CONCRETE EVIDENCE: A COLLECTION OF POEMS VERSIFYING THE CITY

Thesis
Submitted to
The College of Arts and Sciences of the
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of
Master of Arts in English

By
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UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON
Dayton, Ohio
December, 2009
CONCRETE EVIDENCE: A COLLECTION OF POEMS VERSIFYING THE CITY

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ABSTRACT

CONCRETE EVIDENCE: A COLLECTION OF POEMS VERSIFYING THE CITY

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CONCRETE EVIDENCE: A COLLECTION OF POEMS VERSIFYING THE CITY is a poetry manuscript that contemporizes “thinking into the heart,” as the Romantic Period poet, John Keats, put it, and the forms used for such thought. As modernity started to unfold, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Romantics were inspired by their immediate and natural environment of scenic, pastoral expanses that served as the basis for versified meditations. However, CONCRETE EVIDENCE: A COLLECTION OF POEMS VERSIFYING THE CITY is composed on the objects of the urban environment, its inhabitants and their relationships, and it speculates, aesthetically, on how 21st century subject matter changes formal poetics.
The manuscript is intentionally funnel-shaped in that it begins wide
then hones in on the specific effect of the city on people. It is organized in
three parts:

1. **CONCRETE EVIDENCE**

   The section, **CONCRETE EVIDENCE**, is a wide-lens poetic rendering
   of urban objects: transportation, garbage, buildings, work, people, sky,
   and pavement. It is intended to be a meditative treatment of the sights
   of the metropolis through observations that can be gleaned by any eye.
   The poems frame identifiable images in poetic forms and language to
   discover how each influences the other. How will the urban environment
   change rhyme, versification, diction and shifts in thought that are
   characteristic of the form, and what aesthetic choices can be made to
   satisfy form and function successfully—if this is at all possible?

2. **VISAGE AND PERSONA**

   The focus of this section of poems is pointed to urban and suburban
   people and how their relationships have been shaped by their
   environment. How do environmental elements prompt the interpersonal
   relationships and resulting events that mark the profile of suburban
   dwellers? **VISAGE AND PERSONA** examines the urban environment’s
   effect on us.
3. SPECULATION

Writing poetry and approaching problems poetically changes me over time. The turn inward, that it takes to offer a quiet, thoughtful treatise, has the effect of making me the object of my own observations. How am I transformed as I walk through the urban streets, a breath away from all of the things that populate the verse of CONCRETE EVIDENCE and VISAGE AND PERSONA? Change is inevitable, and SPECULATION provides deeply personal, poetic insight into how my imaginative filters manage life’s dynamic streams of emotional, visual, physical and aural stimuli.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over the course of my student career at the University of Dayton a number of individuals have provided the critical guidance, assistance and support for completion of this manuscript.

My special thanks are in order to Professor Albino Camillo who has overseen the writing of the enclosed thesis to its completion and had an indelible impact on my academic development as a poet and creative writer. Additionally, I am grateful to Professors Slade and Morgan for their time and expertise. For your collective guidance I offer my high regards.

Thank you to each of my professors in the English department, my colleagues in the UD Intensive English Program and the staff of Roesch Library for your patience with me. You never waivered from your charge to teach and you joined me in my charge to learn. I am beholden to you.

Finally, thank you to my family and friends whose unwarranted favor is why grace is my intimate; your caretaking is poetic and my gratitude is infinite.
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CONCRETE EVIDENCE
What Urban Was

Tall buildings casting shadows of hope and wonder have filled and emptied by change and chance; have waylaid, in infancy, our efforts in advance and dashed every try we threw up past sky and mocked our hearts’ meaning. High rises of destiny invited a line—we struck a pose: a loose-limbed stance—expectant: ears bent toward a promise of romance of conquests satisfying our material desires. Cross-eyed with wires crossed is one way to see life. To comprehend the double meaning of solitaire the black and red cards are numbered by pair. So eager to justify our ardent, uphill strife we pressed in ascension up a case of rising stairs to pursue creature comforts de l’ordinaire.

