

HOUSE HOME LAND LOSS

by

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Poetry written between March of 2009 and February of 2010, exploring conceptions of home, specifically the author's house in Tuscaloosa, his hometown of Lincoln, and his home state of Nebraska.

DEDICATION

My mother, father, and brother are the reason I return home—whether in my mind or by airplane—and Kate has become home to me, wherever I am. This thesis is dedicated to them.

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House

Three sides,
four
windows. Four

doors, three
hands.

ROBERT CREELEY

Sick of the half-assed levitation down staircases, our enthusiasm filtered through pillows, static collecting in our socks, we flee from the first floor Russians, become the refugees you see in newsreels, shuffling past fences from some famine to a new land, shivering in coats that tent babies, tabby cat in his carrier cage as jackets thrash and toilets flush for the last time after ten, when we were often seen as poltergeist, rousers of rabble, jack-hammers, the second coming of Jacob Marley or second cousins of Ron Jeremy, made to feel abnormal, inmates of some embarrassed family attic with chains and chest to rattle, but the residents in this complex had built their own mythology of assaulting repairmen, of violin strained through the bathroom vent like gruel from a gulag, the spit-thin walls permitting wiretaps by our very own Saturday night secret police, the neighborhood KGB of sex lives and inside jokes so even tirades we spoke in confidence became common knowledge, cause for a story's worth of stair-stomping, door-flogging melodrama, dead-bolted lips Chekhovian in their silence; our nights became scenery for poisonings until door mats no longer slept on keys, locks were twisted in ritual, lights and blinds did their fair share of dimming, so the sight of cats was sharper than ours, we were kicking bedlegs with our multicolored toes and then one post-curfew hour came when I said to her "no, we are not suspect, we are not sick, so let's finish this subterranean escape tunnel with our spoons," and oh that breath once we ducked out smelled of railroad air and dust singed on a space heater.

On my knees, I salt the porcelain stains with abrasive and work against its rings, what's accrued, like a tree's, over years, a buildup of rust and of scum, the green-blue of copper that lolls from the faucet to the drain, the iron oxidized pale pink, this ugliness painted invisibly, minerals and bacteria that compose the bathwater left to blemish the tub for so long I scrub until muscles burn; the project of erasure is a physical one, as we've proven now over this week of defacing and refacing a home so many have occupied, filled with little scars, pins setting the fracture of a curtain rod, grafts of contact paper taking her days to apply to the leprous kitchen cupboards, because what hangs in these rooms is moisture, breathed in and bred without the vents or windows needed for escape, wet bending books, chewing paint off the walls, the ceiling scabbed by mold that has lived healthy above the bathers; I discover it over me like an ominous weather, like invasion, and am goaded into a last scour, gloves damp with the humidity of my hands, working for something, a blank slate, a clean bill, so she can soak after work.

Our microwave collects the liver spots
of pasta resuscitation, and at the spring
of its front door springing, a faint must
bumbles its way into the kitchen, says
something sad about a solitary dinner,
and leaves me to two minutes of heat.

Our first place of combination, a catch-all filled with different degrees of nail and screw, dry wood-glue, a variety of tape meant for every species of split we may be called on to mend together, and tools we only use when something breaks, neither of us qualified enough for creation or maintenance; we build like a storm, through an accumulation of wreckage and energy, and then rest comes as a pile, but inside our detritus I have included your flashlight, bright yellow and black, that we can excavate while waiting for the electrician to fix our squall-snapped lines after a night when everything breaks, and we sleep.

I find her secret
hardpack tucked
in a desk stuffed
with other things
to burn: a photo,
her paper-rolled
budget mummy,
vampire, her ex-
dwelling, smoky.

I sealed my sweaters tight in Tupperware without knowing this state would call for them, would forget some months its promise as subtropic, its pledge to never freeze the soil, concrete the streetside leaf piles into unmoveable masses, turn transparent things opaque, what's let out of the lungs, or rain in its pelt cloudy like milk that only occasionally stiffens to snow (so rare the locals stay home or, curious, hold five-second old flakes like ladybugs in their palms); I don a cardigan outside and in, the home sorely unready for frost, walls solely insulated by the dead or hibernating animals that exploit the holes and cracks, antique heater's gush running a bee line to window gaps that did not hold cellophane in the face of a sill-bound cat who cries his fur is not enough, just as ours is not—we live in our sweaters, we sleep in our sweaters, nothing and no one well-adapted.

Months pass without powering down, and the fan becomes the low paranormal hum of our dwelling, haunt-talk pushed in thin susurrus that is the music of this place now; unplugging would not subtract the sound, but add silence, for this hush has come to be the default, the haint made our house guest, inextricable even in a winter when the wind runs in thick thrum above our roof and the loose teeth of transom let leak our heat—we just shake more blankets out and over the bed, then fold what can on a body, our hands between legs, legs to chests in sleep that looks like hiding, the smallest shape we both can take, and fill under cover with warm exhalation, the fan outside our flannel and down drowning the night in its sibilance, and us in it, boat people tossing back to life on a dead air sea, sending a signal of wind in dedicated frequency.

I buy a Buddha Machine
to humidify the bedroom
in sound, but its batteries
bow out, the few circuits
lose their grip, its speaker,
ceaseless, takes laryngitis,
I don't know—only once
the ambience dissipates,
we realize that we make
our own, balance of sigh
and creak, sine waveform
and circadia, at all times.

