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“THE HUNT, THE FLIGHT”

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ABSTRACT

Abrupt and heated, the alternation between rigid control and Dionysian emotional fracture defines the poetry I attempt to write. Establish a recognizable pattern, and then disrupt it. Speak with authority, but make the experience *real* by revealing, at a key juncture, the agitated, churning undercurrent of the psyche. Similarly, a poet's musical skillfulness means more than his or her ability to establish a measure or to set vowels and consonants ringing against each other. Sometimes music comes from such patterning of sounds, but sometimes it comes from an intentional starkness. Music can derive, too, from the shifting of tones, from the pacing of associational leaps, or from the perfect timing of statements. Whatever its source, music always affects the more explicit meanings of a poem. The sounds of poems produce their own images, and have their own animal alertness. Reading a poem whose music is fully alive, you not only witness but feel the twists and turns of a consciousness in action. This close interplay between authorial intent and textual effect, as well as the ability to fine-tune diction, music, rhetoric, and image, constitute the focus of this thesis in poetry.

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Parable of the Geese

How many times have I seen it happen,
observed the signs as they pass
in the *V* of an ideogram overhead?

Under an autumn sun the river
mirrors a clear sky. Here, toward
the world's end, in the bare beginnings

of winter, feed more than fifty geese –
but far before I finish counting, all
suddenly mount and scatter, wheeling

in great rings. And my heart aches
as I watch them, unwearied still, heading
away again through clear blue air. All winter,

I will dream of them. Among what far rushes
will they build? Whose eyes, at which distant shore,
will they delight? A single one

remains in the water, folding and unfolding
like a geisha's fan the cobalt of his wing –
so I extend my hand

in propitiation, as in payment, dropping
gold seeds into the foam,
until he rises in a surge of blue,

water snapping open beneath him,
and with a rough cry I could never imitate
swings back over the river, following his kin.

In The Kingdom of Childhood

Night cinders turn
to morning's branching sticks
of orange and gold. Overhead,
meadowlarks trill like wind-
chimes, their young, eager
bodies like commotions
of Chinese silk as they ease
into their wings' limits, as they rise
on currents of wind. In this kingdom,
brambles bend and scrape
my naked arms.
Creeks gambol around the wise and mossy
trunks of grandfather trees: there,
amazement of bright mica in water;
here, my tongue touches its clear
running surface like flame. Soon,
I'll live somewhere else. But now,
I have the dark bells
of the leaves, the birds –
this house of the world.

Moths

In spring, I watch snow
drifts of moths float in the dark
wood like thistles, falling to the white

lace of mushrooms under the oaks.
Sometimes at dusk,
moths glow like little silver candles,

lighting a way to hazy
lamb-lipped moccasin flowers.
The moths crawl inside

the blossoms and sleep in halls
of honey – pink lobes, holy
ground, a transept of petals.

Fisherwoman

On the porch, my every breath
hesitates, slow as the walk
of the white herons I once watched
striding through the marshes.
June beetles flutter in the cattails, and I
remember standing on the riverbank,
casting and reeling the fishing line.
I'd watch my bobber
duck and resurface, snapping the line
a quick jerk
every once in a while.

Now my nets and tackle boxes hang
in the empty horse barn,
my arms arthritic, thin
as a dark twig.
From this place I see the marsh.
I hear the water splash
from brown-scaled, leaping bass
that I no longer try to catch. Maybe
tonight, with moon rising
over the water's unmoving glass,
I will catch a last glimpse of a heron –
maybe with a silverfish, wriggling and sleek,
hanging wet from her beak.

The Cricket's Song

The cricket on the kitchen floor
seeks by instinct

the thicket of carpet below the stove.
Every morning he builds

rapport with that thrumming god
from which, night and day, emanates his

most cherished benediction. Evenings,
the happy cricket sings.

Not once has he failed to find a crumb
or seed between the floorboards. Thus,

the cricket learns faith. He evolves
his idea entirely of what the world provides,

of what tomorrow will bring. He thinks:
how happy I am in this empty room!

Here I am in my black coat, solitary and warm!
Then, from his dark thighs, he strums a little song.