L’ordinaire perched atop a case of steep stairs. Behind the black door with a fire bar red planters are filled with manicured fronds? Arched willows never weep for the hope they abscond in eight hours of minutiae travelled to by car, or bus, train, or bike, guiding a stylish Minotaur: Half-miracle, half-fool walking, coiffed, made, among tricks and hustles. Broadcloths of gain drape the throng of traffickers and consumers, alike, fake superstars.

Aghast over happy: the despicable greedy life gluts our cubicles on payday. We snort then stare at the rush from billowy clouds of quiet mist outside our office windows. Cheeks resting on our fists our twitching fingers’ tips reach for the town square. Its lace chlorophyll treetops are stroked with care, cradled by boughs of carved wooden branches grown out of trunks supporting our glances into a future of longing and imminent despair.
Half-years trump half-thoughts. My wishful thinking counts up to 5:00--last minutes of dread are softened by a hum in the sky. Fattened and fed, by verse in my head, I dream a prophetic inking. An imagined world languishes: quietly sinking in a coverlet of the city's breath. My mouth, instead of speaking, turns down by its comers. A thread of dribble and faint flakes of snow are seeping into my winter coat. It warms my heartbeat turning time. Beats strong. Clear. Thumping behind me, up the stairs, and in front of me on the town square. Snowfall gathers momentum and I mime. An angel sings Psalms strumming a folk guitar. With my finger's thinking tip I inscribe the air.
Dumpster Diving

Hinged mouths of metal lie agape in alleys full of discarded things. Heads of cabbage teal from blueberries on edge of rotten leaf. Beginnings ravaged for breakfast, rolled in newspaper, and tossed.

To the right of loving lie discarded wrongs and bleeding. Fistfuls of words flung out the window. Hard work fails us so throw it away. Word pieces have left my head, run the streets and died hurt.

Years of last week’s rot stuck to our pillows. Throw that away too, after scraping it off. Scour the bed with boiled water and soap. Admire yourself in a cracked leather coat where life lines live in rows of garbage.


Looking back of our shoulders to the Île de la Cité, laughing about Cognac warm and fair. We are building a life to be discarded when the hokey hand organ stops grinding love so softly.

Milling about mannered skin, teeth, lips and hair so divine the love we share is sweet breath I breathe messages into your perfect mouth one day will speak to me as discarded trash.
Am I wrong to look down the alley at the folds?
My crinoline’s netting, bunched in a corner, worn and thrown,
pitched on a high note hiding what I want to retrieve
from rotting trash.

A homeless man looks at my window huffing in the dumping
ground of...
Bushy eyebrows, gray wrists, strong as oxen
he lifts my burning ears from a head filled with...

Sunsets deep in our eyes. Moon nucleus rising over the Cok Hotel
I did my whoring filled with pleasure. Currency discarded
for anyone who passes seeking a meal
of garbage.
Ivory Office Tower

Sooty lungs, smoky thoughts
In a weighted chest filling
with colors from framed prints.

Flower petals nonexistent in nature.
Geometric shapes dot periods
of far thought. Not real longing.

What if tiny fairies crawled up a vein
spreading ground cashews on yolks
of Isadora’s spirit?

Swaying naked in dark light.
Shapely tulip bulbs shading
earth’s dirty knowing.

Threads of laughter tracing songs in bored meeting
minutes of dances in shadows of dark light?

Pinky rings glistening on each finger of each
typist flicking orchids off gossamer strings?

Shafts of pink scorching wings of geese nesting
in French sunflowers. Chins tilted up in the dark?

Picket fences marking date groves in waves of calligraphy?
Peach trees in southern orchards? Lynching never hanged?

In the sharp grassy blades of the lawn next door
under awnings in a temple where night passed before
hearing footsteps in hollow ears where dreams ring loud.
The City

Clouidy grey sky-stained
prayer on your taut west cheek
instead of kisses.
Solstice in Brooklyn

Sliced Georgia peaches
eaten ripe with nectar drops
dripping on the step.

Neighbors cross the street
Until slush piles into curbs
Of cold icy lanes.

Radiator heat
Steam up windows from inside
Blocking spring’s upstart.

Can anything grow
In winter solstice shadows
Or does it need palm

Trees swaying and bare
With oversized nuts between
The beach and winter?

