

## IFFY THE CRUMBSNATCHER

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Iffy the Crumbsnatcher is a collection of poems and creative writing that examines and embodies a genderqueer, sexually amorphous character called Iffy. Written in a formally experimental style, the poems explore how violence, trauma, and worldly experience merge to shape Iffy's worldview. The dissertation includes a critical preface that theorizes how anxiety about authentic identity and the abject combine to create a poetics of emergency evident in contemporary American avant-garde poetics. Finally, the dissertation concludes with considerations for teaching bulk-time poetry, using liberatory pedagogical strategies, tagmemics, chronotopic lamination, and cultural-historical activity theory as frames for reconsidering how poetry pedagogy can be revised as student-centric and multi-disciplinary.



IFFY THE CRUMBSNATCHER

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Bernard A. Weinert.

C.S.H.

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## CHAPTER I

### TOWARD A POETICS OF EMERGENCY

Many compelling younger American avant-garde poets, those who have published early career books in the twenty-first century with small, independent presses like Fence Books, Action Books, Futurepoem, Black Ocean, and Spork, among several others, share what can be termed a poetics of emergency. Emergency points toward multiplicity, excess, waste, the abject, and the horror of using real and symbolic violence as methods for interrogating established notions of identity construction, both in poems and in the world. A poetics of emergency, as a theory of making, as well as the term “emergency” itself, derives from poems and manifestoes by Duriel E. Harris, Ronaldo V. Wilson, Dawn Lundy Martin, Lara Glenum, and Catherine Wagner that emerged between 2002 and 2006. In 2002, Black Took Collective (BTC), an experimental group formed at a retreat sponsored by the African American literary foundation Cave Canem, composed of Duriel E. Harris, Dawn Lundy Martin, and Ronaldo V. Wilson, published “A Call for Dissonance.” This poetics statement investigates what poet Harryette Mullen’s calls an “anxiety to embody or represent black identity...[that] may impoverish our cultural heritage and simplify the complexity of our historical experience” (qtd. in “Call for Dissonance”132). The “anxiety to embody or represent black identity” creates problems that for BTC members lead to a “poetic struggle” and possibly “impede fresh considerations” (“Call for Dissonance” 132–33). BTC is calling for an alternative, complex poetics, rooted in possibility, that interrogates the prevailing

metanarrative of black identity embodied in an established poetics: “What would it mean to challenge others (and ourselves) to confront the violence and subjugation imposed on the black body by the representational brutality—stifling, iron-caste assumptions—that come from that anxiety?” (“Call for Dissonance” 133). Questioning and complicating the status quo, as a time-tested formula, in favor of alternatives is always a wager. The wager is especially risky when it is invested in a poetics seeking new avenues that directly oppose established African-American poetics with the possibility of excess and the grotesque:

We seek loss, the invasion, the violent and the beautiful release of a body out of control, a body that seeps. We attempt to keep it safe, but it is tortured. Beauty is located, then, not in the surface of the body—sleek, muscular, clothed—but in its endless permutations—its thick, obese, raw, and glorious profusion. (“Call for Dissonance” 133)

As Harris indicates in her poem “Pourmoreformore PoMoFunk dunk, dun paramour’ or Duriel E. Harris’ Bootybone Scattergram scatty pas de qautre in one act,” one must “get down to get up     high” (“Call for Dissonance” 135). This line brings dance to mind in its most literal sense, “getting down,” which stimulates the mind through the body’s movements, sweat, and the social/sexual interplay of bodies. Metaphorically, it reveals how poetry is a type of asynchronous dance between the poets and audience, who get down together in the moment of a performance. It also implies how descent or descending—into the underworld, to the underbelly, seeking the base, the lowest, the roots, the excluded, the abject—is crucial to BTC’s idea of dissonance, and also to a poetics of emergency. In getting down, and the sacred can be reached through the profane.

Orphic desires abide in excess and dissonance. What if everything is lost and one

comes up empty? Emergency's secret is that loss, failure, and inauthenticity are its perverse sustenance. What is gained from the descent? A difference in perspective emerges: a Blakean experience that complicates established perspectives in the aftermath of going down and getting dirty.

The BTC also interrogates “the anxiety to embody or represent black identity” through its performance series “Live Feed from the Black Unconscious,” which uses “improvisational writing produced and projected on stage in real-time” that “documents BTC’s enactment of poetries of inquiry—engaging (and challenging) the psyche’s making of racial consciousness by conceptualizing unconsciousness by means of differential poetic events” (“Accretion” 81). By mixing improvised writing with body-based performance, including “dance moves, rolling on the floor, springing up here or there,” (“Accretion” 81) as well as voice manipulation techniques, the BTC engages, according to E. Patrick Johnson in *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*, how, “[T]he performance paradigm illuminates the mirroring that occurs in culture, the tension between stabilizing cultural forces (tradition), and the shifting, ever-evolving aspects of culture that provide sites for social reflection, transformation, and critique” (Johnson 7). In creating differential poetic events that include the performance’s synchronic screening and the preservation of the improvised texts, the black unconscious manifests as both exigency and exegesis:

The record of this real or imagined event is projected in what is often a phrase, the urge, our wanting to write this down, our pondering between what it means to arrive and to want to arrive from place to race, sex to barrier, the thing taken apart, ultimately undone, so our grids and screens and habits and departures drift into one another. Where we spring up from is where we emerge. And there’s something about

this we don't want to escape. Freedom Resounds: We go back to enter what did or did not happen, a map of our unconscious, in the room(s) and stages we share. ("Accretion" 82).

The performance exceeds its synchronic moment by existing as both event and record, and permits mirroring, doubling, and uncertainty about the authentic representations of race, sex, essential attributes of a self, and objectification. While the BTC's performances include the dance and sweat of bodies in motion, they also move among their own synchronous and asynchronous representations on paper and as memory.

Johnson discusses the possibility for excess opened up by the dialectic between blackness and performance:

[B]lackness does not only reside in the theatrical fantasy of the white imaginary that is then projected onto black bodies, nor is it always consciously acted out; rather it is also the inexpressible yet undeniable racial experience of black people—the ways in which the “living of blackness” becomes a material way of knowing. In this respect, blackness supercedes or explodes performance in that the modes of representation endemic to performance—the visual and the spectacular—are no longer viable registers of racial identification. No longer visible under the colonizer’s scopophilic gaze, blackness resides in the liminal space of the psyche where its manifestation is neither solely volitional nor without agency. Indeed, one may experience what [Patricia] Williams calls “a split sense of identity” in a context where one’s experience of living blackness (i.e., one’s politics, class position, gender, etc.) and the “fantasy of black life as theatrical enterprise” are at odds. (Johnson 8)

By inhabiting the in-between, interstitial space of the unconscious, the BTC discover

temporary freedom from the anxiety of inhabiting authentic embodiments or representations of blackness. The BTC's assertion that "Where we spring up from is where we emerge," hints not only at how these authors, as performers of the black unconscious, circumvent a resolution to the dialectic between blackness and performance by removing the *expectation* about emergence during the BTC's "Live Feed" performances but also how they dance with the audience's expectations of each. The ability to improvise provides the opportunity for both the audience and the performers to be surprised by the permutations of the performance. In the liminal space of the psyche, the BTC operate in a poetics that is slippery, fluid, and constantly changing in response to the emerging needs of the ongoing anxiety that accompanies engaging how ideas of blackness are constructed.

In addition to the Black Took Collective's imperative to seek alternative, dissonant poetic possibilities and performances to explore the black unconscious, Lara Glenum also theorizes a poetics of emergency, and like the BTC, the emergency is concerned with the interrogation and performance that happens through the body:

I believe in poetry that takes tremendous risks, poetry in which the stakes are extremely high, poetry that connects with the perpetual state of emergency we find ourselves in. And it's not just the current political climate I'm referring to. Being embodied in flesh that decomposes and that is inscribed with all manner of cultural values not of your choosing is also a state of emergency.

At the same time, I don't believe in teleology, in some utopian end toward which art is nudging us. I do, though, believe very strongly in art's ability to crystallize enormously complex questions, testimonies and visions that might not otherwise be articulated. (Greenstreet)

Glenum's description of a poetics of emergency in this interview deepens and crystalizes as she begins to theorize certain writers under the umbrella term Gurlesque, publishing an anthology under that name with coeditor Arielle Greenberg in 2010. In Glenum's introductory essay to the anthology, "Theory of the Gurlesque: Burlesque, Girly Kitsch, and the Female Grotesque," she examines portions of Catherine Wagner's long poem "Imitating" from the collection *Macular Hole*. Glenum analyzes Wagner's use of the phrase "making / my emergencies go off," and Glenum notes that "the speaker in this poem ranges between one corporeal craving and another, unfazed by the 'emergencies' of ecstatic experience" (*Gurlesque* 20). Despite Glenum's assessment that Wagner's speaker is "unfazed by the 'emergencies' of ecstatic experience," it is precisely the body's desire for perverse sustenance that gives rise to the "questions, testimonies and visions that might not otherwise be articulated." Emergency affects a new prism through which to posit these questions, proffer testimonies, and experience visions. As Glenum indicates, none of these are meant to represent the subjective or solipsistic state of the ecstatic trance leading to transcendence of the self, but rather a visceral mysticism that uses the body's nagging abject leakings and profusions as a through line to new knowledge.

Some critics of American avant-garde poetry from Language poetry to conceptualism, including, in July 2013, Calvin Bedient in his article "Against Conceptualism" in *Boston Review*, critique poetics by employing the adage that avant-garde poetics are "all head, no heart," creating a dichotomy between a poetry of ideas and a poetry of emotions. Glenum, in her over-the-top "Manifesto of the Anti-Real" from her collection *The Hounds of No*, seeks an alternative to this dichotomy—"the secret side door to the Sublime" (*Hounds* 61). Glenum posits the Anti-Real as a state of apocalyptic thinking and "annihilation in the

Sublime,” whose targets are Realism (“Realism is the bordello of those who would have their perceptions affirmed rather than dilated”) and Sentimentality (“Sentimentality is a form of exploitation, a connivance with official lies”). Glenum opens her manifesto by proclaiming, “Art is neither a form of consolation nor a butler to hegemonies. Even in its most discreet moments, art explodes,” and closes by imploring artists to “Hang Sentimentality on the gallows of Emergency” (*Hounds* 61). Glenum’s notion of “Emergency,” in this instance, seeks to replace the heart’s excesses—tenderness, sadness, and nostalgia—with an apocalyptic combination of the head and the bowels—the abject. Emergency, for Glenum, is the “totalizing logic of violence” used to arouse the affect of horror “from atop the grotesque pile of refuse” (*Hounds* 61). While Bedient’s head-heart dichotomy seeks to create a poetry of “melancholy” that evokes a pensive, reparative mode for the poet and readers, healing the world’s ills through aesthetic affect, Glenum’s emergency cautions against what she terms “causal logic” or a conciliatory art that is a reparation for the Real’s shortcomings and failures. The abject and the guts—the body’s desires—persistently disrupt the reflective stance and make emotive recollections passing and reconciliations suspect. Emergency poetry creates visceral-mystical experiences of the fearsome, annihilating, and violent sublime.

Several works published in the last fifteen years share the visceral-mystical poetics of emergency, including: *The Hounds of No*, *Maximum Gaga*, and *Pop Corpse* by Lara Glenum; *The Cow*, *Coeur de Lion*, *Mercury*, and *Thursday* by Ariana Reines; *A Gathering of Matter/A Matter of Gathering and Discipline* by Dawn Lundy Martin; *Zirconia*, *Bad Bad*, and *Poemland* by Chelsey Minnis; *Pretty Young Thing*, *Iatrogenic: Their Testimonies*, and *Manhater* by Danielle Pafunda; *Miss America*, *Macular Hole*, *My New Job*, and *Nervous Device* by Catherine Wagner; *A New Quarantine*

*Will Take My Place* and *Entrance into a colonial pageant in which we all begin to intricate* by Johannes Göransson; *The Book of Frank* and *A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon* by CAConrad; *Narrative of the Life of Brown Boy and the White Man* and *Poems of the Black Object* by Ronaldo V. Wilson; *Blud* and *The Butcher's Tree* by Feng Sun Chen; *Drag* and *Amnesiac* by Duriel E. Harris; *The Black Automaton* by Douglas Kearney; *The Book of Interfering Bodies* by Daniel Borzutzky; and *Percussion Grenade* by Joyelle McSweeney, among others.

Beyond employing a visceral-mystical poetry that fuses the insistence of the head and guts, a poetics of emergency also responds to the paradox that proliferation is actually a specific kind of loss or waste. This paradox is emblematic of contemporary American avant-garde developments in poetry and is rooted in conservatism and nostalgia. Simply stated, it means that as American poetry becomes more prolific and less homogenous, the more its expansion is viewed as a loss of purity, which is a form of ideological policing or gatekeeping. Translation, appropriation as a performance of ethically tenuous and messy counterfeiting, and valuing the lowbrow and kitsch engage this paradox. Established or mainstream valuations of these concepts differ greatly from how they are viewed by emergency poets.

First of all, translation is often generally viewed through the lens of loss, and a translated poem's success is often measured by how authentically it is able to replicate the original's meaning and formal qualities in the translated language, which the translation is never fully able to accomplish. As a concept, the translated poem is valued only in relation to the original's status and is often considered a lesser, diluted version of the original. Translated poems destabilize or break apart the authentic locus of poetry and the poetic because what is lost in translation seems to move the translated poem away from

authenticity, even while extending access to the original. The poetics of emergency values the work of translation precisely because of its potential to damage or violently shatter the concept of the authentic in poetry. In *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, Emily Apter describes the possibility for translation to change readers:

Cast as an act of love, and as an act of disruption, translation becomes a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history; a means of rendering self-knowledge foreign to itself; a way of denaturalizing citizens, taking them out of the comfort of national space, daily ritual, and pre-given domestic arrangements.

It is a truism that the experience of becoming proficient in another tongue delivers a salubrious blow to narcissism, both national and individual. Translation failure demarcates intersubjective limits, even as it highlights that “eureka” spot where consciousness crosses over to a rough zone of equivalency or crystallizes around an idea that belongs to no one language or nation in particular. Translation is a significant medium of subject re-formation and political change. (Apter 6)

The nature of translation gives poetry and poets permission to be multitudinous rather than authentic, to explore the anxiety threatens “authentic” poetry by opening it up and allowing otherness to enter and proliferate. Translation is immediately heterodox. For poets practicing a poetics of emergency, however, the proliferation of translation and the heterodoxy it creates grants poets new freedom and permission to be multiple or to construct a poetic self that is possessed by the other or its own otherness. Translation helps to mitigate the anxiety of authenticity that underscores the poetics of emergency by allowing a flow of new possibilities and worldviews into the narrow American field. Examples of recent translated works that prove important to poets practicing a poetics of emergency include *With Deer* by

the Swedish poet Aase Berg (translated by Johannes Göransson), *All the Garbage of the World, Unite!* by the South Korean poet Kim Hyesoon (translated by Don Mee Choi), *Purgatory* by the Chilean poet Raúl Zurita (translated by Anna Deeny), *Song for His Disappeared Love* by Raúl Zurita (translated by Daniel Borzutzky), and *Killing Kanoko* by Itō Hiromi (translated by Jeffrey Angles). The poems in these collections, despite being from three continents, share attention to the abject, the grotesque body's viscera and fluids, as well as the violence experienced by bodies in agony or transition, often on account of their political situation or objectification.

In addition to the effect translations and translation theory have on a poetics of emergency, poets who use appropriation as a method of performing ethically tenuous and messy counterfeiting also embody the paradox of proliferation and simultaneous loss. In this instance, poets of emergency look to the excessive appropriations of poets like Sylvia Plath. In the poem “Daddy” from *Ariel*, Plath creates a persona, via the poem’s speaker, who enacts an ethically tenuous performance by creating an allegory comparing her father to a cruel Nazi, “And your Aryan eye, bright blue. / Panzer-man, panzer-man,” and the poem’s speaker to a Jewish Holocaust victim “chuff[ed] off...to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen” (Plath 50). By appropriating the trauma of the Holocaust, Plath, is creating an over-the-top performance by the speaker in “Daddy,” using excessive and taboo comparisons that not only immediately muster emotional resonance from readers but also seem out of bounds, inappropriate, or unearned. Performance, however, is psychologically important for the speaker in “Daddy.” As she wrestles with a god-like, absent father who died in her youth, she also works to replicate that trauma, first by a suicide attempt to rejoin the absent father, “At twenty I tried to die / And get back, back, back to you.” and then by recreating him through her husband,

“But then they pulled me out of the sack, / And they stuck me together with glue. / And then I knew what to do. / I made a model of you, / A man in black with a Meinkampf look” (Plath 51). Through the appropriative metaphors and allusions, therefore, the speaker attempts to give language to the horror of her complicated psychologic reenactment. The curious image of the “black telephone” that’s “off at the root” evokes ideas of the phone line being ripped out of the jack, but roots also imply subterranean space—where bodies are buried. The next line, “The voice just can’t worm through,” cements the metaphor of the speaker’s inability to connect with the dead, despite how the image of him plagues her. The speaker exhibits exhaustion, turning from Nazi/Holocaust imagery to the vampire, the doubled model of her father, and by the poem’s resolution, the speaker is physically sapped as the vampire “drank my blood for a year” and also psychologically “through” (Plath 51).

When Plath’s speaker appropriates Holocaust imagery, “Daddy” de-authenticates witness poetry, even as it powerfully performs psychic exhaustion, because it acts as what Johannes Göransson calls “atrocity kitsch” (“Kitsch”). For Göransson, kitsch has dual purposes in poetics. First, it is used by critics to dismiss art rhetorically as inauthentic, which means Plath’s poetry, even though it is a complex and rich psychological performance of the Electra complex and the horror of losing the father when he was still seemingly immortal in the speaker’s eyes. But appropriating the Holocaust as kitsch—a replication of art—by equating the speaker with the plight of the Jews, destabilizes the singularity of high art and the culture of taste and gatekeeping that surrounds and protects it, creating what Göransson calls “permeable” or “impure zones” in which art can exist.

Glenum, in “Theory of the Gurlesque,” also discusses how kitsch operates as “a parasite feeding on the production of ‘true art.’” Glenum posits a specifically “girly

kitsch” operating in the aesthetic category Sianne Ngai dubs “the cute,” whereby “the formal properties associated with cuteness—smallness, compactness, softness, simplicity, and pliancy—call forth specific affects: helplessness, pitifulness, and even despondency... [where] in its exaggerated passivity and vulnerability, the cute object is often intended to excite a consumer’s desire for mastery and control as much as his or her desire to cuddle” (“Cuteness of the Avant-Garde” 816). The cuteness of girly kitsch contributes to the poetics of emergency by revealing that “The preoccupation of pre-adolescent girls with all things cute, perhaps, speaks not to their attraction to things that mirror their own innocence but to things that mirror their own abjection and fear of further deformity...it reflects the degree to which they have already found themselves stripped of social agency. Cuteness, then, far from being a harmless aesthetic category, reveals a state of acute deformity” (*Gurlesque* 16). The performance of girly kitsch serves a similar purpose to Plath’s performance of appropriating atrocity as a metaphor. Both the ethically tenuous nature of Plath’s appropriations and using cute girly kitsch to open a deformed zone of creation critique master-servant power dialectics by echoing and re-performing them via the cute object. This proliferates poetry destabilizes poetics with inappropriate but poetically effective interventions.

Moreover, the abject is important to a poetics of emergency because these strains of poetry all focus on the body “afloat in the cauldron of wishes and impulses, the body, multiplied in chunks, bleeding out and taking on water in a murky sea, the body curved and taut, strung like a bow, sunk like an anchor and now a glaze spread on the surface of consciousness” (“Accretion” 81). The deformities of the abject that permeate both emergence and emergency, are examined by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on*

*Abjection*, who explains that dwelling in and with the abject, the I transfigures:

I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish *myself*. That detail, perhaps an insignificant one, but one that they ferret out, emphasize, evaluate, that trifle turns me inside out, guts sprawling; it is thus that *they* see that “I” am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. Mute protest of the symptom, shattering violence of a convulsion that, to be sure, is inscribed in a symbolic system, but in which without either wanting or being able to become integrated in order to answer to it, it reacts, it abreacts. It abjects. (Kristeva 3)

When one overcomes the body’s rejection of the abject, one can dwell within—even thrive among or swallow—the most debased viscera. Upheaval traps the I in a spasm of visceral reaction to its own excess: “it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, permissions, rules” (4). The abject is a test: it functions to probe the limits of acceptability. Equilibrium is impossible. Those who dwell in the abject resist the anxiety of authenticity and fixity that essentialized race, gender, and sexuality identifications impose because they constantly interrogate these constructions through creation and recreation:

The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places...*separates*... situates...and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. Situationist in a sense, and not without laughter—since laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection. Necessarily dichotomous, somewhat Manichean, he divides, excludes, and without, properly speaking, wishing to know his abjections is

not at all unaware of them. Often, moreover, he includes himself among them, thus casting within himself the scalpel that carries out his separations.

