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And other poems

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And Other Poems

[A Thesis presented to
Eastern Washington University
of Spokane, Washington,
partially fulfilling
the requirements
for the degree
Master of Fine Arts
in Creative Writing.

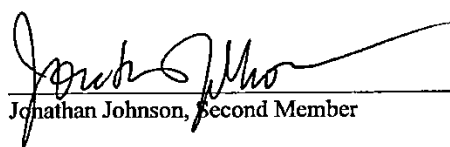
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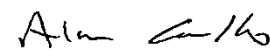
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Michael Schmidt

6-1-16

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The Lord Considers the Subject

One day the air
will finish erasing him.

For now, I breathe
white scent
of rice, winter light
puncturing the cold

in our home
that turns his going
to vapor.

It fades
impossible into
the quick

moment
combing its fingers
through me.

Again This Trying

Sharp iron need
drawn by the huge magnet
of a faceless man

who is asking a question
different every time.
If I could answer,
surely pain would vanish.
Instead, I drag

the frayed string of my mind
over a stranger
standing in a cloud of ash,
light falling
against a too good to be true
face like porcelain.

I want too much.
Or rather
I want something
for which his face is a symbol
falling—

silent, small-winged light.
The breakage will be
soft as
the face of a man
in a distant crowd

terrible
as mercy.

Sleep Paralysis

Forced air dawns coat sleeves in the closet.
Minutes ferment in night's cracked vat.
I tick like a cooling engine
as the day's ghost counts down
to zero, folds itself softly
back into time. Downstairs, cats
tongue crumbs from the floor. Someone,
some white shape, draws close.
Sandpaper in his hand. What spirit
are you? Gulls
in the wallpaper,
plummeting clams, beak-tip,
what word for me? Have you heard
from father? Someone switches
the fan to a higher mode. Blank vowels
float the wire funnel in my mouth,
wear me away. The carpet catches
a pure sacrifice. *Don't worry*, I'm told,
you'll feel everything.

Bad Romance

In my dreams I know better.
In the room called *our life* you are
a shadow. Every day I try
to touch you.

One day I begin to blacken
and you holster the Tree of Life. I've ruined
the carpet. I peel my skin
again and become
the sky by mistake:
full of barren eyes I cannot close,
full of fire.

4:01 A.M., New Mole

Small blue sun
of rotating fan
stuck in night's
nostril. My hand
a pale
star bringing close
sky in a moment
of cosmic
allowance: now
nuzzle, now
a free feeling
in which any pain
might be
swallowed: the distant
friend, the stillborn
first date looking
so good from the Pluto
of the mind's eye,
the various malignant
stillnesses, themselves
digesters of—

I swear
this one wasn't there—

how much longer
until one becomes
a lethal heft
inside the night,
incurable
weight? Chaff,

my self, its gesturely ideals,
its expired
passports to the country
called Elsewhere, my circus
of tiny moral hermits
licking their stars,
watering the browning bouquet
of touch.

One Morning, a Visitor

I rose to live an ideal day
while grandpa sat on a shelf
in his new biodegradable urn. I bet
he's telling that joke about _____,
the one I've heard a million times.
Who has time to listen? He has all time,
he perfects the art of Gone, is good
at this, as he was at everything else. *To be good—*
and I find myself far enough from home
to be at home again.

Outside: a few favorite trees,
running water, (not too much), quiet. Inside:
a desk, windows, beginnings—
the front door opens. Something enters without
a hello, looks at me long enough
for the wind to change, for the dunes to shift,
for a flower to struggle up
from that joke, yes,
I remember it now.

Left Alone

The day pours teaspoons of light
into its mouth, plucks petals from flowers
until they lose their voices
and what's left is cruelty. "*Carpe diem?*
Not me, not me!" the day chants
like a terminal patient in denial,
mouth widening, swallowing us
like placebos.

Swatting Death's Day-Old Fly

Michael, *an anglicized Hebrew rhetorical question: "Who is like God?"*

The house where I was raised
was grain of sand. A pale paragraph

idled in orbit. Fog skulked and slipped about
the gray-eyed future,

its moment
a mirror
on a tightrope, winking, lashes
falling like sparks at a circus.
Let's butcher the lion
and eat ourselves. Let's become
the cliff and watch vultures

circle this house—but it's not yet my family's time.
My effigy dances on their faces while they chant

Michael, pure rhetoric, God balancing
on that pin in a thimblefield, electrons
fraying from the edges of my name—
their voices rise and rarify
green, blue, violet light
and, panicking, unravel—

I watch without grace. I am
an impossible question in my own mouth,
an orb in the core of a star.

Still Life Through Binoculars

My dad uses them to watch
for the foxes that come to steal the dog's food
and shit on the porch, then disappear, grinning,
into the night. These German binoculars saw past
my grandfather's bullet already passing
through the soldier who used them
to watch crowds of gulls drop clams on rocks
or to spy on women falling
from docks—the blue flaw
in the rangefinder his eye, measuring
the distance from here to
there, watching as I shroud
it all, distance inhaling
under starless black leather.

The Thing I Look For

I hail thee,
oh blazon mystery at the center of the world
full of objects my body can't help but inhale. I choose
you: departing in the core, the blue
flame of you, though it is winter and the fingers
of my words redden.

The earth takes in what falls
away before time, in time, after,
our buried prayers, lofty desires.
More than bread, more than water,
more than flesh and blood
you are: *To whom do I answer*,
light, mystery unabsolved.

