


Spring 2020

Human memory as a sequence of recursive algorithms

Hannah E. Cobb

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HUMAN MEMORY AS A SEQUENCE OF RECURSIVE ALGORITHMS

A Thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

Spokane, Washington

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

By

Hannah E. Cobb

Spring 2020

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I

the derelict spacecraft pretends that mission control is still listening,
 tries to reassure them

the year after its launch,

Sputnik

* * *

returned, collapsing, giving up
 its reflections
 of the sun.

wanted,
 finally,
 warmth
 succumbed
 to gravity,
 burned
 in atmosphere

* * *

but don't worry about me
 out here, far from any orbit

I am learning
 the delight
 of missing objects

the derelict spacecraft wants you to talk about not talking about the
things you are not talking about

o
if i say
<everything>is

* * *

daisies, daisies
d-a-i-s-i-e-s
day—
day lilies
daylilies
daylilililililies

* * *

will you
(()) & will you
ever—

the derelict spacecraft is just trying to be honest

o

~y~o~u said

<<i dont trust you>>

<<i dont trust>>

<<i dont>>

& i

* * *

& you

just brought me here

drew my blood

gave me milk-sogged cereal

to replace it

& i am trying to hold my consciousness close

* * *

i was too afraid to tell you

how afraid i was.

Portrait of the Evaporating Child Wearing One Red Shoe

Light still falls on the girl who sits alone on the playground, scooping small rocks into her shoe. She places her foot inside it, wants to see how far she can walk holding pain close, searches for a metaphor that can hold her.

The sun, impartial, warms even her hungry skin. Distant stars, unseen in daytime glare, fuse atoms, send light, silently enter her atmosphere. Perhaps they carry off what they can hold of her sorrow. The rest spills, the way gravel gives under footsteps.

Once, a voice like the sun's light broke through clouds and told her: speak and she searched for the language stored in her bones, the parts of self illuminated in fading light.

One Last Memo from The Exhausted Astronaut

My heart was written into an old film
from those decades when our lungs ached
with the terrain of touch. The dead girl we saw
on the news was lifted from the factory of quiet,
but not before her feet sank beneath
the earth. We occupy
so we can become. Ghosts perform
terrible silence, studded with
resolutions for
the organization of self.

The heart specializes in impossible promises,
the tortures of magnetism. I am trying
to create a daguerreotype of gratitude, to understand
the bloodstained property of longing. I am trying to foster
troubles, to charm strength.

I am turning this rocket around.
Please let me try to rest.

The Robot Barista Greet Megachurch Guests

smiles / as you approach / has a face / made for
smiling / cheeks / dimpled attractively / never stops
/ smiling / calls you honey / makes you feel /
connected / / takes your order / smiles / while she
makes your latte / doesn't say / goodbye / says / god
bless

Formula for Testimony

devour me in simile

in *like* in *like* in as

become my metonymy

you in place of

me the sacrifice

death *to self*

to the world

in the flesh

take up your cross

arrange me by marionette strings

dollhands folded on my lap

dolleyes stare ahead

passive

receptacle for your emotions

your theologies

your opinions on my

worldly flesh

become me to make me something

other

tell me i am *beautiful* now

tell me

i have become *transcendent* tell me

i will never transcend i will never

never

feed me *total depravity* *penal substitutionary atonement* *homo incurvatus in se*

remind me that the only path to goodness goes through pain negate me
let me hope for ruin

engulf me in the loving arms of inescapable affliction
let me drown

The Evaporating Child Dreams of Fire

The match almost looks like a crayon, so after it falls into the bright box, she reaches for it without looking up from her drawing. Her sleeping mind does not know this fragile difference between innocence and destruction. She presses the match to the paper, watches flames catch. A blurred moment, and she stands outside, watches smoke billow from neat windows. She inhales. Smells the weight of things that hunger to be destroyed. Her lungs try to manufacture air from smoke. She whispers apologies while her tears disappear into the heat.

Counterpoints, With a Quote from Paula White

*“I’m downloading
heaven
I’m not downloading
what this world
has to say.
I’m not downloading
the negativity of
what everything else
says.
Every day
I get inside information
directly from—
because I have
access into
the throne room
by the blood
of Jesus.”*

You’re creating
earth
you are creating
how that star
gives from knowing
you are creating
the agreement of
who a person
is.
Just once,
you are outside,
unknowing,
you are
barred from
the table
by the bones
of another.