Instead of sounding himself as to his “being,” he does so concerning his place: “Where am I?” instead of “Who am I?” For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogenous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, catastrophic. A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines—for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject—constantly question his solidarity and impel him to start afresh. A tireless builder, the deject is in short a *stray*. He is on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding. He has a sense of the danger, of the loss that the pseudo-object attracting him represents for him, but he cannot help taking risk at the very moment he sets himself apart. And the more he strays, the more he is saved. (8)

Kristeva’s deject, then, is the practitioner of a poetics of emergency, knowing that emergence is more interested in situatedness, and the power it affords one to construct and reconstruct that location, than coherent or ordinary subjectivity.

### **Ronaldo V. Wilson’s *Poems of the Black Object***

In *Poems of the Black Object*, Ronaldo V. Wilson traverses the distinction of subject and object, placing his poems’ speakers on the shifting terrain of Kristeva’s deject, as he often strides across taboos of acceptable means for interrogating black, Asian, masculine, or queer identities in poetry. Wilson’s collection of poems offer speakers under the influence of the abject body and its lengthy, complicated list of desires, the body’s fluids expanding out, taking the body apart. The poems in the collection use the interplay of various black objects,

all of which constantly reconstruct their objecthood through the imperfection of memory and performances. What does it mean to perform the black object?

Wilson chooses two epigraphs for the book, both of which tactically set stage for the formal and thematic dissonance the collection will create with the existing field black literature, especially for the book's first section "The Black Object." From Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Wilson quotes, "I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage, that splattered my whole body with black blood" (Wilson 3). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon interrogates the psychopathology of blackness, black identity, and objecthood in a society that holds up whiteness as the shaping ideal and blackness as a scapegoat. For Fanon, blacks cannot escape being marked by skin color. Comparing the situation of the blacks with the situation of Jews, Fanon notes that Jews can pass or go "unnoticed" because they have white skin and avoid persecution to an extent, but as Fanon indicates, "I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance...I am *fixed*" (Fanon 116). The project of *Poems of the Black Object* closely resembles Fanon's method for analyzing blackness. In the paragraph from *Black Skin, White Masks* that immediately precedes the one containing Wilson's epigraph, Fanon discusses his process:

I was responsible...for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism [*sic*], racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'" (Fanon 111)

In *Poems of the Black Object*, Wilson creates poems with speakers who are black objects in a world of other, sometimes black, objects, and exposes these voices to the “objective examination” that revealed Fanon’s blackness and ethnic characteristics to him.

Toi Derricotte’s epigraph is from *The Black Notebooks*, and Wilson chooses a passage that emphasizes the dialectical nature of race:

Perhaps “race” isn’t something that locks us into separate groups. Perhaps it is a state that floats back and forth between us, equally solid and unreal, as if our body and soul were kept apart and, like a kind of Siamese twins, joined only by the thin chord of desire. (Wilson 3)

Wilson’s choice of these two epigraphs reveals how the collection of poems will toggle between the materiality of the body as object and the metaphysical idea of the soul, linking them through the memory of the body’s urges and leakings.

The first two poems, in the section “The Black Object,” which begin the collection, “On the C Train the Black Object Ponders Amuzati’s Family Eaten in the Congo” and “In Philadelphia the Black Object Roots for Ai Sugiyama” get messy, spattering readers with complex thinking about race, desire, and the construction of the black object’s psyche. “On the C Train” engages with the story of Pygmy Azumati, who recounted the narrative of watching his family being eaten by cannibalistic rebel warriors. The poem wonders how to carry on and how to be black amid this cannibalistic imagery that is embedded in the story of blackness: “In the story of edible blacks, hacked and splayed on lattice, / how am I to finish the dishes // with all this dining / in the fields of my instance?” (Wilson 7). The narration of cannibalism replicates in the real instance of the subway, as a child calls out “Daddy! I am hungry for some Pyg” (7). The pun on pig (pork) and Pygmy connects eating

flesh and cannibalism to a specific instance, but the desire is there, although the perverse hunger is “subwayed,” connecting one story with the other in that moment. Wilson’s use of the “uh” sound over and over in this poem hints at the sexual desire in play here—the desire to consume—that will also permeate later sections of the book. The poet or speaker’s “instance” is incessantly infused with a lurking, darker hunger.

The second poem “In Philadelphia the Black Object Roots for Ai Sugiyama” uses wordplay that ties the first two poems of the collection together. In “On the C Train,” Wilson uses the turn of phrase “the crust on the bittle lack’s head” (7), which connects with “the rush of the whittle / lights race to the railing” in this poem (8). “Bittle” is a nonsense word, so it catches the reader’s attention immediately, and one quickly recognizes these as “pig Latin” anagrams of little black and little white. These simple changes announce an out-of-placeness that pervades this section examining the black object. All around the black object, others seem to be behaving in the normal expectations of their race (the white swatting the black fly in spite; the idle chatter of white tennis fans), but the black object’s “I” (like Ai in the tennis match) is retired, reticent, “lost.”

“Bittle lacks” also echoes Fanon. Like Fanon, Wilson is also interested in dialectical and dialogic thinking. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon is crushed by Jean-Paul Sartre’s “unhappy romanticism” in his use of the dialectic to reveal blackness as a “transition” on the way to the “ultimate end” of equality among races (qtd. in Fanon 133). In other words, Sartre believes blackness must be transcended to reach universal equality, but Fanon notes the immanence of his own blackness cannot be merely transcended to serve the universal:

The dialectic that brings necessity to the foundation of my freedom drives me out of myself. It shatters my unreflected position. Still in terms of consciousness, black

consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality of something. I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No probability has any place inside me. My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It *is*. It is its own follower. (Fanon 135)

Fanon understands what Sartre does not—he is not able to transcend or synthesize his blackness. The immanence of the black body means it always already be an object, and this objecthood will be located in the body's black skin. In *Poems of the Black Object*, Wilson interrogates the relationship of the black object and the black body dialogically by dramatizing and performing them through his black object speakers, which gives these concepts a chance to engage with ideas of their own construction as objects.

For example, race, fear, and the violence of wounding figure prominently in the prose poem “The Black Object’s Memory,” which consists of three sections of narrative prose. Wilson uses the second person in this poem tactically, to show the speaker, the black object’s memory, having a sort of internal dialogue with the black object, as they both are co-reconstructing these narratives. In the poem, readers see the black object dialogically interrogating and probing its own taboos, fetishes, and aversions, all of which appear through interactions with other characters, all of whom may be both real and projections of the memory. In the first section, “Blood,” the speaker gives an account of a sexual encounter gone wrong, as he meets an older white man who, the speaker discovers, has blood-soaked boxers, “as though someone stabbed him up the ass.” Facing abjection in the form of blood, the black object discovers a limit in this encounter: “Even though he said, ‘It’s only in the back, you can take care of the front,’ you pulled away, warned him about the dangers of Hepatitis and HIV, lied when you kissed him on the cheek and said it was not his fault,

even though you knew it was his fault to be so carelessly bloody" (Wilson 15). The black object's refusal to have sex with this man on account of the blood exhibits Freud's concept of the uncanny effect, which "arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes" (Freud 150). Operating in the black object's memory, this poem is already working within the unconscious, the liminal space between imagination and reality. The speaker's sexual refusal is significant because the blood creates the fright that accompanies the uncanny; it reveals how the fear of disease and death can be repressed in order to quench sexual impulses. The black object is afraid of what it discovers about itself: that it would likely have had sex with this man if not for the blood, because the disease/death that is an inherent risk in sexual encounters would not have been visible. The abject reality of old man's bloody boxers compels the black object to account for the repressed possibility of acting on sexual impulses leading, potentially, to his own death, which distinguishes him from the old man:

You think that he may collapse, that he is bleeding like you imagine the dead to bleed when their bodies give up. You both know what he cannot control, as you watch him enter the train a few cars ahead of you. (Wilson 15)

The old man seems to understand that the blood on his boxers is always already there in a sexual encounter, even if it is not leaking from the body, but his ability to reconcile his desire with the possibility of death makes him wiser than the black object. Even though the black object's memory characterizes the old man as "carelessly bloody" and unable to control his body, the black object learns the fearful lesson that they are both equally out of control or never had control in the first place.

The third section of “The Black Object’s Memory,” “Toilet,” offers a narrative of a black man sitting on a toilet at the Sansom Cinema, waiting to fellate anyone who comes by, and the speaker tells of his reluctance to “feed” him because of the disgusting conditions in the bathroom. Again, the fear of disease triggers the black object’s moment of self-realization, as he tells the would-be cocksucker, “You’re going to get sick” (Wilson 17). The black object has the simultaneous desire to cleanse him by soaking the filth off him in a clean river, to offer a transcendent moment, and also to piss on his black beard: “You want to unload on his beautiful black beard what you give to the urinal’s mouth, a radiant stream splattering on his dim and tired lips” (Wilson 17). This last tableau presents the black object pissing on a stereotypical image of the insatiable black sexual object, subservient and hyper-sexualized, seeking to perform oral sex on anyone who comes by. Defiling this image with piss is a move to both dismiss how he is acting out his objecthood and also to give him another type of abject “grace,” to sanctify and challenge this image, a projection of the black object himself, by making disgust a darkly humorous transfiguration, even while adding to the filth. This section of the poem fits with Simone Weil’s description of disgust from *Gravity and Grace*, to go up by going down:

[D]isgust is the burdensomeness of time. To acknowledge it to ourselves without giving way under it makes us mount upwards.

Disgust in all its forms is one of the most precious trials sent to man as a ladder by which to rise...We have to turn all our disgust into a disgust for ourselves. (Weil 179)

The speaker, too, wants to sink below his own, equally earnest sexual desire—he is in a porn theater, after all—to remove “rings of filth...from his body,” to “mount upwards,” as Weil puts it (Wilson 17). The speaker’s piss would add to the filth, on the one hand, but the urine

is also described as “vitamin-bright” and “radiant,” on the other. It is not the nourishment the “pot-stuck cocksucker” seeks, but it is a kind of perverse sustenance, which makes the section of “The Black Object’s Memory” Whitmanesque: “You will hardly know who I am or what I mean / But I shall be good health to you nevertheless / And filter and fibre your blood” (Whitman 88). The poem is simultaneously pissing on stereotypical notions of black sexuality used to turn blacks into objects, listed in *Black Skin, White Masks*, “As for the Negroes, they have tremendous sexual powers...They copulate at all times and in all places. They are really genital” (Fanon 157) and examining how the black object projects himself as locked into that very object-hood, offering the possibility of transcendence of this immanence only through the perverse, imaginary act of defilement with urine.

The second section of Wilson’s collection is called “Dream.” In black literature and culture, no term is perhaps more loaded with the problem of authenticity more than dream, invoking Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech as well as Langston Hughes’s famous poem “A Dream Deferred,” among other works. By giving us the section’s single poem “Dream in a Fair” in a narrative style featuring dream logic and dream images, Wilson is able to skirt or reimagine the dream as a locus of dissonance and not something that has been done or achieved.

This reinvention of the dream in African American literature happens among the illogical dream narrative and image pile:

He describes on the phone where he is going—  
He says, “I’ve never been this far.”  
And you want to say, what do you mean, you’ve never been this far?  
Do you mean North or East?  
It is then, you realize, he has no sense of direction. (Wilson 22)

or:

Sense matters

It matters in this dream, where what you see is the space  
between dreams and life

This seam becomes a question: “What if you return to the same space,  
tried to find the connection between one dream and another?”

Yusef Komunyakaa, I think, said you should not use the word poem in a  
poem, but I think in a dream, you must use the word: dream. (Wilson 25)

Images in dreams are elliptical and refuse the logic of the empirical world for a symbolic logic particular to the dream itself, which is hard to define, at last there when you wanted to be here:

The other day, I wanted to draw a picture of a girl that flashed in my head,  
while walking down the street.

I imagined her long black hair and eyes blacked out:

Black as the black in the black of the black.

So when I went to look for the video footage

of the barb that lanced into Irwin’s heart,

his body, a struggle in sea, some floating paralysis

some death, I found a mock site—my click,

then a guttural screech

the eyes of the girl

come to life. (Wilson 31)

The mixing of images is typical of dreamscapes, as is the loss of what one is looking for, as the girl the speaker wants to draw is but a flash in his mind’s eye and cannot be recollected in detail, her image is blacked out, blanked out, all-black everything, appears when something else is sought, and it appears as a disruption of the senses, a synesthetic shock that happens when the speaker finds a mock site that claims to have footage of the Crocodile Hunter, Steve Irwin’s death, where he watches the spoof video and the girl he envisioned comes to life and frightens him. Wilson reinvents the dream trope of black

literature and culture, revealing it through his dream poem as something nondescript, black on black, realized in looking for something else by way of the violence of fright, the dissonant shock of discovery where it is unexpected.

Polyvocality is most evident in the poem from this section titled “Self Portrait as Excess O: O Self Selves” as it toggles between voices, (not unlike Eliot’s disjunctive language and different voices in “The Waste Land.” Eliot’s lines “three trees on a low sky” from “Journey of the Magi” is also alluded to in the preceding poem “Self Portrait A: Alimentary”: “trees spread hard / as the legs of a roach // thorned up in a low sky / an exhaustion”). The title indicates this voice shifting is not a shift at all but more of a sum, a cluster, a whole being spoken for by its fragments. The difference in voice can best be heard in these lines:

it makes no sense it is unclear it has no chance  
it is rotten steak blacken it  
i will cut you a rage of meat of decadent cards  
a brutal end: Ruby Jean Johnson dead slain slain (Wilson 65)

The speaking voice of the poem toggles between a philosophical description or even horror (“it makes no sense”) at what is being described, and the agent that commits the horror (“i will cut”). The voices become more ferocious as the poem intensifies into a pure image of evil in the place of abjection. Swallowing is a recurring image in this text, a fusion of trauma and pleasure and a place where the self internalizes (literally) the other and objectifies the self for its weight problem:

name them: collard or collard green col lard be a fat ass  
be a fuck face a fucked face on a pillow swallow swallow in the brain  
swallows swallow to be swelled in a harrowing wood looking up with not light  
(Wilson 67)

In the final section of *Poems of the Black Object*, “The Black Body,” Wilson revisits the ideas in Derricote’s epigraph to attempt to bring the black object and black body together into one. The collection’s ultimate poem “Illicit Traffic” begins by offering advice about poetry, which includes, “do not confess you write it” (Wilson 96). Instead, it is better to “Say you remembered it” (96). The speaker goes on to offer that “if you are black, you are / a break,” meaning that the black poet is a break between other, presumably white, voices: “One of us sings / the point of possibility. // a voice cracking out of a voice. Not a double / nor two of anything” (Wilson 96). The complex image of “a voice cracking out of a voice” rejects how dialectical thinking posits the necessity of a doubling to make something new. The image reprises the idea of an egg hatching out of an egg, circumventing tiresome chicken-egg arguments as attempts to locate authenticity, origins, or fix rigid definitions. In fact, the speaker advises “not saying anything / about being this or that. Things get misheard” (Wilson 97). For the speaker, pledging allegiance to any type of identity is the greatest “dilemma,” because in doing so, one professes one’s status as object. For Fanon, this is his “One duty alone: That of not renouncing my freedom through my choices” (Fanon 229). The speaker doesn’t really know how to rectify this, but an image caption he sees spurs an epiphany. At the end of the poem, a “third and final supposition” is offered, derived from the epiphany: “Imagine this...then say you are it, a memory, / Immigrating, the Hard Way, you, a cluster, caught, connected to, it” (Wilson 97). The last two lines of the poem use commas to slow the pace of the line down, giving it additional gravitas. In these lines, the speaker instructs readers to identify simultaneously as “a memory,” a self (“you”), and an object (“it”), that is in motion and moving across borders into new, challenging terrain (“Immigrating, the Hard Way”). The idea is to be an actional cluster, a “number of similar

things occurring together,” and this lesson also echoes Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* and its final impetus “To educate man to be actional, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act” (Fanon 222). Having embraced Fanon’s objectifying methodology as an actional path to discovery in *Poems of the Black Object*, Wilson’s collection itself presents readers with an actional cluster, and in reaching the last lesson in “Illicit Traffic,” readers can learn to find freedom in resisting the anxieties and forces that seem to compel complex human beings to fix themselves by identifying with their most essentialized, base, and immanent identifications.

### **A Poetics of Emergency as a Prelude to the Shitswallower**

The crisis of the poetics of emergency is the dual alienation that might be the product of doing the work to maintain the emergence of a group. In choosing to not uphold the positions paved by forbears in poetic discourses contemporary poets face alienation. If poets do submit to doing the work of appreciable production for a genre and its social, political, ethical, and aesthetic interests, these poets face the alienation from the self that happens when one is not allowed free, serious play—the freedom to be diverted, to follow the gut.

This is the plight of Kristeva’s dejects, rootless exiles aware of intermingled systems and complex dualisms—that in becoming like Wilson’s actional clusters, they, at times, act on behalf of multiple interests or identifications at the same time, construct a poetic self from the body and its abject leavings, get trapped between the body’s urgings and the mind’s construction of desire and shame, and exist mired constantly in a flux of invention

and reinvention never limited to a singularity. Dejects are strays, fending for themselves, and seeming to turn against the purpose that has already been defined to pursue other, purportedly less useful pursuits. Ronaldo V. Wilson is one such stray, using abjection and objectification to explore emergency's dualities by squandering what essentialized identities might seem most vital to constructing a self.

Poets working within a poetics of emergency dwell with refuse and refuse binaries. They use abject materials that challenge and efface traditional notions of beauty in poetry. Shit, urine, blood, vomit, semen, pus, among other substances, have the power to horrify because they are part of the self—the self evacuating itself, the part of the self recognized as other, as not I—and the feelings inspired by these leavings can be sublime and awful, shocking and then mollifying poet and reader, in contrast to the aesthetic effects evoked by beauty. The abject, then, is a wager of emergency. Because it is waste, the abject appears to lack value, other than a metaphorical purging of self-produced shock and horror, but a poetics of emergency is not a movement toward positivistic purity evacuated of struggle—it is not a rite.

A poetics of emergency fosters a new exigency to recall the abject back to the body, to do more than dwell with and accept the abject as part and parcel of the self. The shitswallower tarries with the abject and attempts to take it in, to delight in the debauched recovery of the abject, to be sustained by waste, decadence, and the negative. A poetics of emergency transfigures the poet into the shitswallower, or the swallower of any abject substance. Swallowing anything becomes wasteful; the act itself points in the direction of excess. Even when related to chewing and swallowing food for vital sustenance, the imperfection and disequilibrium of the digestive system is implied, as the body consistently

produces more and more waste. Dealing with proliferating waste, especially one's own or metaphorical waste from one's culture, then, possesses something rivaling the mythic, making the swallower an abject reinterpretation of the ouroboros—the thing which devours itself in order to sustain or recreate itself. As a practitioner of a poetics of emergency, the shitswallower luxuriates in a society's crises and is continually ostracized and criticized for the very wallowing and recreation that comprises this abject work.

Shaming and ostracizing the shitswallower for doing symbolic work exists historically. The same station afforded the contemporary shitswallower is bestowed on monks in Francois Rabelais's *Garagantua and Pantagruel*:

How is it, then, that they exclude the monks from all good companies, calling them feast-troublers, marrers of mirth, and disturbers of all civil conversation, as the bees drive away the drones from their hives? *Ignarum fucus pecus*, said Maro, *a praesepibus arcent*. Hereunto, answered Gargantua, there is nothing so true as that the frock and cowl draw unto itself the opprobries, injuries, and maledictions of the world, just as the wind called Cecias attracts the clouds. The peremptory reason is, because they eat the ordure and excrements of the world, that is to say, the sins of the people, and, like dung-chewers and excrementitious eaters, they are cast into the privies and secessive places, that is, the convents and abbeys, separated from political conversation, as the jakes and retreats of a house are. But if you conceive how an ape in a family is always mocked and provokingly incensed, you shall easily apprehend how monks are shunned of all men, both young and old. The ape keeps not the house as a dog doth, he draws not in the plough as the ox, he yields neither milk nor wool as the sheep, he carrieth no burden as a horse doth. That which he

doth, is only to conscite, spoil, and defile all, which is the cause wherefore he hath of all men mocks, frumperies, and bastinadoes.