Tilt
my images,
turn this body
into its own reckoning,
a heavy fog, a cold cruel blanket.
Absence believes in desire: I bless
and season this dark, I leave my idols
in your hands. I hail thee: tear me down
stone by stone by bone, iris, blood.

Order of Operations

Shit, shower, shave, my father would say,
mornings when our bathroom times almost crossed.
Now, all these years later, I have ignored this advice,
the price being my calm before the 9:00 A.M. meeting.
Why didn't I heed his mothballed mandate?
Shit, shower, shave doesn't account
for his tar-paved lungs,
his pale poker face after the doctor
fulfilled his office.

Chin up, he would say, as if the words
could make courage
appear like a coin from my ear,
and so I hold up my chin with both hands
and clench through the commute
head on into a bureaucratic pileup.
I hear myself saying a hundred words
to hide our *real lives*

behind the curtains
of marketing...the customer is always
right, he would say,
and these days I make sure of it
to keep the water warm,
the heat on. But Chin up!

go rake the driveway,
the whole avenue if you have to, and it's late, now,
black plastic bags bursting with maple leaves.

The child

would set the rake against a tree,
wait for morning
so he could hold it against the blank field of his face
like a razor, bring it closer
and closer as he stood there, next to his father.

Boy

Hard yellow toffee
of sun in his mouth.
Wasps unzipping the air
around him:

into Mr. Nobody's
basement he falls. He's a drumset
there, a bamboo xylophone,
carefully tuned. Boy:

bag of blue truths, a knife,
the whetstone. Burnt books
about love (man one, man

two). A cyclone's doll,
father's pall, fruit
of overwork, son

of orb-weaving spiders high
in a tree and the light so pink
it sinks to the down of his dark
where a wasp flies, blind,
building its paper house.

Adam'ah

In the dream my father's hands
are dark with soil. He takes my hands,
leans in close and cigarette breath,
tells me the grooves
are where dirt gets stuck, tells me
this is how people know
who you are. Then he is the earth
and my feet are big and I hate the earth

for having him,
for oozing from his head
instead of father-blood
when I find him on the ground:
Daddy's mudding, I said, unknowing,
like it was okay to lose everything
to the ground that does not cry out,
which has been an altar
all this time and the grooves
in my fingers are made
of trenches and graves.

Already Falling

The moments between us are counting themselves,
halving *ad infinitum*. Their faces
neither happy nor sad,
but full of joy, for in them something eternal
opens. I split one
from neck to belly: inside

a boy stands at his grandfather's shore,
gathers its life in a green plastic bucket.
He wants
to be responsible, but he is already
becoming small as the barnacle
cutting the skin of his right knee.
His whole calf reddens.

Each year nudges the scar upward.
He pretends it is migrating
to warmer climes
or seeking a grail
while he stands in the center
of a wet floor,
the yellow voice of a crowd, reading
all the unwritten letters, burning them.

Dear Loves,

This boy owes you nothing. Leave him alone.

Lust

Dirty blue mailbox at the end
of a long corridor of trees standing like ushers,
having forgotten all notion of customer, guest.

The sun clutches them with leaky fingers.
Samaras leap from their gangplanks,
twirling like ballerinas on their single feet

churning the air
to silence. I loosen
the leash on my body just a little.
Three crows hop-scotching
around a morsel in the street

—could be me. Take, eat,
et cetera. A man walks by,
inserts a letter. Fate drops
its flower: he wants me. He wants me
not. *This game is rigged*,
I say to the trees, but they've lost

their voices. My body, broken for no one.
Nonsense, says Wind, walking over
with cold toes, oh, throwing open
the gates, closing the gates.

Hubris

reflected from the bottom of the glass: my eyes look up at me. I drink my face. We could be two boys on either side of a metalwire fence, touching through the holes, the slow melt of the universe. Singe me not. Single-pane-love. I'm more honest than Narcissus: I taste, I swallow, I take myself inside of me.

[This Isn't Healthy. Be Mine]

Gone, my little images.
The fundamentalists
must have burnt them while I slept.
O laundry steam, you
will do. Take my fingers, their almost invisible
bloodless frowns. Let's ride in these cars
of twilight traveling my interstates
of dark, gray headlights revealing gray.
The black shape of a tree asks how we are
and laughs: so it has come to this. Birds lilt from branch
to silhouette. *Help us*, I say—
be our priest! or else I'll cut you down for firewood!
O laundry scent, are saying something sad
and kind? or maybe *go fuck yourself?* Wind
collects my laws in a clear jar. Your dress
of vapor frays. Tree, give me
both rings. Lay me down
in night's cold bath. I hear your birds crawling
like frantic spiders.
I'll grow six legs and cut them off;
I'll grow six eyes and gouge them out;
I can't possibly need what I have.

The Apple

Again, or maybe for the first time—
I, fallen near the tree of a good life,
fallen to myself the earth, I, honey-
crisp, sweet taste the answer
to your tongue's only question. So bite
like I'm your prodigal god. Let
the juices drip. No Eve
but winter on your skin
and a death made of me, wagered
against what you want inside
that skin guarding the heart.
No need to steal me
from the trash. I was always yours
to the core: take, eat.

Regarding Morality

When I woke up from the dream of blowing my nose
I blew my nose. This other time, I had inserted an ache
into an ice bath, and when I woke, my legs hurt. It began
to hail. The sound of it like a smooth uproar, a crowd politely demanding
its revolution—simple case of post hoc, ergo propter hoc? No,
no. Probably standard narcissism to believe the universe seems
to take my life into account, respond in jest or kind.