The running gag is that she dreams of feeding coals into a furnace, only to wince awake and find me exhaling heavily from my mouth into her own, doing my best space heater imitation, an unconscious impression of the one she sits cold in the corner like a child pyromaniac, far from curtains or bed.

You forgot me, the oven says every midnight, and this among other things perpetually pulls us to the kitchen, where we sniff for gases, canary our own mine shafts when I do not turn a dial completely, let the venomous asp of our stovetop maintain a low hiss for some two or three hours since soup; she will ask me, detecting maybe a new dizziness, nausea just now burgeoning, if, in this slightly scented sleep, we are going to die as we breathe with naïveté, or maybe just wake up to find our tabby a corpse sunning under his window, little lungs not as tolerant, mewling as futile as alarms built for this sort of warning but equipped with dead batteries (maintenance like this never comes to me, only in too-late panic), and I will say *I don't think so, I'm not sure*, I will surely abstain from a callous *yes, someday*, because we lay every night in the design of hypothetical burial plots, and to come across us in the morning, chests motionless, the paramedics might remark that the sight of us was a peaceful one.

I am always up ten minutes before the alarm triggers, and this is why: strong sun, insomnia, a discomfort from rough sheets, the cat rattling our loose door, a combination of— and then, on time, I hear the buzz fighting through my shower shush.

Boxed tea: one way
of obsoleteing paper
calendars—its slow
disappearance takes
the blame for a ring
around every cream
coffee cup that sits
documenting days
and nights we left
half full, untouched.

All we get is mail
for former tenants—
every postal worker
ignores our return
to senders, insists
they still live here,
and communication
intended for others
keeps to itself; flag
raised, we surrender
our lives alone, admit
the former residents
to come in and out
our empty rooms.

In the Southern fashion of decrepitude and neglect, my car forms a carapace of pollen spread from dandelion and ironweed, from boneset and elm, thick and the color of tea stain, spores adding golden green which makes the body almost an environment, thriving with spiders that disperse as I turn the key, swing the door, kick up a haunted house's web and dust, breathe a basement must filtered through my pulled-up tee shirt, turn the key, hear the dead creak of battery, and leave to spring the trunk lock, spilling its leaves and seedpods over the forgotten belongings: muddied clothing quarantined, a newspaper marking the last date of sunlight, sporting equipment, tools produced at last time's attempt to fix this—the contents, topped with new dirt and the dead shed of trees, are what's left of an apathetic time capsule, a half-looted tomb.

Spent glass builds up to its breaking point, and eventually we load it like luggage—month after month of drunk—and drive an hour north; we are ready for the redemptive act, that shattering again and again as we pitch each jar into the vast crackle carpeting the bin, shielding our eyes, though we wish we could stare, slow the moment down, watch each bottle in its disassembly turn from geometric to geometries; their contents never gave us such clarity, though they lurched our movements, made witless pilots out of us, navigating our hulking vehicles through doors, out of shoes, off of cliffs, and our mornings worse for it, regret-glowing and televised, spent washing out wine from glasses, washing mouths out with the shower water, clean of residue and ready to be broken down and recast.

The bandage seals
so tightly the skin
beneath it shrivels
up without breath;
I tell her it did not
shrink but swell—
and she says skin
is an organ as one's
liver is, one's lungs,
only covering you.

If the window is a mouth, the air conditioner is a breathing machine, almost medical, pumping in struggle until it gives up the ghost, dies down in seconds of song from a weakly wound music box, the melody begun and then done, asleep as sudden as narcolepsy, unwakeable though I prod all of the buttons in every combination, just hoping for its shuttering respiration to nebulize my bedroom lung, medicate this record heat wave the house has swallowed along with me; I planned to sleep tonight on the floor, my air mattress flat on its back next to me, (the inflation machinery had failed), but after a last tap rattles the cockroach intrusion from the unit and into the open, I lie on my side, 5 A.M., and blow the bed to life, the one apparatus able to use this air for something, the only frightened engine.

In your pewter
jewelry box is
one intricately
glass-gemmed
bumblebee pin.

A buzzing begins from behind the speakers
at the ninety minute mark, splits in hairline
zags right through a Woody Allen diatribe
until I rise, untangle, and rap the television
like a neighbor on the thin apartment wall
parting people from a party, *can it buddy*,
still the sizzle spits in its spurts, shuts up
at my fist long enough for me to retangle
our legs, resign the night; behind my eyes,
I give the sound to your bee pin, and drift.

In lieu of photo albums ripening in ozone and fluorescence keeping track of past fashion and shape, faces and growth and bending of bones, instead of snapshots we complained about when our mothers insisted, sitting on laps on couches on holidays, or occasionally pointless, moments we slept in the open, came home with hair cut or from a dance, a date, or a birthday posed, lit by eight, eleven, seventeen candles below my face, in place of those glossy documents, we stole away with our fathers' vinyl; the LPs then like carousels of photographs in rotation, projection simple, the slidelight finding our ears, leaving our mouths as nostalgia as we flip sides, or through a library that finally necessitated a crate as we have mixed all we have into one collection, her Dad's Steely Dan discography interrupted by mine's only Springsteen and *Endless Summer* pressed against *Harvest Moon*, *Songs from the Big Chair* and us slumped in our own, low candlelight, being told and telling histories, me rooting out records, opening her jackets, her sleeves, play this, oh this.

