

**GHOSTWRIT(T)ER(N)**

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Here. Where I am anonymous  
and alone in a white room  
with no history and no parading..  
He came here  
and placed my past and future on this table like a road.

Michael Ondaatje

...What we owe the future  
is not a new start, for we can only begin  
with what has happened. We owe the future  
the past, the long knowledge  
that is the potency of time to come.

Wendell Berry

## **Low Tide, Newport Beach, CA, Summer**

I sit on the beach just past Neptune  
and eat sand by the handful. Eat it raw,  
sun-cooked, damp, and dirty; I eat the seaweed,  
the cigarette butts, the fleas, the crabs;

I eat it all, mouthful after mouthful  
until the belly chucks the last few bites,  
unloads everything, and I am hungry again.  
Experience watches closely carrying a chisel,  
and dancing in the muddled rhythm of the coming day.  
The tide recedes, no longer laps at my jeans  
wet up to knees with skin pickled,  
cool within the long night's rest beneath  
a belligerent moon hellbent on  
resurrecting salt.

The sand does not belong to the ocean,  
and the ocean not even to itself.

I do not belong to California  
or Kansas or Pennsylvania.

I eat because this is home, because  
this is no longer home.

I eat to know each grain,  
to reveal the exact science  
of the time it has taken to get here.

## Letters: 1918-1919

Three degrees of separation: Jan Rudolph Kraan

Spring, 1918

Dear Brother,

By the time you receive this letter we will be nearly a week into our journey from Rotterdam. In total, it will take the ship six weeks to reach Batavia in the East Indies as we sail through the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean. Well beyond 11,000 km.

I believe Catharina is well enough, though she is prone to motion sickness and is sleeping a great deal. She also seems rather anxious about leaving the family, but is handling the whole of the situation well beyond her 18 years, as you would expect.

I pray this letter finds you well. I will write when we arrive. Tell mother and father we think of them often.

With love,  
Jan

Summer, 1918

Dear Brother,

Batavia looks nothing like our native country, and yet, something about the air, the jungle, reminds me of when we would walk through the woods behind the house until dark. Something about the wildness alive within, the unsettled and restless land. It is beautiful.

Catharina has also been captured by the island. She spends most of her day wandering through the local market buying fruit we have not seen before, with names we cannot pronounce, sounds we can only mouth. I doubt I will ever correctly utter the vowels of the native tongue.

I am set to be transferred to a province on the other side of the island called Bogor. Wish us luck in our travels.

I pray this letter finds you well. Tell mother and father we think of them often.

With love,

Jan



Summer, 1919

Dear Brother,

Please forgive my lack of correspondence and know that I think of you often. The environment in Bogor is so primitive I have scarcely had time to request additional supplies from our base camp.

The water and milk must be boiled, and the wheat must be thoroughly washed several times to be certain we have eliminated the pests. Yet, beyond these inconveniences, we are ever more aware of the restless beauty residing in the jungle here.

We believe Catharina is with child at the moment, so we are hurrying to make the proper arrangements. She would be forever grateful if you could pass this news along to the rest of the family, as she has not had time to write either.

I pray this letter finds you well. Tell mother and father we think of them often.

With love,

Jan

## I, Ghost

(stare at the sky)  
I am not blue.  
(blue stare sky)

I (take a sip of water)  
am not clear.  
(water sip clear)

(walk through the streets)  
I am not concrete.  
(walk street concrete)

I (mimic the boyfriend)  
am not understanding.  
(mimic friend understanding)

(watch the tube and its commercials)  
I am not depressed or limp.  
(watch tube limp commercial depressed)

I (see the grass turn green, then brown)  
am not habit.  
(see grass green be grass habit)

(comprehend absolute zero)  
I am the law of halves.  
(comprehend absolute law)

I (will be going blind) will go blind.

I (am going blind) go blind.

I (was going blind) went blind.

I (have gone blind) am blind.

## **Kraan: 1920-1940**

Two degrees of separation: Marietja Kraan-Dykmans

My brother Jan Jr. was born in 1920 on the island of Java  
in the province of Bogor.

My father had just joined the infantry there,  
and was stationed on the island's outer edge  
as 1st Lieutenant.

We had a house near the rubber plantations  
that was propped up on poles to avoid  
flooding during the monsoon period,  
as well as the Sumatran tiger.

When my mother became pregnant with me,  
we were carried like primitive royalty  
on a chair attached to two bamboo poles.

We traveled for two weeks in this fashion,  
across creeks and through the jungle to Djambi,  
where I was born in 1922.

I remember the chandelier with small oil lamps.  
I remember watching my mother light them every night  
before we sat down for dinner.

The family had a baby elephant as a pet  
because her mother had been shot.  
My parents never could turn away a needy animal.

I remember the gramophone, the sound of my father  
breathing as he turned the hand crank.

There was a priest that came around from time to time.  
My mother would always invite him to dinner and my brother  
would always avoid him, afraid of the brown robe and unruly beard.  
From under the dinner table, Jan would sing  
"Ape, ape, he's going to bite,  
you'll not get me  
I'll scream and I'll fight."

When I was nine, we moved to Timor.  
The people there looked more like Papuans  
than Indonesians, and spoke a language I did not recognize.

My childhood smells like ripe mangoes  
and other exotic fruit I cannot recall the names of

and haven't seen since moving away.  
We did not have apples or potatoes as we do now  
and I'm not sure I know which I prefer.

In 1940, the Germans knocked Rotterdam flat  
on its back, which was hard on my mother.  
It wasn't until 1945 that we had contact with the relatives  
and found out who lived and who died.

**Weber: 1925**

Two degrees of separation: Ret. Col. Melvin "Bud" Weber

I spent the first three days of my life  
in the hospital with my mother  
and no one else.  
As we lay together she whispered my name  
over and over again,  
placing it among the family's journey  
to the Boyle Heights area of Los Angeles:  
the town of Kilbourn, Wisconsin  
and skilled English silk weavers on one side,  
the Hebrides Islands of Scotland  
and father Donald, world ruler,  
on the other.

When she didn't fill in my specific future  
I figured this meant the family journey was incomplete,  
the ending still needed to be written.  
I figured our little section of the family would collaborate  
with second cousins up north,  
aunts and uncles just south.

But at twelve, my feet beginning to fill my father's shoes,  
her chapter ended abruptly.  
She left me to look to God and the future without direction,  
having always saved that part of the story for herself.

## **Mercer: 1931-1936**

Two degrees of separation: Beverly Mercer Weber-Fow

I am sitting in the *Ladies Rocking Chair* originally from  
Mercer's Farm in Kansas,  
now residing in Tustin, CA.  
An old trunk is nearby.  
I like chairs and chaise lounges.  
I like my feet up, so the footstool is important.

My memory of this chair and footstool lives with 1931  
in a two-story white house in Pittsburg, Kansas,  
and in 1933, in the one-story brick dwelling across the street.

I am an only child and I'm shy.  
I pretend the elves and fairies  
live in the violets in the yard.  
I have bad tonsils and the rocking comforts me.

My parents have survived the Depression.  
Because of my mother's pregnancy and poor health,  
the family moved to Pittsburg  
when she was hired at the local college.  
She drives a buggy to the one-room schoolhouse  
with a heated brick at her feet.  
My father is a pharmacist and makes phosphate sodas  
in the Mound Valley drugstore.

In 1934, my tonsils are removed (still have the silver dollar from my father),  
and we travel to Riverside, CA where my father's mother lives.  
We take Route 66.  
Summer's heat radiates from the blacktop  
and mixes with the oily orange-blossom fragrance,  
which sticks to the inside of my nose  
so even the gas stations and rest stop bathrooms  
are laced with citrus.

Again in 1935, the cross country drive is made,  
this time via the Northern route through Utah  
and the Salton Sea: I would float on the lake for hours,  
then lie in the sun to dry, and later harvest  
the salt from my crusted skin.  
We had to take Donner Pass at night  
and my father made sure to share

all the gory details as we rolled into the lookout.  
I could almost see the Pacific Ocean  
as the wind carved my profile  
into my mother's dress.  
I must have fallen asleep  
because I woke up with the sun beating down  
through the windshield the next morning.

We visited with Aunt Ludonie  
and my shoes were swallowed by the ocean,  
but I couldn't have cared less  
with the taste of fog on my tongue,  
and the salt caught on the tiny hairs of my body.  
Eventually my father figured out the iodine in the water and soil  
was the reason my mother's health improved  
with each visit westward.