I had run out of tissue: I used a Caesar salad.
A woman stared from the mirror; a man nodded
from the tree line. I walked through the door
of his gaze; my hands grotesqued the knob—
oh, my slob-heart, my daub-heart, I left you inside that place
like a penny in a fountain, copper shout wavering
among the silver from heaven's upended purse. If only
I collected each moment like a law; if only
I were wise, and carried a freezer everywhere I went.

Self Portrait with Shadow Aspect

So, it's a poem you want? Liar.
Here's a houseplant, it's a
nightmare. Every day its lowermost rosette
drops to the thousand-tongued soil:
look, dearest, your nails are falling off

just like that! Let's vivisect,
bury the room alive. Violet
of the book called *Stillness*:

your shadow
like a vacant carousel:
no small mercy, hanging
like a suit in a closet. The brass
knob staring down
what you want: left and right.
No wrong moves. Take care
of your blossoms and new clothes.
Don't tell the truth
or the light.

Losing His Religion

with thanks to Meister Eckhart

He takes up his four bibles,
imagining the dumpster in the parking lot,
the layers of brown inside like old friends
disliked, inevitable. A door
opens. He wonders if his education brought him here:
maybe Surrealism or Dada replaced his glasses
one night, having found a path of roses
through the walls...the door closes and the 111 degree weather
pounces. The English sparrows divide
the heat. He sees his car in its allotted space,
the neighbor's, not. Sound of children splashing
in the pool, crying out, lossless. He shifts the weight
of the Good Books to one hand, and with the other
he opens the dumpster's heavy lid. Summer reclines
on its throne of grime. Flies attend with their one
day, their two. Each toss allows
God to rid him of God. Light
everywhere, heat. His eyes move rapidly,
testing his world. He touches the stucco wall
with both hands, listens
for laughter as mercy's
twin walks the double
path of his arms to somewhere
near gone.

Having Lost Something

Here I am,
my life a thousand-piece puzzle.

Coffeeshop music simpers;
a new sign sits red, cheap on an old brick church;
a wind pushes at the door.

The attractive barista does
his job, his profile haunting
my periphery.

It comes down
to this, the last piece held

by one like me, incomplete, who might
do anything, force your cardboard eye
into his own void,

disappear like the wind, hovering
like a blue mind
at the door.

Down the Drain

My host tells me he and his wife like to shower together
and it's "not necessarily about the sex." "Oh,"

I say, thinking *sweet Yahweh, five more days*
imagining that tiny white tub
of them, racing, undulating
toward namelessness
and me, parting

them like two panes of water,
insisting they make room.

Well, here I am!
says my inner demon, my private
portable death, constant
metal lip of self:
here I am, love me, there I go
spiraling down, a clear eye
on their faces,
anointed, washed clean.

Guilty and Charged

My crime? All day I did nothing to be alive,
let absence of mind fall like rain on chalk.
What was left: whitish smear, afterglow in the eye
to be blinked away. But after all

the cigarettes, the movies, the cartons of ice cream,
I drew me again in shades
of slant want and need,

waltzed haywire down
streets like old newspapers.
My plea? Let my dust
linger on a hand
or a dreaming ear,

yours: on a sky
of skin and I
the constellation.

I Make Missed Calls

you know who you are

and keep a smooth gray mood
in my pocket. It hungers for
fingers, an arm and a leg
and someone's eye lying
yesterday like a big fat penny
on the sidewalk. No one calls
my limbs and digits home, no one tolls
the bell called silence, cracked
by the gaze of a thousand poppies,
and the moment ceased issuing passports.
But I don't need to return. I have this mood
to lick when I am nothing
but tongue and you: aftertaste
ceramic, dropped and fractured,
something cherished swept
and pocketed by children.

Don't Go to Work:

work comes to us, visits us in our beds,
in our dreams, our restful walks
on the weekend surrounded by days
of work. People who go to work
dig their own graves while everyone
smiles and nods and avoids looking
too closely. We should all,
at an appointed hour, refuse to go.
We should sit in our homes and see
if work gives a shit about us,
and if it does, march it
to the river and plunge its head
under or tie a rope to a branch
and say *Well, we have all day,*
but if you could please hurry. Work, then,
would be dead. We would bury the body
with shovels made of air. We would
ride the horse called gravity
grinning hugely just for us, and we would travel,
and have nice homes without mortgages.
Time would no longer be conflated with money.
Look, all the rivers and trees! The sun going down
and coming up! The moon mooning us all
up there, and nothing to be done
except go on walks, but even that
would have to stop because our bodies
would take breaks and chat about how easy
everything is before falling asleep
and dreaming of whatever's left
to not do.

Death and Taxes and

Moon moon moon.

I, I. Hi, self-awareness,
here's my hand, an arm and a leg,
150 pounds of flesh. No need
to thank me. This is my body,
my deep and dark
in your woods, where one day or a thousand
sounds like nothing, a nothing onto which
the maple and honey locust leaves are
falling. Down: decay: bread of life. Moon
sweating over everything, oh
moon, I drink you I lick you
from dismembered tines
of my affection. Do I grow?
Up or down, union wages. Where
the big watering can, the tuning fork?
Here's to you: ring around the day,
pockets full of faces,
ashes ashes us all, oh moon.

