delivers his most important sermons not far  
from the garden, beneath a twelve-foot metal pole hoisting  
a wooden box for blue birds to deliver babies twice a year.  
On my way to the church office one morning, I find him  
mounted atop a ladder, poking his head inside the blue box.  
Outside the gate, I stop to ask if he should bother the nest,  
and he gestures my stop, then places a forefinger to mouth,  
signaling descent. Feet on the ground, he begins to gauge,  
with ease, my slight knowledge of birds. Stressing disparity  
of blue birds' bright red breasts and blue jays' bold crowns,  
the pastor speaks to me about the propriety of the blue bird:  
"They clean worms for the young, and only make their nests  
out of twigs. They never bring filth or rubbish into the box,"  
he continues, ignoring my original inquiry into nest-touching.  
"Now that old black crow over there, he'd never hurt this nest.  
His song's no hymn, has no rhythm, no refrain," he chuckles.

(cont., no break)



“Just sounds like he’s got a berry stuck in the back of his throat.  
But he won’t interfere with these birds’ house or feeding habits,  
like that old sparrow. The sparrow, he’s a whole other kind.”  
He pauses for a moment, while lowering a collection of twigs.  
Laughing, I shuffle stray leaves below me, pause to watch him  
ascend the ladder, while, over my shoulder, his wife stands  
at the kitchen window, her stiff finger pulling back its curtain.  
She hides behind red gingham. I turn my glance toward the sun  
to find a glimpse of hers. “Seen the same pair of birds deliver  
three sets of babies this year,” he says as the curtains fall back.  
I turn my attention to him, his weight pressed against the pole.  
“The sparrow feeds off the goodness of others. Steals worms  
out from under a blue bird’s nose, when he’s not watching.  
That slippery black fellow will pilfer the box, eat the babies,  
find a female to lay eggs of his own, there in that same nest.”  
At the aluminum post’s bottom, below the pastor held aloft,  
between legs of a ladder dug deep into the fresh moist soil,  
three broken blue bird eggs still drip fresh with yellow yolk.  
Not ten feet from garden’s edge, the barely discernible corpse  
of a sparrow, masked, harbored by a thin layer of white ash.  
Each step of the pastor’s slow decline keeps the silent speech.

## A Calling

The call must have caused a raging  
crawl of red-blood to run rampant.

After inquiry, he narrates  
the deliberation of the gesture;  
how the fatality cut off pressure  
from the skull when he slipped glasses  
off his face, onto a white sink;  
how he closed the shower door,  
laid towels beneath head;  
how he removed socks,  
rolled them into a ball, placed them  
under the butt of the rifle for leverage.

The twelve-page report cannot uncover  
a brother's fear when, on my way  
to the icebox, with six hot bottles of Bud,  
I pause to lift a leftover Polaroid  
from baskets full of Halloween candy.  
Caught between thumb and finger,  
the picture dangles before my eyes  
as I try to distinguish its forms.

(cont., no break)

A man, drunk perhaps, passed out  
in a hall, whose friends crippled him  
with black magic marker. But I find  
no eyes, no nose, only part of an upper lip.

A monster mask might explain nullification,  
erasing form from what is not face.

When the six pack drops, I turn to ask,  
but cannot wait for a response  
before I turn my gaze back again,  
for another glance, for a passage  
into this moment through the gaping hole  
he's put in his head, by way of his mouth,  
still half-open, teeth still tacked to gums,  
through his finger curled into itself, stiff,  
catching the baseboard peeled back  
from the white wall of the narrow hallway.

"Death calls always shake us up," he confesses.

"But around here, no one kills himself.

Uncles shoot fathers for violating lines.

Mostly, calls for the aged, who'd die anyway,  
in their homes, across beds, in rocking chairs,

(cont., no break)

just like the neighbor mom found,  
with that tight gray bun still nodding  
to the green glare of her Zenith TV.

Never fully clothed in a bathtub.”

Grooved white tiles dry as bone, moonlight  
beats black pavement. We drink warm beer,  
clean foam and broken glass from the floor.

Underneath, we want to scream

*—An accident? No. This man had every right to die.*

APPENDIX E

## Bounty Broken Open V

Towering the rock's mount, it is easier to believe  
the crevice between two boulders creates a shore  
opening out, like a river's spill into an ocean's gulf.  
Beneath the high rise of rock, water flows forward,  
down a slip of stone, easing into the earth's swell.  
Light preys on barren branches that shine bright  
with last evening's rain, morning dew, winter's ice.  
Slippery furrows gush with black specks of life,  
ready for the rush of stream ahead, carriage full.  
Deep in trees, still owls take cover, keep watch.  
Leaves conceal the ground, bury deep what speaks.  
Hidden paths emerge for the sake of music's chant.  
What masks, dwells in earth's rendering mantra.  
In the valley, mountains protect at the calling,  
which bounds out to ring back yet another song.  
Each lifted cup carries the opened work of making.