In 1936, my father was offered a job by George Pepperdine  
who owned Western Auto in Burbank.  
We drove out around Christmas that year,  
and had to take the Southern route to avoid the weather.  
Along the way, we would stop and buy a brown bag  
full of vegetables, lettuce, and meat for 50 cents.  
My mother would wash and eat an entire head of iceberg lettuce  
because her body knew the crop had been grown  
in the sandy soil of Southern California, and would have  
all the iodine she needed from years of ocean waves.

## reverberate ɹɪˈvɜːbəˌreɪt

### VERB

1 : be repeated several times as an echo: *the simplicity of the past reverberates in the complexity of the present.*

2 : appear to vibrate or be disturbed because of a loud noise: *last night's dreams reverberate through his apartment each morning.*

3 : return or reecho (of a sound): *late at night, the sound of his voice appears to grow louder as it reverberates through the highway tunnel.*

4 : have continuing and serious effects: *the sun's rays failed to reverberate across the landscape.*

### ORIGIN

late 15th cent. (in the sense [drive or beat back]): from Latin *reverberat-* 'struck again,' from the verb *reverberare-*, from *re-* 'back' + *-verberare* 'to lash' (from *-verbera* (plural) 'scourge').



## Read the Letters, Write the Poems

I (read the letters, write the poems) conduct interviews  
with grandparents (at my convenience).  
I (~~change~~ alter the facts to fit the story) ask for pictures  
knowing I won't be able to change the image.  
I (give the pictures new names) have trouble  
connecting these people with those answering my questions.  
I (~~feel guilty for framing the questions~~)  
I (make up half of this shit) find the travels of this family fascinating.  
When did you have to move from your house to the camp?  
How did you get there?  
What reasons were given for the move?  
I need to incorporate the 4F story  
need more dates, an annal, a map  
draft date, Sr. died?  
I must always return to this collection, update  
To do:  
Call grandpa  
rewrite Hollow Fossils, Matches  
Ghost stories too, ~~love/relationships?~~  
I have no way of knowing what I look like  
against the backdrop of my city  
save a glance from the rearview mirror  
passing reflections in storefront windows.  
The ground gets it all wrong because it imagines me  
as the parallel projection of the sun:  
2' tall, 8' tall,  
awning for the sidewalk  
hidden at night without moon or power.  
I am nothing if I am parallel,  
simply a body of water deep as a shadow  
If I were to stand still the city would still see me move.  
I have been lying on the beach at ~~15th~~ 20th St.  
passing handfuls of sand back and forth all afternoon (~~villanelle?~~)  
waiting for the sunset  
some of this happened ~~and most did not~~  
some of it didn't  
if the divide is obvious I've failed  
but I can't extract anything further from these experiences  
~~I am too conscious of it all~~  
without forgetting or dismissing the goals of the collection altogether  
what happened to that poem I wrote about a week ago about the pomegranate need to find  
it when was I writing that  
Revising, reworking, rewriting altogether

none of this is working without surprise

SURPRISE

I have no surprise here but all caps

I know what I want

which puts me in the worst possible situation

I need to cut my fingernails

Maybe I should get drunk

that's when I wrote the poem

maybe read a favorite, some Gilbert, Siken? Capps.

maybe scrap the whole thing

end of the page, dare I start another

perhaps Mr. Cogito will have something for me

no, this isn't about that any longer

do I really want to start another page?

I hate wasting an entire page on only a few lines

but I also could wind up babbl—

Shut. Up.

Wright? Or Smith again, yes, for the perfect sprinkling of substance

or, sustenance ~~or was it syntax~~

I have got to stop chewing on my nails

need more B poems

hammer and nails

like Japanese ~~grave diggers~~ shovels

wait, mass graves I think, like a hammer and a box of nails

golden nails, tough to hit dead on, malleable (always liked that one)

(reliction too, how do the two look ~~together~~ side by side)

shallow dirt desiring blood

quench this grave's thirst

hammer more bones into me

deeper, let me wrap my lips around their limbs

stab down, shoot up

sunshine

~~copy & cut & paste~~

keep finger on control

+C(opy) X(ut)

## **Burma Siam Railway Assignment: Japan, 1942**

Imperial General of the Fifth Rail Regiment: You have been transferred from the Shimonseki division to Southern Burma with a promotion to Second Lieutenant.

2nd Lieutenant Hiroshi: Sir.

Imperial General: You have 18 months to complete the Burma Siam railway.

2nd Lieutenant: Sir.

Imperial General: You are not to concern yourself with the conditions of the camps.

2nd Lieutenant: Sir.

Imperial General: By any means necessary, your main objective is to complete the railway.

2nd Lieutenant: Sir.

## Sonkurai Rain, 1942

Two degrees of separation: Marietja Kraan-Dykmans

The tracks ended at  
the outer edge of Sam Ong  
my mother and I marched beside

we held each other across the remaining—  
across the bridges  
together we crossed

at times, she would give in  
give up she couldn't have  
I wouldn't let her  
she couldn't—

the others cried as they slept  
without knowing  
she demanded I forget  
but I was nineteen and more stubborn  
than her.

He and I were both nineteen  
when we met

I think she could see him  
as my cheeks blushed beneath the rain  
thinking of the first night we met.

Still, we were both nineteen  
and she had said remember

she said  
meant to  
did I

forget me.

He and I were both nineteen  
when we met  
two days later we were  
we were—  
still nineteen.

## Fragile

I don't say, nor realize this too often, but

I am having a \_\_\_\_\_, just too  
much shit piling up I don't want to

\_\_\_\_\_. For some reason, I  
can't \_\_\_\_\_ go to school, do homework,  
accept certain \_\_\_\_\_ regarding \_\_\_\_\_,

my actions. External shit too though, that's for  
the most part, \_\_\_\_\_ my control. I think it all started  
\_\_\_\_\_. Nothing planned. No one around.

It just feels like everything \_\_\_\_\_, or  
back to a certain familiar downtime. Just starting  
to think about all the \_\_\_\_\_ again, mainly guilt

for various things from family, to...everything else.

I think that's why the \_\_\_\_\_ attracts me so: drink it down  
that's why I came here, right? Figure out how to get further

from family and  
anyone else, especially the close and needy.  
I can't sugar coat this anymore, the truth

don't keep up with it from the  
and that's what I \_\_\_\_\_, I just don't know where  
\_\_\_\_\_. Anyways, back to my original complaint:

slipping away: the connection is just  
from the general daily happenings and interactions  
and I am more self-\_\_\_\_\_ than ever. A growing

disconnect from my surrounding  
looms heavily within each \_\_\_\_\_ thought  
whether that's within this \_\_\_\_\_ or elsewhere.

## Self-inking Stamp

My parents met because of a broken ping pong table;  
I was born 5 years later during the semifinal hockey match  
of the Olympics between Russia and the US.  
None of this, as far as I can tell—  
outside of the odd feeling that accompanies  
watching a replay of the moment I was born  
in a venue across the country—  
has had any meaningful impact on my life.

I have given up trying to figure out ice skating  
and I only play ping pong occasionally.

There are a few things I remember however,  
and some events I did not recall until recently,  
which affect me deeply.

) (            ) (            ) (            ) (

My mother received a phone call in the kitchen  
of our first house on Grissom with news of Homer passing.  
Homer used to sit in his chair and have my father  
exhale his tobacco smoke across his body,  
then snap one of the rubber bands around his wrist  
for acting on the craving:  
I sit in this old recliner to read, take naps;  
I store candles and corks in his old chest  
which retains the smell of this second-hand smoke.  
I don't remember his funeral.

) (            ) (            ) (            ) (

I don't remember a phone call  
when Senior suffered a second heart attack, and passed away  
after driving his wife and mother-in-law to Riverside and back.  
Instead, I recall, or dreamt  
an argument months later  
which ended with my mother sobbing  
and my father's car backing down the driveway.  
A car in fact, I would drive to work at his office,  
a business Senior started nearly 35 years earlier.  
I still wear an old wool sweater once belonging to Senior.  
I borrowed it from my father's closet.  
I never thought to return it,

never saw him wear it.