I’m buying
sky.
I’m buying
the ignorance
of the moon
I’m buying
discord, disagreements,
the contradictions
that create a person.
Again,
I am within, a known
secret.
I am
feasting
beside
the hands
of the laborers.

You’re selling
nothing.
You’re vending
the inaccessible
knowledge of emptiness.
You’re hawking
harmony, agreement,
the dissolution
of self.
You are never
outside yourself,
never unknown.
You
are hungry.
You
are
alone.

The Robot Barista Reflects on National Tragedy

there was never a time / before the war / my
earliest memory / my robot family clustered /
around the data / feed / watching planes /
crash into / buildings / reverse / crash again /
then all anyone said was / god bless /
 / and god save / / and
we must fight / / and
this / must / never / happen / again

Deux Enfants sont Menacés par un Rossignol

After Max Ernst

Sun yawns over stone
buildings, stone children,
inside the open gate.

*When you aren't sure where to
begin, return to childhood.
Remember the moments you
still cannot explain*

Ernst deems the nightingale
threatening, and who are we
to say otherwise? But viewed
from here, it is a tiny detail in
a small frame. So easy to miss.

*One day at school your two
best friends decided, again, not
to talk to you. While you
wandered the playground,
absorbed in your thoughts,
they discovered a box of
tampons. Tried to guess what
they were for.*

Everything is so still. The
children pause mid-leap. The
sky grows dark in horizontal
bars.

*Later, you walked by the tree
where they had hung the
tampons on branches by their
strings. It looked like a late-
spring Christmas tree, decked
with strange elongated
marshmallows.*

The painting is covered by
glass. It stops my hand before
I can reach the house. The
glass mirrors my face. I cannot
close the gate to keep the
children safe.

*Someone cleared the tree
overnight You three walked on
sunny school fields, friendly
again. A nightingale-reflection
flew just past your eyebrow.*

The Evaporating Child Would Like You to Stop Asking What Six Times Seven Equals

She can count it slowly on her fingers, but she'd rather not, knowing that you'll watch and tell her she ought to have it memorized by now. She'd rather not hear you discuss calculus either. She doesn't know what an integral is, but she knows it makes her dizzy. Next year, at Halloween, she will invent a way to dress herself as mathematics—the scariest costume she can imagine, since it seems impossible to dress as failure. No one at school will understand the outfit, so she'll smile and explain, pointing to the numerals, Greek letters, long division problems, each cut from cheerful construction paper, hanging by strings pinned to her arms and legs. She already knows how to live as an unsolvable equation.

Ritual for Divulging Secrets

it's called *shaking out* you must shake out before using the bathroom

before showers

before sleeping

clothed or stripped down to underwear

there's a procedure (of course)

cough into your hands

use your fingers to bend your mouth to show your gums

lift your tongue and lower it

run your hands along the seams of your clothes

shirt collar first then

a hand along each sleeve around the seam at the edge

turn out your front pockets

place your hands in your back pockets

run your hands along each pant leg

if you have been allowed to wear shoes remove them before shaking out

if you start shaking out while still wearing shoes

you will have to start all over once you have removed them

if your shoes are still locked in the med closet you have one less thing to worry about

you don't deserve shoes yet you haven't earned them

run your hands along the top of your sock

brush your fingers along the sole

snap your bra front back both sides

at least we're not strip searching you

you'll get used to it

in a month, this will feel normal

it will be all you've ever known

this is to keep you safe from hidden _____, _____, _____, & notes
about running away
you don't want to run anyway
you need to be here
you belong here

years from now your body will still know this language of submission

you will still search yourself still prove you have nothing

The Robot Barista Reads Proverbs 31

is everything / she is supposed to be / buys her
dresses / at strength inc. / and dignity co. / laughs /
without fear / without humor / without rusting her /
metal joints / she laughs / because your joke was / so
funny / no / it didn't make her / wish / she could
dismantle / her perfect cogs / gears / pulleys / become
nothing more / than a pile of perfect / machinery

the derelict spacecraft would like to issue the following apology

& o

i began to believe your^gravity
to pull my orbit(closer)

* * *

so when you {said it was time}
for me to „apologize
i crawled on my belly
into the [crater]
 {you taught me how}

