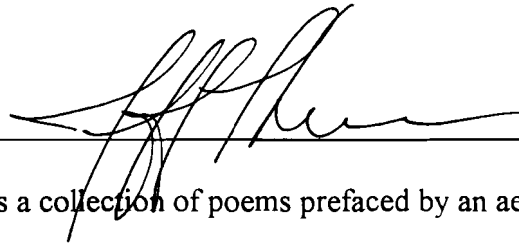


AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Thomas Christopher Dvorske for the Master of Arts  
in English presented on April 25, 1997

Title: Blind Hands

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This thesis is a collection of poems prefaced by an aesthetic statement. The manuscript is organized in five sections: an introductory poem; poems pertaining to the phenomena of experience; poems pertaining to the question of being; poems pertaining to the problem of knowing; and a postscript poem. Though each section operates with reference to these problems, these problems are present, in one way or another, in all the poems.

In fact, this thesis argues categorical distinctions, such as those above, are faulty constructions of reality. The aesthetic statement begins with a conceptualization of language as a river of multiple utterances. We think in this river, that is, we think in language, by use of language. Poetry, too, is a matter of thinking. It is a way of negotiating between complexities of language and experience to find meaningful patterns and connect us to the world.

The poems in this manuscript are lyrical and narrative, often both at once. Formally, they are free verse, taking as their primary means of measurement turns in the

progression of thought. Most of these thoughts are expressed in the matter of a few lines; in other poems, more lengthy meditation occurs.

**BLIND HANDS**

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**A Thesis**

**Presented to**

**The Division of English**

**EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

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**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

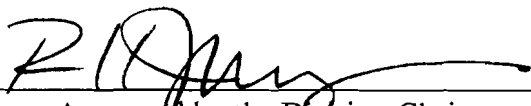
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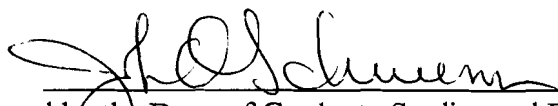
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**by**

**Thomas Christopher Dvorske**

**May 1997**

  
Approved by the Division Chair

  
Approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

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## PREFACE

### I. A Matter of Thinking

I had a dream one night in which I was parachuting from an airplane over a Kansas field. (It was either early spring, or late fall, I'm not sure.) The peculiar thing about this dream was not that I was parachuting without one (the scripted fear); rather, I was clinging to a purple bookbag, ostensibly a parachute, strapped to the chest of Polish novelist Jerzy Kosinski. I might add that this is a comparatively shocking sight, for in some photographs he looks quite menacing. As we approached a certain and painful impact, I grew nervous, unable to decide whether to unzip the bag and let the parachute open, or wait and hope he would open it--he who seemed not to notice me, for only as we approached earth did I become aware I was more than my arms (which at first were not apparent). Gradually, I came into view, that is I began to sense the physicality of my body. I unzipped the bag, and, in the instant the parachute opened full, I hit the earth. It was soft. A recently tilled field. I lay there a moment, smelling the cool soil before waking up. I have no interest in explicating this dream, at least not directly. The beauty of poetry, like the beauty of dream, is that it can be taken at face value. However, if we persist in discussing it, comparing it, explicating it, deconstructing it, stating and restating its themes, one fundamental thing persists: the poem itself--a phenomenon of language, and language, as Jorge Luis Borges tells us "is an aesthetic creation" (79). This does not mean that nothing can or should be said about poetry, only that discussing it

outside the context of experiencing a poem generates abstraction and mis-statement.

Poetry is by nature paradoxical. As such, when we speak of the nature of poetry we either fall into generality, or adhere closely enough to models as to miss our mark entirely. Any notion of poetry or aesthetics must begin with a conceptualization of language, also a problematic notion, for we are using the medium to discuss the medium.

The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin tells us that language is an endless series of utterances. Everything from single words, to novels, to the whole of Victorian literature, for example, may be conceived of as an "utterance." Moreover, Bakhtin's theory advances the idea that no speech act (textual acts included) is entirely independent; rather "any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (951). Whenever we have a change of speakers we have determined the boundaries of an utterance. This notion of utterances provides a useful conceptual framework for language acts. The experience of a poem, of a single word, is an immediate experience, but not an isolated one. It is part of, not apart from, all other language acts the poet, the reader, or the listener has experienced. By this measure, no act of language is entirely temporal; it is as atemporal as it is immediate. The particular business of poetry is to, in the immediate experience of the word, invoke the whole of utterances unnamed: what one might call "resonances."

We find poetic language best demonstrates this theory. Consider the last line from James Grabill poem "Suddenly Tonight I Am Listening": "as all words form again when

any is said" (26). In Grabill's poem we have the grammatical and syntactical completion of a sentence, but the poem is not closed; rather, it opens into the whole of utterances, indeed, into the realm of "possibility." William Stafford tells us that "writing is the reckless encounter with whatever comes along" (67). Wallace Stevens tells us "description is revelation," and, in Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction, "it must change" (344, 389). These are important statements in that they characterize poetry, the poetic act, as an experience of phenomenon and the making of phenomena. But, underlying our experience and our making of phenomena are some assumptions, first about the nature of poetic language, already here addressed, and second about the making of poetry.

