This Great Filter

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THIS GREAT FILTER

A Thesis Presented

by

JOHN SIERACKI

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2017

M.F.A. Program for Poets and Writers
THIS GREAT FILTER

A Thesis Presented

by

JOHN PETER SIERACKI

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many people to thank for my evolution as a writer over these years, most notably Dara Wier and David Feinstein, and also Joe Massey, Peter Gizzi, Jim Tate, Jim Haug, Ish Klein, Andy McAlpine, Alex Scalfano, Delia Pless, Wilson Yerxa, my partner Rhonda Cobham-Sander, my son Sebastian, my parents and many other family members, friends, colleagues, and muses.
ABSTRACT

THIS GREAT FILTER

MAY 2017

JOHN SIERACKI, B.A., UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
M.F.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Dara Wier

A collection of poems.
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FALSE VACUUM
Action Alert

Use this poem to turn your company into an engine for planetary change as a proud sponsor of public radio. Reverse the tilting and right the rain. Implement the impossible dream. For as the lollypop gang so rightly sang to wendy, you’ll be history and just a little note of history pitched at the right angle, even slightly off is enough to hear when you’re far enough away, for instance the Australian youth are leading the way to a brighter tomorrow something like that is gold when you’re on your galactic paradise cruise sipping nectars scanning this unique sequence to summon death from the skies using it also to form a hammer of the mind, to erect barricades.
The yellow on my face
I know is there.
It’s on the faces
of all the cormorants.
Through the Screen

shell structure
binds a white sky

branches flirt
with infinity

with winter

a witch works
the thaw

the lifeless stream
over stones

vines stalled in
their strangling

cats fixate on
little stirrings

a formula sets
into definition

twitching deities
Sheer

Curtains blind
me to snow-
covered pines.
Their shadows blur
with white sky.

Tinge of blue
almost blue
interdict this
hazy game
of melting.

Hiding hawk blows down
plastic bag of road trip trash
falling for
rodents.

Shadow of long-
horned beetle husk
clinging
between us.

Window remind
me of your
shape.
Lunacy

You there, with your face lit from a thousand miles by a strange star, one hand tapping the windshield of a silver chevy metaphor I built out of this chair — why so quiet today?

The solar winds cannot penetrate you. Your eyes are stone in the endless rapid, unblinking in the blistering arctic of eternity.

Yet down here in the hills the lost kick blindly through xylem and root and the lonely flower in your midnight.

Pretend I’m your son, too much in the sun dear moon, and I’m driving away down the dark hallways of outer space, out your front door, a nova you won’t see for a thousand years.
One Day

When our sweaters run dry and clouds shake the strings and oceans tangle

we will read our old meaning of the word one and shame ourselves.

We’ll go to the fair lick comestibles stare out spectacles and jump the senses

when we cast about for anything that resembles what once was day.
Accretive

Nobody talks out here.

I enjoy life so much
I’m almost not ashamed.

Chiding myself, I hear it all
the time: Live in the present.

But the past presents an infinite
number of moments. And the future,
well you can make up any moment
you like. For me there is no present.

For science either. None of you
have any clue what infinity means.
For example: Fermi’s Paradox.
Devoid of infinity. I think I have
a better grasp of it, but I don’t know.

I’ve been around like a trillion
six hundred billion days. And you?

I hear you’d like to name my latest
era after yourselves. It’s not that
I’m a misanthrope, but sometimes
I wish you’d all go away.

It’s lonely. I’m glad you’re here
to recognize me. You should have
seen some of your predecessors.
They recognized me too, I guess.

It was like a dream Yes there were
things, but I was not turned on enough
to recognize them. You woke me up.

The years—what you call years
are just these points in time when
the sun makes the same bad joke
again, and I laugh as I always
have done, and move on.

All these days I’ve woken to
but I still haven’t figured out
how to fall asleep. I’ve come
to terms with dreaming. I’ll be lonely
when you go. When you’re gone.
Airplane Cry

none of this
is supposed to
be let alone
be observed
by anyone
these space rocks
all this art
devoted to religion
or one might say
fear of death of
the possible of
an afterlife
that might be
better or worse
or worse of
nothing of
space rocks of
leaves a yellow
butterfly couple
uses like steps
up what is okay
an infinite canopy
Solar Impulse Re-entry

At first waking
we don’t know the time
we gather in twos and threes
we repeat “adalimumab”
facing directions
hunger wafting.

It’s what we live for.

We turn the mountain
to intercept dreams:
I like you I
love you I love
you we like you.

We speak into each
other into
receptacles
for our
selves.
Spines fuse.

We sleep wherever
we land.
I’m already dreading the day
I return from the dead. It better
not be at the end of summer.
I plan to grow in water on the ground.
However, inorganic arsenic levels
are rising and the FDA says I might
emerge with a high enough concentration
to pose a threat. What kind of monster
what kind of cool sunny-day tune
what kind of cereal? The oxbow!
The oxbow is where I shall perform
the operation the shallow thinking
the brilliant wetlands of Northampton
the wildlife sanctuary the keeper of maps
the Secretary of the Commonwealth
the constellation completes and points
to where I will immolate immaculately
and sink my roots and record my new album
and charge the depths and grow new potatoes.
The Watchtower

We have had increasing clarity that became increasingly clear. We have had some avocados. We have had penny-royal tea and lava; we have nuclear casualty and avalanche. We have some volcanoes. You and I have met where the brown smoke meets the blue. The more aware we became the more aware we became we are not exactly aware.

We had spoken through slits in swaths of fabric until we spoke in conditions that only allowed faces. We spoke into each other’s mouths so as to become mouthier. We had become each other. We divided each other countlessly, rebuilding vacancies. Blue smoke rises from our fingers as we forget the difference.
The Tongue

The tongue lurks in a dinky dank cave where right now he is hugging a stuffed bear that talks when you pull a string. Any string. To give you an idea of its age, I’ll say the bear is worn. Its verbs don’t lift as much as they used to. Sometimes the tongue sits by the fire in his slippers and smoking jacket, musing over a time he was the tongue of some hegemon or other a thousand years ago, back when kings really ruled. Or he imagines what it’s like to be the tongue of a farm animal. His business plan includes mining the seams where his ore detecting equipment beeps the hardest. My reluctance: the cave is too big as it is. He suffers from the opposite of claustrophobia, which is difficult to say. We have phases, like trying for weeks to pronounce every hard consonant we possibly can as a Z. You might find him on chilly days deep in the forest all fat and pink and pulsating from the surfacing blood as he lurches out of his steaming hot spring to towel off. But probably not, because he avoids trails. In fact he ruins them when I find them. His regret: not settling down with a mate. Though that’s probably not their version of the story. And it’s hard to do when you are living forever and they are dying off. As he likes to put it, I have said it all, often quaking, at times surefire.
Thing Nothing

I’m the one
the last ones all
sing around

thumb and fore
finger to my
terminal

and you get
no one you pinch
at broken

firings broke
at the spigot
lost water

you get it
in singing birth
butterfly

of nothing
why you leave me
while I last

abide me
the last moppers
all mop me

those vessels
making those thoughts
thinkers on

winter birds
won’t shiver won’t
even cry
ever for
fever blessed
hair fracture

past berries
pointy hackle
past thin bones

waterline
brake colder pond
the black queen

past naked
eunuchs yew clubs
yellow knaves

down endless
white circle vast
deference

down lightning
gold seams jagged
winter line

wandering
all flight curves down
recorded

I am one
the wary the
weary the

ordinary
worry ending
ever after
Infiltration Filtration

You being your house, you are your populated essence. That poor man at the door on a frigid Tuesday night, hungry and exhausted, to whom you gave soup and bed, the one who has been watching TV in your head now for several years, the one who turned out to be death, is he aware of your condition, your uncertainty?