(                    ) (                    ) (                    ) (                    )

My father was discharged from the army  
after Senior's first heart attack  
to run the business, which also meant Georgetown was out of the question.  
My father was certain Senior wouldn't make it out of Saddleback Hospital,  
which is now surrounded by office buildings, a mall,  
shopping centers and parking lots,  
but back then was the only thing around  
outside of the coyotes and orange trees.  
My father said he'd never seen someone so completely colorless,  
but I like to think of Senior  
against the stiff white sheets of the hospital bed  
as the color of campground ash: half exhausted morning fire,  
half star-fueled bender, half desert sand.

Senior wouldn't drink on the weekends,  
would spend his time cleaning the pool and barbeque.  
But eventually, the burgers became greasy again,  
and I was paralyzed with fear whenever the automatic pool cleaner  
caught one of my toes between its bristles.

(                    ) (                    ) (                    ) (                    )

I used to smoke Parliaments, liked the recessed filter.  
I used to pitch the butts over the back fence  
of our house in Laguna Hills.  
My dad would be working on the hill, come across one,  
and think of his father working beside him,  
as he too smoked Parliaments.  
Quickly though, he would recall the image of himself smoking  
at my age and pocket the butt.  
I found a coffee can filled with these spent filters in the garage years later.  
I guess he never thought to throw them out.

(                    ) (                    ) (                    ) (                    )

When I was in college, I turned our kitchen table over,  
dinner and all.  
Walking out through the garage,  
I thought my sister was crying because she had been frightened.  
Looking back, I can see she was more afraid than anything,  
wondering when her brother  
would come home.

) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

Growing up, I believed I was a tragic figure  
simply waiting for the tragic to happen  
so I could prove my existence, my worth,  
exert an extraordinary force in a direction perpendicular to life itself.  
I often find myself wishing for tragedy  
so I might have something to measure myself against,  
as if to say, look what I have been through,  
to make waking up each day valuable, unforgettable.

Then I came across this thought:  
what if I am the tragedy in others' lives,  
stamping pain into loved ones?

) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

I should remember my grandfather's funeral, but I do not  
and what makes it worse is knowing the memory  
is coughing up blood somewhere inside me.

I could have shattered my mother's foot  
instead of the plates.  
Thankfully, I only got kicked out of the house.

I would trade some memories for others,  
but where would I be without the guilt  
and the desire for more?  
Certainly, not here.



## Fracture

Once again the communication between      and son  
    has succumbed to anger. I      understand why this happens,  
    but I know why the lines      for me. It all comes down

to the difference between      and      , and  
    wants      to do with what I have to say. I can only hold  
    my      , and confusion for so long

because I want to tell      so damn much, and want  
    to hear what      has to say. I know I can learn from  
    the chance just never quite finds its way into      conversations.

    wonders why I raise my voice and I want to tell  
    because      made me so, I am      , but do not, am not  
    in the same frame of      : over thirty in black and      .

But      has got to see it sometimes in different      gray  
    from my less      , more      , immature approach  
    I'd only known for      years. But when it comes down to it

and when I begin to      , I don't have the words  
    don't have the volume, to talk over the      voice  
    as I stew in the wasted      ever filling      house.

I am sick of the lectures, I can      to a conversation  
    and      to continuously feel like I am  
    another language. I have      up, am      up

but I have      and am able to make some common  
    for myself. I am pretty damn      about what I can/will  
    can't/won't do with my      and      . I would love to share this

with my      , but will not gain anything from the opening      .

## Sonkurai Rain, 1942

Two degrees of separation: Marietja Kraan-Dykmans

The rain was left to bury my mother  
because she would not cross.  
I could not cry  
had to cross  
she slept and passed  
she asked me

to forget.

The bridge to Sam Ong held her  
with the rigid limbs and cryptic glance  
that sliced through the jungle  
the rain  
and the walking dead, unsympathetically—

I lay among those both dead and undead  
slept beneath the weight  
and wept because I could not

find her tears in the rain  
kiss her tears

could not forget—

I was still nineteen  
and slept to forget—

the night we had

the morning.

## Collapse

Continuing from last when  
was need to be  
within skin, will begin again with

who is able to keep When stop  
turn to a hopeless need to carry  
because knows too

who is able to interpret  
from actions to predict from words  
what and will do next is perfection.

The ability to what write on the page  
and not just Though doubt  
will because this lonely place

Isolation name and while here  
drunk waiting for this to show  
that what dreams before

from this world too itself  
not meeting and satisfied  
simply there and will this life

or this winds an impossible request  
then fuck this place ( ).

## Friendly Fire, 1943

Two degrees of separation: Ret. Col. Melvin "Bud" Weber

I still have that bastard's tags: PFC Daniel Schrum.

My mouth was filled with a stew of mud and rain and blood  
because I couldn't move my arms or legs.  
I held my breath face down in that shit as long as I could:  
I'd seen feet reduced to chowder and didn't want to find out  
what it would do to my lungs.

I could breathe through the flesh smoldering behind me,  
the mix of oxygen-rich blood and gun powder  
gargling with grenade-scented fragments  
leaning against my spine.

I wiggled my way through the slop,  
wanting only to return the favor,  
wondering how Schrum could stand in silence  
watching the body of a fellow soldier spasm through the trenches  
without at least considering the issue of privacy.

) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

I wake with a similar feeling after a dream of the grunion running  
along the coast of California.

My mother wakes me up late at night, I am six,  
maybe seven. We drive in silence to the Aliso pier,  
waking slowly and waiting for the females to bury themselves,  
deposit their eggs and receive the wave of males.  
My mother rubs my back to keep the chill from settling.  
The females will sometimes lodge themselves too deep in the sand  
and have to wait for the next wave to wriggle free.  
As my mother's fingers spread across my back,  
the sensations center at my scar,  
begin to expand like a flowering cabbage  
between my vertebrae and into my lungs.

I wake up as the veins of the dream constrict  
around the nerve connecting each jagged bulb of shrapnel along my spine.  
I follow my breath  
lumbering head first toward consciousness  
as my heart takes a slow, deep drag from the adrenal gland  
and releases the blood with great restraint

to comfort the body,  
to sharpen the mind,  
to absorb the memory that led me here.

### **Sonkurai Rain, 1943**

Two degrees of separation: Marietja Kraan-Dykmans

He asked if I remembered anything of Djambi  
the morning after—  
just before—

Night was still fast asleep in my thoughts,  
blood still shallow within my cheeks.

Since they came, I—

I cannot recall my childhood home  
or my father's face.  
But when I kissed my mother—

I remember her cheeks tasted of salt,  
tasted as I imagine my grandmother's cheeks  
would have tasted were I to kiss them once more.

I only remembered this because the handful of rice  
we are given each day in this camp is unsalted,  
and tastes nothing like this memory.

## Reverb

father father cannot breakdown—hearing listening nothing—

—frustration him him him he him  
him he our mind white shades—

experience emotional known—

—explain echoes his breath—

—contribute do not need speakingfucked—

fucked learned decisions: sure life future our—

—conversation discussing comfortable—

my own someone—

—someone—

—someone talking talking—mute I god shy am—

my read meaning : question : know this—

### **Burial, Indonesia, 1943**

Degrees of separation unknown: Marietja's son

Fragments of Japanese  
stabbed into the mud, stuck straight up.  
Beneath their boots, I could understand little  
of the Japanese grinding through her teeth:  
boy—please—me—

My mother collapsed and began to pray.

And finally in Dutch: I love you—monsters.

Her dress whipped and snapped  
like a sail between her thighs  
as she bent over the shallow grave.



## Before I begin, I must first address this

I think this, and keep my distance, but  
what if? What if I don't take that step  
and miss my chance? It is my strong

belief that (or or whatever  
you want to call it) can only take you  
to a certain . After that, you have to

figure it all out. I know I should relax and  
let it take its course for the time being, but  
I know I am always , and when

I get there, I always want to go . So  
as you can tell, I am . I say I want  
to know, but that lack of is half

the reason I find this all such torturous :  
the second guessing, constant wavering, etc.  
But I just don't , am I in it for the chase,

will the chase always end up the same way?  
Will there ever come a time when good enough  
is good enough, when I will stop about

what lies thinking about  
where my own two feet are in the  
moment. How am I supposed to know when

that ? I hear my own voice, deep inside  
call out from time to time saying "yes, this is it, don't  
fuck this up." But I have been in the past and

wouldn't be here writing this if I had .  
I guess I am better off waiting for some sort of sign  
to tell me when to hang to convince

myself that I have the ability to figure out when  
that time comes.