Hunt and Flight

At dawn my dogs
scream at the dark deer

just paces ahead of them,
lunging through toothed leaves

and bruise-blue stems.
A narrow creek down the gorge

roils in its bondage,
white with turbulence, rushing

over the sharp stones, its voice
roaring through trees.

At the bank the deer plunges in,
foams for the distant shore

and the dogs, panting,
toss themselves down

to dry earth. Soon they'll return
to me, tongues lolling, full

of their old natures.
Now, sunlight and shadow chase

each other across the landscape.
I ask those fierce tawny bodies

that love to surge and hunt
to kneel, obedient and silent, at my side.

Ritual Hunt on the Discovery Channel

Its vaulted head rears up, blue
as a bird's wing, mouth hooked. It lunges,
and all the men see twists into a surge
and grind of water. Its body

swirls below; line they refuse to cut
slants from the stern, sweeps down
to strategic muscles, wave-finished fins.

Savage or desperate, the shark plunges
below the dark surface, rushes again
and again for the open sea until exhaustion
strips it and they haul it in,
pink bubbles pouring from its mouth.

Hours pass, the camera pans.
From the mast, the shark
hangs, blue, staring blindly.
The men raise their red mallets,
press together for a last photograph.

July

When the faces of early corn
grow old silk beards
that rustle in the dark, Grandpa sways

at the edge of the field, drunk, parting
stalks with the butt of his rifle,
scanning the stand of crop for eyes,

flashlight sweeping to catch
a silver luster – the tell-tale sign
of deer. He'll poach a fawn

and drag it back, trailing gore,
to the empty barn, split it open,
twine its feet to a roof-beam, leaving

me, at dawn, to marvel
at a hot, red sunrise.

Grandfather Dreams of Shooting Bats

When the fresh dark
of a July night clots and coheres
like sap, on a peeling
picket fencerow, downing Wild Turkey,
the barrel of a shotgun
propped against his side, he leans.
Tight-coiled with a hunger
to see bodies drop
from the sky, he longs
to fire on the bats
as they quit roost
in the sycamore trees.
He riddles their forms with buckshot
and howls in a voice
roughened by whiskey
as they tumble down
to hip-deep stalks of July corn.
He fumbles with the cartridges,
cussing when they won't slide
into the firing chamber.
Before those last ringing
echoes cease,
a black thunderhead bursts
from the still-swaying branches,
a thousand beating wings
punching holes through the stars.

Grösse Fugue

The violinist with the arrogant handsome face
strikes the strings of his instrument like shards
of flint, as though to draw sparks. Pink tiles glint

like bent plates of blood above
our heads as we watch the shadows
and amber bars of light alternate

across the hardwood stage, as we sit at the feet
of the string quartet on a winter night –
my grandfather given a few hours

to forget the tumors swelling
beneath his flesh, which he has asked
me to feel. From the floor,

echoing shrieks and shudders lance down,
the candle-scent air roiling with screeches
and pine, pearwood and flesh, the violin

bows like sword-tips in the January air.
Fevered notes crash like glass
on macadam – and when the Grösse Fugue is all

around us, above and below us, inside of us,
filling us, I can hear the keening and scathing
dirge of my grandfather's genes, the family

genes I share, scraping and twisting against each other,
echoing the rondo's climax. His narrow
yellow body slackens in the chair, like one

of Christ's saints, naked in a gilded
painting, all ribs and knees
and hollow-lidded eyes.

Muskellunge

As we've done a hundred times, we cast
fishing line to lake, grandfather, grandson
watching the sun-bleached beauty of the ships
pitch like Greek triremes across the waves,

water like a sheet of beaten tin,
pines on the far shore stating their dark shapes.
Your long grandee face in the light of the sun
turns the color of flame – a pensive hand

on your beard, your tapered eyes stare into light,
your reflection swims among minnows. You return
to a memory I recognize, as though we
had been children together.

Forty years past, you flung a ten-inch lure
strung long with treble hooks, the barbed tips meant
for lip and gill, crackling and crisp with blood.
Prescient, oracle-like, you knew the prize

waited, its strategic muscles surged
and plunged in fierce runs, violent headshakes –
and you caught it, the muskellunge,
the fish of ten thousand casts.

