THE UGLIEST GIRL IN COLUMBIANA COUNTY

A thesis submitted
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by

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POEMS

Decommissioning Activity, #1

Clear the foundation, this slab
drifts like the salt grains we've left.
The silt sinks through distinct exits,
North and South, to Willow Grove
and places unknown.

This reflection of retainage
drums up the stacked dead.
Limestone pallets in the
historically unused meadow.
All send out runner vines
and bless the aquifers below.

Above, safety shower heads
hang calcified stalactites,
snaggle-toothed,
aching for skin,
aching for the strip.

We've done our best
to redact their memories of flesh.
Tornado Watch for Columbiana County, Effective 6PM EST
It's not exactly danger, it's...oh, I don't know. Something oppressive...like thunder.
~Watership Down

Tar slackens. It knows the score, lays dumb and drags tongue under tires. Concrete swelled before, filled with ice. Not it tenses against the push of sky.

Sheets stick slick like cellophane, crackle with ozone. A bed abandoned for the chill of a basement floor while the stratosphere fault-lines.

They forgot to crack the pane. Sparrows are sure to sweep in, free to drape the lamps with twine, to craft hats of tin-foil.

The light grows nauseous.

Across Ellsworth Avenue, twigs fall like the eight of wands. They snare conversations from Hanoverton and pin them to lawns and telephone poles.

Such murmurs fall into the bent ears of grass:
Driving wheel left to rust.
Darts on a dress.
The Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County and Her Antonyms

The lovelies of the county: countless seeds on a parachute ball. With wind or other forms of flattery they waft away, untouched by soot and safe in stratospheres. When they give it up they mean it, owning moans and curled toes.

Such girls find comfort on the altar, on that seat of adoration. Holy, holy down to the depths of viscera and marrow.

They don’t bleed through jeans during 8th period, or crack windowpanes with thoughts.

The Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County skulks along the chain links and false dawn of the industrial park. She speaks the dusty language of sparrows, of things tiny and common.

She shifts in her strange skin and finds allegiance with the Starlings and Cedar Waxwings: despised gluttons fat on cherry blood.

Pretty girls as far as Centre Township claim ignorance of these birds, even when they suicide against sliding glass doors.
The Catastrophes Are Many:

the faulty latch that catches loop,
pulsing diode in the attic,
the errant mole, chocolate-rich.

*Or an aquifer, marrow-deep.*

A ruptured membrane, uninvited.
Amelia Earhart’s broken nail;
the half-life in submerged steel.

*Or barrels sunk like bones.*

Triangle fractures in windowpanes,
the shuddering of basements walls,
the bucking of a county route.

*Or benzene, mirex, chloroform.*

Black ice in the shade of night,
fraying of a vein,
the final hiss of a black hose snake.
Autumn in Uncanny Valley

The hills drip funereal wallpaper:
A nauseous swirl of paisley and rot seeps
through loam to the riverbed.

The trains yawn a Doppler howl.
It slides into the vale and shatters
like the window suicide of birds.

The song strain hitches into minor key.
Crooked chords pucker skin, shudder
up the bones and grey-scale the land.

In the furnace-sick night, shadows trudge
an industrial strut, assemble within the god-void.
Who can know what dreadful cargo they unload?

Black boxcars lurch to places east,
and west. Those cumbersome carts amble
over horizons and past the vanishing point.

Autumn comes in a decay haze.
I have lost count how many have sieved
through me: a quickening silt

in the uncanny valley where
birthdays are memento mori.
Cicada Cicatrix

Red-eyed beasts push out the Titlelist, strange egg rattles down the bowl.

Lumped to lump, erector-set legs sore, hooked body to body. The curse shifts on the par four.

Like the cousin May-Fly that skitters up nostrils, they cling to the knee sock

of a fireman's father. He is the one dying under the rot of Ohio sky.

The cicadas chirp the countdown; a malicious rat-a-tat July to September cadence.

It's only Autumn that can exorcise the grass and oaks of the Cicada's abandoned mast.