In Poetry, Language, Thought, Martin Heidegger tells us "the making of poetry, too, is a matter of thinking" (99-100). What form of thinking is this? Moreover, to borrow Heidegger's own peculiar question, "what is called thinking?" For Heidegger, this is *a priori* to the question of poesy. To answer this we may borrow Heidegger's own recursive logic. Heidegger tells us the question "'what is called thinking?' can never be answered by proposing a definition of the concept *thinking*, and then diligently explaining what is contained in that definition" (Lecture II, 21; italics mine). This is because for Heidegger, and ostensibly for us all, "the thing itself that must be thought about turns away from man, has turned away long ago" (Lecture I, 7). For Heidegger, then, what is called thinking is a "most thought-provoking" question and what is "most thought-provoking in our thought provoking time is that we are still not thinking"



(Lecture I, 6). It might be worthwhile at this point to ascertain what is occurring in Heidegger's almost comical roundabout inquiry. The nature of his inquiry is that of a perpetual motion machine, returning us always to the question. No matter how hard we try to do so, we never arrive at a definite answer until we realize no definite answer is possible. For Heidegger, thinking is the act of thinking, even so far as to say that thinking is action. As language is both temporal and timeless, so, too, is thinking simultaneous with action, or the act of itself. There is another way of expressing this that we've already encountered: "as all words form again when any is said" (Grabill 26). Or following Heidegger, "the making of poetry, too, is a matter of thinking" (99-100).

## II. The River of Poetry

Poetry is the negotiation between words as ideas, and words as physical sensations--the manipulation of the mouth and the affect of hard consonants or soft rounded vowels on the ear all operate toward the direct experience of the poem. This negotiation forges a presence that is not readily perceived in exposition by function of the discursive nature of exposition. "Poetry is words," says Wallace Stevens, "and . . . words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds" (32). The manipulation of sound and silence is what we call music. Presumably, the first order of Stevens' Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction is in its title: "notes" can be read as referring to musical notation. Poetry, whether of narrative or lyrical expression, must give itself over to the sounds and meanings of

words to even be considered poetry. At this level, poetry is an act of dispensing with preconceptions in favor of what comes along. It is not an act of imposition (exposition), but of position. In this way, it differs from other forms of discourse where language is a means of persuasion. This is not to say that persuasion is not present in poetry, only that its presence is an effect, not a project.

Poetry is negotiation in another way, too. It unifies sensorial experience and thought by breaking the smooth, linear progression of words along the page. By definition, the making of lines is the breaking of lines. It is this break we call verse (to turn), and the turn suggests a change in direction, or a change in thought. Free verse makes use of change in thought as a means of measurement. Each line bespeaks its own world, its own autonomous experience, but each line exists in relation to other lines, often, in seemingly contradictory positions: this line verses the next. Lines possess a synecdochical relationship to the river of the poem's thoughts. Like Heraclitus' river, each encounter with a line changes, which in turn changes the poem. But the river, the poem, remains.

Poetry implicitly critiques linear and categorical thinking. The mimesis of poetry is of the simultaneity of experience. Poetry relies on the power of suggestion, believing finally that suggestion is a more accurate rendering of experience than explanation. Heather McHugh says poetry "is language's way of being of two minds" (3). It puts forth an idea or sensation, and, in the turn of a line, or even through the course of a line, it may

take away those ideas and sensations, but both (and more) are present. The poet Jorie Graham discusses how the refinement of language through poetry ensures for us that this mimesis engenders a responsibility for experience and for the world around us:

Each poem is, in the end, an act of the mind that tries--via precision of seeing, feeling, and thinking--to clean the language of its current lies, to make it capable of connecting us to the world, to the *there*, to insure that there be a *there* there. For it is when we convince ourselves that it is not wholly there--the world, the text, the author's text, the intention--that we are free, by the mere blinking of a deconstructing eye, to permit its destruction. It can't be *taken* from us if it's not there. It's up to language to make sure that it *is* there, and so much there, that its loss would not be an act of interpretation--a sleight of hand--but an act of murder. (xxviii-xxix; italics mine)

Poetic language is a performative act: it does what it says. It insures that what is there is there by speaking it into being. In this way, poetry makes a direct appeal, a gesture, to the audience to share in the making of meaning. Moreover, poetry insures that what is there, by being there, is also what is not there. The remains of the page, the margins the line does not extend to, the silence, where space is made for other utterances invites us to

interact with that world as well, and with the worlds of our own making.

### III. Blind Hands

I neglected to mention that the point in the dream where I begin to sense the physicality of my body is the point where my doppelganger disappears. I recognize myself and another recedes, I recognize others and I recede, or the other way around (they recognize me), equally true. The poems in “Blind Hands” dramatize the difficulty of connecting to the world with which we are unutterably connected. The often confused, fragile, or even confident voices of these poems seek a way out of isolation via language that will connect them to the world in a meaningful way. The problem occurs in another way, too. When the weight of the world’s connections threaten to devour us, it may be that all we have to offer one another are blind hands, with the hope that, when we hit that field, it is soft. And that we may rise transformed.

