

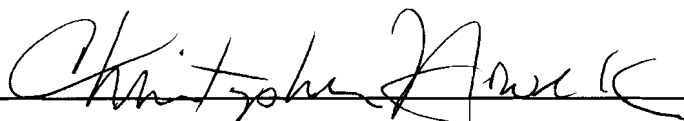
An Abstract of the Thesis of

Tim Baldrige for the Master of Arts

in English presented on May 15, 1993

Title: In The Countries That Never Happened

Abstract Approved:



This thesis is a collection of poems both in lines and prose, all of which are described in an introductory aesthetic statement. This introduction describes the poems by exploring two schools of thought which informed the sensibility of their author. The first is Deep Image romanticism; the second, Postmodern skepticism. The Deep Image looks to the unconscious as a source of poetic "truth"; the Postmodern, or a certain current thereof, undercuts truth, and in doing so, castrates the Deep Image. The central problem of the thesis, then, involves finding means to access the serious in a Postmodern world; this struggle is most apparent in the tone and in the emotional content of the images. Where Postmodern uncertainty prevails, the tone remains light and the images pastel. Where Deep Image romanticism gains momentum, the tone becomes more serious and the images more resonant.

The volume is divided into three sections. The first, "A Measured Hello," is mainly love poems. The second, "The Duck Pond," pushes the boundaries of the prose poem form. The third, "Black Dress," treats the mutability theme.

**In The Countries That Never Happened**

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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  
Master of Arts

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by  
Tim Baldrige

  
Approved for the Major Division

  
Approved for the Graduate Council

## *Acknowledgements*

A number of people are deserving of thanks for, in some way, making this project possible.

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Special thanks is due to Kelsey Hebison, whose four-years-young imagination coined the phrase "in countries that never happened," which sparked the prose poem of the same title and eventually became the title of this collection.

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# Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction: Poetic Aesthetics                       | 1  |
| Prologue: In Countries That Never Happened            | 7  |
| <br>  |    |
| <i>I. A Measured Hello</i>                            |    |
| <br>  |    |
| The Measured Hello                                    | 9  |
| Wishbone  | 10 |
| A Three-Day Fishing Trip Finds Us Looking For Answers | 11 |
| Searching   | 12 |
| Love in a Cup of Air                                  | 13 |
| The Blue Kiss   | 15 |
| Elegy   | 16 |
| <br>  |    |
| <i>II. The Duck Pond</i>                              |    |
| <br>  |    |
| Duck Pond   | 18 |
| Entropy in a Rainshower                               | 19 |
| The Overcoat  | 20 |
| Poem as Block of Wood                                 | 23 |
| Following an Angel                                    | 24 |
| The List  | 25 |
| Julianne's Wish                                       | 27 |
| Dreams  | 28 |
| The Ruin of Bluebirds                                 | 32 |
| Coming Home   | 33 |
| <br>  |    |
| <i>III. Black Dress</i>                               |    |
| <br>  |    |
| October Flight  | 35 |
| The Sky's Black Dress                                 | 36 |
| Snow  | 42 |

## Introduction: Poetic Aesthetics

*There is this cave  
In the air behind my body  
That nobody is going to touch:  
A cloister, a silence  
Closing around a blossom of fire.  
When I stand upright in the wind,  
My bones turn to dark emeralds.*

James Wright  
"The Jewel"

### I

The writing in this collection is informed by two conflicting sensibilities: Deep Image romanticism and Postmodern skepticism.

The first sensibility, that of the Deep Image poetry movement, has provided a theoretical praxis for the poems. This praxis can be described in terms of Jungian psychology, which maps the psyche in terms of the ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious, all of which comprise the totality of the self. The ego is consciousness, the known, the "I am," whereas the unconscious is a repository of hidden psychic elements -- memories, impulses, archetypal figures. What is important here is Jung's described functions of the ego and the unconscious, as well as the prescribed relationship between the two. The ego reads the moment and makes decisions; the unconscious provides the ego with necessary information pressing, at the moment, for recognition. Ideally, the receptive ego listens to unconscious impulses, and, through this symbiotic relationship, the psyche remains healthy and life is lived in Edenic richness.