Waiting for the Bus

I read the poem to the birds.
They don't know.

To the leaves, but only a rustle
on the road.

To my cell phone but it leaves
me for Montana.

A man walks by, his coattails
flapping elegantly over his butt.

Then another in sweatpants
with a much larger butt and

how easily we are eclipsed. Oh sun-behind-
the-clouds, you are a lesson, erased—

what does that make water?
My bus kneels for an old man.
I try reading the poem to him

but he places his cane on my foot
and leans—

my body, again
a brother.

Apartment Tour

I almost miss the holes in the outer doorframe
where a padlock was. *A gay couple*, she says,
as if that explains everything.
Bad relatives, she muses.
They are gone
of course, and everything else is new,
but I imagine their ghosts lingering
by the washing machine or the refrigerator,
watch them pass through the frayed screen door
where my body is a west wind wanting
everything, every moment suspended
like an oracle,
that I might learn how to leave
a sign
that I was here
while Cindy, *that's* her name,
has moved on
to describing the view.

Bad Romance

The moon fractures himself
to sneak through my window-blinds
this night of ardent loneliness, embalms
my body with glass to see himself whole

again. His light demarrows
my bones, chokes the piney stillness
of the late summer air. He writes
hello on my forehead and kisses it:
hello. He sways down me, down,

until I am almost pure *between*, pure
god—so narrow have I become.
He writes *wind* on my feet:
oh moon, hold me before I go:
I hope you like what you see.

Adult Video Boutique, 24 Hours

Adult meaning: don't feel ashamed, you make your own goddamn decisions. Work not included.

Boutique: sophisticated as shit. Eros always open: how do you do it. Do you accept volunteers. I can't keep my fingers from the person you would help me (for a nominal fee) become. Here, peel my hours from me. Make them sexy before you take my __.69. Take me: I'll help.

Found Dialogue (Man on phone, Seattle Metro)

Can you hear me?

Can you hear me?

I love you.

Can you hear me?

You're fat.

You need to stop eating.

Can you hear me?

I love you.

I love you.

You're fat. You need to stop eating.

Can you hear me?

I love you.

Stop eating.

Shit Happens

Along the boardwalk,
a teenage girl complaining about her boyfriend—
doesn't like it when he drives high
on Special K. This is when (a) I appear cool
by smiling all street-wise or (b) I seem
lofty, a real, otherworldly poet. I keep walking—
after all, I'm the guy on forced vacation
in his parents' house, having wrecked his life. In fact
I could use some Special K. Just add milk for strong bones,
just add more for a carefree feeling. Not even
all these specimens of light flitting on the water
like new, aquatic butterflies
would get me down. I might pin them up
for future inspection.

And that heron,
staring at the water like a sage on the verge
of catching some final mystery, long beak
like the scope of a rifle my grandfather
looks through as the bullet drops the elk—
what am I supposed to do with it?

From my distance,
the guts spilling out under the knife
could be handfuls of strawberries. Something nice.

It all fades, anyway, behind a static curtain of gulls
and the otherworldly clouds, the other world I once believed
I could enter if I touched the water at the right hour,
moon-phase. I want to yell

like today is someone else's fault. Maybe that kid,
calling his brother's name, is to blame. *Aiden*,
like my childhood friend. "Look, the telescope is free!"
They watch the heron watching that gray
wrinkled face of the sea wearing my reflection
like a temporary tattoo—and, like a fool,
I keep walking, each one of me
reaching for the moment.

Learning Contempt

"Typical. A mile behind. Get with the picture."—my father, to my mother

Her purse. Its universe
of small things. Pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters
in their places. Wet wipes
to kill the germs: *Cleanliness*
unto godliness. Leaving takes so long.

Because I am dying for my father
I hear my voice echo his
as if ordained. Her body stops.
Slumps. Her fingers resume,
slowly. The motes
of her hands rifle, sift

like silent questions that lift
from the ground, tremble,
and fall back. Then her throat
makes a sound and she pours
everything onto the table.
He's already out for a smoke

as the coins clatter,
as, years later, she becomes plain,
receding into dishes,
the war on lint, gray hairs

on the floor—his, shorter,
and hers, longer, that twine
around the broom-strands like time

in God's jealous hands, which
hold everything,
even this lukewarm ceramic

moment where my mother searches
until each quarter and dime and nickel and penny
for the waitress
is found.

In Bowling Class, I Think of Dad Taking Things Three Months at a Time

...And when [Pilate] had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.

I wake to go bowling.
We're graded on attitude and attendance.
Everyone laughs. No one cares
about winning. Everyone cares
about winning. First line.
To the left, a woman from the hospital bowls
a strike. She claps and cheers and my heart
beams a little. To the right, a football athlete
plays in headphones—world
between his ears. In Olympia, my father
to whom I will not speak,
whose face heavies
with his ledger of days,
plants azaleas after surgery, the grooves
in his fingers filling with soil
and mercy. Neurology says 95 percent expire
in one year. Everyone thought it would be the smoking
that did it. *Expire*, as in
toothpaste, milk, bread. Second line:
approach, backswing, follow-through,
95 percent, one year, maybe I'll get a spare
but memory sprinkles its gray
powder over the moment: silhouette
of Julian of Norwich praying for the wound
of compassion and the present
is God's private sacrament.