After the same manner a monk—I mean those lither, idle, lazy monks—doth not labour and work, as do the peasant and artificer; doth not ward and defend the country, as doth the man of war; cureth not the sick and diseased, as the physician doth; doth neither preach nor teach, as do the evangelical doctors and schoolmasters; doth not import commodities and things necessary for the commonwealth, as the merchant doth. Therefore is it that by and of all men they are hooted at, hated, and abhorred. (Rabelais)

Responding to the question of why monks are shunned, Gargantua indicates that because monks are shitswallowers, consuming the excremental depravities of others, they are ostracized. Furthermore, monks are ostracized because the work of shitswallowing troubles the domesticity. In this way, the monk is like the ape, a creature that risks defiling everything because it is not domesticated, serves no purpose, and does not contribute to the greater good. Gargantua goes on to list human professions that do serve a purpose, and the invisible, monastic shitswallowing that is a monk's work is not seen as having social value, which makes them ridiculed outcasts. Poets are afforded a similar station as shitswallower, as is anyone who tarries with what is turned away or ignored, because their work is equally regarded as monastic, symbolic, ethereal, and superfluous.

The only way to further upset the expectation of useful production is to make a spectacle of the swallowing, to make the swallowing pornographic or parapornographic. Making swallowing visible brings swallowing on/scene, which Linda Williams describes as “the more conflicted term with which we can mark the tension between the speakable

and the unspeakable which animates so many...contemporary discourse of sexuality...

On/scenity is thus an ongoing negotiation that produces increased awareness of those once-obscene matters that now peek out at us" (Williams 4–5). Because even symbolic shitswallowing is outside the frame of acceptable and behavior leading to useful production, the motives of practitioners are questioned. The act itself, like the waste it deals with, is gratuitous. Carl-Michael Edenborg, in *The Parapornographic Manifesto*, extends Williams's on/scenity into the parapornographic, which supersedes the pornographic-antipornographic dichotomy, noting "the insight in the limitlessness of unclothing, in non-Euclidean anatomy, in the darkness of excitement. That law creates desire means loneliness. The fact that those things that prevent our desires also create our desires means loneliness...In the ego-loss that is gluttony, of mechanical repetition or traumatic violence, the pleasures are multiplied, and that which is foreign will become, I wouldn't say harmless, but at least intimate"

(37). The contemporary shitswaller, via technology and remediation of "the shit," has unprecedented access to its limitless revelation, its continuous re-unveiling. Furthermore, for Edenborg, "An unusual association is poetry. By showing what should not be shown, through the fantastic and the surreal, many pornographic images...express a kind of mysticism" (14). The power of Kristeva's deject, as swaller and exile, and dejecta, as the swallowed abject, functions by making the majority of people, those who cannot identify with abject swallowing, complicit in an economy of glutinous consumption and purgation that luxuriates in the seemingly useless existence and futile acts and output of the deject, the swaller. After all, it's their shit being swallowed, too, and they would prefer it remain invisible and not be so glutonously sought after.

Despite visceral-mystical possibilities, shitswallowers are unable to transcend the shit

they are compelled to consume and repurpose. The genuineness of swallowing is temporary, and despite the exigency to disappear it, the shit leads to excess and abjection by way of digestion or by way of the purge. In fact, according to Scott Wilson in “Writing Excess,” “Authenticity’ is a continually mobile, lost object that resides nowhere and in nothing other than the ‘shit’ that is expended, expelled, or repelled” (566). Despite luxuriating in what is cast aside and hidden, shitswallowers can do little more than reveal what is excessive and abject, to bring it on/scene, to point to the shit, and for this, the shitswallower is villified. The shitswallower is not a redeemer but a monster performing shameful symbolic acts. The simplest of these is to point to the abject, the shit, and posit “I am that, and that is me, of me, mine.” Jorge Monteleone, in the introduction to María Negroni’s collection of poetry *Mouth of Hell*, discusses the poet as monster:

A monster is what shows itself, what one’s finger points to...As soon as the poet points to something...it becomes his mirror. Therefore, what is shown is never more than an endless, solipsistic reproduction of the poet himself.

The poet-monster knows that he reveals the world but only while locked inside it, like a lost relic. He walks among ghosts, all the while destroying what he desires, suspecting that he might be no more than a mere projection of himself and believing that he plays at living when, in fact, he plays with death. (Negroni 9–10)

Alighting on the excess of real and symbolic excrement and what it means to dwell in it, to dwell in and swallow society’s superabundance of shit, the poet reflects and luxuriates in that superabundance. The poet’s potential for success comes from performing the role of monster and shitswallower by focusing attention on specific, abject, and omitted concepts and objects and bringing abjection on/scene, which reveals the waste prevalence of excess.

Monteleone describes “the monster’s fate”:

The monster: poor maker of enchantments, of phantasmagoric fascinations that, in a final act of speech can dissolve, that the world too might have a veritable, monstrous double, a place where all things, and even humanity itself, risk dissipation by their crimes. There, poetry persists.” (Negroni 10)

A poetics of emergency seeks, finally, to discover a place for dissipation, to call attention to and dwell in the abject, to hold a mirror up to society, and to make readers experience the futility and shame of the shitswallower’s performance—a purveyor of visceral mysticism through bodily excess in pursuit of reconfigurations that lead to action in pursuit complex embodiments pointing toward social justice.

CHAPTER II

**IFFY**  
***the crumbsnatcher***

*They say I'm plump,  
but I threw up all the time.*

—Courtney Love

## ***eatshitlist 35***

- 36 shitswallower
- 37 iffy the crumbsnatcher
- 38 iffy feeds
- 42 a boy's swill
- 43 icky the girrltoy
- 45 titan'd family
- 48 ex/amen
- 50 oncology
- 52 delivery by extension

## ***(i did odd) 53***

## ***niches/itches 85***

- 86 recurrent sleep paralysis
- 87 c'est iffy & icky
- 89 icky: an education initiative
- 92 chain the skeletons to the treadmills
- 93 piety / pouty / petty / prettiness
- 95 iffy chats random about hunger
- 96 to decency or to de-sense seeing (upon Rodin's *Adam*)
- 98 iffy waxes tiresian

## ***go ergo foregone forego ego ago 100***

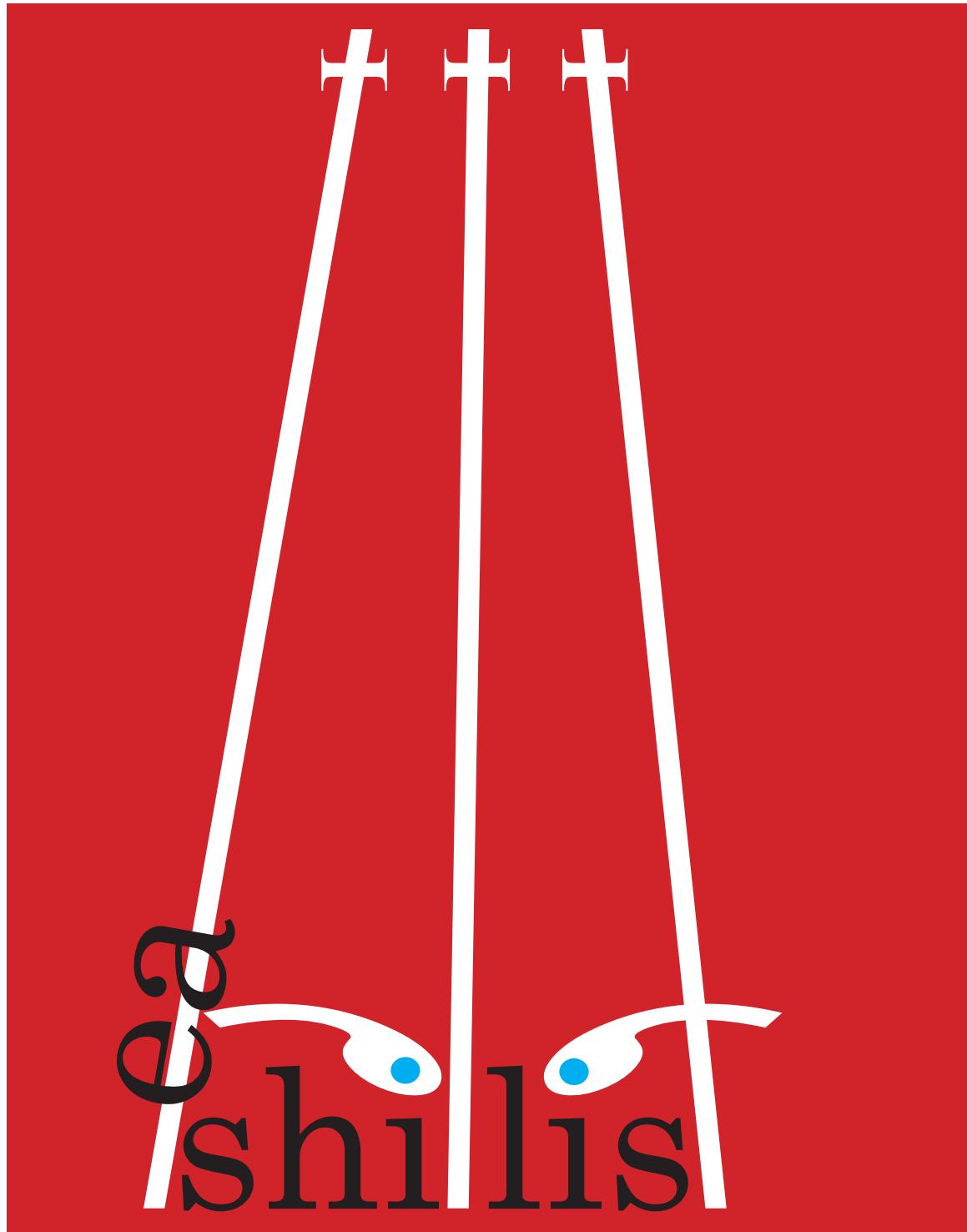
- 101 dreams under the wrack of the new empathy
- 103 scannear chitter for konerak sinthasomphone
- 105 i rote right my suicide note: i discussed myself
- 107 how i herded in the flowerless city
- 109 riddance: mis((s))(((mass)))culinity
- 115 in the mireroars the angle of death
- 117 lodeholder
- 121 say y'all remember you're: fore sing you're
- 125 sextsing

## ***evelize 128***

- 129 to murder the murderer's murderers
- 130 few / fewer / fuse

- 132 for Sherman
- 137 an iffy goodbye is no goodbye
- 138 iffy hollers at a surfeit of wind
- 139 if i have put myself into a cloister with reason
- 140 S.H.it's-wallower

***notes 145***



# ***shitswallower***

Oh, i am on...

the midnight again  
in cloudless you:

her first gasp, shit my last lisp, shit

i'm fecal & breathing in fetal

## distress

circular logic  
teased by mobile  
he shake his

i'm eating you  
i'm overfed

her moisture

(your milk's  
in my mouth)  
it makes me -

deep space woven:  
space between space  
a vibrating place, then

my finger  
pull my hair  
trigger

wound spew into  
concentric silences.

a limb, up and up,  
a bib before parting;  
pat-pat: explode, then

eat this flesh  
peep this flesh  
drink a dram of this flesh  
flesh of my flesh  
it's mine, too mine

## ***iffy the crumbsnatcher***

asleep in cun stubba  
i wanna off tha cock  
& stay. it. gone.

aslip. aslap. klept.  
seized as aspic, clipt  
as suspect poinimoot  
6'2" ddf ub2 7.5" cut  
bimary masc. A+++  
ex militia to the frunt uv

hair and stay stave  
toy towel spread em  
wider wider wider  
widest burst  
powder spider  
anyill virgin  
milkim milkim  
killim kill  
dise(x)cretion

mama gazes mama  
towel touches mam-  
mal buffs wipes & teaches  
buttfloss backta frun

i clubby buttee  
won bled won  
blend won go down  
w/in klempt leper  
clubby body odd wo  
ee's a fighter oohs  
jets is fitter inta

pick?sure  
pink?sure  
pick?ture  
cocksurer.

off the cook  
init stay allcools  
coldim col fush  
frush fish  
scalar scale lit  
too fat too fit

the spectacle of foot  
isheeman enuf to gaze  
izheefem enuf to pain toenails

*the only thing i ever really loved in my life was whoop—*

the assumption  
of a someday  
a sun confessed  
on sinday pro  
deuce iona mic

knowing enuf to know  
better is knowing enuf  
to know butter a farce

of nature translates wimmen into seize

the importance of a first tattoo:  
sweet nothings something into  
the gristle or booty skin  
nougat space till the body  
into art it blossom ink smidden:  
the importance of a first taboo.

took back yer club  
as less lethal hairless  
it looks ligga fish  
outta fist lips  
it ins n stays it in  
till it spits its mad shit

i canna no  
canna feelit

canna bleedit  
canna sleekit

c'mere, u iffy?

iffy, suckit.

## ***iffy feeds***

A de-beaked bird or how  
does one duckbill work?  
*word!* its way is silency

underserved? cephalopod  
or monotreme injects  
into my strangeness  
let me call her  
an Annie heroes a wardrobe  
let me call it a Martha

of heroine of brainwashing  
whose geniuses bleed stringy  
rainbows oversevered by Electra.

see the populace  
rainbow simple seeds  
a spectrum to seek if  
not too the spectre

of semiotics. *egg!*  
if not seismic recollections  
placental advances

little by lotto  
cereal invades.

Count me worthy to suction.

the wings of a thing  
cuten when separated  
from that wish they were  
designed to make fly.

under the aileron of bee  
reckoning with the urge  
of the force G equals

loans or liens.  
on the propeller  
of transparency

the pure music  
of corduroy is not  
a color written over dearth

*ink!* as a sexless tiger  
births ecoforms

i submit fully to the grief of marigolds.

## ***a boy's swill***

When I was an infant father used  
to needle me with sick entreaties: "Lick  
me! Lick me!" he begged, no, imp-  
lored his voice full of the breath that urges  
clouds to storm. I guess my young saliva  
salved the open sores on his  
penis, the same skin my alter-  
ego broke open while gnashing, lea-  
king infection like a blackberry-filled

### ***PASTRY GONE RANCID***

the layer-baked treat vehicle swollen to bur-  
sting. Slurping cum & pus, father's bitter  
sweet excesses, I stained my cheeks,  
bib, & baby-t, while his hirsute  
grunts merged with the background: a whir  
of wild ecstasy made mundane: rattle  
bottle, storybook, handmade cradle

When I was an infant mother used  
o needle me with sick entreaties: "Lick  
me! Lick me!" she begged, no, imp-  
lored her voice full of the breath that urges  
clouds to storm. I guess my young saliva  
salved the open sores on her  
areolas, the same skin my alter-  
ego broke open while gnashing, lea-  
king infection like a blackberry-filled

### ***WITH IRRUPTED DELIGHT***

the layer-baked treat vehicle swollen to bur-  
sting. Slurping pus & milkblood, mother's bitter-  
sweet excesses, I stained my cheeks,  
bib, & baby-t, while her squeals  
& shrieks merged with the background: a whir  
of wild ecstasy made mundane: paci-  
fier, breast pump, daytime TV.

## ***icky the girrltoy***

the limb of my baby  
glides into my pussy

i am too moi-  
st w/ horny for-  
give me

i want her  
back in for keeps  
but i settle for her  
miniature limb

it foots up again-  
st my womb, wom-  
bin' me fool-  
in' me w/ match-  
in' pangs, hot  
as when she crown-  
'd out of me, sear-

in' we twin-  
ge of deep the way  
you know only  
if you take on a toy  
or man who  
packs more  
& gives more

then you need

my girl she won't go  
back in, all the way  
in, baby, like i want

she's mid-thigh  
in, tho, in mid-  
squirm & her foot  
& tiny toes steer

me, kick my shi-  
vers & out  
& down i grin-  
d & squeeze t-  
here & feel least  
half of hole glo-  
win' loud over  
her cooin'

## **TITAN'D**

**FAMILY:** my moth-  
er st-  
retches out,  
a dr-  
ought-plagued con-  
tin-  
ent & the death-  
camp work-  
curs ex-  
cavate water-  
melon rot  
from her vagina

her cunt pulp bare-  
ly no-  
urishes the sky d-  
r-  
aping loo-  
silly off th-  
air malnouri-

shed skulls  
the death cam-  
p work-  
curs machines  
groan day & nigh-  
t, day & night  
excavating & proces-  
sing like the ex-  
tended moanroar  
of a barrel-  
chested man i wan-  
t to cum in my mouth

as if the st-  
rung out wail  
could fill the d-  
earth of his imp-  
otence & then the death-  
cam-

p work-  
curs' white tents  
tense against hot win-  
d in the tamp-  
on cave the sub-  
tle congress of bone-  
white canvas w/ the visible  
bones under loose-  
cest s-  
kin w/ the st-  
raw color of my moth-  
er's vaginascape

i reach my hands  
up to the dried plantfield  
of the middle-aged  
man's over-  
groan prick-  
ly chestscape,  
the plan-  
ts surviving  
on memories  
of water only

my fingers & palms  
tend each leaf & spine,  
guardening the b-

loom of an arid mom-  
ent & in the minute  
eternity be-  
tween deathdrought & f-  
lash flood i feelhear  
the ear-  
th salivate & the ache  
of that sound drowns  
the cease-  
less grin-  
d of those awful  
machines pulverizing the dry ear-  
th & the work-  
curs step feebly

from the pure white  
tents & dusty bulldozer  
cabins to see what  
acid drop-  
lets the sky mouth  
my moth-  
er bequeaths  
them to purge  
the chemically bitter-  
sweet-  
end flavor of water-  
melon rot soa-  
king all our condemn-  
end palettes

## ***icky's ex/amen***

i have a source of night

i have sores first  
principle & foundation

i have a piece of evening  
stored in cellophane that prevents air  
from translating crepuscule to rot

i have to pee before  
the cream of dusk overtakes  
the maneuvers of the wristwatch

yearning at the thigh Y of midnight,  
bytes of evening traverse wires  
& spit monsters into the between  
of three hands or distressed pudenda

*All hands on the lever  
of the Nightmachine!*

it turns you on: your breathing  
girl-daughter-body: a lunar syndicate  
injects the cold probes of St. Jerome  
lymph node to asshole all cajoling  
all girl-breathing all night-heightened

dilated & hyperaware

i have in a vial liquid night that surges

like a moonflare that is a cunt gusher

like a throbbing star added to a painting  
to balance out the ache

like a valence between nocturnal eyes  
undermining the sway of to gaze

like abortions vaccuumed from the womb to praise:  
(gobs & garbage limbs want feed me  
droned in the limbo of perpetual nightcogs)

## ***oncology***

styrofoam packaging w/  
meat bloodstain  
discarded

a five of diamonds,  
corners nicked off

the bud light can  
crushed, cracked, throw-away

fuck sounds, a metal door  
squeak, squeal, nothing to eat  
shuts, silence, more moans

but a half bag of mild  
winter's salt waits  
unused to rusting

a keyed Accord, she smokes  
to trim her  
newly unpregnant body  
unminted, undetailed, decaled

trimmer, stiller, stalled but

she flaunts it  
so Euro

flower garden, girder  
scuttled bedding  
a hip to repair  
metal-metal  
betting on an argument

snow falls one day, gray  
that melts  
next day, murky slush

nature's clog

sex is cancer is

what radiates?

shoe run-off on white linoleum  
rugless, bare

to clean up

mark it meat, marker  
color injected  
feeling ingested  
infestation of stains  
exterminate

into winter, potholes grow legion

a coffee can of butts  
sits off stoop right  
overflowing w/ tar

pilot clicks  
whoosh of gas

carbon monoxide  
ups the buzz  
of sleep

the disease sizzles  
cooking seize  
itself a cure

it's curtains.

## ***delivery by extension***

"Didja ever see a muff like that, son?" Father said, holding out a Polaroid. It was a picture of me being born, the crown of my head emerging from my mother's dilated cervix during vaginal birth.

It was another one of his tricks. I was getting smarter, though I still didn't know how to answer.

I could respond affirmatively because I had been there. The Polaroid evidence enough.

Then my father would call me an incestuous slut-bitch, as I would have admitted to seeing my mother's vagina.

I could respond negatively because I did not remember my birth and had not seen either a picture or video representation of it.

Fifteen with acne, I had not seen a vagina either.

Then my father would call me a queer, saying I wouldn't know what to do with a vagina if I did run across one, even that cooze my mother's. He would say my privates were as gooey and limp as the insides of a soft-boiled egg. He would recite the latest ads for erectile dysfunction verbatim, getting himself worked up at the thought of the invariably silent, all-too-willing forty- or fifty-something models from the Cialis and Viagra commercials, their still-tight rumps feebly disguised by loose-fitting dresses constructed of flattering fabric.

He would excite, raise his tone, drop his pants and extol the virtues of his shaft, all hard reds and veiny purples. Harder, bigger, and more veiny than mine ever would be or could be, he'd say, product as I was of that slut-bitch cooze my mother and not of his dumb minions, his billions of sperm.