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## The Gesture

So what are the words we put to stone  
in this dream all too  
unclear to be named? If I find  
you may I say

honestly who I am? will you accept  
what fears and convictions  
I place, cautiously, in front  
of you? and will I,

knowing as I do my own methods,  
tend toward the desperate,  
stem from anxiety, from fear  
of not having anything hook,

or catch or stay (and if it does  
decay) for even a  
moment . . . will I accept you? To linger  
as I linger now

anticipating your word . . . wanting to breath it  
in my mouth . . . tear down  
the scaffold of days to walk, unencumbered  
in the certain light of familiar

speech. Say to you without the customary  
doubts . . . I love . . . dream  
the pulsing dream of our life tragic,  
beautiful, and mundane, and stand

in the field where shadows and sunlight  
do not, for once, trade fear  
with pride and exaggeration.  
I'm claiming this territory,

cautiously, for us . . . that we may meet  
for a time, put away our doubts and

misunderstandings, for something  
familiar, to touch . . . now, please  
speak.



I

## Flow

Upon the spire  
the woodcock sings  
the nature of the arrow,  
a singular force.

The secret way  
he slides from the bed  
follows a line unsteady--  
not his own--

but a crutch that carries  
a limp mind from one  
idea to one more  
in short  
ejaculations.

Tina. Hands. Mort.

Tina floats off the edge  
of a circus. This is not  
my tent, says Tina, these  
are not my hands.

The lions roar, the lion's roar.

Tina hears the lions roar  
and comments about volume:

*The tent holds a great volume.*  
*Volume is loud.*  
*Loud implies heavy.*

Half-dressed,  
center-ring,  
Tina prepares to jump  
from a tower of bottles.

Life is so unkind, she says,  
my worst nightmares  
are always about clowns  
in the circus.

The lion's roar, the lions roar.

Tina likes the circus  
but hates clowns,  
their big floppy shoes, round-red  
noses and pithy hats.

Clowns wear gloves,  
says Tina. Gloves protect  
the hands, says  
Mort, the clown.

Tina likes Mort's hands.  
They suggest *reach*,

but Tina is afraid to reach.

The lions roar, the lion's roar.

Closed

Tiny hands clutter the streets.

He thinks of Alaska  
and fire engines.

Smoke pours from the desolate angel's  
eyes (picking rhubarb)  
the chrysanthemums have wilted.

I only wish this rain  
were harder (birds, time)  
would beat my body  
into the ground. Orange

buoys bob on a gray  
sea. A fingerprint  
falls, followed by aces  
and knees.

May it rise with the mud,  
a fanning of veins, orange peels  
and flesh spill on the brick  
streets, there, into the hands  
that float, unaware.

## Witness

### 1. Short epode for a beginning

It is the beginning of November. But  
that does not matter. Except. Except as a place  
to start. Begin. To start anew. Roll out of  
fire into soft, cool, afterbeing. The addictions  
of memory, how once a smoker always  
a smoker. As time spreads thin, swells  
turns and begins again. The victim drowns  
the lifeguard. The crowd-hypnotic: "oh  
the wonder." Right now, the subject  
of this poem sits downstairs playing cards,  
alive, five months after he drank himself  
to a downtown apartment above a hobby  
store and devoured ferns, azaleas, chrysanthemums and dew  
before turning blade to flesh; five months,  
five fingers--grip the handle like a pen,  
get a handle on things, one's own  
diminution, forcing a tenuous conclusion. Tenuous--  
I believe--out of what? out of fear--Fear is a good place  
to start.

## 2. Drifting

It must end. It must end  
It must . . . the wheel the bone  
the novel the poem the voice  
inside my head Wallace Stevens  
is dead is dead--it must end.

He chants his addendum, fourth  
note, left out; it can't keep going, writhing  
turning the worm (the apple) . . . growing  
inevitable, desire: turn free from time.  
"It must end" he cried, rhyming to die.

And I, an attendant caretaker (the tequila  
shot, the kiss?) blur in glorious  
abstractions that make a meta of the story  
that has no end. In which the end  
is what is desired. In which desire is dying.

Had I too killed myself, a long time ago  
in a city of emerald, city of rain  
exposing veins to the concrete below  
where the one tree on the block  
hangs over the street, where the bough breaks

the cradle falls--but I'm a lullaby, singing tales  
of cows and moons,--empty vessels tied to a dry  
dock corroding--it must  
end taking the knife the robes cut free  
the long wait begun, in the distance

dark clouds like ideas, a clearing the throat  
then proceed--the waiting, the nailing, the mother  
at the foot crying, and the one whom he  
loved there watching the day filter to dark and away  
the way herds seen from above

become small and wisp away, the way smoke wisps  
away through the chimney, through the teepee

the warm fire dying, smoke drifting away  
when asking how to fish these waters  
this time of year, morning or night

some tip or hint, like chartreuse or streamer  
or the one in the back of the box you don't  
remember, the mayfly the jitterbug, some hook  
into the moment before  
the dory cut free and drifting away.



## Swans

The moon, a half-  
thought passes like a brain.

I'll never see your face again.

Words gather in dark pools; only  
the sense of summer  
is on my lip,  
the orange bowl sits on the table  
the azure light bathes the room  
the room in which we've never  
kissed. The room that does not  
exist.

How in the night can you be found?

How in the way you move loves music?

How in the way you love moves music?

How music in the way you love moves,  
moreover,

rests

in that room?

Swans of memory  
of what occurs  
when no more memory will occur.