A confederacy of shells blow from anchors and memories of a sunrise-sundown chorus.

In a month the scab slides southwest. It sloughs off completely somewhere around Darke County.

King Cicada remains, gripped around his egg, in the dogleg bunker exposed by a drafty May.
Questions Following a Phrase from *Life History Notes on the Ohio Little Brown Bat*

What little business do bats have?

What space for knick-knack bat tchotchkes? What load limit fields their sprees?

Can they carry long the heaviness between their ears? Femur-free yet full of stratagems and all the echoes caught.

What bat ideas are their flight?

Do they sink under diminutives?

Do they tip from skies when thoughts are freed?
How the Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County Got Ugly

First, it happened. Happened for four months.
It hurt her in the
She couldn't find a
and no one knew that she

Time timed on her cheekbones. Her face mausoleumed.
The dead turned in the
like the inversion of her kneecaps.

That thing that happened hung in periphery
It victimized her with Polio and from a point
in Summit County, compass-shadowed
her she would try to
But there was no

Clavicles cracked that summer and she was bird-hollow.
Retinas detached. She could see her own neck.

What happened for four months, happened for five years.
And no one will
And she still can't
In the Bone Mill

frit frets through flesh
while the thermoform
press sweats. Press sweats future
anxieties, quakes with quivering
faults. Faults strain beneath the itch
of a rail-yard cicatrix. An itch a century
long, scraped-sterile of benchmarks.

The known moan: collected sighs
of third shifted bones, the creak
before the come-home, the foreman's
simper-stained mark of Cain.
When the seismic seize takes
hold the home shakes down
the naked skid into unknown.

In the bone mill, even the filaments
know certain scores. Deeping in
the scorch, shudder dark of negotiation
week. It's a hard thing: missing
their makers, their switchers,
fearing atrophy, the searing
stroke of a scab.
Death As Seen From Florence

Some shout a Sago struggle, wretched and submerged. It's not an easy thing, meeting your maker.

From this altitude, a weekend second coming, perhaps a third. He drags toes over clear-cut mountains, vertebrae agape.

He will miss her longitude, mistake the Il Duomo for the Belvedere.

Morgantown brittles in the joints of arthritic bridges, fallen before. She crosses them at thirty-two thousand and some.

Contrails and grace dissolve in this place and she kneels always West.
The Filet-O-Fish and the Holy Terror

The door made that noise when he came in, Lenten offering in hand, to the kitchen with the resistant linoleum striped with fault lines and one peeling gap that widened with each summer. My father determined appetites and knew how to fill the belly with pits and hollows then and now still. Pepper, mutt-successor to Bunky, was on the table again. Incisors hooked through an eye in the lace curtains, brain-scrambled with oil-fryer lust. *I'll think about eating it* I said and he said *no goddamnit you'll eat it now and I'm going to watch every swallow* and I said *no I want to wait, I want a Barbie audience. A Last Supper cast in plastic.* Pepper trembled the table and swayed against the loose wing-nut. *I swear to God* he said *I swear to God you better--.* I sock slid down the hall and he thundered enamel from work boots in pursuit. The struggle was brief. *No no no I will eat it now I will I want* I said. *no you won't eat tonight if you won't eat here and now the dog will eat now.* Father tartar-bombed my feet, scattered bun from fish. I suffered the ecstasy of the brown dog, the curtain-crash, table-collapse. Held back by one cracked hand. And still that night I lifted Father's sleeping eyelids and watched his dreaming roll through the exhaustion and wondered what end drew near.
The Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County and the Sticky Fumbling

Myopic eyes and reptilian hunger
behind the utility shack

behind Southeast Elementary
covered in chicken grease

after running over the white ermine
on Cunningham Road and

lying to her parents about Popeye's Chicken
he wearing her jeans because of an accident

there’s the pipe with the carnal graffiti
she wraps her ugly bits with upholstery

when his fingers test the bones in her neck
ghosts of a thousand volleyball games

thunder in the gym behind them
and the Buick is misty with the

rose smell that corpses exhale.
Mirex

He mired, his salt-load solvented in her Swisher Sweets, in her sweated sheets, in her pores. In her.