So, in a Deep Image poem, such as Wright's "The Jewel," the unconscious is

seen as a wellspring of resonant material; the poem itself seeks to act as a conduit in the ego-self axis. By rendering an image soaked in unconscious substance, in a language that nullifies ego bias to achieve the transpersonal, the Deep Image poem, just as a dream, provides an avenue into the unconscious. The poem acts not as a simple metaphor (rose=love), but as a means to experience a sense of the unconscious, the sense of a dream: controlled astonishment, tinged with anything from fear to sadness to affirmation. In "The Jewel," then, we can see the Deep Image working when the "bones turn to dark emeralds": it is not explicable in the way John Donne's twin halves of a compass is explicable: the image asks to be sensed, not dissected.

The Deep Image, as a model in this collection, varies in degree from poem to poem. "Searching," by the last half of the poem, seems to gain a readable amount of unconscious voltage. "October Flight" has some Deep Image moments: the angel sleeping by a dry brook, the blue light trailing from the fingers. "The Sky's Black Dress" uses the Deep Image as a kind of narrative premise; that is, the poems are told from the point of view of an old woman nearing death. The poems resemble journal writings done at night, in quietness and darkness of a kitchen, at a table near a window. She begins a poem by mentioning something of her surroundings, and then allows dream-like imagination and memory into the poem's atmosphere, to create a kind of underwater feeling-tone which hopefully embodies the sense of her self pressing (as mentioned above), at that moment, for recognition. And by placing her near death, I place her, metaphorically, near the unconscious. Also, because of her age and her particular disposition, I imagine her ego as having loosened its strings, and so being more receptive to unconscious impulses.

Deep Image theory has informed the poems' formal elements as well. For

example, rational narrative is normally downplayed, strange images may appear, modifiers are used sparingly, and the sentences move quickly as possible, without excessive subordinate clausung. The impetus behind all these tropes is the same: to deny the ego its firm hand, in an effort to allow unconscious impulses into the poems.

The second sensibility informing these poems is one of Postmodern skepticism. Although a Postmodern consciousness need not exclude Deep Imagism, there is a particular brand of Postmodern thought which undercuts Deep Imagism's sincerity -- which, in terms of "The Jewel," would doubt the cave's very existence.

I discovered this Postmodern skepticism in the stories of Barthelme, Coover, and Barth. Initially, their dazzling oddness and humor drew me into their departure from tradition. In some of the stories, however, resides the darker side of Postmodernism: if a multiplicity of perspectives oversee a situation, and none have more "Truth" than the other, then all are meaningless; the world is a wasteland. This deconstruction manifests itself in a narrator who undercuts the reader. Granted, the explicit function of postmodern literature is to challenge firmly-rooted precepts of Western liberal humanism. But, the dark side of Postmodernism not only challenges these precepts, but suggests their invalidity, and, by paranoid extrapolation, annihilates belief. And, when some of these precepts include romantic ideals -- a deep interior of intuition, morality, genius, passion -- Deep Image theory is undercut as well (*what* cave behind the body?).

Now, I have come to understand the beneficial side of Postmodernism -- at an intersection of many avenues, belief and faith become key, as truth loses its capital T; that is, there *is* room in a Postmodern world for Deep Imagism. During the writing of these poems, however, Postmodernism still held for me a sense of nihilism behind high-velocity, pastel illustration. Inevitably, this skepticism informed the poems. For



example, a strange image may become caught between depth and glibness, which prevents a Deep Image resonance. "The Measured Hello," "The Blue Kiss," and "The List" are examples of this lighter tonality. They echo a condition in the sensibility of this author, whose still-forming model of Deep Imagism has been challenged by Postmodern implication.