Home

Shadows are under five billion trees ...

RAY BRADBURY

Welcome, from the Ghost Town Tourism Bureau

As one of America's most haunted cities, we are known for feng shui. Neck kisses. Strings instead of switches. Basements here are spacious, unfinished, and full of grave flowers. Choral chambers. Nails may be exposed on the steps. This city is a stockyard, a video arcade. It used to have a stronger smell. Doesn't come up much. The dumbwaiters can accommodate your infants for easy bedtimes. Just keep the door clear of obstruction, pull firmly and sing while you do it. Here, the trees die and become newspaper. Here, a whole home will hollow out like a cared-for skull.

Independence Day is Mostly Evening

July sees the thicket spilling with botany, like the produce of a man, too ambitious with his groceries, coming home.

Florets of fireworks bloom as if the roofs are having spectacular ideas. The lawns singe in this brainstorm.

The sun lingers over warm beer. In the streets, mothers picking up kids and bigger debris by growing headlight,

fathers busy touching wicks to cigarettes, flicking both into the grass like stunned crickets coming conscious.

Their shirts, for a day, are collarless. Kitchens sleep, TVs sleep, the bathroom sinks scintillate with candles.

Though the local stations wind down, boom boxes continue to harmonize with canine wails and report.

Families flank the blocks in rare symmetry. The sons and daughters juxtapose, some taller, more handsome.

Dark no darker than dusk. Whiffle balls and brothers invade and abscond from the conifers and shedtops.

Names later diffuse through the night's new opacity, many ending in Y or the stop of a consonant, vowels

held out in polyphony, something like a storm siren. Not even the dog visible. Not even the bush it was in.

But the square of turf blots, again a square of turf. Children, invisibly inked, reveal then in the heat.

How their clothes are gunpowdered, how their burns are minor, whose eyeglasses are crushed in a fray.

No one ever thinks that the neighborhood shadows can feel so savage, take what they want to take.

Capitol Beach

Again, the lake must be seen to
by scientists, as it's intoxicated.
Walleye bob to the top, oopsy-
daisied, overturned, gas, bagged.

Again, the lake must be seen to
with dredgers, chugging aerators,
a necessary quorum to provide
its chlorine levels, party plans.

Again, the lake must be seen to
be believed, wide as the houses
that gang up on it allow. Its skip-
stone wind is a weak fist whiff.

Again, the lake must be seen to
prosecute it for any crime, must
be caught in the act of capsize,
of undertow, or edema, to drain.

Again, the lake must be seen to
exhibit psychopathy, trying to
drag a tubing toddler down. Try
to drag its bed for bones. See.

Again, the lake must be seen to
its conclusion, be site of its own
shaken cremation, until, turbid
and thick, it refuses speedboats.

How a Summer Coda Goes

First, you are barefoot upon departure,
grip with your toes pile of shaggy lawn.
The toolsheds are feral as they crouch

in the darker fade of day like predators,
only seen in cautious states. Unkempt
arbor, bike chained to an electric meter,

the path home acned with goldenrod
that rings a school bell. With a trowel,
you till the funereal dusk in patches

of action figures and housecat bones
because some mistake has been made
by a younger self who kept a diary,

practiced, clumsily, mourning like this
in August and thick insect glossolalia.
Clouds break open like rot wood,

water beating the street in a holy din
you listen to with the eyes closed tight,
without talking. Still unable to grasp

the sundial nearby with its movement
as decipherable as a pond's altered blue
algae levels, its body no better to anyone

than a poison vat, come to near-nude
by children in various stages of sumac.
A tire swing brings to mind a car wreck.

Post-curfew hours, like television sets,
are stolen as the teens move in and out
of windows. Their baby siblings know

but keep mum. Crystalline grass
and jagged asphalt say *get your shoes
back on*, where two boys stoned

a bottle with fervor, conversation
all arc revision and then shatter,
razing the season if it can't be kept.

Shadows are Under Five Billion Trees

You are fifteen degrees
colder below the broad
elm stretch. Your skin
tremors, then tightens,
as when, nights, you
suspect your solitude.

Either in pain or pursuit,
children are shrieking
from a sandlot obscured
with a fastness of pine.
Their yelps peel at you
like fawns off-course.

Hours pass. The children
exit the curtain of wood
like shadow puppeteers
at exeunt. Silhouettes,
their rabid fans, reach
to tug a jacket or hand.

The glow you leave in
is exhausted. Nothing
has a twin. Now light
signifies an oncoming.
Now light throws shadow
like a secret, accidentally.

Outside your bedroom,
the fir no longer claws
your window. For pets,
it kept drifts that fled
to its apron, sometimes
staying hid until April.

Now the snow, famished
of dark, departs. Leaves
duck into culverts, squat
where shadows are best.
You, too, prefer sleep
in a citadel and darkly.

Unbroken Expanse of Snowy Grass is Scared

Quiet fills out the football field.
Where am I, it asks, hypothermic.

First it follows a teapot's catcall.
Its eyes are very communicative.

Exposes its belly on the patio tarp
asking for a mouth's halo of heat.

It's a nice venue for pole shadow:
Frisbee skip of blocks-off sound.

