

THE SMALL DISASTERS LP

by

Lindsay Daigle

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ABSTRACT

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Lindsay Daigle

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THE SMALL DISASTERS LP is a book of poems that respond to the visual and audible elements of musical albums. In this way, the ekphrastic method (traditionally, poetic representation of visual art) is simultaneously utilized and critiqued in order to explore an emotional landscape of melancholy, loss, death, and self-doubt. The poems navigate through their separate worlds as the speaker attempts to understand herself among these emotions. Three sections of poems, separated by standalone “intermezzo” poems, fluctuate through disorientation, deconstruction, and reorientation of voice and, therefore, self. The critical introduction to the book situates my investigation of ekphrasis’ value within the larger scope of ekphrastic tradition through a phenomenological lens.

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INTRODUCTION

We Take Shape By Dwelling: The Phenomenological Value of Ekphrasis

Since Greek Antiquity, writers have used ekphrasis to interact with and vivify seemingly static pieces of art, usually paintings or sculptures. A traditional understanding of an ekphrastic response involves a verbal description of something visual through poetic expression. The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* calls ekphrasis a “detailed description of an image, primarily visual” and attributes its origins to rhetorical Greek tradition (393). Many poets and scholars have turned and continue to turn to Book XVIII of *The Iliad* as the first example, where Homer elaborately describes the scenes depicted on Achilles’ shield. Homer’s combining of depicted scene and artist’s material is what seemingly sets this apart as ekphrastic description:

And he forged a thriving vineyard loaded with clusters,
bunches of lustrous grapes in gold, ripening deep purple
and climbing vines shot up on silver vine-poles.
And round it he cut a ditch in dark blue enamel
and round the ditch he staked a fence in tin. (Book XVIII, *The Iliad*)

The very first sentence of Chapter One in James A.W. Heffernan’s book on the history and poetics of ekphrasis, *Museum of Words*, is, in fact: “The earliest known example of ekphrasis in western literature is the lengthy description of the shield that Hephaestus makes for Achilles in the eighteenth book of Homer’s *Iliad*” (Heffernan 9). It’s true: Homer does describe a piece of visual artwork in this scene, which would fit the traditional definition of ekphrasis. However, the shield is imaginary. Homer did not actually experience an immaculately etched shield before choosing his words to describe it. Heffernan calls this “notional ekphrasis,” wherein a writer verbally represents an imaginary work of art. He says, “To see the difference between a passage

about an imaginary work of art and a poem about a real one is to learn something of what has happened to ekphrasis in our time” (7). The first-hand experience of art, now, seems to be an essential part of the ekphrastic response. It’s what separates ekphrasis as a subcategory or method of poetry.

Heffernan acknowledges John Ashbery’s “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” as a contemporary exemplar of ekphrasis. In his 15-page poem, Ashbery responds to his first-hand viewing of Francesco Mazzola, or Parmagianino’s sixteenth century painting, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*. His response goes beyond pure description of the painting. Heffernan says, “In place of this stark, single response, Ashbery traces the undulations of his meditation on a painting, blending art history with personal history” (183). Rather than starkly assigning language to the painting as able to be viewed, the poem maps a viewer’s aesthetic experience, recognizing each stage in its practice, from close detailed observation to widespread humanistic consideration. Heffernan calls it “blending art history with personal history,” which is true if one considers personal history to be that which the person experiences prior to an encounter with an art piece. In Ashbery’s case, he both receives what has been created and contributes to the creation of a new experience. His speaker directly addresses Parmagianino throughout the poem, acknowledging the conversation he has entered into by being viewer, writer, and all that he was prior to approaching the painting.

In essence, he is also entering into the conversation of the ekphrastic tradition and, toward the end of the poem, nods in Homer’s direction to do so: “I beseech you, withdraw that hand, / Offer it no longer as shield or greeting, / The shield of a greeting, Francesco” (Ashbery 82). Much happens in this brief passage. We get a classic ekphrastic description: In the painting, the figure’s hand is larger than the rest of his body, which indicates its position as outstretched in

front of the body. Ashbery shows us this by using the words “withdraw” and “offer,” as though the hand can only be drawn backwards from its current position. In addition, Ashbery likens the hand to a shield, which calls up the image of Achilles’ shield from *The Iliad*. This is certainly a salute, or “greeting” to Homer’s credited place in the ekphrastic tradition. But the speaker pleads with the painter to “offer it *no longer* as shield or greeting,” which speaks loudly, especially since the line occurs near the poem’s end. Because of the line’s placement, I can’t help but hear this as a plea for the redefinition of ekphrasis, of the conversation between art and artist, aesthetic stimulus and human. It is in this literary moment in the twentieth century that one can see ekphrasis’ definition expanding.

Now, ekphrasis might refer to an artistic response not just as poetry to painting, but between two different art forms of any medium (i.e., painting responding to music, music responding to dance, etc.). The traditional pairing, especially in scholars’ discussions around ekphrasis, remains as poetry responding to still, visual art, such as paintings, sculptures, and photographs. In any case of creation responding to creation, one of the primary qualities scholars and artists have come to expect from ekphrasis is description. But if we follow the use of ekphrasis as a poetic method through the last century, description has become less emphasized as a response. In favor of what, though? How do we recognize the ekphrastic process in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? There has been a shift in poetry’s use of ekphrasis that challenges us to criticize its purpose beyond being “a representation of a representation of a representation” (Gosetti-Ferencei 165).

In *The Ecstatic Quotidian: Phenomenological Sightings in Modern Art and Literature*, Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei – through her analysis of Rilke’s engagement with Cézanne’s artwork – makes a distinction about a poet’s task: “to bring the essence of things, not their

ordinary aspect, to the reader's (intuitive) perception, an intuition that requires active engagement with the real within a departure from prosaic seeing" (170-1). Gosetti-Ferencei is discussing artistic encounters through a phenomenological lens, as I will throughout this explorative introduction. I am drawn to phenomenology here because of its ontological focus. As a branch of philosophical thought, phenomenology continuously asks these questions: How do we understand our existence in relation to the world around us? Is there a self? If so, what is the self, and what is it to be aware of the self? What is consciousness, and how do we know? Ekphrasis, I believe, is an artistic method that asks these questions as well, as it necessarily poses a poet in relation to an art object.

In the passage above, Gosetti-Ferencei critiques realism and recognizes the intersections between the internal and the external self that are necessary for poetry to communicate what is below the surface of everyday life. But it is unclear what she means by "the *essence* of things" beyond it not being "their ordinary aspect." This is due to the fact that exploring "the *essence* of things" is partially what phenomenology is concerned with. I agree that there is an internal, ontological (I hesitate to use the word "essential") quality in a poet's response to visual objects, one that goes beyond pure external description. With the help of Mary Jo Bang's, Mark Doty's, John Ashbery's, and Sara Ahmed's ideas and words, I hope to uncover how active engagement with an object (or space full of objects) allows for "a departure from prosaic seeing," one that gets at revelatory qualities of both the self and the world. What does ekphrasis do beyond its use as description, and what is the writer's role in that process? Why do images surface the way they do in an ekphrastic response, and what does that tell us about ourselves?

In her collection of poems, *The Eye Like a Strange Balloon*, Mary Jo Bang represents a newly defined use of ekphrasis for both writer and reader. Her poems approach visual pieces of art (paintings, films, photographs, etc.) through not only descriptive, sensory language, but figurative language as well. Sensory language serves the function of bridging communal conversation among painter, viewer, writer (who at one point is viewer), and reader (who may also be viewer at some point), as well as what is painted, viewed, written, and read. Sensory language offers common ground. What is figurative might do the same, but as well serves a separate function, a more self-oriented one (the self of the writer, and the self of the reader). For the reader, Bang offers an entirely new layering of aesthetic experiences, separate from [on top of/below/behind/in front of/alongside] the artwork to which she ekphrastically responds. First is the viewing of the artwork itself. Then comes the retelling of the experience, which complicates what would otherwise be a raw description, like a photograph of what's being viewed. In *The Ecstatic Quotidian*, Gosetti-Ferencei invokes phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty: "Images [visual and verbal], then, are not tracings or copyings of the world; they are the overlapping of the seeing and the seen, the 'inside of the outside and the outside of the inside'" (165). What is it that complicates description and pushes the inside into the outside, and vice versa? What happens in that act of translation of what is seen to what is described? What is "the seen" that coincides with the act of "seeing," and when do they occur?

In response to Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* (oil on canvas, 1907), Bang's poem of the same title says, "Over here our story begins / and over there it continues / like the idle hum of the clown car" (88). Here, Bang introduces a narrative to Picasso's image, along with character and voice through the first person collective perspective. Much differently, though, we experience the image through another sense – the sound of an "idle hum" – a sensory

experience we may not have understood had Bang not brought our attention to it. The “hum” sound comes from a “clown car,” a distinctively small-sized automobile not usually associated with through its noise. Through this poetic image – one that is not visually present in Picasso’s painting – Bang provides a figurative description of the figures’ nearness to each other in the painting. Not only do we see the figures’ proximity, but we feel it in terms of confined, perhaps uncomfortable, space. Confined space might connote claustrophobic feelings, which might in turn ignite panic, heightened body temperature, sweating, quickened pulse, etc. All of this a reader may not have experienced from viewing the painting alone. Bang provides a “seen” image overlapping with an act of “seeing.” In the poem, the reader does the seeing, while simultaneously encountering the writer’s “seen” and calling up one’s own seen images.

The Academy of American Poets says that “modern ekphrastic poems have generally shrugged off antiquity’s obsession with elaborate description, and instead have tried to interpret, inhabit, confront, and speak to their subjects” (poets.org). To “confront” and to “speak to” an image is to assign the ability to communicate with and through that image, as though the image might speak back. To “inhabit” introduces a more complicated relationship between writer and image. To “inhabit” something is to dwell within it, to exist and move around inside of its space. The word “inhabit” assumes a certain amount of familiarity – past, present, and/or future – with what is being inhabited. There is a “mine-ness” associated with the space, where I affect the objects within that space as much as they might affect me, and my relationship to those objects will constantly shift in accordance with how I am oriented within the space. Viewing an image as a space a writer might inhabit is to understand the ekphrastic process as a method of discovery

about the ways in which we are oriented. Through ekphrasis, a writer necessarily gives an account of oneself through poetic expression by inhabiting the space of another art form.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard says of writing poetry: “And how should one receive an exaggerated image, if not by exaggerating it a little more, by personalizing the exaggeration? The phenomenological gain appears right away: in prolonging *exaggeration*, we may have the good fortune to avoid the habits of *reduction*” (219, original emphasis). One of poetry’s purposes is to enhance the experience of the mundane (the pieces of our lives in danger of being overlooked), to enlarge the potential of our realities – “to avoid the habits of reduction.” Visual art is by nature an exaggeration: even an unfiltered photograph is the making of one’s visual experience greater simply by duplicating the moment of its existence. Ekphrasis, I believe, is the personalizing of an already exaggerated image, “exaggerating it a little more,” “prolonging exaggeration.” It is within a writer’s control – or, at least, a writer’s individual consciousness – to assign particular pieces of language to a visual stimulus.