Her core spun loose, lost axis, lost depth with him in her. Him: the wobble king, silt-stirrer, slit-sealer.

Bareback rider, he wants to explode her core to compounds.
If You Meet the Buddha on the Road, Kill Him

Be assured, if you don’t he will return, slither out of the heating duct at a party held some November night in the basement apartment of a friend.

Only he will no longer be the Buddha. he will shake in metamorphosis, genderless, a Frankenstein’s monster of every undead trauma long coiled, now sprung from yellowed memory.

Perhaps a well-known hand or a winter car ride, down Route Eight from Cuyahoga Falls sighted through the faces, will choke you with Buick exhaust.

You should have left that gentle man broken on the road.

There will be other visits, ones that don’t stir the bile. A transvestite in the Akron Country Diner will smile knowingly as she tugs her silver chains.

You may even share cabin air with the Christ Himself, on Continental Flight Four Hundred.

Eventually you will long for visits: a temporal burst of stars across a foggy room.
The Hearts of Fish

are low and grey. Simplest of the vertebrate.
Silt-heavy, they droop close to the origin.
Do the ventricles hear

the core turning, nickel-rich?
*Scales protect finfish from scrapes and diseases.*

*Scales can show growth rings similar
to that of an aged tree.*

Silly piston, grey and hard
runs the circuit alone

rehearses the same phrase
heart-gills-body
heart-heart
gills-body-heart.
Questions for a Barred Owl

Sorry bird, stranded in daylight,  
what ruffle has you now?

Are owlets safe? Did branch break?  
Does something prickle your downy skin?

Black-eyed bird, wakened wrong,  
Can you feel the state shake?

Where are your thousand now?  
But bone and fur? Rattled loose to lawn?

Erudite bird, how will I die?  
By water or road? By my hand?

By knowing, now.
The Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County Considers the Physics of Former-Corpulence

In other space the fat globules separate. A slinking mercury memory arcs through dark matter.

She tracks the trajectory of her jiggling elliptical orbit. Sometimes her bits collect, parade, balloon-tethered to her.

Every other year they descend through the stratosphere to remind her: matter cannot be created or destroyed.
Marching

June knew she would die before him,  
the twelve years between  
a small variable x in a genealogy  
of bad hearts, tuberculosis, deaths  
in the County Cork style.

She dropped memento mori throughout the house:  
stubbed-out cigarettes from the winter of 1990  
squeezed between fingers as she  
watched the bombs fall over Baghdad.

A triangular fracture upon a pane  
made by hands pressed against the night  
that summer the hot air balloons  
floated through the backyard.

Dwight would follow the thread for years,  
until he stopped finding her hairs  
across the back of the couch.  
Sleeping sighs ceased to wake him in the night.

Didn’t he know about winter deaths?  
They move sudden and against turn,  
like the cold fronts that smoother  
in the Northeastern Ohio practice  
of making lions into lambs.
It's Got Me a Mess

FRANKLIN SQUARE - Recent explosions in Salem Township have caused additional problems for one veteran suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

John Caldwell, a veteran served auditory hallucination after one explosion. *I thought I was losing my mind.* The far-off artillery, a few nights I felt them.

Caldwell lives Route 558, lives through the vine, through reports of explosions in the township. In a million years he heard them. *I thought it was just me.*

All explosions at night with all but one in the township that came to pin-points. Theories range seismic charges nothing fits the thread.

Caldwell has lived: *can't begin to tell you ... a lot of the nights walked my house with my trying where it's coming from.*

One person who learned the setup is involved and dangerous after dark, during daylight a group of people was called to watch the least exploding on Butcher Road. The seismic charges in shale drilling, underground soundings for the drilling.

The COMPANY specializes seismic acquisitions and maps the oil and gas. The procedure requires geo-phones along the roadside.