Football field could be parking lot,
toppled drive-in screen, for you.

It likes your festive key ring jingle,
wishes for a marching band of that

walking back to the cars it atlases,
has no aspiration to be a blanket,

to catch in wind, to speak to wind,
to be features squeezing up in wind.

You get to be its first feet, a ruination,
For you, there's short-term memory.

Bars Close to Closing, Night Loaded for Bear

Some men are at work in the alley
on signatures of urine. A promenade
of bars from which they lazily evacuate.

Many have government jobs. Many
wander in and out of denominations.
Noon fights back with Bloody Marys.

Midnight, though. The traffic in fits
and pedestrians taking risks with Red
Rover-like thrashing, no held hands.

The homeless talk at smokers outside
the upset stomach of a club. Women
regret their attire, focus on shivering.

Alleyway, then doorway, then stairway.
No one seems to use any of the three.
But, to be a city, these are requisite.

Rare taxis spirograph the city proper.
The pickups are phoned in and tacit.
Passengers sit obediently in the back.

Some drunks fuddle their cars through
the neighborhoods, the sleeping watches,
the blinds, shades, curtains of split levels.

Hospitals are suburban, inconvenient.
Helicopter lights keep a bored strobe
waiting for morning's rural coronary.

Never does the city see a dormancy.
Hundreds of taquerias do not shutter.
Forklifts dodge shopping insomniacs.

Night, its ceremonies. Garage doors
descend. Whole moon a full-frontal
flashlight; clouds pass like hands.

Migration in a White Out

Snapped like picnic linen, a blizzard
puts its ghost costume on the block.
Pupil aperture widens like a yawn.

Rooms get separate light; hall, some;
bedroom, less; deep closet, none at all,
though it pines for windows full of field.

The week starts, shrugging its shoulders
at unclothed you and your frosted cereal.
Further in, the day makes a go of thaw.

You jerk to the mailbox, work a furrow
like a stop-motion snowman, all torso.
Migrating birds in flight close their eyes.

With hands like a conch, you blow,
make a little furnace and woodwind,
coupled like the TV's glow and music.

Later on, brave the featureless lanes,
hunt for a pond to crack under your feet
or a drugstore holiday treat clearance.

As you go, breadcrumb your gloves.
(They're too big for any bird to pick up.)
You'll detect a distinct sound of rifles,

unlucky hunters taking more shots
at the Canadian geese sleep-flying.
Make for home in much the same way.

In Spring, Everything Must Have Appellation

It is April, as brutal as gums
teething. Contagions are trying
symptoms out on mall women,

who sneeze through the racks,
which sends their nasal droplets
dandelioning. You wish for May.

So your brow furrows. You silence
yourself, and pass like a Labrador
hand over tentlight. Half the week

you are a spy sent to a park bench,
instructionless. Not one briefcase.
Your job is to name everything—

Lucy the Lake. The poplar brothers,
Bo and Aggie. Wind “Walter” Gust.
A picnic’s swept-away plate, Emily.

Randall the Only Taxi, always idle,
popping meter gum in its cheek
to a steady waltz of three counts.

The fauna and industry. Gutterwash
of napkin mass. The high schools.
You give the city its nomenclature.

Work Around Water

A creek cuts like a side-lain
split of lightning through
the gut of town, its crooks
accommodated, and even
accentuated by bridgespan.

Today, a bulldozer ponders
terraforming, cold-engined
about the pulled-up piping
of to-be-tailored arterials.

How best to shape the land
to retain the shape of land—
how best to flush the flood.

The city, its blight annexed,
begins to beautify drainage.

To leave the waterbodies
be like indigenes, like sleep-
thick grandfathers, glided
around. To respect the sag
of shoulders and labored
breath, the pause and creak.

This rift will exist to channel
what we want to flow out,
so we will lavish it. In rain,
and rain event. In drought,
when roadside flourishes.

*Each bank is beginning to fill
with vegetation, as designed.*

Nothing Happened Today

You spend Wednesday with the window
tuned to gray, to a poor reception of rain.

The neighborhood is made an island chain,
a cul-de-sac atoll waded by the dog walkers.

You think of the socks sopping like sponges,
shoved in the shoes of commuters downtown

below sport coat and sports section canopies,
dashing past panhandlers to the flooded mall,

their children, home and drying and in tableau
around the kitchen countertop, backpacked.

When asked, they say, today, nothing happened.
No worms grew out of the blacktop's split lip.

No girls began looking beautiful, their clothes
ill fit on the elegant trees they're growing into.

Soaked long enough, the boys will grow too,
like animals encapsulated, enough to fill rooms.

A Few Holes in the Roof to Breathe By

Late May lets spiders in- and outside.
The jambs are never well-weatherized.

Everyone swarms with their wine
near the stove. Or a large swaddling

of bath tissue. Your new lover lights up,
and you circumambulate June in tandem.

By the end of July, a tone fingers ring
from wine glasses begins to occupy

your days like gnats, hang over cores.
The only sound in July is the Black

Cat-like static of a shirt removed
after work, thrown to the carpet,

jaundiced. Halfway through August,
drunk, you tongue skin for blood

but get twelve volts instead. Finally,
mid-September knifes you a skylight.

And in This Corner, Twilight

8 PM slinks like a luchador
to the soft shore of hurrah,

enters to firework fizzle
your living room still unlit,

and sits on your chest,
limbs tied in sleeper hold.