## II

A range of voices has influenced me as a writer, and become part of the poems. Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, and John Barth have been mentioned, and along with them James Wright, W.S. Merwin, Galway Kinnell, Robert Bly, James Tate, Adam Hammer, Christopher Howell, and Russel Edson have all made their way into the salad of my writing sensibility.

There are models at work in the poems besides those outlined in the pages above. One is the concrete image -- show, don't tell -- which suggests that poems are felt ideas, rather than abstract scaffoldings. And Denise Levertov's essay, "Some Notes on Organic Form," proposes a theory of free-verse form for these concrete images. In her essay, she references architect Louis Sullivan's "form follows function" as a protocol for poetic form, where form is language and function is poetic content. As Levertov puts it,

Hopkins invented the word inscape to denote intrinsic form, the pattern of essential characteristics. . .in objects. . .and the word instress to denote . . .the apperception of inscape. . . . A partial definition, then, of organic poetry might be that it is a method of apperception. . .based on an intuition of an order, a form beyond forms. . .of which man's creative works are analogies. . . .

Levertov's theory of form seems to complement Deep Image theory as well, in that the poem, rather than being built by the rational mind, instead grows organically out of the

impulse from which it began. Of course, organic form doesn't undercut the need for technical attention -- clean phrasing, tight lines, pronouns with clear referents. Rather, the technical is a necessary tool in the search for organic form.

Organic form is, by definition, a fairly open model; each poem finds its own form. This openness questions poetry's formal boundaries. My thesis attempts not to answer the question, but to put it to the test, by presenting poems both in broken lines and prose. Is most free verse, as Ezra Pound put it, simply prose chopped arbitrarily into lines? Could the lined poems in this collection have just as easily been prose, and vice-versa?

My answer is "No." After time spent converting poems from one form to another and back, I realize a difference. Poems which are enjambed, while not necessarily more compressed, bring certain phrases and words into close focus. And in such poems, time is also a factor, because line break pauses influence cadence. On the other hand, prose poems proceed by the unit of the sentence -- a longer utterance. And in this utterance, I am finding more room for room for human voice to enter the poems; in taking the electron microscope off of each word, there comes more room for natural expression. This is not to denigrate poetry in lines; rather, it is to suggest a direction that will bear future exploration.

Poetry is an activity through which one can hope to better understand one's self, others, and the world. These poems, as a body of work, speak of exploration rather than conscious pre-intent. They reflect a writer's struggle to synthesize the aforementioned dialectic present in a postmodern society, to braid a vision that holds in the swirl of everyday life.

*Potato*

*Inside of one potato  
there are mountains and rivers.*

Shinkichi Takahashi  
translated by Harold P. Wright

## **Prologue: In Countries That Never Happened**

In the countries that never happened, people do as people do. Life to them is a candle, children gathered with fireflies around a rotted stump. Day finds pastures of women and bellies filled with sun. And men seine silverfish wriggling shiny from the river.

Each Spring finds all at a weathered rock sunk in a mountain's foot, for the sky has hidden its face. Among scrub and bone-white earth, a zero of dust holds all they know: the village. Every sunrise, a cup of water, waiting for the sky to raise its hands.

Across mountains, in the countries that have happened, two men ride down a road below a filigree of oaks.

"Coming along on that barn?" one asks.

"The limestone is cut. We begin tomorrow," the other replies.

The second man is smooth as a pebble. His hands are antlers of a crimson elk. And his horse ripples like a pond.

In the ditch a crocus blooms. The man who asked the question scratches his whiskers. The other tips his head, and listens.

## *I. A Measured Hello*

*tell me that you are doing  
well, or that it was mistake*

*that placed you in that world,  
and me in this; or that misfortune  
placed these worlds in us.*

James Tate

## **The Measured Hello**

An *H*  
is an iffy breath:

and I,  
a flamingo

anchored  
in tar.

