Boneyard Shifts & Shadow Work

by

Aaron M. Smith

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Masters of Fine Arts

in the

NEOMFA

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

May, 2008
Boneyard Shifts & Shadow Work

Aaron M. Smith

I hereby release this thesis to the public. I understand that this thesis will be made available from the OhioLINK ETD Center and the Maag Library Circulation Desk for public access. I also authorize the University or other individuals to make copies of this thesis as needed for scholarly research.

Signature:

______________________________  ________________________
Aaron M. Smith, Student          Date

Approvals:

______________________________  ________________________
Craig Paulenich, Thesis Advisor   Date

______________________________  ________________________
Philip Brady, Committee Member    Date

______________________________  ________________________
Roger Craik, Committee Member     Date

______________________________  ________________________
Peter J. Kasvinsky, Dean of School of Graduate Studies & Research  Date
ABSTRACT

*Boneyard Shifts & Shadow Work* is a collection of poems completed in requirement of graduation from the Northeastern Ohio Masters of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing. The poems in this manuscript are based in part on the post-modern theory of pastiche—written in language pasted together from world mythologies, science fiction, pop-culture, hipsters, the Anglo-Saxon alliterative tradition, and DJ culture this manuscript attempts to paint a landscape in which the psychopomp or shaman is a primary character. The manuscript also employs composition by field and persona poetry as primary poetic devices.
Table of Contents

Section I

The Burning Season… …2
Outlander of a Windy Country… …3
Winter Thunderheads… …5
The Magician Reveals a Totem… …6
The Cowboy Virus [DJ’s Manifesto]… …7
Rambling Outland Hills… …9
The Magician Performs a Hilltop Ceremony at Dusk… …11
Birthing a Storm… …12
The Old Man… …14
The Sketch… …15
When ‘Strange One’ Woke… …16
Be Like the Trees… …17
Gentlemen Losers, Paradigm City… …18
Among Industrial Ruins… …20
The 7-Eleven at the End of the Universe… …21
The Old Man Meets the Magician… …24
This is Warehouse… …25
A Place for Broken Things… …27
The Broken Season… …29
Section II

Monsoon… 31
Denim Granny Feeds the South Bound Train… 32
Dogman Bivouacked Outside Bisbee, AZ… 34
The Watcher… 36
Seabee Grandaddy Sits… 37
Hey-Hey Cello Baby, … 38
Watchers’ Picnic… 39
Recipes for Prom Kings… 40
Dogman Tells of the Everywhen… 42
Junkstore Cowboy’s Lament… 43
Watching From the Crack in the Window… 44
These Modern Times… 45
Dogman & the Empty Signal… 46
Seabee Granddaddy Signs to a Lost Alley… 48
A Name the Stones Forgot… 50
Wall Leaner’s Meditation… 51
Binding… 53
She Dances Here & There They Say… 54
I.

The poet makes himself a seer by a long, prodigious, and rational disordering of all the senses. Every form of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he consumes all the poisons in him, and keeps only their quintessences.

Arthur Rimbaud
Letter, May 15, 1871
The Burning Season

Hot equinox unrolls earth’s
copperhead tongue
into an ember,
all that’s needed to ignite
a season for bones
and limber mushroom muscle.

The rat-te-tat hello
of ribcages,
empty of anything to protect,
is the song
of smoke rings
sailed on a woolly day.

The drum beat
of ground grown things
is the carnival's pulse,
when razorback renegades,
men who grow manes,
are king.
Night’s speckled eye
presides as audience
over myths performed
on the still-life stage,
painted pallet-pyre.
The stomach
of old brown river
full with liquor
made from goat horns.

Cracked reeds hum bend-body sutras
for the old men of the forest.
With hairy legs they command
the dances of this season—
even the pelting drum
of bored fingers
waiting for frost.
Outlander of a Windy Country

The hills run away like wild horses, while days
settle into grooves just behind oaks.
   This is a country of breezes  just beyond nowhere—
   below, a lake country of grapes.
The Magician’s bunker naps,
door round in the lee of a hill.
   Grass grows tall here.
   Above the door   a single oak   strung high
   with fireflies and red silk prayers.

   Inside the halls are plastered,  floors wood.
   The air rich with clove,  walls flicker
in points of light.
   Old rock n’ roll posters  and heavy tapestries hang,
   a brass Buddha rests atop stereo receiver.
   Speakers grumble, smeared with guitar.
   Leather clad books lay nameless in piles
surrounding a blood red recliner.
A tabletop guardian,  coyote of Oaxaca,
stands next to a cast iron ash tray filled
   with left-handed cigarette butts first rolled
   under blood moon.

   The television fixed dead to snow
and silent.
Magician points towards this winter glimmer:
This is evening news.

   He pops a cork,
pours glasses until empty bottle,
   invitations glasses to guests,
   the rest   drink themselves.