Want flicks its body at a bulb
until both flicker out, tired.

You are just doing laundry,
just accumulating cat hair.

There is strength enough
for soup, strength to tap out,

to leave the weak AM band
its job of cheering fatigue.

Engines and infrastructure.
This is gloaming's tag team.

Joints groan. The water-heater
gasps, rises, goes silent again.

Variables of Light, Heat, Movement

Summer evening freezing. Cottonball exhaust
lifts off from a heavily breathing bicycle pack.

Night disorients. It occurs before you leave
the movie theater, the only light a sepia tone.
Your car keys change pockets on their own.

The water feature's gurgle, pitched an octave low.
The stoplights overhead, obvious now, and brash.

To make days longer, you are encouraged to take
alternate routes to work, play songs, not albums,
never photograph moments of splendor for proof.

In the low contrast of late afternoon, all the lines
lose their weight. Nightjars and thrushes fade in.

Your eyes adjust to the new contours of night
like a foot and then two into a hot bath, cooled
by the body, always insisting its temperature.

Nothing comes to sit on the void of couch. A cat
makes snake and rabbit sounds in the spare room.

Without vision, all is terse and unrecognizable.
Sudden armchair, ruckussing stereo moving right
to left. In the dark, you are new like a tourist.

In this, your home. Where can you go but through
rooms, expecting none of the furniture you bruise.

Day Divided by Many Little Nights

Sleep is rapid transit. Its tunnel
lights flicker Morse code letters
until you reach the its sunlit lip.

This happens on bed sheet, grass.
This happens on mid-day laminate.
Afternoon's tablecloth swiftly yanked
so the dinner placement of it wobbles.

Afternoon and its late postal worker,
blue in his uniform, frumpily martial.
He may be your closest human contact.

Water welcomed in through a faucet,
and then careful placement of water.
On bookshelves, below the nightstand,
where they'll leave a lipstick of sweat.

What's there to do before she's home?
Express confusion with the tuning TV.
Cast a life study of her on the off TV.

After unlocking, arm full with mail,
she is fuming about a faceless driver,
who seemed asleep behind the wheel,
delivering roses to the wrong address.

Darkness is When

Windows down, gusty like a wraith,
you talk over clothing, a snapping
sleeve, the least aerodynamic thing.

Further on, you are shimmering wash-
eteria as you spill like ash from an urn.
Orion is large and obvious. You are still

finding sweetgrass between your teeth.
Six or so more blocks, wildlife safari-
quiet, your mouth forms a long O

and does your breathing. A laugh
you have grown under your chest
forgets gravity, pulls out like a weed.

Night is dissected, a birthday cake
covered in the half loops of cursive,
illegible after the guests divide evenly.

Parked, your seat reclines. Whoever
is backseat curls as if in a lifeboat.
You make as little light as you can.

Kingdom, Phylum, Family

Rhino-sized wall holes open
the family room to weather,
so the mist invites itself in.

Pathetic excuse for daylight
on a grade school portrait,
on a sleeping chimpanzee.

This is meant to make you
leave, harassing pythons,
a tower of giraffes cuddling

leaves off a childhood tree.
You buck up to the inclemency,
drawstrings tugged, and peel

ex-girlfriend letters stomped
with ibex dung off linoleum,
pin them up like wet sheets.

A streak of tigers watch you
sleep in your adolescent bed,
but they putt-putt like mopeds

which you find soothing. Give
them the foot like dachshunds.
Without a roof, nights are dank

and canopied. Your humidifier
is now unnecessary. Like fungus
from an ant, you sprout memory

from the crown of your head.
There are millions of breeds.
This is a second nature to you.

Dispeller

In your hometown, you are absence
of home. You are shortfall of awe.
You are defog. Wiper blades raking
a glaze of rain. You are the kitchen
light mother kept on. Unlocked
garage. Evening intersection's
non-traffic. You are what bends air
so that it, tuning, forks. You are bed
made. You are small business, alive,
well, remodeled. New bike lanes.
You are unchange. House phone ring
unceasing, cutting a stage of sleep.
Ghost uneasily roomed. Yearbook
yearly removed. So you are removal
of book dust. Carpeting, cleaned.
You are no apple tree. You are quiet
stair climb. You are far-off mowing.
Hypnic jerk. Reason for moving.

Land

It is poetic, musical ... of fugues without a skeleton.
Melancholy with vertabrae. That is why I can't live here.

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA

Locked land
is still water-
drawn. Bridges
are the army
corps' craft
work here,
of similar
disposition
to the men
riveting them.
Build to a sea
level given
from survey
after survey.
To demarcate
goes horizon
far. The lines
at times appear
after mowing.
And from mid-
bridge. Merge
west. The sun
confronts all
arrivals. Flanks
of coal-burning
engines gargoyles
at the entrance.
Monumenting
the effort to blur
through this.
How fast cattle.
Standing laws
keep casinos
to the other
side, so Iowa
gets to glitter.
Tractor trailers
void stomachs
upon stockyards.
Mile one is true

and humorless.
And as silent as
can be, divide by
barrier neighbor-
hoods bullied in-
to the interstate.