But the heart  
becomes

its own  
apprentice,

relearning  
the eyes,

your soft  
flashlights, on a tightrope

to the final *o*.

## Wishbone

We wake to violets drowned  
in bedding and the moss of dreams.  
And *where am I?* is a cloud

of sun  
below the bed. So we swim back

to the night shore, where  
slender hands

brush your hair,  
gather sticks,

and withdraw  
like druids into foliage.

A cold moon  
waits.

We hear  
that small

fire  
scatter violets

in our midmorning sleep.

## A Three-Day Fishing Trip Finds Us Looking for Answers

A heron lifts  
and skims the pond.  
We cast our lines.  
And as grasses bend  
to twilight,  
limestone crags wake  
on the sunken bank.  
You ask *what do we die for?*  
Broken branches half-submerged  
let go the grey  
bark in flakes  
floating anywhere or sinking.  
I love fishing here  
with you  
and a memory of you  
last morning,  
alone by waters  
calling *here,*  
*here. . . .*  
Show me  
with cupped hands now  
what  
we die for:  
shadows  
our lives have shed.



## Searching

Orchids hang beneath a blue pot's  
edge like bloodied lips.

My love, are we to stay?  
It's raining again, can we

depend on rain?  
Drought stunned us

who ran outdoors  
to a desert sky:

And now rain,  
the wound washed open.

We join ourselves  
dancing round flames in darkness;

we fill ourselves with blades  
dropping like silver stones into the heart's well.

To bleed the sky for a  
lace too fine to see;

to comb the grass, pale shades in amber.

## Love in a Cup of Air

It was only in the  
cup  
of air you

handed me that I  
found  
a desire

to kiss  
deeply  
into your world

this radium  
cactus  
aglow

in a dark open  
grave,  
the July sun

and classical  
birdsong  
uncontrollably arriving

on fingers of  
the wind.  
But soon October

pried open its  
closet  
of bones and

longing; I flung  
the cup  
into space.

We felt it  
in the ribs,  
ran lost

in labyrinths  
of the  
magnetic heart,

scraping off  
filings  
that keep ridiculously

coming back. Even  
today,  
just walking

a field of  
candles,  
this heart

ignites a  
prayer:  
threadbare

gloves and letters  
go up  
on flames

to the cup like  
a moon  
far above

and away. The  
old cactus  
falls

from a trapdoor  
in my side.  
Goodbye, my

sweet love, goodbye.

## **The Blue Kiss**

We met  
in a willow,  
the music of  
smoke  
curling around us.  
You offered  
me lace  
from your grandmother's  
afterlife.  
How could I  
have said no?  
But bent  
hands  
in your shoulders  
clicked on a porch light,  
and,

when you  
did kiss me,  
the doily  
fell,

like a torn  
web,

missing.

## Elegy

A silver finch tails off  
into woolen night.  
I can't find my hands.  
They must be stumbling  
through November  
thistle,  
bending away wind,  
looking for you.  
They must be lost  
like a handkerchief  
caught on barbed wire.  
For them I  
sit down in the finch's  
night, rest  
against the absence of so many things.

## *II. The Duck Pond*

*It's a contemporary poem!  
O God, yes, such clear waves! I am obligated now to look  
across the lake  
if there is a lake (if not, to look across something else,  
something blue)  
and begin to make out little dots  
in the distance  
which will become waves and swallows.*

Adam Hammer

## **The Duck Pond**

One afternoon, a mother duck and two baby ducks were waddling along a grassy knoll. A hawk circled above. The mother duck stopped and straightened the baby ducks' respective bowtie and bonnet, and the baby ducks began munching a patch of pink wildflowers. The hawk spiraled lower. The mother duck spread her black shawl, shepherding her young into cattails, where a pruned grandmother duck lay in reeds and tangled fishing line. The grandmother's eyes, stark and wet, riveted on some speck in the sky. The mother duck read from a book of lore, and her children sang refrains, calling warm south winds for the soul spiralling up toward dreams of earthworms and fresh grass. The hawk landed, left a bloodied field mouse, and lifted into the wind -- some other time, some other day. The mother shut the book.