In his face you saw a venerable
old king, scarred, his scales iron breastplates.
Elusive beast, tall tale, fishing story of a thousand
North American lakes, you hooked it and warred

to bring its gleaming five-foot length to shore,
bloody prize, well-gaffed. The sweeping curve
of its imperious jaw held the armature
of your hooks like a quiver, and you looked

on it the way a lord looks from on high,
from a narrow window. Old king who will
not catch another, your mouth curves
like a yeoman's bow with ecstasy.

Need

When the woods above my house
fold back to glass,
when the maples silver, branches singing, when
all night the snow falls, then, warily,
the fox leaves the skirts of the trees,
a flame on the unrelieved landscape.
A rabbit hangs from its teeth.

Whoever said nature was kind?
Once, in a distant city colder than these woods,
I saw a boy with a beaten face
begging in the streets.
Birds fluttered everywhere,
jewel-bright in manicured shrubs;
scraps of yellowed newspaper
and smeared magazines blew past him
down alleyways, where the subway's
roar muted the solitary
flutist playing on the streetcorner.

I don't blame that fox,
and if a bird had come to rest
on that pitiful boy's arm, he would have done
what anyone would – satisfied the animal
hunger that lives in all of us, tearing
feathers apart, burying its body in his own.

Persephone Likes Bad Boys

To speak plainly, I was bored as hell
by my mother. I never saw meadows
without daisies, I sang maidenly
naïve songs of her beauty and fecundity.

She, with the turbulence
to shatter continents or set oceans on fire,
instead daubs the landscape blue with heliotrope,

a child smearing paint on construction paper,
and settles for an ornamental daughter,
one wed to the village idiot with black teeth.

I know that this earth is run
by mothers, but understand that I'm
a girl no longer. For centuries, scholars
will paw at my narrative, dispute

the exigencies of the virgin. Was I drugged?
Did I cooperate? Was I violated,
as happens so often now to
modern girls? What I know: I knelt

at my mother's heel, ready
for release, until the trapdoor slid open.

Nobody pushed, nobody pulled.
I wanted to live in hell.
I nose-dived through lightless caverns,

heard the train-howl of tornadoes
until I fell into his chariot, onto his lap.
He drove that chariot down and snapped
the long reins near my face. He did not
give me roses. He did not speak of birds.

On earth, it snows. The bitter wind states
that I am having sex in hell, lying
alongside Hades, in his bed, fingers
hooked in one another.

I do not know what winter is, only
that I'm its cause. When I return,
smeared red with pomegranate juice,
I follow in my mother's wake. I fling
flytrap and nettle, ground glass and nightshade at her feet.

I screw my tongue to the roof
of my mouth, wait for November.

No Release

- After Hernan Bas' *Apollo with Daphne as a Boy*

Why should he wish to escape
at all, pearled skin and frozen

delicate face that conjures both boy
and girl – androgynous, he's poised

between his next-to-last and last breaths,
but there's no paralysis

in the limbs, no bark graveling over
the concave chest, no face

lost in canopy. Feet so swift
a moment ago stick fast in slow-

growing roots. It always stuns me
when I see it, the weight and heft of lust,

and yet I remember it—every cell of his
body my cheek our lips engorging and

scraping, my hands and feet going numb, I
try not to moan, unspooling slowly

over the arc of the pool—
Now Apollo, in the painting, blond torso

jutting pond murk, strains
to haul his lover back; I've mistaken

the arousal glistening
in the sweat for trepidation

so I conceive of my love all night, imagine
the enormous gold palms

on me, his touch light as an insect's –

chapped drag of a monarch's tongue:

swollen, I will walk for days like someone
carrying something brim-full, the liquid

jostling, thick, at the edge of the glass.

The Atherton Hotel

We lay on the four-poster bed,
legs tangled together like horses' legs,
feet brushing up against the dark
footboard carved with flowers
and trailing vines.
All night, below those wooden
ivy leaves, I watched the slow
mystery of your cock rise up, delicate
as a telescope, or Pan's horns.
Our arms weave together
like snow geese, white as milk.
Below rolling hills, pines blur
with smoke as our tongues
untangle. I will leave with you
still sleeping in morning light
the way the ballerina on the nightstand
leaves her music box – gowned pistil
pushing from a flower's mouth,
twisting and rising, unbreaking her
notched spine, lips resinous with pollen.

