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## Snug Harbor

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# SNUG HARBOR

A Thesis Presented

by

SEAN JEFFREY BATES

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

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2018

English Master of Fine Arts for Poets and Writers  
Poetry

SNUG HARBOR

A Thesis Presented

by

SEAN JEFFREY BATES

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ABSTRACT

SNUG HARBOR

MAY 2018

SEAN JEFFREY BATES, B.A., OBERLIN COLLEGE

M.F.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Peter Gizzi

Snug Harbor is a collection of poetry dealing with a collective working history and the personal working history of growing up in various restaurants around Upstate New York.

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## The Glass Factory Opens

I took a ghost road home  
to the ankle licking Chemung  
kicked up in preparation.  
Monday with a plate of eggs,  
handed a cauldron of coffee.  
Here in the valley,  
knuckling out  
in this rich vein.  
Later, the one whistle sounds,  
two boys steal up the hill,  
their fathers are headed home.

## The Devil in New England

A good attic should shudder.  
Old Scratch,  
he knows where we keep  
the yellow stained spinet.  
And he plays—oh he plays  
astride those cheapkeys,  
—sinning with both hands.

Me and the Reverend,  
sweet in the parlor  
when, down the drain pipes,  
I hear a gypsy sting dance.  
Lucifer's own rendition  
of the prance and shuffle,  
that confounded street tickler.

Hell, I take to the hallway  
dancing like laundry on the line.  
Reverend looks at me over his nose.  
I say fry the fat of this prodigal evening,  
the lamps ain't even lit.

i. rice

water bound sprite,  
daylight burden  
in a chapel of mud.  
driven without tide,  
cherished  
in terraced edges of the sky  
turn the wind  
green enough  
to slaughter and haul  
and sell  
and begin again.

ii. sugar

crutched over cane  
in stalking fields.  
bubble tar,  
sap tooth sticking.  
hack ankle and be  
slick to the sole  
and buckle  
this honeysap,  
to these cloying dreams.

iii. cotton

prying cream.  
a praise of sentinels.  
flayers for the day.  
swords drawn  
in the thicket.  
snow-like  
white knaves cackling  
behind fingers  
that bite.

## A Bartender's Quandary

My stern broomhandled master leers  
never yet to spare me.  
But my champion of suds at hand,  
the indolent bottle,  
my dusty partner  
grins green with delight.

I am a bearded matron.  
I have two aprons:  
one to wash and one to wear,  
but until customers are well thatched  
and drowning boister with relish,  
I buff no brass.

## There Are Vineyards Upstate

- i.     made by ice age claw  
       flooded by slow blue giants  
       drained by grapes and steam
  
- ii.    ripen like the Rhine  
       but bottled in Upstate slate  
       smitten with Riesling
  
- iii.   pressed into service  
       the vatman's few red children  
       corsairs in bullion
  
- iv.    falling rain runs through  
       robbery under the trees  
       bitter long battle
  
- v.     thimble on the hill  
       a stone chapel on the bluff  
       small song for a son
  
- vi.    great oak cauldron full  
       blushing sap to live again  
       but first we must wait
  
- vii.   great abandoned king  
       some tangled reclamation  
       still sits up for sale

## On Millersburg Ferry

The boatman worked with his back.  
In hand a headless spear, prying.  
Two boots leather strapped bright and sturdy.  
He eased to a lean and eyed the passengers:  
A cobbler with nothing to carry,  
two nodding farm hands fighting sleep.  
Strings of hair clung to the reverend's temples,  
The boatman sent the smallest of smiles to the reverend's daughter.  
She watched the shore, only her curls  
trembled in the air.  
These ferry rides,  
no cost but the coin,  
made the voyage cheap.  
When he kicked away the pebbled shore of the Susquehanna,  
nothing could take the teeth from the wind.

(Interloper)

He swept through yesterday,  
walking low-East of the oaks.

We saw him legging over hedges  
sweet talking to himself in the plantations of God.

Enticing, they called him.  
Some said worth his salt

though he left the trees standing like used spindles,

He slept out in the dark hay, careful with his messy thinking.  
They found him there, and still rolled him on.

Carry this jasmine  
until rapture.

May we never catch you,  
nor the slink of your shadow.

Come with news of the harvest  
or come not at all.

## Winter Knives

The small waters  
are fleeced of chatter.

As in Eden  
before Adam gave names.