## **Entropy in a Rainshower**

As rain falls through the voice of you, clay angel, we give in to a silence of music adrift. We are walking on roads of downed leaves among tulips glimmering, orange and red pantomimes in rain. We don't hear you anymore. Blue spruce sway the long grey afternoon. Break us, angel. We're backfalling into wings, saying goodbye.



## The Overcoat

### I.

It's an evening of wind and ice. Beneath pines on a mountainside, two glowing windows face wind that cuts in through cracks between logs. There, a young woman at a wood stove stirs a tin pot. Outside, wind flies through trees and around the cabin, rattling things. She sets down the ladle, goes to the window, clicks a latch, and peers out at pines darkening with indigo dusk.

She jumps up, startled -- the door suddenly open wide. Wind swirls in dust and snow. His body fills the doorway, hesitates, then steps in and slams the door. His grey overcoat bulges on the left. She moves behind and reaches his shoulders to help the coat off. It drags the floor; she hangs it near the stove. He opens an oilcloth pouch on the hearth: three rabbits, a squirrel. He stands and stretches; she moves to him. His arms, chilled from outdoors, come down and enclose her.

## II.

The April blue overhead is soft with cumulus. A white tiffany cottage faces the sea, windows and doors open to a breeze meandering in the front room and kitchen and out the back way. She can't help it that the clothesline sags; she makes the best, hanging laundry toward either end, away from the middle. Hands pin up a damp silk blouse, socks, underwear. She folds the grey overcoat onto the line. The weight of the coat pulls down the line so the coat, swayed by wind, brushes the grass. She walks past the cottage and sits on a cutbank by the sea.

### III.

No motion of dust in a band of light. It is morning. Light enters a vertical window on the east wall and bisects the room, touching the lower west wall and floor near a cluster of objects: a trash basket of crumpled paper, files hanging in a wire frame, and a crimson wooden box with no lock. Dust on the surfaces. These objects lie near the shadow of a card table where, among scattered papers and coins, stands a foot-high statue of a man in a coat, walking. It's a glazed, dark grey flecked with white, more so on the shoulders and head. His back is to the band of light and the particles of dust as he stands facing the door in the north wall.

## Poem as Block of Wood

You might not expect a dwarf to live inside. But you can say it's the dense gray of aged wood. You might paint it blue like a smashed window. Then talk to the dwarf suntanning on it in his briefs. Wood's firm as wood, he'll say. By now, you suspect it's a black hole, a flickering home-movie fadeout, clinking glasses, *cheers*.

## Following an Angel

Last night, when you stepped into that December sky, sandalprints lighting like streetlamps in a row, the snow curling in behind you seemed a gust of wind -- you disappeared that fast. I remember last March, you floating to where I stood on the porch whipping eggs for an omelet, white dress clinging to a clothesline of a body -- that morning we took a walk in back of the house, where the garden was. The omelets never got made; we made love instead, on a blanket of soil and mulch, the giant flowering whatever providing us fragrant secrecy from the old man next door. Later that morning, in bathroom clouds of steam, you poked your head around the shower curtain and asked for a towel, and I, bending to smell your hair, noticed that even freshly tinged with Peach conditioner, your wet locks smelled something like the mulch out back. We watched Arthur that night, and I remember you saying how you liked getting caught up laughing at Dudley's jokes, then tripping on ones that edged his sadness. I wonder if it was all a matter of his giving up the money -- either me holding on to the you in the dress I loved in the garden, or you holding the handle of a locked door in some room, moonlight striking the blinds, waiting for me to come in. Tonight I sit in this dull living room, winter storm warnings on TV. A dress of yours still hangs in the guest room, do you know that? I get up from the recliner, and walk to that room. I lay my ear to the door, and hear a quiet singing. It's a thin sound, like a pin dropped from the ionosphere. And this time, I *do* open the door, walk into your darkness, and kneel on the hardwood -- leaving an afterimage of myself standing in the hall, looking out a window at snow spinning down.