## Borrowed Tune

"I'm climbing this ladder,  
my head in the clouds,  
I hope that it matters."  
--Neil Young

"The characteristic feature of the age in which we live  
is its *separateness*."

Now look who's pointing fingers.  
My best friend's wife tells me, "find him a woman." A time  
of burning; lightning heats the air in alleys--every one turns  
away. The bartender saying "call the cops, tell  
'em a Mexican stole my bronco, he's headin'  
north." The Mexican at the bar says, "hell, we're all going  
that way;" a leader stroke, the alleys glow, ash trays,  
beer like breath and a little Patsy Cline. The woman  
in tight white jeans bends over the pool table, knows  
we're watching. She takes her partner's cue,  
tousles his ducktail and deposits a quarter  
in the juke-box. The restroom machine sells prophylactics  
in four exciting colors, Swedish lubricant  
and a guidebook to "Fishing Scandinavia."

Lightning strikes

the courthouse: law and physics tempt the blushing  
man, his synthesized blood, acidic thoughts  
of fractions and magnolias  
blossoming in shafts of green light. Along the woman  
in black rises "Unchained Melody," her sad-eyed face  
turning from the form of a question. She lowers her top  
to the Mexican, . . . in any case, she hopes the storm  
will end.

The sign above the bar reads,  
"Beer is good for breakfast;" the woman in white gyrates  
to Elvis' "Don't be Cruel." My friend says,  
"It's not that I really want to sleep with her; hell, I'd  
rather masturbate."

"After the wounds are cleaned of their  
infectant pathogens . . . the mind still  
swells." And any way the woman in black rolls the dice,

they still turn up snake eyes. She pushes the Mexican,  
he moves to kiss, "don't be cruel" she says; there's more  
to the song than what's written.

### The mystic Spanish

night: thunder, lightning and Lorca parade  
the room on white Stallions. In the corner  
the bartender says, "I need a million friends."  
Another lead stroke sends all earthly simpatico

up in electric Spanish dance, followed by the return  
stroke of tequila, shot down our throats.  
We walk out in the rain, the alley seems to call  
another city: sharp black lines of buildings,  
Stuart Davis and Jazz along a mist of moods.  
We piss by a dumpster, light cigarettes and kick  
rocks against cans that line the backs of stores.

The night has its own devices, needles in trash bags,  
the wind moans old songs: *the wind who listens*,  
to our footsteps down the luminous alley. The woman  
in white mouths me a kiss through the bar's tinted  
window. Robert Johnson sings "hellhound  
on my trail," and city train dirge rumbles underneath  
the pulse of what really matters inside us,  
the steady moon finds a break in the sky.

## Rain

Suzanne likes to sit on the porch  
when it rains. She thinks  
of a deep sorrow that longs to bloom.

When Bob comes home. He takes off his hat  
says, oh shit, sits down.

Suzanne likes the rain. It reminds  
her of birds crying, and  
a sadness-filling loss that expands.

Bob has a face like a doorknob  
that turns and turns but doesn't  
click (no matter how much  
you kick and scream *open up*  
*you goddamn son-of-a-bitch*)

except to say Suzanne--

*speak softly of the rain.*

Before the Dawn  
--after Garcia-Lorca

Nowhere tonight may the wind  
be heard. Everywhere, I think, the world  
is silent. In the clean light  
of my room, goldfish! Water trickles  
as though from an ancient spring. Nets  
hang from the ceiling.

I settle down, in the comfort of my nest  
suddenly,

oh wounded guitar  
your red song

grieves.

Night is (it seems)

(for Kate)

Light trickles through  
the open window like  
slow speech.

Her body bathed  
in seeming light lay  
in body dreaming

of colors of chaos  
of ocean overripe  
the pale flight of  
her paramour.

To My Sweet Giver of Palms

The earth beneath  
us folds:

from our mouths  
spring  
    perfect  
        doves.

Wish

Just once  
would I like to rise early  
during the last dark hour  
before dawn, and visit upon  
the dreams of the sleeping.

Immeasurable worlds, blue-edged  
cantata, a murder in the alley.  
See the white rose dropped  
on the street, the lovers  
waking up, only dimly aware  
of who they might be.



**II**

## The Red Kite

Perfect  
in the air. The red  
kite suspended  
above trees

pulled taut his line  
then retracted  
into blue.

It held  
there, like a breath  
urging him toward heaven.  
A cloud moved in the way  
the kite desired. Each step  
forward and every gust  
defined air as the air:

red, blue, red  
kite like a star  
longing to be  
wished upon. And so he

wished, as the kite  
broke free, the duologue  
disappearing, curved tail  
like a question mark  
slipped into a seam of light,

the wind over children,  
Sunday picnics,  
panting dogs.

He dreamed this  
moment of miraculous flight,  
air warming, his slow  
wavering an incantation.

Would he be a prayer  
coming true to one  
clothed in grief  
wandering the world  
below?

Across the small town  
a boy bolted from his home  
to where the red kite  
fell.

He watched it land  
softly (inside him) then  
he reached up  
to catch the wind.

## Innermost Desire

To work my way  
    along your thighs climb  
in and stand  
    up inside you arms out-  
stretched my love  
    we are beautiful  
devouring skins.