Cripple at the Station

What was he thinking, seated quietly,
saddled with flesh: pale boy
dressed in black, two silver
studs in his nose, tattoo crawling
from his collar. His legs were cut off
at the knee, loose folds of cloth
pinned in his wheelchair.
I loved him. I wanted him to walk.
I wanted to walk with him through that autumn –
embracing, sunlight flashing
off our naked arms in the city,
along the tracks where trains no longer stop.

I wished so powerfully I had to speak,
for doesn't everyone need to feel
the beloved body? Lodestone. Polestar.
I yearned for the soft breathing.
I am alive.

I almost pressed him to stand
and would have understood the anguish
on his face as part of the effort it took to rise.
I could no more accept what I saw
than he could heal himself.

Amphetamine Love Song

High on birdsong and Adderall,
with July light pressing
through the screen, I'm wide
awake at five, a wood thrush's
first tinny notes spilling
downhill in the swift air.
My muscles writhe like downed
electrical wire, syncopate the bird's
music as all along the east ridge
maples luminesce with dawn:
their bodies glow, I can see again,
I tremble at the bird's complex,
wild song. Below my palms,
grain patterns on the heartwood sill
vibrate to treble clef and glissando.
Now I gape at the slow
elegant curve of the sun
rising from timberline.
I almost see the bird's
scarlet heart hanging in its side.

Queer

Will spanish jasmine bloom colors
of silver tequila? Will I find my car keys

drunk and swerve away at three?
I dream of amphetamines.

Hot nights keep my bedroom window open.
Outside magnolias blossom and I'm still

the fuckup that hits the streets
like a prostitute. What makes me tick?

Each night I tie fifty dollars
to my thigh and get gored

by the circus of my desire. Men
fumble above me like elephants and I give

it up. But when I wake I take my body
outside into evening light and sing.

The Brazen Serpent

'And the LORD said unto Moses: 'Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he seeth it, shall live.'

Metallurgic weight on a crooked tree,
our antidote hangs high, fangs hid
somewhere in the grin and grotto
of its bronze mouth; beneath, we

stumble from tents to desert,
to the snake-plain where the last
gleaming asps pour into their dark dens,
disappear. Thorn bushes clench

shed scales. This desert swallows
our complaints like dust, while
wind-driven sand scouring rock
returns us to the marathon of bites.

We crawl on our hands
and knees to the bronze
effigy, remembering the hiss of roped
bodies rolling over us, as we slept.

October

Tonight I watch you ride alone
through fields of crackling white grass.
You bury your hands in the horse's mane –
it gives what I can't, and you leave

me guessing what lies behind
your silence. Now, the pitted edges
of farm equipment jut the gloom.
Threshers rust in the dark, a toothed
moon flickers over dry pines.

Across the field, the woman
you married last August leans
from a window ledge. Even
at this distance I see her. *Look at my face,*
I want to say to you, *hold it near*
to yours and see a mirror.

I hear the frozen ground snap as you go.
Gathered moonlight pools in my throat like flame.

Ashland Drive

You leave a bonfire party in the woods tunnel-
vision-drunk, swerving your father's
F-150 between the white
lines at 2:00 a.m. Narrow road –
all sharp turns and drops through dark trees.

You don't see them until they gaze up,
translucent discs for eyes
like full moons in front of you.

When you rip the wheel and pound both feet
on the brakes the trajectory flings you
into a patch of sumac and teasle. Glass
on your lap, blood from a broken
nose soaks your shirt. Deer hair drifts like dust.

Somehow you wrench yourself
from the busted driver's side window
and stagger out, the truck
still running, headlights flooding the trees.

A doe lies on the roadside, spinning
in circles; her front legs
thrash through gravel –
a repeated, high-pitched shriek.
You watch until she stops moving.

What sticks with you:
dragging her body to a ditch;
scars the slivers of glass make;
the wreckage you leave behind.

Elegy

There will come a moment, driving
through July's mist on Wopsononock

when you see the red berries of the mountain
growing wild at the site where fathers

and mothers driving home from the steel
mill veer off, lost every year.