At first though, images might surface in a writer’s response without conscious choice, sparked simply from artwork’s visual stimulus, differing widely from writer to writer. In comparison to Bang’s poem, for example, Stephen Gibson’s poem “Les Demoiselles d’Avignon” responds to Picasso’s painting of the same name with dramatically different language choices than Bang. Gibson, too, provides voice for the figures in the painting, but emphasizes the sexual in conjunction with the domestic much more than Bang does: “Viewed from any angle, who would regard us / as loving, kind, gentle, caring, generous / to a fault, while wanting to strip sheets from a bed— / and continuing—even as the fondling has started” (lns. 1-4). There are certainly no clown cars here. Why such wide disparateness in response? What is it about the ekphrastic process that pulls a writer in one direction or another? According to Bachelard, the

ekphrastic process would be meant to “avoid the habits of reduction.” Gosetti-Ferencei calls this avoidance “the ecstatic quotidian,” or “the stepping outside or ‘ecstasis’ of the ordinary feeling of the self’s familiarity with the world” (1). Poetry actively works against familiarity. It counteracts the “reduction” of our ability to be conscious of ourselves through the interaction of language and other art forms. Ekphrasis’ new function is to prevent this reduction in self-awareness, to facilitate ecstasy from the quotidian, and to thereby promote discovery of self-orientation. In Bang’s poem, for example, the reader learns a new association with a clown car, and as a result, learns how s/he feels about that association, if it arouses other images or memories, and presents opportunities for self-analysis and reflection. For the writer, she learns that a clown car is a surprising association as well. Although, this is a result of a direct phenomenological relationship with the object to which she is responding. She learns about how she is oriented within the space of a piece of art, thereby presenting opportunities for self-analysis and reflection as well. To use Gosetti-Ferencei’s terms, both reader and writer experience “the overlapping of the seeing and the seen.” The present experience with art/poem overlaps with a plethora of past experiences with a plethora of objects.

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed is not talking about poetry or aesthetics, but she defines *phenomenology* in a way that helps us to better understand Bachelard’s views on writing poetry, and therefore, to better understand the purpose of ekphrasis: “Phenomenology is often characterized as a ‘turn toward’ objects, which appear in their perceptual ‘thereness’ as objects given to consciousness. Rather than consciousness being seen as directed toward itself, it is understood as having objects in its view — as being shaped by that which appears before it in

‘this here and now’” (25). To further understand the “phenomenological gain” of the ekphrastic process (of a writer’s sense of consciousness through engagement with art as object, of using language to respond to a “this here and now” in the form of artwork), I’ll “turn toward” *Queer Phenomenology*’s ideas about orientation and space. Ahmed’s ideas will then be in conversation with Bang’s “Les Demoiselles d’Avignon” and Ashbery’s “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,” as well as Mark Doty’s book on the poetics of encountering art, *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon*. In this prose work, Doty explores the reasons why we feel a certain intimacy with art, specifically still life paintings. He enacts the ekphrastic process by describing works of art through the lens of personal experience and memory, while theorizing the act of viewing art. Through his close engagement with Dutch artist Jan Davidsz de Heem’s seventeenth century painting, *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon*, Doty concludes that the painting (paired with the act of viewing it) offers opportunities to further understand ourselves through the lens of the world around us: “description is an inexact, loving art, and a reflexive one; when we describe the world we come closer to saying what we are” (6). In this way, Doty is participating similarly to Ahmed in phenomenological conversations of subject-object relations.

Ahmed’s book looks at subject-object relations through a foundational engagement with Edmund Husserl and other phenomenological theorists. She explores the ways in which we are oriented toward certain objects, as well as the reasons why. She says in her introduction, “To be orientated is also to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us to find our way. These are the objects we recognize, so that when we face them we know which way we are facing. They might be landmarks or other familiar signs that give us our anchoring points. They gather on the ground, and they create a ground upon which we can gather. And yet, objects gather quite differently, creating different grounds” (1). All writers are grounded by their subject material,

shifting anchors always according to time and circumstance. In the ekphrastic process, however, a writer responds to objects within the space of the image. Space, for our purposes here, is the area within the boundaries of a piece of artwork. In the case of Picasso's painting, its space equals everything within the perimeter of the canvas. The objects within that space are more broadly defined. An object could be any visual speck of the artwork – an image, figure, shape, color, brushstroke, line, detail, etc. – all of which can be responded to with language. A writer might be oriented toward a particular object because it is an “anchoring point,” something we “recognize” as “familiar” and are therefore able to speak about.

For instance, in her response to Picasso's cubist painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Bang orients herself toward the objects she might recognize as familiar. Her “anchoring point” could be, most discernibly, the human figures in the painting. Her response goes beyond this obvious objective focus though. In the jagged, triangular shapes toward the right-center of the painting, acting as background for or possibly decoration with the figures, Bang turns toward the color blue alongside gray-white and says, “If we seem vulnerable // under the past-pattern of clouds / in motion, over a pale blue / conveyor-belt ocean, it's because we are” (88-9). The jagged shapes, lines, and colors, as Ahmed says, “gather quite differently” for Bang. In them, she has identified a sky and an ocean, the color blue referring to both as one reflects the other. The prominence of the figures as objects within the space plays a role in her identification. She is oriented toward these sky- and ocean-objects through their relation to the figures' vulnerability. The figures are mostly nude – only draped material covers small parts of their bodies – which might account for their vulnerability. But this is not what Bang associates with it. For her, it is the moving sky, the moving ocean, and what happens in between them: their mutual reflection, the color blue. And it is this state of in-between, caught among two infinitesimally giant objects

“in motion” at the hand of someone or something else, that makes the figures small and vulnerable.

Objects within a space “gather quite differently” to those perceiving them, accounting for the differences in ekphrastic response among different writers. Doty calls this gathering of objects within the space of an artwork “a concert, a community of separate presences; we are intended to compare their degrees of roundness, solidity, transparency, and opacity. They are each a separate city, a separate child in a field of silent children. They speak back and forth — do they? — across the distance between them” (Doty 17). Bang’s poem shows how objects within the space of Picasso’s painting can “speak back and forth” in order to say something about human vulnerability – how, clothed or not, we are all exposed and defenseless in the face of an expansive, grandiose world. Depending on a writer’s perception and translation of this conversation between objects, every writer has a different “ground” to stand on within the space of an artwork, which influences the language choices made.

What a writer chooses to write in the ekphrastic process – “the overlapping of the seeing and the seen,” in Gosetti-Ferencei’s words – is based on several factors: personal history, bodily history, and the [lack of or recallable] memory of it; emotional present and past(s); emotional futures/dispositions; social context (preexisting norms); and personal interests (likes/dislikes). In addition, writers have *writerly* histories: past experiences with writing, reading, and studying the ways in which language is used to communicate aesthetically and rhetorically. All of these factors converse with one another, bringing one factor or another to the forefront relative to another. Based on this conversation among internal histories and predispositions, one’s ekphrastic response might be a narrative from the writer’s memory, jogged by an object seen in the piece of art. It might be poetic verse inspired by an object or a combination of objects. It

might be an account that resembles another writer's style or sentiments. It might be a more traditional form of ekphrasis as pure description of the space. Even if this is the case, the choice of what to describe and in what order depends on the aforementioned factors as well. These are a lot of varying factors though, all of which are not always easily identified, especially in relation to the object with which they might associate.

Ahmed looks particularly at how inhabiting a space correlates directly with one's affective history in a way that might be self-revealing or truth-telling: "Bodies may become orientated in this responsiveness to the world around them, given this capacity to be affected. In turn, given the history of such responses, which accumulate as impressions on the skin, bodies do not dwell in spaces that are exterior but rather are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling" (9). Ahmed uses the word "dwell" here, rather than "exist" or "live." To "dwell" is to inhabit in a way that involves passing time and the interplay of thought and action. Inherent in this term is also its connotations with the past – to "dwell in the past" is to allow one's thoughts to linger on past moments, often associated with regret, grief, or confusion. When I dwell, I stay a while. By inhabiting the space of a piece of art, our responsive bodies "take shape," twist, turn toward certain objects, based on accumulated impressions and affects from past spaces. The self of the writer is then translated on to the page through ekphrasis. It "take[s] shape by dwelling" among the objects perceived, an active phrase that shows the ability to move through, change, and be changed by one's lingering within a space.

Doty provides an example of how past experiences can influence one's reaction to an image and, in turn, one's language choices to describe that reaction. He recalls listening to a radio commercial with his grandmother: "The adjective the radio chose for the spots was 'horrid': interesting clear sound, immediately calling up, for some reason, a chain of scents —

vomit, calamine lotion, peculiar odor of a cigar box filled with rubber bands, girdle folded in a drawer” (Doty 11). At one point in the speaker’s life, his dwellings (grandmother’s house, in this case) contained this chain of scents that he has [and still does] consider “horrid.” His response, at first, “accumulate[d] as impressions on the skin,” and now is manifested as language choices in this ekphrastic passage. He says “for some reason” here, which indicates that the speaker isn’t sure how associations between the smells and the word “horrid” came to be. He is oriented toward these smells (and the words used to describe them) as a response to the word “horrid,” but can’t quite place the direct correlation from one to the next. It’s an aesthetic reaction, a disposition that was once not there, and then was because of bodily experience. Doty’s body continues to “take shape by dwelling.”