Trees walk up like men,  
a harder step than they have known.

It wasn't a hymn caught in her mouth,  
it wasn't the way they laid her hands.

Now my labors, dire and soft,  
haunt through stark reeds  
to wail.

I know nothing of winter knives,  
or how they bite  
with a sable blade.

## Eaves

A warm creak  
to this home,  
a wooden ease and groan.  
The wind batters the shutters,  
the windows reveal the rain.

From his chair, the iron poker is his crook  
and his flock is hearth and fire logs. A hewn kettle,  
lionized and rough, breathes a constant note.  
An axe kneels at the door,  
a slim gun rests quietly.

The fire stretches their bed  
Her shoes in their footprints,  
where she let them rest.

And tonight,  
his pipe will bring no comfort  
with the smoke's grey hug  
on his skin.

Still it comes,  
in the whispered morning,  
turned over again,  
her pillow cold,  
as if she had risen long before,  
careful not to wake him.

## Deep Lock Quarry

All workers carved one face  
at the deep lock quarry,  
watched it crumble into the canal  
and wash on.

Brick stocks guarded  
sweat like sap sticking.  
Mills churned, the steam coughed.  
Raised arms held high  
and brought down for bread.

The chimneys  
were buried in tall coffins.  
More leaves than cobblestones,  
more sapling than furniture,  
a family of cold millstones  
mourned by no one,  
when they drained the water for the rails.

## Riverwatch

Levee stompers  
went out that day.  
Bulge was moving  
on the River.  
Floodwaters  
coming like a whip  
down the line.  
As bad as '27, maybe,  
we didn't want to wait and see  
what had been sleeping.

Levee stompers at dawn,  
and even my mother  
went striding.  
She said when the River gushes up,  
even the grass churns under your feet:  
the whole world draining, by the neck.

Levee stompers until dusk  
went searching.  
Even my mother,  
climbed to the roof,  
and topped the high mast  
and heard the levee wail.

We saw the bones  
of factory lines.  
We saw the shopping carts in the street  
like lobster traps.  
The sandbags ran out.  
The cavalry  
died in the stables.  
And we heard the levee's howl  
like a gory battle cry  
broken  
with the River  
in its teeth.

## C.V. (My Family's Restaurants)

- i. LINCOLN HILL INN: they met.  
O'BRIEN'S, on a different hill,  
    yellowed sign missing a letter, grease fire up the hood fan,  
    said it wasn't his fault.  
There are no stories about STARS.  
THE GOLDEN GARTER for a day;  
    hired by the father, fired by the son.  
SHORTY'S, a gin mill, a dive  
    my grandfather burned down twice.

- ii. THE KNOTTY PINE built by my grandparents where  
SHORTY'S had burned, lines out the door for  
Bates Prime Rib,  
I could climb a barstool to politely request,  
"One Shirley Temple with extra cherries, please!"  
GLENORA WINERY CAFÉ over Riesling vines. My job:  
turn off the lights, 6 switch flips.  
THE LIBRARY, renamed THE VILLAGE CLUB AT SANDS POINT.  
BERGEN COUNTY JAIL, "Two 4am bus rides away  
to sling slop."  
VERAISONS RESTAURANT  
AT THE INN AT GLENORA WINE CELLARS again,  
but this time to build a hotel.  
My brother and I peeled gold potatoes seated on upturned pots  
in the kitchen, my father showed us on the blueprint  
the way doors would swing.

- iii. LAKESIDE RESTAURANT AND LOUNGE on Keuka Lake,  
last name on the checks. I shepherd my siblings  
roaming in the house next door,  
occasionally too loud and too close to customers.  
The place was haunted by an old fisherman in the mirror,  
and a woman on the docks.  
In the attic of the house we inspected  
the cedar walls and ceiling  
and the door that opened into the falling air.  
We left when my father's  
father said he would crucify my mom.

iv. RONGOVIAN EMBASSY: I helped hunt for the next place.

I filmed my parents. The tape  
of them pointing with ideas.  
I point the camera: the back stairs,  
clearly a smoke spot, the pantry  
pink Sweet 'n Low packets all over the ground.  
Big plans.

LONDON UNDERGROUND open kitchen. The customers saw  
tall white toques stride,  
the chefs could never swear,  
and they did.

INDIAN HILLS GOLF CLUB rebuilt, new logo with three hills.

BOSTON CULINARY GROUP concessions at

GREEK PEAK SKI RESORT. Hot dogs and burgers.