He parted your lips and imposed himself in your house, infecting members of your colony, everyone standing and chatting around your sunken liver room intoxicated with his jaunty angle, his cocky step, his naked recidivism, his seminal signature cocktail, sperm and germs, sugar and a spearmint sprig.

Demons forged you golden ovaries in the heart of serious minor. One seed lodges in a duct, four, then sixteen. They are establishing a home for wayward and weary interstellar particles. None of this equipment is made for such a body. He is refusing water. If he goes, you all do.
Can Be Enjoyed In

My gods are experts not authorities. They would rather I learn someone than teach me to me. Around stems they make laws from wooden specks. Lifting atoms they overlook evidence that all is made of metaphor.

My gods light up leaves with light and watch them faze. They fade into the clouds at night in royal outlines of royalty. Their lines goat around with smirks drawn without lifting the hem.

They can’t draw. I come assembled. Do they know stones float up the ground reassembling their set of axes? There is no room for more axes. The animal in me keeps making me make them part of me, a pureness opening my eyes that by definition does not exist.
I Refuse to End My Life Cycle in the Stomach of a Bird

You can write too many good lines
They hatch like pythons underground
Too many to deal with with your stick
Each day half an inch further up the trunk
For your head you are offered a choice
Linen bandages or cold steel casing
The external compression headaches
The loss of sunbeams soil seamless sky
The swallowing of the tongue in panic
Why did you spend your days munching
The leaf cell by cell the field by tufts of clover
The endless wanting the flowers at bloom
Even to know the ecstasy of the worm
In its tunnel the taste of sweet decay
Strawberry Moon

Sometimes I seem like God.
The things I think a lot
are the ones I want.

The perfect yellow
stripes down the garter
snake’s back are mine.

I pull up strawberry weeds
just a little red significance
in black earth, no problem.
Like a quarter inch. Laughing.

I’m a desperate god.
Everyone’s a leaf on a branch
of marsh mallow
jockeying a wind.

My head spreads open.
The eye I see
when I close mine
has gone from mustard
with thick mascara
to blue.
Every Particle Belongs to Me

I might become metastable
    a knocking sound from the front

    will this fear ever leave me

at energies above a hundred
    especially when turning
    this voiceless inertia despite a
    billion gigaelectronvolts

    corners sometimes accelerating
    plodding mind never to reverse

the universe could undergo
    a second noise from the rear
never to echo during its
    catastrophic vacuum decay

    found aftermarket stabilizer
    clanking down the bottomless

with a bubble of the true
    and fittings that appear to be dry
    singing bad-boy songs into a
vacuum expanding at the speed
    with play/noise from the rear stabilizer

    shower drain again bereft

of light. This could happen at any
    regreased front links as recommended
    as merely a point in a void to avoid
time and we wouldn’t see it coming.
Avalanche

There’s a baby in every room.
It’s tummy time, as they say.
Gina giggles and nods. She
lets in Jonathan, who’s still
looking for the six-pack he left.
He gives her a mock high-five.

The cutters are both named Liz,
their arms extended in order
to get the blades beyond
their own bodies, smelling
as if they smoke and don’t wash.
And the cuts are always good.

I spent the whole morning
dealing with an accident.
Make a room too nice and
nobody wants to leave.
It’s like meaning to an infant;
we can tell ourselves anything.
I can already feel my neck.

More exponential than
explanatory, I move
in time away from birth.
I think of all of the clothes
I find under the covers.
I trip over shoes, mull over
numbers, take the rest of the day.

I dream of dandelions,
soft yellows in every inch
of the green I lie down in.
I rehearse in my mind what
I might say to them, but instead
I drift off. It looks like I’m
dreaming. That’s the dream I want.
The Difference

These poets sitting around the table are human. Like any stuff comprising atoms, they are mostly nothing, per unit volume. Most of their molecules are water. Most of the cells present in the biota before us, in the space the poets seem to fill, are bacteria. Those that aren’t, are derived from DNA that’s up to four percent Neanderthal.

Yes, these poets’ ancestors, like yours and mine, enjoyed kinky interspecific times. Like ours, their lives were mostly hard. They died sooner and more miserably. They had a gene for the gumption to doggedly pursue a notion for survival that put before their individual lives the dominance of their species and tribes. Not many of them ever got to feel the specialness of soaping up their genitals in the morning, like you and I do every day.

It’s not easy to choose among unknown paths. One way could lead to elk and berries, one to a Neanderthal-style romp, another to lions and bloody death, some perhaps to Poland, or the sea. It’s not easy to board a bunch of trees that everyone tied together last night and ride into the ocean, alone. Do you still feel connected somehow as you stare into the maw of forever, the tongue of water, the palate of sky?
AFTERGLOW
Confounded Sky

I haven’t heard from the sky in a while.  
A crow caws from over near the pink house.  
The trees are steeling themselves for a heart attack.  
The wind is trying to smother everything.  
It’s making it cold and I give it my laughing face.  
Lines keep creeping longer out of me though I beat them back.  
Chimes fidget but cannot touch themselves for their ring-ding-ding.  
The afternoon traffic slurps absolutely from a trough off to the right.  
My right ear is going, going to gaunt voices of humans out there.  
I can’t live near any of this anymore. I can’t dig  
like a boy digs just randomly with a plastic army man  
anywhere with his plastic army man of hope to find  
imaginable things underground. I can’t do that  
while the ones I love are dying or maybe their systems  
their little essences are turning into vowels all around me.  
A little smoke and then goneness, that’s new.  
My friends are becoming new words.
The Spirit of the Ague

I’m trying to get past this image in front of me of a tree’s branches intersecting each other in silhouette like old fingers with blossoming tendrils for nails, in front of a sky in layers of bright white, barely blue, and mascarpone and a rain gently killing the far and wee whistles of birds, the whole act closing so absurdly slowly.

I’m trying to get past raspberries and other berries and the sun that so shamelessly stepped across a tree and made it green to the touch. If I could only. I’m trying to become not me, to remember the ways I entered my friends tonight and other ways they became me.

When you get a chance, fill a glass with ice and then with water and listen to everything to the whimpers of blue falling in and out of love of silver just trying to make its way in the world of white as it makes its mistaken entrances.

I’ve got tangles and knobs. I’m trying to see beyond a little group huddling in the tree-house playing cards and so I will run and as I run there will gather around me a little cadre of gnats who will have achieved my velocity hangers on mostly who are into the arts and turn up their noses at things that money can buy until I have become one of them buzzing around my old body attending readings and plays everyone making out with each other with our wee lips and hands spreading disease and other life so subtly in between our words, the red pervading only by the stain of a scientist and the gorilla in which this virus originated.
Luckily All My Cats Are Dead Already

Almighty purple biceps of lightning
flex above the bare-knuckle big box store
in which we huddle for hours while
our new phone purchases process.

I am so glad this particular perfect
set of people are here with me for this.
I will love all of my friends forever.

The Filipina hospital worker from Holyoke
flirting with her whipping boy sales associate.
The thunder that interrupts like a bad baby.
And of course Chris our wireless expert.