   I enjoy the oldest bottles of grape
from the vineyards down the hill,
get paid to draw circles,
mix blood and soil,
   summon allies from the ether.
Retreat, retreat,
    I heard an old man call one day so,
    I built this bunker.

I am more or less powerful.
    I invent new language,
    bring about a Great Year when the mood suites me.
I barter astral retrieval for fermentation of the vine.
    These walls stand true against whitewash fence bravado,
    built by a twirl of my emerald fingers—
    with a twist they draw a kiss of petals or bloody maw.

Magician? A name given to me
    by farmers and craftsmen down the hill—
more what I am than who, who being a function of what.
    What I am is what I do, and I do
    cast circles, transmit signals, draw specters like splinters
    from invisible skins.
Some even say a madman within a madman.

That sinuous rumble? A winter thunderhead.
    More of them this season than any I remember.
    A season for a great, great dark.
    How any of us make the troubled run
through days utterly blind, I don’t question.

I’ve built fires that consume more than I’ve got,
    nothing can quench them.
    I’ve a big box of Ohio Blue Tips for a brain,
    when every thought is sandpaper—
ten-thousand twinkle lights, one
for the name of every star whose name I’ve forgotten,
    one each for a match head burst in a moment of fame,
in a windy country where embers never die.
Winter Thunderheads

They speak a language written
on the tip of a nebula’s tongue.
    Fat, disposable gods
    filled with salt
    and rust,
they untangle their innards—
ten thousand miles of gray flesh—
leaving them
    along deer paths,
uneven avenues,
    coiled inside industrial carcasses,
twined between the tangled ribs
    of trees.

Born in the mouth of Ursa Major
their long sleepy sail
    leaves their blood starless,
    their slow breath cold as
    the deepest nothing,
their restless grumble
    poison in the ears
of a napping heart,
thoughts heavy enough
to still a stone.
    Somehow both terror
    and joy—
a season long  4am train.

Keep a taper burning
    in your veins.
Draw the blinds.
    Curse the way of things;
    the sending of vagrant angels,
this endless undoing.
The Magician Reveals a Totem

Given me by a lion
of some sweet savanna plane of Serengeti,
it took root in my scalp and grew powerful.
A sail in the wind, a rope to climb towers.
The chain-link before my eyes it holds tight
a varied history, five grand for follicle testing
and anyone will see where I’ve been.

Cunning years found it wild,
trick of bramble burrowed in my skull.
A multifloral wilderness of strict sense
and Id, psychopomp split sanity.

Somehow soft in its sultry rock n’ roll,
it walks its own way
as subtle spring’s no-need-to-forgive.
Its fettered grove,
intoxicant nightscape.
It’s god? A nameless one, but
its incantation is the drum beat.
And at sounds made from emptiness,
I toss my head, brandishing totem mane,
in broken dance towards fields of signal
in the sky.
A hermit break-dancer blessed  
my Roland 303 and named me thus.

He said,
Son, a six shooter  
and turn table  
are no different,  
both are governed  
by hip-instinct.  
You will spread  
the beat, infect empty space.  
Head-feeder,  
dance-bringer,  
fingers hot  
as hydrogen fusion in the dark  
of the ever-expansion.

I follow the doctrine  
of Acid House laws,  
take pills  
buzz all night and spin  
circles of sound,  
drop bass  
through maidenheads  
of new hopefuls,  
crush order  
to chaos,  
grant the Massive dance,  
after-hours transmogrifications,  
trip-hop mission modulations.

My boldest law—  
an equivalent exchange—  
invariable transfers of energy;

I turn sound waves  
into concrete breaks,  
complex muscle control,  
liquidized limbs,  
warehouse grace.
The harder I drop,  
the harder they roll  
through fire in their flesh,  
lighting the golden lanterns  
in their chests.

Oscillate  
towards sawtooth wave,  
through lowpass filter,  
disengage  
sound from symbol,  
shatter  
deadbolt brains  
of clinical “norm” obsession.

Freedom exists in a drum machine,  
sixteen step sequencers.  
I can ram it four to the floor,  
syncopate,  
truncate  
rhythms of drums, drums  
 deriving sound from void,  
captured in silicon and thrust  
at 1,000 watts per channel,  
barking toward  
black-curtain listeners.
Rambling Outland Hills

I’ve never played the game of war
between an official career
   and psychopomp aspiration.
The trick to this get righteously stoned—
I can slow down a humming bird
to the pace
    of crazed monk
    mountain mantra,
expand time
    by opening my arms.
In autumn I wander these grasslands
    smoke only wild plants
    from forest grove.

Have you slept out in the wind,
wheat stalks silver in stars?

Seeing glow of civilization
    I turn
    toward If-finity,
    into haze and hill.
Wind walkers, tree talkers
    every manner of outsider
rambles here.

At equinox of hues
    I break open barriers,
bandy weirding words,
    gather willow nymphs,
downy river elementals.