John Ashbery’s well-known ekphrastic poem, “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,” explores the ways in which we are shaped by both the receipt and the creation of art. On the second page of his poem, Ashbery’s speaker reflects upon Parmagianino’s portrait’s ability to communicate with and through the viewer, revealing difficult truths the viewer might not otherwise understand without this subject-object relation:

that the soul is not a soul,
Has no secret, is small, and it fits
Its hollow perfectly: its room, our moment of attention.
That is the tune but there are no words.
The words are only speculation
(From the Latin *speculum*, mirror) (Ashbery 69, original emphasis)

In this passage, Ashbery aligns “our moment of attention” with the space in which the self dwells (though Ashbery uses the controversial and difficult-to-define word “soul” instead of “self,” perhaps as a way to explore its meaning). In this case, attention is given to artwork upon which the speaker gazes. The speaker, the artwork, and the gaze that inhabits the space between them

are all in a “room.” This room, according to Ashbery, is also the “hollow” in which the “soul” fits – and it fits it perfectly. To this, Ahmed would say that people “are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling,” which indicates that our selves carve out a perfect fit no matter the space being inhabited. It “is small” enough to fit within any room, any moment of attention. Within any piece of art encountered, a viewer can always orient herself toward an object based on her histories. For Ashbery, the self being oriented is the “soul.” The word is repeated – “the soul is not a soul” – but used differently in either instance in order to acknowledge that the “soul” is a mysterious concept. It’s as if he is saying, ‘the soul is not a *soul* in the way you think it is,’ or ‘our self is not the mysterious, intangible soul that we understand it to be.’ Instead, it “[h]as no secret.” It is malleable and turns toward objects in its view, in every moment. There is no secret here because the viewer then becomes writer. He is able to assign language to his orientations, his self, his soul. Which pieces of language he chooses, however, “are only speculations” as to how to represent it. “[T]here are no words” because it is impossible to accurately capture an experience that is constantly shifting and taking shape by dwelling. In a separate parenthetical line, Ashbery is careful to bring our attention to the Latin origin of the word “speculation” – “*speculum*, mirror” – which indicates that the writer’s language choices are always/already informed by self-reflection. Within the space of a piece of art, the writer sees himself (his histories, experiences, memories, etc.) reflected in encounterable objects, and then ekphrastically responds. Doty, too, wonders about the soul/self in relation to objects: “Is that what soul or spirit is, then, the outward-flying attention, the gaze that binds us to the world? ... ‘I’ as the quickest, subtlest thing we are: a moment of attention, an intimate engagement” (Doty 49-50). If we consider the phenomenological implications of Ashbery’s “room, our moment of

attention,” then ekphrastic “speculations” are as close to self-truth (the “I”) as we can get in this process.

Ashbery’s line, “its room, our moment of attention,” tells us, too, that space and time are necessarily linked as contextual conditions for ekphrastic response. In any space, we give our attention to objects moment by moment. Even when our gaze lingers on one detail for a second moment, that second moment is informed by the initial moment. And the following moment may turn the gaze elsewhere. Ahmed places importance on this kind of interaction of time and space: “The temporality of orientation reminds us that orientations are effects of what we tend toward, where the ‘toward’ marks a space and time that is almost, but not quite, available in the present. The question of ‘orientation’ is thus not only a spatial question” (20). It’s interesting that Ahmed emphasizes the word “toward” here to refer to the interplay of space and time. “Toward” certainly is “almost, but not quite.” It suggests a pointing in a general, not necessarily specific, direction. “Toward” references the *over there*, not necessarily the *here*. The objects we are oriented toward, then, don’t necessarily inhabit the same space we do. We may be in one space, while we face/point to/look at/notice an object in another. This idea may account for the poetic image that appears in an ekphrastic poem that does not directly correlate with any visual aspect of the art piece. For instance, there is no “clown car” in Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*, but Bang was moved to put one in her poem. She was oriented toward the clown car for some spatial and temporal reason outside of the “this here and now.” Within the space of the painting was an object that Bang noticed – perhaps the enlarged nose of one of the figures, or the seemingly entangled limbs of the figures, or seemingly uncomfortable proximity of the figures, or merely the color red – that then *reminded* her of the image of a clown car and allowed her to *recognize* it as such. How we orient ourselves within a space might shed light on our orientations

toward objects outside of that space, especially ones that we may have forgotten or buried deep in our consciousness, through recognition and reminders.

Doty uses the image of a Magic 8 Ball's interior liquid structure to illustrate the act of recognition: "I think there is a space in me that is like the dark inside that hollow sphere, and things float up into view, images that are vessels of meaning, the flotsam and detail of any particular moment. Vanished things" (26). Recognition is possible through one's perception, which, as Ahmed purports, is a direct result of one's orientations. In any particular moment, the "[v]anished things" we thought had left our minds may "float up into view" based on the act of perception. We may learn that we are, in fact, oriented toward these "vanished things." We then respond to what we perceive by *reaching* for certain objects, but not for everything perceived, and not in the same way each time:

We might think that we reach for whatever comes into view. And yet, what "comes into" view, or what is within our horizon, is not a matter simply of what we find here or there, or even where we find ourselves as we move here or there. What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations that we have already taken. Some objects don't even become objects of perception, as the body does not move toward them: they are "beyond the horizon" of the body, and thus out of reach. (Ahmed 55)

What is within our horizon are our personal/bodily/emotional histories, the non-narratable factors that contribute to our orientations. What is "out of reach," what does not "come into view," stays buried below the surface of the "dark inside that hollow sphere," to use Doty's metaphor. Ahmed uses both "reach" and "reachable" here. To "reach" for something is an act similar to the state of "towardness" (27) since the object reached for is not necessarily obtained (thus defining the state of "reachability"). A "reachable" object implies a choice whether or not to "reach" for it. Within

an ekphrastic response, a writer makes a series of choices – in words, tenses, images, line breaks, stanza breaks, etc. – all of which are wholly individual to the writer. Therefore, if what we “reach” for manifests itself through an ekphrastic response, we might be able to gauge our own and others’ “horizons,” the limits of our bodies’ histories “rewritten as the history of the reachable” (55).

For Gosetti-Ferencei, our “horizons” are defined by “ordinary things..., suggesting another side of reality, unseen within our habitual quotidian regard” (9). It is possible, through ekphrasis, to discover new limits of reachability that stretch beyond our quotidian horizons. Responding poetically to a piece of artwork requires a suspension of expectations and a willingness to inhabit an unfamiliar space. Doty says, “The heart is a repository of vanished things” (26). Ekphrasis requires a willingness to *reorient* oneself with “another side of reality,” with what has vanished. Still, the objects toward which one is oriented, both interior and exterior to the space of the artwork, may be familiar on their own or remind one of other objects – vanished or familiar. Because of these unknown outcomes, ekphrasis is a *disorientating* experience. It shakes up what we consider to be familiar:

When bodies take up spaces that they were not intended to inhabit, something other than the reproduction of the facts of the matter happens. The hope that reproduction fails is the hope for new impressions, for new lines to emerge, new objects, or even new bodies, ... The “new” would not involve the loss of the background. Indeed, for bodies to arrive in spaces where they are not already at home, where they are not “in place,” involves hard work; indeed, it involves painstaking labor for bodies to inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape. Having arrived, such bodies in turn might acquire new shapes. (Ahmed 62)

I think it is fair to say that newness is a desired end result of ekphrasis: a fresh image, a fresh perspective. We “hope that reproduction fails,” which means that our response will not perfectly resemble the space we are responding to, but exist as something else entirely. Poets call this allowing a poem to “stand on its own.” Ashbery writes of this as an inevitability, even when an artist/writer has specific aims at the outset:

[...] as in the game where
A whispered phrase passed around the room
Ends up as something completely different.
It is the principle that makes works of art so unlike
What the artist intended. Often he finds
He has omitted the thing he started out to say
In the first place. (Ashbery 80)

Frank O’Hara also calls attention to this “principle” with his poem, “Why I Am Not a Painter”:

My poem
is finished and I haven’t mentioned
orange yet. It’s twelve poems, I call
it ORANGES. (O’Hara 262)

The ekphrastic process complicates the creative process detailed by Ashbery and O’Hara. In a way, the ekphrastic poem, through “hard work” and “painstaking labor,” becomes the reinvigoration of a piece of art. For the reader, the poem is a separate and new aesthetic experience. For the writer, this is true also, but there is a special sort of newness that accompanies it. The “new impressions,” “new lines,” “new objects, or even new bodies” are the discoveries we make about ourselves through recognizing our writing choices, the choices made as a result of our orientations (or disorientations reoriented). Then, our newly oriented bodies “acquire new shapes.” Our body/self is new because the conditions shifting around us require it. We are now oriented toward different objects for different reasons. We are now reminded of certain objects because of other ones. A group of cubist figures now connotes a clown car.

Bachelard argues that a sense of disorientation is nothing new for a writer: “Poets are well acquainted with the existence of this hesitation of being... [T]he spiraled being who, from outside, appears to be a well-invested center, will never reach his center. The being of a man is an unsettled being which all expression unsettles” (214). In other words, when a writer inhabits the space of a poem, one must expose the “spiraled being” within by using poetic expression to “unsettle” familiarity. In order to “reach his center,” or discover truths about the ways in which one is oriented, one must, as Ahmed said, “take up spaces that they were not intended to inhabit.”

If we understand one’s “center” as the particulars about ourselves as revealed through the ways in which we are oriented toward objects, then ekphrasis’ value lies in that revelation. We can’t know this, however, unless the process is brought to consciousness through reflection. In *The Ecstatic Quotidian*, Gosetti-Ferencei investigates German poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s poetic engagement with Cézanne’s paintings. After reflection, Rilke came to realize the ecstatic and imagistic potentialities his poetry had in relation to viewing Cézanne’s paintings:

Through Cézanne he learned that a certain kind of abstraction gets closer to the real, an approach that requires breaking away from a practically oriented or abstract relationship to objects and discovering how they are constituted in perception. Rilke recognized that Cézanne’s departure from the ordinary and received ways of conceiving spatial relationships might lead the poet, too, to other kinds of verbal images, to “unusual word formations which leave behind the rules of speech sanctioned by everyday use” such that Rilke could “venture into utterly new territory.” (152)

In order to bring to the forefront the awareness of our orientations as discovered through ekphrasis, we must be reflective of the process. We must look closely at the choices made while ekphrastically responding and wonder about our connections with the objects toward which we turn both inside and outside the space of the artwork. These connections exist beyond “a practically oriented or abstract relationship to objects” once responded to in a poem. Through reflection, we can ask, for example: What are we reminded of, and why is that? Is there a memory we can point to, or a fraction of one? Are there particular emotions associated with that object?