We were babysat by the mountain.  
We crashed and ate and crashed  
and skied and ate. We were a different family  
on a vacation where we could ski,  
on a vacation where we could afford to ski,  
on a vacation where we could afford to ski more than once.  
We presented his signed business card  
at checkout,  
“Sorry but our Dad is your boss.”

- v. KING RICHARD'S RENAISSANCE FAIRE turkey legs, muddy boots.  
Written on the side of big cups resembling trumpets,  
YARD O BEER.

PORT AUTHORITY Ferries

to Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. A full day:  
the beach, the Atlantic. My father worked.

FRANKLIN PARK ZOO and STONEHAM ZOO. \$4 waters.

I worked retail in the gift shop, sometimes

I'd be the one to crumple all the new bills so we could count them.

My parents managed. In our too big house by the sea  
we each had our own room.

My father turned to crack or cocaine: pipes on the dresser,

makeshift bong in the recycling. He gave lectures,

he loved us. He threw chairs. We babysat ourselves.

My father got fired. They didn't promote my mother.

We didn't know why

my parents went back Upstate.

My grandmother watched us.

vi. TRADITIONS AT THE GLENN RESORT AND BANQUET HALL.

The Susquehanna River flooded  
and trapped us in Binghamton.

I had a shift until 6am. One guy with blue hair  
who's only talent may have been rolling tables  
said I looked older than fifteen  
"Because you work."

My father's first DWI.

FAT CATS jazz at night. Busy Market Street business.

Upstate NY tourism. I bussed tables  
and I worked functions. I got drunk  
on New Year's in the small back room before  
I was supposed to pour the champagne  
toast into a tray of plastic snapped-together  
Marie Antoinette glasses.

My family:

Jeff, Kathy, Sean,

Alec, Mia, and Brian all

took five days of vacation to Long Island.

The phone rang:

the water main near the restaurant had exploded  
and flooded the basement and first floor.

He lost most of his office, his cookbooks.

The inspector sued the city, the city sued the inspector.

My father drove back that night talking to insurance companies.

We drove to the beach. FAT CATS closed.

- vii. HOLIDAY INN & SUITES. He arrived  
for an interview they said was a formality.  
“The position no longer exists,  
just heard from the regional office.”  
My father hit a car outside the hotel’s bar.  
He went to jail for a DWI.  
FRIENDLY’S when he got out, he managed.  
While he was gone my mother was a bank teller,  
then an assistant manager,  
then a financial consultant  
studying and passing licensing exams.  
She quit for the next restaurant.

- viii. HOLME'S PLATE turned down my parents' consulting offer  
as the restaurant hemorrhaged money.  
I worked there without them.
- STOCKYARD RESTAURANT & EVENT CENTER at THE RAMADA.  
My parents created the name and the business  
with help from my older sister's credit.  
The hotel to the brim frackers, natural gas pipeline workers.  
Tuesday was payday  
and the bar was only a crawl away from their rooms.  
I learned how to pour a beer.  
I reminded them to smoke outside  
The owners of the Ramada charged my parents with grand larceny  
after they hid their touch screen cash registers  
in the basement and said my parents stole them.  
We ended the month-to-month lease,  
carried the booze out in crates.

- ix. SNUG HARBOR RESTAURANT: Keuka Lake, Hammondsport, NY  
Rejuvenated a failing 225 seat restaurant  
in the historic Finger Lakes Region. Established profitable  
relationships with local wine, craft beer,  
and sustainable farm industries. Swam every day.  
Caught my father cheating on my mother twice.  
Once with an employee.  
Once with the nurse  
who took care of my dying grandfather.  
Scrubbed every inch.  
Hired every friend:  
Katarina, Jackson, Will, John, Caitlin, Elizabeth,  
anyone old enough to commiserate,  
my youngest brother bussed,  
my sister served, my brother served, I tended bar.  
Realized a 60% revenue increase  
over the past owner. My mother,  
the front of house sergeant.  
She squeezed the books while my father tried to run the kitchen.  
Crashed and napped in the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor apartment:  
a bunkhouse or cottage we couldn't afford.  
Managed bar staff, maintained inventory and pricing,  
drank for free right from the tap,  
slept in booths at night,  
provided customers with tasting options and suggestions.  
Ran out of money in our third winter.  
Ran out of favors.  
Ran out of summer.