Oh my God the cats are outside, you say.
I hope they aren’t drowning in this.
I don’t care. They aren’t my cats, or yours.

On the way home I realize this is the ideal
to hitchhike in if you are a serial killer.
An old friend just posted that he’s praying
for the great things of God to manifest.

The purple is there all the time and we sense it
only under conditions such as this, they say.
Me and My Restless Shadow

We’re going to see Santa.
“Hi horses! Hi!” Juliana calls across the parking lot. There’s no stopping to start a point in a continuum a Christmas in life in Juliana. “Hi Santa!” My shadow has left me for her and her horses when we sit in the wagon and we look around for magic. Anything can happen. A jet of horse pee on blacktop. Pictures of peoples’ feet. A Santa who knows the colors of all the major tractor brands and a song that ends with a unicorn. A shadow that needs to go back to the earth. A girl who sees everything.
It’s Winter and No Worries

I’ve been watching these two childlike soul dreamers play outside for a couple days now. Look, they’re up the tree then down. They love each other. They remind me of how good Benigno’s chicken was last night and the brownies he hid on top of the water cooler. Sometimes my life feels like a behemoth pack animal driven by a shadow through a desert of little dry things. Today let’s make it birthday for three, as at first unshod, now unclad I step across to join my friends in the woods where they once were stuck in the trees. See them fly with the gusts up into the white sky their mother whose womb engulfs all our wild emptiness. As I watch the pure blue of their walmart logos dwindle away I realize that if I were to let the wind take me I too would break into nothing.
I Should Write

that I just saw Juliana running in her big mukluks down a dirt road from the pagoda which still holds in a few of its hidden white petals a few inches of snow. It’s April and the unstoppable girl has entered the temple where a monk beats a giant prayer drum.
Drops to Drops

Under the sun and thin pines I lie melting, my wide whiteness spotting, regarding abandoned leaves and webs as we sing together about our changing, sometimes sad, its pace being eonian, its path earthward and inward at once, sometimes angry about our fate, how unfair, sometimes afraid of what we do not know with blankness before us. We enjoy also, with each other, our little set of shared perceptions cozily defined, our schedules blank in a sky of blues, and a muddy ground of lives who have gone before we go.
Special Powers

Juliana’s bracelet makes sparkles on the sun and big rainbows.

When it’s really hot like in Africa, it lights up and speaks quietly.

It just said it would like to be on her wrist instead of her ankle.

She is hissing behind my chair right now. It turned her into a snake.
Hush

Out on the river
I didn’t notice
the log disappear
until it floated
up again, this time
with dark eyes

or this blue stone
in my pocket
you put there
god knows when.
My Advice as You Run through South Amherst

Though patches of poison ivy flank the roads, and wary farmers watch from fading pickups, while watersnake tails vanish in the hyssops, and down the field the mud sucks at your soles,

ask how membranous your corpus is in rain, how easily clog the tubes, wherefore loaf down the sky C-5 planes green as moldy bread, or surface plump yellow slugs in a storm.

Try going down Sweet Alice today, a lush but elusive trail, at times a blackened sturdy climb, then a downhill stream through bracken. It’s death to those who try and cross this mush, she warns, so go up and down me. The cadavers underfoot are frogs and red salamanders.
The Holocene Life

All on our stomachs on inner tubes, all quiet with the white rapids ahead as quiet as the rapids behind, staring at the rocks of the river passing under, looking for eels or fish or that inescapable life sign the human skull; but none for me. I see only what is not even an ear or a scapula, though Nate sees an eel and the kingfisher a fish. In the end it’s still water at the end of a bottomless afternoon. We never consider which season would be best if we were to come back as drops of water that enter and leave this river. Maybe we never could. Maybe we always have.
Roaring

You and I thought it was okay to climb down a small gorge along a trail broken with fallen trees. We walked into a small pool under a small falls that trickled through moss from punchbowl to punchbowl as they call them, like a party.

We decided we could climb up to look into a punchbowl. One of us inserted hands and feet into the little holes which he then told the other to use as he made his way. The punchbowl was full with a boulder right in the middle.

We told each other we each told friends the story about getting a fetid porcupine quill stuck in our hand near here, though it had only happened to one of us. One of us told a story about how friends kayaking in Gill found a dead body on the shore.
All This Way

You’d think a thousand ants
crossing each others’ paths
all over this blank boulder
would know there’s nothing to eat
up here, where nothing happens but
the days, near the very shadows
where one of my marriages
decayed like a dropped apple.
The forest and orchards slumber
across the land, covering reasons.
I crawled all this way up
a mountain not to find
meaning in an eagle’s flight
or in the mountain’s core.
I lie back and guess at
the depth of the lidless sky,
the vast iris that in dreams
I walk up like it’s a staircase,
and at the time it would take
the black ones and the fat reds
to pick my body away,
scour a perfect skeleton.
Recalibration

1
Blue flutters by,
pauses to pick specks
of orange and green
from blacktop cracks.

2
Peristaltic baby
moves toward light,
earth already
passing through.

3
Pinkening cloud
spills another
potion to induce
reincarnation.

4
Through the shell,
falling baby
cannot foresee
sprouting a first leaf.

5
Eyes satellite,
spot dark zit head;
switch lenses:
instead, a tiny tick.

6
Lottery ticket
crumpled and spent
scuttles across
broken sidewalk.

7
One of those old man
faces nailed to
the house crawls
with caterpillars.

8
Clean dark green
renovated bridge
announces “Hey Fatty!”
in white graffiti.

9
Old man washes
up, then washes
away again in
waves of traffic.
Entropic Paradise

Under the eye of Norwottuck perhaps in the wetlands among brightly paddling mallards there is no human production that can convey this color or contain for you their emotion

while pedaling hard on my bike with one hand lit up by the sun the other by the green shadow of trees shaken with the idea that having killed once a thousand more would mean nothing everyone is a checked box that will be filed lost, and as the straight pines were mocked by the deciduous trees all spread out like a party laughing drunk with their animal tenants smelling the earth as it respired

when the sun let it go somewhere around here between the moss and the soil between the mallards and what we used to call Snake City my glass tooth my loose bulb my flash drive fell from my pocket

and all those electrons that glue together our photos now under water cosmically separate. Are we ready to separate particle after particle at the bottom of Poor Farm Swamp?
The Short Answer

o to travel
the orient by foot
and wash at least
one dinner dish
in each land
to sweat and jest
among the migrants
and the tyrants

or to marry
an afghan man
in the 1960s
move to kabul and
give up my passport
to watch my mother-
in-law sew and
beat the servants

or to stay right
here and watch
shadows gather
at the outskirts
of my feet in water
to defend my
original premise
my belly button

o to devote
my art to my
life by writing all
the time mostly
ignoring people
to presume that
someone will like
how I have to say it

or to enter
the orange world
of the red eft
on the slopes
of norwottuck
to vow silence
and aspire toward
neophyte newthood

and to confess
to them how I
beat my slow big
brother for whom I
didn’t grieve enough
too many times
in the grassy heat
of our youth

o to live on
mount sugarloaf
on a bed of twigs
and remove half
of myself every day
to lay an egg
and free myself
to my hatchling
The Defenestrators

This is the name of Khalif’s new band. He said a punk/metal band in Scotland has the same name, but they won’t mind. Most people will think it’s defenders or demonstrators I told him, while the more scholarly will wonder whether it means people who throw things out the window, or those who throw people out the window. Use confusion to your advantage.