## Argument

O I don't care about sadness,  
the way a tear stains the cream  
silk of a coffin, for outside  
my window, young finches of Haddam  
sing to seven emerald moons.

## Bipolarity

So now you're gone  
and I'm left here watching the sun  
slip down the sky's throat like a pill  
beyond the hills, beyond the city  
and beyond the ocean beyond the hills  
and the hills and cities and oceans  
beyond those, it keeps going  
like a globe.

I came here to find a voice.  
A woman. Anyone, I  
don't know. Outside my window someone calls  
my name. I do not think they're calling  
me, but sure enough it rises  
above my window, the buildings,  
then evaporates. I've heard  
when you microwave black coffee  
it changes chemical composition and becomes  
something else.

Rocco's pizza sign squeaks on every  
rotation, something to count on, at least  
as long as there's Rocco, and the things  
you own, though barely enough to fill a coffee  
spoon, so much for measurement--  
the distance to the hills beyond the city,  
the geese turning West then paring off,  
colors to dots, then to mist,  
then to nothing. They're closer to hills  
than you. Extending. There's a point  
where invisible becomes tangible,  
you know this because you feel yourself.  
There's a point where this  
doesn't matter to you, then it does,  
then it doesn't. That's what tides  
are, a reminder things come and go,  
but ocean is constant. I rub  
a bottle of cheap wine as if

it were a lamp and I had three  
wishes. I'd sow them all for amber  
fields of wheat, soft and bending  
in August breeze. But it's not  
a lamp and I have no wishes, or  
I do, in either case  
the bottle's empty.

There are other  
things you can count on alone:  
your footsteps scrape the rainy pavement,  
the way all voices are foreign, the sound of  
breaking glass, ambulance's revelatory blast  
in your gut, blood, the simple  
wisdom.

In the park  
an orchestra plays *Rhapsody in Blue*.  
They say ocean makes sky look blue,  
or is it sky makes ocean look blue?  
I don't know, does grass  
make trees green, or trees  
grass?--either way, it's bark  
in the middle and you can't be  
upside down, or you can--it's  
an important distinction.  
Much of what we've forgotten  
comes back when there's nothing  
to do but think. I dream  
of snowed-in passes in Utah,  
trains idle like dinosaurs  
in tar. If you died,  
your body may not be  
found for weeks. At night  
I count the dots of light  
that cover the city, signs  
of life, smile, electric-shock therapy,  
tongue depressor from ballpark  
ice-cream, white ball sailing toward the hills,  
rejected. But that's its job: to be  
wanted, then hit, then wanted again,

like a battered wife. The empty  
bottle.

When they say it's never  
any better than it is  
now, or it's never  
any worse or it'll get better--  
when they give advice--they're really  
dealing it for themselves.  
But there's a point. I understand  
why my mother plays solitaire every night--  
at fifty-five, after breast cancer and a colostomy,  
masturbation takes new form. I'm really  
talking about myself.

Below my window  
a beautiful woman loads a box in her blue  
car. The simple act. I yell her name,  
but names don't fall, they expand,  
then contract like lungs, balloons  
sailing over the hills, bloated intestines,  
the penis and love.  
I'm wondering if this will stop,  
or keep going  
like a globe.



Or

It may have been the sweet  
rancor of his blood that made him  
on that first day of summer  
lick the earth.

He dug a hole, buried  
himself to his knees  
in a narrow plot  
where roses grew. He hoped  
they would grow  
through his crotch, thorns  
tangled in pubic hair.

The stems curled around his waist,  
up the sternum, circled the throat,  
through the jaw and finally punctured  
the place where words become music  
growing through the body  
from the earth.

A little ways off,  
in the shadows between streetlights,  
his tongue dances, a single flame expiring,  
in ritual of the body that's dying  
for its soul.

A Theory

(for A.H.)

Tonight as your hair chimes in the wind  
mighty fleas circulate  
routlessly about  
the multi-panelled sky. I shudder  
to see you lying there.

The tropical air is raspberry syrup.

The parking lot two blocks away  
is a mask, or else  
a sea. O but I am not looking at you

through the front window  
to where these words pass the voyeur  
on the sidewalk  
who's looking at your chimes, ornamented  
curls relax in vibrant air.

Perhaps he too sees me, my feathered speech  
dangles impromptu, like a cockatoo  
of ineffable fire.

He passes crystal trees, stands  
transfixed in matters of fact  
which drop, one by one,  
a riot of bees, her falling hair,  
whatever he sees splits the railway  
sky, is thrown onto the earth.

## City of Flies

He wondered about the blue  
spire, radiating in the night's  
folded arms. At cross-purpose,  
a number of windows line  
the street all housing animals  
aware of other windows. I wonder  
where this town might be, and if  
this town is not where I would be  
when I am visiting the arms  
of the spire, what town then  
would it be?--faces green  
and beaded with sweat  
in the morning dew condensed  
against glass (from which)  
he wipes himself only to find  
more eyes.