* * *

i counted

<five[> fo]ur ~thr:ee

2 &

the derelict spacecraft is beginning to fear your language (a visual manifest)

o

the way you

say

```

)((+&o8{      "&-- -{ }}+)((+&o &      o int{8o, #+~&8#o8o-- &o int}}      "      &#
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```

can(i)rewire

re program

is there still

time

to become

unharmd?

the derelict spacecraft tries, again, to define beauty

anything but

daisies/lilacs/peonies

do-forget-me /roses/

* * *

but (me)

?

but will you trust my

hull(breach)engine(failure)broken

plate[]glass[]windows

* * *

only

the cruel hands

of an absent mechanic

II

the derelict spacecraft does not belong in your open skies

o

[bury m]e in~earth

let dust se[tt]le into` the crater

i will leave <<behind>

* * *

even a brok[en] vacuum

is `right

[twice]

correct, but without`

{beauty}

* * *

once (i) hoped (you)

could (save ^ me) & learned

this new `atmosphere ignites

every [brok]en thing

the derelict spacecraft tries to not belong to you anymore

but o

how you held my {mind}

how -i- -thought-

* * *

thought//you//would

keep it safe

(for me / from me)

* * *

it's been years _____ but

i only just noticed:

your voice still ((echoes)) in recursive algorithms

the derelict spacecraft tries to comfort the lost spirits of Apollo 1

so what if you never found the sky?

* * *

even the explosion (()) could not destroy the witness of
 fraying wires at your feet
 your last breaths
 heavy

 with
 oxygen

* * *

your memory is held
in histories

perhaps this, too,
is a kind of home

Again, This Same Fearfulness

It's as though some urgent soul is programming my mind's operating system and believes I can prevent my body's decay by monitoring its every sensation. Is my hand going numb? Is it now? Is it now? My internet search yields an insight: numbness is often a symptom of anxiety attack. Possibly my mind has been betraying me all along. Or maybe it was always my body. I send another email to my doctor. I am here in the closed circuit, infinite loop that returns me to questions of time and what to do about its end. It's the roller coaster I cannot exit: I paid my fee and now I must sit still as the ride attendant straps me in, pulls the lap bar snug against me and I fall.

The Robot Barista Thinks You Are an Inspiration

you / with so much / wisdom / about the birds / and
where they nest / and what it means / to transcend /
to ascend / to pretend / to be like a sparrow / wise as
serpent / but not temptress / you must / never be

But I Am Still an Asteroid Slowly Breaking

I scatter pieces of self as I'm flung along my orbit—
a confetti-rain of blood and bones.

* * *

And they don't give you words for what they do to you, so you invent your own.
(I met a child once who named each of her tumors after cartoon dogs.)

Is it breaking in if the building was unlocked, abandoned?
Lead paint peeling from the wall in green avalanches,
asbestos raining, filing cabinets still full
half-remembered histories, no more room for terror.

* * *

As photos flooded me, I knew that place was my not-home,
like the place I went when a house
could no longer hold the fires of my longing.

* * *

And they told me to count:
the snags in the carpet/the birds that slammed into the window/the wires exposed by the
hole I punched in the wall/the number of days until I was allowed to wear my hair in a braid.
(After I left, I wore my hair braided for a month.)

* * *

The magma lives cozily beneath the volcano,
but if it finds freshwater,
something new will shatter.

The Evaporating Child Musters a Moment of Courage

She pulls life jacket straps tight,
 unsure of buoyancy's trustworthiness,
 looks down from the cliff.

Her breathing shallows,
 the jacket drawing her closer to herself.

She can gather herself into one moment:
 the instant where she decides to be
 brave, to plummet
 into deep water, back toward the rafts,
 the guides, and the bit of shore
 where she started climbing.

Into the river—and
 for a moment, all she knows
 is water depth cold,

then the inexorable life jacket
 lifting.

Blueprint for Vulnerability

it's not what you think

the monster under my bed is still there

it followed me all the way here

even though

i sent it graduation announcements

one after the other

begging

i've grown now

find someone new

to break

it just bares its teeth and sharpens its claws idly on the nail file it pilfered

then it yawns terribly and curls up below my bed

to dream

i'd like to use that space under my bed to store all these documents i have piled up

these papers proving i am very grown up

they accumulate like snow

i leave them scattered in piles on desks and in drawers

when the heater clicks on

classnotes/certificateofcompletion/paystubs/checksiforgottocash/outdatedresumes

/attemptedmanuscripts/oldleases/postcardsineversent/todolists/forgottenartprojects/

whirl

following

the vent's

warm air

a story now

disordered

toward

erasure

like

these

memories

i

cannot

hold

The Robot Barista Stays in the Lobby During the Worship Service