### **Resurrection, Indonesia, 1943**

Degrees of separation unknown: Marietja's son

silence is slow and deliberate now

lashes and gunshots above me,

crisp echoes rush towards me, hand in hand  
with a thrashing rain

my mother does not cry and is not angry

she is burying my body to cool the ash and skin

I feast on the smoldering coals

she is back home with her family

she is licking her wounds because  
she is starving

## Confessional

The tracks (may or may not) end at Sam Ong.  
She and her mother (were carried by rail) marched to the camp.  
The rain (weather unknown) was left to bury her mother  
I have reconstructed (created) this journey so I may appreciate the distance  
by traveling (mapping out) this trail.  
I (only know her as mother here) never spoke with Catharina Kraan.  
Her daughter, Marietja, carries (her memories separately) these poems within her.  
I know (very little about) these experiences through her eyes,  
through her husband's (journals) eyes.  
This collection began with (a complete fabrication of) their story,  
starting in Indonesia, moving through Australia, and finally settling in California  
where I met their granddaughter  
and began to listen and retell (record and steal) the horrifying facts  
(to evoke the desired effect) as they happened,  
in an attempt to share (benefit from) these experiences with a wider audience.  
I am (not) proud to have recorded this portion of history,  
which is why I decided to pursue the rest of this family's history in this way.

## Confessional

I say the word  
until I lose it

confe ssc o nfessc onf es sconf  
e ssc onfes sco nfess con fe s scon  
fes sc onfes sc onfess c onfes  
sconfes sco nf es scon f ess c onf  
es s con f essc on fessco n fes  
s confe ss con fessco nf e ssc on fe ssc onfe  
ssco nf e ssc onfes sco nfess

until I find  
somewhere in the middle  
a box opening up  
pages breathing on their own

whispers blossoming on a stranger's lips

I take myself too seriously  
I never read aloud  
sounds too much like my father's voice  
never dance or pretend to dance  
reminds me I haven't worked hard enough  
childhood memories are dying  
I can't make up for time lost

I need to talk to myself more often  
otherwise the words will forget me  
this town will forget me

this page will wake up,

return to the white space

the power to speak for itself

## **Physiology, Australia, 1945**

Two degrees of separation: Max Dykmans

I can't look her in the eyes  
because I will be forced to speak  
and shouldn't: her hands seem—

I hold her hands in my lap and let my mind  
wander the inflexible skin folded across her knuckles.  
Were we to marry, I would have to lend her  
my family's stories until she finds  
her mother's cheeks and father's house.

The memory of her childhood is masked with the soldiers' faces  
that stole her food each morning,  
but she has not grown angry enough to feed herself,  
still has not found the bridge from extinction to the present.

I walk the lines of her palms with my fingers  
in search of some remnant of our first night together  
when we were both nineteen, but find only  
the crude trenches the soldiers left behind.

Her heart beats unconscious blood  
as it slithers through her body  
in search of something familiar.

## **War Crimes Trial: Changi Prison, 1945**

Chief Investigator Major Cyril Wild: Mr. Hiroshi, are you aware of the charges against you, sir?

Hiroshi: I am not blind to the fact that you are looking for a place to lay blame.

Wild: Mr. Hiroshi, you have been convicted of B/C War Crimes for violating the Laws of Wars defined in the Geneva Convention.

Hiroshi: My superiors instructed me to build a railroad using the prisoners.

Wild: Mr. Hiroshi, are you aware of the fact that because you have been convicted of violating the Laws of War, you will be sentenced to death?

Hiroshi: I have already smuggled my sketches and will from this prison in my Bible, which will rest peacefully with my father in Japan.

Wild: Mr. Hiroshi, are you aware of the number of soldiers and civilians that were killed as a result of the poor conditions you forced the prisoners to work in?

Hiroshi: Many men's lives were saved because of my bridges. I feel that I played a great role in this war for my country.

Wild: Approximately 150,000 deaths, Mr. Hiroshi. Over 60,000 of which were POWs.

Hiroshi: Becoming a prisoner is the greatest shame imaginable. Much worse than death at the hands of your enemy.

Wild: If you'll excuse me, Mr. Hiroshi, my plane has crashed somewhere near Hong Kong and I will be unable to attend the rest of the trial.

Hiroshi: We didn't have enough paper for the death certificates of the prisoners, we most certainly do not

have enough for yours.

Sentencing: 1st Lieutenant Abe Hiroshi will be put to death by hanging.

Dr. Nakai: Mr. Hiroshi, do you understand that you will die instantly when your neck snaps beneath the pressure of your own weight.

Hiroshi: I was captured nearly two months ago.

## “War of all against all”

Thomas Hobbes

A day after Friday the 13th and it can't  
get any . The more I think about it  
the closer I am. It consumes my every thought.

In between wondering whether this  
is right for me, the more my sets in  
the less I can any thought that originates in .

The more I am disgusted with the constant  
cycles of , , and I expect of my body  
in this diseased existence. Every corner I turn into

is punch-lines and leftovers,  
reasons from trying to convince me  
expectations are simply and impossibly

regardless of whether or not you are paying attention.  
I am afraid of the others send my way  
knowing they won't like what lurks behind .

I don't even know what is actually waiting behind  
those , but I am with it, I want to eat  
it handfuls at a time, get to the end of that

and eat my way through .



## Refract

She slides into the seat next to me  
with jeans worn in all the right places,  
hers in the stretch of time  
now mine to admire;  
a bag too big for a weekend stuffed above.  
As I swim within a miniature drunk's bottle  
of sooty red train-wine sifting through the theory behind screw tops,  
a lopsided smile snatches her lips like a match in the wind  
questioning the dawn's enjoyment  
of fermented pulp, skin, and vine.

With an exhale, flimsy smirk of my own,

-What better time of day  
(no one here is driving).

-Well it's not top heavy  
(and I can screw the top back on  
though I never seem to find the time).

She sits in silence only long enough to exhale and  
determine the conversation is worth carrying on.

-I lost a jacket once  
(conjuring as much appealing suspense as I can manage).

-Perhaps  
(though when you've become that jacket a loss nonetheless  
too much).

Silence and thoughtful stares,  
satisfied in knowing I have lost at least once before.

The now empty bottle rests atop black and white pages  
left open and alone for the moment as I become a man of her past  
in a muted stare through the grimy sunset-window,  
or maybe just short of it as I catch a glimpse of this desire  
within the darkened figure of a rotting pier.

The reflection: a man and a woman  
drinking in another world, a past bottle of wine.  
The two of us in bed together,  
eating dinner beneath the covers: an aperitif,

a main course, a dessert?

She smiles in the sweet jam of a midnight snack,  
the raw sugar and coffee of our second morning.

And when lunch never came?

A full drink remains

in the cloud of her memory.

With the gray eye twisting in the train's snaking reflection

the loss is apparent as she is returned

to my pensive stare, the me of the present

becoming this man of her past,

a rigid mask she cannot lift from this night's

passionate haunt: an end she would not have dared predict,

but came to expect with

daydreams of another walking in the feet of his wine,

lingering within the half eaten fig,

or dancing the dash of cream into his black americano.

In the absence of horizon,

stolen by the unlit tunnel

she squints, unaware of our exchange

hating the me of her present

as the estranged lover of her past.

-Sorry

(didn't mean to stare).

A shiver rocks her shoulders

she is again naked for the first time

with the stranger that night

wearing the mask of the man now sitting beside her.

The brakes quietly interrupt. I stand,

waver past her like an embarrassed flame

stoking subtle intimations.

My boots are uneven,

I gather our reflection and a farewell,

leaving an empty seat and the Solana horizon cradled by her crossed arms.

She turns.

-Perhaps

(perhaps).

## 47C8-900

Two degrees of separation: Robert Fow

I don't really have a name.

I was born in Alabama during the Korean War in 1951.

I have black numbers hammered smooth into my tin yellow skin.

I was mounted to the rear of Bob Fow's brand new metallic Chevrolet sedan, and I was proud to serve as their assigned identification.

The car didn't come with a radio or heater.

It had no clock.

Such luxuries couldn't be afforded at the moment as he was Private First Class Robert Fow.

He later attached a heater to the firewall on my passenger side, and put a radio on the dash so he could listen to the ball games. The clock never happened.