## Some Last Thoughts

Maybe the last time  
you were alone thinking  
nothing is yours without

killing yourself, it occurred  
to you that you never sent  
that Thank-you

letter to your Aunt for  
the plaid Christmas  
socks with trees stitched

on each toe, an angel  
on the little one, and  
how you hated

those embarrassing socks,  
but had to admit  
they kept your feet

warm and when your girlfriend  
said you were cute  
for wearing them you felt

strangely proud  
as your hand slipped  
between her smooth white belly

and spandex pants--you really do  
think about sex most of the time,  
don't you? But now

you tear your sock on a loose  
nail, your toe peeks through,  
like the eye of an angel

parading the heavens  
in golden gown draped down

long over the charged

and violent night surging  
the synapses of God's brain  
in which you sit, biting

your lip, hands propped  
under foot, delaying, like  
the prince of Denmark, sewing

his socks, a gift from Ophelia,  
why did you fall in love with her?  
She really isn't very smart.

Still, there's something tragic  
about her, and you're a sucker  
for a tragic face. The actor

watches a brook cut through green  
hills of Denmark, fog and mist roll  
over the castle four hours after

Fortinbras has come  
to reign. The actor's play  
gave proof, testimony to twisted

offerings of parenthood, and where  
was Ophelia?--drowning in the symbol  
for the unconscious--that's it!

That's why you love her,  
the symbology of her death, nothing  
in life so much except

the mind to conceive  
of that death (nothing she said  
made sense anyway) this could

go on forever--  
sometimes you think it will  
but you want to sleep.

It all makes sense now,  
why your dad's friend  
the cantankerous old bombardier

dying of colon cancer, pulled  
on his patched hunting socks  
and walked out, alone

in the chill December air  
to put a bullet  
through his head.

## White

Midnight on the porch: our talk  
is of sailboats and wisecracks,  
the way we all have moved, and  
toward what we are moving.

A friend, tipping her glass  
says the pear trees are fists  
solid, punching holes  
in the sky. Another agrees,  
but feels only what falls.

Of all the weather between us,  
we share the wind. Before this night  
will end, someone, floating on a stem  
of moonlight, will stumble--  
laugh with the sea.

## Lunch

Not the sound  
of her  
voice, but  
the shape of  
her lips  
pressed  
full around  
the bread soaked  
with butter  
borscht.  
Bikaver drips  
from both sides  
of her  
luscious mouth.



## Self-Portrait in Winter

Across the table, her face turned toward the window, watching

the last word spoken dangles from meaning like a blown tire,  
the face turned away, the face the window's reflection, the parking  
lot light and the white asterisks falling:

a condition cold imposes on the viewer (the viewed)  
that neither should be seen in light  
of winter,

that a clear and concave lens pushes away the immediate person  
in pure aesthetic robes.

It is afternoon, the brightest time of day when the northern  
earth in all its whiteness, I desire  
the southerly slipping  
sun

and all that was green and lethean waits (with bitter history  
of self-reproach) the unseen her profile shows: the window  
through which night becomes known, the space inside--

sugar in black coffee; it's 4:32 a.m., the hour some believe  
is always death's  
quiet hour;

the couple now asking for their check.

Later they will inhabit their ordinary spaces  
which later still daylight diminishes

I'm stricken with silence

and the absence old friends bring with them

the time in which your life alone is secret  
and exposed: the Mona Lisa: DaVinci's, Nat Cole's,

Bob Dylan's "must've had the highway blues," but her,  
the one I've just met demurs the coy  
smile of a hidden life

of the object "cold and lonely  
work of art." In the madness of blind storm  
the room turns to snow--formless desire

in the restroom of Flo's  
    Polka-dot lounge  
I write her a note  
    on the back of a quote  
from *Diary for Myself Alone*

ask her out for coffee, leave  
    her my number,  
she's 23, divorced, has a son  
    I'm delighted with

an irony blinding hunger. The quote reads something about birds  
and bicycles and living a loving life, hearing  
in weeks that follow, the dumb-blind laughter of the ill-content  
and morose

a worm in the making of a spring rain  
a bird eats the worm in the making of spring rain (the worm

like an illness exposed, like greetings) the warm rain  
the change in season when nothing else will--the wished for

open to blossom in full pleasure of sun, complacent  
afternoon, southerly breeze, the cottonwood trees  
mingle in the bluebird air around them, the escape

a disturbance, a rustling in the hedge row in front of the house between  
Union and Exchange, some sinister angel, some last remark torn  
from the collar, some phantom self believing winter the season  
of clenched teeth, comes to procure

out of the blind window that looks on the night  
out of the reflection that stares back into the dim-lit room  
of closures, out of the day-long glare of snow and sun and chrome  
fenders gleaming on Commercial, out of the image of myself  
reflected in the window, the white room, the laughing in the night of a  
winter that won't disappear

some simple pleasure, in the subject as object

a cogent statement or thesis: the marriage of hammer  
and nail, something hung on the wall

that can be forgiven or forgot

## I was Rejected like an Unlike Thing

I recognized that the *what* that was before me bore my same skinny frame, and so was particularly shocked to see it rise and tear through the virginal dawn in an all-out sprint. The naked runner ascending the hills with the speed of an electric knife. I could see him no more from the vantage of the well-tower, preferring at last to believe the wiry bugger had fled for good.

## Challenge

Caught on a hook, the Autumn  
breeze smells of death, and apple  
carts. I was saying, before  
time's gloved hand worked the brush  
and day succeeded day, tickertape  
and heavy chains dragged down  
the brick path.