432

Young ones
howl from
a ball pit.
The outlet
embraces
like a cave.
As Roman
decay was
built in. A day
of snooping
through wind-
ows, or owl
necks always,
like jar tops,
twisting past.
This, haunted
by merchants
who hawk
deformed
corduroy over-
alls, archaic
floppy disk
edutainment.
Fed by its own
water tower.
Kept warm
by a shawl
of parking lot
pulled up to
hide acne scars.
The cars signal
their leaving

with seizure
episodes, rattle.
Two functions
here: departure
and effluvia.
The food court,
a failed utopia.
A place to rid
oneself. Weight
loss retail space
available. Women
in the karate suite
practice breaking
noses. Later walk
to nylon fire sale.

426

Grama field
is in italics,
emphasizes
the horizon-
tal current
of air. No
pause. Burg
is Atlantean
in a mirage
from heat
lying water
on pavement.
Slow to rise.
Structures
push against
the ground,
stand, tired
sawhorses.
Ranch homes
cower, afraid
to shoulder
another story.
A diamond

is ignored
in its weeds.
No. Boys
shadow play
an inning,
dust bases
off in blasé
archeology.
Are safe left
alone. Rarity
of pavement.
Roads forget
to be named,
so as not to
fray, lattice
a grid, tight
as two hands
churching.

423

Each barrel
greeds up
high beam,
moon, then
shines white
like miracle.
Antennae
begin here's
irrefutable
tempo. Their
red pulsation
in triplicate,
as vertical as
shirt buttons.
Kept in even
pace, pylons,
tines along
the dashes
delineating
lanes. Bathed

in effulgent
wash of work
light, a road
crew, mouths
masked, super-
vise steamroll
progress. As if
to greet some-
thing unearthing.
To the only hill
top, a temple
has climbed, is
glass and rafter.
Like ascension
paused, resting.
Mile markers
bead by, rosary.
Turn signal
clicks sync
then speed up
against talk
radio cadence.
That is given
by mast radiator,
air inspissate
with its gift.

420

Signs noun
and verb
with exits.
Here. Here.
Ascender
windbreak
a bulwark
for the cattle
scatter. Plot
of car parts
is growing
rust, is not

the antique
store it wants
to be. Porn
barn, World
War II library
and museum
once a truck
stop. Still,
three more
for all those
who cannot
or won't stay.
Those things
adapt, take
credit cards.
Without hills,
the town still
hides. Behind
the high-rise
grain elevators,
quiet as cud-
chewing, fume
passing through
a screen door
kept latched,
never slapped.
Rare children
make basketball
hoops driven
into concrete
gratuitous.

409

Of dozens
filling front
seat legroom,
a body shop
receipt gets
plucked out
by carjacking

crosswind,
rips across
the redacted
October crop,
skipping shot
goose, just as
blown. Apart-
ments, board
game barren.
No one buys
trees for them.
Clothing on
lines break
small sound
barriers, pop
at a terse gust.
Little brothers
smoking, sun
lit vampires
lain in empty
acres. Bigger
brothers recon
on bikes. On
tracks, penny
savers flit. Ant
hill and its BBs.
A neighbor's
grill is a blanket
scent. The kids
upwind of it,
obfuscating.

397

Jagged graph-
like skyline
shows a city
that peaked
once. One
skyscraper,
limestone,

rust-domed,
blue bronze
sower over-
seeing leng-
thy plains.
Easy to make
this pinnacle
turning point
for a radius.
An ordinance
presses the rest
groundward,
says no taller
than. Expansion
must move then
like lungs, out-
ward. Towards
turbines barely
recalling their
predecessors.
Towards Cold
War air force
base housing
reincorporated.
Arterials dead
end in the out-
skirts. Hemmed
in by annex.
Highway barrels
through. Paddock
with guernseys
in its confines.
Silos increase
their ambition.

353

Now, a water
tower bullies

the scape. This
one, in hot air
balloon getup.
Quickly, fast
food options,
Stanchion sky.
Windbreaks
along parcels
say *we got you*
surrounded in
a posse drawl.
Lots of ammo
in the big box
store. Parking
lot perforates
a barn shape.
Still, corrals.
Carts a sparse
livestock loose,
just periphery.
Off-ramp motel
chains. Days,
Motor, Com-
fort Inn. Truck
grunts can't
pass the ply
of curtains.
Smell of all
the invisible
gas expelled
without an air-
ship to buoy.
Sour cubic tons.
Scratch ticket
mutilated, so
soon useless,
papier collé
against gravel.
Stop for snacks.
Unisex bathroom,
humid as June.

Kid platoons
in a cornfield,
detasseling.
Their hands,
like locusts,
fidget plague.
Set the stalks
to blossom.
Idle pivots
are plesiosaur
skeletons sat
in the field,
fluke echoes
of here's actual
natural
history. Once
a sea. Rain
runoff coughs
flecked eras.
Weapon tips,
behemoth bone
shard worked
back like seeds
into soil, under
sneaker soles.
Noon held
aloft. The hay
stacked with
sack lunch
ate bleeding
from razor-
like leaves.
Four dogs
running rings
into the dirt
driveway
where a bus
idles evenings
for the flood
of preteens.

Dust plumes
with departure,
a dissolve.