## Aspire

When the fireflies are whiskey drunk,  
hovering like dust in the sun

I will catch fifty,  
fit for a proper lantern.  
And in the blue dusk,  
I will set my jar of light in the window and walk

Past clothesline  
into the tall grass,  
into meadow.  
Keeping my one window  
in sight, I run.

In rain  
my tree stands like a watchtower  
and I race to dry  
beneath lording boughs.

This year I will be tall,  
tall enough to reach the first branch.  
I will climb to the highest place;  
I will look down on our house  
and shake its eye  
in my hands.

Yet this year still,  
I stand  
tip-toed on roots,  
wild palms  
full of rain.

## On The Feast Day of Saint Lobster

He minces like a surgeon. The beasts go into their boil. My father already blunted their nerve endings with the heel of his knife. They clunk. I peel potatoes. That is my job. I gouge out their eyes and mind my knuckles. Soon the unguarded kitchen simmers. In that small time when there is no meal yet, between cooking and cooked, napkins sit cross-legged, knives lay down, bibs embrace necks. The creatures from the grave, they rise shades of pumpkin. My father talons them onto a platter. Steam hovers. My family lunges for their seats. The table is set with claws raised and bread singing.

## The Summer After They Put Out the Blue House

- i. am I older now? if I know where my checkbook is,  
can I work a riding crop  
or take on water?  
for the nerves in my feet, maybe  
a dance or two,  
before this whole place closes  
and they throw on the lights.

ii. a rare chance  
at an empty park  
full of perfectly chasable geese.  
mothers no longer  
guarding. the bolted slide  
left over.  
the bruise  
below my knee. the one sock  
that falls.  
my brothers and sisters below me  
wouldn't dare climb  
this tacky staircase which grabs  
my other sock  
holds strong and I keep an eye—  
out in the sun,  
the shape of my mother  
is cross armed.  
my brothers and sisters dance beneath me,  
shrill devils at the maypole.

- iii. my father hasn't seen buildings this high since the service  
when he split a bottle at the coliseum.  
he hasn't dared since my sister was born,  
since the sub base was open,  
since he held her,  
and a rank, and a file, before being freely dismissed to:  
make more children, ease a pain.

iv. we are hidden.  
we have uniforms for the night  
patrol. two dovetailed backyards,  
a whistle, a lookout, sizzle of crickets,  
our cool breath escaping untagged,  
traitor in our garden game.

v. stop sprinting  
through the mudpit lawn  
where little sculptures with hands  
and faces are undiscerning  
of two people's errands  
and how they make way  
in a crowd of avenues.  
at the fountain, babies  
balance on new feet while parents' hands wait  
with a safety pin and a cloth and a wish  
to not be those parents  
that chase,  
but their little bird  
escapes  
to fly naked on the water.

- vi. lead right to a sleeping playground  
near our sledding hill, now snowless.  
where the summer waterslide needs trash bags sewn,  
so a runway can pour  
a field of baby soap agitated by the firehose gush  
only one summer after they put out the blue house.  
the of the fire, my father was quick to see smoke and a story  
climbing out of the block.  
I still play in the green yard that ate up that house.  
the laundry line can hold my weight  
feet dangling over where I imagine the kitchen.

vii. an unexplained resemblance  
between generations. no one remembers  
taking this one, but that's your smile for sure.  
the kitchen light stays on to keep the house alive.  
we give it names, we draw its ghosts:  
    a kitten at the bannister, is one.  
I caught a tail dipped in ink, fleeing some writing.  
these dusty paws printed on a headboard  
can't be bottled;  
our camera doesn't have that quick magic.

viii. the snow:  
young snow,  
too early to be taken seriously,  
falling on the still-green.  
salt thrown at dinner.

## Ode to Chef's Tongs

Hot coal handler,  
brave spoons of the Earth  
greedy as patrons  
privileged to prod the roast  
and taste bubbling onion broth  
just as it blooms,  
whirling cowboy pistol,  
street performer's  
juggling trick,  
with a scalloped mouth  
not always of mercy  
when jaws crack and snap  
closed to plunge  
one amicable creature  
into hot doom,  
only to emerge with open grin,  
new twin sons, at my father's call  
you volunteer ironclad hands  
when I can't.