In late 1952, Bob told me we were moving to Pennsylvania since the Army said his duty was up and he could now leave Redstone Arsenal. After a year or so of driving around in Pennsylvania, I was removed from the sedan and attached to the trailer that was now stored in his sister's garage. I had little influence over my daily chores and felt quite useless. From time to time, I would catch a glimpse of my replacement on the sedan and was consumed by an overwhelming sense of sadness.

Some time later, RCA transferred Bob to Massachusetts.

I was mounted to the inside of his new attached garage in Westboro where we stayed for several years until we moved westward to Tulsa.

Again, I was given the purely decorative task of watching over the garage in silence with my two other now useless companions.

We were disappointed, but I took care of PA and MA as if they were family because I know that's what Bob wanted.

In 1974, we left Oklahoma for California.

After a year or so, OK joined us in the garage, replaced by one of those fancy pre-scripted tags.

We were hung in four separate garages throughout the Tustin area, but no matter how many times we moved, Bob was sure to reward my loyalty and the respect of my tenure by placing me atop the display.

I am happy enough in Tustin.  
But I often think of Alabama  
and would like to return at some point,  
to revisit my birthplace.  
Bob tells me he is working on something,  
that he knows someone who would be interested in my story  
and could perhaps find some new job for me back home.

## **The Drowning of Violet**

I will not be violet when next we meet,  
but here is the light anyhow.  
Light held, the only place I know

now coaxed out of our lungs  
from pale blue to black-out ink, violet hue.  
Look  
for what you cannot see. You will find me,  
within this very water spectrum  
in another order, blistered

upon a white light road,  
in the air we refused to breathe, splinters  
of the apple's own suitcase, its  
polished seeds

brown and unfolded  
(I will fill you whole again until you need another).

The green will feel you, will  
paint with you, you, more  
than the mere subject, only green: the grading, canvas,  
crease of scaled leaves

and their reflection, the shade of shade  
and the unseen space between these  
violating the ethics of green  
where you are

brushed into another.  
This is how we make love.

## Sonkurai Rain Recalled, California, 1998

Two degrees of separation: Marietja Kraan-Dykmans

I was nineteen  
when we met

minutes later I was—

He whispered beneath the rain,  
hands and lips pressed—

His damp breath—  
lips curled—  
eyes missing before a vague cast of clouds—

his voice wrapped the memory of my father's home  
around my shoulders like an unfamiliar shawl:

his jacket a crude tent,  
his fingernails longer,  
hair more coarse.

The sensations are compressed now,  
condensed into a single chapter  
in two separate histories.

When it rains at night  
I lie in the backyard  
let myself sink into the mud beneath the fig tree—  
tears and droplets unrecognizable, I—

even as I lie half-naked—  
the umbrella of his silhouette now a faint sloshing,  
I am still held to the ground  
beneath the low, drowning hum of Sonkurai rain.

I am in love at nineteen;  
I am grandmother at eighty-six;  
outside it is raining;  
inside it is raining.

## **re·lic·tion ri-'lik-shən**

### NOUN

1 : the gradual recession of water leaving land permanently uncovered: *presently, the reliction of the lake is indicative of an approaching drought of the gravest magnitude.*

2 : land uncovered by reliction: *archaeologists are squabbling over several bone fragments discovered near recent reliction within city limits.*

3 : (archaic) dark tracks in one's skin resulting from a collapsed vein due to repeated blood letting: *the man's thigh was stained with reliction.*

4 : recurring dreams of a past traumatic drowning episode: *his nights are constantly riddled with reliction.*

### ORIGIN

Latin *reliction-*, *relictio* act of leaving behind, from *relinquere*.

## Written when I was drunk

I have been            this for some time now  
but never had the        to bring it up. I miss  
the        spent together        . There is so much

between        that begs to be explored.        minds  
function within the same        , and where  
they        is what brings        closer together.

Reading over what I've just written, this seems  
to portray a bit of repressed        , somewhat  
of a        letter. And this is, because        and am

when I consider how much        have separated.  
I have been doing my own thing for sometime now

perhaps choosing to avoid        at certain  
times due to the awkwardness between        . But  
do not be angry with me, I struggle with intimate

, and if uncomfortable, simply  
.        have both struggled with life  
supposed to be searching for, why it is all so

and why        supposed to feel such tremendous  
significance within        here. I have always found  
a great amount of solace within        .        have

calmed the        inside        release as I continue  
to        the building pressure within. I remember seeing  
in        eyes as well, but I have not looked for some time.

There is so much        here        ,  
but I believe there is        unknown  
within the merging of        . Something to be found

in the joining of        ,        lies dormant  
in each        and        to be awakened.        yet  
to begin to sample        , but it is        late.

If        one mind that thinks as two,  
find the answers        searching        .



**Seance for a son, Helix Hills, CA, 1998**

Two degrees of separation: Marietja Kraan-Dykmans

At once the match's flash is a fire.  
My mind burns the night sky  
and muffles the porcelain snap of Japanese rifles.

I hardly notice the rain stop.  
The fire smashes the droplets into vapor  
before the rain can reach us.  
That is why I nudged him  
toward the flames, despite the jab of copper  
and oily perfume expanding upon itself  
within my nose. I can't tell if it is the fuel  
or fire upon his skin.  
I hold him there throughout the morning,  
inching our bodies closer to the heat  
so he might know the flames,  
perhaps recall the warmth of the morning  
and not its brilliant end.

Back in my kitchen  
the single candle flickers behind the sink,  
this memory of my son—  
prism-like and hollow—  
dissolves into my reflection  
wagging in the window.

## Balance

Is it because I \_\_\_\_\_ myself, because  
I have no \_\_\_\_\_ in my \_\_\_\_\_ or the \_\_\_\_\_ of others?  
Have I been lying \_\_\_\_\_, and if so, for how long?

The more I \_\_\_\_\_ what I want,  
and what I have in my life that is \_\_\_\_\_,  
the more \_\_\_\_\_ scratches at my mind.

Always perched on my shoulders,  
clicking at my heels, \_\_\_\_\_ its jaws within,  
always eating, getting fat off \_\_\_\_\_.

Guilt racks every \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_,  
the more this \_\_\_\_\_ eats the more I can see  
\_\_\_\_\_, the heavier it gets with emotion fading

beneath every thought. I tried to go home tonight,  
to get some of my things. As soon as I arrived,  
I became \_\_\_\_\_ and wanted \_\_\_\_\_ I denied.

I was the one that \_\_\_\_\_, I \_\_\_\_\_ on the bed  
took my half of this \_\_\_\_\_ with me. And now  
I wanted to glue it \_\_\_\_\_, make nice

and play \_\_\_\_\_? I am \_\_\_\_\_ with this \_\_\_\_\_,  
with the whole production. I have got to get \_\_\_\_\_ here  
before her roommate comes \_\_\_\_\_, time to pack up,

go get a \_\_\_\_\_ and convince  
I am better at \_\_\_\_\_, instead of  
\_\_\_\_\_ to conceive of the chances that I \_\_\_\_\_ have been that person.

## **Self-Portrait**

I wish I could paint one  
or knew someone who would,  
as the mirror is my only echo,  
reflecting the expected.

Like looking into the sun,  
I cannot see my center,  
just the edges of my profile.

Without a center to hold me in place  
I am a dream forgotten from the night before.

Somewhere in the future,  
I will bump into me  
unknowingly.

I will look as I do now  
minus the sadness of the years to come  
and wonder who this suspicious person is following me,  
and whether I should turn to confront him,  
or run away.

## Confessional

*Forgive me father, for I have sinned.*

What is it that brings you here, my son?

*I used the Lord's name in vain,  
cursed my father and his father*

Say five Hail Marys and may the Lord be with you.

*and his father*

Say five Hail Marys and may the Lord be with you.

*and his father*

Say your Hail Marys, my son and may the Lord be with you.

*Forgive me father, I do not plan on saying my Hail Marys.*

Then why have you come to confession, my son?

*I have a question.*

What is your question then?

*How many times will I need to curse my father  
and father's father and so on,  
to reach the Lord himself?*

Just the once, my son.

### **Mission Accomplished, 2003**

One degree of separation: James E. Hurst Jr.

The Vietnam war is as angry and belligerent  
as it ever was with its 44th birthday on the horizon.  
What was once a taut scrotum  
is now mistaken for slippers  
as he shuffles along without direction  
like the exhibition of Caesar's chariots  
traveling the world with wheels bolted to a stage.  
He walks in circles with shoelaces and testicles tied together  
mumbling about diseased cattle, phantom limbs,  
and the wiggle room created in the fermentation of the truth.  
With devout hatred, he shits bits of soldiers while pacing  
through his iron lung with a wooden crutch.  
He dreams of teaching Tomorrow about suicide,  
about the devil's aesthetics the next day,  
and who they will hire to redecorate the day after.