We pounce frenzied tangos
    around hills topped with bonfire.
   Spirits stripped nude
   we caress secrets
of primitive sensuality.
Bared to bone,
    we relinquish the weight
of a tired year,
spread wings of willful intoxication,
   bark at the moon.
Our prayer of dangerous dreaming,
a rarely sung signal
  of opulent repertoire
  wine-loaded blues of feverish occupation.
  Call me by any other name,
  hammer of the gods,
firfly gatherer,
  son of saber winds.
  How luxurious to remain undefined,
to flower in fire.
  To worship like this
  burn worry and weight
in a pyre of flesh.
The Magician Performs a Hilltop Ceremony at Dusk

His legs grow in denim,  
like he was born to it.  
His feet stomp black leather.  
The strut of his mane  
could trample the coming storm.

Hand-rolled Zig-Zag smoldering  
at his lip, he draws a circle  
with Kentucky bourbon,  
and spits a swallow once  
in each chief direction.  
He stands facing east,  
flicks a match into the grass,  
the circle razes even in the wind.  
He spreads his arms and drops his head,  
his mane multiples darkness in his eyes.

The wind runs from the north,  
arced light jumps cloud to cloud.  
He arches his back in rallied benediction:

A splash of midnight oil,  
a cut moon hung overhead,  
smoke and lighting to grow a godhead  
on a right-rolled ember.

Bone bearded fathers open  
your cobalt eyes, clap your hands  
full of daggers, hang mouths wide  
and hum up the wind.  
Our hungry hands open the earth  
to exhume the secrets of dirt-dwellers.

At this time of turning twist a tidal  
visitor, a trick, and a broken plow toward  
our favor. We ask for the twice-tried luck  
of the green man's slow-burn to brown.  
Leave us his long-armed summer, reaching  
for the broken season of long, long dark.
Birthing a Storm

Magician speaks
from the lee of the hill,
sounds like flint against steel.

Looks like someone
called down
the first thunder storm
of the season.
This is the bone yard
for old gods,
the eldest have no names
and were worshiped
by glottal grunts,
crude dance, and howls
that carved mountains’ spines.

Hear that broken drum?
These tricks, vintage slight-of-hand.
Knowing the flash point,
that’s carnival at best.
But invoking fire from the heavens,
true grit.

Any man can sprinkle water
on bundled twigs.
To cut a cloud,
hang it to bleed,
that’s stout work.

Most symbols are savvy,
but a true totem
can split a mountain,
slay a king.

Yet this smug conjurer,
long-armed and wild,
strikes a kettledrum,
calls the names of those
in the sneaking know.
Your ears find
   the signal subtle?
Well, not all fanfares
   are made of trumpets.
The Old Man

He wears nothing but bones,  
leaves, and raw leather  
around his waist.  
Every so often  
he sheds his skin.

Beard and nostrils filled  
with blue smoke,  
he smells of pete,  
digs his fingers  
in only the richest dirt.

He strikes a drum  
to build the fire.  
A halo of beats,  
bone snaps,  
fraction between emptiness  
and sound.

A pipemaker, the Old Man  
sends signals to sky dwellers.

Drying sage speaks his weaving:  
his airy embroidery,  
between myth and miracle.

He stands  
against the season  
for forgetting,  
its white wash wind,  
and things pale-uncanny.

A twice-baked botanist  
he splits the horizon.  
A man on a path,  
he can surmise  
the wily length of fortune,  
fix what is broken,  
clearly heed allies  
assembling lanterns.
The Sketch

Transpose dawn’s red light with the inkscape of a wispy literati.

The walls sigh and their triangle patterns burst, a flock of startled crows, at the ink stone’s laughter.

A wash of heavy cloud brushed through this blotched city, through a greasy window whose sliver of white lives like an open wound.

The wind is a literati sleeve, held like a sail by a free hand, scoops the air shaded by oil smoke.

The rustle of careful hair spread like tendrils, black blades.

The fan, spun as a broken enso, whurrs perpetual.

The vision smeared as a drop of sweat blurs the eyes.
When 'Strange One' Woke

Magician woke
from childhood,
like from a dim-lit sleep.
Lights without
their lanterns
lofty in thinning trees,
who carried ember
as their hue.

Suddenly his fingers
forged with the skin of firs,
the names of plants,
ways of wild things,
of the weird
ignited in the stove
of his skull.
Digested in the innards
of the earth,
a dreamer near death
and woken by the breath
of feral plants.
Named again under no-moon,
season for birthing earth.
Now a man,
these old words smolder
in his chest.