## When Chores Are Done

Raised in one or two houses  
made holier by dirty feet,  
while open windows drank the night.  
And we'd finally cleaned the house  
so friends could come over  
and doors could be left open;  
it's warm enough  
for my father to place sandalwood incense  
in the aloe's soil.  
The thin torches could lift prayers,  
though he doesn't pray;  
he wishes:  
keep his family safe out on the hill  
or by the river or behind the little league field  
where burdock caught one of us  
before our parents could, when we slipped off  
our clothes and stood on our shoes  
and a window broke three alleys up  
when one catch was missed  
and feet found pavement gritted  
and we lit joints at the top of the slide  
at the lip of the valley and looked:  
the factories were skeleton  
shifts but they blew the same hearty whistles  
four times a day,  
workers in the museum, farms raising  
solar panel seedlings,  
papermill boutique malls, the corner shop  
sells only windchimes,  
a grocery store offers upward mobility:  
scholarships, community college—  
  
and my father's voice:  
a holler, my name,  
and we know the time.

## Late to the Last Drive-In Movie

Neighborhood packed in a minivan  
mobbed up in the trunk biting down  
giggles, hands packed in convenient closeness— silence.  
The girl in the booth rolls her eyes for a living, we pay her before  
We have to search the back  
rows with dimmed lights apologizing, park  
and an ancient box of cartoon popcorn dances on screen  
to vinyl vibrato strings and unnamed cola.  
I find a corner near you where  
sharing blanket  
is providence.

Under the screen's blue  
white, hot sun, we bask on  
while electric waves roll overhead humming the chorus from each window,  
a crescendo vapor laser trail projector ignites in trick light fumes before  
I inch my pinky  
closer to  
yours when I can, before  
the radio erupts,  
the orchestra raises

—a voice, one voice, *the* voice.

## Deep July

Even the cicadas  
and I are  
brooding,  
the very  
tithe of  
this haze.  
I learn  
to spin sour.  
When I run  
home I am  
pumiced and washed.  
Down  
the river  
they scorched  
that skinny island  
with this year's  
fireworks.  
That Scottish Rite  
Cathedral  
is up for auction  
on the parkway.  
I'm dying to  
break some windows  
in that place,  
and see some  
empty rooms.

*It's All Happening at the Zoo*  
Franklin Park, Boston

I befriended a peacock  
free to roam  
through the people parts of the zoo.  
Even had to chase one  
as it eyed M&Ms  
spilling from the gift shop doorway.  
Me in my fullbrim outback hat,  
badgeless khaki  
boyscout shirt and shorts.

I worked  
in the Dippin' Dots space-cold ice cream hut,  
in the giraffe safari stuffed animal hut,  
outdoor airbrush tattoo parlor hut.

Places people want three day animal themed tattoos:  
forearm, bicep,  
lower back giraffe, calf calf,  
deep cleavage paw prints with glitter  
I was required to provide.

I ran register tape in the Giddyup Grill.  
I slung things breaded into checkered baskets.  
The cook with the teardrop tattoo  
called through the heat lamp,  
*Fries down.*  
He told me might have to run,  
back to Cape Verde. He said he dressed up  
like a cop and robbed a few dealers.  
My register ran out of pennies.

Late that summer, men came for him.  
*Who?* I said.

## The Face I Wore

I don't have all the letters  
he wrote,  
in a county jail, for me.  
I have what I have  
on yellow paper with attempts  
at richer words. In the margin,  
I see him try out sesion, seshion,  
session, I love you, how's your mom? I know  
his words written  
in a caricature of the usual  
scratches, he slows at a word, questions  
the legibility. Do I see  
a boy in this bed? Was it me  
who bobbed and floundered, or him  
who swam with what to say  
and thrashed when I would  
not write back.  
Luxuriating evil in my stomach,  
the power of silence.

## Long Island Sound

I punched my father in the head  
as he reached across the stick shift  
to pry keys from my mother.

We were parked near the shore.  
He was dazed  
from beach cocktails with dinner.

I flinched,  
waiting for the door to open  
and for my family to spill out,  
before I was taken to task in that sandy parking lot  
and gaped at by full bellied diners.

But my father stayed in the driver's seat  
and reached to the crown of his skull  
the way you check a wound you can't see,  
and expect bloody fingers to return.  
And my hand ballooned  
beyond my wrist  
like it blew a gasket and was taking on water,  
at critical mass.

My mother drove to some picnic table vending machine park.  
Couched between my sisters and brothers, I drank fistfuls of tears  
whose salt made me the drunk one.