But what can I teach an old man  
who can't smoke without an oxygen tank,  
can't remember a life without excess fat,  
can't fuck without three pills, a spotter, and a defibrillator?

Instead, I wait for him to die,  
hope Tomorrow is free from addictions.

Even the earth suffers from his stubbornness  
as this history buried enough treasure  
to keep his offspring alive and delighted  
with every bomb brought back to life  
by the soft flesh of farmers' sons,  
his future warriors.

**Therefore, I take**

While I believe I have had  
I can assuredly say I am no where  
as I was the other night just by comparing  
  
long night out I have  
sneaking  
I have to doubt I  
  
surrounding environment creeps  
through my with each step in each  
I am a pawn  
  
cannot look  
I can front the other.  
Why can I see as truth  
  
no choice however uncertainty!  
trappings of ether  
I aware of the infinite  
  
my past unattainable  
the finite becomes  
To know is to know  
More on this later I stop thinking about

## Reverb

Fate/destiny + confused confidence = present wrong

try confidence others + fuck up I'm gaining  
snap out of it = thought + know + understand = help me opening information  
mulling time we last year = us our capacity

I love you ill + your place contact you know = leave our  
presence/our conversation and you = thing think

beg for ignore your something minds + potential not too we will more

= drink drunk near as handwriting + suspicion +  
waking moments everyone anxiety = turn to back I

no circular

around despite theories: end + beginning cannot = you

## Morning in Minor Chords

Love the early madness of warm nights  
when the world forgets to breathe.

Love when madness crushes the thin lips of dawn  
beneath waning gills of darkness and an unreflecting moon.

Love the shy iron sprout of sky sleeping motionless  
as madness rides the deaf hum of silence in the stiff sunrise,  
still drunk with his nocturnal oppression of the ground.

Love the tension that rocks the scaffolding of night  
moments before a sweating sun tongues the eastern horizon  
and shards of the greasy evening vanish  
under another muggy  
                    summer  
                    slathering.

Beneath madness, beneath my paper ceiling  
I wonder if his thirst for dawn persists.  
Parting the doors like branches disguising a meadow  
I step into, become part of  
the rail-thin threads that clothe each evening as  
the marrow of my ribs aches  
for the cellar that is not there.

As I step out into the early morning,  
madness snatches my damp body and  
I wait for the fragmented whisper of a breeze  
to separate each atom from the other,  
to recede from the anchor of our coast.

I am a fish blowing kisses with lips of despair.



## Interpretation

"A pint of sweat will save a gallon of blood."

Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.

Her desire  
leaves her like the figuratively  
exhausted, malleable breath  
she forces out,  
faking the love, the sweat.  
"One cannot take the same path  
every time," she says.  
I push.

Once again the same path,  
try tracing it and she'll say  
without words  
the drawing wasn't supposed to be in black and white.  
Protruding fingers blur the line  
shade the line,  
the black, it stops.

I bask in a glory,  
my past leaks into us  
and I don't know what she's saying  
because triumph is only himself on my tongue,  
and I've forgotten how to translate my touch,  
or refuse.

Her body leaves some truth:  
my fist. And her,

her sex looked into me.  
Never said hello.

## **First Viewing Recalled, 2005**

Degrees of separation unknown: the body of James E. Hurst Sr.

I don't recognize myself  
in the wind. No, no more than  
I would know my grandfather  
were he to return from the earth's bowels  
as a wooden echo  
carved from others' memories.

Were he to appear  
within the shallow ponds of history,  
would he slink into the darkness  
and stand like a silhouette?  
Or would the night act as shadow:  
a formless recounting of how his sons  
and their sons devoured what he left behind  
to act as will and testament?

Regardless, he does not come. I can no longer be a Hurst.  
The same wind that had its hands upon my grandfather's chiseled face  
has left the memory of my father's chin rounded  
and robbed me of any distinct feature either would have passed on.

## reflection |ri'flek sh ən|

### NOUN

1 : the throwing back by a body or surface, of light, heat, or sound without absorbing it: *the sidewalk is often cooler than the asphalt because of the reflection of the sun's rays.*

2 : an image seen in a mirror or shiny surface: *he did not care to look at his reflection in the mirror.*

3 : a thing that is a consequence of, or arises from something else: *a good son is a reflection of a strong father.*

4 : a thing bringing discredit to someone or something: *he was a sad reflection of his former self after being released from prison.*

4 : an idea about something, esp. one that is written down or expressed: *the journal was filled with reflections regarding his personal aesthetics.*

### ORIGIN

late Middle English : from Old French *reflexion* or late Latin *reflexio(n-*, from Latin *reflex-* 'bent back,' from the verb *reflectere*..

## **Thinking of a Son**

Present: Aaron Hurst

I think of holding my son  
at the edges like a photograph slicked with developer  
and begin to cry as I wait for the contrast  
of his eyes and cheeks to separate, darken,  
overdevelop, and disappear.

He hasn't been born yet  
and I already regret the decision.  
It's not that I worry about providing for him,  
or waking up late at night to feed him.  
Instead, I wonder what qualifies me  
to answer each delicate why, and how I will subdue  
the frustration within for not understanding enough for both of us.

What will I give him that will leave a lasting impression  
beyond genetics: the temper, the chin.  
Where is the wrinkle that will determine whether he is his father,  
or, God willing, is not?

## I, Ghost

I (am history) am not historical.

I (will turn 29) do not know the sound of my grandfather at age 18.

I (have stories) have no story worth telling.

I (wonder when history will visit) cannot follow his memory  
because he describes history the way he would explore a cave.

I (am undefined because I chase the flaking ash) am left at the edge of the fire's light  
hoping for faces and names.

I (search for the unedited version) am not a part of that history  
consisting of stages: childhood, hunger, war.

I (struggle with the weight of his story) do not recognize his life,  
only the man standing before me, age 82 from conception.

I (have seen pictures) cannot picture his face in the mirror, shaving, aging.

I (want to build a home beneath this experience) cannot find a place to call my own.

I (am a homeless ghost) heard history belongs to those already dead, and not yet born.

I (search his face for recognition) listen to the infinite.

I (stay silent) have gone deaf within the chorus of history,  
these familiar voices singing separate tales.  
Once ownership is exhausted, or extinct,  
the embers dull at flame's edge.

I (follow the future reflection of the sound of my voice) cut loose from the conversation.

I (have the flint) do not have the stone.

I (hear a voice) have no path to translation.

## Operation Bellybird Recalled, Laguna Hills, CA, 2006

Present: Ret. Col. Melvin "Bud" Weber and grandson

I can't deny the strange need for an unknowing  
air apart from this cockpit, separate from myself,  
my grandfather,  
and his confession regarding sins of  
a soldier  
unknown to me.

He says something, a whisper,  
a vine from the past about wanting to forget  
the war, about being unable to forgive  
each bullet, each nickel-plated package  
released from the bombers?

slate gray lips and toothless mouths  
expected to coax fire from the soil,  
to purge more fire from within  
without consideration for roadblocks  
like helmets, cigarettes, and medals.

A whisper about wanting nothing more than to erase  
the dreams and scars that melt the pink flesh  
from his fragmented mind: a tattoo  
of stolen shoes and watches.  
Infidelities. Blank stares.  
Brotherhood. Horizon. Release.

## **That**

With you, there is a finality in everything said.

“Would you like a glass of wine?”

“No, not right now.”

“What, you’re not drinking tonight?”

I wish I could live like that.  
I would always know where I was  
no matter whether sun  
or death lurked on the horizon.

“Sunrise or sunset?”

“Sunset.”

“That figures.”

Perhaps that is why I found the courage to say *I love you*,  
*put up with me for the rest of your life*,  
knowing that that was all I would have to say.

## Heir to the Throne

I am (doomed) the oldest heir to the Hurst name.  
Call me (Napoleon: Emperor; Mandela: Convict) exiled.  
I (am Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>, I am, I am) have no successor  
will (have) at some point defile(d) the memory of those before me.  
How (will I prepare) will that time happen upon me?