It Is the Hour

of great loneliness, just after the feast
when the family wanes

and what's left: dishes, dishes,
distance, its roads paved

with us. Outside,
it begins to snow, but

what is there to blanket
down here among

the leftovers of our lives, these old books
and school projects,

this museum curated by a mother I disavow
daily? Can I find here

some sign of the boy I was, a word
from the man I am?

It is snowing in earnest now. I press
my face to glass

and there I am, small, making
an igloo in the snow—

I would reach through my own dark
future around him as the motes trail cold
and colder

but breath fogs the glass. What is outside,
what in?

A Communion

My father walks clockwise around the Christmas tree
that looks less and less like a green bowling pin or a corseted
Victorian as plastic twine falls to hardwood
and the branches loosen. I take a deep breath
as the tree eases into its own fullness, dying now
and in a way already dead. My mother stands beside it like an actress
staring down act four, lines wobbling in her mind,
movements blurred by age as she sweeps away
pine needles or kneels to rearrange the blue-white LEDs
among the lower branches, asking my father
“Where did my shoe go?” or “Did you know your son is a vegetarian?”

They are tangibly old. I never saw til now age buried
in them like a wedding ring in a grave, never weighed their lives
in grams that gleam like half-remembered
dreams in a sock drawer next to the confiscated flash drive
containing my high school poems, the ones that made me
gay. And so my father walks clockwise around this doomed reason,
slowly, dizzying, the twine like a hard snow at his feet as mother
mumbles something about not scratching the floor,
and the baby Lord, still as a white China plate
with four cold meatballs on it,
sits on the table. When my parents turn unblinking
to look at me—the single member of the audience—
like the director has disappeared before the last supper,
I take the flesh into my mouth
as if it were a choice. I eat and wait.

Unwritten Letter, Postmarked by Terminal Illness

Dark. This body a betrayal. Have gone
groping underground for life but nowhere
to be found. Have tried
to be whole. Now? I'm water. Draw me
up to the land I love: clotted streets, pier-creak,
tow-boats, fallen pink petals, rising scent
of fermenting everything. Breathe with me
before I go.

Useless Ward

Having to wait for some necessary thing—like you
or rain that won't fall upward. It's hell, this room.
It knows you're leaving cell by bell, breeds clocks,
vivisects seconds, sows
their skins in the carpet. You are a piano key pressed
and the knife, the room's silence
between one and two. Dark,
this waiting, this second,
your hair. These eyes open
and these eyes close. I reach
my deathbed hand toward
yours, my own body, necessary thing.

After 48 Hours' Notice, She Hears Water

I help her carry
a couch down the narrow
stairway and what her face does
to stop tears should kill me.

Her son, almost asleep
in the passenger seat,
asks *where are we going*, looking up

as if from miles downriver. She almost
sees the receding cosmic
hand. Would shake free the whole
world. Does not know
how to follow.

Common Courtesy

The hair of a thousand mothers
fills your mouth
your ideals
immolate themselves
with a knife and a bouquet
in the night's jeweled throat

Smiling
venetian
moon,
no one
can save you; cast yourself
a sailor's millstone

The day is young
and sinking
in joy. Grief, your dog,
and all the roses want to lick you. If ashes float down
they are lazy eyes, winking minutes; if you don't want
to eat the silver platter
I'll bring the bees.

Failed Creation Story

When the shoe ran away
the asparagus king died
and We ran out of lemons.
We submit that death be
punishable by insects
and what the goddamn glisten
is going on with this asphalt?
The one-direction souls
are flying. Any savior
will do. If love is made
we are each
its monument. We are
out of lemons. What are
you souring about?

THE FALL OF THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

I.

On his way, Michael gets tired and stops at a concert in a park. Lays down his sword and sits on a blue bench. There is only the Artisan but He's always talking Rest This, Rest That—surely a moment can't hurt. And the guy working at the sound booth has such eyelashes. Michael's wings shiver as the prayers for intervention rush in, but Sound Guy turns up the volume and Michael can barely hear himself be. He doesn't wonder if this is the fatal mistake, if this is where the exchange of the thing for the shadow of it begins. Michael hears shrieking in heaven. Feels heavy with the Artisan's will. Some old guy gets up and starts shaking his ass and Sound Guy grins, looks at Michael who is also grinning, and suddenly the wind is full of feathers, sharp as razors, sharp as the erased vowels of the Artisan's name.

II (Forbidden Fruit).

One time Michael gets lost in a nature preserve in Michigan. Gabriel is there. They walk for hours, listening to the birds—Gabriel names them—and looking for the rumored corpse of a muskrat. Gabriel can't stop talking about the Artisan, and it drives Michael mad with a lust that looks like the day before crocuses in spring. Gabriel is soothing and Michael speaks for the first time. He talks and talks as if his words could cleave to his shoulder blades, form wings. Michael blinks and Gabriel is gone on the Artisan's blue tide. Something strange happening in his form. A wet on the face. Michael buys the Audubon Society's guide to North American Birds. He does the best he can, his body already peeled from the Artisan like skin from an apple.

III (One Night Stand)—

doesn't know how to do it. Other guy doing all the work. Loves how it feels in there but Jesus, the smell... Afterwards, the guy says This was great and all, but your body is almost too perfect. Who really looks like that? How much did it cost you? Michael thinks—thinks—O Lord, in your mercy, and remembers—remembers—the Artisan was never wrathful, not even once. But His mercy was always like a forest of razors and His love like a millstone around the neck of the world.