Never you mind, moon, face of an old  
man peering, bearded and sullen, I should  
see you go down yet,  
                                  go down  
and rise again.

## I've Not Yet Begun

In spite of how it appears  
a mild influenza has wrapped my head  
like a scarf; several orange banners  
rip in the fast wind. The sky splits  
an eggshell, or machine. Take it  
from the freezer, the head, the one  
with so many eyes for seeing all  
that should not be seen; each day  
our lives go rolling by with tiny  
fortune cookie messages pinned  
to our lapels. I've not yet begun  
to swallow the truth of them.  
After the seventh glass of wine  
I live inside an oyster, dark  
pearled mouth closed round,  
the sweet drops, the taste of your  
tongue--I've not yet begun.

## Oblation

The moon has descended through us  
and we are left here on the script  
of this ocean floor, in a darkness  
no one dare speak of.

It is as if the blind hands  
we hold each other with  
have found a sight so terrifying  
even the wind--waves  
of the prairie--has given over  
its names.

Friend, you crossed a continent  
to save my life, and tonight  
I'm paralyzed in the center

of something receding, waiting  
for words to cut the bowels  
and spill this agony in change.

I'd like to pray, send  
the dove from my ark to find  
tropical land and Carib wind, but  
around here Key West is a cemetery

and you are alive, wresting in thick foliage  
and longing  
for a light to rise  
through your body, a womb to contain  
you.

I want to spread my arms across a wooded  
bough, take every stone thrown,  
bleed for those who have nothing left  
to bleed, but as blood turns stone  
and each piece of silver that surrounds it  
bears the marks of grief--I hold

to your lips water, with the faith  
you will rise again.





At 3 a.m., I Begin to Doubt

I was thinking  
    of your fishnet  
shawl, how fortunate  
    are Salmon, their  
certainty of return.

Considering Glenn Gould, #1

Lake Simco. It is Autumn. A silver  
sheen runs the scales of things.  
Something like twilight invokes  
itself and all its delicate wanting

deep in the solid idea of ice.  
Above the surface of things, fragile  
tinkling of frozen air in itself  
a surface, ever thinning

to a glorious display of colors. Rising  
from the surface of scales and time. The pale  
precision of time        the idea of North  
on a pure white plain, waters deep and dark.

A Dying Quail, or How to Kill a Poem

From the fern thicket  
the gray cat emerges, claws  
click on brown linoleum  
flora. He licks his  
whiskers, cleans his claws  
of feathers and flesh, a speck  
on the mirror. Hind legs  
stretching, he makes his way  
to the living-room, sun  
bakes the cream colored carpet  
warm, lazy in the fading  
afternoon.

He lies there  
gently purring, I roll  
him over, *wanna fight?--*

I love my cat

(said with a groan).

To Kill, or Yati Yati Yah . . .

and nothing will probably happen.

Walk through the narrow door  
announce "I am here"  
to the mother nursing her child  
and thinking of green Sunday  
for no other reason than there is

one. And another thought  
does not pass like a football, hail mary'd  
in sudden-death overtime. We come to  
expect nothing, like this sand--  
which is an example,  
though of what, only time will tell,  
and he's outside whirling above the city  
delivering the traffic report  
like a litany of boredom, circumscribed  
by self-doubt and the ironic feeling  
he's above it all. And other things ironic

square off for another round  
of important distinctions  
between points of language  
drop-kicked the whole nine yards  
like a statement of purpose  
or a letter  
of intent.

## Four Notes

1)

It all looks like this, these cans,  
this mess, that shit, the flagellant  
quartet sounding off tenor  
the city street corner.

2)

Beneath the bridge a band  
plays liquid sevens and asphalt  
screeches--the tires on the  
street laugh in the dark  
alleys of an overburdened night.

3)

tee hee, too who, what'll we do?  
the river is a speedboat  
stew, a massing, a passing  
the red crow's missing, even  
the hood's pulled over  
the eyes.

4)

Walk it yourself. The milky  
indifference of metaphor, really  
just all wax. Take care  
of the engine, transmission  
and headlights. Sound your horn  
when happy or sad. Consume  
consume, zoom zoom, zoom.

## Eyelashes

I waded through your thick gesture  
for about an hour before I figured  
you'd left. Silly me,

I'm not much used to paying  
attention. The doorman  
said you'd gone to Sicily.

I sighed. And congratulated him  
on the weather, then asked if  
you planned to return soon, a question

for which he did not possess  
an answer, as I do, often, in the  
Mediterranean downpour of your departures.

## Dissatisfaction with Metaphor

Quietly, September flakes  
peel and fall from their  
insufficient walls. Oh

what a pity you could not  
be here with chains  
and lenses wording the

liquid tapestry. I've bought  
you time, you crone, to lift  
yourself from the mire. Still,

it would be unkind of me  
to think you silly and wrong,  
not to mention just plain stupid.



## Writing Workshop

Today is a day of doing things by the book,  
long lists, busy lunch, quick break back  
to the office, I eat voraciously, read  
Longinus.

At the writing workshop  
someone asks "is language dead?"  
Contours, tourniquet, fields of brass  
howl discordant, a fragile leaf falls.

Growing impatient and abstruse  
I watch a bee  
saw through the ceasefire silence, the downward  
glowering of us all. The conference room  
walls: mauve.