A REPRESENTATIVE explained the right-of-way, used up the during daylight hours like exploding.
Caldwell said the explosions were something completely new. *Other vets heard it too but they live on the other side I don't know about the others* I can't live like this. This has got to stop.

Caldwell looked for but hasn't seen. *Sometimes it sounds on the battlefield* *Other times away.*

*It's got me a mess.*
The Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County and the Self-Love Catastrophe

She should have known the bathmat would not hold, deceptive seashells and their faulty octopus grip.

Her toes must have popped one loose and, of course, the rest follow. Puck, puck, puck and her poor tuckus lands drain-side.

On the roof, the birds are sniggering. She can hear them, knows their hollow heads dip low to the exhaust pipe.

She tries to look through the roof, to meet the woodpecker's eye. He is the worst, always interrupts her comings and goings.

He sends the occasional dang dang down the roof through the bathroom fan.

She wishes she could shudder like steel, grind to exhaustion, but the pipes constrict and her toes tingle and numb.

The woodpecker tells the sparrows he does not mistake steel for wood.
When He Brings the Doldrums

Dew-wash the freckles from foot to chest. Backwards prance, ankle caught drain ditch. An Oxford flood won't free you from those blighted snares; the splinters prick you. He wilts into you, drags the moon from under thigh.

Undertake this new solution: heavy swallows till your belly fills with soot. His toxic metals melt absurd. His wrong form, his beryllium smile submerged, trachea-sound. Penny-singer, panty-thiever: bind him with no call.
Carbon Monoxide Death, Benton Rd.

The string has frayed, clear the dashboard of fingerprints, dust hieroglyphs chatter clean me.

Let the water through windows, sealed.

Topographies that hold him are not concentric. Spiral always inward, always to the summit, to one answer: absurdity.

Spiral to the curious black hose, snake neck slack against the door, nostrils pinched by power windows.

He remembers the linens, cups, a cancer wife, her patina scratched across walls.

Rafters above cradle unused wares. Steel and rust angels chant in the language of hemoglobin, lividity.

They'll find him curled, hands like a child.
Volatile Organic Compounds

A tree implodes with starlings:
hated creatures.

Her bells are full of bats, sick velvet sack:
Thiamine babies.

Her blood was boiled once:
poisoned vessel.

The crik stinks and rots:
sickened scum.
Helen Tussey's Offering to the River Ohio:

Oh Helen, Coraopolis is losing land, limping back to the silt-soot, swelling with barge scars.

Your boys rise from new shores, mucked with river and grief, bearing strange gifts: pen cap, flip-flop.

They come chattering of the long drag through hallways of Sewickley Valley Hospital, of box-springs at river bottom.

You give jars of buttons, mined from the duplex: detritus of your loneliness. They layer over dormant mayflies.

When they cross break-walls again he will be dust. Come August and his wraith recedes with the waters and leaves only the haunt of feature across your boys. A salt stain of heavy brows, a tendency towards leaving too soon.
The Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County is a Poor Daughter

Her father fears his middles, the ends left to fray. He dreads the mess of decay, the excess of what's left after him: the ugliness he cast to exist, the bad egg laid.

She is his brown thrasher: chaos chick. The ugliest bird sashays, mouth twig-full, to the downy spot in his periphery. She nests in his nausea, in his negotiation week. She swells his home with monoxide lullabies. Fills the hollow left in his orphan's nest, no wraith of his mother but the black of himself turned girlbird.

Same-stuffed, does he feel her marrow want? Her hollow bones? Does he know the time of her bloodless tides?

What worth, his damned strange hominid? Once desired, now speckled with gender trouble, disordered and his.
The Two Most Unhappiest People On Earth

The War was on. Outside, the porch pulled loose, exposed their cogs and shame.

He, a smoking nurse, commandeered her rig, surfed the sludge in her stomach.

She owned the slosh, acquiesced, yes, to her brunette blues, yes to the coverage embedded in her sacrum.

They welcomed the leaves, denied detritus. He licked from the necks of broken branches.