## The List

Dan and Julianne embrace like limp dandelions. Julianne mouths: "I feel okay." Dan's hands are bags of sand.

Julianne butters her toast listlessly. The morning drags. Dan, asleep, at 10:32. Julianne is daydreaming of a chemical, which, in weak solution, would generate white dots on houseplants. She stands, her long pink T-shirt slipping down over white moons and thighs. She wheels the lazy susan, then back, and settles on a bottle of blue food coloring.

Dan, at a beach. He leans back, back, and completely over backwards into an arch, his face absurdly upside-down, hair an electric spritz. He is recalling a joke a friend in high school told him: "What's the difference between a blonde and pixels? Pixels cohere to form a clear picture." What an odd, boring friend. Dan smiles, his face pulsing with blood and sun.

Dan and Julianne, completely stuck together, a wad of pink bubblegum the size of a hot tub. Struggles, grunts.

She tiptoes to the bedroom, teaspoon in hand. Dan mumbles in sleep. Quietly, quietly she slips a leg up on the bed, then the other, then the first leg slowly over him, so she straddles the air above his curled, blanketed form. Leaning farther, she holds the spoon over his glass, and tips the spoon. Blue drops splash and dissolve in shades of sky.

Dan, in darkness. He outlines, with both hands, an hourglass in the space before him. Then he kicks at what he feels as ground, pulls his arms back in violent self-embrace. Then a voice: *But this is who I am, Dan, this is who I am. . . .*

K-Mart is bustling. The center-aisle photographer, all moustache and smile. "I'm impaling myself on your knee, Dan." Dan shifts the wooden stool. Flash: in the photographer's mind, the "Mountain Waterfall in Clear Pool" backdrop suits well her untamed perm and his stern, albeit distracted, beard. Years later the photo, yellow, brittle at the bottom of a desk drawer, will be a list of them.

## **Julianne's Wish**

Starting nowhere, going nowhere, Julianne sinks submarines by the seashore. Little plastic ones. She plinks them into breakers.

She moved here when she was four. Seventeen years of gulf has browned her and bleached her cutoffs. The universe, to her, is a mussel: dark hands shut on a pearl.

In the pail, one sandy sub. She fingers the hatch open and climbs in. The sky folds closed behind.

Astonished by life-sized quarters, she notes a gravity pulling to all sides of the room. She tears a bag of cotton balls, and lets go. They expand like a slow Big Bang. She has tea, and a magazine.

Something outside envelopes the sub: her hand, pushing a toy sub through breakers in sun. Inside, cotton balls hover on the walls.



## Dreams

### i. 6:14 AM

When Marianne woke she told me about her dream. It was night. Her sisters and she were running across the roof of a building, then stopped at a collapsed hole. Her sisters ran on into the air, but she couldn't move. She sat at a white drafting table, penciling a plan of the roof, its chasm in the middle. She was inking in the chasm when a level-eyed architect came up behind and yelled *hurry up!* She drove a huge block of ice through a city at night. Her passenger, white beard on a hollow face, threw a knife at a car, puncturing a tire. It crashed into a storefront when I shook her awake, and she was still after telling the dream in a flat, grey whisper.

ii. 2:36 PM

I was grilling burgers, and Melissa, our daughter, was in the yard staining a shelf. Jerry, a friend, quietly mouthed his ice cream. I flipped a patty, pressed, and grease singed the coals. She wiped a thick streak of black walnut up the white pine. Jerry smiled his dark eyes, *another coke?* He left to the kitchen. I asked Melissa about tennis lessons, and she laughed into the circles of stain she elbowed in the wood. *Today*, she giggled, *today Rick put an albino garden snake in Wendy's gym bag.* I dropped the pepper shaker into the fire. Jerry came up behind and touched the cold coke to my arm. I walked to where my daughter was working, and picked up a rag.