The runner-up name was Donna Circus which refers to some extinct amphibian or reptile, he told me only after I had come up with my own spelling.

We sat at Grammie’s metal folding table eating bratwurst and chicken kebabs. She’s not my grandmother but I think she likes it when I call her Grammie, too.

We had just finished a game of touch football, where one team won with its distinct height advantage. I was aching after a long-overdue tumble in the moss while going deep for a pass. One option after lunch was a video game the boys were calling Goat Simulator.
Mike

Behind the island I meet Mike
who shows me his handshake:
peace, love, unity, respect.
Respect is a little flick
of our thumbs toward each other.

He asks if I smoke.
I say No, then think again.
He says his father is in prison and so
Mike runs the marijuana farm
up there by the pole on the hill.

He lets me borrow his flippers
and we swim away from shore.
I watch the bottom fall
into a coral canyon,
brain coral and fan coral,
yellow striped fish and indigo
fish in suspended obliviousness.

Mike brings up
a black and white urchin,
gestures for my palm
and places it there so I can feel
the suction as he pulls it off.
He brings up the shell
of such an urchin:
“You can use it as an ashtray but
you can’t pack it in your suitcase.”
He crushes it in his hand.

He gives me his life jacket
in exchange for the flippers.
He dives into a cave
at least twenty feet
and emerges from another
side I had not seen.

On the way back I swim
through schools of tiny fish
watching them shift
direction with my hands
and making an evil snorkel laugh.

I put laundry into the dryer
and come back with a wet
twenty-dollar bill. I ask
about snorkeling at the far end.
He says No, it’s too shallow, but
He doesn’t know, maybe
I’m looking for shallow
and the bright little ones.
Mike reaches to me underwater holding a tiny clear inflated plastic bag that seems to contain countless more clear inflated plastic bags.
Right Straight from Yah

Jammin: look at your hands
some nails long white
some crumbling yellow
the pink skin reddened, the black
blackened coal that won’t rub off

Example: feathers in your hair
the round cushion of your chair
the green the air the body
at rest the body from outer
motherfuckin space the
innards the python
intoxication
the day the state the
free the moment
the velvet the throne the
silver the flight
Status: eternal

One hand the lightning bolt one
the black lager pint one the
golden gear shifter one the hash
spliff one the solar eclipse one
eggs and sugar
point b minus a point
your eyes the eye between
the eye and itself
look at your lightning
speck to speck minus
immobilization
here now here

Can I have your hair your
chair your ostrich feather
your peacock egg the billy
bone the scroll inside the soul
you shroud you hide
Make a Little Beautiful World with My Hands On

In the beginning
It’s two thousand nine
It’s raining inside

There’s blue putty
Made in China that
Smells like anything

A world of pockets
A sky opens
A beach bright
A burger place
That disappeared

We’re puddle jumpers
Uncle trumpers

A caged macaw
Tightens a ball
Of newspaper
In its mouth

There’s a chute where
Skee balls collect

Where we empty
Into a sea

A sea monster
Admires the flank
Of another
If the Wind Blows Again

halls our house
knock down by
tree by force
by gravity
opacity read
ferocity read
immensity
shadow of
wind huddles
us shaking
fast questions
whispered the
smell of sweat
on rock our
house the
bricks we threw
together one
day we question
thinness the
shirts the length
of time for water
we sweat
the time just
streaming away
whatever of lime
melting bone
and cartilage the
question of away
our language
rolling why
rock and dust
now mud we
incorporate
as a crypt
but survive in
solid stone

if a whistle a
wind of sound
were wasting as
we wander if
there were
at least that
high in the trees
our plodding
muddy minds
a trickle of
water in this
heat we learn
it gets worse we
tell ourselves
it could get
even a tickle
of grass for
our feet our
words have
flown our
birds decay
in a whistle
ending so
certainly so
laughably
slowly

3

whispering
whittles my bones
sharpening
against you stuck
in my own
boar trap my
contraption of
blame as my
innards fall
stuck falling
in air now water
the water mud
hardening against
you who knew
who would not
who kept a hidden
cache of rounded
stones words
once thrown in my
favor ignorant
brutes whistling
for whoever
might heave them

4

opening my
eyes to yours
you blow into
me my life
again water my
lips caress me
down give each
other’s water stand
me up run with
me make me
smell the wind
carry me down
the winnowing sea
we find by salt
on the wind we
make a little
boat today tying
together trees we
push off into
the roaring
DARK AGES
The Art of Living

I crawled around the places I know,  
a parking lot that snow and ice  
and the night had surmounted,  
name after name I should know,  
and there were sodden tree pieces  
on a dark disintegrating blanket.

I crawled around the inside of my ear  
wandering the lonely streets  
of Danish villages and Polish  
birthdays, and there was a lake  
of flower petals for mine, inside  
a cardboard vessel of flame.

I crawled around the outside of my mouth  
breaking dishes and dying again,  
testing water of different seasons  
for acidity, for serendipity,  
and there was city after city  
leaving a thin and distant trail.
A Journey

In dreams
I grieve over
the home I loved
the one I have yet
to leave awake
the crushing
singularity.

You say a cross
between a
hazmat suit and
a two-person
horse costume.

I say no
a two-person
hazmat suit
modeled on Janus
faces vying to
face the audience.

You say the
crushing miracle
of death
spreads us shell
and all to all
places at
once.

I say that turtle
in the road
is really a
heap of wet
leaves.

We pull. We
read the sign.
We pull hard.
The sign says
doors sticks pull hard.
Another sign a
hidden one
says use other door.
Little Darling

salutations sunshine
I’m such a poet I’m so much more I’m so much gladder not to do all this work thanks for keeping your distance for sharing my sandwich for my new sports car for smelling slightly of lemons you of all people understand middle age or was that so long ago or so long from now you’re such an old soul you’re so much more no matter what I claim I’m just checking to make sure you’re sitting quietly like a normal human being do I expect too much of people of life of you after all this space dust passed us by it doesn’t seem to matter anymore but would you marry me maybe we could get us a little house by a rushing river and make babies and maybe moonshine when you come up slow and nibble at my neck press your days against my face make my animal smell your animal your days coming like a swarm of butterflies splash of insect wings their colored powders orange starfish on the wettest ledge
Before He Opened

his eyes he tried not to be able to lift his hand off the bed. His arm ached yet exhibited full range of motion. He considered a possible origin for the name Melissa in an Irish way: m’laddy; m’lassie; Melissa. He thought of Melissa the girl he knew only by phone, who lived ten thousand miles away. Paralysis, giving way to petrification. Every day getting harder to move upon waking in imperceptible increments. In a similar way that kids grow up. In a similar way he was moving to Australia.

Sometimes your legs can weigh more than a battleship or just a teaspoon of a pulsar. Sometimes you don’t realize this until you’re halfway across the bedroom. He glanced out the window into the trees and down to the ground where smaller plants seemed to be itching. On the toilet he considered a list of things that he needed but did not want: the toilet, etc. His head was breaking with an achy refrain: “If you fear dying then you’re already dead.” This might be somehow relevant, he thought.

He considered Melissa. He approached the mirror and anticipated the dawn of a red sun. He appeared the same as last night although he was hoping to catch
something imperceptible.
Nothing was as it seemed.
Completely still. There she was,
a few words typed out
that made him feel better.
He smiled. He thought of something
he thought of as witty and
typed it. She sent a kiss emoji.
She sent a video.