Perhaps a midnight phone call from the other coast  
or, if I have time yet to return home,  
through an empty line with only heavy breathing  
dragging itself through fiber optics  
no time for preparation or burial  
of emotion, the memorial is tomorrow  
and I've left a large hole to dig.

My book (is empty) is filled with voices other than my own.  
Voices (echo echo cho ech cho ech o cho o o o) drowning out  
my voice.



## **To a Grandson**

I hold an old war photo of your grandfather at the edges  
opposite the flame.

It is necessary to switch hands and fingers  
to string the fire along like a puppet  
because skin melts and heat—like the image—  
is not bound by gravity.

In the picture, he stands on the heel of his left foot,  
hips askew, as his father did and as your father does.

This picture is nearly identical to one  
of my grandfather in his Air Force Uniform  
taken just before he left for the Pacific in World War II.  
The lone difference lies in his smile  
where all predictions and reflections vanish.

Remember that forgetting leaves the taste of fire  
rancid at the back of the throat,  
only to recede into the gut itself, leaving nothing.

## **I, Necropolis**

I can't sleep any longer.  
I will spend the rest of my time here  
eating the graves of loved ones  
handful by handful  
to know I haven't missed  
a memory.

## **Ritual**

My body sways while the whiskey steeps.  
Empty glasses peel eyes and limbs from evening's husk  
As night buries my bones beneath me.

Whisked within the glass, knuckles of ice recede,  
Tremors render my frozen fingers into puddles of black rust.  
My body sways while the whiskey steeps.

Lined pages lying low in the empty glass sweep  
Across disjointed pages under a still-born dusk  
As night buries my bones beneath me.

Oceans of rust curdle and weep  
Singeing hand and page with the lips' distrust  
In my body, still swaying as the whiskey steeps.

Dawn approaches, melting the mind asleep  
beside old graves to avoid the growing risk  
of losing the bones I intend to keep.

Having reached the inner ear, virgin vines creep  
Into the remains both delivered and discussed.  
My body sways while the whiskey sleeps;  
Night tells me the bones are not mine to keep.

## **Hurst Plays with Matches in the Rain, Tuscaloosa, AL, recently**

Saw the rain dance alone this afternoon  
in the violet smoke  
of dusk-filled shelf-clouds  
circulating, yet unable to pull it together.

I've heard of buckets, sheets, four-legged  
domestic animals of differing personalities,  
but never seen anything like this footprint of rain

vacillating between branches and asphalt,  
whether to weather the night and boxed-in temperature  
or find space in the bunker once our hallway.

Each toe of rain  
bounces and splashes down again on the dance floor of greased pavement.

These splintered toes gather again  
and run the length of the street  
before returning and casually sashaying over to the mailbox.

Then, the rain releases for a moment  
to tease the oak soaked to the marrow in warnings;  
the druid tries to strike a match  
but the rain returns.

This rotting giant takes a bow and exhales,  
knowing nothing will predict its end.

But why lie down when you can take it standing up?

I say, keep matches in your pocket,  
refuse to remember the moment one is cut down,  
separated from, and ushered into another history.  
Leave that twisted corpse,  
leave it to be stomped into splinters.  
Cut in on rain's partner in the darkening, cooling evening.

Did the rain know I was watching and longed to fill the space  
just between it and the asphalt?  
Would the rain have asked me to join and who would have led?

I like to think I would have, as I know the fox trot, waltz and cha cha,  
but I think I know better,  
think I would have been the one cut down

and would have loved it either way.

## Reverb

worse doubt	/confusion trusts my mind\ /joy\ /locked doors doors obsessed\ /faith actions\ /myself\ /about stable\ /cold doubt\ /laugh\ /comfort her back together\ /desire out of\ /repeating\ /filled with others' persistence	pain persistence road beyond actions be stable I feel cold house home sh/w/c
experience		
trust		
think this deep		
void end selfish sick		
drink drink myself forgetting		
ould		

## **Hurst Kisses the Rain, Tuscaloosa, AL, more recently**

A cold rain peels the paint from the bricks of the house  
while the shutters shudder beneath the porch: blackyellow

crosshatched eyelids with a winter-coat of dust.

The gutters boil over and give way, leaf fossils are forced to jump.

Eight shots ring out, bring sirens and a bag of bones.

I've never seen the dust dance from the kiss of lightning

and I'm from Dallas, mostly.

I've never seen lightning leave a glass footprint

that mirrors the fear of salt abandoned by oceanic evaporation.

I started jumping, thinking I'd better try and dodge the lightning strikes,

but then I remembered I was wearing rubber-soled shoes,

so I'd be fine as long as I didn't have any metal on me.

Wish I knew Mr. Gilbert from across the street, he'd know for sure.

Always carrying that box of old tools around, gathering leaves

and drinks while wearing a suit of armor.

## Hurst Recovers, the next day

What the fuck was that? Illegible  
and incoherent, look at the handwriting,  
the -ings are missing halfway through

and you've never met Mr. Gilbert, so  
what the hell do you know? Oh,  
and those eight shots and sirens

were two kids getting shot behind  
the house, the gun running through  
your yard and over the neighbor's

fence steaming beneath  
a damp navy sweatshirt. If  
it wasn't raining you'd have

smelled the shriveled skin melted  
from the volume of shells the gun  
dispersed and gathered, the knuckles

filleted on that *heap's* loosened teeth,  
the one who dragged himself  
across the street with a bullet,

one lung exhaling its last breath, the other  
heavy with enough air for its owner,  
you, and the gun. The other heap

ran and hid one-legged,  
refused the EMT's hands and  
scooped the bullet from his own calf like a child

clawing at a pebble. And  
you, sitting on the porch, blind drunk  
in birthday stew, scribbling in childish

shadows of rain, or should I say killing  
time and wasting away. While children all  
around you prove the existence of perseverance,

you butcher another line.

**Distillation, Tuscaloosa, AL, a few days later**

Mouth full of mash  
and the smoky remnants of its particular barrel:  
  
should I sift through the whiskey for each yellow casing  
to feed my grandmother as her mother did?

Grind and boil and wait?

Work at not swallowing

let the years pool on my tongue

numb each bud until

ripe.

Then drink. Drink as if  
the spirit is peaking,

the palate's blisters blossoming  
with nauseous thoughts of my grandmother's hunger,

my drive to erase every day but her last in Sonkurai.



## **Hurst Smells Lightning, Tuscaloosa, AL, yesterday**

The clouds come and hang low,  
all day refusing to rain as slate-white wrinkles work  
themselves into crooked fingers.  
I wait outside with nostrils flared,  
breathing in the string of unconnected static  
as the clothesline breaks free  
to blanket my South.

The rain comes with a porcelain clap,  
snakes through the streets,  
creases the horizon,  
slices dusk in half.

Each clap like a vein collapsed at God's elbow:  
the shadow of this particular high  
now etched into the flesh of His disciples,  
sucked into the body, and let loose like a scent's silhouette.

I cannot avoid the lightning's metallic spike  
hanging heavy in the saliva that pools on my tongue  
and shouts down my anxious throat.

I cannot avoid the urge to remove my shoes.

The smell of lightning consumes me.

I wrap quarter-inch chain around my waist,  
sling it over the branches of the dying oak out front.

My toes and tentacles of centipede grass are woven into the soil  
beneath the storms' growling limbs.

I cradle the chain at my hips like an expectant mother  
knowing the time has come to release and rejoice.

## I, Ghosts

(Hello?)

Up to this point, it's all been a sham.  
How can I assume  
when all I know is what's contained within,  
when the only thing I have to translate  
is my own handwriting? (who's there?)  
I have handicapped me all my life,  
never allowed a bare introduction  
or an original experience.  
(Speak up, please)  
Meet your parents, meet your friends,  
meet booze, meet your wife  
I say (I can't hear you).

I didn't exist until (Speak!)  
late one night (hello),  
when I realized  
silence was not equal to an absence of sound,  
the pages in my journals were filled with others' handwriting.  
I cannot know without experience,  
the past has no home,  
the output is distorted (who's there?),

meaning, my father is my father  
unlike he was a son,  
unlike himself at the age of 29,  
unlike anything other than the father he is and has been.

Despite the fact that we stand primarily on one foot,  
clear our throats and harbor fear in similar ways,  
we struggle to open the loss of my grandfather (Senior?)  
instead seem content to mend the fracture as one (I can't hear you)  
would attend to a drafty window.