It will grieve you that the dead
can't see the bright orbs of fruit, glowing

like sparks just beyond their reach, and you slow
to watch a doe's passage, her hooves

crunching in the tangled field of shattered glass
and wreckage, delicate neck reaching like a Doric column –

You tell yourself that the soul won't need
any pleasures, no berries, no fragrant juice spilling

from stained lips; you think that not existing
may simply be enough. Eventually the doe goes,

disappearing into the wood's tangled reach,
the leaves breathing heat. Difficult to imagine,

but you too go on with life: appointments
and grocery stores, scrawled notes

and telephone numbers. The soul finds solace,
or else it just forgets. But all summer,

red berries on the mountain spread like ashes.

Forest Solipsism

This garden-forest admires me. For my
sake it paints itself with wet pigment,
ecstatic red and azure of wild irises –
just so I'll bring my love affairs here. These
curving pussy willows, watch how their dark
profiles shape green tents of private silence.

But I need something more, with my body
here below the needled, searching fingers
of northern spruce. I am sick of this world
that lets the outer disguise the inner,
that lets the big-eyed hunter fall in love
with his own reflection in the gleaming pool.
I confess right now that it is terrible
to be like this, beyond all harm.

Morning Poem

Every morning, as I start
to eat, I hear low voices

caught between mouthfuls, men
and women on the news, talking –

another country, another world,

one I've never been to, but my body
registers truth. Bullets arc through clear skies,

mortars turn neighborhoods to rubble
before the photograph changes.

A blue morning in September, people leap
from the burning floors, higher,

lower, loose coins and keys
tumbling from their pockets.

Men raise guns and children labor in the fields,

cargo ships abandon harbor with holds
overflowing with fruit.

Those analytical voices all run together
until I taste them, ash in the pulp.

Later, in the kitchen, grapefruit rinds flung
in the garbage become ripped-out tongues.

Attending Emily Dickinson

She rests in white, expectant
as a bride. I watch

a hot sky through the pane;
she traces movement through

the slanting light, the ribbon of my tongue
an eyelash floating in her stare.

Almost there, she fixes my eyes with her own.
Does she hear me calling still?

Peonies with wax petals
sway on the window ledge.

Polished snouts of shoes
peek from an open armoire.

On his silver cross, her suitor
dangles from the yellow walls.

I climb until I reach her chin
and kneel before the altar of her lips.

I interpose; she doesn't look away.
We leave together through the open pane.

The Egyptian Gallery

In the museum's desert
stand the hot conical tombs
full of mummified flesh
and bones, and the little wooden boats
on which the dead
sail uselessly, in no direction.
Osiris, Set, Isis, Sekhmet – they've changed
since reigning over temples on the Nile.

What can you expect from gods
with beast heads? The ones later
fared no better: give me riches, destroy
my enemies, the story's the same.
Some preferred slaughter and others full
granaries; some promised childbearing, worked
solar eclipses and seasonal floods.
After a few millennia, all rub shoulders
in the same museum, composed
of stone and wishful thinking.

Brother's Addiction

You couldn't pull your gaze away.
The way your head lolls on sloped
shoulders resembles a young stag,
one with a too-heavy rack of antlers,
your angular face blank and ruminant,
your fur dark as blood-colored wine.
The sweeping branch of each archaic tine
forks, like a model of your brain, pronged
and erratic.

In this dark room in front of the fire,
I count the track marks that dot your arms
like henna dye, and think to the old myths –
Actaeon the hunter coming upon Artemis
bathing naked in the pool, her gleaming
wetness, limbs smooth. He couldn't pull
his gaze away, and for daring to glimpse
a goddess unawares, she changed him to a stag,
and his own hounds mauled him.

You share, with Actaeon, an inability
to shift your gaze from what you shouldn't see.
I watch the way you plunge away, a stag
leaping from precipice into tangled woods,
fleeing. The dogs' teeth snap
at your delicate grooved feet.
Your limbs bend slowly on the sofa
as you twist in agitated unrest,
as below the rack of caribou horns
mounted on the wall, hypodermics
glimmer in the firelight like hunter's arrows.