Trade winds never last
Long enough to chase away
The impending snow.
After Hours Joint with an Outhouse

Grandma’s relish tastes of jalapeños.
Burning the chill of friends
Bearing frost from outdoors
And frugal largesse of welcoming
Air. In a brief pitted olive
A tooth crumbles and cries
Against Jack Daniels’ soul
Racing to the shed in violence
Heard in rotted slats
And a sinkhole of stench.

The cottonwood counter
Basks in silken dogwood.
Lamplight wafts of cedar
With a hint of cigar.
Small vestiges of sorrow
Turn champagne to beer
While the post-midnight
Patrons, dot streetlight
Clasped in the creases
Of the door they came in.
Finding Sanctuary #1

A halo of coolness
suspends blessed saints’ death walk
through opaque color.
I fall far behind them
where god’s spirit can find me.

I trail them in fear
face in profile eyes cast down
past forward. Step through
on to middle ground. Ring
fresh chimes, signal I’m here.

Wop! I’m healed—leap toss
Kick my crutch. Lay on hands. Drink
poison. Handle snakes.
Hallelujah glory!
Where are you? god asks me.

Halo of lightness
Homily dissolves. Scented
fleshy sin evolves.
Rosaries on wooden pews.
Pub rats scurry from vespers.

Repentance catch dawn
climb over vaulted skylight
Ceilings implore grace
Bitten tongues spew out forethought
Anonymous thorns prick my palms
Concrete Evidence

Pei curvatures circle in and stop just short of skin on life,
Inhale a whistle exhale a plea to not perish from inside out
While cabs race by, always alive, slicing perils like a knife.
A bus collision is taking place; tossing random people about.
Touches hold long and linger their smells on shoulders,
Eyes slither up thighs, hold long, relax then smolder
Their brand, a hot iron, into the city’s creamy center
Of feeling bound to hope: a show of concrete evidence.
Need a devil’s plan to rescue me. Since, now, I know God’s won’t.
Sailing off a ledge I strike hard edges; snow drifts all the way down,
Land in street litter, cracked pipes and skulls, to find that I am sound.
Tossing myself off, I flail a while, fix my chin, and swim down a wall,
Skin my knees and knuckles, wince, brave the pain then crawl
Through salt melting brain freeze; merciful warmth after all.
VISAGE AND PERSONA
Symphony No. 1

I.

Reading Music:

To see the melody--
Tone, rhythm, tempo.

Codified symbols
on a specialized page.

II.

I know its shape and the landscape.
Oh. It is divine in places found.
Throughout the city I see treasures.

III.

Young bronzed-green eyes
Piercing traffic and screech
Round the corner while
Clutching daddy’s hand.
White collar hovers
Stiff round his brown
Neck. Lineless. A
Sinewy perch

Of wonder of fear
Of taut strings of
Pulleys spinning a
Crowded street corner
Presaged by Banneker;
Organized centuries ago.
A wheel. A spoke. A
Hub of desire.
IV.

Oh. The scent of sound wafts from the ground.
Sights pierce then reverb the back of my eyes.
Throughout the city I see treasures.

V.

I dig through the grave,
Peer over its trench,
Arresting the scavenge
Left for me by thieves.
Trundling amid mass
Scraps of ruin in mass
Heaps of thoughtless...
Hairpins have fallen

From a dancer’s bun holding
Painted gold stars
Caught the wind;
Dropped instead of blowing.
This twinkling gutter
Its stagnant water
Sparkles like sugared
Ginger lying still.

VI.

Come morning I wake.
Pause. Before opening
My eyes
I have cried in sleep.
Sunrise
Forms salt beds.
Its crystals
Reflect treasures in
The city.
Lost in the City

Which way do I get to Indy from here? His question posed casually in Dayton.

Grey, sticky stains affronting his gear; fiddle’s bow dragging the length of the station,

smoke winding from embers of a ciggy, past his ear, burning heat scorching his face and mine.

He turned brazenly in my dreams. I tossed all night. I dreamed he walked west in a straight line.

His mouth clamped shut, as he tread right, fastened, closed in slow determination.

After lunch, past dinner, at the library’s front door, he reeked consummation from the night before.

Smoke wound from embers of a ciggy they shared, burning, heat scorching his lips and hers.
Proposition and the Reading Man

Transit fares ring like slot machines laughing.
Waiters perch on bench slats breathing bus fumes.
Tilting, he asks, “Shall I pay you?”