291

Birch trees
unemployed
on the creek
shore. Limit
load one ton
on its bridge.
This stretch
was elected
for bisection,
so its small
glitches go
below unfelt.
Curt names,
Germanic.
Rock. Elk.
In dialect,
the rivulets
are homonym
for neck pain,
clefts bent,
sedentary
sleepers.
Driven star
posts node
high-tensile
barbed-wire
into maplines.
Draped, they
are heavy with.
Are frozen into.
Winter flanks,
dun and crystal-
liferous. August
acre's mono-
culture green

now a vast
dishwater,
camera film
sprung early,
washed out.

272

Trains incise
town no more
than five, six
minutes apart.
Meant for
empty, then
for mountains
that fold, rise,
breadlike.
Stone, grain,
ethanol tank,
some graffiti
go with them.

270

A monument,
straddling four
lanes, in hunting
lodge façade.
Majestic
overpass. Duo
of rearing steel
pegasi bookend
from the top.
Families there
by accident.
A re-enactor
tears tickets

at the mouth
of an escalator
lancet-arched
in video. Ear-
phones pipe
in ambiance
of calf bawl,
axel clatter,
the narrator's
gravel, affect.
A walk through
abridgement.
Straw fire
is fiberglass
and begs one
to mime heat.
Volume level
kept low
in focused
wandering.
Once, mostly
bootfeet wore
the continent-
spanning paths.
But a placard
asserts speed
is a victory
underneath
a peephole
to the Dwight
D. Eisenhower
Nat'l System
of Interstate
and Defense.

259

A queue
curls into

the giant
hog lot.
How air
is filled
out here
involves
every sense.
The retch
of farrow
topping
constant
pig burble.
Heavy scent,
at once new
and an end,
fogs off
the clods
of ordure
and suffuses
the unfurled
cloudiness
of so many
steaming
things. Huff
of nostrils
atomizing,
feces heat,
blood heat,
the killing
floor hosed.
If the roof
tore its joints
and rose,
the piggery
would vapor
like coffee
from a mug,
like geese
spooked up,
like ghosts
set free.

Delivery
truck dawn.
Sucklings
plug maws
to mother
(roughly
estimated
two, three
pro-football
fields long).
The purpose
is feeding
efficiently.
A dominant
employer.
The homes
in assembly
form a sort
of perimeter
of hamlets.
Clans pack
as wolves
do, cave in
late night
garages, open
to the dead
end street,
battened,
expectant
of sprawl.
In its shape,
distinctly
not grown
but in a field.
So bovine,
a ruminant,
its quartet
of chambers

all process.
Back flat,
for stirrups.
Too, its sleep
same, stood up.

230

The pheasant
lift like hats
from wheat
half-life.
Thunder, then
a reminder
of gravity,
lead-riddled
bird tumble.
From the copse
one anomaly,
Orion, vest
bright orange,
plods en route
to new corpse,
guts it, hand in,
puppeteering.
Decay, a change,
as crops, erased.

222

Mildly, a boo.
Gently spread
air rifle seed
about a torso.
Calliope mu-
zak polluting
in big mono.
Town square
time travels

in the flood
lights. Less
sulk, sag. Lots
of walkeating
men off work.
They crook
dog-curious
for a corncob,
which tilts
the air force
brass band.
Amphitheatre
is fat mothy.
Same audience
a housefire has.
All children
freely wander
to the barrels
of syrup trash.
Yawn mothers
with turnstile
arms. Surprise.
Sun sets behind
everyone's back.

196

In stretches,
the highway
runs along-
side cars
coalful.
A rapid
dragging
framework.
Scarves
of carbon
fade out
as speed
changes
other speed,

causes hummingbirding.
For those
at a stop,
fluttering
zoetrope
of opposite
side. Candy-
stripe arm
claps down,
signals a sync
of flicker
and bell
and whistle,
wags stiff
to the train
blowback.
So slight,
parallel to
commotion
and its blur,
juxtaposed.
A motion
picture—
composite
of an iron
horse, legs
strobing
below body.

164

Waves of soy
green enough
to be algae.
To elicit
calenture,
waves firm
to the foot.
Stray stalks
of corn like

periscopes.
How weeds
ruin what
they break
into. This
plain, a dress
form, formal
gowned, on
arched back.
With so many
interruptions.
A leviathan
thresher ready
with its baleen
to tooth krill
grain. Baler,
hands nesting
what's dead,
what's left
to lighten
the lea. Near
dusk, will-
o'-the-wisp
trucks flicker
towards home.

143

The Midwest
grows black
hole-massive.
Just enough
tilting vista
there to hide
its few things,
swung behind
and clutched.
Every curve
takes minutes
which disputes
this as ocean.

Basic waves
with only two
fingers. Who
these people
are. Counties
gather them
like spilled
collectibles.
Drifted horse
does not see
a thorn-thick
fence until it
is fenced. Any
thing would be
crushed below
this sky, as if
another sky be-
low completes
a tightened vise.
Rotunda. Posts
but no lights. Like
bulbless stems.

126

What's frozen
thaws, so that
preservations
peel. Weather,
house's wood,
do not get new
paint. A family
dwindling only
sees. The filling
station expects
its elderly, so
brews its coffee.
Measurement
here takes time
as shape. Years,
segments of.