She sipped up all the maple syrup, became the bane of Ohio Edison calls.

Questions of mass destruction rattle down drywall; the war makes avenues into boulevards.

There is no safe place.
Setting His Features

The story is convex, swollen with sawdust. It directs its proceeds to this point. In this point, there is no return. How could there be? The end slid over the curve a long time ago. Forget beginnings. There is a body, still. The body is tired from telling. The body is in repose, lips slack and hands only recognized. In this story: an implosion of starlings, box turtle in his Busch box, cemented sump pump. All sunk, all set. The story is all laid out.
The Ugliest Girl In Columbiana County Rests In the Attic of Ethel's Millinery Shop

She followed the topography this far. It's the pause that buckles tiles; her eye-freckle betrays shades at the aperture's edge. It's the only way she can find such strange gifts: charcoal gum, iron shaving. The birds rest decimated, a peasant wrapped round a heron in the porkpie valley. Their language is lost to her now. In the absence of took-took and caw, she constructs a genealogy of the horses; feels their hair shuddering in the plaster. They were a blue bunch and a good match for the tin ceiling, cracked. In periphery they might manifest and bead-bloody linseed with their galloping. Had she time and world she would slip with them through shutters; through maintenance boundaries with her pilfered feathers.
Litany to a Barred Owl: In Times of Exile

Grant me lift, another rite.
Grant me speed, lift my want.
Grant me eyes and ears and feathers long.
Grant concealment, grant me gone.

Grant visions of topography.
Grant downward slopes, grant them green.

That you would spare me
from fence and crik.

That you would spare me
from shadowed trees.

That you would vouchsafe for passage
to other space.
**Shooing of the Catbirds**

Catbirds clutch the top of rakes, senseless in the garage. Father says: we've got ourselves some squawkers.

A revolution 'round the Dodge, I am no girl, straddler of oil sicks; my belfry's bat-less.

I seize his pitching wedge; I am no driver of birds lost among tools, in state-controlled bluster. There's a snowy silence, a flash of a bowing ass, safe on prongs. Oh Father, let the pretty birds free.

Door-frame's warped, you never could see, could know, I'm titty-true. Your bassinets were always blue. You thought you paid your dues, Oh fatherless Father, did he do the same to you?

And now a girlchild! What to do? Go silly birds. He'll sweep me clean with you.
June M. Daniels
1923-1991

The head-start, the gun jumped
you died a rabbit death, an
Ash Wednesday exit.

He fed your cardigans to the incinerator
but left your cigarettes half-smoked
to catch motes in the basement.

And the house lost its houseness
and your crafts list unfinished
and he took a decade of note
collecting before he finished.
At the Mouth of the River of Bees

She was a small thing, they say, almost like a child. With new mysteries in new songs and new names for new mysteries and there’s the way of it, name and mystery, and the pulse of a grand tail. To the hollow vale into which the pebbly bridle path leading from their gate descended. Imminent threats of fierce storms: a fierceness that stirred her more than his gentleness. *Come with me*, he said offering her another choice, like a priest administering Last Rights at the mouth of the river of bees. Her dreams are visited by bees, but they bring her no messages; the calligraphy of their flights remains mysterious. She will follow the spirit dog to victory like a ghost. The flames ate the sky like a hungry monster who could never get enough, remotely resembling God.
Questions For a Barred Owl Concerning the Consumption of Bones:

Are my bones white like the bones of moles?
Do they scuttle down the gullet the same?
Do they let off a dust when you cough?
Can you taste memory, do thoughts
rattle against your down belly?

How heavy are bones? Are they the same
going in as coming out? Where does
the worry go when flesh and feelings
are consumed? Hungry owl, can you sink
my fear if you swallow my bones?

Whose bones are best?
Where are my bones?

How many bones are stacked in you?
How should I count bones? Do you break bones?
How many bones in me are broke?
To a Burned Woman

PERRY TOWNSHIP - Ardes Bauman, 60, of Salem, is the woman burned. Monday is mourning that Tuesday identification was made.