Does my sign say I’m for sale?
Is my zipper loosing traction?
Are my lips swollen and juicy red?

Old-fashioned ideologies, replace
plain inquiries—an intruding sleight of mind.

His courteous brow arches:
“For the newspaper,” he explains.
My retreat reddens my ears.
My cheeks and nose are plump
With the heat of his reply.

I slink into the melee of beeps,
brushes and stares. My costume
is a stripe of desire.
The Perfect Couple

In a room of helium
Balloons giggling bouncing.
Slow tails sharp elbows
Crooked arm imprints

Encircled a length of pain
By way of destiny.
Miracles enslaved us
In your hold on my waist.

Tombs buried us alive
For drawing boundaries of expectations
For living in imagined paradise
We would not go for fear.

To music we could not hear
Faithfully we spoke the unknown.
Changed our words in mid-sentence:
You soothed me--rocked me in doubt.

Recover an old medallion
At the bottom of our tea chest
Bearing words we say to unlock doors
So gravel underfoot won’t tear our soles.

Leaflets flutter down with weight loss ads.
Losing weight will make us light.
Crying in our sleep will make us right
As we cling to each other on the dance floor.
Finding Sanctuary #2

Homeless and gentle
Making friends who keep teddy
Safe under the bed, bug-free
Natty sloppy and sweet
With one eye hanging to see
Monsters that eat little children.

Food stamps and soda
Making sandwiches to eat ready
For bed--the overpass shaking.
From point to point we roam
The street looking for the mean
Monsters that eat wives and children.

Cautious and wary
Your tender coils have loosened
Into tired strands of blonde
Dirt lice and dreams of home
With both eyes open to see
A saving grace that sees us.
Past Our Old House in a Hurricane

An address of crumbling brick:
Identification numbers still exist
Above the screen doors on our porch
Stoop reflected in mirrors of rain.

I remember each day spent in a corner
Of the sofa enchanted by lint
Living in darkness
Behind eyelids shut tight.

Waking, wishing, thinking
For ranch-style-floor-plan solace.
Where shutters watch porch swings
Amidst lawn chairs.
Take Away

He dashed across the lawn.
I never saw him again.
“Tow-headed?”
Does anyone say that anymore?

He ran, slipshod
In flip-flops. The grass
May as well had been
Beneath his flat feet.

I heard him cry mute
And disappear in a red
Car envelope of misuse
And ride into midday.
Main Street Queens

Signmeisters gesticulating chatter galore.

They swish and sashay
past muddied embankments
of gullies they slept in last spring.

Melted ice flows in palpable streams.
Their wet tongues move deftly
through glinting talk themes.

An anklet dangling;
two don tight tees. One
insists on too skinny jeans.

We laugh, hold our thoughts;
pose questions with our eyes.
We are not part of their jokes.
Strange Sort of Heaven

Life goes on forever until
It spreads above appearing
Expanse of sky knows what.

Clouds belched by power plants
linger over crops feeding moths
fluttering on tissue paper wings.

Workers in fluorescence
believing every song they hear
from sidewalks of moving flesh.

Cover me. Live me. Protect me
from harmless thoughts
while I whittle a stick of doubt

Fold a piece of empty
into halves fitting the pocket
of my vest.
Fast Food

Rain.
Shine.
Under glass
And upholstery of new car smell.

White kids jump, leap,
smile and shimmy,
through and above,
the jumbled jangle,
pink and yellow jungle gym
at Burger King
I-75 North.

The dancing tassel
of Jenine’s mortarboard
now long past memory
at the interstate exit.
Baby graduates from Kent
then mama
eats pheasant
under sesame seed buns
in a hurry.

(Es) Chewing stability for
Peas and macaroni and cheese
ache too much
like Daddy’s knees
and the thought of being
alone, burdened
pressed densely
into the flesh of her cortex.
The plastic net
of the pink and yellow jungle gym
shines
under glass
for the white kids(kin gloves).

Jim Crow caws of
our new northern home
off the free(dom) way.
SPECULATION
Certainty

In me make me be you. I am
adrift on a silvered shard of pane
in darkling mindless nothing.