The Sun Speaks to Icarus

Little soul, little one naked save
for the wax and feathers glued
to your Cretian shoulders, do now as I bid
and climb up these clear stairs
of sky. I gave all you needed –

earth blanket, bed of blue air,
the narcissistic bent that makes your life
different than others – but you have
no place in my house.

Do you suppose I care
that you consider yourself better
than those below, the Aegean sailors gazing
upward, awestruck, in their little triremes?
I expected better, I confess – your hubris catches

in my throat like ash, I see
your arms strain as you soar
through acres of light. But I
foresaw this. Do you think a few tears,
or the sweat on your face upset me?

Risen from the earth
in your flush of feathers,
you will breathe heat and fall
to the heaving, grinding sea.
It's right that you should drown.

Sisyphus and Saturn: Guest Lecturers

Most days I feel keenly
 that I shouldn't be trusted, that far
 from being the psychiatrist
 I'm the head-case, full of scorn
 for myself, for what I do. Outside,

pink and blue azaleas are in full bloom.
 Students bear light books at their hips, flit
 past the proper wrought-iron gate, its spear
 tips glittering, the blood-red bricks
 of an arch above their heads. I wish

to speak to the dark-haired pupil
 with his hand raised, with his hungry,
 pretty face, to say something that matters.
 I lecture on the Ephyran king punished
 for his chronic deceit: always straining, futile,

pushing the stone, weeping in hell.
 I tell him of an existence made meaningless
 by rote repetition, and hate myself for it;
 as a child, I learned whatever revealed
 weakness deserved to be devoured.

Hunting in the forest, following the tracks of deer,
 I found what I was always pursuing –
 the trigger snapped and the doe careened
 though the woods, its wound larger than a tangerine.
 I felt a contentedness in those moments – the natural

order of things had played out. Leaning on the podium,
 observing the white-rimmed eyes rolling
 bored in their sockets, I want to eat them all, to crush
 their torsos between my jaws, crunch the bones
 like crab shells, the crackling feet like fish. I want
 the genitals to melt on my tongue like caviar,
 to take all that life into my mouth.

Divas, 1717

In the Santa Maria Nuova hospital, in Florence,
the production line gelded eight boys
each day. As the spring warmed, woman
admirers collected peonies, gathered them
and showered the boys.
Someone was always leaning
over them, gathering by the handful.

The real flowers, the boys'
bodies, grew white with wounds more brilliant
than Phoenician purples. *Long live the knife,*
the blessed knife! unrequited lovers
of the opera would shout. And the castrati
came on stage like drag queens in whirled
chiffon, striking their weary poses.
Courtiers snapped fans open in the audience,
and the singers' calls soared like sirens.

I suppose they needed their Iphegenia,
the girl sacrificed to fill the Greek sails
with wind like song,
and the boys, never rescued,
lived their lives a public spectacle.

Ars Poetica on Route 53

Late autumn fluttered yellow and orange along
a stretch highway just past Fallentimber

as I grappled with countless metal parts,
working to coax my father's Fairlane wagon

back to life: pistons and gears, black
socket sets, Allen wrenches, the morning

numbing my hands as I fumbled with a butterfly
valve on the Interstate – I stabbed pencil

stub down its throat, unhitched the bolts
holding the air filter, pried open the wing-

nut cemented in years of rust. Coal trucks kicked
twisters of snow on the tarmac, whirling

before drifting down like thistles or breadcrumbs,
and deep amid trees wet-black and snow-glazed,

a film of ice glimmered on a November lake;
deep below, I imagined water churning

the way brake fluid must eddy in the dark chambers
of the master cylinder, orbital, lubricious.

Sometimes the tangled valves and lines
of thoughts coalesce, become the one resonant note

thrumming in an engine's black chest –
sometimes the exact ridges of white hills

beyond a windshield grow in significance,
and you rush off at double the speed limit.

ACADEMIC VITA

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Education

The Pennsylvania State University	May 2014
B.A., English (Creative Writing, Literary and Cultural Studies)	
M.A., English	

Association Memberships/Activities

Schreyer Honors College	2009-2014
English Graduate Organization	2013-
2014	
Volunteer as an educator at the Altoona, Pennsylvania G.R.E Center	2010-
2011	

Professional Experience

College of the Liberal Arts	2011
Graduate Instructor in English	2013-
2014	