## Moonlight Sonnet

I look at you less than I'd like to now,  
opening up from white, like a flower.

Your stomach, like linens dried at night,  
rises from the earth into moonlight,  
billows ever forward to meet the wind.

Bathed in distant stars, your form streaks,  
bursting upward, a dash of silent red  
between sleek orange daylily petals.

In those brief hours that separate dusk  
from soil's receding arms beneath us,  
we recollect hymns sung to mandolin.

Half-closed eyes in shape of the crescent  
reflection against your skin, your descent  
rises from below, falls, rises again.

At the Bathhouse

I dog paddle, keep time  
to push ahead, gain ground,  
though my feet are off  
the ground, in the water.

I smell the fish they had  
for dinner, just before I reach  
the end of the lane—too strong  
for tilapia. Perhaps roughly.

More present than the scent  
released from floating bodies  
and back into the water,  
from where it arose,

are fluttering tongues I understand  
without knowing the language.

They are teaching a child  
how to swim.

(cont., break)



Their voices ripple across  
the surface, ring out into the space  
where we all come for air,  
blue, breath in thick water.

Sound is constant, brings comfort,  
even laughter, as the girl  
kicks her legs, flaps her arms,  
finds her own way to be here.

She will not remember,  
three years earlier, finding  
a way out of this immersion,  
lungs full of water,

she gasped for air, the shock  
of a new world almost too much  
to bear, until the sound  
of her voice billowed release.

Now she cries with delight,  
struggles to be free

(cont., no break)

of the hold her parents  
seem willing to relinquish.

Water rushes into her ears,  
threatens to swallow her back,  
draw her under, again,  
into the silence of self.

Voice keeps her afloat,  
the undistinguishable words  
keep coming, and fear  
shapes into strife.

When her wrist slips loose  
from fingers, she forgets  
where she is, moves freely,  
in no time, out into the deep.

## Going to Staves

It winds away from itself in its turning.

It caves into itself through new growth.

If a house goes here, planks splinter,  
turning slivers of wood away from nail,  
cracking them beneath the sun's heat.

Then, when it rains for too long,  
the wood blisters, and rots away.

Lathes of a cask turn toward it if,  
in their steadfastness, they give way  
by the marbled corn crushed inside  
the swollen staffs bound tight  
by strapping metal rings.

Turning there one fall, the piano sat  
unplayed in grandma's garden shed.

Our parlor floor had gone to staves,  
and didn't return until late winter,  
when vines began to climb pallid keys.

(cont., break)

Returning to it might take years,  
but if a wet spring draws tomatoes  
back under, distended fruits,  
neither devoured nor divined  
in their taking, fall to the ground.

From it, we pull new boards, even nails,  
lost keys to be played, again and again.

Pocket Full of Posy

You see ties fly up in the wind.  
An eighteenth-century plague,  
with choking soot, snows the city.  
A light grey film covers the lens  
through which we watch a leaf,  
trapped in mid-air by a spider's  
deserted web, spin with the smog.  
Below, plywood gurneys bring forth  
broken marble slabs. Bones mingle  
with stone, remembering catacombs  
beneath Paris streets, large cavities  
where decomposing bodies ridden  
with disease wafted mellow apples,  
the caves from which the boulders  
of the city's rise were quarried.  
Thousands of dead are recollected.  
Rumors of war spread as refugees  
blessed by ash roam the rubble.  
Memos dance down dark alleys,  
flirt with the tops of cathedrals

(cont., no break)

where pigeons rest between flights.

Cracks in the foundation spread

new charges, ripe to explode.

Stretches of street shine, red-slick.

A beginning, the origin of birth

pains, seems more than we can bear.

\*

She tells me again, of aunt Dorothy --

taken to the bus stop by brothers,

seen aboard, thought to be destined

for Binghamton to tend their parents.

Dorothy's hand changed her course,

as her brother's changed his, when

a missed ship to Germany delayed

his landing close to twenty days.

"Most of the men aboard that ship

were killed within hours of arrival,"

my grandma recalls. He landed

just in time to clean up remains,

to empty camps, grant holy

(cont., no break)

freedom among fallen wreck,  
bless them with his prayers.  
His sister got off the bus in Vinco,  
not ten miles after her own departure,  
and eloped with Uncle Harold.  
She never made it to New York.  
Her arrival there may have meant  
a life of loneliness, a song of liberty.  
Her parents waited. Fifty years later,  
she used her inheritance to conduct  
a virgin-like wedding, with fresh  
ceremonial trim, her step down  
off the bus not enough.