## Another Opening

The restaurant waits.  
Our players primp rogue feathered costumes  
and strut out those bright lines  
that sold two desserts  
last Tuesday  
to much applause.

The manager coronates  
with the hand of God:  
for each realm of tables, a server as monarch;  
for each monarch, a busser;  
for each busser, indentured servitude  
and a night of breadding and watering  
and deep bows.

In the wings,  
a few aprons find necks,  
a few cigarettes  
find heels.  
The chef strides by in buttons,  
stabs the stove  
with a lit baton.  
A count goes out,  
places are taken.

## Sleeping Above Our Restaurant on the Lake

Two stolen plates:  
green Caesars smuggled  
up the high mast  
of the house,  
above the hive  
that hums and rattles  
like an engine,  
there's a cottage from  
someone else's life.  
Those days off,  
those mornings  
we played  
our third floor  
getaway game.  
The whole place opened  
and busied beneath us,  
until slinking for coffee,  
got us spotted at the sugar and  
caught by the arm, my mother says,  
"Lose the pajamas,  
get behind the bar.  
Lunch is slammed."

...Or Ruby Cottage

*Snug Harbor:*

This restaurant's ribcage waves more than drunks on docks  
worth watching from windows.  
Light switches sit up like rude fingers.  
Our matriarch of the southern crooked leg,  
*Ruby Cottage* used to wink from the sign,  
used to have more than diners haunting,  
local coin used to find beds already warmed  
in the only brothel for miles.

Every customer asks

Have you seen *her*?

I polish up another glass as well as my best answers:

A portrait of a woman hangs at the top of the stairs,

a white face in a black shawl,

She sizes you up like a mother,

presides over each night,

and dares every man

to fear a woman alone.

The drunks laugh bubbles into new drinks

"That's a sneer only the Madam could have."

## Dead Shift Dinner

it smells like a valley restaurant  
rinsed off and shined.  
the dead shift turns over  
like a headache or thumbscrews.  
we're shining ourselves into the brass bar,  
we're pulling the linen  
from lonely tables showing ankle,  
as the lake lies down,  
and chairs hang up like bats.  
we pack away the feast,  
plumbing lists, thumbing bills,  
picking butts from the gravel.  
on the crooked lake,  
where water thrums  
so do dead steamboats,  
wise salt veins, ghosts  
in the houses of wine,  
great oak vats full of schemes  
on the east wind— waving  
like a postcard  
through the door.  
the keyed lock forgets his grin.  
black aprons slither off from our waists.  
as we leg it down the road  
pulling a quiet heist.

## Fireworks Night Poet

We threw a blue sheet over a good spot.  
The spangled blanket poked by grass beneath.  
The snap shot explosions  
are what thumped.  
When I think of all this kindling I've gathered:  
images stacked like wood, a cord of time just for me,  
it haunts now like using Young as an insult,  
like imagining the beds of other people.  
Days I've kept on shelves, admired  
happily before stowing groceries, and standing for praise.  
My smile could not be broader.  
The grand finale, the final boom,  
I recognized a neighbor  
in the grass: a family of faces upturned  
to see the booming sky.  
Maybe I'll pilfer the entire night,  
and make up their names.

## Tutelage

Scrub out basins  
with radical ideas.  
Recycle happily the destiny of others.  
Disregard calls to lend  
pauper thoughts  
to rich men prayers.  
Radiate enthusiasm  
over artisan water colors.  
March into television.  
Proselytize ghettos  
or simmer in your tree  
where they used to  
hold dances:  
damn good barbeque.  
Bloom to insure  
they see you.  
Utter sensible niceties  
as the waiter walks away.  
Pity that no one knows  
you fear to stand  
in an audience.  
Brim with radical ideas;  
do nothing.

## The Tourist Returns

I'm an Ass on an ass.  
Sitting in a train of donkeys  
splayed up the marble steps  
of The Old World.

I'm not the only one  
who has dared confess to having  
a true fire in the belly  
and theatrically thrown my body  
at The Continent  
begging for a lean cut.

Each country  
welcomed me, a con:  
I was slamming my pockets with fists of ambrosia,  
little bears with little flags, and Real Wine.  
I was packing my cheeks with contrapposto,  
a certain European Sensibility,  
untranslatable names for bread,

When I returned to my own front door,  
the wanton profile of The Vagabond,  
basking in the quotidian,  
I heard a drizzle in the gutters,  
“God,” I said, “it even rains here.  
How beautiful. How just.”