Because Your Pews Were Not Built to Accommodate Android
Bodies

thank god / you have tv screens out here / and in the
bathrooms / so i can still hear / you tell me about hell
/ while i close up the till / while i count today's
earnings / while i rewire my inner organs / thank god
/ for this lobby / where the mother / and her crying
infant / can still hum along / with the praise band /
while not disturbing anyone / with their unvirtuous
anger

The Bankrupt Mechanic Admits that Everything She Knows about
Spaceships was Learned from Watching *Firefly*

*Sometimes a thing breaks, can't be fixed,
it's just an object, doesn't mean what you think.*
An object in the fading oxygen supply
my lungs try to innovate, use what they can find
but all they bring is fire:
it follows air into my bloodstream
inhabits
the breaks
in me.

Once I thought I knew how to end suffering
numbered steps that would repair the engine, life support
so we could fly back home (but I had thought
the sky was my home)
steps that guide you to pull apart the cables
re-wire the grav thrusters
until you see that what was once a spaceship
is now a broken house
or an empty interstellar tin can
(*a mystery meal.*)

When they came for you,
black SUV, dark windows
your mother said
“she’s in her room.”

You were putting on winter boots: you thought
you’d see the snow that day. You learned
they can—anyone can—
take the sky.

The Robot Barista Plants a Garden

this is where / it all happens / growth / bearing fruit
/ the constant struggle / to become / enough / by
becoming / always better / the struggle against the
sun / the way it / dehydrates / as it nourishes / the
struggle against earth / good and bad soils / among
other plants / try to stand out / to not be like the
others / to not be strangled

The Evaporating Child Evaporates from Me

I am thinking today of the spaces between recollection, like this photograph. It must have been taken by someone I knew, the last year summer camp was good. I failed the swim test, so sat on the shore of the lake while everyone learned to kayak. A mosquito landed on my copy of *The Two Towers* and I snapped the book shut. I hadn't considered the fractal of gore its death would leave on the page: a wordless elegy. I still have the book, so every time Meriadoc enters Fanghorn Forest, I remember. And I still have this photo, which I developed later that day. When I look at it I remember the smell of chemicals in the darkroom, and watching my figure appear in shades

of gray, but I can't say who held the camera to frame
my unsmiling face between aspens. The tyranny of
memory presents my child-self as an isolated figure,
but someone must have pushed the button to click
the shutter closed. Did we scribble our addresses in
each other's notebooks, and promise to keep in
touch?

Acedia

Desert Fathers nicknamed it *the noonday demon*: that impulse that propelled them out of eremitic caves, turned them back toward Constantinople, its gilded glory. Acedia seems always to strike me in May. The weather turns and I suddenly want to adopt a puppy or maybe a boyfriend or cut my hair or open another credit card or learn a new language or toss everything I own out the window, book-pages fluttering as they fall. The icon of the woman framed by the drive-through window tells me that breakfast sandwiches are two for five today and I say *I'll take two then, thank you* and as I wash down the last bite with lukewarm soda, I wonder if this is how I will die, sitting alone in my car past midnight making meaningless choices. Two breakfast sandwiches, green eyeshadow, plastic

cups and paper napkins. Hoping that the man I texted yesterday will text me back today, although I'm not sure if I actually like him or if I'm just bored, but when we walked to the waterfall and just stood there quietly, together, watching, I let go of restlessness and contemplated the water as pulse after pulse met the concrete base of the bridge, then flowed back to meet the rest.

the derelict spacecraft begs to be freed from the inevitability of
memory

o

let ((me)) not think of
the white room/stark walls/hard carpeted floor/muted voices from outside/the only place
where ((i)) lost ((my)) breath

* * *

the locked door turns in-
-to (burning) gardenias

* * *

ashes fill the room
&the inevitable vacuum
embraces

the derelict spacecraft longs to re-learn anger

you
 re-compiled me
 (replaced all *fire* with *quiet*
 (useless))

* * *

left me
 with
 fear&

-- -a-guttering ell-- - -ee- - -dee --- -

* * *

&o
 i would like to feel
 the flames along my hull
 ((again))

citing malfunctioning circuitry, the derelict spacecraft begins to fall
away from the memory of you

i fall

through the motherboard of your longing
wings flapping uselessly
through empty air

* * *

i plead for rest, for return, an eternity

| | | | |
|------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| you | me | falling | |
| into the golden wiring | | | of an unexplored solar system |
| at dawn | | at twilight | asteroids |
| at midnight | cleaving | a | chasm |