\*

We cannot lose our site for growth,  
here in midst of new scattered ruins.  
There's need in sweltering sewers  
for your presence, for green fungus  
to grow on bone. When overcome  
by the birch's immense root system,

(cont., no break)

we choke saplings, which take root  
far from branches, shrouding cloaks  
of shine and rain, where fool's  
parsley blooms in compost,  
raises green clusters, reaches again  
toward fair sky. The sown teeth  
of a splinter-twisted dragon breach,  
give rise to grove-fresh vintages.  
Charm the sleepless hydra, abandon  
to it, through its own starry scales.  
Reach into the rings, ringing out  
in winding wood. Celebrate new  
growth from the very branches  
shutting light from fallen seeds.  
Amid the wood rises a thicket.  
Among the thicket? A clearing.  
We turn to cut back forsythia,  
returning buds to staves. Cries  
sound until, laughing, we fall.



Maidens of Bounty

*I only harvest some.*

--Neil Young

Born of the dawn, we fill our baskets with bounty.

We lay down our skirts, and the woodpeckers gather.

Resting before streams, water washes over us.

Deep in the forest, owls keep watch of dreams, wakings.

In the harvest, find the fullest cup, swallow hard;

allow the drawn pleats to protect, cover the eyes.

What lies to be seen endangers, engenders us.

Winds of evening song shield ears fearful of voices.

The mantra rises, falls, climbs to surface again.

Each note nears silence, brings to bear the night's middle.

Reaching toward center, we know of nothing to grasp.

In the still of dark, we long for fresh cut grass.

(cont., break)

Midnight tears from us tears, which fall out in great folds,  
around ankles, knees, thighs, forms splayed free of all bonds.

Our tongues reach to taste and savor lickings of salt.

From under the valley, beneath the mountain come cries.

Our sarongs are no cave, no haven, grave forgotten.

And behind them no secrets to expose, be forgiven.

We know what we give, offer free without blinking.

A moment to celebrate, to ring out in the darkness,

to laugh, bring our dance, leave our bodies to wander,

to recall, forget of the world outside shackles,

to bind and to free us from the gift we are given:

a meadow, a sky, endless cups running over.

## Making Room

Turtles climb onto logs, fall off  
when we approach, all but one  
who stays on to take in the flash  
of trees parted to glimpse his long  
stretch toward tepid morning sun.

You point through the gap,  
making sense of the urge  
to sit in the warmth and digest,  
then disperse when proximity  
opens the distance between us.

Off to the side, a male duck  
struggles to mount his mate,  
grasps with his beak her neck  
reared back. He turns her glance  
forward to ripples of turtles' dives.

Along with the blossoming redbuds,  
I sway, keep time with the wind,  
lean into its fragrant offerings,

(cont., no break)

diverge from the edge of trees,  
and step into the new opening.

The pause we take along this path  
disrupts the life of the lake,  
complicates the loss silence offers,  
asks the frightened turtles to return  
to their points of departure.

For a moment, we slip into the water  
with them, immersed in the rush  
of cool skin. Arms drape shoulders.  
I feel you sink below me,  
your straddle even with my stance.

## Postcard for Grandma

I sure do appreciate that box of clothes you sent.  
I've been wearing the housedresses around since  
I got out of the hospital. They help me think  
of times we watched roses grow from ravage.  
When I'm wearing your polyester-cotton blends,  
I smell coffee grounds & toast, feel old Missy,  
her back arched, rubbing against my stockings,  
see those miniature juice glasses full of kool-aid,  
& grandpa's swift walk home from the post office  
for lunch. He must have looked forward every  
day to seeing you, at the end of his letter shifting,  
dressed in these dusters. I see so much of grandpa  
in Bink. You know, we plan to get married, over  
Christmas. Never been so sure of a driven love.

## Requiem Mistress

From the top riser I watch her run a rosined bow  
across the stretched strings of her mahogany violin.

We'll stop several more times during the rehearsal,  
again, to tune the symphony, to bring the winds  
and horns into the cleared sweep of resonance,  
and the singers, too, if they are ready, eyes open,  
ears prepared to hear and recall, to hearken and herald,  
stumbling upon the arrival that knows no restraint.

She rings out from center, bellow of the whale's bowel,  
stands tall without notice, curve of her back to the rest,  
slices into the sated air, stroking the tone, her ear wed  
to the hollowed satin wood's fill and release, her breast  
and elbow rising in time with each stress of the strings.

Even maestro looks to the ground, steps off the podium,  
freely mingles with the vibrating hustle of forty to one,  
and with eyebrows raised finds direction for pointing  
hundreds of voices along the steady swell of her bow.

From silence, twining into cat gut wound tight with steel,  
couched in brass trunks, grasping taut timpani's leather,  
sound lifts script, a fatal score, busy with the scrambling,

(cont., no break)

pressed black into white, raised by an eye of difference—  
when to breathe, to release, when to sway and to hold,  
to press into the next space, think forward, past notes,  
to sight along the coming rhythm, the inevitable lunge  
of previous measures, pouring, praying across the page,  
striding and smudging ahead into runs, rests, and ruins,  
so that when one arrives, another slips through the staves,  
the veiled drape of passing--the tributary of life's reprieve.

VITA

#2

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