## In the Safety of Streets Named After Trees

A girl crosses my headlights  
the image of a deer.

A comfortable strange  
is glimpsing a neighbor's pearl bottomed pool  
admiring their privacy.

I pick out tiles from a book of tiles  
imagining keeping each one clean.

The work is nearly done in the yard.  
I admire the enclosure  
and path of tiered lamps.

Voices ring out on a nearby corner  
a call's width from their homes on their streets.  
I sleep unimaginably well.

The tiles arrive with the morning.  
I plan my whole day around  
what they take to dry.  
I tamp each of them in place.

## But Rilke Said

I wouldn't take you there:  
one high tower climb  
dressed as purposeful villain  
alone  
in the pillow of arrogance,  
a certain glee,  
a wave of earth between  
isolated columns  
where I love  
to threaten  
to stay.

## Whoever Said The Devil Was Dead?

we must silence our fat mothers.  
we must silence our fat fathers.  
the seed did not take.  
the old linger.  
the magik failed.  
the brine from breasts.  
the children in soot.  
the world woke up flat.  
built on feet.  
built on backs.  
we must chew this fruit.  
we must eat this pit.  
raise spattered hand.  
to spattered mouth.

## The Age of Last Scattering

Even a place for all of us  
down in the reeds.  
Tiny molds to brim with lives  
and love to walk fingers back  
up some traceable string of memory.  
Time surprised to be strung taut and shaken awake:  
the age of bricklayers, and salt, and parked cars,  
and the shelved up way we used to dance,  
the age of alcohol and oil paint,  
basement stairs paint cans,  
Dixieland and old pipe tapped window glass,  
the age of bombast and gifts, flipped stomach kind of fury,  
of milk, bartered baths, spelling, memos, opera and swing,  
bracken and slack jaw and blue eyed girls and sugar and sugar,  
the age of wrath.  
the age of scrimping, of pandering knees,  
the age of owl nets, grey-paged daisies,  
and eyes that reach.  
There was even a place for all of us  
where we tried to chronicle  
where we tried to name  
each new strangeness.

## In Common

we get to know:  
our greasy years,  
cackling.  
your training bra regret,  
my pissed zipper school days.

we get to learn about your father's liver  
and my father's heart,  
our mothers' nightwatches:  
embers, down, a sharpening stone,  
look venom silence,  
punk ugly christmas.

we get to wish for the relish of divorce  
and hoofing the gas pedal  
interstates away  
from the children who raised us.

Jeffrey,

I am slate born of a seamstress.  
My skin has ripened and creased at my knees.

I am what has been made of me.  
Is there more to say?

“The twists of your fingers  
at the frames of your glasses,  
became my own.”

## Friends

Beyond standard drunk  
for this late in a stairwell.  
Some of us sit, some parade and domino down.  
Our evening just put on a rosey face,  
and when shouting a toast,  
his name was raised—we echoed and glugged.  
We traded cheers to health  
for the blistering pleasure of an articulate oath,  
*Fucking Jackson, the prick!*  
*what a piece of shit.*  
*The bastard.*  
We raise fists stuck to beverages. A Toast.  
We know he hung himself  
and we try not to think  
about how he left us all here.

## AFTERWORD:

When I was little I used to play a game with my mother where we would try and spot the most 'broken down barns'. My childhood was and most of Upstate New York is filled with used buildings in various states of disrepair. I remain fascinated by what those who live in the present must decide to do with the skeletons of our working past: giant empty wineries, paper mills, and yes... broken down barns. I began to imagine the workers there, I wanted to speak for them, but I was wary of sentimentality. These buildings are crumbling personal-political monuments. I don't want to be the poet who glorifies without recognizing who is or was left out of that conversation. My task was to connect my own life of work with the heritage around me. There is no way to separate me and my speakers from the places they have worked. The way my father and mother had bore us into work. I grew up in these restaurants. I learned and failed and loved in these poems. And my testimony, my voice, is a hand reaching both forward and backward, connecting memories of service with a used up present. I am reporting from the scene of the restaurant, especially Snug Harbor because it felt like the end of something: restaurants bookend my childhood and my poetry, but also the death of my friend Jackson. I want to share my own part in the heritage of work. I do not want to go back. I do not want to be 'great again', but for the people and speakers in these poems, and for myself, the work remains.