He glanced through the mirror
into his face and down to his belly
where some of his parts seemed
to be twitching. Let’s not make
this all about sex. That would turn
this relationship into a joke.
The kind of captivity
where the guards remain
within arms’ reach.
Where they are invisible.
Where they are attached to you.
Factors in the calculus of waking.

Driving an irresistible force,
he turned and returned
for a second waking.
To be horizontal on softness.
To be at the center, looking
along a horizon.
To stop thinking. Bubbling
up. Consciousness.
To be prior to ease.
There she was,
a spirit sweeping
a barren landscape.
Dancing by herself
sometimes in little
fantasies, waiting.

Before he opened his
mind again, he tried not
to be able to think his body
off the bed. Immovability.
His planet had been dying
since day one. Clouds rolling by,
a protracted procession
with armloads of flowers.
A thousand lifetimes.
Nothing ages the way
it used to. He was becoming
permanent, an electron.
For You

My mind was
My smile was
Blank but
For you

For you were
For me were
Holding me
Softly kissed

Softly kissing by
Softly lit up by
Your skin
Lipstick perfume

Lipstick perfume nightly
Lipstick smearing night
Licking it off
Tasting you

Tasting your mouth
Tasting of mouths
Becoming one
Tongue flicking

Tongue flicking my
Tongue thrum me
Tugging nipples
Hand along

Hand along folds
Hand opening folds
Liquid lights
Silver thread

Silver thread lengthens
Silver sticky lengths
Blank but
For you

For you structure
For shell structure
Alone with you
My mind
Stupid Rules

I can’t help but you.
When I see my favorite mountain
I you.

My desperate belonging
is a shape the vision to you.

Trees fall on themselves,
fall on broken cans
of themselves.

Decrepitude inches wider
next to discarded tires
in slow brown water.

Let rules mimic agreements.
I make enemies
to you my days aloft.
Audia

A woman with a white uniform
and a smooth purple smile
appears by the beach.
She offers me a massage.
Swedish? No. Deep tissue.
U.S. dollars only.

Comprising mostly dark matter,
my head sinks into the face
cradle of her massage table.
Her hot oil is cosmic
radiation carried on the solar
winds of her fleshy hands.
They reveal clusters and clouds
across my knotty back.

Her fingers tousle my hair
the way the outskirts
of a hurricane had
the palm trees the other day,
bending and bending.
Which is the way she has my toes, too.
When something about their work
turns someone on—
for Audia, that’s feet.
Her thumbs press constellations
into my heels and along and
among my tarsals and
metatarsals.

Particle by particle
the radiation clears my mind.
When I open my eyes,
before I can close them again,
my brain empties
onto her white shoes.
Get into a hot tub
are her parting words.
There’s one in the adult area.

I sit in this area
accompanied by rum and coke,
a brown leaf buffeted
in bubbly water,
the green hilltops
ragged against the clouds,
jagged if I include
the antennae.
Tarocco

A Tarot Game

The bridge I cross
the river over
which you hover
in curling green
your black hair
snaking with eyes
of clear flowers.

How could I ask you
of you when I have
this bridge of snails
to cross me over?

Eyes of rolling dice
cascade into a box
of mud under
the skin of the river
in repeated serenities.
Specks of sentience
land on my landscape

and fly away, horsefly.
Fruit fly pass me by.
Syrphus ribesii: hide
your maggoty ways.
Star Path

I want to visit her face,
her skin the sea foam I will
map and cruise around in.

She speaks of an isle of women
both stone and flesh kinds.
Fishermen keep them there,
blind to the fact that from
their caves, the women
cruise the Milky Way
and keep planets of men.

She sleeps in cardboard,
gets high and wonders
in the night where her
friend wanders off to,
what kind of ship he rides.

I want to visit her jungles
lined with white beaches
massaged by little waves
under which she keeps
a little galaxy of flesh.
Oracy

One pure drop with the curve of your body
an angel asleep on a cheek will fall
and wet my face. I might never love you
under crow clouds, a sarcophagus lid
this blind american colossus of sky
thunder in the clear tones of division.

Seeing rainbows in church glass I will kiss
your right temple, as you plash by blackened
snow mounds that leak the winter’s dark urine.
As you mash your clitoris against my chin
that night, my voice, a mere acquaintance will
stumble into the walls of some third temple.
Hosting a Rainfall

I smell a used shirt and tell myself it's you, to ingrain it.

You and I lack symmetry as my gods have no hierarchy.

There seems to be a lot of death going around. Everyone’s death tastes okay.

A mouth part with teeth and a tail part. The reflexive parts.

Water, sun, green, bubbles—these are some good examples.

Having once made the sound of forgetting—boink-boink-boink—

now I’m all boooiiiiink . . . boooooiiinnk . . . . . . bbboooiiinnnk.

A new axis for now where I find depth.

A state of self-effacing effulgence, decay.
Treeish

another hour we spent
apart we spent apart we
spent another hour thinking
of leaves of what if one loved
a close one what would they
be waiting for but a breeze
and it happens all the time
I see it through my window
a threat to couples to all
everything’s delightful as they
bob together bob together bob
and hope the name’s bob and
together spend time apart
with a close one in a breeze
what to wait for to happen
through my window of hours
delightful even in threat
to singles to double their
everything bob together bob
apart in this hope of ours
Fringe

tree trunks stylin
sustainedly sexy
in sunsets
of decades
in waftin
hangin back
along their walls
we can’t see
we in paisley
and dark along
walls we can’t
even acknowledge
yeah I’ll get up
and dance here
watch them watch
me their only
signal their signal
I watch I
drink in trunks
with sunsets on
their sides with
decades deflectin
a herd of pine
withstandin
Nazanin

Turn up your spitfire
eyes, your fractalizing
psyche of Scythian vision
and shine, the queens of queens
your lucky mothers, the fodder
that became father
to your corpuscles and skull.

In writing rewound
and voices unveiled
they sing as if to star
to sing you whenever
my marble of must.

Hold me in your bird-chatter
eyes, your white erupting
into yellow into your butterfly-
wing blouse, the rings that ring
your mouth, the champions
who found themselves
in your oblivion of hair.

When my body is smoke
and your hand of stone
I will go back to star
to wherever I back
your warble at will.
Maggie

An island resting far from the sea,
in a simple dressing gown she sleeps
in a fist as tight as she can make.

She says potatoes used to grow on trees
and come in wild bunches and flavors,
and coffee used to taste like mud.
We drank mud to make us sharp.

A miniature moon, her head
faces wreckage along the river
uncovered by fall, recovered by snow
as we stop in traffic on the bridge.

“I never thought I’d see this so many times.
This morning I told a young man I’m
twenty-five. He had such hanging eyes.”
Scenes from a Bike Ride

1
Half veiled in a childless wood, half
forgotten, fallen, rusting on
its side, once perhaps a collector’s
prize, with its still-glossy-brown, eight-
foot sesame seed bun, lies an
Officer Big Mac climb-in jail.

2
The ursine ladies of Hadley
mount their wide, low mowers and ride
the hills of their backyards caringly,
undulating like slow-motion
jet skiers on a sea of green,
wondering maybe about love.

3
There are cows, and their outrageous stink,
drifting slowly across the hills.
Some are black; some are steely brown.
See that white one over there
with the striking figure, on her own
little hill? I think she likes me.