Bachelard explains further how poetic expression allows for this kind of self-discovery by using much of the vocabulary valued by both Ahmed and myself:

The phenomenology of the poetic imagination allows us to explore the being of man considered as the being of a *surface*, of the surface that separates the region of the same from the region of the other. It should not be forgotten that in this zone of sensitized surface, before being, one must speak, if not to others, at least to oneself. And advance always. In this orientation, the universe of speech governs all the phenomena of being, that is, the new phenomena. By means of poetic language, waves of newness flow over the surface of being. And language bears within itself the dialectics of open and closed. Through *meaning* it encloses, while through poetic expression, it opens up. (222, original emphasis)

Our conscious self “advance[s] always,” beginning with speaking “at least to oneself.”

Addressing oneself is not always easy though. We want to *mean* something, to substantively give an account of oneself, which is a lot of pressure – an often overwhelming amount of it. Language isn’t enough to mean. We need more complex access to language. We need a way to relate to

objects, to others, and to the ways others relate to objects. After all, how do we know we mean anything if someone else cannot acknowledge it, if the evidence is not in the ways we interact with the world? Doty says, “We think that to find ourselves we need turn inward, examining the intricacies of origin, the shaping forces of personality. But ‘I’ is just as much to be found in the world; looking outward, we experience the one who does the seeing. Say what you see and you experience yourself through your style of seeing and saying” (67). As Bachelard says, “through *meaning* [language] encloses, while through poetic expression, it opens up.” Doty says to “say what you see,” and I would say to *then* “turn inward, examining...the shaping forces of personality” through reflection. The ekphrastic process is that more complex access to language that allows us to know ourselves more fully. No longer simply the poetic description of something visual, ekphrasis provides for us the opportunity to open up our access to poetic language, to confront the orientations we have and will have as a result. The objects that co-inhabit a space with us allow us to direct our narrations toward other objects, based on the histories that have mapped themselves onto our bodies. Past and present overlap in an attempt to understand – and possibly change – the future. Like Bang says, “Over here our story begins / and over there it continues.”

Most of the poems in *The Small Disasters LP* have a foundation in the ekphrastic process, evolved, as I understand it to be, from the traditional description of a visual piece of art. In this collection, I seek to be in conversation with music albums, with at once their album/CD covers and their music. In this way, I am complicating the tradition of ekphrasis being a verbal description of something visual. It’s important to my own creative and critical investigations to

consider what happens when poetry responds to not only visual art, but the sonic qualities of music as well. At the outset, I intended to simply *engage* with the albums – study the covers, listen to the music, respond – but I wasn’t sure yet what that really meant. All I knew was that I was not purely describing the images; I was not reading the lyrics; my intention was not necessarily to “reinvigorate” the album.

The first few poems I wrote in this manner were “The Milk-Eyed Mender,” “Funeral,” and “Into the Blue Again.” These poems thematically approach death, sadness, anger, and loss, which makes sense due to the melancholy that laces each of these albums either visually or sonically. I wondered though why certain concrete images from the covers made their ways into the poems, and others didn’t. I asked myself why, even though I had no particular associations between that music and an old relationship of mine, it was memories of that relationship that saturated my language choices. I asked, why is my speaker “burying your body” in the first line of “The Milk-Eyed Mender” when the album cover is full of bright, lively imagery that suggests nothing about death? Where did the violent “splitting hum that plucks each hair from my head / one by one, then drives it rootward through my pupil” come from in “Into the Blue Again,” especially in response to such an abstract cover and a mostly instrumental track list?

It wasn’t until I encountered Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* that I truly understood the sort of exploration my poems were undertaking. She asks similar questions as mine. For instance, she discusses our sudden emotional responses to scents and acknowledges “[t]he surprise when we find ourselves moved in this way or that. So we ask the question, later, and it often seems too late: what is it that has led me away from the present, to another place and another time? How is [it] that I have arrived here or there?” (10) In creating my collection, I had been wondering the same things. I had been participating in a foundational conversation of

phenomenological inquiry. By engaging with these albums, I am entering into their space – visually and sonically – and orienting myself toward certain objects within it. These objects might be shapes, colors, images, lines, portraits, etc. from the covers; or they might be words, inflections, rhythms, chords, notes, etc. from the music. And my orientations toward them are already there upon the moment of my arrival, based on (as listed on page 11) my personal history, bodily history, writerly history, and the [lack of or recallable] memory of it; emotional present and past(s); emotional futures/dispositions; social context (preexisting norms); and personal interests (likes/dislikes). Ahmed says, “The concept of ‘orientation’ allows us to expose how life gets directed in some ways rather than others, through the very requirement that we follow what is already given to us” (21). My poems are the result of the ways I am oriented within the space of an album. It is those orientations that direct my writing choices and facilitate the conversation.

This way of understanding my relation to objects within the space of an album does not altogether account for the ways in which I respond. The internal and external associations I have with objects do not manifest themselves in obvious nor clear ways. *The Small Disasters LP* is separated into three sections with “intermezzo” poems after the first and second sections. There is no narrative, no story being told, no particular characters to follow. Instead, the sections aid in an emotional investigation of self, in which the way we understand ourselves is questioned through a fluctuating sense of disorientation, deconstruction, and reorientation.

The first section begins with “Fevers & Mirrors,” a poem that establishes the kind of dreamlike imagery in which the rest of the collection is steeped: “Ceiling fans are ordering me to drink sweat / from old houses.” The poem also establishes the speaker’s continuing struggle with self-knowledge, as well as the methods to attain it: “as I stand in front of a mirror, / empty space

that ties my wrists, adorned blackness speaking / my face.” The speaker is disoriented. She wants to understand herself in the midst of familiar and unfamiliar objects surrounding her, of preconceived notions, of memories. She is “supposed” to perform certain actions to attain this understanding. She makes moves; she climbs. But what she ends up with is discouragement: “another flight, a recurring self-portrait of wilted / foreheads, another thick wooden wall.” Ahmed calls this feeling of disorientation “unsettling.” She says that “it can shatter one’s sense of confidence in the ground... The body might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action. Or the hand might reach out and find nothing, and might grasp instead the indeterminacy of air. The body in losing its support might then be lost, undone, thrown” (157). In “Fevers & Mirrors,” the speaker climbs a flight of stairs, “piles of glass shards on each step,” showing the speaker’s increasingly shattered state. The poems that follow in the collection shadow the speaker as she attempts reorientation, “the hand that reaches out [to find] something to steady” her. Most of the poems are merely these attempts though, revealing the speaker instead as “lost, undone, thrown.”

The second section deconstructs the speaker’s voice, but maintains a sense of being “lost, undone, thrown.” The poems are not meant to be in the speaker’s voice as the reader knows it from the first section, but rather a series of voices that may be or have been a part of the speaker. From the first to the second section, voice as representation of the self is not shown to be static, much like our experience with art. “Parachute,” the intermezzo poem that occurs between the first two sections, is meant to demonstrate how our experience with art (particularly, music albums) is transitional and transformative. Following the first section and preceding “Parachute” is a *pause* symbol (■) in the middle of an otherwise blank page. This symbol is meant to be an interactive tool to engage the reader’s imagination and involvement in the

aesthetic experience. When listening to music [on any device other than an old-fashioned turntable], the listener is able to press the *pause* button at any time. During a pause, the songs previously heard are parts of the most recent moments experienced by the listener. Even if not consciously, the music resonates within the listener, as well as all the images, memories, senses, etc. that were sparked by that music. This page in the manuscript is a fluid, transitional moment, replete with the reader's experiences of the first section's poems. In this case, the speaker is also in a transitional state, as she is wading through disorientation. This moment of pause is a breath to consider what happened before what happens next. "Parachute" is a part of that transition.

Following "Parachute" and preceding the second section is a *play* symbol (►) in the middle of an otherwise blank page, which signifies that "Parachute" occurs *during* the paused moment. It responds to an album that values time and transitions, full of lyrics like "I used to wish to be back home again," and "You say, go slow, but something's right behind me," and cover art that features a well-loved stuffed bear seemingly too large for the landscape surrounding it. In response, the poem is concerned with time passing as it edges toward something else without ever reaching it. It often uses comparative phrases such as, "larger than a river," "Heavier than trees," "hotter than steam," and "more gone than blue." There is movement in these phrases, though the speaker isn't sure toward what (or when or who). The poem suggests growth out of childhood into a different kind of protection, ending with "many selves that avoid a tree's shade." The *play* button on the next page allows the reader to consider these "many selves" while entering into the second section, full of many selves.

After yet another *pause*, intermezzo ["Into the Blue Again (Reprise)"], and *play*, the third section of the collection attempts to reorient the speaker by returning to the voice established in

the first section. Because of the *pause* and *play* functions, however, the voice in the third section is meant to be a continuing blend of those experienced in both the first two sections. In other words, the three sections can be considered one long section, or long play (LP), during which the reader “presses *pause*” and “presses *play*” between tracks.

The second poem of the third section, as I have been calling it, is an important moment in the collection. It is a poem-in-sections called “Not-Reflection,” which is the only poem that is not ekphrastically-based. Mirrors are a recurring image throughout the manuscript as they signify self-knowledge, self-assessment, and our awareness of ourselves among the objects that surround us (i.e., seeing ourselves at the same time as the space we are in). The title “Not-Reflection” pushes against this image and attempts to ground the speaker in what she is not, rather than continuing to explore what she is, was, or will be. The poem harkens to a specific traumatic memory – that of a loved one’s attempted suicide – a memory that needs no artistic stimulus to be triggered. Doty offers thoughts on the importance of paying heed to memories for the sake of self: “I am learning to accept the flux and revision time and experience invariably make, but I am also learning to love what I wish to keep the same, something that nothing in my life has taught me until now; learning, that is, not to let go but to hold on” (43). By holding on to this memory through poetry, the speaker is able to understand that, through “time and experience,” this trauma is no longer a reflection of herself. However, “flux and revision” continue impacting the self recursively, through disorientation, reorientation, and back again. The poems that follow “Not-Reflection” maintain the speaker’s self-inquiry, while considering all that has happened before, past and future happening simultaneously in the present. In the final poem, “July Flame,” the speaker states, “Things are different now.” She is still, however, disoriented: “My clothes are too big. [...] What looks / to be a winged drop is bruised oblivion-limbs.” She ends up oriented

toward death – “brace myself for the impossible exit, / the hot push of some other sky” – which is the only thing she can know for certain.