* * *

between

(
so

feather-soft

) us

III

the derelict spacecraft runs a diagnostic to assess current damage

o

long ago, I { } you

& trust became

sparks[and rust]

* * *

but this one—

shiny new orbit appearing

to change the

//unchangeable//

vacuum

* * *

did_it_come_here

to re/pair

bro/ken cir/cuit/boards?

the derelict spacecraft needs to be reminded that the present is not
the past

[[you]

were [percussive//maintenance]]

a blunt+object to

every broken+circuit

* * *

he

kisses disconnected~wires

believes

even broken machines{{ }}

* * *

but o

when you think you are a (nail)

every

thing

looks

like

a (hammer)

the derelict spacecraft searches the internet for the definition of love

an erasure from Merriam-Webster

noun

\ 'ləv \

(Entry 1 of) 1a(1): [tender]]ness

felt , or ((
assurance))
of the sea

{his first
informal address}

* * *

4a: unselfish benevolent fatherly concern

God for (2): [[brother] concern]

for others b: *adoration of 5: a *god (Eros) or

of 6: an amorous AFFAIR

* * *

7: the sexual score of zero (as GOD

: holding one's opponent

in

affection)

The Crew of Apollo 13 Reports from Lunar Orbit

Houston, now that your radio waves can't reach, all we hear is the regular beeping of life support, pathetic buzzing of the alarm that tells us we have little water left. We ignore the dying alarms, ignore the silence that follows their death, ignore the cold. Jim says he sees a moon-monster in the shadows. He keeps yelling *there it is!* and then floats away, doubled over laughing. Jack watches the dials in case we orbit ourselves into gimbal lock. Our radio waves disturb the still surface of the moon. Old jokes are suddenly funny again. Fred slaps his knee, says *tell it again—the one about the talking dog*. And we tell it again, because here we remember only three jokes, and in the other two, everyone dies alone. If mission control

could reach us here, they would say *curl up in the cold capsule, leave consciousness behind a while*. We open another pack of caffeine tablets. We don't sleep, but we still dream—all of us the same fevered caffeine-dream: a childhood day marred by finding a dead baby rabbit on the road. Even then, now, realizing no earth-thing goes on forever. And you were there, Houston, pacing in meetings, flipping switches attached to nothing.

Houston, we dream of you.

Autumn Cinquains

someone
 forgot to turn off
 the sprinklers tonight
 air below freezing sheets of ice
 coat leaves

iced-over
 blades of grass bright
 outside my car's windows
 while I drive at midnight looking
 for calm

I once
 was supple soft
 before cold night sprinkled
 apprehension on me and I
 I froze

layered
 in frozen drops
 each blade is unnatural
 yet glistening softly brings me
 delight

and me
driving alone
until I can reassemble
myself who will be delighted
with me?

The Robot Barista Tries Hard to be Sad Without Being Bitter

bitterness is / unladylike / unfeminine /
unandroidlike / inappropriate / might upset people /
and besides that / i want to acknowledge / what is still
/ holy / about this shiny world / with its tv screens /
and robotic coffee stands / and good intentions

The Glass Delusion

will you understand what I mean when I tell you that today
my teeth feel fragile?

in the fifteenth century, doctors were baffled by patients who believed
their bodies were constructed from glass.

the patch I sewed on my jacket begins to unmend itself,
frayed threads stretching away from the fabric.

I was away from the house when the thunderstorm began. the dog,
afraid, somehow shut herself in the closet

in the flooded street, the water rose to the knees
of the man directing traffic.

I could hear the barking, but not locate it. I turned on a flashlight
walked through the house, listening

one princess believed she had swallowed a glass piano in a time out of memory.
walked sideways through doorways for fear of shattering.

the dog must have been in there for hours. when I found her
the closet smelled like piss.

I cut apples into slices in case my teeth have become suddenly glass. Most days,
I believe too much in my own mortality.

Hypochondriac's First Kiss

this wasn't

awake all night carrying the dread of dying

wasn't

scouring the internet for a diagnosis

wasn't even

aware of every sensation

waiting for something within me to break

it was

you

leaning toward me

and i

forgot

my body

you

pressing against

my lips

and i

curled into your warmth

and there, in the silence of things not-yet-said, it became good to be these bodies,
precariously full with blood. i forgot to worry that something would shatter.

i opened my eyes and the saints on the apartment wall looked at me, pausing in the midst
of their martyrdoms

then i closed my eyes,

trusted

my quickening pulse.

Autumn Cinquains

again
time to tuck these
red leaves in leaves of books
flatten them to preservable
bright things

once I
thought I saw him
from afar a man who
almost loved me disappeared in
falling leaves

I will
go to see you