The technicolor
nightshade dance
with the mandrake-she
broke his bond of a singular sanity.
Now he steps through curtains,
a guardian of thresholds,
something more than man
living life between.
Be Like the Trees

Sugary flame
the lick of your fingers
are our fingers.

these are the ones
that catch sky’s dust
the dust that forgets the world

Your hot molasses wound
is the medicine bag that
teaches us to shed our skin,
before the slow storm that erases.

these are the ones
the universe gave each
a thousand brushes
to catch the paint
of winter’s masquerade

As night knits itself long
across the sky
it wakes the ground barren—
keep the ember under ash
so morning will remember
its tempered heat.

like them I live by
a burst of brilliance
dancing on the stovetop
of the earth’s turning
living in subtle simmer
through the long, long dark
Gentlemen Losers, Paradigm City
[for William Gibson]

Our neon hieroglyphs
burn immaculate
in the gray-dawn
metronome of oily rain
broke-beaten on
wrought-iron railing.

Our voices run
in the pipes,
pipes run through
the city sharing
cryptic whispers.
Our voices
white noise
in the wires.
Transistor troubadours,
we unblacken
fractured facts.

Capacitor-deep,
rampant running,
we are unknown,
anonymous
in our antecedents.
Shadow,
hasty to mask,
thin as onion paper
at noon.
Auditory canals anointed
with platinum earwigs,
we are out-listeners,
however bull the signal
we keyboard cowboys
lasso branded goods.
We eclectic sons of silicon
   call up god-shaped code,
   lost lines,
   apocryphal databases
   of ceremony.
   The forgotten angels
   of our under-nature,
   alternate souls
nowhere near surface,
   boil under veils
   and buzz of wire,
   of speed.
   Lives seeded
   in ghost-wastes
somewhere between
   concrete
   and madness.
Among Industrial Ruins

Twilight smolders behind
ragged steel skeletons.

The rust drips into pools
still as concrete.

Stray dogs patrol angles of shadows.
Their beards wag in the wind.

They will oxidize too—
that slow subtraction by air or time
carving away the sweetest meat,
the sterling knife against flesh.

Maybe starting with the chest,
a whittling away of the self.

Raw and angry, tattered piece
by piece, diminishing to the bone.
The 7-Eleven at the End of the Universe

About time for a pit stop
    I’d say,
sally forth all pocket change,
karma coins,
    and bad religion.
Just so happens we are crossing
the universe’s end
    so happens
the 7-11 at the end
    of the universe.

A pack of Zig Zags,
    ninety-nine cents,
those aviator shades, no,
the blacks ones,
    five bones even.
Slick flick of his knife
and the tag is off
    the shades turned on,
darkening his eyes.

You’ll never find your way back,
be sure to sample
    the red raspberry Slurpie,
mix in some Mountain Dew,
    Jolt Cola,
black bird’s red wing.
In this mixture the high octane
of the midnight data jack,
    and his digital graffiti.

Welcome to the supply depot
where hipsters refuel incendiary engines.
Bumble buzzing pep pills,
cigarettes, cigars,
    condoms, condiments.
Dressed like a wooden Indian,
Uriel stands guard
behind the counter,
finger
his fiery sword, slurping
a haloed mochachino,
nudie mag
shoved between the

Book
of Enoch.

His eyes turn and say,
In my store impurity
is impunity.

Kicked back, Magician leads
the buzz session:
All moralities broken,
therefore subjective.
Inside this collapsed space time
we’ve no time for halfcocked hangmen
hot for pig head dust town justice.
The manic law of personal power
written by men of knowledge
good and bad
prevails over the vegetable religion
of rotted dogma.
Our signals are strong enough
to grope
the Milky Way.

This place?
Common ground
for assorted madmen.
We are cracked, or crackling,
open to everything—
foreign signals from other-space.
This congregation is placeless,
formless,
is a head place,
a dark district,
you need crow’s eyes
and coyote’s tongue to walk here.
Outside black leather cherubs
        ride a bucking dolphin
complete with sonic language squeal.
        Thrown like potato sacks *smack*
into a leaky dumpster,
parrot-squeaking into cockroach portholes.

Eyes darkened by solid shadow,
immed in stainless steel, Magician
        swaggers from door to curb
spun-drunk on soda slurry.

There is only one highway—
        moving in every direction.
Tune to exit 66’s station
        and lax your sails.
The Old Man Meets the Magician

I am a psychotropic politician
heading predawn committees.

Mocking Bird told me you boast
a signal reaches the stars—

Sonny, I sent up smoke signals
now clustered in the Milky Way,
they sing back on thin nights.

Enough chit-chat from you,
Strange One,
the night is full,
let us reach our arms
like bulging antennae
towards the unfolding sky.

I worship drums and smoke.
Dance on nights when
the nameless ones wish.
My fertile feet inscribe
totems in the dirt.
Watch my footwork
weld signals,
   drum the earth
   for allies.
   With kinetics I send myself
towards alpha wave
   ecstasy.

Who is the beat maker?
I call the drums from the earth.
They play themselves,
sending Sunday passer-bys
into rapture.
This is Warehouse

Side A.