4
As I turn up Moody Bridge Road
into my favorite pasture, the clouds
have parted in the shape of something
terrestrial, surprisingly detailed,
at just the angle I would choose,
tempting me to the sky of blue.
This Poem Came to Me in a Dream

When I come back, I will dedicate myself
to ridding this place of assholes and crybabies.
Soon, before I die, every spell will break,
the world will awaken, and finally I
will find clean new paper lined in dark blue
and no one will try to see what I write.

It won’t be because I have to pee; rather,
it will be because you wake up and sneak
out the bedroom to cough, that I come back.
I’ll look through the window, around the street
light to see if snow covers our road.

I’m not quote unquote trying to quote
unquote do anything;
each line is just a note to remind you.
Pasture after pasture we’re
wasted in the whiteness
lost in my thoughtlessness.
Veranda

the lifelike depictions
crying into the stones
every word a testament
each world evaporating

it struck us that whatever
we fancied we could fashion
wherever the moon stuck us
water no longer the ink

everybody seeming to break
surging seams of ourselves
wandering tinier systems
wishing to the pictures

gathering up our figures
spiraling into the life
quick clocks and thick ones
unfurl gravitate expound
SCALE INVARIANCE
Before I Speak

I’d like to have your attention
and a moment of silence.
And a dinosaur tea party
where we’re all dressed up
in pleats and lace, yellows
and pinks. When I’m anxious
like this some people bake.
I like to do something magical
like hose out the garbage can
pull the dead lily stalks
smell the wild grapes
prepare for rot mostly.
I mean how many of them
can make it, how many
will be squashed by kings
and how many will kings fuck
and how many of you
came from out of state?
When I get older I’d like to open
a little bag of corn chips
and look under the dresses
of trees and be defrocked
and defrock those around me
and twirl our frocks around
on our fingers, our branches
oranges and bananas, papayas
suck the beans of the cocoa pod
and all his friends and ancestors
shoes like they are out of style
as if anybody understands style
anymore, I mean come on people.
Address

To the one obsessed with orgasms and letting it be known
To the elders bent in prayer for salvation
To the one knifed in the parking lot for nothing
To the one sitting quietly in contemplation
To the evangelizing ones who deny their emptiness
To the one beaten on the ass behind the shed

The little one showing everyone their fancy shoes

To the one who thinks their anger problem is sending them to hell
To the one opening a box to inspect a silk white hood
To the unnamed one identified only by strange perinatal words
To the unarmed one just buying some candy
To the one living at another’s mercy
To the ignorant one

The one everyone mistakes for a spider

To the one striking names
To the one who felt like their friend was ignored
To the one who didn’t die but rather gave their soul to a machine
To the one up all night worrying about losing their family
To the one who stole someone’s credit card
To the wealthy one

The newly converted one who would do anything

To the one leaving
To the one who wants their name everywhere
To the one who tells everyone they play a part
To the one facing concrete walls until they die
To the one with authority whose mistake ended a life
To the one who shot to kill

The one who chose to be ruled over

To the one left
To the one who killed someone accidentally and doesn’t know what to do
To the one studying things only snails can see
To the one driving a flag around town
To the one writing who just lost their train of thought
To the one for whom everything must have an ending

The merciless one
Bucky’s Rejoinder

You boasted the kind of amygdala that climb trees, the kind they train to hunt lions in Australia. There is a video out there of your hippocampus allegedly overturning a car in desperate search. Your face had loosed a thousand to happy deaths. You were ferocious on the field, spirited by the campfire. Your voice arched the spine, stood the hair erect. Overhead thunder on a kick-ass night. Then it was water falling through a grotto I had to hike days to get to. Then it was a high sweet whistle on the breeze that found me.

Buckminster, as I’m known, was testing the science of ripples—“their dimensionality in pah-ticulah”—in a sculpted puddle on the estate, when you strode to the edge. Quelle charmante you said, all American. You could lace your shoes and a dozen piglets would burst out the cellar door. The cut of your jib focused everyone’s pure cold lasers on smokestack steam melting into blue blue air. You sucked forth my soul. My paraphernalia you chucked down the pool, stone-shod and sour.
Hemicrania

You were born so long ago
your birth is gone from you;
when you hear laughter
they’re chiding this palsy
your birthlessness, your
freshness handicap, your
mirthless bubblewrap air
never to mingle with
the atmosphere, bear
the smell of saliva
drying on skin, carry
love notes from cock
to hen, linger over shoe
leather made shiny by
a girl’s heel.

There’s
a lot you can do while
you wait for the right word
to carry you along
the canal into the open
black and green dark
suddenly glossy with rain
where it will drop you
and enter the soul
of someone else.

You
can somehow manage
to split your living head
vertically in half,
ride around the blackness in
a glass-bottom boat for days.
The single atom of gold
that is your clue, that’s
how you know you are.
Please Stand Up

There’s nothing better than being obliterated under a black sky on a hard winter field, the air made of ice, the bones of stone when the Davids come out.

I look up and there’s David shaking his head. David on one side of the door, I on the other poised to ambush the other scouts as they enter. David always lights up a room. Mama’s on the chair. Papa’s on the cot. David’s on the floor yellin’ his fool head off. That’s how he learned to sing it.

A state of matter you can’t sink into unless you wish it hard, ghost it.

The David just got Davider. There’s David at the podium saying things I ghost he wouldn’t. It’s David doing Frankie doing Johnny doing David when I let my eyes deceive me when David is about to undergo six months of intubation.

Out here there are no stars. Out here we’re trippin’ hard.

What if I die here? My whole industry based on bad David sells the concept of good David. We could fund the wars on the back of David. Everyone comment on the photo of David from twenty years ago that Beth just posted. Could I forgive him before I go?

All of my Davids precipitate gather to obviate my face harden their ghosts for whatever I’ve longed for the wishes I’ve held to the ghosts I’ve made of the Davids I’ve loved.
David and I decided to hike up a mountain. As we set out, I pointed to where we were heading: Rattlesnake Knob. I knew we had more to fear from the gigantic white cows in the neighbor’s pasture than from rattlesnakes. I made comments that were meant to keep this distinction ambiguous. David’s nervous humor about the cows was assuring.

On the side of the mountain, we came upon the gigantic cylindrical water tank, with moss and lichen on its sides. We wondered about how much water it could hold, how the water is used, and gravity. I told David that I happened to read in the paper recently about a similar water tank in Hadley, and it said that one holds a million gallons. “When future generations come across this, they’ll think it was a bathtub for giants,” he said. “Or their toilet,” I said. “Maybe those cows are the ancestors of their cows.”

On the knob, on the trail to the views, we came across a rusty iron pole sticking out of the ground. It had an A embossed at the top. We looked at the other side, and there was a G. “Amherst and Granby,” I told him. We played a little game where David committed a crime in Amherst, and I was the cop, and when he crossed to the other side I was powerless. He wore blue sneakers that reminded me of hunger.

We looked out from the first view and he surmised after a while that we were looking east, at Long Mountain, not south as I had told him. David saw a hawk below us, and I told him it was a vulture. He went out on the ledge and picked an evergreen sprig with blue berries. My heart raced at the idea that he might fall from the ledge. I looked at my phone and told him it was juniper. He put the little branch in his shirt pocket. He told me about his maladies. I told him I had several too, and that we’re a couple of sad cases, medically speaking.