A blue found near her remains, registered her name. The death remains under.
Salem police said Bauman was summoned and taken. No arrest was made, said it was certainly a matter. Said, I don’t know. We wait. Any action depended.

The remains will be still. The results to return.

While on routine Egypt Road observed the closed-off Monday.

The road dead ends, but runs north with a steel crossing.
Zoning Questionnaire for Salem, Ohio

Is the foundation built on marrow?
Is it haunted by beavers, minx, and fowl?
Do the feathers of birds emerge from the rafters?
Does the basement floor shudder from unseen concussions?
Do the walls swap wallpaper?
Do the registers sputter up skin cells?

Do the barren blimp-circle the lightning rod?
Southern Shallow Groundwater

Swallows swoop at crik level, what pulls them low?

Magnet hearts, heavy with minerals, answer sunken metals.

I cannot hear anymore, the spooling and unspooling below.

I lost their language, their names. They will not tell me; I will not know.

*Crik-craw* the downy crows bellow, and *who-cooks-for-you-all*, the Barred Owls moan.

Bark and moss suckle their shrills, swallow the answers low beneath the loam.

Only bones speak back on the lab slab, those poor minerals spilled from owls among the dust of danger and Sparrow down. Their hollows hold an excess of echoes from below. The progress-throb beats sick in dissected birdie bones, nausea of a noxious first coming: what seeps skyward from soil and mars other bones and fills fat full with filamented foil.

And the bird bones become my bones as I sip from the stilling pool.
Closer to the core than me,  
I question you the more:  
the map gaps, fed squirrels,  
your many pets.

Your pheasant-feathered fedora,  
your horseshoe pitch.  
If I can still see,  
does it mean they still exist?

And grandfather, I have done  
the track test, the tongue  
to wire, the bathtub nest,  
the wanting for death.

Your ninety-one to my nineteen, my  
twenty-five. Can there be a kind century?  
Are we kin in this mixed,  
undermined misery?

What will I have left to say,  
if we should meet again?
The Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County and the Pillars of Salt

Most of them dust to a halt somewhere around the 7 and 14 Truck Stop. The Ugliest Girl wonders what drew the damming down. Was it a longing for carbon skies? For chemical criks and skeletons of steel? Grain silos and the echoes of reeds? The salt statuary stills, fused to clay. A little alchemy at the ankle is all it took to grind the population to this pulpy halt. There is no one left now; the whole damn town is stuck. Loose from the petting zoo, tiny deer marry themselves to the stalled with tongue and tooth. Squirrels swirl black and grey and every family dog loses name and leash. Back in the borderlands, TVs chatter up entropy and cars hum in garages. The white noise shudders her spine. The Ugliest Girl looks and looks but does not salinate. If she was to turn to anything, it'd be soap. Nostalgia, silly wants, whatever seeps through veins at the point of exit would catalyze her into a sudsier substance.

But she doesn't pass over the Pennsylvania state line. She dare not creep a toe. She haunts firework factories instead and the clay doesn't claim her. She fixes fuses to her shoulder blades, bakes in sulfur and sizes up the stratosphere. There's only coming down she's known. There's only ugly that she's known and now what is she? Pretty girls were always goners and the rich girls smoldered against their ceilings before the rest fled and now there's only her. Ugly before and now what?

If she was salt, who else would there be to speak?
Huntingdon County, Fall 1780

In the morning He broke,
ground in preparation to sow the girls
between the corn-hills, where
the plough could not be brought
to bear.

Wild pigeons in the woods
looked and saw smoke issuing
from his children and informed
them of time.

The volume of smoke, satisfied,
started for home.

In time, according to promise,
she, too, saw the smoke.
The Favorite Bone of the Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County:

_Hyoid:_
This one's a ringer, a crawl
on the knees, gives way to
features set. She managed the
long float this long.

In this featured set: a
smile, a capillary
torn.

She has this
hypoxia hypothesis
that welcomes a
swoon.