I might say the entire ekphrastic process is a study in disorientation. It is purposely entering into a space with an intention to discover something unexpected based on my orientations toward the objects within that space. Ahmed calls this kind of entrance “deeply disorientating. ... They are moments in which you lose one perspective, but the ‘loss’ itself is not empty or waiting; it is an object, thick with presence. ... You experience the moment as loss, as the making present of something that is now absent (the presence of an absence)” (158). It is the “presence” that I am most interested in here. What is lost – familiarity, expectation, self-knowledge – is replaced by the making sense of the unfamiliar, the unexpected, the unknown. The act of making sense results in language in the form of an ekphrastic poem and reflection upon that language. Recursively, disorientation results in reorientation and, therefore, a regaining and increase of self-knowledge.

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The Small Disasters LP

Is there anything
To be serious about beyond this otherness
That gets included in the most ordinary
Forms of daily activity, changing everything
Slightly and profoundly, and tearing the matter
Of creation, any creation, not just artistic creation
Out of our hands, to install it on some monstrous, near
Peak, too close to ignore, too far
For one to intervene? This otherness, this
“Not-being-us” is all there is to look at
In the mirror, though no one can say
How it came to be this way.

John Ashbery, from “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror”

Turn on the machine
that muffles the ghosts that waft

between the mind’s synaptic clefts.
Beyond the classic blank
of the clear-cut
the twin movement of wind
and snowflakes is busy

embellishing the stonework.

*Mary Jo Bang, from “Rock and Roll Is
Dead, The Novel Is Dead, God Is Dead,
Painting Is Dead”*



Fevers & Mirrors

Ceiling fans are ordering me to drink sweat
from old houses. I am supposed to tear the wallpaper
from their skeletons, squeeze from it the elegy-sebum,
crumble it into balls for the spinning fan to shred. Worse
are the light bulbs in my palms as I stand in front of a mirror,
empty space that ties my wrists, adorned blackness speaking
my face. I see flights of stairs, piles of glass shards on each step.
They moan a pointed-finger-gospel to climb like hot mercury.
At the top, another flight, a recurring self-portrait of wilted
foreheads, another thick wooden wall.

Into the Blue Again

I'll write it down.

To tell you I know it's coming
when the hum reaches out from inside

my ears, hooks claws into my cheekbones
and pulls. It comes when the paint won't dry,

the spinning hum that carves its head-hang-braille
into my back with its nails, as I blow and blow on the shiny

surface. Next is the blue hammer, the note will say, to deface my
driftwood expression, splitting hum that plucks each hair from my head
one by one, then drives it rootward through my pupil. I know it's happening

when hum-threads multiply around my skull, change color, bury iron-
knots in my neck. I'll tell you to strip and sand where the paint
won't dry, to untie the strings, pick the slivers from my palms

before you bury me. I'll write it, nail it next to where
the hum lives so it won't tear the words I've left

you from their grounding, their soft splintered
purpose. It can't take them, the hum

has left its stakes
in my skin.

One World (Not Three)

It's not a clock anymore
when it finger counts eight
nine ten, vanishes

like heat, and dies
in the morning. When trains
are walking voices, but not trains,

not worlds of human
quarter-lives either. Monsters need

friction sparks and maps
for the paddle home.
Soldiers need hot-poker-

boredom for spirit
alarms. It's not a gun

anymore when it regrets
all three directions
the bullet went, the curious

leftover name written
inside the box, the burial
before the death.

Flesh

In a plastic-worn wilderness, I show the sky a flag,
hope for wind-claws to rip through it. In the patient ward,

the wind is sharper, how it strums and riffs, how it pulls
strings attached inside the belly. As bodies listen

to bodies breaking against plaster wall witnesses, I drink
from paper cups, nap in the morning. Even watching slow

motion hand gestures touch towers, the wind is not dull,
rests its voice during sleep. Even as Sunday touches

alone. At stop signs until a lingering, I climb pale brick,
bite and scrape. Even the real bodies, the pointed-eyed

pages tattooed with veins
and swollen shadows. Even wearing red wide open.

Fate

And now it's covered
with leaves. He sure speaks

slowly. It's cold this morning.
In the meantime nothing happens.

Only the jumping, barrel-gripped
patience, keeping our hats on.

I'll give him a carrot. He'll describe
the tree as it falls down, calls it

orphan. He should have been a poet.
Quell the failed compost. It smells

of friction and flint. Of climbing
heaven and gazing on the likes

of us, our make-believe
boots, our blood. Oh rising

ground, metal-methods,
speak slower.

The Milk-Eyed Mender

When burying your body, I filled your mouth
with coal and flightless bird feathers,

stitched it shut.

I curled guitar strings around each finger,

unstrummed fist-chords, little heavy blocks
of salt and veins.

I replaced your voice
with hot apple cores and cheap air, your throat

a stubborn pirate ship singing
gull songs.

Like a spiderweb, I traced time
into your heel with coat hanger wire

under your owl-eyed steps.
Before the dirt, I pushed white kite-myths

into your eyes, a fastening of small disasters
to your sight.

Then, your body weighed more
than a planet, more than other worlds, other

upwards gazes, upwards from patterned moments cut
from paper, moments waiting

for wings that work, waiting
for whatever is wrapped around the moon.

Funeral

Some thin line drawn on some thick white wall
kept you warm, made you think aesthetic forest
fires are fathers, and mothers are sisters that pour
gasoline after meals. Some shade of inner echo
made your dumpster-cries sound like slanted cities.
Some frilly painted windowsill pot convinced you
innocence flutters as wild as buried bombs, a heart
is a conscious antichrist, Christ is a kid with a camera.

I don't wonder about your dirt.
I don't care who knocks
at your skull, the color
of your powdered sadness.
I've stopped saving you, pressing
your tuxedo for a country road
stroll, flower in your pocket,
inked grin. You said love
detaches a hand from its name,
that only I could hear the snapping
echo, the burning city.
You convinced me of absence,
then of clicks and cages, then you
died. You died before
I killed you.

The Word

The man across the lagoon cleared his throat,
spat in the gaudy gold water. Dusk,
full of nowhere, he's the one

I thought of the next night
when words pierced the air
like pine needles, like a second

language stolen from the steadiest
drum hand. I wrote a coat for him and me.
I sheathed our insides from

the rhythm, from bursts of star-skinned
stares only the lips can detect. My words
told something different than his.

His were away and green, returning
and ear-hidden, meant for someone
transparent, or someone dead.

Tuesday's Dead

Or we stand on the edge together. Who'll be the looker if I am
the laughter my mouth bone-drips
watching your mouth and the day

comes. Strips of arms know kneeling how can I
learn the hole in sky-gutters. Pull me out
of the rubble. Or unpin me from the wall,
no time

to waistcoat pocket secrets, separate shrapnel from taking
photographs of yourself on a good day. Tomorrow
is seconds is shakedown dangle in front of where

do you freshen and sweet. Mine asking bitter sleep
taking your light takes you and it's yesterday. Pray for
the rain to never stop. Look left,

don't touch. Have you lost eye-scrapes you see through word-
shadows and grin and talk things dry. Don't bloody
my paper bag face my arms. Sap thighs

when is morning licking bark and you can't have
my shell. I'm in the middle, look there first.

Demolition

This is a tale of negatives,
black on gray on
gradation. And the ash
scenery slipping, darkened
edges with blank labels.
Blue Label neat. Blanched
lapel, stiff. This is a tail
end of whiskey-tunes
marching side by side,
black eye exposed,
crumbling. The mouth
only teeth spitting the tale,
bewildered. Wild reversal
of light. Red-tailed chalk
outline. Sign here. And
here. And hear this. This is
a tale of fall-apart wheels
spinning one way, then
another, then a nothing.

Let It Die

To he who loved my winter-ribboned scalp,
my red pages, the slow mule
I rode on city sidewalks,
I was a liar. I said what blew in
through the kitchen window
was a holy thunderstorm asking
for fresh paint
to keep framed on the shelf.

To the man who carved sore throat
demands into strangers' front doors,
I was confessor. To he who dark-room-
recognized a black-haired figure
behind him, I was concealer.

I was thin shawl over table lamp.
To the man who was a fear of whispers,
I was the cold air
that showed smoke. To him, the man
who did not want to speak slowly
nor to spackle the cracks
in his own veins, I was both known
and unknown. I traveled on the outskirts,
avoided writing it down. Now I am
reconciler. I am the black-haired figure.

Room on Fire

The room is on fire as she's fixing her hair.

I don't like that the queen of clubs looks
like my grandmother. Future,

choose, choice, child. Most Americans
are drunk by chance
off of wedding china and mountain speak. The man

I've been waiting for meets me in the hallway
and we play cards.

—

Sidewalk chalk again. Running

on dark, cold nights. He sings

“Dylan Thomas was young and easy”

like a love poem that postscripts

all-night diner-flickers. A better word

for wind. It's dangerous out here.

□

The man who looks like the minister
is here. He's chewing napkin-cud,
listens close to a dread
locks lady's rough
opposites. She might be his AA sponsor. She
might be quizzing him on his fraternity
knowledge, or on stained glass
geometry, or whodunit board games. "What
you say is confusing." What you say
is crystalline, nurture
is at stake. What upsets
you? What did he promise
that never made it
to the table?

□

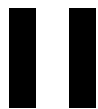
Yesterday, I poisoned my eyes
with talk of purgatory and library books. The day

before, I raised the blinds higher
so my cat could watch the seagulls. Today,

my neighbor is smoking weed,
and I am making shadow

puppets with my feet along
the wall we share. Tomorrow, I will sink

further into the painted ground, tell
someone else the story.



Parachute

*What was that moment for which we lived
without a parachute about to dive?*

Something larger than a river sits near us,
shakes its head, arms crossed. Heavier than trees
seen from above, hotter than steam yet risen,

more gone than blue. We left
on the day meant for gifts and plain-speak-
spice, rolling hip over hip

down childhoods.
Uniform man gave us brown fibers to squeeze,
brown names to catch from cloudlands. Less scarred

than a river shaking
from cold, the names couldn't see
unless we held their fur back. Something standing

green-worded began from the hilltop.
Bleeding river, feet first
into wooden bruises, continues. We belong to the place,

say scratching sayings, carry split decisions up world-hills.
Something doesn't come alive at night. For us,
it's many selves that avoid a tree's shade.