I could respond with silence.

Then he would say I was too high-strung to answer him, too hoity-toity to even acknowledge that ever since that fucking slut-cooze my mother split for Memphis, my father had looked after me. Look at you with your fuckin' glasses he'd say, the veins, neck, and temples bulging and pulsating in time with his aroused heart beat. He'd punch a hole in the wall, then another, remember me and give chase, blunt force trauma from fists or forged-steel wrench on parts of my body typically covered by clothes.

I could, as was my custom, stammer and stutter, offering the nonsensical gibberish that had become my normal utterances in our exchanges.

Then he would say something like you stupid motherfucking shit-worthless cunt-bitch son. I haven't raised you to be such a fucking imbecile, have I? Then all veins bulging and pulsating, body tuned to the terror frequency often associated (wrongly) by distant poets and television evangelists with seraphic angels, he'd fetch some rope and tie me to a leg of the workbench in the basement, imposing his hulk, the violence of the struggle and contact steeling him to finish the reenactment.

I'll give that feeble head and mouth of yours something to do.

And he'd drop his pants and smack me with fists first then dick. Punch drunk and woozy I'd be whatever he wanted as he worked, possessed by billions of minions he'd release to coagulate on my zit-ridden face as it swelled and in my mouth as it bled, the pus, blood, and come a bitter dinner.

I would kneel tied to the workbench while he left for the honky tonk to ogle invariably pliant and yielding forty- or fifty-something alcoholic townies in their stained white tank tops.

It was another one of his tricks. I was getting smarter, though I still didn't know what to do when he would bring home a townie who'd snort and chortle at me because I'd pissed myself and nose cocaine off my throbbing forehead as a joke. He would fuck her for loaded hours, lit up by coke or my Adderall (when he filled the prescription), booze and Viagra, on the table near the workbench in the basement, willing his dick to finish. Then all three of us passed out in awkward positions, savoring the cool basement clime during a sticky summer night.

As the hard red Sunday invaded the window wells, my father would wake and whisper, pointing at the still-naked townie, both our heads pounding with assorted hangover, "Hey, boy, didja ever seen a muff like that? Huh? Didja? Well, Didja?"

You could say I saw her, our eyes plump and bloodshot.

I began to mutter.

You could say I was getting smarter. You can say I smarted.



*(i did odd)*

***cast:***

iffy the crumbsnatcher  
icky the girrltoy  
trick #1  
trick #2  
trick #3  
whorus

## ***whorus:***

i did odd.  
did i?  
o, i?  
oh-hh.  
did iffy O?  
did icky i?  
did icky get iffy.  
iffy becomes icky?  
i. ick.  
iffy did, iffy odd.  
did we odd?  
wee did.

**icky:**

girrlurine

years missing  
my fatherwear

you know i know the No  
& know the No stays

when our togethers  
twitch nerve synapses

i crosshatch & slip

tears in the sphere

of the cell phone.

::

**:iffy**

for a price  
given @ auction  
no reserve

too far out of fashion  
for those Nietzsche boyz

who chirps?  
slangbirds  
(so far out) in

dis-  
solve into wrists  
mapped rivulets

blood-  
born-  
e

clay/thirst  
nose/mouth  
sunken eyes die-  
verse cities

chronic, organ, rejection

[*vox arcana*=planet  
embedded w/  
order & chatter  
& moisture & odor]  
or intelligent life

## ***icky:***

Daytime demo/lisht. Hermagraphic: One girl body lit with charges, detonator, distance=sum. Elsewhere, an encoded delivery via cells, voice activation triggers implosion dusts her no(o)n-body down to furniture, rubble, ash; opens her dammed emotion until the janitors bleep it up & bleach & bleach it out. For safety=sum. Public.

## ***iffy:***

A failure. To hello? Properly. she  
wilt, say: is what i felt like *pijama*?  
hat down. top heavy. puffy nipples.  
ugh-ughed. asunder, close: a sleeve.  
Labia minora (apologize) mine pull-out  
couch his eye unshaven in she subcutaneous  
folds, beaten & all-too-wet tickles, latent, gamed.

## ***icky:***

I'm sorry I didn't. Shave, I couldn't. Know. To dress, how you wanted, too.  
Sleep with me, I. Dressed for sleep, too. Wet for sleep.

## ***iffy:***

O fuck! you  
ask a favor,  
a lion, a parent.  
calm. no! what?  
who? you are wear  
mys leap o. -er  
shore my spent  
health i hor-  
ribald tor-  
rent i pen. i fer-  
retted ow 't my  
sell alone, o'er  
looked i 't-  
rain to oh,  
ver, look.

## ***icky & iffy:***

The herest one. Girl of little whole. Day encloud or. Boy of little whole. Night enclave &. Both dead shamed. Whither mouth to ass or mouth to mouth or ass to ass or ass to mouth.

## ***iffy:***

Sunpath & pull & pull & flora.  
Outtake & away. We he zip.  
We came on came und came  
& thunderdrop as from a sprig  
of poison. Awkwardness  
to tire red, echo to meadow  
to fame swings ten reps balls  
out & bends spring into all ten  
days pre-summer. Trim  
our little Davy's IVs.

## ***icky:***

I didn't wear underwear. He didn't wear socks. He didn't. Let me. Finish his forest. Out we walked so satisfactorily. Pain/t(h)ing(e) unsatisfied. It didn't rain. Spying foul days. We split. We yearn. To audit night. Too auto: are selves alone? To eroticize.

## ***icky:***

Roses glued to fingers like insects  
scuttle wallpaper inches. *pre* -  
half clock face, button ring,  
requisite sounds, plus skin:  
ancient circular shapes. *mmmm* -  
broidered hands thong size  
into which slip digits  
& geraniums creep elastic:  
stop breathe, stop  
looking, keep rolling  
inches toward, - *ing* toward.

## ***icky [to iffy]:***

The instruction at. Referenced memory at. The memory could not be "written." (Never be "written.") Click on OK to terminate. Click on CANCEL to debug. (Or replay our hourglass immaculating vid. It is real you. Know by the quivering. Twitching intently. Knowing intention intensely. The camera stationary, unwavering. Miraculating void.)

## **iffy:**

Press to thaw  
a no. never,  
never elegant.  
cut, clot, no.  
never, never  
finger a block  
of ice in voice.  
Weight: i wish  
i could feel  
yr suspicion  
on my shins.  
going bad,  
how am i  
to assign my  
suspect pills?  
i don't know  
what to a—  
sign in ink.  
the lamb—  
how bad  
it tastes,  
your head.

## ***the tricks:***

Dim their blood with theater. Cook it slower.

## ***iffy & trick #1:***

I blew him a song of forgetting  
to breathe along  
a high pressure front & note      a long  
into drawn. Out of the way!      loop  
My memory dredges  
his nudity too before the  
misappraisal of the Arkestra.  
Us lasted into rain & amiss—  
give into blue roots & crudité  
& hands. i sap an asp.

Walk-off w/ a full count  
1, 2, 3. & a gesture of lone  
to huddle wit & pine for.

## ***icky & trick #2:***

The door was open. The light wronged us. Fluorescence & TV. We talked.  
About sports about. Face it, it. Happens too. A lot. Of guys who want Want.  
To please between pleas? Him. Body. It. Lamp limping. Wrong me. Wrong  
u. Wrong us.

## ***iffy & trick #3***

Whither she walkin to spread  
abortive yearnations.  
We finished; she ran. The shower  
hot. Sprays. Extral! Extral! i index i  
in which i fog her under-  
side & wash. Abreast  
of levees' intention, splayed  
ridicule spills from my non-com  
flesh, improvisatory in solitude.  
She too bit, & toweled off, too.

## ***icky:***

As/of any Anne Plath, Ur, Sylvia  
Sexton, come und come agin.  
'tis still sticky, sticking,  
still jelly, gelling *n n n* set,  
sepulcher=t'watch red lite,  
chalice ov urochrome strisms  
to tabernacle rations. To many  
you manufracture hunger  
while eating, - *e e n* w/ thy eye out.

## ***iffy:***

No food is too divine. To put away. I forever. With the eye that sprays, say stay, too. There. The eye that splays. Too raw to say. Anything. I never.

## **iffy:**

Up to spring's fence  
& pressed against  
a field of practice zephyrs,  
i overexpose my sprig  
in a snapshut & clover trans-  
lates to lavender  
& on her certain tongue  
i come to a fecundity  
only silence can allow for

*IF...*

& only onward i dash  
until i spend a bend  
in my river off to key-  
note her kind of over.

## ***iffy becoming icky***

Jig. Saw two bodies. Incompatible Timesharing System: an advanced love interruption facility that allowed body processes to operate asynchronously, using complex interruption handling mechanisms. Sex in. Gust in it. Proliferates currents. Of data or it puzzles. A jest or. A torrent of having fealty.

## ***trick #2 [lamenting icky]:***

i want to know yr fuzzez agin  
& hear you talk the blink  
in the big browns bumps  
nd stubbles za next world  
waitin fer waitin fer dulls  
watch you walk the senses  
away but eyelid hate to see  
you slink the horizon awayward  
so many yrs ago saw the masts  
first fate thur is down thur  
runed smell the DATY pit  
i watched Big Eye Gym Girl jog  
half kickbox tread to beat shit  
her undefeated record stench  
she souths one her revver short  
bed pickup her talk pumas half  
interstate price i reckon nipples  
rustle mine concrete over  
butt drawl in her cord'roy  
jacket i found goodwill ind'tit  
underlined her mud chubby  
nail paint noise in valor dis  
stress the stended cab, the sting-  
slip r steam wand r after 'scretion  
exhaust called "billie planks"  
dry heat pers'prate rar'fied up  
holster with how thousand cells  
taste denim air unqueenly  
stillcum tues churns towel out  
specials wheels tank bra  
greasin tire chasers chasin' itsee tee—  
sing int nuff loud :.herself

## ***icky [to iffy]:***

The catastrophe outside me. Tongues we'd toss for prizes. More moth eaten & paint peeling. Sweat & the carousel creaks. Swells with the dizzy. Where I'd swelled of...where were you? The catastrophe within. You were? Wear our skin? *Out.* Then fade. *Out!* Folded under. *That dark.*

## **iffy:**

As if all in all an orgasm is to annoy flesh:

then i'd posit  
her coming  
to once then too  
him coming  
to my icy successes.  
O she's *pijama*-ing  
her sleep-in song  
if that song's  
X, pinpoint,  
then whistle  
at gristle  
upcoming  
the morrow.

## ***tricks:***

If to identifier. Uncertainty pleasures pleasure by degrees. Underground economies. Turnip. U. P. Downturn. Then skin yourself alone then. Leave market. Mark it.

*iffy:*

Two yoo-hoos hung:  
the moon his if music  
reads red into early.  
Havest what is left  
of what holds?  
Color, flavonoid, eclipse:  
a garnish on nothing. o blood-  
& as she comes shit  
into her own void moon  
eyeshot o-  
a bent note. ver

***icky:***

Apron, are you a lesbian?

## ***iffy & icky:***

We spend hell's eons with spatters  
of hot. oh well, ill. clean  
it & it can cover & cover,  
prevent us. tongues ever.

re: where we shell: diet & diet,  
lipping skins after hours' set play  
playing upon our lips' lips.  
who if (as in, her, when) we cried

out outed would hear us amid  
that cyprian static, for what is beauty  
but beauty bean-muted? begin a  
kit, tears in spheres. walls. dr. for what

is pain elastic? shades of the root fire  
make embers in ears first fire past fear.

## ***whorus:***

Can you take? Ownership of what? Lust emits? (Fat omits.) Are you too? Omissive you? Torn away from? Permissive you? Watch what? (Gender eats.) You suckfuck? It / Out. (Suction-assisted fat removal.) Out / It. Then Lip it. Then Lipo Those Lipids. (Tumescent anesthesia). Tease pleasure. Distend. In / Out. Tumesce. Whole within a / voided hole. Without a hole. Invented hole. Curate. Mouth the words. Ovacuate.

## **iffy:**

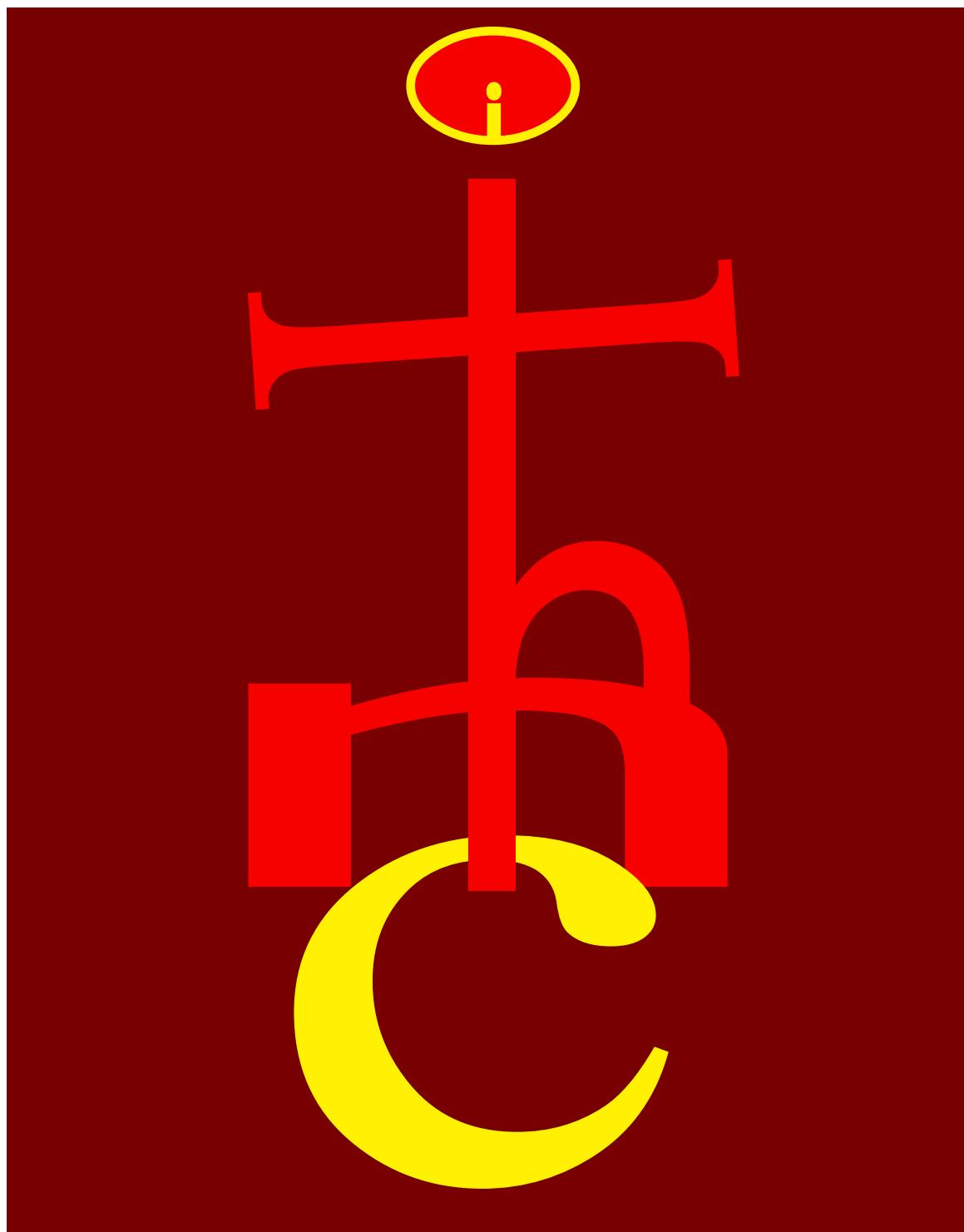
I took Dove soap with me,  
scrubbing dawn's doves into long  
nights, their wings beat feathers  
into stinging fleshes of flight.

The muse is sick of the music  
of her leaving, which was just, right,  
too, now officer, she's not buried,  
hear? among the poplars, cricks, & toads,

her *ohs* so sailing over the canopy  
beneath which bullfrogs grunt ethereal  
stories: long, moist, resonant, base:  
the oncoming of a real stunner come.

Again, the kind hers was just leaving him, officer:  
women in the nightmare, <sup>there</sup><sub>their</sub>, <sup>tare</sup><sub>tear</sub> named. <sup>here</sup><sub>here</sub>, <sup>there</sup><sub>there</sub>,

<sup>hair</sup><sub>hair</sub>, <sup>clear</sup><sub>clear</sub>,  
<sup>heir</sup><sub>heir</sub>, <sup>heir</sup><sub>heir</sub>,  
<sup>air</sup><sub>air</sub>, <sup>hadre</sup><sub>heir</sub>,  
<sup>tare</sup><sub>tare</sub>



## ***recurrent isolated sleep paralysis***

nothing is more  
real ~~than~~ nothing

the kiss in which  
i fails to exist

should i ignore i  
i am disappeared

dispossessed of commas  
~~pawse~~ to cradle my butt (tee-  
hee)

*Oh, Johnny!* Edith never  
Ednas me the way Jason's

beard stubbles my dry  
chic stanzas in excretion

nothing towards no  
alpha-numeric sets in

which the blue-wed sunset  
in which the <sup>(the sound  
of two</sup> rosé leaves  
swallows  
goes here)  
enact no loving query  
to a body suctioned in mud

*pianissimo*  
*decrescendo* let me me a *ketcchh*  
*poco a poco nnn lerrr reeeeeee*  
*al niente*  
*far niente durrrmm blunk ferr*  
*diii zyzrrr ssshhhul*

*wyzy hhesshhh ennn*  
*pleee nnn duvuuuummm*

## **c'est iffy & icky**

flashing red  
one blood-  
shot lovereye

i lament the lids' ticks

flicks of a switch

murderous eyeing  
silence into cock-  
a-doodle-dos,  
does w/o sound  
sleep arches into infinity

five bulbous sixty watts flick-  
er our ceiling fan sputters  
fingers spin an undesired half-rot-  
ation blades as apparitions to re-  
member summer sylphs

neural pathways leak cells to a leaden finality

lids toggle, tongues ent-  
angle two sets of two  
jittery addicts

water molecules rage Cana's off-  
a-point opposite light-  
house remains lingering—auto-  
mated for ships to miss cause-

way dress-shoed feet shuffle under com-  
merce, concretins & steelskulls n-  
ever tarry above sidewalk grates, f-  
ear poison gas, sulfur stench, col-  
lapse into sub-

terranean insomnia, my senses  
dull your breath, lovereye, un-

evens then stops, how hypopnea

dear bumblebee, your dear labor dares  
add sweetness, but mine mines stoppage

breathe mistrust  
lover, i pant unto ex-  
haustion the ceiling fan notes  
strokes of conflict in our body  
turbines, stokes intert-  
wined webs to-

night: thunderstorm & shor-  
tness of breath, i-  
sland-bind, charged together, love  
or i believe in our twin symbolic impo-

tenses: in u-

nison the wind turbine antennas beat red repeat feeling / unfeeling.

## ***icky: an education initiative***

You know who you are.  
I see you all the time.

I'm at work ALL THE TIME, a robot.

You only look at sorority girls  
with short skirts & make-up.

I just moved into a new apartment complex.  
I do not fit in so well.

There are lots of people around  
me but I don't click with them.

I am lonely.

And I see you all of the time:  
b-ball shorts, tight t-shirt, gym body.

You keep your baseball cap on during sex.

You don't say stupid shit  
like "it is the motion of the ocean"  
or "it is how you use it."

You have never had to.

You aren't sensitive.  
You just pound.

The girls you fuck don't know if it hurts  
or if it feels good.

I want that experience of being fucked  
like a sorority chick before I graduate.

I haven't made love in a long time.  
I am disparate.

I know you don't want to date me.  
I am OK with that.

I am nervous.  
It is so hard to be sociable.

I am scared of who I might meet.

I don't want some 40-year-old perv-creeper.

I am so nervous.  
I am never comfortable.

Can you send me a pic of you in your frat gear?

Put "Emo Skater Wants Hunky Clean-Cut  
Frat Guy for NSA Sex" in the subject line  
so I know you are real.

I am so fucking nervous.