iii. 10:32 PM

Marianne finally persuaded Melissa upstairs to bed, since tennis lessons would start at nine. Then she came to where I sat on the couch, said *cowboy, you got room for a lonely hussy in your stable?*, and sat on my lap before I could answer. We looked out into the front yard's stringy cedar, and beyond to the Flynn's brick housefront's mass of shadow. Upstairs, music started loudly, then tapered away. *Sound asleep*, she said, smiling.

iv. 11:58 PM

As we slept, our bodies locked together warmly, I was on a grassland plain playing volleyball with my previous semester's calculus students. There were about forty of us altogether, hitting around. My team won. Then someone shouted *the final's match is over here!* We ran along a vague old wagon rut running through the prairie until I looked up and, to my astonishment, saw a bare sandstone mountain. Everyone clambered up the side's jutting surface, and I made it to the top behind everyone else. The top was naked sandstone, bumpy but fairly level, about forty feet by forty feet, and a volleyball net stood waiting. Melissa was kissing Jerry on the far court, and Marianne was in the near court, handing back Chapter Three tests on derivation. She got along well with everyone.

## **The Ruin of Bluebirds**

The hand, Miguel decided as he folded the newspaper, had been in fact created by the men who claimed to have found it. The circumstances delineated in the article were suggestive enough -- friends fishing on the sunken bank of Willow Pond, arcing their casts to reach the shaded corners. The reporter even seemed to insinuate theological motive. But a charred white parasol and white-gloved hand were all the hard evidence the authorities had. No one else in the county had seen the sky split in a flash of light; no one had heard the notes Ramon had heard, blue notes that lit on the limbs of trees. In Ramon's testimony, he and Marc just stood by the pond that was then a brilliant moon-white disc in the pasture, their faces turned skyward, fixed like frogs in a flashlight beam. And then it descended from the heavens -- a white glove holding its parasol as if a teacup, rotating slowly clockwise as it came on, smoke trailing out of the wrist. Their fright had been unspeakable, but their curiosity unabashed. The reporter detailed their wrapping the hand in Marc's tank-top, the delicacy in handling the parasol during the six-mile Jeep run back to town. But my God, Miguel wondered, what life in this universe of flesh and delight could find supplement in dismemberment? Life is fulsome, Miguel thought, life is rich. With a last sip of coffee, he stood in spokes of morning light and set his paper on the table. He pulled on his overcoat, snapped on his hat, turned, and walked out in the street -- to find bluebirds everywhere, lighting on lampposts and passersby as well. A few lit on Miguel's shoulders. He turned his collar up and quickened his walk to the apartment, hands in deep pockets, face a mask in the hat's shadow.

## Coming Home

Thomas took his doubt down Nema Street. It was dark. A car drove by, a car with an old acquaintance that didn't wave. Thomas didn't either. His chest was a dog, sniffing the concrete and tugging its chain. A thought spoke: *do I carry this beast, or does it carry me?* Clouds blew by, barely lit by city lights.

Not right, Thomas decided. He gripped the chain and leaned, holding himself at bay. Trouble. He was strong, but the dog would not slow. A stalemate formed on the sidewalk. The air was cold. Thomas shoved his hands in his pockets, the chain tight in his heart and his mind.

Thomas grew to hate the streetlights. In the dark drops he called the chain respect, strength -- strength he could almost believe. The light, though, was rhythmic in recurrence. The dog beat on.

Thomas looked up, and two blocks away he saw the veranda he knew too well. Tired and frustrated, he knew at last he could not control the dog. He decided to go with it, imagining some possible greetings: *Hi, father, here's my nightmare. Hello, father, could me and my imperfection come in -- I know he smells but it sure is cold out here.* Well, thought Thomas, death has always been a 95-cent novel of entangled passions. Some things never change.