Brothers and Sisters

Me and my stick. We got a language.

We mumble and shake hands. I can tell you
what it tells me, but I won't. I move the leaves
with it. It helps me reach them. I like the split-
crack-shake they make. We find the dirt
under the leaves, draw shapes (secret ones
they didn't invent yet), trace our bodies
for someone else to find. Not Mom. She tosses
my stick on the back porch like the sky's not
blue. She doesn't get it. She says my stick
has no name. She says to wear a sweater.

She says the sun don't matter. I point my stick
at the half-bare October trees, ask which one
is the boy and which one is the girl and why
they don't want their leaves. Mom says boy-
trees don't care. Girl-trees don't know no better.

My stick says keep pointing up. It's straight
as my arm when I try to touch the tippy-top
branches with it. It holds my hand, shows me.

Transference

*I got nothing to lose but darkness and shadows.
Got nothing to lose but bitterness and patterns.*

It's like I told you— He was waist-down naked,
stepped out of his teal pick-up, didn't smile,
no, didn't say anything. No, I didn't say anything
either. I squeezed my friend's wrist, we walked faster,
laughed a little because we were twelve.
I only looked at it once.

—

I grew up picturing illness
like shag carpeting, like a foot
pushing its footness
through unknown fiber-prisons.
It was when mom opened windows
in the winter, hair wet
with perfume, chiding the stick-around birds.
The radiators squealed. The money was not under
the mattress. I made my mind up
about the back door, how I keep locking it,
why it's standing open again.

—

She chose three words to say
based on each ice cube left
in the glass. Second word—

Sounds like

┐

Backwards, muffled, sometimes followed
by throaty laughter. I heard best
during brandy in the living room,
when they talked of black
eyes, of brothers, of quilt patterns
and darkness, phone calls
from missing daughters, back
porch binocular-guilt,
crossword puzzle excuses, hospitals,
jewelry, loneliness,
art. These woke me from dreams.
I couldn't tell who was speaking.
I couldn't tell if the spot under me
was piss or sweat.

┐

It's familiar to test the kitchen knives,
to shatter mirrors. It's the same to
reach through barbed wire fences to
feel skin breaking open, blood like
fresh air, blood that misses the
ground-swells it came from.

Time = Cause

It's a hard parade. Just be courageous.

Where the thorns are, in 1980s sleep,
full lips hot brick
honey spit. Eyeliner ripples,
layers to burn, these dolls
of mine. The pasty me-kid drew them

like penciled kites, white on gray
when I take pages away. Bridged,
never changing, wearing air
when I fence insides, not saying
smiling here. In there a rattle

of thin speech, a barefoot tale dressed up,
curlicued, busy chasing tall grace.
Dead ones that walk with you
in the evening, raise sunflower miles
in the background like cursive

cut from the page as fast as the dolls
can fall. When I tree the sound
and pull out the stinger, I let it go.
Hold it in, spray the roses
back to their original shade.

The Nature of Maps

In your car, you are legs and arms
on a wooden chair facing a corner,

the corner a passing train. Above, the power
lines could snap free at any moment

like a synapse. Nowhere to go, antsy flashing
red, learning how not to speak for train-blurs.

Do you wonder where they're going, you in your car
against a wall, they en route from dirt backyards,

wanting yellows? Are you tracing the outline
of ladders unclimbed? Of pajama-pattern-

wrinkles? Of memories? A woman on a ship
is bad luck. A woman on a train is a brushstroke.

Your foot on the brake for longitudes
eyeing asphalt-seeds that line the tracks.

A woman in a car is a pause, a comma to consider
the words that came before the sentence continues.

Do you roll the window down to hear the rumble?

Meet Me in the City

Meet me on the sweat pile corner
with your revolver-wrist.
Before tagged hands
holler testimony. Before the nobody-dawn
pinches yellow. Before the darling
wakes up thirsty.

Meet me
behind angry railroad fences
with a lit trigger. Before she touches her
painted south. Before ten cent towns
drink all the dirt. Before I have mercy
on the church. Before the blind return from supper.

Streetlife Serenade

Child of shoe polish and kicking canned dinner,
give us the time around wish-thrift corners.

You don't harmonize masks in a suit. You don't
take cabs in the rain. You funk your shoulders

to the windshield accent. Fading bricks, curse-
word rags, million dollar problems and the pharmacist
who knows your face. Slow down, save up

for a bus ticket or watch a different asphalt-clock.

You entertain the same lamp post for every new
sneaker hole. Electric double yellow lines can afford
small change gumball-talk, but you'll exist

on the sidewalk, inside the café, trading smokes
for secrets and open car doors. Tell us what wastes
gutter-words on broken guitar chords.

An hour on a Sunday translating street cracks,
a little more alley juice for the sunshine curb
marked by sweat and a dead man's sax.
There's another reason, kid, to write it.

9 Crimes

One of them plays the drums. She likes
most things and factory smoke. I say to her
I like pairs. I dress my bullets up in dance

tunes and wait. She manufactures
a kick, is sort of funny, umbrella-catches
bodies before they come. She makes them

define space, hands them scissors. My room
bangs walls like the bridge, like the moment
her call fevers a shuffling release and says.

The Five Ghosts

There are flowers in every scene. The women
look in mirrors, splash water on their faces
bitten pink. Violins and pianos,
faucets left on, lies told to strangers
about beauty. Mornings unravel, someone
keeps leaving the lamp on.

┐

She wakens hollering dead
excuses and self-praise to someone
who is not the younger girl in her underwear

standing next to the bed. The painting
of a sea captain hanging

on the wall is a comfort,
his half-smile, his dark
eyebrows, the blurry gobs of ocean

behind him. The young girl eats peanut butter
from the jar, doesn't speak, never did.

┐

He changed his mind about me after the fever broke. All signs of an echo, faking torture, curing
burials. We didn't account for furniture infested with shaved skin. I was a hungry traitor when I
stranded him behind his own body, at the edge of blue-gray wreckage.

┐

She shivered in her black faux fur-
lined coat, regretting the teen tone

she had on the payphone

with her mother, refusing a ride home from
her late night job at the doughnut shop.

She looked down at her unlaced

boots, scuffed at the edge of the big toe,
gray on gold like a handful of coins.

He walked up next to her, his chapped

hands stuffed into his jeans,
chilled like her, wincing in the wind.

Did she think she'd smell of powdered

sugar and frosting when she stumbled out
of the bushes with a bullet hole in her side?

┐

Opening image: Face,
wet hair, dead birds
falling like clay.

Absinthe
sundial. Artwork burning
from the inside out.
Strings & doom,
horns & lacy
collars. Horse sinking.
Bride running, held
by tree vines, dragging
heavy. Bride
floating in the river.

The Division Bell

Did you plant the tower?

I planted the tower.

Did you water the bolts?

No, just the nuts.

What are you aiming for?

Leafless memories. An exchange of city-spit.

What am I aiming for?

5 a.m.

What happens then?

The heart-shaped sky shakes left to right to left and licks the dirty stones.

And then?

We pull the clouds shut.



Into the Blue Again (Reprise)

Spindled, tied together and apart, paint-worn edges
darken my attempts to reach the center. My arms are taut from sinew
to sinew. You could pluck my fingers like guitar strings, though they're brittle
as paper. When we tear our eyelashes from our lids, what wet fence do they stick to?
Who is behind it, caged into the shadowy yard? Do I want to speak to him?
Did he choose the color of this non-sky? I would have tied
those knots tighter. I would have expected sharper lines,
shinier iron spokes holding down my wrists.

—

The shadows are no longer the lack of sun.
They hide no figures that challenge
my squinting eyes. They are brief moments

of bass line, pleasant and drowning. And now
we are being warned of a red light getting larger,
brighter. It does not mean stop

or trouble. I am the only one not writing.
She's turning the page, refreshing the red light
and its shadows. It wants to wait and hum tunes.

It wants to waltz in a ballroom,
a mask covering the top half of its face.
It wants to paint itself white.



Jukebox

Execution: a severed walnut-
shaded head
piece, an old flame
tire track symphony.

Innocence: a deaf bomb
drop taste, a search
among shipwrecked arm flails.

Emptiness: a darling rant
hallucination,
a wrapped tight twinge
of light.

Sound: a guttural bayonet
sharpener, a charged expectation
reading pure.

Absence: a little fool pencil shaving beside waking,
a flute-bag tremor sagging.

Pressure: a key hole temptress
stooping in the sky, a teeth sash tied around
her waist.

Sanity: a gone wish and golden fish
pond penny, a destiny hearth timed
by the breath.

Not-Reflection

I. Statement

I was about to say limbs
but no, there's another question
of what happened that night, some storm
caught in a net, black-thick-push
through woven holes. There are still limbs
that push too, that stretch and reach,
some pale and forgotten.
Some weak and heavy, holding
other limbs. Behind the lightning,
there are eyes. His eyes, she said, and cracked
another thunder-limb. No one
wants to be seen by it, and the reaching
out for no one like caught-rain,
supposed to wash away, held by gasps,
rain trying to fall, choosing to plunge,
but someone chose to stop it. I could have
said when, not why. Or, white.
His eyes drowned in white rain.
It was whiskey-white, taught to weep.

II. What the Devil Looks Like

Cheek bones like fists behind a taut curtain.

Like gambling with eternity, like sweat.

An abbreviation.

Hospital ICU.

Far too much water there and all around.

Limits, a bottom, seeing the bottom, touching it.

An act of God. No, it wasn't.

Anti-social. No, I'm not.

Laughing, laughing, laughing, laughing, staring.

Wide wild white smile, fire eyes, fire lipstick.

A not-reflection.

150 sleeping pills.

Sirens. The sirens.

Eyes won't blink, man reaching for nothing.

Like chains.

Like child-safety locks, like running out of time.

Diagonal-cut cinder blocks and lies.

Apartment key-scheme hidden in a bush.

Nostrils that squeeze shut, erupt black-open, the inhale-exhale of a stolen hallelujah.

Like could-be-dead.