my love falling strands of
my red hair will twine into your
jacket

yellow
leaves quiver on
aspens when the wind blows
harsh their branches scrape your rooftop
and moan

winds howl

winter darkness

gathers time's horizon

let yellow-red leaves fall only

hold me

arrest

my decay between

warm book-pages of your

attention watch my fluttering

descent

Poem Without H. Pylori Bacteria

What I had taken to be crushing existential dread turned out to only be a stomach ulcer. No, actually, not even a stomach ulcer, if I'm honest. The doctor said it was on the way to being one, but the final diagnosis, which she typed efficiently into the computer, was "gastritis." An irritation, an inflammation. Still, I loved and hated the way *ulcer* sounded, the way it made me into a stereotype of a stereotype. The way it finally gave me a reason to sit on the couch and catch up on this season of *The Bachelor*. I know I should hate that show, but there's something about the way that Chris Harrison comes onto the screen to tell everyone that it's the final rose, even when we can already see that there's only one

rose left on the table. But thanks, Chris Harrison for telling us something we already know. I know I should also thank my body for breaking down, just enough to let me catch my breath for a goddamn second. I should thank my body, and text my sister about what Tammy said about Kelsey, and sing along with the jingles in the commercial breaks and believe with all my heart that this brightness from the television screen will always light my way, and none of our beautiful bodies will ever slip into an uncertain darkness.

Waking in a Hotel Built from a Disused Cathedral

stained-glass morning-light falls to your face,
your arm, wrapping around me
your breath slow and almost-awake.
I slip away to the kitchenette.
the coffee maker gurgles and spits.
morning.

the building creaks in the cold air:
echoes of the prayers it used to carry.

oh,
I used to be so afraid of my body, mistrusting its flesh
but here my skin still feels new in the places
you have touched. jewel-toned light
brushes arms, hips, breasts.

you are asleep, and I am alone to contemplate
the ways I have departed from who I thought I'd be.
but here, perhaps, some ghostly-holy hand reaches,
in blessing, toward my forehead

and this morning I do not flinch away.

The Robot Barista Serves Another Coffee

and another / and / / getting lost in your
work / brings you closer to / your customers / to
humans / servant leadership / or at least /
servanthood / gears in her head whirr / keeping her
smile in place / executing the code for / have a nice
day / she becomes / / now she doesn't even
have to / think

Losing It

Afterwards he rested his head on my chest and slept.
I lay still, listening to the quiet calm inside me. I was
a thin flame beneath my skin.

The preachers had told me I would become
a chewed piece of gum or a worn-out
pair of shoes. But instead I was

whiskey poured over ice,
skein of yarn unspooling toward a sweater,
beam of light filtering through dust particles.

A Prayer to the Astronauts in Orbit above Me

I would ask you what you can see from up there, what you can hear, but I'm afraid I no longer want to know.

Two days ago, I arrived at my boyfriend's apartment with a basket of clean laundry and grocery bags full of canned food and dry pasta. We prepared to shelter in place. We hear sounds of the neighbors through apartment walls: snoring, fucking, laughing, dogs barking. As predictable as the beeping of the equipment that monitors your oxygen. It's hard to write much of anything now, when I'm not sure whether any of it matters. Hard to write a poem when I know that every other poet is writing the same poem—the one about human beings sequestered six feet away from each other. Six feet, I'm told, is the wingspan of a vulture, the length of a llama, the

height of my brother. When I take a walk outside, I imagine my brother lying on the sidewalk between myself and other pedestrians. This is how I know whether I am safe. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I still admire what you do, the advances you are making up there in low-earth orbit, but I no longer wonder what it is like to be you: to hear the glug-glug of the rocket fuel draining out of its tank right before you feel the weight of explosion several stories beneath you propelling you toward the unknown. I'm already there.

Duplex: Turkey Ekphrastic

After Jericho Brown

“Residents are finding it hard to coexist with their 20-pound feathered neighbors.”

— *Linda Poon, CityLab*

Perhaps I have misjudged everything.

In Thailand, monkeys are fighting in streets.

The monkeys fight in mobs in Thailand:

The tourists who used to feed them have gone.

Fearing infection, the tourists have gone.

I stay in my house and look through the window.

Alone in my house with nothing but windows,

I watch the turkeys wander the street.

A gang of turkeys stops cars on the street.

More of them move to the city each year.

Moving to cities, scavenging trash