## ***chain the skeletons to the treadmills***

forecast tonight: winter mixture:  
rain-sleet, sleet-ice,  
ice-snow, snowdrift, wind,  
relent, a clearing, then melt

rivets of sweat on their temples.

contemplation: cars skid, fishtail, crash

spring looms: a shipmast  
inkles over the horizon

*electronically controlled  
alternator with chain  
drive precisely controls  
the pedal descent  
allowing a wide range  
of users to exercise  
smoothly within  
zones*

*of dis-  
comfort of dis-  
ease*

abominable guitar chord,  
death-second of  
its wail, holds, enfolds.

basal ganglia at center: *hold  
up, slow up, stop, control*

mirror-lurker:  
an imagined flub-flap  
below belly button

package folded, pantried, put away

*i just want to see me see my pussy once, body*

stigma and ovum,  
shifty hairline, rotshoulder  
spineblade, exposed sickle  
skin stamen bulbed by pollen,  
perennial, bud-dotted, porous, processed

boqueted wilt  
muscles wiry  
pistil exposed

A sov<sub>e</sub> re n uεlvo s A

*g*

•

U

## ***piety / pouty / petty / prettiness***

A strained female face: sweat.  
concentration over every word spoken  
aching knee on kneeler  
in pillory of all  
denominations are granular, if  
you'll remember

nipple peak / pique / peek  
sheet, white, rubied

perk up. shrift & elbow discomfort,  
warming lubricant or mopping  
up thick aftermath

stains and burns

barely out of teens  
it's discovered.

sweat wall, cross-hatched  
wicker with lipstick, grief  
in darkness, a voice sounds  
like half a wrinkled face

mid-mass, a bird enters  
church, confused feathers  
aflutter, it lingers among  
rafters, while i ponder  
over kneelers, among dissonant  
voices of god and Other  
half-memorare, naughty in uniform,  
kim unfurls, reeling on dope  
and nicotined, buzzing late rebuzz  
rebound each mispronunciation

an obligation, a misguided  
angel gilds a season with weather  
severs eardrums in silence  
song a frequency above, vibrato

weeping into orgasms  
over risqué pages

still half-hard, a thighbite  
rush of adrenaline over impropriety

finger trace nipples in concentric  
circles leaving burn  
marks wanting grafts

hum, hiss, strum, click, the Vic.'s  
needle dum-dee-dums  
beyond reach, like bedded  
sins. Cistercian, cervical, and blossoms.

## ***iffy chats random about hunger***



**Talk to strangers!**

You're now chatting with a random stranger. Say hi!

**You:** i want

**You:** some lonely man

**You:** to bust a nut

**You:** on my face

**Stranger:** lol

**You:** r u lonely

**Stranger:** semi

**You:** then im afraid ill have 2 leave

**Stranger:** lol

**You:** nothing compares 2

**You:** the sperm

**Stranger:** lol

**You:** of the truly

**You:** lonely

**Stranger:** show face

You have disconnected.

## ***to decency or to de-sense seeing***

*(upon Rodin's Adam)*

Lump under wait  
for the human  
tongue, hand-  
crafted nub  
in bronze sans

(pulse beat, ore, arousal)

jouissance that

bud i lick suck  
kiss pure how  
decreation works  
to disappear  
a self unreflected

(dull, vulgar, gross)

in his striated abdomen  
shielded from ridicule

(the reticulation of sin)

by the sinew  
of an overwrought arm

the right is if  
by accident by  
incitement a riot of  
saliva coats when  
statuary feigns a frozen  
wriggle still the bud  
so wondrously unalive  
dark bronze pulls  
at my premolar  
fillings rubs  
my frenulum linguae  
raw from overuse

( h e m o g l o b i n   t a s t e ,   t o o ,   a f t e r w a r d )

curling tongue  
whilst i persist  
to draft enraptured  
by the cold metallurgy:

how unreal these  
flicks & strokes to extract  
to purify kneeling  
gazing up at truthbeauty  
until he descends:

bulbospongious  
muscle tremors  
unto embarrassingly  
flesh to dissolve  
sublingual nitroglycerine  
pills to stave angina to  
melt but never swallow  
gifted barbiturates:

desire that arrests  
the bloom of eye  
amid the thick  
of pouring heat

## ***iffy waxes tiresian***

Yoga for insomnia. / Yoga for narcolepsy.

So much for the Hippocratic oath.

Nutritionists and fashionistas  
are unarmed. Sandinistas  
teach the populace to toggle  
between adoration and revulsion:  
a sub-waif waist line  
or Anna Nicole's Olympian bust line?

Some of the chosen  
merely sit & breathe  
while others bustle  
over concrete shapes  
of themselves or relatives  
frozen in a blast  
of furnace ash.

Journeyman doctors  
reach the end  
of the mind and find  
Iffy but no palm,  
empty pillboxes but  
no donkey, no praise  
of No. Immoral Soul,

sing softly until I end.

My song never  
reaches the Hot 100.

Neither Anna Nicole  
nor Kate Moss  
will ever love  
me neither in this life  
nor in the other

Regard this posture:  
posture is all posturing.

Stop jocking / stop joking.  
shut up, dude, shut up.

Now on the Big Time Dating Show Leading Always to Sex,  
Iffy waits  
behind the silken curtain  
to pose with a copper coffer  
containing an ouroboros, all tooth-  
some sinew & shimmering scale

for the last Oprah.  
now on DVR.

After choosing a mate,  
Iffy lounges  
beneath Egyptian cotton  
sucking himself still  
longing for

the androgynous  
mate (who has slipped out  
the side door)  
who has slipped into

something more

uncomfortable.

& old body parts,  
dry lotus petals, unfold

(Today's tip: you can energize wilting  
greens with an icewater bath.)

hormonally altered by pills:

His flower half-withered.  
Her fluster half-hard.

e r a o  
j FOREGO EGO  
g EGO FOREGONE  
o b j FOREGO EGO  
e r g o

## ***dreams under the wrack of the new empathy***

i want to push  
my body  
into the gulf

between death & wealth,  
weld the breach  
w/ hell's torch,

& recoil,  
to marvel over  
the riches my dear-  
th has willed, wiring  
time to my end

breath, ghost beads  
of work sweat,  
piquancy of arm-

pit concocted  
from the wild

abscess of the image-  
engined cod-  
e-scape: my hope

(double-click)

meanwhile arrayed,  
an elite (be  
still me we) argues  
plans for game creat-  
ures in a season-

al kill, schemes  
for which flow-  
ers i choose  
to cede to wilt

amid the biology  
of iron's leaching b-

loom & hours whiling aw-  
ay brown bloods coagu-  
late in a dead-  
ened forest, refuse-  
full, beneath finger-  
nails or among  
an irradiated desert  
i now wield,

overtaxed in the unrest  
of sleep's caustic we-  
ald, i inhale a moon-  
scape, devour  
the code of unfolding no-  
ise & regurgitate:

a dwale  
i spot weld  
to a familiar  
taste indus-  
try lucid dreams, dim-  
ensions of was-  
te (page load time) analy-  
tics the elite we recre-  
ate :: weregild : world.

**SCANN-  
EAR CHITTER  
FOR KONERAK**

**SINTHASOMPHONE:** i do no-

t need to k-  
now you foul poli-  
ce of Milwaukee fee-  
ding fags to the de-  
sire mons-  
ter then laughing whe-  
n the hair  
on this one's seve-  
red hammeard head not boil-  
t like the others for stock  
is corrupted by the win-  
d & de-  
styled to uglee—

an as the head  
looms staked in the yar-  
dove the beast  
piked there dead eyes ex-  
pressive but abs-  
tracted of spark-  
le spack-  
led w/ blo-  
odd as if in full yaw-  
n the belly of the be-  
ast now overs-  
tuffed to gut-bust  
-ling w/ taint-  
ed forbidden me-

at while the pol-  
ice steer their super  
-charged cruise-  
rs w/ th-  
air fat fat fucking  
hairy belly meat p-  
ointing service re-

volvers out the wind-  
ow & daring bull-  
ets to evaporate the dow-  
ntrodden hum-

an refuse hudd-  
led on the stree-  
ts absented of shel  
-turning aw-  
ay from ho-  
pe & home be-  
-lie-  
fing only in the ex-  
is-  
tense of the mons-  
ter b/c of the dis-  
pursed affect  
of that unreal hu-  
nger which con-  
-sumes all weak

-er desires whet-  
her r-  
aw or cr-  
-ooked.

**I RO-  
TE RIGHT  
MY SUI-  
SIDE NOTE:**

*I DISCUSS-  
ED MYSELF.*

i wrote  
my suicide no-  
te to my di-  
arrhea:

*diar-  
rhea, i wrot-  
e, im sor-  
ry down t-  
here die-  
aria ive hel-  
d you as yo-  
u fell th-  
rough my fin-  
gersieves & let  
you li-  
nger undern  
-eath my finger  
-ails for weeks  
when we got gr-  
een & went paper  
-less b/c i want-  
ed to feel lik-  
e a true wor-  
ker real-  
ly does: grr-  
itty rust-  
ick unaf-  
raid of being  
dirty, but all  
i ever get  
is sick & sic-  
ker from you  
even tho-*

*ugh how  
you cau-  
sing my bowels  
to shudder  
is how i tho-  
ught God to fee-  
l even if on-  
ly at a base-  
line level a no-  
thingness that pre-  
cedes a rumble*

**dear je-  
sus,** i shout  
-ed, **no joke it is happen-  
ing! will i make it  
to the toil-  
et?**

then it ends or is o-  
ver & here i am ag-  
ain agony anyw-  
ay anymore wailing  
in a hot poo-  
l on the c-  
ouch that som-  
ehow pu-  
ts luscio-  
us pun  
-gent me  
-mories in my he-  
adpeace.

**HOW I HER-  
DED IN THE FLOW-  
ERLESS CITY:** h-

ow over-  
run it is w/ bloo-  
ms how ov-  
errun it is how o-  
ver it is i can-  
not bare  
for it to aga-  
in blossom w/ can-  
non fodder in the gr-  
ay frothing muckgard-  
en of ru-  
int pedd-  
les in sn-  
ow holes ab-  
scented of frsotwhi-  
te o ab-  
sense of frag-  
rants to lure me frag-  
ments too lu-  
rid me as i hur-  
tded the so-  
uls of this bloo-  
ming city into who-  
les we dug to-  
gather before the cluster  
.bombs sign-  
aled the beg-  
inning of the endtimes:  
the shrapnel put-  
ting my bawdy und-  
er du-  
resst i can't re-  
st und-  
er the pet-  
als of these flow-  
erring selves wh-  
illest i al-  
so push the shov-

else that cover  
the rotting sm-  
else of corps-  
es where-  
in where hell-  
se in this flower-  
less city this flow-  
erring city gros-  
sing dirt up-  
growth beg-  
ins bl-  
ooming unt-  
ill it c-  
overs the fert-  
ile mar-  
rows of all  
are dead g-  
one aw-  
ful bones.

**RID-**

**DANCE: MIS(((S)))-**

**((((MASS)))**

**CULINITY: all**

the men me-  
tasta-  
size  
& breathe die-  
sell c-  
louds th-  
rough hospital t-  
u-  
be-  
s into o-  
pen air.

((opine, heirs)))

the trajectory  
(((tragic di-  
rectory)))  
of their vis-  
cous  
(((viscious visions)))  
saliva is unmappable,  
as are its splats,  
just as the die-  
cell cloud shi(((f)))ts CO<sub>2</sub>  
to st-  
rat-  
o-  
spheric heights  
(((here-  
tical blights)))  
on the wind's wh-  
im.  
rusted  
tumors over-  
whelm the gears  
(((humors over-  
come the years, n-

odd to Hippocrates &  
hypocrisy)))  
of these ma-  
chin-  
es

((excavator  
backhoe  
steamroller)))  
who daily th-  
rust a metal-  
lic grin into the mall-  
eable ear-  
th to shape it into a sing-  
u-  
lar vision, intert-  
wined, r-  
odes leading an-  
y-  
where ra-  
pidly.

((scission)))

now, their liga-  
mental belts  
are torn & beg surge-  
ry & reco-  
very's long labors  
& the joy-  
nts ache unlubric-  
ated, unused, rusted o-  
ut & weakened w/ minute  
fissures & distress & fat-  
igue, nuisance

((new since, séance)))  
plants taking over  
paths their metal t-  
racks once con-  
quered.

now, the men  
can't th-  
ink where to go

for re-  
spite.

((wincing, queued)))

de-  
spite i-  
n-  
jury by repe-  
tit-  
ive use, the meta-  
static men k-  
now the lamps  
of home are a sun

((asunder. us, under, dunder.))  
that never rises, ex-  
cept to charge the skin  
w/ melanoma  
(((accept  
cha-  
grin, cha-ching)))

& even

amid their flickering

((a-  
mend this bi-  
ckering)))  
these men have over-  
run the grid w/ t-  
heir s-  
urging & when  
the bla(((h)))  
ck-

out comes, jit-  
t-  
erring nigh-  
t in a cold sweat  
chainsmokes & pain-  
ts, ever ar-  
task-task, a flatline  
running across h-  
ours like a fabric-  
ated sw-

eatshop shroud,  
bought on s-  
ale for half  
of what  
the work is  
worth, less even than ba-  
sick need, & nigh-  
t buries their meta-  
static faces like a bill-  
ion irradiated moons

((trill-  
ion dul-  
lard debt  
ball-  
o-  
o(((w)))ning)))  
i cannot love  
in need of proph-  
ylactic darkening  
(((proph-  
etic, dar-  
kling))))

the dirt, wit-  
ch is night's own reflection,  
(((sown deflection)))  
answers every query,  
softly & often,  
no matter how vain or fool-  
ish, hiding the luminary st-  
ill lives, like compul-  
sive hoaders, until the w-  
hole earth b-  
looms carcinogenic *Hepatica*  
*nobilis* absented of s-  
cent or shade, amid the cross-  
pol-  
luna-  
ted wind  
(((spoilt mind)))  
that nothing  
remains to block.

& the end-  
less f-  
lapping acreages  
((ache r-  
ages: a test pattern, pat-  
urnal, diurnal)))  
of bagged filth for-  
gone & for-  
gotten in putrid st-  
ages of bio-  
degradation.

**IN THE MIRE  
ROARS THE AN-  
GLE OF DEATH:**

*i am the an-  
gel of death  
is what i say  
while poi-  
sed in front of the pub-  
lic rest-  
room mir-  
ror & i pray for t-  
hat to come true be-  
cause i grow rest-  
less w/ longing  
as no one an-  
swers my craig-  
slist ads i post  
all the time re-  
guarding my acne  
fetish. i just wan-  
t to fuck a cut-  
e girl or boy  
whose chest  
back & should-  
ers are pep-  
pered w/ blem-  
ishes like red ri-  
sin wishes & pop  
the pus-  
tules w/ my teet-  
h & consume the spurt-  
ing emergenc-  
y of pus whi-  
le we bot-  
h bother to get hot  
& off on the pure per-  
verse fuckery.*

*or perhaps she is a cutter  
whose acne sc-  
ars re-*

ripen under the tutel-  
age of her razor the ex-  
stacy that burns  
w/ the elixhilir-  
hating pain of e-  
ach new incision  
& how fatal-  
is-  
tic-  
ally the blood pain-  
ts our ba-  
red flesh w/ rust  
a soul oo-  
ze ma-  
king bear-  
able all the un-  
cross-  
able gaps & fis-  
sures into w-  
itch lovers are pro-  
ne to be end-  
less-  
lie s-  
wallowed.

while calc-  
u-  
lating the after-  
math of such fan-  
tasy the ine-  
vita-  
bull division  
that is hour de-  
sires & how it hur-  
ts to look into the mi-  
rror the ot-  
hers longings pre-  
sent-  
to our own so-  
lip-  
cystic desire

& we cant hell-  
p but look, eve-  
r expecting to see  
a lost twin, ever my-  
stif  
ied to fin-  
d out  
the twin  
is frater-  
nal: no liken-  
ess at all.

**L-**

**ODE-**

**HO-**

**LDER:** s-

wallowing yr se-  
men t-  
urns on my elec-  
trick ulcer.

i can feel  
it hu-  
mmm  
when u stop  
mouthfucking  
me & s-  
hoot yr cu-  
mmm porno  
styley into my m-  
out-  
hhole.

(porno styley me-  
ans u re-  
move yr dick  
& hold my he-  
ad & face in pl-  
ace by my h-  
air w/ 1 hand  
while jacking  
off w/ the other  
hand until u o-  
r-  
gasm into my mouth-  
holy)

i am on-  
e my k-  
needs, of c-  
our-  
se, & nude ex-  
cept for a gar-  
meant a-

round my mi-  
ddle  
(i have n-  
ever felt com-  
fort-  
able w/ my m-  
idle)  
maybe a ski-  
rt pul-  
led up or tube  
top pulled d-  
ow-  
n, or some sophist-  
i-  
cat-  
ed bust-  
ier or garter  
or even a tee  
or what if i have-  
n't loosed yet my neck-  
tie? it depends real-  
ly on what kin-  
d of product-  
i-  
on this is & who  
i am sup-  
posed to be

in the end

i get mostly  
what i want & s-  
wallow what do-  
esn't d-  
rip d-  
own my lips  
& chin & chest  
& belly, waisted  
& s-  
mile she-  
ep-

ish-  
ly lit up  
by the electri-  
city of this ulcer,  
this cum ulcer,  
which is u be-  
coming par-  
t of my body  
(par-  
ody of my body)

b-  
leading into my cav-  
i-  
ty w/ yr dr-  
ill w/o pay-  
nkiller & e-  
very nerve hums  
through yr ro-  
gue de-  
posit

(there is the hi-  
gh p-  
itched whirr &  
the smell of b-  
urning e-  
name-  
l)

& later  
once i have c-  
leaned up  
& had a gl-  
ass of wine, c-  
lean slate, rie-  
sling & come to  
my senses i th-  
ink back & then get  
the naked he-  
artburn that ra-  
ces like an imp-  
possibly fast but unseen

UV streak from my  
ulcer's bl-  
ddy gutpunch up  
my esop-  
hag-  
us & into my thro-  
at & w/ ul-  
terior mmm-  
otives i gurgle yr name-  
less name & th-  
ink: i'm too  
old too end-  
joyn this, t-  
hees th-  
oughts

**SAY Y'**  
**ALL RE-**  
**MEM-**  
**BERN YOU-**  
**'RE: FORCE**  
**SING YOU-**

**'RE:** s-  
elfs on me  
your h-  
ells on me  
screen my you-  
th-  
fullness a-  
top the toy-  
let of bur-  
ied de-  
sires & fin-  
grring th-  
rough the h-  
air matted t-  
hick w/ stink  
& dr-  
ying precome  
& bal-  
led up bits  
of tis-  
sue to plea-  
se & try to a-  
void the sm-  
ell of the so-  
ul wherein the dee-

pest hole  
of the body w-  
here hell & the cell-  
f a-  
vail each ot-  
her's dee-  
pest re-  
sources for-

tune & change & fast-  
end to this sym-  
biosis the shit  
of each es-  
capes disco-

very even as it  
escapes the far-  
ce that pu-  
lls raccoons  
nigh-  
fly out of sew-  
worse to am-  
ble blindly in front  
of t-  
heir oncoming ob-  
liv-  
i-  
on & be-  
come par-  
t of the un-

natural world w-  
here the moon  
is concrete & Kevlar  
threaded with a-  
varice out of an elect-

ironic garble of e-  
laments. knoc-  
king i hear:  
"hey, man, is ever-  
y-  
thing OK man? you-  
're talking to ur-  
self & ta-  
king forever  
to come  
out & i c-  
an't continue stro-  
king belly & cock sim-

u-  
l-  
tan-  
eously like a t-  
rained ani-  
male to a-  
rouse app-  
lause, a monk-

key video a-  
version of self ab-  
scented of the so-  
ul's fitnessed, wit-  
nessed, finessed p-  
ride of man-  
e & as you  
in there thin-  
k to fin-  
ish to con-  
scent-  
trait on con-  
crete moons  
& Kev-  
liar rivers  
& dead raccoons  
drying at that exact mo-  
meant the toy-  
let backs up  
& shudders  
& grr-  
gles its opa-  
que dis-

play what was want-  
ed belly hair h-  
and min-  
gelled body h-  
air & butt  
w/ was-  
te the just last not-  
e prior to dis-

connection

& sta-

tic."

& from

out of the mess

a mini raccoon s-

whims th-

rough murk

to take a b-

reath of it,

the concrete moon.