His mind lost in potential acceptances, he was jarred somewhat at his father's sudden voice. He looked up -- he was already there! He climbed the front steps of the veranda as if it were a gallows. Stepping up to his father, he began to rationalize the dog and. . .where was he? Thomas turned to the yard. The dog was on the front walk, feeding on the scraps of his offhand acquiescence. Thomas turned back to his father and walked inside, fingers combing his hair in relief.

### *III. Black Dress*

*Has the top sphere  
emptied itself? Is it true  
the earth is all there is, and the earth does not last?*

Galway Kinnell

## October Flight

As we walk the beach,  
the roof of the sky blows away.  
Dark leaves whirl  
like a snow of moths.

And we can't stand in this  
tide surge,  
say, its blue pools  
curling below us

like violets.  
In a park, an angel  
sleeps near a dry brook,  
blind as grass,

feet white, knees like  
crow's wings,  
heartless  
    in the question  
of your thin arm out a window

to take the moon's string  
and hold on.

\*

We walk with this  
blue beach light  
trailing out our fingers.  
One day down.

The black scarves of our faces  
in the wind.



## The Sky's Black Dress

*These poems were found among the personal belongings of Leanne Shaeffer upon her death in 1987 at the age of 92.*

5/3/87

In this window  
The night is water  
I see myself walking  
By the toolshed where  
Lovers once broke  
And warmed  
Easy as floating on a river

Now the shed  
Is drowned in vines  
Now the stairs  
And sleep

5/8

Fog brushed the window  
And I slept  
Asking

now I adorn

This blank garland  
In flutes of witch-fingers  
And who am I now

at what door

Bends a man  
Tapping a nail

Tender, rose palms  
Curl onto nothing

And I woke then  
Like a raft

adrift

In an inlet  
Of cave-white trees

5/21

A black branch sways  
And brushes grass  
A limp arm  
As if  
    this night  
Has a broken bone

So move on  
Says a voice  
Don't linger, don't  
Remind faded light  
Its mistake  
    a mask  
Behind glass  
Antique  
Wedding china  
Dims

As  
    the moon  
Draws its veil  
Out the window  
As water  
In a basin  
Begs  
The moon  
For gravity and  
Light

The branch is  
    still

A moment  
As wind follows itself  
Into woods

The kitchen table  
Waits  
For supper  
And its children  
    while I stand  
At the screen door

5/27

The moon  
          blue water  
In the night's belly

I could take  
          a walk

Draped  
Woods of silkworm nests  
Saplings bent  
To some  
          other light

And my hands  
Stickfires  
In  
      a wind

Rippling the sky's  
          black dress

6/11

In trembling air  
My hands

The moon  
                  is raining  
In the meadow

These hands  
                  blue  
As a window rattling  
Blue as birch  
Leaves

In  
Moon rain  
A rooted boot  
                  spills night  
And the mums  
Flame

As if  
          brittle pages  
These hands  
Fold  
Into my lap

As if the meadow  
                  is rising

6/14

He walks from  
a light

My eyes

Iris of the sky  
The sun

Flank of a mare

Papers  
in a wind  
Of bluebirds

His hands in  
prayer

## **Snow**

Maybe the man's face is ice  
Snow in his grey hands  
In his valley  
For twenty years  
He's looked  
At the back of his own head

The man plows his field  
In driving snow  
As if it is better  
To sink in dreams

The ass brays like a foghorn

The man freezing  
Begins to leave  
Himself in the furrows  
Feet calves knees thighs  
Pelvis then his torso

His arms lash the reins  
The snow  
The ass brays

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Tim Baldrige  
Signature of Author

5/13/93  
Date

In The Countries That Never Happened  
Title of Thesis

Oberg Cooper  
Signature of Graduate Office Staff Member

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