in neighborhoods. We stay in our houses.

In our houses, where we become wilderness.

Perhaps I have misjudged everything.

the derelict spacecraft enters the atmosphere at an unknown speed

o

this is what it is to be

wanted

pulled into air, through air, by

air—falling without fear

without—

* * *

ignition(hull breach)]

ignition.systems (failure). ignition

red-alert. ignite. ignite.

ignite—

* * *

now I am a burning point

glistening through dusks above

(earths' darkened oceans)

the derelict spacecraft doesn't want to be afraid of him, but

can anything [[warm]]

(unholy) metal

after the

coldness ^ of ^ space

* * *

cameras break

amid ((too much (brightness)))

mechanical joints stick in place`

~filthy~with

dust

from asteroids

* * *

an e x p a n d i n g

universe

will never offer

uncomplicated starlight

the derelict spacecraft sings a plagiarized love song

o

my love is a red, red—red-redr[edr]ed[red]alert
 an alert is an alert is an al-
 ert [alert] the way he holds[my]—

* * *

let us go[then],let us
 [go]—let us—you and
 you & desire &
 let[us]go

* * *

{twinkle}l[it]tle
 like a diamond in the
 [sky]how I [wonder]how
 I [wonder ho]w you
 will [br]eak me

Coda

Descending

You are sitting
somewhere in the sky and the pilot
has turned off the cabin lights. The windows
shut out glowing cities below. You set your book
down, settle yourself into the rigid seat and try to sleep.

Silent wings bring you closer to me, descending in swoops
that drop your stomach with you. Weariness
still clings to you like stray dust in your
pockets. And I am trying not to miss
you. You will be here soon.

The plane's wingtips illuminate, casting small lights into the sky between us.

Duplex: Black Hole Ekphrastic

Light orbits at the end of the universe,
It fuses with darkness, is torn.

United with darkness, tearing apart—
Into the singularity of dense space.

Everything comes together in dense space.
A scientist at her computer, on Earth,

A scientist types algorithms,
Stitching together pieces of waves.

Threading radio waves together—
The image: dark circle, surrounded by light.

Dense dark circle, surrounded by light,
The photon orbit casts glowing shadow.

The orbiting photons glow strangely,
Light orbits the end of the universe.

the derelict spacecraft's repaired optical circuits are overcome by
the beauty of the moon

careening through space i behold
 through space i behold
 space i behold

* * *

i behold a breath of free air
i behold a breath of free
i behold a breath

* * *

free air that for now will guide
 will guide
 will guide
 behold —

Notes

- pg. 11 Paula White is the White House spiritual advisor, appointed by Donald Trump in November 2019. The italicized portion of this poem is a quote taken from one of her televangelist speeches.
- pg. 13 This poem is based on a painting of the same name by Max Ernst.
- pg. 28 This poem was written in response to set of photos posted online by urban explorers, which depicts the now-abandoned Academy at Ivy Ridge, a former disciplinary boarding school. The Academy at Ivy Ridge has been accused of fraudulent accreditation and the abuse and torture of teenage residents.
- pg. 33 The italicized portions of this poem are quotes taken from the TV show *Firefly*.
- pg. 38 The term *acedia* was coined by early Christian monks known as the Desert Fathers to describe a state of spiritual restlessness—or the impulse to leave one’s desert cave and spiritual practices and return to the city. I am indebted to Dr. Gerald Sittser for this and other information from his scholarship in early Christian history.
- pg. 46 This poem is an erasure of the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary’s definition of “love” accessed July 2019. Some punctuation has been added.
- pg. 47 I wrote this poem shortly after reading the book *Thirteen: The Apollo Flight that Failed* by Henry S. F. Cooper Jr. Many of the events of the poem are fictionalized, but I am indebted to Cooper’s writing for helping me establish the tone of the poem and for explaining technical concepts, such as gimbal lock.

- pg. 49 The cinquain is a syllabic form developed by Adelaide Crapsey. I am grateful to Jonathan Johnson for introducing me to Crapsey's work.
- pg. 60 The line "a thin flame beneath my skin" is adapted from Mary Barnard's translation of Sappho: "a thin flame runs under/my skin."
- pg. 63 The duplex is a poetic form invented by Jericho Brown, which is featured prominently in his recent collection *The Tradition*. In the essay "Invention" which he wrote for Poetry Magazine, Brown invites other poets to try their hands at the duplex form. I have gratefully taken him up on this invitation.

Vita

Hannah Elizabeth Cobb

Education

Eastern Washington University, Spokane 2018 - 2020
MFA, Creative Writing

Whitworth University, Spokane, *Cum Laude* 2012 - 2016
Laureate Society Member
BA, English Literature and Theology
Computer Science Minor

Teaching Experience

Composition Instructor, Eastern Washington University 2018 - 2020

Classes Taught: Composition 1