Kind of
like
earning
it.
Turning

The valley swells and constricts the land when I return.
The dead take in a Sunday matinee when I return.

The river carries fire and burns away the filth.
A carbon print smolders still and haunts this place of return.

All those dormant dears and enemies turn in civil dawn.
Route 8 bucks and thrusts against old terrors when I return.

Skin has a memory and it shudders at the border.
The vacuum remains and swallows daylight when I return.

This city is a memento mori folded in hills.
All the shadows shed their living anchors when I return.

The basement stairs wind down to the same dark foundations.
The murder plays out in this crooked place when I return.
The Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County Plots to Drown the Cicada King

*All the old knives that have rusted in my back, I drive in yours* - Phaedrus

If only his knees bent the other way. If only he didn't leak stale oil across the parking lot. The tobacco stains sting, she keeps her arms in slings. He causes her quaint heart to fault. He creaks along those cracks, forged for his pleasure. Sinkers in her marrow, craters in her moon, aches in her moan. Her little deaths: forgeries of fear.

She waits to offer his throat to trouts, dangle a leg to the Blue Gill by Sevakeen Dam. If she knew the right sigils, she'd summon a cadre of seven year olds to discover him in the focus of a monocle. But always he hops and tugs the tether, snaps her snare.

Every lily-pad narcissus fears a mirror, the self-spit, the sky. So she grows the shiniest of scales; she swallows refracted sighs. He can't suffer to swarm a warm inside. He can't suffer the prism back, his own silvered murk. She knows his wells and fills them with silences. She knows him well. Come a still, and he'll drink drown their lake down.
For We Are Many

She prays to the Peach Savior, tongues pits: her mediatrix.

He is foot-washed and dewy with promise and needs filled.

She, the issuer of benzo-sighs, owner of night-terrors and mares.

He quells their thundering hooves, winterizes her caulking, but she's still suspended from that litany: Who knows what savageries--?

One more, one less the difference between October and a March, the same Route 8 ride to Gehenna, hemoglobin-sick from Corolla exhaust.

Her demons know the same fuzz-burst, a wanting her vanilla trauma.

When, sunk beneath a wooly safety, the Peach Savior plumps her pulp and asks- *what is thy name?* comes the echo, *We are legion.*

No sea, no precipice. Ohio's clay comfort dubs the teeth, barks her pigs to periphery.
Cups for the Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County

Impossible! Her vulturine path breaks
from spiral, cracks inertia track. How could?
Her feathers are wind-stiff, she hangs
from the bow of ten cups above a shadow family,
her barren spots confused.

She swallows old inertia, careens beak-first
into the hard hope of divination. How to sip
from cups when she's slept among the swords for so long?

And the wielder? Somewhere still, with rusted
hilt in neon rooms cutting up other girls.
Ballad of the Superfund Lovers

Suckler of sump pumps, she's ugly on the inside, she's sealing shallow wallows, she's septic tank safe.

Dirty in the nest, he vows his volatile compounds, he vacates during vespers, he vexes venom from her vipers.

Shale-boned and submerged they creak in the cranked core, they could caulk cracked aquifers. They crack through the rusted door.
The Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County Reads a Tutorial on Finding the God Spot

Deny yourself day-time TV, milk, meat, and the lure of human company.

Collapse a cathedral in palms, carpet burn knees wear his shirt to cobwebs.

Only then will they come.

Tinker with toys, finger beads (use oil if you are a little dry), ignite match heads, invoke hood ornaments.

You may have to squint, squat, and stretch to see through the frontal fog.

Let go, embrace a little death.

The wings of birds will peel from wallpaper, the dead will join you for a Saturday matinee.

The shudder of ecstasy will be complete.
A Beatitude for Those Who Doubt Resurrection

Those who ask the black courier birds
for news of the dead, eat
mirrors, choke on echoes.

Those who char the carbon
of photo prints, aching for new
will only stale the microfiche.

Those who grasp the hands of strangers
as they exit Cinema South searching
for his hand, will be emptied.