To get down, I chose an eastern path that ended up being not really eastern, and not really a path. We had to go down much of it on our butts. I told him his wife would kill me if I let anything happen to him, and he agreed. I must admit that somewhere along the way I think I lost part of David.
Cooling Board

I left pieces of stupid media on all your channels in case you decide to endure and you’d like something stupid to walk that skeleton staircase in the middle of somewhere dark and absurd you made in something you wrote.

Stoned in sleeplessness like a walking porcupine you muster some mustard. We’re all conditioned to remember certain kinds of things, to weather. You have supporters in the north. The day suddenly heats.

A skeleton face in the forest behind my house I have to get used to enduring, below the repeating calls of “madame, madame your face is on fire” from some knucklehead bird in this reality you made, this face of a killing god.
For Brushes McDeath

How many killers have walked this path before? Each one maybe fond of saying, there are two kinds of people in this world, I think: those who—followed by endings like, get out before

ey they get hurt, or, understand what a trifle human progress is, or, live for themselves. Between the wild grapes and the fungus shelves one had stashed his ammo and sniper rifle among rocks outside this porcupine lair. No explanation will be needed, none would mean anything to the families. I’m not a witch who can bring down a bear with a song, but down they’ll go, one by sad one, then soon my blood will run in an oak leaf vein.
For Rick Yarosh

That day chiseled a relief into Rick’s face
and the pink and gray hills of his brain,
when he and the friend he lost bolted
out of their Bradley, lighting up the desert day

like children of the sun. He rolled like they told
him, but the fuel lit the grass and spread
it instead. In seconds there were new stream beds
and hills on his head, and fathomless caverns.

You find black holes when you see the gas lit up
around them. Rick found out whether you can see
the grass light up when your face is on fire.

The inescapable is now among us
a titan you would not otherwise see
who was destined instead to consume the fire.
North, You Are Letting Me Down

I bring all my good words
with me, and my best.
A small number is nearby
when I tie my shoes.
Then as I stroll, turning into
the possibilities ahead
I look around and notice
for example that the asphalt
is laced with good words
and will it support animals
that might want to cross,
or that the trees teem
with some of the best
until they and the trees are
indistinguishable.
And the sky—well it all is
beyond control.

North, I came here thinking
you’re cool and free
a place for all the lives
I seem to be living in
the first half of this one.
Then you became the south.
If I cut them loose I lose
everything, which is why.
Neanderthal Remains

The man we will come to know as Lance rolls up in his golf cart and says,
They put me with the group behind you.
It’s a threesome of Orientals.
I got fed up, they’re so slow.
The foursome ahead of you is all women.
Same thing. Mind if I join you?

Scientists recently discovered
skeletons of new little folk,
homo like you and me,
the kind of people that make you wonder
whether the legends of gnomes endure
because they’re real.

The man we have come to know as Lance pulls up in his cart again.
I was supposed to be with the group behind you.
The first twosome they put me with went on ahead.
Would it be okay to play with you guys?
He complains about all his strokes.
He stashes bloody marys in his cart.
He walks backward down hills.

I find lost balls in the woods.
When I was little
the ball washing machines fascinated me.
Put your dirty ball inside,
turn a crank and watch it descend into a black box.
It pops up again, wet and clean.
Saying Hello

All night I can picture the glow
on my face changing color.

The stink in this room has mutated
from flower-vase detritus to molar abscess.

For weeks I’ve scoured documents:
top-secret memos, blueprints, terrain maps.

They assigned me to captain Air Force One.
The President-Elect and I start our new jobs on the same day.

Consider the carbon fiber sheathing that allows Angel, as she’s known,
to penetrate any airspace while remaining safe from prying.

I’ve taken the initiative to conceptualize
some new tricks for her, like the screamer

which neutralizes body parts receptive to sound
and sequesters brain parts at the interface

of language and thought,
within a half-mile radius.

When he says “yes” to a full demonstration
that moment will explode inside me forever.

“Did you know she’s the reason we can now get
the internet on commercial flights?” I’ll ask.

People like me, people like us,
we’re on the modern-day endangered list.
Thriller

With a head the size of this room
yes he could swallow one of us whole.
With a stomach the size of a Cadillac
yes he could inhale the whole garden.
He will often grip his victim firmly and then
spin violently to rip off chunks of goodness.
Sitting on this swing I am quite literally
a target for his swarm and the method
I’ve just learned is a technique called Natalie
which is English for a nostalgic focus on
the ancient practice of eeling, or feeling.
It’s important to have magnetite crystals
up in there to guide you for he is willing
to strike adult humans and I’ve already been
in the water with this animal in my house.
This time is going to be very different and
to draw him in I have soaked my guts in
fish clothes. My chainmail socks and butt
helmet add another level of protection because
with this guy it’s not all about size. You
could fall into a pack that eats you alive.
Physical Science

Shimmerings glisten.
Ground leaves
after weather
after shadow.
Tinglings blink.

I snip off
the end of a cigar
I smoked half of
then left to welter
when it made me sick
left it to whatever
in a little flower pot
that’s now for ashes
thinking it might last
the emergences
of spring
and yes
it lights.

I spend most of this half life
making sure the bathroom faucet is off
watching for blue to close up the sky
rolling up clothes for something.
There are no wood nymphs.
People keep dying.
Birds keep laughing at me.
People keep asking.

If this is all there is
I writhe
pulling at dirt
calling out to it
drawing breaths.
I writhe on the floor
bloody myself
against it
think of words
in voices.

This cigar is
this cigar cutter
is junk
is me falling.
This watching is
the constant.
Happy Little Pile-Ups on Jonkershoek Road

An ad reads, “Bikes and Wines.”
Vineyard hopping on bicycles.
Vineyards sway in the sun under a jagged mountain.
Birds pause above the jags.
The road rests like a rock.
The air is the air everywhere.
trees cross by generations.

People come from all over, putting out signals.
They attract and repel across the earth.
Sometimes they cancel one another.
Some meet my gaze. Some look past me.

I am biking down Jonkershoek,
Calling at a sign with pictures and instructions
for handling baboon encounters, which I take a photo of
that in the end I don’t need. There aren’t any.
There aren’t even any of the baby ones like in the pictures.

The sign at a vineyard entrance reads, “Wine / Lunch / Cake”
but I find there is no lunch or cake.
However, I leave fortified
with a Syrah named for that
little patch where its grapes grew,
right there on the mountain.
I leave with the vision
of the small castle near
that little patch where
a German spends six months of the year.
Not these six months, though.

These six months, the 'coloured' workers
are surprised to see this white guy
bike up the path to the nature reserve
or the historic gardens or whatever.

Someone sits on a stone bench texting their lover
whom they have never met in person and
who texts back that they adore the flower photos
from The Old Nectars. A deceased woman
gave these gardens to the state.
Her flowers are now tended by Richard,
who went out of his way to secure my bike.
I Don’t Think You’d Mind, Charles

The fact that you’re not alive anymore occurs to me like the intermittent snarl of your neighbor’s chainsaw all day today while I sit in one of your plastic chairs smoking a cigar as we would together in an alcove of ferns and rocks, young maples and pines above your terraced wildflower gardens behind which in the woods an hour ago I walked and scared four grouse into low flight and I swear I heard the huuh huuh huuh huuh of a black bear that sent me into low flight back here.

Inside, Kay misses you and speaks of you often, sometimes as if you were still with her, yet she is happy without you content to live alone in the wilderness, and she doesn’t want to spread your ashes in the flowerbed where you wanted, not until it’s thoroughly weeded, or she might spread them in a prettier one that’s just a few yards away.