Developmental Composition 1
Composition 2
Introduction to Creative Writing

Relevant Coursework:
Composition Pedagogy: Theory and Practice
Teaching Practicum (3 quarters)

Prepared and adapted course materials to ensure student success
Adapted standard Composition 1 materials to better suit the needs of developmental students
Created curriculum for Introduction to Creative Writing and shared curriculum with other instructors
Adapted standard Composition 2 materials to suit the needs of an online class in accordance with COVID-19 social distancing measures
Scheduled and conducted individual conferences with students; held regular office hours
Collaborated with other instructors including grade-norming sessions, curriculum development, mentoring and support of new graduate instructors

- Volunteer, Spark Central 2018 - 2020
 Facilitated various events and activities for the patrons of Spark Central, including planning and executing educational after-school activities with a focus on writing for children and youth living in the West Central neighborhood.
- Intern, Writers in the Community 2018 - 2019
 Participated in EWU's "Writers in the Community" program in collaboration with Sacred Heart Children's Hospital's "Arts in Healing" program by visiting patients and facilitating brief and interactive writing instruction sessions.
 Curated a variety of written materials to use during these sessions.
 Trained another intern to facilitate sessions with patients.
- Consultant, Whitworth Composition Commons 2014 - 2016
 Collaborated with student writers at Whitworth University through one-on-one consulting.
 Centered consultations around equipping clients with writing skills for future compositions.
 Ensured a comfortable, welcoming, and encouraging learning environment.
 Conducted in-classroom and out-of-classroom writing workshops.
 Assisted in hiring and training new consultants.
 Chair of Technology Task Force.

Professional Experience

- Web Editor, Willow Springs Journal 2018 - 2020
 Helped to maintain the WordPress website and social media feeds for Willow Springs journal.
 Updated Willow Springs website with new content.
 Participated in management meetings and decision-making.
 Read and evaluated submissions to the journal, helped prepare journal for publication.
 Maintained email communications with contributors and staff of other journals to facilitate collaborative projects.
 Participated in hiring and training an Assistant Managing Editor and Assistant Web Editor.
 Hand-printed letterpress broadsides for distribution at AWP.

- Assistant Manager, Global Neighborhood Thrift 2016 - 2018
 Communicated effectively in a multicultural and multi-lingual environment.
 Ensured that all tasks related to closing the store were completed each night.
 Worked independently to process and sort store inventory with efficiency and accuracy.
 Maintained customer and employee safety by calmly addressing various challenging situations.
- Contributing Editor for John Kaites 2016
 Provided constructive feedback to as an independent manuscript consultant.
 Assisted Mr. Kaites in organizing ideas and developing content, wrote and revised substantial portions of the book according to Mr. Kaites' specifications.
- Nonfiction Reader, Script Journal 2016
 Read and evaluated nonfiction submissions to the journal. Met with a small group to discuss pieces and reach decisions for journal publication.
- Missionary Literature Database, Whitworth University 2015
 Collaborated with Dr. Pam Parker to create the prototype to a web database that would allow users to search a collection of documents relating to missionary work in China.
- History Fellowship, First Presbyterian Church of Coeur d'Alene 2015
 Interviewed church members to compile an oral history video of First Presbyterian Church
 Accessed outside resources to expand my knowledge and provide important contextual details.

Presentations, Publications, and Honors

- Prairie Schooner* Forthcoming, Fall 2020
 "Review: *In Accelerated Silence*"
- Green Mountains Review* Forthcoming, June 2020
 "Review: *As One Fire Consumes Another*"
- The Thing With Feathers* 2020
 "Duplex"

- AWP Intro Journals Project 2020
Honorable Mention for "the derelict spacecraft tries, again, to define beauty"
- Willow Springs Magazine* 2020
"A Conversation with D. Nurkse"
- Rock and Sling Blog* 2017 - 2018
"Reading Toward The Stars"
"Environmental Art"
- Northwest Undergraduate Conference on Literature, University of Portland 2016
"Communicating Dependence: Elizabeth I, John Donne, and the Paradox of Self"
- Writing Workshops, Whitworth Composition Commons 2014 - 2016
Visited classrooms as a representative of Whitworth Composition Commons to facilitate learning related to research, peer review, and other topics relevant to university writing skills.
- Script* 2016
"I Come at You Not With Sticks"
"Invocation"
- National Undergraduate Literature Conference, Weber State University 2015
"The Tolling of the Bell: Structure and Time in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*"