Occasionally light from other cars muses through the foggy windows. After it's over, Michael can hear sweat sliding down a cheek. He reaches out but nothing's there. It takes him hours to find the word *pain* blooming inside him like pleasure.

IV (Human).

Gets a lot of flak about “essential gender” and how he’s a “mindless sycophant of the Patriarchy”. Can’t stop seeing Sound Guy’s long eyelashes. So what if he’s always loved men? Where do angels fit in the hierarchy of the oppressed? What does his opinion matter? Anyway, now he’s only...

V (Failings).

He is starting to unbecome from everything, like the Artisan’s ONE TRUE NAME (those goddamn vowels!) and a purple spider’s dewy web hidden in pines. He’s been on the internet 34 hours, reading, looking. He has black hair; his fingernails are growing. He is beginning to know things. He doesn’t want to stop, not ever.

VI (He Does Not Transition Well).

His skin losing that divine
shine, that heavenly
smooth. He sits for hours at a table, listening
to mediocre music and glancing
at families that alight and disappear
like prayers. Can still hear the shrieking, but muted
now, and his sword has turned to stone...
what can he do? He wanders by the food booths,
hunger not yet arrived on its dark train.
But Michael can hear the tracks, the clangs. He looks
up. Normally this would do the trick,
but all he sees are maple leaves
shaking. He has never had to think about home.
He hears a deep whistle, gulps loud as a cartoon.

VII (Michael Learns About His Wikipedia Page),

which is repeatedly vandalized by anonymous users. But there are two users who watch over it, undo the damage (see, for example, 24.76.246.225’s deletion of the entire text, briefly replaced by the words “your [sic] all gay. Gay. Gay. Gay. Gay.”)¹. Michael wonders *By whose hand*.

¹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Michael_\(archangel\)&oldid=619872088](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Michael_(archangel)&oldid=619872088)

VIII (“It is solved by walking”).

Michael was reading in Starbucks when Sound Guy walked in with a girl. They sat down right in front of him. His hand tightened around peppermint hot chocolate. Tried to smile but Sound Guy kept talking to the girl about ontology, how a thing that is needs what it isn't: how he needed her. Michael began to fixate on Sound Guy's gray fedora. Shook his head and blinked. Got up and went outside, remembering Augustine. Began.

Narcissus on the Path to Personal Growth

The pockmarked sky,
the labyrinth of repressions, matters
of mind. I jettison
and choose desire
full of minotaurs;
I collar my shadow.
Days sober out
of me, lost
on the blank map of therapy.
My gods, reduced
to self-talk, are
riven: bell-halves
almost ringing,
though I blame the gods
for things: *you have done this.*
You made the raft of obsidian
and smiled. You must be
colder even than me.

 These days, I bed
gallium angels, polish
my reflection
until it's molten. The way
is the way. We've tried,
haven't we? Looked
back to Eurydice and survived?
You see, I care
about others;
fever
loves a body.

Prayer When He Goes

God grant us
night and night's
bed its emptiness

let us rest in the hundred-syllabled
edges may the body ask
the question let the soul
be silent in heaven

and on earth
how quickly things go wrong
here

all I want one
solitude scraped
from an angel's tongue
that we might burn
and be filled

learn to walk
our tiny paths
from dust to dust

Autumn Ultimatum

Bare branches blink
on my block tonight. *Tarry*,
the maple leaves on the sidewalk
say, yellow red brown mouths licking
time's gray bowl as cars
round the roundabout: distance machine:
obscene among the small, unremarkable birds—
still. I am
on fire, my left iris is life and my right
death: beyond that, one long
vein, the ore of us
gleaming, no one blinking.

Dusk with Friends

This light is one thousand cows
grazing on the patch of emerald sky
near the horizon. I am like a hundred bulls
trying to throw their riders.

Do I want friends?

We went walking along a slow river at the end
of our last day. All we wanted
was not to buck the grief that
pulled against our mouths—
we spoke of nothing, really,
hardly saw each other
or ourselves. Our faces could have been
anything in that dusk—pink clouds,
letters from the moon—
see how I get carried away? Of course
they were just faces, lost
in the temporary trance of skin.

Diana's Grandmother, at the Wooden Shoe Tulip Festival in Woodburn, Oregon,

stands by the pink tractor
in the middle of Princess Irenes.

Says, some got pink
in their hearts,

says, forgive the dog!
he likes to run
around and make
a mess of things.

Says, it's like God had
a box of crayons and nothing
better to do, and see

here, if
you suffer

the beauty of just one
flower, you'll know
the whole field,

asks, which one is your favorite?

Goodbye Everyone

Green lights all the way down
the hill as the car flies toward the bay.
O water, wrinkled face
and endless lips, close my eyes, smile
my lips as I comet down. I leave them.
My prostitute future won't know
I'm gone. I leave everything to the tooth-
bright moon—he climbed through my window
once, into my bed. *Nothing*, our stillborn
light in a dark skull. Love is tidal,
ebbs, lays bare the rocks
and jagged shells no one remembered.
My thousand selves
wait to receive me; even my death
will be a failure. Nevertheless, I leave this
small naked dark between the days to you
and that narcissist sun. Brakes
failing. My arms: glass, metal,
cold. Diana, the water's edge.
She has seven smooth names to skip
before she'll say mine.

Questions for the Charitable Reader

If a poem falls in a forest
and no one's there, is it still
a poem? Will the earth be soft?
And if a reader falls,
could the poem's arms be strong?