Dancing at the Drive-In [End of the World Mix]

A thousand FM mouths beat box
viral breaks at the speed of dawn.
From their posts
they stand and draw
a syncopated squiggle show
on the rotted,
yellow movie screen.

If you’re dancing...
If you are dancing...

From here the DJ breaks
down
barriers,
the curtain covering
votives swimming
in the chests of the faithful.
His crazy claws dash,
scratch and flicker
in stop-motion miracles.

If you’re dancing at the end of the world...
If you are dancing...
If you are dancing at the end of the world...

The crowd hums prayers
through these rifts,
lifting aqueous arms
in time to 35Hz transmissions.
In time to the tune-choice of
their rude boy padre,
patron selecta,
they pound with pregnant feet upon
the rusted husks of insects.
The web cracks of their
windshield eyes
highlighted in lasers
called from the sky.

*If you’re dancing at the end of the world, raise your hands.*

---

Side B.

*Warehouse Speaks*

Disassociated youth, I know you.
Turn me on. Fill this skull of steel and brick
with alpha wave induction equipment.
Reclaim me. Give me slip of skin on skin,
full-bodied humanity gnarly in the nostrils
of you, the massive, swaying breathful.
DJ exhale purple flowers, after-hour hums
electric in the ears of a thousand arms,
feet, thighs, legs. Trip-step liquid living,
discover haloed strangers in strobe lights.
Seethe light from my blacked-out windows.
Calibrate hydraulic hips, weave steel tight
tendons, forge arms smooth and blue blades
of shoulders, arc your wings towards sweating
girders in time to dub psalms—your dark deity
hedonism swells so sweet in my lungs. Don’t stop
until you burn away the last ounce of flesh.
DJ, employ finger-twirl to build this sideways
safe house, invent tapestries of talking juxtaposition.
Pluck stars like candies from shadow.
Grab their pulse. Rush through thoughts
with stone blades. Eviscerate difference
inside this sweet jungle.
A Place for Broken Things

A place where
clocks move
like grizzly monks
at prayer.

This place is sleeping.

All shouts
are whispers, but
not all whispers
are shouts.

Nameless molecules dance,
masquerading
as sea glass.

Little known,
a voice sings here.
Long,
it stretches between
furthest corners,
argues with itself,
whether it sounds
more like Nina Simone
or Billie Holliday
while it sways
in a rocking chair,
polished, painted with dahlias.

It drinks whiskey,
and it drinks whiskey.
Here, light is irreverent
   in choosing
what it illuminates,
invites us
   to the business of crevices,
were flies bask
in beer-lights.
   Forges a neon armature
   of forgetting,
half comatose
in celluloid cremation.
The Broken Season

Stone solstice grinds its gears,
pours the cold ashes
of blank photos over everything.

this lamp’s light is black
its silent palette forgets
lessons crack open cold
just a touch nulls ragged heat
bites down hard when it hits bone

The moan of this old man’s bones
hum out lights left in the window,
pushes us sideways toward sleep.

ten thousand lights die
in the iced reflecting pool
birthdays of the dead
counted as intoning drops
in the copper singing bowl

Razor-wire chords string his spine—
each deep-rattle, proof
he’s shambling outside the window.

hold the silk silence of snow
bear its numb tattoo
memory scattered as drifts
afterhours drink liquor sighs
and fall from their chairs like leaves
II.

The world is all that is encased here: life, death, people, and everything else that surrounds us. The world is incomprehensible. We won't ever understand it; we won't ever unravel its secrets. Thus we must treat the world as it is: a sheer mystery.

- Don Juan

*A Separate Reality*
by Carlos Castaneda
Monsoon

Open.

For this skin,
no crone’s thick salve.

This
and only this
brings relief to skin,
whipped by sandpaper wind
These limbs ache
in their sinew;
to purl,
roots digging
like come-curled toes.

Milk flowers left
fresh to the rain.
Their colors hang in the air,
smell of green flesh burst
at the seams, knitted across
the mouths of the landscape.

Open.

These yucca limb-fingers,
raw fence posts,
stretch in praise.

To breathe?
A heavy spirit,
quickly fermented.

Open.

A deep itch stitching
the spine   splits at the hip,
helixes through the dark
remembering a sapling,
embowed in its body’s
respired simper.
Denim Granny Feeds the Southbound Train

Keep singing for Jesus
and chewing the mumbled
language of God—
a child learning to speak,
first language raw
as fresh fallen kill.

Ice has cut her tongue,
turned brain to vinegar,
but she’ll pickle the world—

as her grandmothers
growing grandkids
on red beet eggs,
canned tomatoes,
one hundred rhubarb
litaniess against the devil
in a language which calls
bell peppers, mangos.

Great granny
of train time gospel
serves her sway
of sweet crooked spine,
heaping spoonfuls
of her Hefty bag’s quiver.

Passengers drown
in the lessons
of the sour wine
pouring out the top
of her head.