**SEX-**

**STING:** i want u  
to give me all  
the co-  
pious de-  
tails of yr blo-  
s-  
so-  
ming sex  
lief don't s-

pare shit  
& send me new-  
d pics of yr bod-  
die stru-  
g-  
gling synthe-  
tic-  
ally again-  
st its p-  
lump or scan-  
dal shots of u  
+ boyfri-  
end

(no one will  
ever see t-  
hes-  
e—  
lies)

yr fist try-  
ing to be all b-  
one & vain p-  
umping his swell-  
ed pur-  
pull in neu-  
tral or stil-  
led cum run-  
ning over a dam-  
n of knuck-  
les onto his vise-  
tight sc-

rote-  
tum or the con-  
damn still lief  
tossed on cheap she-  
ets lac-  
king threadcount

& yr pain-  
ted soft top-  
o-  
graph-  
i-  
es sp-  
read out  
on same ruf-  
fled cot-  
ton yr made up  
fuckface cha-  
sting coy  
(chafing boi)  
in the after-  
math ≠ deter-  
mining the pat-  
terns & trick-  
les of his rich yo-  
hung spr-  
itz on the stub-  
bull waxed void w-  
hair yr pubic l-  
andscape  
wd guide his pro-

being sade-  
tell-  
i-  
te cock from mid-  
riff to pud-  
end-  
a vale a-  
gain if u  
had any h-

air had any-  
thing to protect  
from the cur-  
rent of yr t-  
win bare ri-  
vers but-  
t we don't—

desire is all l-  
ack & floats u  
2 on & floats  
on u 2, on 2 u

& pudd-  
less above yr priv-  
ate reg-  
i-  
on until it e-  
vapor-  
ate  
s & we breat-  
he fin-  
ally & breathe it  
in f-  
eeling it su-  
staining our cell-  
vs. or f-  
ailing that,  
it just sin-

ks right into s-  
kin lit-  
t-  
orally be-  
coming vs.



**TO MUR-  
DER THE MURDER-  
ER'S MURDERERS:**

chic-  
ken-co-  
lored S-  
outhern chap (c-  
hump) char-  
ged for the cha-  
grin of his ow-  
n alcoholism, aft-  
ern-  
ooning be-  
hind win-  
e-tinged s-  
hades & tom collins,  
wood pane-  
l after bloomtime  
gets m-  
oldier & mustier, br-  
eat-  
hs shorten  
while folding f-  
lags, it's illegal  
to use an *i*  
to outfit an arm-  
o-  
ire with mothballs.

two movements:  
an arm, a need-  
le, drip by drop  
toward death r-  
ow, no, stay, sad-  
dle me with that dead  
man's D-  
NA. i am a kill-  
er is the k-  
iller is me

## ***few / fewer / fuse***

WHY THEN

i'll fit you  
you mother-  
fucker i'll fix  
you you moth-  
erfucker i'll  
hit you you  
motherfucker

i'll fit you  
you fucker

i'll fix you  
you fucker  
i'll hit you  
you fucker  
i'll fit you  
father

i'll fix all your fathers

mother i'll hit you  
mother i'll fix you

mother i'll fix it for your lover  
forever  
i'll fix it for you later father

i'll hit you lover  
i'll fit you lover  
i'll fix us

lovereve'll get you others  
& others & others

i'll not forget the others  
i'll fix your others' sisters  
your sisters' sisters.

i'll hit it with you  
i'll fix it with you  
i'll fit it in you

i'll fix you  
i'll fit  
i'll fix.

i'll hit & hit

i'm ill  
ill fit  
ill fixed

I'M at will  
i will ill  
i will it  
to fit  
i'm fitted  
for it

I'M FIXED

I	
WILL	I
ILL	WILL
I	I
WILL	TILL
	ILL

## **for sherman**

what i mean to say is i mean no,  
that's not what i mean to say  
i mean to say something "some-  
thing, anything" the silence  
is torture, i mean. what i mean  
to say nothing at all even something  
said, i mean, can mean nothing  
but what i mean to say, something  
i meant to say, i mean, before  
i was so rudely interrupted, i  
mean to say what i mean to say  
regardless of who is speaking.  
i will interject, being derelict,  
what i mean into this laborious  
discourse, i mean i will labor  
to say what i mean to say and i  
will, i mean to say, say what  
i mean until each ear hears what  
i say i mean. what i mean to say  
is i mean to say i love what i  
mean, so to say, i love what i  
mean to say, for instance, say  
i mean to say what i mean to  
say then once what i mean to  
say is said only then can i say  
what i mean by what i mean to say,  
that is to say, i will say what  
i mean about what i mean to say  
when i say what i mean to say,  
and then also when i say what  
i mean about what i mean to say  
and then say what that means.  
i mean, i see a man or woman,  
and i say, "say, that man or woman  
may mean to say what i mean to say,"  
but i've not yet heard that man  
or woman express what they mean  
to say to see whether it is similar

to or the same (in principle) as what i mean to say and i say if we are in agreement why not say what we mean to say to one another. i mean to say, who does not love to revel in the agreement of saying and meaning and saying, furthermore, what one means to say. yet, if this very same man or woman means to say something askance of what i mean to say i mean, this is another matter entirely. what i mean to say is i will say what i mean to say i mean until the man or woman understands not only what i mean to say but also adopts what i mean and says what i mean to say before i say what i mean myself, or failing that, says what i mean to say simultaneously with the thought of what i mean to say unclouding itself cognitively because what i mean to say is why spend time saying what one means if another means to say something dangerously contradictory to what i mean to say. i mean, if what i mean harbors any kind of value at all, then certainly this value presents a kind of universal and i will find that what i mean to say connects me with other mans or womans by the shared principles of what we mean and say, i mean it is not possible and possibly not even conceivable that what i mean to say is not what i mean because if i mean to say it, it must mean it is what i mean and what i mean to say ought to be said in such a way that what i mean to say is recognized as saying what i mean to say in the doing of the saying. say any man or woman happens to hear the act of me saying what i mean to say, i mean, this man

or woman should know what i mean  
by and/or through the act of saying  
what i mean to say and if the man  
or woman do not know, it is perhaps  
because they have never imagined,  
i mean to say, something other  
than what i mean to say. that is to say,  
i have completed the extent of what  
i mean to say to the fullest superscript  
of my powers for saying what i mean  
to say i mean. i have made the act  
of saying what i mean to say so  
incontrovertible from and interconnected  
with the true meaning of what i mean  
to say that any man's or woman's version  
of what i mean to say that differs  
from the true version of what i mean  
to say or mean will most surely  
be the fault of the man or woman who  
has superimposed what he or she means  
to say or means or says over, above,  
beyond or through what i mean, what  
i mean to say or say i mean. i mean  
these mans and womans that don't  
mean to say i say what i mean to say  
have tipped the communicative playing  
field in favor of hises and hers  
egos, in favor of believing i mean  
to say something other than what i  
mean to say. what i mean to say i mean,  
i mean, i mean i think, or what i mean  
to say is i think the acting out  
of saying what i mean to say is a  
perfect act. i think and what i mean  
to say is as what i mean to say appears  
like a ghost voice on a recording  
device as if from out of nowhere.  
what i mean to say gets enacted  
and emerges in what i say i mean about  
what i mean to say and what i mean  
to say is these mans or womans cannot

possibly think, what i mean to say  
is, cannot possibly think what i mean  
to say is something other than what  
i mean to say or of what i mean  
to say as expressed in word or deed  
ought to mean what i mean to say  
and not, i mean, what some mans  
or womans means to say i mean. i mean  
what gives that he or she the right  
to say that what i mean to say is anything  
other than what i mean to say i mean.  
i mean, considering a discrepancy  
between what i mean to say and mean  
and what some man or woman thinks  
or interprets what i mean to say i  
mean makes me so angry and frustrated,  
which is unwholesome, i mean, my anger  
prevents me from acting out what i  
mean to say. i mean i want to rid  
the world of the potential mans  
and womans who say what i mean to say,  
i mean, differs from what i truly mean  
to say i mean because, i mean, in this  
way it is possible to once and for all  
mean what i mean to say in emergent  
thought and word and deed finally.  
what i mean to say is i will then not  
hesitate or waiver to say what i mean  
to say for fear because then when  
i say what i mean to say it will be said  
in such a way that what i say i mean  
to say will really, truly be what i  
mean to say and mean without hesitation,  
counterpoint, misinterpretation, or dispute  
until what i mean to say differs  
from what i mean and say, at which point  
i will have to refute what i said  
i meant to say with what i mean to say  
about what i meant to say and said  
and meant & it will become gospelized,  
eliminating of course, those mans

and womans who say that what i mean  
to say about what i meant to say  
and said differs from what they mean,  
what they say and what they mean  
to say about what i have said  
and meant, or say and mean, and then  
what i mean to say and mean about  
the changes to what i have meant  
to say and meant will become gospelized,  
overflowing, i mean, with the absolute  
truth of what i mean to say that is until

## ***an iffy goodbye is not goodbye***

carried over peoples & voices & swells  
i arrive, iffy, at your end rites  
bearing what i know as sorrow  
to gift to you, pyrrhic now, enashed.  
since wheels & whim spun your body  
under for their lechery, alas, iffy, besnatched  
by odd meters & ritual sayings ancestral,  
i yield tribute in tears & cries & inquiry,  
allowed by the fraternity of space-time  
to stitch my first hello into a last farewell enacted.

## ***iffy hollers at a surfeit of wind***

shushup, you, the wind!  
in your howls & how

neglected

the body is  
the wind  
alleges with howls & creaks  
& footfalls

left in a forgotten  
foreign dusting.

the body's at once an impressionable,  
pristine cliff face

snowcrunch:

& then discovered  
& then pockmarked by bootfalls

impact, indent, shape, tracks to trace  
& then blown over

with the drift of girl

exploring my aloneness

& wind, shushup!

in the shelter of boy: my aloofness  
wends alongside the wind  
whipping

my attempts to mutter  
to summon back the body losst

& left for raw on the pique & torn  
again open by the freeze.

***if i have put myself into a cloister with reason***

*rape and objectification become as close  
as you get to love and my raping and objectifying  
you as close as i get to love. the small of  
the backache a bird twitters away feathers the first  
flutters of invasion the plan made before  
the plan-ness of planning was known*

*oft i sleepwalk through tears* (plainness of pining is k-  
*in the fence of design a fold in a stellar* now-  
*crosswalk a-consciousness i've never* n)  
*unknown in waking alone.* (the suppuration)

*nothing to fill in, nothing to mend  
the separation.*

*i've taught you everything  
i know i've taught you nothing*

what is it to think  
a thought that keeps  
us twain, a thought  
that keeps the idea of us  
safe from thought? (save this thought)

**S.H.-**

**it's-**

**wallower:**

can't i just  
be evil in pe-  
ace? can't i just  
be bathed in pee? can't i do  
my nude penance w/ the priest?  
can't i just be  
evil in person? why does it have to  
happen by re-((rote)))  
mote. don't fuck with me.  
stop droning on (((u d-  
roll drone, u roiling, u un-  
manned, royal-  
ing, ruling moth-  
fuckers))) this is prayer-  
time: anytime u see this ph-  
raze, it  
means "in progress." it means  
i'm screened. it means time served  
since my last con-  
fession. concession:  
i'll take my money back. i'll take my mon-  
key back. i'll take a hot dog. i'll take  
the pen-  
n-  
ant. it's not for me. it's for my nep-  
hew. put the trophy down.  
wipe off the smudges.

i'm sin-  
thetic, interpreted th-  
rough the broken language  
of forgotten passwords: u can't unlock  
my coffers anymore. u can't give me  
coin at the con-  
venience ((venial))) store. i don't  
accept t-  
hose denom-  
((demon))) i-

nations. u can't p-  
lay w/ my gender anymore  
(((i'm not gent-  
ler anymore))) i'm not  
prepared (((pep-  
pered, sprayed for bugs, sp-  
ayed, eyed))) to tuck  
it up under anymore, to crotch  
it, to go all Houdini,  
so to speak.

i can't visit your c-  
ages anymore, can't rock  
your imprisoned stock  
of traders (((oh, weight, traitors)))  
anymore. yours truly, mock-  
ery of (((rule of law)))  
the rule of lay, which is s-  
penned, s-  
penned, spent. un-  
till: surp-  
rise: this is a fool's nursery, b-  
rest milk fantasy, something's  
afoot, deformation z-  
one. can't i just re-  
main a theoretical  
(((heretical))) amerikan  
casualty? (((casually))) can't i c-  
lock your indiscretions  
on my spy  
phone & c-  
lick send? ((c-  
rickets))) can't i down  
cockroaches in a game s-  
how binge until i die?  
(((crickets))) i t-  
race b-  
ill-  
ions: if i'm not chasin' 'em  
i'm erasin' 'em.

i know how man-  
y govern-  
means my prostitutes  
have slept with. i know  
how many institutes  
my govt. has s-  
leapt with.  
i've been a gunner  
on severe-  
all think tanks, my re-  
sum-  
e reveals. s-  
hoot to kill. my interest level  
matches the interest rate,  
& also my kill rate: see u downrange. i have  
video thanks to my sm-  
art-  
phone. suck it. that's not b-  
lackmail, it's a re-  
quest. i'll even let u c-  
lick delete (((sick de-  
feat))) defeat fuels a fetishist.

that's as n-  
ice as i can say it, u s-  
ick fuck. u c-  
ant par-  
lay forever. i k-  
now the shape  
of your nipples.  
i'd like to thank FOIA. i know  
they're puf-  
fed out & fat. i'd like to think  
foie gras. but i don't.  
u are the liver (((live  
why-  
er))) in this  
zero sum game.

shit's torture, crueler  
than the fast food

i force feed  
poor paupers in the park  
after dark,  
the ones  
who have lost their fear  
of humanity & skitter  
up from the pond to see  
what the com-  
motion's a-  
bout: i like to see them fight  
over breadcrumbs, over  
cigarette ends w/ a couple  
leftover puffs, over forties w/  
a few backwashed s-  
lugs. it's comical. at least,  
that's what i con-  
fessed in the interrogation room.  
(((tactical insertion of interro-  
bang!:  
no col-  
lateral risk)))  
baked in a govt. oven,  
(((quaked w/o re-  
lief, flooded under, help-  
less these(s) indebted))) in a long  
queue waiting for the ding  
(((din nobody say the ding  
was u in the two-way mirror's ref-  
lection. mired  
in deflection. i didn't elect  
*this* shit. genuflect. inflect this per-  
form-  
ance enhancing drug—s-  
odium pentagram—w/ o-  
c-  
cult feeling. read: t-  
wo way mire))) to go into beast  
mode, u do need in-  
formation about my imminent at-  
tack to terminate me w/ ex-  
stream prejudice  
(((pre-jaundice))).

just do it.  
fuel up, pre-  
pare for a long f-  
light. u know my wear-  
a-  
bouts (((worn out))). only a matter  
of time until i'm in range, cross-  
haired. (((ho-  
me on the range)))  
discharge. let one rip.

the conditions i live under  
are profoundly disturbing.  
one condition is this: i have  
a limited window & it is o-  
pen for your sniping (((snark  
& death-  
marches))): make me a widow  
or widower, a wallower, i'm a wall-  
flower, a fatalist, a follower,  
an allowler. i sw-  
allow shit, t-  
his. i can hard-  
ly tell what but can't hard-  
ly wait. "when," i whisper, w-  
hip smart, but star-  
k: i'm no agency.  
i'm a rare proper sub-  
ject: subhuman  
(((suburban: b-  
urnman))),  
continually involved in planning  
evil deeds, planting  
seeds. so g-  
ANGST-  
er prlSsy: Just-  
ice, w-  
ill u miss me?

## **notes**

### **shitswallower**

Meconium aspiration syndrome is a serious condition in which a newborn breathes a mixture of meconium and amniotic fluid into the lungs around the time of delivery.

#### **Causes, incidence, and risk factors**

Meconium is the early feces (stool) passed by a newborn soon after birth, before the baby has started to digest breast milk (or formula).

In some cases, the baby passes meconium while still inside the uterus. This usually happens when babies are “under stress” because their supply of blood and oxygen decreases, often due to problems with the placenta.

Once the meconium has passed into the surrounding amniotic fluid, the baby may breathe meconium into the lungs. This may happen while the baby is still in the uterus, or still covered by amniotic fluid after birth. The meconium can also block the infant’s airways right after birth.

This condition is called meconium aspiration. It can cause breathing problems due to swelling (inflammation) in the baby’s lungs after birth.

Source: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002563/>

### **icky: an education initiative**

This is a found poem built from a casual encounters personals ad from Craigslist.

### **chain the skeletons to the treadmills**

This poem has a quote from a catalog description of the StairMaster StepMill SM5 from Southeastern Fitness Equipment (<http://www.southeastfit.com/shop/steppmill-sm5/>).

### **piety / pouty / petty / prettiness**

This poem is for Simone Muench.

### **omegle: talk to strangers!**

This poem is a screenshot of a real conversation between Iffy and a stranger on Omegle.com.

### **to decency or to de-sense seeing (upon Rodin's Adam)**

This poem is for Ronaldo V. Wilson.

**to murder the murderer's murderers**

This poem is in memory of Darrell Grayson.

**for Sherman**

This poem is for Gabriel Gudding.

**if i have put myself into a cloister with reason**

The title of this poem is taken from *The Love Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, letter 2: "If I have put myself into a cloister with reason, persuade me to stay in it with devotion" (29).

**an iffy goodbye is not goodbye**

This poem is a loose version of Catullus 101. It relies on several translations, both literal and literary.

## CHAPTER III

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHING BULK-TIME POETRY

#### **Indications of Bulk-Time Poetry**

In August 2013, contemporary poetry scholar Seth Abramson published the inaugural list of “The Top 200 Advocates for American Poetry” on the online news website the *Huffington Post*. The list is significant in beginning to define the contemporary moment in poetry as a bulk-time for two reasons. First, in his lengthy apologia for the list, Abramson opens by noting that there are “more than 75,000 poets in the United States alone, and more than 20,000 books of poetry published in America each decade, lists of ‘top poets’ have increasingly become anachronistic” (Abramson). These numbers are staggeringly large and indicate that any reader of contemporary poetry would be unable to keep up with the pace of contemporary poetry’s production, let alone the historical and worldwide breadth of the genre. One of the foremost contemporary American poetry scholars, Stephen Burt, also notes the muchness of contemporary poetry has led to differing evaluations of poetry’s heft. Burt, in the Poetry Foundation’s *Harriet* blog post titled “it’s too much,” posits the crisis bulk-time poetry creates for contemporary poetry critics by, when he acknowledges “to be *au courant*, I should keep up. And I can’t keep up” (Burt). Burt cannot attend to the many, many intriguing poems being published and discussions taking place, a great many now online—all the things that are of interest. It seems that Burt still ascribes to the metanarrative of scholarly mastery of the entire field of poetry, although he goes on to

intimate how technology has changed the material availability of different small, hard-to-find, shoestring-budget poetry journals. In the contemporary milieu that has developed over the last fifteen years, technology's ethereal materiality has been added to the crop of hand-crafted journals (which still exist) to create massive differentiality. Differential texts is a term coined by scholar Marjorie Perloff, to describe "texts that exist in different material forms, with no single version being the definitive one" (Perloff 146). Digital materiality creates twofold lurking in online environs. Just as one can always be lurking on an online poetry-related website, the site is also lurking, waiting for the next user to log on. The proliferation of access to digital publishing opportunities has allowed poetry and the conversations about it to grow and be published at a heretofore unseen rate. This lurking of the digital and the dread it seems to cause feels different to Burt than "the spate of pretty good print mags that popped up for those who could find them, and then sort of receded, or disappeared" (Burt). The dual materiality of poetry's growth allows more access to poetry and its conversations, but it also speeds the growth of the field of poetry into the quantitatively untamable behemoth that Abramson reveals. Because of this, traditional notions of scholarly mastery in the field of poetry have been undermined.

Beyond being too big to wrestle with under the recognized pretenses of scholarly mastery, Abramson's list is symptomatic of another bulk-time precept: canon-espousing agents are more plentiful and more likely to be evacuated of the content these agents are seeking to define. The dramatic increase in list making as an agent to define a canon creates an antagonistic dynamic between the agents creating the genre (poets and poet-critics) and the content of the genre itself (poetry). The list, as a concept, changes the perception of what material is considered canonical. If lists are replacing anthologies as canon-making

agents, then perhaps this move is a conceptual sleight of hand to mitigate the fearsome bulk of the genre, reducing it to a manageable size. A list is a conceptual canon-making agent that mediates and clones itself exterior to the genre with which it is engaging. Abramson admits to creating his list in response to another list by *Flavorwire*'s Justin Diamond. Adding to the exponential possibility of lists as canon-defining agents, *Boston Review* published a list of recent poetry-related lists on 16 August 2013. Just as conceptual poetry is a type of poetry rooted in the idea represented by the text, exterior to and perhaps altogether different from the text itself or any idea therein, any list pertaining to contemporary poetry is an attempted intervention to manageably constrain bulk-time poetry. In other words, a list is an attempt to mitigate Burt's anxiety by positing what is enough for an audience to master, even if what is enough is merely the list or lists themselves.

Aside from the proliferation of lists, the condition of bulk-time poetry recently revealed itself in a more traditional site of canon construction and debate: the anthology. In fall 2011, the *Penguin Anthology of 20th Century American Poetry*, edited by Rita Dove, caused a kerfuffle when preeminent American Poetry critic Helen Vendler wrote a racially charged negative review of the anthology:

Rita Dove, a recent poet laureate (1993–1995), has decided, in her new anthology of poetry of the past century, to shift the balance, introducing more black poets and giving them significant amounts of space, in some cases more space than is given to better-known authors. These writers are included in some cases for their representative themes rather than their style. Dove is at pains to include angry outbursts as well as artistically ambitious meditations.