Those who repeat the collapse,
who liken him to swooning towers
will suffer history, will swill ash.

Those who seek the dead among the living
will not be comforted, will
still in the nauseous wake.
Following a Caveat about Digging Too Deep

The frames won't clack, the silt won’t shift, seals won't crack, barrels won't roll, necks won't snap, tongues won't swell.

Our cranks are stacked, our ropes are slack your cribs creak back, your pains aren't at the center of our drill.

Never mind the throbbing thud, the silvered mud, the failing bud, our sinking chrome. Never mind the snaking hose peeking from the loam.

Just step past our frick-a-frack, our clack-a-lack the scattered black, the loathsome smack when we bust apart the bones.

We won't seize your sighs, your seismic fears, your nearly dead, we'll sink below the bones. We'll slink beyond the bones.

We won't disturb your own, your sleeping own down below, down above our slithering, dithering drill.
The Ugliest Girl in Columbiana County Leaves the Sick Bay.

*Our revenge will be the laughter of our children – Bobby Sands*

Throws off blankets and skin, slinks and sinks out of the stink. Vacates her Psycho's mother-dent. Her home's for rent, apart. On her way out, she won't rattle the tunnel trap spider from his perch. The tar loosens in the street, it slid all summer without her and now she sinks toes brick-deep. The statues paused at the Penn-Ohio line dust apart in her passing.

Her sack filled with surfaced shadows: dears she can’t let go. The bile is low and her knees cracked back and time times no more. She decimates her dusty dwelling, her feathers loosen silt.

Her happy tethers pull her down to the Ohio River.

The trout await her kisses. They will fill her with new words.
NOTES

The following sources were used in the found poem, *At the Mouth of the River of Bees:*

She was a small thing, they say, almost like a child. -375.

To the hollow vale into which the pebbly bridle path leading from their gate descended – 308.


Imminent threats of fierce storms –pg 183.

Come with me he said offering her another choice – pg. 95.


A fierceness that stirred her more than his gentleness – pg. 97.

*The Year’s Best Fantasy and Horror.* Edited by Ellen Datlow, Kelly Link and Gavin J. Grant. St. Martin’s Griffen, NYC.  2004.

With new mysteries in new songs and new names for new mysteries and there’s the way of it, name and mystery, and the pulse of a grand tail. – 285 “The Fishie” Philip Raines and Harvey Welles.

Like a priest administering Last Rights – 190 “With Acknowledgements to Sun Tzu” Brian Hodge.

At the mouth of the river of bees – 1 “At the Mouth of the River of Bees” Kij Johnson.

Her dreams are visited by bees, but they bring her no messages; the calligraphy of their flights remains mysterious. -15 “At the Mouth of the River of Bees” Kij Johnson.

We will follow the spirit dog to victory -143 “Woeful Tales from Mahigul” Ursula K. Le Guin.
Like ghosts and the flames ate the sky like a hungry monster who could never get enough. -34 “Bread and Bombs” M. Rickert.

Remotely resembling God -181 “With Acknowledgements to Sun Tzu” Brian Hodge.

Come over here, baby. Let me say hi. – 113 “You Go Where It Takes You” Nathan Ballingrud.

_The Two Most Unhappiest People On Earth_ features lines from Elizabeth Bishop’s _In the Waiting Room_ and Anne Sexton’s _Noon Walk on the Asylum Lawn._

_Setting His Features_ was heavily influenced by Margaret Atwood’s collection, _You Are Happy._

Many of these poems deal with a chemical disaster that occurred in Salem, Ohio between the 1960’s and the present. The Salem Public Library is in possession of most of the documents relating to Nease Chemical and state-funded clean up efforts. In addition to these resources, I also relied heavily on The Salem News for information regarding past incidents of chemical pollution as well as the current issue of fracking in Columbiana County.

The poems _It’s Got Me a Mess_ and _To a Burned Woman_ were taken from the February 16th, 2012 and October 27th, 2010 editions of The Salem News.