And she knows
they’ll all be thirsty
before awfully long
as her song unrolls
carpets of hot earth
next this train plugging south
toward mountains rising
like dry tongues toward
a kissless sky.
Dogman Bivouacked Outside of Bisbee, AZ

Wary moons
moles the skyline
    atop their poles
planted along
the whispering wall
    that cages
    the mountain’s
trek-steppers.

A hand-rolled perched
    on his lip,
Dogman tosses
    an empty Alpo can
into his fire,
cracks a forty
    of Old English.

His nose wet with sage
    and yucca,
he gnarls:  its monsoon.

Out here,
    off the grid,
white noise rambles.
    A wasted vagabond,
    it’s the only signal
between mountain
    and highway.

Dogman considers the bottle,
    drinks at forty-five degrees,
teeth clenched to the mouth
    like its-a witch’s tit.

Hiss-hum-spit,
    the muffled thunderbird
of a wandering mind,
    the only signal
and buzzed
    to the tune of copper.
Dogman hears along
streaming coos
of his malted breath
wayward waveforms.
They wrap their legs
around the antennae of
whurly cars
obscured by night’s
hand-clothed ears.

So live the silent.
Call him hear-all-evil,
all-good,
see-all-beeps, burps,
blips,
witness-all-blind-
tocsin-between.

And when
there are no trucks
or coyotes
there is breath
and the sound
of the cigarette
burning.
The Watcher

He stands in the foyer, head hung against night’s drifting spindles. A hat crumbled in worried hands, his hair white even in the narrow waft of street lights. Memory faded as worry-spots on woodwork have drawn him here from the sleeping house’s easy coos. The slouch of his chin a scolded boy’s considering his feet. Here he knows no one, the sighs of the sleeping house unfamiliar to his breezy ears—he is here to listen. In this hour of night things, a tear crawls down his cheek, and just the smallest whimper, no more than a visiting draft through the window. The chimes, toks, and ticks of all the years of this house, he hears them as a fat clock, unwinding itself in bravado to the turning of the moon—in the way it paints its yellow face on the dreaming eyes of the dead.
Seabee Granddaddy Sits

A glass effigy
of sun smolders
under Dutch Master cigar.
His swollen feet
too divine for
any floor not worn
with South Pacific
whiskey and gritty soles.

Grunt for barley drafts,
a bear-force typhoon.
Slips bills, like Gallo’s bottleneck
over strings,
toward a familiar hand.

Steel veins: eight, twelve,
sixteen bars—still sing
alley brawls
and cat-in-can fights.
Ragged music
bedded with what is broken,
burning need-fires
in bellies,
sheep innards,
scratch-to-win.

He gropes through
noonish ether toward
that old-time
nirvana.
Hey-Hey Cello Baby,

Marilyn Monroe struts
over air vents at every pop
of my lady’s hip. She grows
her roses in axle grease, they taste
like whiskey on her lips.
This she sips and sips while
she screams around the courtyard
like some kid Daytona come to town.
And I’m her tambourine daddy.
She rolls her eyes down the street
every time she catches a whiff
of mama’s special fuel. Red hot
tempered agave devil does
a claw-toe jig like roofing nails
against brick. The beat drops
and stops in the middle of the yard,
compliments of the DJ overhead,
carrying the hammer of the drum
machine behind his angelic head.
And Hey-Hey Cello Baby wants copper
bent ‘round her wrists and ankles.
Now she’s a transistor gypsy
twinkled of toe in time to diamond-hunter
granddad, who’s scorching the banjo.
He’s sitting porch-wise behind the bend
of none-other-than-that blue devil’s arm
taking my lady’s petunia appendage.
And me, I’d wallow in worry warts
‘cept for blisters on my brain from
this flurrious scene of summer hot
debauchery and I thought
what I’d do was
I’d pretend I was one of those
agave devils,
or should I?
Watchers’ Picnic

Its not perfect weather for a picnic, but they still see the stars through clouds thin as the blankets they sit on. A dozen or so gathered here at the tops of the trees, most quiet, having eaten. The ground below beginning to moisten at the skirts of morning whose soft feet pace back and forth as she prepares. And these lights aloft among the afterhours happenstance, soft and old as stars, celestial fireflies. What ever kind of visitor, who knows such things? The cooings of these lovers’ midnight afternoon mingle with moth wings. One couple forgets the melody of the song they were humming and listen to the leaves tickle their feet. The girl smiles her laugh like a silent movie star, and cups her hand aside her lover’s head and stitches a secret in his ear. As the clouds saunter past the flicker of the moon changes their faces, as if the dull light is swimming the years of their skin.
Recipes for Prom Kings

Pieces-parts occupy her decaying delirium, life precarious enough with wilted lips—lipstick in place, mouth helter-skelter. And skin she has forgotten, her own that is, foundation no use against rouge-less gray.