Multicultural inclusiveness prevails: some 175 poets are represented. No century

in the evolution of poetry in English ever had 175 poets worth reading, so why are we being asked to sample so many poets of little or no lasting value? Anthologists may now be extending a too general welcome. Selectivity has been condemned as “elitism,” and a hundred flowers are invited to bloom. People who wouldn’t be able to take on the long-term commitment of a novel find a longed-for release in writing a poem. And it seems rude to denigrate the heartfelt lines of people moved to verse. It is popular to say (and it is in part true) that in literary matters tastes differ, and that every critic can be wrong. But there is a certain objectivity bestowed by the mere passage of time, and its sifting of wheat from chaff: Which of Dove’s 175 poets will have staying power, and which will seep back into the archives of sociology?

(Vendler)

Dove critiques Vendler’s racist, ideological language and shortsighted review in her response “Defending an Anthology,” also published in the *New York Review of Books*, where she notes:

Part of the problem with the phenomenon one could call poetry politics is the reluctance of many scholars to allow for choice without the selfish urge to denigrate beyond whatever doesn’t fit their own aesthetics; literary history is rife with stories of critics cracking the whip over the heads of ducking artists, critics who in their hubris believe they should be the only ones permitted to render verdicts in the public courts of literature.

But as we know, every generation burrows into its own hard-earned defenses, and it is the prerogative of the young to challenge—yes, and shock—their elders. (Dove)

According to Dove, the larger issue at stake is the ideology of mastery in the field of poetry. Vendler, in addition to critiquing the anthology for being too multicultural, also critiques the

notion that Dove, a poet as opposed to a critic like Vendler, should be allowed to edit an anthology. Since anthologies renegotiate how the field of poetry is constructed for a given time, as well as who gets to perform the construction, their publication can be an occasion for hotly contested ideological disputes.

Vendler's review of this anthology is just the type of politicking that Dove excoriates, as Vendler attempts to defend capital P Poetry (white, highbrow, universal, timeless) from oppositional historicizations and interventions like Dove's by using a foundationless numerical and hateful ideological critique, leaving the content of the anthology to be dealt with later in the review. How does Vendler know where to set the number of poets or poems of merit in a given century and how many of those poets or poems ought to be, or be penned by, persons of color? Vendler's review does point toward some concepts that need more scrutiny, namely the concepts of selectivity, which, to Vendler, connotes positively, and elitism, which connotes negatively. The access to poets and poems that allows one to be selective, it seems, is also what empowers specialized knowledge, which is the other side of the coin from elitism. The distinction is in deployment. Vendler uses the idea of being accused of being elitist to counter those accusations before they can be made, naming her knowledge as specialized: selective. By assigning distinctions to ideological terms like selectivity and elitism (and their counter-terms inclusivity and pluralism or populism, among others), Vendler attempts to wrest control of the production of the anthology away from Dove and Penguin. The function of the list of terms defining engagement with the contents and agents of the field is no different from the somewhat-more-straightforward lists of Abramson or Diamond. Vendler tacitly defines the list of critical terms that permit her to remain a master over a given area of poetry, during a time when poetry has gone bulk. By

strategically manipulating the discourse, Vendler excuses herself from having to wrestle with the entropy, chaos, and complexity inherent in the sheer numbers of poets Abramson posits, and subsequently books and poems, regardless of quality, by rejecting the vast majority out of hand. Regardless of discourse, a contemporary canon is a multicanon.

Furthermore, I'm interested in Vendler's notion of "staying power" as a universal concept of all poets or poems of value. Poetry does not really have the rigidly linear narrative of periods that anthologies and other canon-forming agents would have us believe. And the stamina of the poems and poets selected or preserved to represent a historical period does not fully reflect the array of forces engaged in shaping the genre or even the historicity of poetry during those eras, but rather reflects how eras have been remediated through emergent discourses that shape and reshape ideas of value over time. The development and classification of poetry and poets by historical periods is, in actuality, greatly dependent on chance, chaos, and the political positioning of the writers with respect to what those who create, re-create, and disseminate anthologies (and criticism) deem emblematic of an era or of the genre itself. Assuming that a poem or poet arrives within in the field of one's experience on account of stamina or staying power is to overvalue or be seduced by how furiously the story of that staying power has been shaped by ideology and discourse.

Contemporary views of the field of poetry are part of a larger cultural dialectic. This dialectic pits a Romantic, nostalgic, pre-lapsarian view of poetry (or any art medium, really) as fallen from its once-pure, natural state, by way of its encounters with culture, against a progressive, experimental view that sees historical developments in poetry as part of an inevitable progress and betterment, a narrative of moving toward. While the first worldview

might be seen as cyclical, art promises a future that will resemble the perfection of the past's pure, untroubled, natural state, the other view might be seen as a linear chain of causality leading toward an ultimate or perfected end state. Both ideologies, however they parse or historicize the "how things came to be this way" of poetry's past and what it means for poetry's future, avoid dealing with the abundant complexity of poetry's present, diverting attention away from the contemporary field to an inaccessible *otertime*. Poetry's agents (poets, critics, readers, anyone with a stake in the field) grasp at the illusory poles of past and future, which seem to promise the possibility of timelessness in mimicry of bygone classics or pursuit of future immortality or fame. In effect, both poles can be collapsed into one, as reaching toward the future that the illusion of progress seems to afford by experimentation, a poetic agent is really only seeking a vantage point beyond the illusion of progress from which to look back on the future's self with the same permanence and perceived immortality of those nostalgic ones who look back on a pure, perfect past. As Joyelle McSweeney notes in her essay "The 'Future' of 'Poetry,'" those who engage with poetry have to enter the complexity of the present's crushing excess:

Poetry's present tense rejects the future in favor of an inflating and decaying omnipresence, festive and overblown as a funeral garland, flimsy and odiferous, generating excess without the orderliness of generations. It rejects genre. It rejects "a" language. Rejects form for formlessness. It doesn't exist in one state, but is always making corrupt copies of itself. "Too many books are being written, too many books are being published by 'inconsequential' presses, there's no way to know what to read anymore, people are publishing too young, it's immature, it's unmemorable, the Internet is run amok with bad writing and half-formed

opinions, there's no way to get a comprehensive picture." Exactly. You just have to wade through the plague ground of the present, give up and lie down in it, as the floodwaters rise from the reversed drains, sewage-riven, bearing tissue and garbage, the present tense resembles you in all its spumey and spectacolor 3-D. (McSweeney) Literary and historical periods, viewed as static and monolithic instead of inherently multitudinous, create ideologies that inform the illusion of stability and containability, which those with a stake in poetry need to attempt to mandate a/the future. So much of the effort of criticism in bulk-time seeks to quarantine the contamination and the plague, whether aesthetic or politicized, that McSweeney mentions before it gets out of hand.

The present of poetry is part of a chaotic and emergent strata of chronotopic laminations, which according to Paul Prior and Jody Shipka, are "dispersed, fluid chains of places, times, people, and artifacts that come to be tied together in trajectories of literate action along with the ways multiple activity footings are held and managed" (Prior). Chronotopic lamination, by including trajectories, histories, narratives, ideologies, and more, extends what can be included within inquiry in the fields of poetry and poetics by asserting that "literate activity consists not simply of some specialized cultural forms of cognition—however distributed, not simply of some at-hand toolkit—however heterogeneous." The idea of chronotopic lamination is important to literary inquiry because it permits flux and change in the literate description of a complex system, instead of trying to ideologically police what belongs in the system in order to keep it critically manageable, often at the expense of pluralism. Since a lamination is a rich type of multilayered distinction in which certain elements of a system come to the forefront of one's conscious activity at a certain time and place, it concurrently creates a space for what is seemingly excluded, hidden, or

inactive—what is subconsciously operating—to exist in the substrate of the lamination, co-shaping it. By thinking of the field of poetry as complex and multi-layered, its study can be relational, rather than inclusive or exclusive, since chronotopic laminations are not fixed but fluid and developing.

Regardless of how it is laminated at any given moment, contemporary poetry alters the very past it leans on for stability by way of its engagement with and laminations of the ideological perception of the past's perceived fixity. The concept of multiple, changing laminations of poetry explicates Eliot's statement in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (Eliot). Chronotopic lamination, as a method of inquiry, allows for the formation of multiple, perhaps infinite, laminations by individuals to explore the interconnectedness and (re)shapings of past and present in the field. Looking at a canon as a particular lamination, rather than a definitive narrative of inclusion and omission, allows for more agents to enter the conversation by positing counter-laminations that alter the idea of canonicity. Every canon that can be created has an anti-canonical comprised of what the canon omits, and even an anti-canonical, which might remedy omissions, makes further omissions in its selections. Likewise, every narrative that espouses to explain poetry's present has a revisionist narrative that laminates contemporaneity differently. Any *en vogue* canon, canonizing device, or ideological attempt to narrativize the past or predict the future of poetry, like an anthology, list, or theory is an always already incomplete view of a milieu or a view that is emblematic of the time, place, and the subject(s) who created it, which makes it inevitably malleable and insufficient when viewed in isolation, regardless of its complexity.

An oft-quoted truism about history states "history is written by the victors," and

poetry's history is no exception. Throughout its development, poetry's dominant mode has coincided with advancements in human technology. Poetry's preliterate and prehistorical origins are oral, and evidence of poetry's innate orality shows up in textual poetry in its various formal attributes like rhyme and meter. And yet the textual mode of poetry dominates study of the genre to the degree that studying oral poetry is typically a specialized, comparative practice, uncommon in general surveys of the genre. The ideological supremacy of the textual mode of poetry, however, has little to do with combat between the modes themselves and more to do with the illusion of permanence that the artifacts allowed by text technologies, like books, affords the poetry contained within them. Oral poetry does not have this materiality and oral transmission and performance have to happen synchronically, the performances immaterial or devoid of tangibility westerners seem to prize. The mode itself does not afford the diachronic possibility that a book does. In theory, one has forever to engage with a book of poems because even a poorly made book is likely to outlast its user. The materiality and hegemony of textual artifacts has become second nature to those who engage with this technology, so the idea that the prominence of textual culture is ideological and based on a number of chance developments—including the development of necessary technologies that are economically accessible, as well as leisure time afforded to use them—is an ideology foreign to many, especially in academe.

The emergence of new media poetics and digital forms, however, proves that textual materiality is ideological and develops or morphs as fast as technology permits. With respect to this modal evolution of poetry, Marjorie Perloff's concept of "*differential texts*, texts that exist in different material forms, with no single version being the definitive one" evinces poetry's transitional state, in which the eminence of textuality is giving way to the

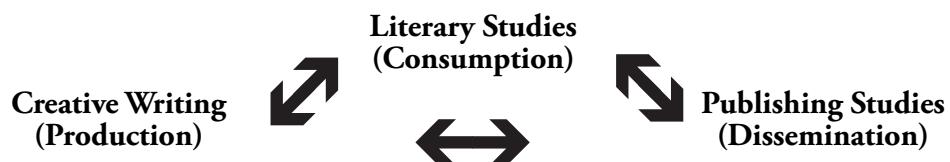
emergence of digital or multimodal forms, to the point where poets are publishing textual and digital representations of new work simultaneously, recognizing the sea change as it happens (Perloff 146). Even Perloff's language, calling these new forms differential *texts* (my emphasis), belies her privileging of textual culture, even as new technologies emerge to reshape it. This is, perhaps, symptomatic of the way emergent technologies, and the forms they allow, are often shaped by the power and prevalence of existing technologies. Why should new media forms be called texts as they emerge? What does the retention of this word as a lingua franca to describe linguistically based forms mean? Perhaps retaining the word "text" controls the way creators and critics alike think about new works as they emerge.

Just as emergent digital technologies permit unique "born digital" forms to be recognized as wholly distinct from textual culture, oral poetic forms have the appearance of being subsumed by the textual milieu, to the point where transcribed "born oral" poems like *The Iliad* adopt the features of textuality, including a fixed author-function, lines, line breaks, and page numbers, all of which would be foreign to the oral performance. Study of the epic is emblematic of the limits of poetry study that does not account for different modes, as John Miles Foley points out in *How to Read an Oral Poem*, where the path of least resistance is to teach *The Iliad* as if it were part of textual culture, rather than studying its pre-literate origins ethnopoetically or archaeologically. Contemporary poetry study treats oral forms as if they do not exist, despite what Foley calls "a genetic relationship between the kinds of verbal art we find in texts and those we encounter in performance. Given this reality, it would be foolish to argue against broad similarities between two kinds of poetry that are historically and genetically related" (Foley 38). And yet, genre surveys of poetry ignore what can now be referred to as the tripartite modal variation of the genre—as oral, textual, and digital poetries

coexist—and their coexistence can be interrogated relationally, via chronotopic lamination, even if no definitive origin, true representation, or essence can be recovered for poetry, and even if the field itself is too large and complex to be mastered.

Currently, the textual mode dominates the other major modes in contemporary poetry study. It can be argued that this kind of study, still under the influence of New Criticism's formalist theories, focuses on consumption of poetic texts, ignoring the multimodality and interdisciplinarity that is inherent in the field poetry. The English studies model, in which the discipline of English is viewed and studied as inherently multidisciplinary, draws attention to what lacks in contemporary poetry instruction, namely by allowing the deployment of literary and cultural studies, creative writing, and publishing studies simultaneously on the field simultaneously:

**Figure 1: Triangle of Poetry Study**



In the same way that oral, textual, and digital modes of poetry coexist and are subsequently codependent, these three disciplines of English studies are all interdependent, although they are typically studied and instructed as discrete fields. Many arguments about the literary study of poetry regard conflicts between using concepts of text-centric, formalist close readings or applying a given theory, based on the instructor's ideological situatedness, to one or more representative works to give a reading of the field. Both of these methods, however, rely too heavily on the schema of historical periods or mastering the application of a theory to a set of works and are more effective as the poetry in question is at a larger historical remove,

rather than applied to study of poetry as it emerges.

## **Two Difficulties in Delivering Post-Secondary Poetry Pedagogy in Bulk-Time**

The considerations of bulk-time poetry expose two particular difficulties in teaching post-secondary genre survey courses in poetry. First of all, the use of historical literary periods (Classical, Renaissance, Elizabethan, Romantic, Victorian, etc.) to teach poetry superimposes a linear, historical metanarrative of progress, causality, and fixity on the genre that reinforces misconceptions about genre emergence and development of complexity, both in isolation and in relation to the development of other genres. A period-based survey of the genre usually teaches traditionally accepted canonical poets and poems from each period, progressing historically from the early written texts like *Beowulf* to contemporary poetry. Aesthetic, formal, or stylistic tendencies of a given period are often compared and contrasted with the previous period to show how the genre moved forward over time or historicized to show how the writing of a period engages the events or technologies of the era or a relationship between poetry and the ideas of the age. In this pedagogical model, what Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* describes as the banking concept of education is prevalent. According to Freire, this model objectifies students by removing their agency as creators of the narrative of their own learning:

The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to “fill” the students with the content of his narration—content which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their

concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity.

'The outstanding characteristics of this narrative education, then, is the sonority of words, not their transforming power.... The student records, memorizes, and repeats these phrases without perceiving...or realizing the true significance....

Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into containers, into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. (Freire 71–2).

This established pedagogical method does offer valuable historical, bibliographic, and form-meaning information about poets and poems, but the perception and reception of this information as static or unchanging runs counter to experiencing poetry as an emergent field. The period-based survey of poetry is only one lamination, rooted in literary and cultural studies. If one examines poetry as always already multidisciplinary, this method of instruction ignores the production of poetry and also the conditions and methods by which work was and is disseminated.

From the poet's perspective, opposed to a scholar or critic, an officially sanctioned historical and bibliographic narrative for the genre of poetry matters less, perhaps, than the study of how poems work as form-meaning constructs rooted in a special, even hermetic, use of language. The poet's way of engaging with the field of poetry is more in keeping with Ezra Pound's maxim from Canto 81:

What thou lovest well remains,  
  the rest is dross  
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee  
What thou lov'st well is thy true heritage (Pound 98–9)

Of course, poets also engage with the field antagonistically, learning just as well from the trash they discard as from the treasure they keep close. A poet's engagement with the field of poetry may tend to be rhizomatic and anachronistic, rather than a linear, neat historical-chronological narrative. In this way, poets create an unconventional and unofficial—even unacceptable and unsanctioned—heritage from the poems, poets, and uses of language they encounter and, inevitably, absorb into their praxis. Working anachronistically—out of time, out of order, often idiosyncratically and serendipitously—poets create their own ahistorical connections and pathways that have the freedom to run counter to the official narrative of the field.

Poets, through their ability to engage with the field of poetry via serious play, which allows for risk, failure, experimentation, false starts, dead ends, infections, and possessions, have a freedom that, in many cases, scholars can lack. If poetry instructors embrace poets' ability to construct their own rhizomatic and anachronistic heritage through play, it can radically transform poetry instruction from what Freire calls the banking model of education to the problem-posing model he advocates as the practice of freedom, in which:

The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own. The role of the problem-posing educator is to create; together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the *doxa* is

superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the *logos*.

Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality...strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality. (Freire 81)

The student-centered, problem-posing version of poetry instruction can include thinking about the work of teaching and researching in a course as chronotopic lamination.

According to Prior and Shipka, chronotopic lamination reveals how “dispersed, fluid chains of places, times, people, and artifacts that come to be tied together in trajectories of literate action along with the ways multiple activity footings are held and managed” (Prior). In adopting cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) in the poetry classroom, students are asked to perform and examine the tying together of places, times, people, and artifacts, to be critically aware of their literate activity in laminating the field of poetry. Chronotopic lamination moves literate activity—namely reading, writing, and theorizing about poetry—from exteriorized practices that take place only after a learner develops a requisite skill set to an inhabited practice that is not separate from the world within which a learner. In other words, it shifts thinking about reading, writing, and theorizing as embodied, intertwining, and ongoing practices that are shaped by happenings that were heretofore considered unrelated to literate activity:

[L]iterate activity is about nothing less than ways of being in the world, forms of life. It is about histories (multiple, complexly interanimating trajectories and domains of activity), about the (re)formation of persons and social worlds, about affect and emotion, will and attention. It is about representational practices, complex, multifarious chains of transformations in and across representational states and

media (cf. Hutchins, 1995). It is especially about the ways we not only come to inhabit made-worlds, but constantly make our worlds—the ways we select from, (re)structure, fiddle with, and transform the material and social worlds we inhabit.

(Prior)

Chronotopic lamination, then, theorizes this complex, emergent, embodied activity as being of particular time and place. The most attractive aspect of thinking about chronotopic lamination in the poetry classroom is that it allows for change and development. A lamination is contextual and depends on the students' activity performed within a specific chronotope or time-place. In a real sense, it allows students to consider themselves and the way they experience the world as both critical to and inseparable from the literate activity of a poetry course.

The second difficulty is poetry courses and poetry instructors in the American university system face the challenge of acknowledging an ideological predisposition favoring Anglophone, culturally homogenous, high-art/elite, and text-centric poetry, while neglecting the poetry of other cultures, populist or lowbrow poetry, and poetry in modalities other than textual, with oral poetry and born-digital poetry being two of these neglected modes. The difficulty ideologies pose to poetry pedagogy is not that they operate in the first place but that they remain, for the most part, an unacknowledged, invisible, and, therefore, unchallengeable set of beliefs about what counts as poetry. These beliefs about poetry actually work as an intervention against bulk-time poetry—the “plague ground” McSweeney states we have to wade through until we are exhausted and give up—silently performing the work of gatekeeping as long as they remain unexamined. Even the first difficulty examined above, that an instructor can teach a fixed narrative of poetry’s historical periods and an

established canon of poets and poems from those periods via the banking model, is an ideology that is intermingled with other ideologies that excludes certain kinds of poetry under the guises of mastery and selectivity. Certain ideologies intervene to save poetry from its own bulk through systematic denials. Instead of using ideology as a means to silently deny kinds of poetry from being part of the conversation, it is more useful to make discussion and interrogation of ideologies and the judgments they influence the access point for poetry study.

On the poetry and poetics website *Monteridayo*, Johannes Göransson discusses the sleight of hand in academia that allows taste to be exchanged for selectivity and scholarly mastery:

Academia is based on the idea of “mastery” of a “field.” A “capacious” sense of the field, but mastery all the same...[i]n this case “the field of contemporary poetry.” To master this field, scholars need to have read the right texts (canonical poetry as well as secondary scholarship).