Since your death, she has had to put Maddie to sleep, and old Lumpy has lost the use of his hind legs, and it’s hard because he liked to roam the mountainside but now he needs to be dragged and lifted just to pee, and the answer everyone thinks of, to put his buck end into a little carriage, probably won’t get done before he’s too much trouble, and it’s hard because he’s happy.

The Sweet Williams and pale blue Forget-me-nots you planted continue to reseed on your old green mountain, as it continues to break apart so senselessly slowly into pieces marked only by the breaking.
Still

Sitting on a mountain you hear machines,  
you won’t fly down that tunnel of branches,  
you can’t forget some people. You think in words  
and mosquitoes are up there. They can have you  
they keep thinking as they hover at your lobes.  
Note the secret marking in the junco tail.  
The ragged hawk blows like a thin black bag  
randomly away from anything you think.  
At hundreds of feet the wind takes more chances.  
See, in the foothills the rivers grow deep  
with souls pushed out the bottom, the moon shine  
of all last nights passing through this old man,  
this liver, this press of days. Operate  
the crusher. You can put in trees, boulders.
The Draining

The day after we buried Tommy
after we stood and watched a light blue
syringe empty into his dark blue vein
and his head fall like a baby’s, after
we put him in a bright box with a toy
and sprinkled our catnip, the day after
we walked through slushy snow
full of prints that the day after
would be almost all vanished,
we found a pattern in the snow
off the trail that could only have
been made by a boy made of sticks.

We sat on a wooden footbridge
and watched melted snow flow under us.
We reached and pulled cold water
to our mouths and gulped it down.
Is this the time of year most souls depart?
There are such things as dumb questions.
Life is our disease and death is our life.
At least there is enough water around here
and talus caves and an underwater town.
Evocation

My dad fell.  
Subdural hematoma.  
They opened his skull.  
They being the doctors.  
University of Maryland, Baltimore.  
Commas are important. Sutures  
run along his crest, black ones.  
From his ear to his face, too.  
His limbs are bloated. He wears mittens  
so he can’t remove the ventilator.  
He communicates facially  
when consciousness does whatever.

They closed one of two lanes.  
They being Hadley, the town of.  
As if it is broken. As if they will fix it.  
A bridge that had been happy  
unrecognized, an unmarked  
section of road. Unless instead it  
cheers to be recognized, finally.  
I don’t know. No evidence.  
The anger in my cycling grief  
shrinks. Weeds grow  
over cement and asphalt.

It’s Friday, most of us are thinking,  
and we are happy. I’m thinking:  
like all the other bad ones out there  
bad kitty just wants to be loved.  
Someone else: I gotta lose weight  
so I can be thrown around. Or:  
who is in charge, the mountain or the mist?  
When I was smashing a pink lady  
apple on the floor of the Atkins store.  
The shoe of course bigger than its foot.  
Whatever people think. Swaddled.

Let us sing to summon this great  
filter of humanity, day after day  
until someday has always been  
that way, bring it alive in its  
infinitudes with yours  
and the endless ones  
and nils of you  
with mine.
The Disciples

While some poets can barely
get their pants to button, others
seem to just slide right out of them.
They all have their moments.
I know one who is being handed
from one woman to the next
in one of those “it takes a village”
villages to this very day.
Some are trained in special operations
to neutralize opponents as quickly as possible
by whatever means are at hand.
Some sit on the toilet for much longer
than the rest of us, some
out of physical necessity while
for others it’s mental or spiritual.
Some poets merge with the landscape
or the sky or the sea.
One for example is becoming
a warren for voles down by the stream.
One became the wind on the Oregon coast.
Another is pure sunshine.
Another is lifting his arms slowly
while dancing in place to an old jingle.
Ablata Causa Tollitur Effectus

*Remove the Cause and Its Effect Will Disappear*

Starting with the joint of the right hallux where

the proximal phalanx meets the metatarsal
we observe disintegration

that tells us he suffered from gout.

There is evidence of decay from a deformation that caused him to walk tiptoe

at night possibly while making a sandwich—

that’s a joke—

and as we move up the skeleton, more clues emerge.

For example, note the stress marks on the lower vertebrae and ribs where swings used to hang next to the monkey bars and to the right

we can discern the sandbox where he and his nursery-schoolmates played.

Also, the outward bowing of the forward lateral radius starting from the ulnar notch shows
an almost spiritual appreciation
for electric guitar that snapped
like the devil’s whip at his back
and we can infer also for drums
a horde rumbling on his tail,
keyboards that warped the sacral mold,
and vocals that filled his parietal sails.

He was a runner almost
certainly, but these grooves
show us another habit.

They tell us the number
of people this man
loved whom he didn’t like.

This is confirmed
as we examine
the minute
structure of
the inner ear,

remarkably intact.
Note what we call
the red carpet lining the
snail-shell spiral of
the cochlea.

This is where
several courtships began and
ended. We see a bra
dangling from the bedpost,
for instance. Entering
the skull via the nasofrontal
suture is tricky. One
must be careful not
to shatter the surrounding
bones. If we pry it
apart with barely
enough force,

black rays
shine through
the fissure and we see

revealed a space where
some have argued he
spent entirely too much time

but is in fact the site
of desperation
in the form of
a singularity
from which he could not escape.

As we zero in, training our telescopes exactly, looking back in time almost to his origins, we are able to see what researchers have theorized might be there, a little light.
Afterglow
Afterglow is another term for the photon epoch, in which photons dominated the energy of the universe, according to Big Bang theorists. The photon epoch started about 10 seconds after the Big Bang and continued for approximately 379,000 years. Atomic nuclei were created in the process of nucleosynthesis which occurred during the first few minutes of the photon epoch. For the remainder of the photon epoch the universe contained a hot dense plasma of nuclei, electrons and photons.

Dark Ages
The Dark Ages are thought by theorists to have lasted for the 650 million years starting 150 million years after the Big Bang. During this period, most of the photons in the universe were interacting with electrons and protons in the photon–baryon fluid. The universe was opaque or “foggy” as a result. There was light, but none we can now observe through telescopes.

False Vacuum
A false vacuum is one that appears stable, and is stable within certain limits and conditions, but is capable of being disrupted and entering a different state which is more stable. A hypothetical “vacuum metastability event” would be theoretically possible if our universe were part of a metastable (false) vacuum in the first place. If this were the case, a bubble of lower-energy vacuum could come to exist by chance, and catalyze the conversion of our universe to a lower energy state in a volume expanding at nearly the speed of light, destroying all of the observable universe without forewarning.

Great Filter
A Great Filter is whatever prevents dead matter from giving rise to expanding, lasting life. The concept originates in the argument that the failure to find any extraterrestrial civilizations in the observable universe implies something is wrong with arguments that the existence of advanced intelligent life is probable. A Great Filter acts to reduce significantly the number of sites where advanced civilizations might arise. This probability threshold, which could lie in our past or future, might work as a barrier to the evolution of our species, or increase the probability of self-destruction. The main counter-intuitive conclusion of this observation is that the easier it was for life to evolve to our stage, the bleaker our future chances are.

Scale Invariance
Scale invariance is a feature of objects or laws that do not change if scales of length, energy, or other variables are multiplied by a common factor. An example would be something that looks exactly the same whether viewed through a microscope or a telescope.