But she prepares each night-out anyhow, mind bloated with obsession: the first clammy touch of her finger upon a novel neck. The writhing flavor of acrid agony tickles the back of her broken tongue. Mindless, her hand flops through pages of her a diary, now cook book:

Hips and joints make the best soup bones; but the sweetest meat is the cheeks--this she must savor, slow cooked with chunks of cactus to preserve the juices. A brain, too, is a terrible thing to waste from it a sweet pâté, simple flavor, rosemary. Roast of golden-throwing-arm, leg of track star, beer battered badboy, sautéed home-room hero. But she didn’t always know how to cook, didn’t always cling to the calm terror stitched between the pages of her book.

Does she wonder, back in that deep patch of primordial pitch, who pinned this curse to her like a first place ribbon whose needle has stuck her in the chest, bled her at the moment of victory? The slight girl who preferred black, was it her? The Cat Woman, was it her feline clan on a black Sabbath mixing powders for a skinny slinker to sneak into her lemonade at lunch? This a million times until she stopped speaking, another voice tuned into her mind: Standing rib roasts, stews, gravies, Sheppard’s pie, prom night princes slow roasted with a dry rub.
But she didn’t always know how to cook, didn’t always dwell between the pages—her senior prom date, she ate him raw.
Dogman Tells of the Everywhen

First Father’s gift is a
feathered snake
eating his own tail.
The emptiness between
his jade coils is filled with
helix paths,
our journeys are blue trails
of nebula in his annular sea.
Faces of the grandfathers’
songs carved into moldy scales,
their stories rant like mad drums.
The dead dance
along his rock-chancy verge
slipping like sequins
back to the sea.

In the bruised light
of the between
listen for his sire signal
calling us
to the uncanny procession
of sounding seers
who tamed the knowledge
that which ever way we walk
we are headed toward home.
Junk Store Cowboy’s Lament

Badboy bodhisattvas ride the thumb-hooked rail line of their turquoise belt buckles towards siesta under a hammered saltine-tin roof. The rusted quartz clock is stuck near quarter past, hour hand oxidized to dust sleeps in the gears. Junk Store Cowboy clicks his spurs in time to a tune inaudible to little old ladies who rifle through voodoo gimcrack brought west by means of a swamp-soaked storm that never touched down. Relics raised from the burning blood muscle of the French Quarter rouse the pink in the pale cheeks of girls still dressed for church. And while he won’t whistle he tips his hat, smile sharp as a chinked razor and twice the gamble. Holy water and copperhead oil shelved side by side, his logic buried in the purple dunes of other-times. Sighing at the thought of customer service, his bones creak stories of gizmos and whirlamagigs, hinting at the touch of Da Vinci’s gilded hands. Dreams, dreams, dreams. All the half-thoughts, and possessed inklings of countless wunderkinder. I dabble in the half-baked, sell only cracked pots, and keepsakes of wicked History’s wheel. A hairy sidewinder in this copper still of time, I sing Old Boethius’ forgotten consolations in time to the rise and fall of vanishing sand hills. I sidestep that old siren mutability, our lady of both tragedy and grace.
Watching from the Crack in the Window

She lived in a crack in the window, being very small, 
haven given most of herself back to from where she came. 
The last of her is this minuscule inch, less than the glow 
of old, worried street lights knitting the space between moths. 
This place the best seat to watch, of all the tiny crevices, 
a million deaths as the bruised light limps through the window 
and hushes the last swirling particles of the sleeping.
These Modern Times

Imagine the man
made whole
by four walls and a balcony.

The acrid smoke of his
black pipe tobacco
wreaths his head in habit,

while he types on a well-oiled Smith-Corona, each stroke a thousand-year itch.

A dozen muffler wrapped hours a day wondering,
*if the future is stupid, then?*

Every time he grapples a PBR out of the frige he reads, “BUY A GUN.”

He spent twenty years underground and perfecting a singular skill—

no one knows his name, everyone dreams his fallout face,

and sleeps a little worse each night.
Dogman & the Empty Signal

Oh can he smell it,
   like eons have odors.
So sour it pricks his crusty nose,
   burns deep in his lungs.

The dark,
a hot swarm of aeriform hands,
   where even man’s deep trawl
of zeros and ones won’t return
from its search.
The dark’s fingers are thick salve.
      The texture of their stretched demise
pulls around his legs.
   As they drag him
      they shudder,
      break.

Oh he can hear it,
   like the universe sputtered,
sparked, blacked out.
      Stone-heavy silence
thrust into his head,
plugged into his ears.
His own signal choked
   in silent squelch,
   crams his throat
   with the terrible nothing
      of a zero-sum.
The taste of a stalemate with
   the great, great black,
hot tar at the back of his tongue.