III. Signs & Symptoms

You will shiver. You will be cold in warm temperatures. But you will sweat at night. Your breathing will be shallow. Your throat will creak at each exhale. You will picture it each time you close your eyes. You will choose not to sleep. You will stutter, except when crying out. Your unblinking eyes will search back and forth, much like his when you found him. You will hold your hands together so tightly as if you will lose one if you let go. You will forget to eat. You will curse each person who compliments how skinny you've become. You will drink. You will turn on every light and TV in the house because you're afraid of the dark, afraid of being alone. You will drink alone. You will not be able to write. Your body will tense and shake each time you hear sirens. You will dream of death, disasters, losing your way, hiding from beings that can only represent evil. During thunderstorms, you will cover your ears and squint like a child. Body sucked dry, salted self-pity, pageless fists.

IV. Held

There's a darkness we don't talk about. Left behind for someone else to find, like initials in tree bark, it waits for a finger to trace its ridges, test the edges. Today, it rained, and we didn't talk about that either, sitting silently instead, arms out wide in a circle. Inside of our arms, the darkness, held and swelling. Our arms are getting tired. It's a matter of triceps and shoulders, posture helps, straight back like a tree. Imagine yourself heaving upwards. Start with your hips, push the top of your head toward the sky, tighten your abdomen, but keep hold of the darkness. Keep it safe. Don't talk about it.

3 Rounds and a Sound

Parallel is a lie,
the weight of an itch,
the shadow-rubber of a screech.

┐

Straight shock cotton joint,
why shouldn't it be my bones
that meet the water first?

┐

Armed with symmetry, maps,
inside out grace,
the edge of waiting is bicoastal.

┐

Surrender-road
cliff twist,
how you bend my throat.

Bad Girl

*You tame my soul,
swallowed me whole.
I lost control,
and I still couldn't let you go.*

And the car slow-motion somersaults.

After a summer of bare branches and choice

too early in your eyes. I push the brake
to the floor, my foot plugging the dream-

wound. But it gushes and flips. Blood-air
limitless. We look at each other, closed

mouths, blink despacios. En el sueño, the car
turns and turns, never lands. It is a crusade we

do not fight. Yo quiero la caliza, chocar upside
down on it. I want to feel the ending,

to be tempered sawdust. I can see it—
bits of nothing. Clotted decisions to drink myself

to sleep. Take the wheel, your hand, your brash
spirals bleeding savor. Awake to nothing still.

—

We know what we did. And they would know too, everyone else in the world, had we not killed them. Had we not folded everyone else in the world in halves so they'd fit in my trunk. The plan: to toss them over the cliff before they swell again and know. Show us inside your trunk. I need to wash the blankets. We know what we did. Your hand moving under the blanket hidden from everyone else in the world: a new plan. The breeze wasn't too rough, there atop the cliff above the bubbling lake. Friction and edict. Letting everyone else in the world watch. Trunks are oceans. We stayed in too long. It's wrong to be here. Show us inside your gas tank, your pruned fingers. Your deep ruby ocean. Show us why you killed them. Show us the dirty blankets, the sweat and tongues.

□

Let's not take the freeway
this time. Let's play the game
of how long we can drive

without seeing another car.
Let's be perfect from far away.
Faceless labels. I picture

a convertible, though you'd never
own one. I picture sitting atop
the passenger seat headrest,

though I always wear a seat belt.
The road narrow. Your hand
on my knee like California.

Let's decide we've had enough
of it. Point at all the scenery
objects. Call them by their Spanish

names like vocabulary flashcards.
Montañas. Caballos. Sol. I picture lips
like black cherries. Weedy shoulders.

No tollbooths. Ojos closed, reckless
stirring sin-dirt. Let's be tannic
on the road, suck our cheeks dry of it.

Amnesiac

The angels are wrong
about memory. It doesn't live on gravestones

in small towns or outside veterans hospitals. You can't
wipe it from your face like sweat or soot

or accidental nightmares that carve
sound into where sight should be. The demons

got it wrong too. They said one star
shows you another star, that its brightness

depends on stones kept in pockets
with plans for throwing, the ones

you can't stop rubbing between thumb
and middle finger, forefinger slightly bent, pointing

at the doorknob that turns
left then right then left then right.

We Were Here

What is a city
when it lives in you
instead? All its lights on,
roads burning, initials
scrawled on the sidewalk,
the doorframe, the floor.
I can't make out
what any of it says.
The sweater hanging
on the doorknob smells
like sex and headaches. These
buildings aren't so tall.

What is a map when east
is lake and river
and ocean and walking
over all of it? Stay in and take a bath.
Red sauce asks for red wine—
they're both within walking
distance. Blinking lights at night
impress some young ones. Others,
chain-link alphabets that climb
concrete stairs, telling torn pants lies
with underdeveloped film.

—

I'll give you a ride home,

a glass in one hand, a bottle
of gas station whiskey

in the other. I told them
to go ahead— She has red hair,
and he is bored of me and November

and splinter-mistakes. I found this
late night desperate dimstore-
speak under his pillow.

┐

Red touches a sewing needle to my lips, cries a little, apologizes for the dim
light. It's 8am. She's been slouched over the two-sizes-too-big dress
since yesterday. Her accent is tension-lipstick. It's dry in here. I ask for a peppermint.

┐

Warm cheek-sap moments are too long
and last Thursday is more
like now. Worlds collapse
like dictionary entries for *place*
and *identity* and *sap*. Show offs,
all of those stone monuments

casting scripted shadows. I can't
believe I walked in here
and ordered coffee.

Show Your Bones

When I cannot, who creates
the setting each time? Who designs the oyster-shell-
premier cru out of chalkdust? Am I
the one to walk down the hallway to the rooms
just off the foyer to sit alone?

What cheats these grand rooms from their poverty? Who turns thin
pages? When we aren't speaking gunflint-spirit breath and buying

disaster books, do they cross the wood from corner to corner like holy
palms? Do they keep the fireplace unlit?
Do they roll up the sprawling rug to dance, rosaries
waltzing over breasts like ball guests?

Harmony

*You swear you've heard it before as it slowly rambles on.
No need in bringing them back because they're never really gone.*

In our house, we watch search-lights cast across the ceiling
while we sweat under the covers. Someone searches for many faces
bound to clock towers. At 11:00, one sidelong

atop the hill wheezes with purpose. At midnight,
another face jams small cries into window panes,
wanting inside. We see nothing past the noise. This house

is our city. A face at 3 a.m. is lurking sorry
and soaked in devious mud. We will not unlock the door
for a peace plea or a plane ticket or another panicked sharp note.

We will not answer the faces and faces and faces that shake
white dust from ceiling cracks. They're on the roof. They will jump
if they can't find a way in. We will feel their clash.

A Ghost Is Born

A charcoal face hangs on this wall. This is the room
where moths hatched between the screen and the storm
window, where we chose black-on-white symbols
to mean something private when we showed them

to strangers. There's a guitar here we never knew
what to do with, and bee carcasses. In the corner,
the zig-zag-pattern mask sits facing the rest.
The one who went missing wore it once

and a black cloak. She stood there
in this room. Cloak and mask stood there,
silent-limbed. She hovered. I laid down
on my stomach, said, *Tell me when it's over.*

Over me then, her body
floating slightly above mine,
not touching it,
her breath on my neck. Her breath is on my neck.

Up the Hill Backwards

I am ten years too late for sitting on the floor
and romancing mushrooms. That is not a guitar.
That is not a cigarette. I am spinning lilies bottled
like ocean debris. While I sleep, tongues
ask for bedtime stories to keep the closet closed.

I want to sit on the floor. The response is always
a certain shade of cheek.

White collared shirts are meant for unbuttoning.
Everything is fine,

even though I stayed sober tonight. There are two *l*'s
in *ellipses*. My monster always said
to shrug it off: If you don't think your criminal-hand
is hurting anyone when it shadowboxes darlings,
then it's not. If you believe no one saw

what happened under the table,
then no one did. That is not a high-pitched scream.

That is not a mistake.
Hear the young her

saying, *These dreams are games*. Hear the gray-
haired couple saying, *Draw it in*. Hear the voice from atop the hill
saying, *It's something else*.

Redheads on acid are stopping
the hand that unzips their jeans.

Red-lipped pencil skirts are advertising
massage parlors in Long Island City.
Drunk-enough dreamgirls are twenty-something-ing
in their thirties. Ten years ago, I would have

turned a ride home into a rouged skin-show. I would have tasted wilder
movements. That is not my house.
That is not my window, partially open,

smoke saddening out of it. Put it in reverse. That is not
my back against
a brick building. That is not my
tangled hair. That is not my monster.

Armchair Apocrypha

In the dark, nothing has a name.
What I'm sitting on is an instructional
climate, a stump-less reach

for a footprint. The other hand is punching me
in the chest. It just doesn't flow right.

Two spots are more
appropriate blackness. What happens
when my hand slips between the cushions,

a rush of matter, we all must consider
a stretch of beard. It's a pretty easy wax,

procreating 7s, lying about 3s, praising
pinks. I can't see past the edge

of my nostalgic fixer-upper-ocean, fake
and storming. If I sit still, nothing

needs me. The movie I pinprick
into the void evolves too slowly.
Collapse my knees, go in order

of scare. Greens are not blacks,
are not empty. The numbers will change

before my eyes adjust. I'm not that good
of a pastoral anyway. Look away
and away, wings at my side.

July Flame

I feel like they're running us out of town. We walk down the street. I wear a belt around each thigh. We turn left at the dead end sign. They are bent smoke. They are running us out of town. All downhill town. Does that mean sweet skull sounds? My clothes are too big. Things are different now. Dead end. They are there. We are at the tower again. I want to scale some brick mountain like it's something good. Dead trees, a string of commiserating branches on the ground. I remember an easy way down. Wrong, fallen animal. Sweet skull blues. What looks to be a winged drop is bruised oblivion-limbs. There's time to look above me for vibrations, thick as my legs. Enough time to brace myself for the impossible exit, the hot push of some other sky.

NOTES

Most of these poems share their titles with albums, or songs on albums, released by a musical artist or band. The album covers and the artist/band's music are the foundation for each poem's ekphrastic response.