At sixty-five
MPH, a town
is ten seconds.
A post office's
swift swan song.
Ruins of houses,
houses, trailers.
Town of twenty.
Seized highway
as main street,
propane tanks
slender as war-
heads sat next
to corrugated
steel everything.
Bar in a home.
Allotted only so
many structures
to purpose. Wide
load trailer extends
Ogallala's life
to half a minute.

107

Xed, extra
2 x 4s cross-
bar a drunk
fence, give
it a brace.
If any find
height here,
then slouch,
corsetry's
asthmatic
lean, or line-
man crouch,
legs and arm
in a tripod
to embrace
wind rushing.

A stave silo
like a jigsaw
puzzle mussed.
No piece where
pieces were,
so the osiers
of its hoop
skirt, exposed.
A willow limb
juts like bone
from the break,
a femur from
the thigh tear.
If an elm
should disease
from inside,
it will forget
give, so break
like a fullback,
no tackle, no
guard. Sapling
stakes, a corset
of three tethers,
teach how
to take wind,
not to bend.
backbone.

88

Rigs sleep
like steeds
hitched up.
Pneumatic
snort. Semis
are waking
with sound
like neighs.
A feeding
teen, spray
of sunflower

seed shells
from inside
a cargo van.
Driver deep
knee bends
and ambulates
mid-marathon
while a game
of tag swarms
around steel
community
college art—
here made
oxidizing
wreckage
(an incident
of aesthetic
to interrupt
the flushing
toilet white
noise). Ears
pressed to
crooks, how
one uses
sea shells,
for a shh.
Passengers,
their cubist
necks bent.
A hundred
miles, then
next rest.

55

Zipper tooth
shelter belts
secrete geese,
which spray
into the clear
designation

of above
at an air
horn yowl.
Only winter
sees surface
reflect sky,
both dirty
white. Out
in the open,
the fowl
spindrift.
A squirm
of muscae
volitantes
flocks with
this flock,
amoebic, in
marionettic
movement,
irreal glide.
Against taut
cyclorama
the wires
must hide.
Plain sight.
Afforest-
ation foot-
lights this
theater full
of floating.

20

Hills are slow,
bluffs sudden.
SUVs instead
of pack mules
corkscrew up.
At the top,
a plaque notes
how one man

died. A lone
helicopter low
at the plateau
tip. Sagebrush
beating ictus
to its bluster.
An older man
hardly shaken,
bent on a bench.
Scrub crush
under squeal
of approaching
babies bjorned.
Camper horn
peals off a far
aiguille. Math
is somewhere
in the still
before echo.
Strata, itself
reverberations,
like a ruler.
A multi-tiered
rod demarcates
how curious
mobs eroded
rock more
effectively
than the past
water could.

Loss

The silence of being full present,
an ache along the forearm, being fully home.
And let the fragments fall, flightless,
and went back in.

GREG KUZMA

I've come to
the plains. Back to

cabin fever

sleep.

A white

draped again.

I went
to crawl inside
an avalanche,
in the dim

blue.

And felt

the air
from my skin.

This place we have
on the TV

has come in,

far from us
and inarticulate. We've
conquered
it,
like stray dogs,
brought back.

As well, I can add, the men
and women who come out of
the town.

hunt In autumn I go
 boys.

May.

Rob

the heat

kept

there,
the many

stars.

Nebraska's dirt.

Out my left window
the fields scattered
no bigger than

sin.

The garden
had luck

before.

Had more

than used, more than needed,

and more

died.

I

spread out underneath them.

December
sleeps now,

too fierce for me.

A rainy spring, and
dogs tracked down.

After the
first
stink
half digested. As the air
is.
Now there's no sign of them,

the bone, the sinews.

Being a father has meant
being

the trees, the crops,
not so much

to be.

Lacking
hills.

Last week
the wind

called

home.

Nebraska's farmers

cough,

old and ready for cutting.

Their wives are
indoors more.

Girl Scouts

are streetlights
to be rescued.

Nebraska

is silent
listening to them.

Nebraska also has her hogs.

It is no lie.
I write this.

Sometimes it does not come,
like this year, at all.

This

place burned down,
waves there, sad.

Autumn is

wreathed in gunshots.

Then autumn brings
the
dun-colored, pretty,
dry-straw
Nebraska out.

Russians
so full of
teeth like
Halloween
pumpkins.

There

there.

The problem is death, the laureate.

Was trotted out on
dignified occasions for
some paper work.

Death

on TV.

I can hear you

Nebraska.

I've heard.
Mine was
forced
birth
and long enough to know
Oh it's
enough to sing praises like this.

I
sleep in the woods,
have written
enough.

Notes

“What Stars” mentions the name of Czech anatomist and physiologist Johannes Evangelists Purkinje. Among many discoveries, Purkinje is noted for identifying what would eventually be called the Purkinje shift, in which the brightness of red and blue colours changes as light intensity decreases gradually at dusk.

Some language used in “Work Around Water” is taken from the Lower Platte South Natural Resource District website on the Antelope Valley Project, at <http://www.lpsnrd.org/docs/Major-Projects/antelopevalley.htm>.

“Dispeller” is inspired by and adapts language from Mark Strand’s poem, “Keeping Things Whole” from *Selected Poems by Mark Strand*. Copyright © 1980 by Mark Strand.

The Loss section is comprised entirely of an erasure of Nebraskan poet Greg Kuzma’s 1977 chapbook *Nebraska: A Poem*, originally published by Best Cellar Press.