Dogman tears at his chest,
   his mouth contorts,
lungs buckle.
His dinner slides up
   and lands in his lap.
He spits once;  
    mouth rinsed  
    with stale water.  
Dawn’s careful drums  
a loft in his head.
Seabee Grandaddy Sings to a Lost Ally

The breath of bleached absence sings through cigarette’s spark of rye fume.

Lavender's blue, diddle diddle
Lavender's green,

When I am king, diddle diddle
You shall be queen.

What broken back? His nightwings, like some beerlight archangel, are tinged with arthritic cartilage whorl.

The train's a-comin' around the bend
Goodbye my lover, goodbye

By baby by-oh, what makes you cry so
By baby by-oh, goodbye my lover goodbye.

Clear skies are stalks
of sweet grass
for chewing.
These my constant dream,
but this land?
Dry as my veins.
She never loved just me.
I'll find new bones to dance your dance again. Raw bones, twenty limber and hot.

Need fire and oily incense in dollar store citronellas.

The train's a-comin' around the bend
Goodbye my lover, goodbye

By baby by-oh, what makes you cry so
By baby by-oh, goodbye my lover goodbye.
This song is his stretch of years,
bent into one restless night.

By baby by-oh, what makes you cry so
By baby by-oh, goodbye my lover goodbye.
A Name the Stones Forgot

Call him mouse shadow under the year’s second moon.
Who now will speak this name and call this tiny brother from
the slumber of instinct when he knows songs the wind forgot?
All the roots of the world he’s walked in the between time,
when milk flowers glow and the eyes of First Father blink away sleep.
His needling eyes laid bare upon the death of stars, burning gold,
nebulae of nether-this-nor-that. He grows small in his age,
dismantled atom by atom, bones given back to the universe.
Adrift in his mind-sea are the plants’ names who’ve lost their tongues
to arid time. Now no more than a wordless lullaby of morning
while he stuffs his cheeks with seeds. Testing the wind with
whiskers, the Pocket Mouse retreats back to innards of earth
where dreams dark as a stubborn patch of midnight remember
what he’s forgot, recall his trekking as a giant among suns,
drifting far from the light.
Wall Leaner’s Meditation

Wall Leaner spends his
days on whatever/cheap tallboys,
on the flypaper laugh of
Old Timer and his honey
hash sprinkled into a roll
of stale Bugler tobacco.
Old Timer’s hard fingers collect
sand scratches, gardener snakes
rolling ZigZag papers
like memory of cricket legs.
Old Timer’s tin foil kept
between his molars, a promise
to a girl, calls her Sally.

Leaner smokes through a scar,
opened like a dirt-pink, wrinkled lily
ready to suck the venom into
his head and strain it through
lungs, blood vessels, gray splatter
closed ecology. He unhinges
the scar, turning himself inside
out, prays for sands to clean
the other side of his skin.
A soupy velvet’s oration,
one open one he wills it.

It’s a slow day for the march
of the Hawaiian Shirts,
while he hangs in and out
of the public library’s wall
located siesta-downtown.
Old Timer’s blend turns to
sweet walnut somewhere
between tongue and brain.
Recipe of his days— toasted
dirt, sprinkle of grit, and malt.
Watches his own home movie,  
slip and spill of self washes  
over slop and ill, slips himself a mickey.  
Evening’s overhead announcement,  
dogs rustling garbage cans.

He dusts off his eyes,  
opens windows in his head,  
invites the pale alley  
into the rooms of his body.  
He gathers all of himself  
back into his mouth,  
fills the stretched jaws  
of this yaffle child with  
his wayward flesh.
Binding

with bits of twine collected
by little brown birds, with strips
of first place ribbons for beauty,
most homeruns, fattest pigs,
biggest pumpkin, with dried
daisy chains made by sisters:
sister naps on velvet pillow;
sister flutters in olive winds—
with thirty second count of fuse,
horse hair from mama’s antique chairs,
hair still tied with yellow thread
in a shoebox, the veins
of the oldest man’s arm
oldest man who still smokes
bare ass camels and shoots J. Daniels,
broken shoelaces, locket chain
of first lover lost to storm drain,
yarn spun copper and ironwood kite string
bound wily.
She Dances Here & There They Say

A witch
of the strangest sort,
as if copper
were like water.

Born in the wake
  of a dark sky's fire
  at dew birth,
she is the two-fold guest
  casting sparks
into the tinderbox.
  Nymph of second chances,
a toss of bones decides
fate by pyre or pouring.

She wears the mist
  around her waist,
the arroyo curve
  of her hip
too dangerous for man.

Born from desert,
her skin matches
  sun and shadow
tone for tone.

As if she were a dried gourd,
music maker,
  a beat rises from her feet
and chest as she
  swirls her way moistening
  the sand
  with her dance—
legs saguaro sinew.
An eddy of green light,
like a lantern
    at her center—
its tendrils scurry the length
    of the horizon,
red bursts bloom in furrows
    dug by her feet,
like a most unusual flower
among a thousand measures
    of cracked
and wanting earth.