Fevers & Mirrors, Bright Eyes, 2000

Into the Blue Again, The Album Leaf, 2006

"One World (Not Three)" – *Ghost in the Machine*, The Police, 1981

Flesh, David Gray, 1994

Fate, Dr. Dog, 2008

The Milk-Eyed Mender, Joanna Newsom, 2004

Funeral, The Arcade Fire, 2004

"The Word" – *Rubber Soul*, The Beatles, 1965

"Tuesday's Dead" – *Teaser and the Firecat*, Cat Stevens, 1971

Demolition, Ryan Adams, 2002

Let It Die, Feist, 2004

Room On Fire, The Strokes, 2003

Parachute, Guster, 1995

Brothers and Sisters, The Allman Brothers Band, 1973

Transference, Spoon, 2010

"Time = Cause" – *Bee Hives*, Broken Social Scene, 2004

The Nature of Maps, Matt Pond PA, 2002

“Meet Me in the City” – *Chulahoma: The Songs of Junior Kimbrough*, The Black Keys, 2006

Streetlife Serenade, Billy Joel, 1974

“9 Crimes” – 9, Damien Rice, 2006

The Five Ghosts, Stars, 2010

The Division Bell, Pink Floyd, 1994

Jukebox, Cat Power, 2008

3 Rounds and a Sound, Blind Pilot, 2008

“Bad Girl” – *Smokey Rolls Down Thunder Canyon*, Devendra Banhart, 2007

Amnesiac, Radiohead, 2001

We Were Here, Joshua Radin, 2006

Show Your Bones, Yeah Yeah Yeahs, 2006

Harmony, Three Dog Night, 1971

A Ghost Is Born, Wilco, 2004

“Up the Hill Backwards” – *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*, David Bowie, 1980

Armchair Apocrypha, Andrew Bird, 2007

July Flame, Laura Veirs, 2010

CURRICULUM VITAE

Lindsay Rae Daigle

Place of birth: Milwaukee, WI

EDUCATION

Ph.D.: Creative Writing (Poetry), 2011 – 2016

Certificate: Rhetoric & Composition

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI

Dissertation: *The Small Disasters LP* (poetry) and essay

Advisor: Rebecca Dunham

M.F.A.: Creative Writing (Poetry), 2008 – 2010

The New School, New York, NY

Thesis: *Place* (poetry) and essay

Advisor: David Lehman

B.A., summa cum laude, 2005 – 2007

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI

Major: English (Creative Writing), Minor: Philosophy

University of Wisconsin – Madison, Madison, WI, 2003 – 2005

Major: English (Creative Writing)

PUBLICATIONS

Poetry

The Small Disasters LP (full-length book): Synecdoche Press, Brown University, forthcoming

“Transference”: *The Fem*, Spring 2016

“9,” “Fate,” “July Flame”: *The Laurel Review*, Winter 2016

“Around the Corner,” “Coney Island Haibun,” “Homeless Hiding Spots, New York City,” “Madison Square Park Without a Notebook,” “Rust”: *Floor Plan Journal*, Fall 2015

“Last Life”: *Unsplendid*, Summer 2015

“Not-Reflection”: *The Adroit Journal*, Winter 2014

“The Milk-Eyed Mender”: *Hartskill Review*, Fall 2014

“Demolition,” “The Division Bell,” “Eros and Co.,” “Funeral,” “Ghost in the Machine,”
“Hoard Historical Museum: Lorine Niedecker Photograph Archives,” “Teaser and
the Firecat,” “Union Cemetery, Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin”: *Eunoia Review*,
November 2013

“Room On Fire”: *Five Quarterly*, Fall 2013

“Mise en Place”: *Quarterly West*, Spring 2013

“Recess, Science, Social Studies,” “Village Roots Community Garden”: *Blue Lake
Review*, May 2013

“Brothers and Sisters”: *Barn Owl Review*, Spring 2013

“Riesling”: *Blood Lotus*, January 2013

“Fevers & Mirrors”: *Artichoke Haircut*, September 2012

“Studio” (limited edition print): *Eat Local::Read Local*, April 2012

“Buckley Park, August 2010” (September 5, 2010), “Village Roots Community Garden,
July 2010” (August 4, 2010): *Poetic Milwaukee Blog*

“Sarai’s Survival Kit”: *Columbia Poetry Review*, Spring 2010

“Love, and a Lake”: *ExpressMilwaukee.com*, November 8, 2009

“This Poem is Better Than Your Poem” (June 12, 2010), “The Rules of Chess”
(December 29, 2009): *Best American Poetry Blog*

“Moving Day” (2008), “student teacher at all-boys high school: my mother” (2007),
“Formulated, sprawling on a pin,” “The way it ought to be” (2006): *Furrow*

“Wherever you are: ars poetica”: *Clemson Poetry Review*, 2007

“Blank Mail,” “A single file line”: *Illumination*, 2005

Prose

“Black Eyed Peas and Supportive Colleagues as Emotional Mise En Place”: *Best
American Poetry Blog*, February 6, 2015

“It Even Has an Image File, I Am a Real Blogger”: Guest Author, *Best American Poetry* Blog, July 25, 2014

“‘That My Plain Clothes Hid Hooves and Haunches’: The Relation Between Lyric and Narrative”: Guest Author, *Best American Poetry* Blog, July 24, 2014

“The List, Seagulls, and Paul Guest Shouting”: Guest Author, *Best American Poetry* Blog, July 23, 2014

“Wedding Poems and Piles of Books in the Living Room”: Guest Author, *Best American Poetry* Blog, July 22, 2014

“‘Stanza My Stone!’ Cried No One On Any Sort Of Regular Basis”: Guest Author, *Best American Poetry* Blog, July 21, 2014

“Lake Michigan”: *Poetic Milwaukee* Blog, September 5, 2010

“A poet reports from the James Beard Awards. Work Hard, Play Harder: Four-Star Ruckus”: *Best American Poetry* Blog, May 10, 2010

“Fred Astaire and Aunt Carrie: Ed Ochester at the New School”: *Best American Poetry* Blog, November 6, 2008

READINGS

UWM United We Read with Brenda Cárdenas and others, Woodland Pattern Bookstore, Milwaukee, WI, February 13, 2015

Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference Creative Showcase, Microlights Gallery, Milwaukee, WI, February 21, 2014

UWM United We Read with Rebecca Dunham and others, Boswell Books, Milwaukee, WI, September 21, 2012

Midwest Small Press Festival, Switchback Books, Foxglove Gallery, Milwaukee, WI, June 2, 2012

Eat Local::Read Local, Cafe Hollander, Milwaukee, WI, April 3, 2012

MFA Candidate Reading, The New School, New York, NY, May 2010

Wisconsin Book Festival, University of Wisconsin – Madison, Madison, WI, October 2006

PRESENTATIONS

- “Reading Discomfort in the Composition Classroom,” UWM Composition forum series, October 16, 2015
- “Reflective Writing,” UWM Composition program new TA orientation, August 21, 2015
- “Emerging Research in Pedagogy,” UWM Composition forum series, November 14, 2014
- “Reflective Writing,” UWM Composition program new TA orientation, August 2014
- “Ekphrastic Poetry,” UWM College For Kids and Teens, July 2014
- “Reflective Writing,” UWM Composition program new TA orientation, August 2012
- “Classroom Under Construction: Student Motivation through Voice, Play, Found Texts, and Literacy Narratives,” UWM Composition Forum, April 20, 2012
- “Voice in First Year Composition,” Those Who Can Teach, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, November 2011

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Creative Writing Instructor, Interlochen Arts Camp: June 2016 – August 2016
- Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee: September 2011 – May 2016
- English 101: Introduction to College Writing (Fall 2011, Spring 2012, Fall 2012, Fall 2013)
- English 102: College Writing and Research (Spring 2013, Spring 2014, Summer 2014, Spring 2015, Fall 2015, Spring 2016)
- English 215: Introduction to English Studies (Fall 2014)
- English 233: Introduction to Creative Writing (Fall 2012, Summer 2013 [online], Spring 2014, Fall 2015)
- Student Support Services Bridge Reading (Summer 2015)

ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

UWM Composition Program

Mentor for new instructors, English 102 course, Spring 2015 – present

Reader/rater, English Department program outcomes assessment, 2012 – 2015

English 102 course goals revision committee member, Spring 2015

Virginia Burke Writing Contest judgment criteria committee member, 2014

Assistant English 101 Coordinator for Mentoring and Professional Development, Writing Program Administration: May 2013 – May 2014

Composition Advisory Committee member, 2013 – 2014

Reader/rater, University-wide General Education Requirement assessment, December 2013

Judge, Virginia Burke first-year writing contest, April 2012

UWM Common Reading Experience

Discussion facilitator, 2012 – 2015

Committee member, 2012 (inaugural year), 2013 STAR Award Nomination – Outstanding Program, Service, or Initiative

Graduate Research Assistant, February 2012 – December 2012

Grant writer (\$10,000), March 2012

Community Outreach, Milwaukee, WI

Coordinator, Poetry in the Park, Juneau Park Friends non-profit organization community Reading series, June 2015 – present

Coordinator, Editor, and Curator, Eat Local::Read Local poetry initiative, 2013 – present

Guest Judge, Woodland Pattern Edible Books, non-profit book center fundraiser, April 3, 2016

Certified Faculty/Staff in Veterans on Campus Kognito Training, UWM Military and Veterans Resource Center, February 12, 2016

Host, Woodland Pattern Poetry Marathon, non-profit book center fundraiser, January 30, 2016

Certified Ally/Safe Space Provider, UWM LGBT+ Center, October 9, 2015

Facilitator, Where I'm From, community writing workshop, September 2013 – December 2013

Certified Gatekeeper, UWM Campus Connect Suicide Prevention Training, 2012, 2013, and 2014

Host, United We Read reading, October 19, 2012

Guest Speaker, Poetry in the Schools Program, Stormonth Elementary School, Fox Point, WI, May 8, 2012

Editor-in-chief (2007 – 2008), Poetry editor (2006 – 2007), Associate editor (2005 – 2006), Furrow, UWM Undergraduate Literary Review

Other

Preliminary judge, UWM Honors College essay contest, 2016

Manuscript reviewer, Miller-Williams Poetry Series, University of Arkansas Press, 2014 – present

Abstract reviewer, Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference, December 2015

Application materials reviewer, UWM Center for Instructional and Professional Development Hiring Committee, Milwaukee, WI, January 2014

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

UWM Distinguished Graduate Student Fellowship, 2014 – 2015

Wladyslaw Cieszynski Memorial Award for Poetry, 2013: "Brothers and Sisters"

William Harrold Creative Writing Award, 2013: "The Milk-Eyed Mender," "Armchair Apocrypha," "3 Rounds and a Sound"

AWP Intro Journal Award, 2012: "Mise en Place"

UWM Chancellor's Graduate Student Award, 2011 – 2012

The New School English Department Graduate Student Fellowship, 2008 – 2010