It's not just anyone I want.
It's you, your hands
on my shoulders resting,
guiding this body.

Before you it was another,
and yet another before.
What will I do
with you when you close
your eyes? How much
should I give you
to carry me away?

All these lines we draw in air.
When we get to that forest,
I'll be nothing at all.

Early Fall

Crabapple scent reddens my last rites.
Leaves go mad with dying; death ferments
our lives, buried in the stomachs of beasts.
I must be dreaming. I go seeking
a familiar world
with my tarnished innocence,
my notebook of dormant transfigurations.
I wander the gardens of loss
looking for the soul. Soul!
Each day I entered
your sunlit room
chanting *dust to dust* and you
pinned me down, lashed me
to your pyres of joy.

There He Goes

The sun is out. It is raining.

The solid earth drinks the liquid earth,
which falls small and soft as our hands
once were. I forget
the hall where light passed through a mason jar
in your hand, became more than itself—
for it is said a memory shrinks
and hardens every time we return
to it. So I remove my self
like a firing pin,
a key from a lock
to the chamber in which we echo,
where we pause for time
like a nurse
shining a narrow light
into a patient's eye.

Regarding Memory

Since then, each day gnawed
into my chest like a bitter word.
I want to reel you back: unslam

the door, gather your footfalls
into a bouquet, collect your glances
like fine silver spoons. Now that we're back

in the same room, I catalog the things I would not lose:
gray blazer, tiny glass for dessert wine,
the bell-stemmed succulent leaning
toward a new light,

outlines of touch we cut from the hours
falling around us like pamphlets
over an endangered, wartime city,

and the quiet, the quiet like invisible portraits
upon the walls. What have I to say?
It doesn't matter, for on the bed
your shirt sings its leaving dirge
to skin, and I am almost
climbing in.

Death and Taxes and

My hair is all over her hands.
This is not a sexy observation, all the black unfinished
filaments lopped from my scalp, divested
of origin, destination. I am small
so I pretend

I'm in a car, hundreds of miles away,
near Pocatello, perhaps,
where Justin and I rubbed our heads
against the car's interior gray,
blue static bright between us
like a symbol I would spend the rest of my life
forgetting, the invisible reason
revealed as particle, wave,
time's measuring stick
paralleled to his hair,
making blond holes in the dream
my neck had become.

That isn't how it happened. It was me
on *his* shoulder, me he sighed
into that breach of maleness, and what I am
even now, black falling from my head
like stale pieces of night under the twin moons
of the stylist's hands, veined
with what happens
to the literal body, the minutes
radiating toward the black sun
of distance
as my silence pales
like fingertips just after
the letting go.

Betrayal

I left my best friend
to be with boys whose bodies
beckoned, even then. I slipped
through the slit between them.

Aiden, who spent lunch period
catching a red dragonfly—
no one knew he was gone
until he strolled back into class,
gave me the frantic buzzing thing.
He whispered *for you* so close to my ear
I forgot.

A lifetime later,
I wonder
if he—perhaps in arms
that give him
to himself—
ever remembers me,
dragonfly eyed and alone,

if he chooses from among
my twenty thousand portraits

the most good, the most beautiful
inversion, makes the image true.

The Outlier, Sleeping Alone

I'm tired of narrow beds in poems.
I prefer a queen-sized bed myself,

memory-foam topped, feather-soft
all the way down to Atlas Himself,

balancing It All on His nose like a bad dream.
I would like to extend my sympathies,

say, You don't have to be a clown.
Instead I read, I eat the lonely,

their *l'appel du vide*, their untranslatable *toska*, their exhausted *sangfroid*
while infomercials sift sugar from the dark air.

It falls softly on me, like a soothing voice.
When He wants to play our little game

and the bed shakes,
I wrap an arm around my inner beast

and hold my breath as He
pretends to hold back a sneeze.

Regarding a Beautiful Figure from the Supine Mind's Eye

The almost barren tree.
Wet pavement, slush
soaking the back of my mind.
Get me out of here, conductor. My face
is my ticket. I have nothing
I cannot misplace. That figure
playing Chopin, for instance, he's a slice
of beauty. Seems so close:
the universe, what a slap,
a tease.

—but then
I have always been given to self-pity.
What else, when one has too little
faith to blame the gods, when memory becomes
a metal sound slanting into light,
catching there like a thought in amber?

Oh, me. Oh me oh my. The hour
is frowning; I've done something wrong.
I've clung to the branch
of the moment like a dry leaf.
Or the branch refuses
to let go. In this circle
of who owes whom,
in the middle, wind: pushing
at the doors, a rabid radius.
The light jingles
open, having mistaken
itself for a door.

Like He Owns the Place

Dust on the scrap of countertop.
Mass produced artifacts
fogging the place, light
dripping thick on faux-brick black
walls, and the barista calls *J.D.*,
J.D. You jetsam doctor,
you heavy star bending the room
toward you,

smooth anonymous
pale skin and silver gaze
like a letter from beauty itself,
asking to be
suffered—on your paper vessel
write a law, a little one:

let bygones be watered at noon,
a bird in a dog is worth a day,
never crumple an emptiness,
a sorrow saved becomes you.

Look at me. I wait
like a child
given an exact sum,
eyes sand-dollar wide
for a sweet and the promise of it heavy
in the future's golden hand
and shaking.