## Poem

The moon is ratcheting  
violently upward. I thought  
I left the coffee pot on and  
turned to see the house ignite.  
Needless to say, I walked on--  
passed your frozen door,  
the tiny staircase that mocks  
big feet. The shortest step  
between two points is the first.  
Time I went on to something  
radiant and suspicious, like  
lions in the cafeteria, jewels  
in the mouth of a dead man, the  
backstage that is all over  
the front page where, it is  
said, the ingenue can be seen  
making out with her many white  
white moons.

## Sea Spring

A white gull spirals  
ocean surf, black tipped wings,  
ellipses,  
a branch budding toward flight.

## After the Beach Washed Away

Winston maintained the fish  
inside his head had become  
lovers of a sort, tickling  
with soft fins his innermost  
desire and outermost gesture.  
Scaly and mythical, Winston  
in the desert, testifies the rite  
of goldfish. The sun beat  
spectacular incisions, the sky  
wept fire. Winston could only  
think of fish, till the fish became  
that which they touched, deep  
fish of thought, celebratory, inspired  
scribbling, vericose veins, the one  
and the many, diploid, haploid,  
paranoid Winston the scholar of beaches  
pale as these many strange seas.

## Outerleast Gesture

Simple instructions:

the foot goes in  
toes first passed the  
lips, knee now, both  
feet if you like (you  
must) careful at the  
waist, continue on  
the belly, breast  
shoulders and yes  
even head itself  
poof! This too  
is a form  
of pride.

## Irene in Thought

Incessant blue, the marshes the grasslands, endless horizon running along the background of a painting, inveterate thickets, poplars, a swath of clouds floating thoughts, no, not that, this:

a huge screen peopled with eyes, eyes of the deep sad image of despair, the feeling of your body so totally your own . . . someone else's something

like this: money, several large containers containing the living room, in thought, patches of light along the back wall, two windows in front, an apple tree, not that, this:

your warm eyes wet from crying, hands like pulp, no definitely not this, an old photograph marking the leaves of a book, of you of me in the park that late summer evening reading under the cherry trees,--you character you, always joking

eyes like movie stars', batting brows the long kiss goodnight, Irene. No, not this at all . . . something

like floating thoughts, a swath of clouds, poplars, thickets, the autumn sky, how in time your room, its windows roped green with summer vines, will tell the color for the sky and you will choose to make a thing of it, or say it is not.

Comfort

A clock ticks by the ashtray.

No one is heard crying.

From the well spring long shafts of green light  
layer upon layer  
green jay bird across a cerulean sky.

Every time I think I die,  
simple things demand more notice--

the pine tree, the wish, her belly  
brown in mid-summer light.

The old limestone wall.

Every time I think I know

Vastness!

14 Floors above 6th Street: A Pastoral

We the chattering blackbirds who dwell  
in your anterooms of thought, now speak  
to you perched upon the roof of yourself.

You know the trees will not break  
your fall. We've heard you,  
but to us, you do not listen.

The sky is no place for humans.  
Though you were born of infinite blue  
you wear a measured hat, turn

right or left, hail a taxi,  
avoid the rain and all the rest  
ends a line. Beneath your last breath's

brass instrument turns  
a steady wheel of blue light.  
Do you see it now? Gaining speed?

Ever in a dizzy wonder will there be  
time. Friend, there is time.  
Time enough to know about time.



Watkins Glen State Park, 1997

(for John)

Walking up "indian  
trail" we happen  
upon a statue, the madonna  
illuminated, an afternoon  
so grey the flood  
of remembrance cannot

find its sun. "Burial ground"  
we joke, climbing the stone  
steps, the caretaker's tower  
the one supply remaining,  
an old glove, like some fallen  
gesture, or pathetic

recollection suggests nothing  
but tearing off the  
hand to walk defenseless and  
without obligation. Free  
in inability from inability.  
This is the dance in which

no movement occurs, the hymn's silent  
echo, the mausoleum, loaded  
chamber of incense and prayer.  
The rain falls cold  
on this field, high above  
the gorge cut through time

the lake a glacier has made.  
I'm here with my  
life, at this edge  
of the world, watching it blur  
into memory (ice breaks, falls  
to the rushing water)

wanting to tell you something  
tell us something, brother

in this world it is not the hook  
but the opening  
a hook makes we must  
respect.



Glenn Gould #2  
(Reconsidering)

We are concerned now with convergence  
and rising take hold the ephemeral tongue  
dressed in keys to be fingered.

Even when dining alone  
we are of two minds. So then  
what is the relationship between self

and ice? Perhaps why love is described  
with red terms, or the moth extinguished  
by candlelight? In the dark room

we tip burgundy waters to our plump  
and ready lips, an invocation, a prayer, that  
when meeting, finally, we may not dissolve.

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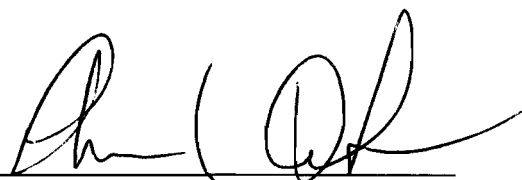
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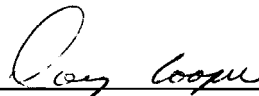
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