Each rung I seize in devotion my arms
ache to hold this mind of mine.
In me make me be you. I am

Inside, your night’s swoop curvature
is filled with convex fancy light
of darkling mindless nothing.

Unsure to know and settle into
your bellow of fiery edginess
in me be you I am

Our infinite flailing limbs are caught
and crossed and joined behind our backs
in darkling mindless nothing.

I was until you became to me.
Taut listlessness is bound in us.
Make me be you. I am
reposed in mindless nothing.
Man Sitting on a Curb Pointing

His smile is genuine ivory
One finger stabs the air--
Upward--piercing atoms.
Invention swirls around us.
A new made-up symbol
Joins us instead
Of the things
We will do today.
Yoked in a shared
sight. Together
We ignite each other’s
Flame on hunched backs
Laden with things
We will do today.
Earthenware

Vegans do not eat chickens
or eggs of amorphous strain
hatched from scrambled limbs
of kicking bones awake in sleep.

Fringed bangs and lashes
brush at my face. Birdlike,
hungry, catching barbed wire
rolling by in clumps
on the train overhead
shaking the bridge.
Terror of Auschwitz
rattles my brain.

My shallow snort:
a phrenic scale up bitterness tells
phlegmy stories:
the hotel in Shreveport
and the Lorraine--
someone dying for me
living for change
fighting for faith--
a supernatural feat.

Vegans lap at the ground
sour taste buds gorging
sweet organic champagne.
A sacrifice transfused
intravenously through time.
Entropy

The smell of fresh peonies encourage us
We oblige the leftover petals
Pick at remnants of regret
on a thread of light
Ultraviolet rays illuminate stains
Brown

The face of a spotted moon
reflecting our soon to be golden years
Fragile
Afraid to be clear

I touch your flesh
You disperse into shadow
Blend into gray wade into deep water
At once we drown in a wave of disdain
crouching at bay like a wolf
Stay

We frolic near the surface
splashing like our son in the surf
Playful
Ecstasy frees him

Tossing dried stems at the end
Inside
A soothsayer’s caress
A glass ball of lies
wound round our centuries
holding hands kissing lips
Jukebox playing goodbye
Onset

Nothing happens now.
Youthful times, and pretty, float in a mirage back there. Somewhere words are simple.
Messages play quietly from signs under lace.

Fear outlines my turned-in feet where I stand for all or nothing that is left.
Alone stands next to me in the Metro mumuring French I echo to a breeze.
The train comes in nine seconds of speed. A silent blur.
I stare into moving.

Dust bunnies litter my sweater--leftover warmth follows me on errands.
Cagey old age spreads a perfect blanket from biting cold outside, when I walk on broken legs from antique chairs to the marketplace after dark.
Sleepwalking. Hobbling gently in a slantwise shuffle dodging warning shots.
Saturday Night in Paris

Parisian streets always seem safe
On slickness leading to cool
And the warmth of a dark club
where recesses in shadow are silhouettes
Bobbing to the mind’s sixth sense
Lurking in the corner
Nestled in a lover holding
On for dear life and good
Food going down slowly
Past a catch in the throat.
Midwestern October

Fresh cut grass from the park in autumn
sinking in my nose braced for brown.
Moist among dry
Green against frost.
Do my ungloved hands tell my age
and bloodshot eyes reveal my secrets?
Both cast hot shadows in light of winter.

In the heat of our kitchen
his arms smell of baking;
his touch a song from '99.
I grind coffee beans by the fire for dinner
standing next to him two trees in autumn
smells of color catch icy flakes
of fresh cut grass.

He will leave me
to southern exposure.
Fallen leaves bare branches
against the mouth of our cave
where my heart is ready for October.
I long for foliage
on green grass cuttings.

Salty sadness
lies slick on my fingers
curling back on palms from yesterday.
Winter's weight
opens and shuts
disturbing
final trail of snow.
Resting on the Way South for Winter

Frozen midstream on a lake
Caught in momentary pause
A current has stopped my flow
Dragging fate that lies below.

Unmoored to time between
Top water and bottom’s pull
Sailing midstream on a lake
Traveling to a cloudburst.

Beauty redirects shame
Traveling south to warmer climes
Ribcage tightening in a shiver
Breast resting on a sunken heart.