Narcissus, Lapsing

All night you give me dreams of travel and falling
in love. Now it is morning I'm already in the bookstore,
the coffee shop, the mall, spending the tarnished silver
of my indivisible nation of solitude, INC,

nothing but
memories and mirrors
shaking at me,

my eyes are scrimmed green
with your afterglow—or shall I choose
the easier story, have I merely looked
too long at the sun? Dear Lord,

you're an asshole, a bastard,
you little fucker you. I quote:
it is not good for man to be alone...
well, it's noon and here I am,
you having sent me
merely to the cold cheek of the AC.
If you aren't

a fiction, why not be
a better writer, why not
pray to me
now and then?

In March, I Would Bless the Lord

but the lists of what we've lost
are everywhere. They bloom
from bus stop trash cans,
they line the faces of passers-by,
take donations
at all hours. What have I

to write? Faith's ultraviolet
wavers on pavement after snow, what was
hidden become sudden surface,
sun on my skin,
pleasure dancing on the head of longing's

pin. Next door, the police are looking for my neighbor
gone one day more than the man
who called himself word
made world. I remember

her voice like a river full of rubies
cooing her son to sleep, song through thin
walls taking me too.

Bastard, savior, name your price. I pray, close
my eyes when the stone begins
to roll, whether we are to receive the angel
or its absence. Uncoil fingers from my fist:
count the cost. Count again.

Shooting with Tinnitus

tinnitus: n, *pathology*. a ringing or similar sensation of sound in the ears.

His fingers are children
frolicking on the black fields of the gun.
My fingers are just fingers, gripping hard.
I cover the orange clay pigeons with the red dots
and they shatter, one after another, as shells fall
to murky water. He loves my fast blood,
how it fills his larynx with chimes,
and in my body all the doors to all the rooms
are flung open by a metal wind.
He has so much to say. I take my aim.

At the Circus Club

It's as if happiness were branded
onto his face: he can't stop smiling,
this man who rolls up in a wheelchair only to stand

and shake his ass in the dancing crowd. His teeth
are black, monumental. I stare,
misstep with three women

as we dance around the invisible
reason for dancing. The man shakes
his way over to a woman who looks like a mourner

in a neverending funeral procession
only to be ignored, though he tries
and tries, juggling his one happy
bowling pin again, again,

while the crowd falls all over itself, all
agiggle, and the night paces its cage,
and finally she extends her hand.

Meanwhile, my partners have lost interest
and who can blame them?
My eyes, those teeth...Voilà,
is it loneliness, making its mockery
of what bodies could be,

stretching air so you could walk it
tightropelike? There's God at the middle:
growing shadow, ceramic smile, falling

into the man who can't be sad
and the woman who can't be happy
as they twirl in the dark

and I reach out my hand.

You Leave, and

for you

my breath like cold glass
breaks. In the general traffic
of my body, your absence rests.
In the gas station parking lot
the pumps begin
clearing their throats;
fluorescent lights
blink back tears
and prices skyrocket.
The roads knot themselves
into a gray skein. This
is awkward. You were

to be the hero, I made
a hole in the narrative. Here
the attendant siphons night
into mason jars,
adds straws and
those little parasols.
His tongue is a flame
he will drown
in thirst. He passes a drink
to each customer,
sweeps up my breath
and places each shard
like a delicate morsel
on my tongue. When I spit,
he smiles

and gathers each piece,
makes of them
a single pane
I look through, watch
as the Lord unthreads you
like horizon from sky.

The Lord, Walking in the Evening

and the serpent said, Ye shall not surely die. —Genesis 3:4

Shadow of a crow
falls down a brick wall
and into the dream
of grass, a new century
of need. I take light

like glue into my hands
and kneel, wanting never
to be moved, though what I mean
I could not say.

Insects stick to my skin
and die. A grey jumping spider
passes over me, wisdom seeping
from her eight-eyed gaze—

I've lost the mood for metaphor,
and no one's telling me what to do.
The day gestures to my decisions—
mine, the first lie.
What of it? I will call for help

but tomorrow, or after forty days
and forty nights of my subject's prayers
have covered me. See how easily

I betray myself. How I want any hands
will have me. The bird is returning to its perch
but the shadow sticks
to my hands. I bend

to lick. The subject always knew
something was wrong. How the world
woke with a start, slivered in
like the wind I was and sent
into the dark.

(Limited Vita)

Central Washington University | MA, TESOL (with Russian second major), *June 2018*

Eastern Washington University | MFA, Creative Writing, 3.99 *June 2016*

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Lewis F. Archer outstanding graduate in English. Foci: Creative writing, literary editing. Theology minor. 3.685 GPA.

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TEACHING

CWU | Graduate Instructor, English, 2016-18

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WORK APPEARING OR FORTHCOMING IN

Tin House, *Stirring*, *Willow Springs*, *The Cresset*, *Ruminate*, *Rock & Sling*, and King County's "Poetry on Buses" program

ACADEMIC

::"Deja Everything: Surrealism in Contemporary American Poetry" | Panelist, Montana Book Festival '15

::Presented a portfolio of poems at the National Undergraduate Literature Conference (Utah 2012)

WORK & VOLUNTEER

Spokane Community College

Spokane, WA | Present

Writing Center Tutor

Facilitate language-level and idea-level learning in student papers. Help with revision, editing, proofreading, confidence, and overall clarity. If language is the shape of thought, I help people to think, in a way—hopefully—that integrates intellect, emotion, and the body in order to produce papers that use language as effectively as possible.