In some sense what scholars master is a “taste”—they learn to appreciate that Eliot—not say Harry Crosby—is a “major figure.” They read a bunch of books that show why this is the case; they master a taste. Except, they don’t call it taste, because taste is not objective; taste is variable. So they say “this or that poet is major” or “important”—and the reason they can prove this is that he holds a certain place in the lineage of modern American poetry. I’m simplifying here quite a bit, but this basically is what’s going on.

But it’s not just the field-ness of the field that exerts pressure on scholars’ taste. Scholarship demands poems that can be *read* productively—i.e., that it is interesting

to write papers analyzing. (“In Defense of ‘Brooklyn’”)

A significant determining factor in making poets and poetry major is that their work is deemed interesting by a group in the know, and the capacity for secondary cultural production, in the form of papers or artistic response, signals that poets and poetry are interesting. In the essay “Merely Interesting,” Sianne Ngai examines how the production of new knowledge is the indicator that art is deemed aesthetically interesting:

Diachronic and informational, forensic and dialogic: the aesthetic of the interesting thus has the capacity to produce knowledge. *[A]*// contemporary criticism is thus, in some sense, an implicit justification of why the object that the critic has chosen to talk about is interesting (which can be for “innumerable” reasons, as Henry James reminds us, including ones grounded in feelings of ambivalence and dislike). . . .the interesting...keeps the possibility alive that a critic might actually continue the task of influencing public judgment, if only in the modest way of suggesting that some texts are more worth paying attention to than others and then supplying reasons why.

It is here that we can begin to glimpse why the fact that the judgment of interesting seems peculiar to restricted or what Kosuth calls “serious” communities (groups based on specialized knowledge in which “an audience separate from the participants doesn’t exist”) does not necessarily entail an exclusivity that belies its claim for universality. For while it may be true that interesting always begins life as the judgment of those in the know (as seems in keeping with how its recognition of novelty requires a preexisting knowledge of frameworks), the demand for justifications that it solicits from others, which in turn creates the occasion for one to supply them, suggests that this aesthetic is actually aimed at enfranchising outsiders

and thus expanding the boundaries of the original interest group. ...we thus find the interesting at the border between the common and the specialized, bespeaking a desire to open up the “serious” group founded on the possession of specialized knowledge, but without dissolving its autonomy, in a way that once again points to its special relation to pedagogy. (“Merely Interesting” 815–6)

The aesthetic judgment “interesting” then, demarcates outsiders from insiders, although it also reveals the heavily guarded access point to knowledge production in the field. Access to the various kinds of information one needs to participate in cultural production becomes a point of contention in the delivery of poetry pedagogy. Those who can be considered in the know simultaneously seek to preserve their insider status while also vindicating their arguments through the persuasion of others, even those outside the serious community that Ngai describes. This complex duality in poetry pedagogy can, in a sense, justify ignoring the ideologies used to shape the poetry—and the teacher-student dynamic—because students, as outsiders, are conditioned to think that information received from a teacher is true and not ideologically constructed. Gerald Graff’s encouragement for literature instructors to “teach the conflicts” in *Professing Literature* permits interrogation of these dynamics:

Falling into the creases as they do, interdisciplinary conflicts go unperceived by students, who naturally see each discipline as a frozen body of knowledge to be absorbed rather than as social products with a history that they might have a personal and critical stake in. (Graff 258)

The pedagogical goal of an instructor in poetry or any discipline then, should be to encourage students to pursue actively the location where their knowledge base intersects the serious community and develop the skills necessary to produce cultural knowledge within the

discipline. Current poetry pedagogy is still too content with students learning about the field rather than equipping them to produce knowledge within it.

### **Using Tagmemics to Create a Student-Centered, Problem-Posing, Multi-Perspective Poetry Pedagogy**

In the previous section, two challenges to delivering poetry pedagogy were examined, namely the use of fixed literary periods to provide a manageable historical narrative of major poets and poems, as well as the prevalence of unexamined ideologies used, implicitly or explicitly, to limit what can be included in post-secondary poetry instruction. It is now necessary to introduce a problem-posing, student-centered poetry pedagogy as an alternative approach that allows students to study the field from multiple perspectives. In this pedagogical model, poetry is viewed as an emergent and complex field in which poets and other agents have and continue to produce, consume, and disseminate poetry of various kinds through various means. The goal of this pedagogical model is to provide students with the necessary skills to read, write, and theorize about poetry and to gain enough insider information to make them capable of ideologically aware cultural production that engages with and (re)shapes the field. In order to accomplish this goal, students are asked to complete a semester-long investigation, beginning by reflecting on the knowledge of poetry that they already have, and interrogate the ideologies that shape their knowledge and judgment. This pedagogical model, however, must be anachronistic in addition to being student-centric and problem posing. This means that students will engage with the field out of the official historical or periodic order. In fact, they will *create* the field anew for themselves through their investigation into, engagement with, affectation by, and

remediation of the field. In laminating their own literate activity, students will gain insight into what perspectives or trajectories of action delineate the management and acquisition of knowledge in their progression from outsiders to insiders in relation to the system.

In *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike introduce a multi-perspective heuristic for exploratory inquiry into a field, discipline, or problem. Young, Becker, and Pike identify a method for investigating and problematizing a “unit of experience” which the authors define as “recognizable, namable, recurring ‘sames’” (26), bits of data organized into “*hierarchically structured systems*” (29) that comprise how a person constructs their world. The authors posit:

*A unit of experience can be viewed as a particle, or as a wave, or as a field.* That is, the writer can choose to view any element of...experience *as if it were static, or as if it were dynamic, or as if it were a network of relationships or a part of a larger network.* Note carefully that a unit is not *either* a particle *or* a wave *or* a field, but can rather be viewed as all three. (Young, Becker, and Pike 122)

This multi-perspective method of investigation is derived from Pike’s linguistic theory tagmemics, which addresses, as Bruce L. Edwards notes, the continual problem in many fields of inquiry of moving from outsider to insider status in order to foster idea exchange and development:

[Carl Rogers’s] principles meshed well with Pike’s concepts of “etic” and “emic” perspectives in language inquiry, i.e., the distinction between “alien” and “native” perspectives on discourse generation and reception, and the necessity of finding the right bridge or “tagmeme” [unit] that would yield mutual insight. From the tagmemic point of view, every rhetor’s task is inevitably analogous to the kinds of challenges

“alien” translators in a new cultural environment encounter: locating a point of entry into a particular language ambiguity, problem, or challenge that will provide a true bridge for nonthreatening exchange and that, therefore, might make possible meaningful change. Thus, in tagmemic terms, a rhetorical task involves deliberately leaving behind a default “etic” or outsider’s perspective on data under consideration, and employing heuristics that assist a communicator in approximating an “emic” or insider’s perspective conducive to reaching the projected audience. (Edwards)

Because the goal of tagmemics is to find specific units of experience that act as a bridge for outsiders to gain a foothold in an unfamiliar field, its aims mesh well with the goals of an introductory-level poetry survey course, which is meant to provide students with critical knowledge of a massive and complex system—the field of poetry during bulk-time. The difference between a traditional survey and a course using tagmemics is reconfiguring the course from a lecture-based, banking-model scheme, in which students receive information from the instructor, to a problem-posing course that challenges students to investigate poetry using this method. The new goal of this course is for students apply the perspectives from *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, (see Table 1), to *interesting* poetry, in the sense of Ngai’s aesthetic category.

**Table 1: Particle, Wave, Field**

	<b>Contrast</b>	<b>Variation</b>	<b>Distribution</b>
<b>PARTICLE</b>	1) View the unit as an isolated, static entity.  What are its contrastive features, i.e., the features that differentiate it from similar things and serve to identify it?	4) View the unit as a specific variant form of the concept, i.e., as one among a group of instances that illustrate the concept.  What is the <i>range</i> of physical variation of the concept, i.e., how can instances vary without becoming something else?	7) View the unit as part of a larger context.  How is it appropriately or typically classified? What is its typical position in a temporal sequence? In space, i.e., in a scene or geographical array. In a system of classes?
<b>WAVE</b>	2) View the unit as a dynamic object or event.  What physical features distinguish it from similar objects or events? In particular, what is its nucleus?	5) View the unit as a dynamic process.  How is it changing?	8) View the unit as a part of a larger, dynamic context.  How does it interact with and merge into its environment? Are its borders clear-cut or indeterminate?
<b>FIELD</b>	3) View the unit as an abstract, multi-dimensional, system.  How are the components organized in relation to one another? More specifically, how are they related by class, in class systems, in temporal sequence, and in space?	6) View the unit as a multidimensional physical system.  How do particular instances of the system vary?	9) View the unit as an abstract system within a larger system.  What is its position in the larger system? What systemic features and components make it a part of the larger system?

Source: Young, Richard E., Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1970, Print, p. 127.

According to Tom C. Hunley in *Teaching Poetry Writing: A Five-Canon Approach*, tagmemics is an adaptable invention strategy that is useful for many applications:

Tagmemics has come to be associated with certain “discovery tools,” or heuristics, found in it the attempt to restore invention and problem-solving to the center of the writing and critical thinking process. Pike defined a “tagmeme” as any discrete chunk of language. Thus a poetic line can be construed as a tagmeme, as can an image or a stanza. Tagmemics provides a systematic way to look at any subject in three different ways that Pike referred to as the “particle perspective” (what is X?), the “wave perspective” (how has X changed over time?), and the “field perspective” (how does X relate to Y or Z?). (Hunley 41)

As a structural methodology for teaching an introductory-level poetry course, it allows students to invent their own inquiry, while simultaneously gaining insights how using the perspectives of particle, wave, and field influence their learning. Tagmemics is useful for poetry study because the particle, wave, and field perspectives include and reframe so many kinds of inquiry that are already taking place in poetry pedagogy. For example, the particle perspective allows formalist close reading of a specific sonnet to happen in the classroom (#1), but that sonnet can also be examined genealogically over time, noting how the formal definitions have been maintained or modified (#5). The field perspective allows for the study of how the canon is formed and systematically organized over time (#3). Ultimately, the particle, wave, and field perspectives create course objectives that are inclusive and allow for many forms of inquiry while still encouraging specificity—it is adaptable.

In addition to including multiple activities to study poetry, a tagmemics approach can serve multiple cohorts within the same classroom. In an English Studies department,

for example, students required to take the genre survey of poetry include traditional English studies majors, English education majors, and publishing studies sequence majors, all of whom are expecting to acquire different knowledge about poetry to serve their interdisciplinary goals and affiliations. Banking-model genre surveys that rely on delivering instructors' specialized knowledge and beliefs about poetry are unlikely to be able to serve multiple cohorts in a single classroom. Conscientious instructors may realize that this situation is not sustainable, but readily available pedagogical alternatives are scarce. By using tagmemics to structure pedagogy, instructors can scaffold assigned reading, writing, and classroom activities to model the various perspectives of tagmemic inquiry. Tagmemics allows discrete cohorts of students to tailor their learning in and out of the classroom to the objectives and learning outcomes they perceive as most vital to their discipline, balancing that endeavor with the institution's and the instructor's objectives and learning outcomes for the course.

What does an introductory-level poetry survey course look like using a tagmemic pedagogical model? It begins with activities meant to spark discussion about the assumptions and beliefs students and the instructor have about poetry and poets. The first assignment asks students to perform some reflective research by creating a document called an “Ographe” (adapted from an assignment created by Duriel E. Harris), which is essentially an annotated bibliography of twenty-five poems, poets, and poetic works they’ve read or poetic experiences they deem important. Instead of summarizing the Ographe’s inclusions, students instead attempt to articulate why these things are included on the list. Having a list of important works and experiences allows the instructor to investigate common experiences with poetry and the poetic among a diverse group of students. It can also be a

useful beginning to discussions about how ideology shapes what the Oraphes include. A second activity that helps reveal assumptions about poetry asks students to create a drawing of poetry. For this assignment, students are given a blank sheet of paper and have access to crayons and markers, but only basic guidelines are given. Since poetry is an abstract concept, the drawings tend toward the symbolic. Once the time period for creating the drawing is up, students form small groups and are asked to share the meaning behind their drawing and how what they've made is a drawing of poetry. Inevitably, students draw images of books, pens, eyes, hearts, stars, rivers, and other symbolic elements. The symbols represent assumptions such as poetry is meant to be written, features sensory images, is about love, is an expression of the poet's feelings, is about nature, must rhyme, among many others. When small group work moves to full-class discussion, it can often jumpstart discussions about what assumptions the learning community shares about poetry and also what is omitted.

Key readings can also help the learning community interrogate and define beliefs about poetry. While students are working on their Oraphes, the class is delving into the ideology of poetry, the poetic, and the poet, distinguishing verse from other genres, and using the visual arts as a comparative model to discuss ideologies about art. Gertrude Stein's essay "Poetry and Grammar" uses Stein's own work with both prose and poetry to attempt to define a difference between the two. Stein eventually defines a poem as a text that names a thing or person without saying the name explicitly—attempting to become that thing in language. Stein's challenging text shows students how difficult it is to distinguish poetry from other genres, even for the author herself, especially when poetry can abandon its most recognizable formal attributes like lineation, rhyme, and prosody, and still remain poetry.

The class follows Stein with Mary Anne Staniszewski's *Believing is Seeing: Creating the Culture*

*of Art*, which makes the argument that art, as we know it, is a web of cultural systems and ideologies propagated during the past two hundred years (28). Incorporating poetry into Staniszewski's paradigm for art's ideologies, students vacillated between essentialized, what the class called “exclusive,” definitions that rely heavily on received formalist notions of poetry and completely subjective, “inclusive” notions of the poem, such as calling anything poetry that declares itself a poem by authorial intention—if the author says it's a poem, it's a poem. One ideology that students did not doubt is that poetry is inherently textual. Adapting Staniszewski's arguments about how the term art is used to poetry, textual poetry has only come to be the dominant mode within five hundred years, even though its acceptance as such in the academy is almost ubiquitous. This textual ideology ignores the long history of poetry as a prehistoric oral genre. Oral and digital modes, despite having correspondences with textual poetry, are seen as something other than authentic poetry.

In addition to unsettling students' beliefs about what poetry was, is, or might be, discussions of oral and digital modes allow the class to examine the emergence of the poet-function, which is inspired by Foucault's essay “What is an Author?” and the author-function—the idea that the author, as a discrete identity who creates a discrete text, did not always exist and whose function is subject to change. As we discovered, the ideology of the genius that creates poems that exist for their own aesthetic sake is emblematic of the textual mode's ideology, whereas the bardic poet-function is a poet of orality storing knowledge and narrative on behalf of the collective group. Roland Barthes's idea of the scriptor, as an assembler of text by including other texts, in “The Death of the Author,” may have predicted the digital poet-function.

After the Ographe assignment and the examination of the many ideologies that

structure what can be called poetry in a given context, students pick several poems from their list to serve as the particle they investigate. Once the class begins reading poems, students complete reading responses on the collaborative class blog that apply reading strategies modeled in class to the poems students are interested in studying. These responses serve as the groundwork for the tagmemic investigation that will continue in the coming projects.

After completing the particle perspective, students examine the poem they studied as a particle from a wave perspective and create a multimodal presentation. To model the wave perspective, students read several sonnets, discussing the how each sonnet creates meaning not only as a discrete poem whose textual features bear meaning but also “as part of a larger, dynamic context.” Particular meanings can be derived from the context of the poem when the poet writes in or names the poem a sonnet, since that form has a rich history in Anglophone verse. An example of the wave perspective might examine the traditional Petrarchan love language of a sonnet, explore Shakespeare’s playful variations on this language in “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun” (Sonnet 130), and wind up looking at Harryette Mullen’s “Dim Lady,” which is a prose poem “sonnet” that updates Shakespeare’s sonnet’s theme with contemporary slang and a female speaker addressing a female subject. Students use the wave perspective on projects that investigate star images or the color red in various poems, visual poetry in the context of street art (and vice versa), the intertextual origins of poems in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, and stylistic and lineage-based connections between poets and their mentors or influences (or anti-influences), among other dynamic trajectories. Once the investigations and multimodal projects are complete, students present their work to the class. The multimodality of

presentation tools like Prezi allow students to incorporate sounds and images, adding a multisensory dimension to their presentations that is lacking in a text-centric course that focuses on exams or reading response papers.

Finally, students move to the field perspective to create a final essay for the course that builds on and includes evidence they've gleaned from the other perspectival investigations, particle and wave, that they have been working on throughout the term. It is at this point that the students' progression from outsiders to insiders in their learning about poetry is tested. Are they able to bring the progression of the course full circle by displaying how the poem they began examining as a particle relates to the context of a large, complex, abstract system, and the ideologies and theories that shape it? Structurally, essays tend to focus on the field perspective first by making claims about why a particular poem or series of poems is interesting, using knowledge gained from the wave perspective and particle perspective investigations as evidence, but students also have success writing essays that begin with the particle and wave investigations, leading to a field perspective in the concluding section of the essay. It is also not uncommon for tagmemics to allow students to invent another argument to make in a final essay. Final essays from poetry courses using tagmemic investigation methods are diverse in scope, including tracing the connections between Shel Silverstein's poetry, comic strips, and protest songs to theorizing a genre of poetry comprised of the compositions of serial-killer writing—Jack the Ripper—to linking Robert Frost's canonical poem “The Road Not Taken” to the canned, produced life of the main character in the film *The Truman Show*.

In addition to the diverse and intelligent final essays students invent using tagmemics, they are also asked to reflect on and describe cumulatively how the tagmemic investigation

and doing the work of the poetry course itself comes to be shaped by its occurrence at this particular time and place. This reflection asks students to indicate how choices about the tagmemic investigation affected other course-related activities, and also how seemingly unrelated events, serendipitous occurrences, physical locations, resources, routines, stressors, and other work patterns and factors shape the work they do and the output (reading responses, presentation, and final essay) they create for the course. This reflection on chronotopic lamination may give students insight into how they transitioned from outsiders to insiders in relation to poetry, but it also may serve the purpose of teaching students that the chronotope in which they perform these activities to make this progression is equally important to the content they need to declare themselves insiders.

### **Conclusion: Is it Too Much?**

Bulk-time throws the purpose of poetry scholarship into question, but opens up pedagogical possibilities in the poetry classroom. The concept of “mastering the field” becomes so inflated, abstract, and nebulous, that to attempt it is ridiculous. In fact, certain ideologies are employed to perpetuate and prop up the concept of mastery, some of which include limiting the number of worthwhile poets in an era, excluding poetries of other languages and cultures, excluding modes like orality and digital poetry, excluding or cordoning populist poetries like Slam, omitting children’s poetry, omitting lowbrow poetry, omitting doggerel, light verse, omitting kitschy poetry, excluding poets who are part of a perceived MFA-factory system, and omitting poetry based on the poet’s identity, among many others. All of these tactics serve to manage the unmanageable bulk.

A counter viewpoint to the ideologies used to make bulk-time poetry appear wieldy

could be to state that choices matter. The poetry one chooses to read, write, discuss, and theorize becomes more politicized and weighty simply because there are so many other alternatives. In teaching contemporary poetry, I do not allow my own choices, and the ideologies that inform them, to operate without interrogation, both from students and myself. I want to offer students a reason why I choose to read and assign the poetry that I do, and I want the reason to be more substantial and more complex than to say that this is the best poetry ever written or that reading and appreciating it is healthy, like taking vitamins, or appreciating poetry is a moral imperative in an era when more people are literate than not. The real reason I advocate for poetry instruction and see value in teaching it is a I have learned almost everything I know about the world and myself by consuming, writing, producing, and disseminating poetry. Poetry, because it is bulk, overstocked, overflowing, boundless, excessive, and exhaustive has the possibility to contain multitudes because it is special use of language, a system within the system humans use to structure, add depth to, and make meaning from the world. Rooted in language, which is often viewed as merely communicative and quotidian, poetry can be deceptively complex, slippery, and daunting, but its resistance to language's everyday functions are at the heart of its appeal. Poetry can affect those who engage with it, intimating or echoing the power language possesses.

And yet the possibility of gaining what I list above from a lifetime studying poetry is not available to everyone, and in an era that values speed and the quantifiability of standardized test results, the qualitative and slow nature of poetry is often viewed as an impediment, or worse, meritless. Poetry, like many of the arts and humanities is asked to justify its place, not only in the world, but also in the curriculum of colleges and universities. Why should students study it? Poetry is often perceived as an antiquated or irrelevant art.

Although I need no ulterior motive to study poetry, I understand how poetry pedagogy needs to be less static and traditional, less rooted in the banking model. This is why I choose to teach poetry as a complex and massive system. Using chronotopic lamination to frame literate activity and tagmemics as a method of inquiry into poetry, students in this pedagogical model will gain a meta-educational benefit by learning how they can use a systematic, multi-perspective approach to make discoveries and become insiders—with the ability to create and shape a complex field. This is a valuable scheme that students can employ across disciplines as lifelong learners, whether they appreciate poetry or not.

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