I cannot say this is my story  
anymore than I can claim the tree  
I planted at the age of five as mine.  
The boy who planted that tree is dead  
just as each word here  
is put into the ground the moment you are aware of they exist (Speak!)

(SPEAK!)

(Speak, goddamn it, speak when spoken to).

## **Impurities**

Nothing thoughtless.

I see each action as I experience it.

That moment my mind awakens and realizes I am in love,  
filled with hate, hungry or drunk, I hit record  
and search for the essential,  
eat the reflection  
hoping to taste the truth:

a room with skin freshly melted,  
the moment of just enough:  
all impressions  
where words are knots  
searching for their own silhouette  
as you whisper into their ears  
hoping to persuade them to speak for you.

And you, you blame them for the distortion  
when it is your own mouth speaking.

I would like just once to see  
color unrecognized,  
intensity uncomplicated,  
experience unexplained,  
silence dissolved  
without a word  
spoken or otherwise.

## **We, Necropolis**

I pray this letter finds you well,  
Please forgive my lack of correspondence.  
There was a priest that came around,  
I figured our little family would conspire.

So you'll understand the lack of my correspondence.  
But if my parents are to survive the Depression,  
Our family will have to conspire,  
I will be forced to stand still in the city.

But if my parents survive the Depression  
By any means necessary  
I will be forced to stand still in the city  
Near the tracks at the outer edge of Sam Ong.

By any means necessary  
I think of Senior as the color of campground ash,  
The color of the tracks outside Sam Ong  
Where I lay among the dead and undead

Thinking of Senior and campground ash  
After dreams of the grunion running,  
Submissively laying among the undead  
Unable to recall my father's face.

After dreams of father running  
I beg for forgiveness with mud covered lips  
Unable to recall his face  
As I feast on the coals smoldering on my chest.

I beg for forgiveness with ash covered lips  
Knowing I will need to lend her my memories  
As I feast on smoldering coals  
Blind to the bed made of blame beneath me.

She knows I have leant her my memories  
As she smiles in the sweet jam of a midnight snack,  
Blind to the bed made of blame beneath her  
As a reflection of my desire in some other mind.

She smiles again with thoughts of sweet jam  
When she was brushed into another  
Reflection of her desire and some other man

With a home and a clock.

Watching as she is brushed into another,  
Outside it is raining, I am in love at nineteen  
With no home and no clock,  
No memory of her oily perfume, or the warmth

Of the rain at nineteen.  
Instead, I wait for him to die and  
Excrete the skin's oily perfume and warmth  
So I may reconstruct what I think I've seen

Instead of waiting for him to die  
Beneath the iron sprout of sky.  
I reconstruct what I saw  
When her body painted truth in black and white.

Beneath the shy sprouting lie  
I no longer recognize my need for her  
When I hide in black and white  
Shaving the beard, aging beneath fear.

I no longer recognize her,  
But can't forget the whispered nothings  
Seeping into my ear as I shave the gray  
From what I haven't had to drink tonight.

I have forgotten what instructions were left  
By voices once distinctly my own  
As they sat drowning in what I had to drink,  
Running ragged into fire and gut

Speaking in tongues no longer my own  
Leaving twisted splinters of the dying evening  
To ram the taste of fire through my gut  
Because I tried to kiss the lightning

And wound up locking lips with a perverted night  
To celebrate birthdays and birthday violence  
By slipping time the bile-burnt tongue  
As spirits peak, aged to perfection.

Celebrate birthdays and this historic violence  
By snorting the lightning God has provided,  
By taunting the spirits with sexed-up perfection,  
By pulling up your skirt to show off your sham.

Snort that lightning and sing of what God has provided  
To taste the relevance of a suspect truth  
By taunting the spirits with sex or perfection.  
Spend the rest of your time here eating their graves.

To be relevant, you must not sleep any longer.  
Handful by handful press the dirt into you.  
Eat the graves of those loved.  
To know this life is to conspire.

## Horse Wrangling, last night

We were arrested last night after what began as a trip  
to nickel beer night escalated.  
We felt my father, God rest his soul,  
enter our body by way of the fingertips on the beer bottle.  
Well, we got up without really knowing it  
and walked down the highway to the nearest farm.  
Once there, daddy told us to cut the tails from each horse,  
probably because he was a snake wrangler in his day,  
was convinced snakes lived off the devil's breath,  
and well, the tails look like something close to snakes.

He told us the extraction and eradication would require  
a pair of pliers, a blowtorch, and a chisel,  
so we gathered the tools and got after it,  
digging out every bit of the coarse hair,  
every bit clinging to the base of the horses' spines  
where it was rumored God slept,  
but uneasily so because of that devil's breath.

With all the liquor, we weren't able to talk daddy out of it,  
so we visited the neighboring ranches and farms,  
met with every horse within a square mile throughout the night.  
But near the end when the sun was coming up,  
one of the horses was making a real fuss,  
and the farmer's daughter, or sister or something woke up,  
came running to the barn screaming her head off.  
Before we knew it, daddy had her by the shoulders  
with the pliers squarely fixed to her ponytail,  
and before we knew it, the chisel in one hand,  
blowtorch in the other,  
daddy had gone and disappeared.

Well, we woke up this morning without any idea of what had happened,  
but the deputy here was nice enough to fill us in on the night's tales.  
Wouldn't have believed him if the horsetails and that poor girl's scalp  
weren't hanging from the rafters of the jail cell.  
Sure do feel sorry for all the horses and that farmer's daughter,  
but we know daddy's somewhere here or other sleeping easy,  
dreaming of God sleeping easy without the devil breathing on him.

## Seance from Prison, tonight

My great granddaddy fought in a war before he was full-grown.

He died many happy years later, once history had been born.

My granddaddy fought in a war before he was full-grown.

He died many years later, once his story had been born.

My daddy fought in a war before he was full-grown.

His story died before it was born.

We've been fighting,

our story is no story,

we die in hand-me-downs.

We've been fighting,

lived years ago

died years ago

live die

-d -d

*live die live alive*

*ride high*

*tide lied fly*

*comes goes*

*blue black*

*snake snakes through lake*

*along shore sure*

*real i eat.*

*bird feather weather*

*sunsbime sublime*

*shoot it stab it halve it.*

*crack blow go*

*granddaddy go*

*know no no*

*only wear*

*share make snare*

*stay here stay near*

*bury me whole*

*hole*

*rejoice listen voice*

*no talk no more sbock*

*tale tell teach*

*search and preach*

*live die*

*dirty dirty*

*it's me*

*see*



## **The Spirits Come**

Coroner: The inmate was discovered dead in his cell this morning.

*We left without a sound.*

Coroner: It appears that he died in his sleep late last night, but we won't know for sure until the autopsy.

*When they open us up, they will find our father.*

Coroner: Clean the cell and burn the sheets, we could use the room. Matter of fact, forget the autopsy, throw him on the fire as well, could have been some sort of disease and we don't need any more prisoners dying.

*Through our melted lips, our grandfather will tell his story.*

Coroner's assistant: Do you hear that?

*A family tradition, a well-known surprise. The fire doesn't know it, but we're still alive.*

## **This**

is not the poem we intended to write.

Never has been.

For a time now, this collection has gone through different stages.

Each new stage a reaction to the dissatisfaction with the last

once we reach the realization we've been acting.

Each new stage a response to the curtain

separating public acceptance from subconscious honesty.

This is an attempt at writing from the other side,

a conscious attempt at collective honesty.

Our fear is that this will become a farce (that was a lie, this is a farce),

a funhouse filled with mirrors showcasing vanity from all angles

because, honestly, by naming it here, honesty no longer means honesty,

but instead becomes an attempt to meet the meaning of honesty

somewhere between subject and reflection.

This is honesty (for the sake of vanity) as we see (try to imagine the best way to exploit) it:

We are racists, drunks, cowards; liars, thieves, gossips, and cheats;

complacent, apathetic, and unstable; stupid, lazy, and loud-mouthed.

We are sexists, fakes, fucking assholes.

At times, we consider prison a welcome vacation.

We wish for tragedy so we won't have to wait for it,

obsess over the worst of this life

because it all lives within us and bubbles up without notice.

We began by telling you this was not our intention,

know that, and we will spare you from the rest.

But know also, by naming this,

we have not only altered the image,

we have placed it in the past and stolen the very essence of its reflection.

## High Tide, Newport Beach, CA, Fall 20--

We wander nameless through the alleys  
of Newport. We are strung out like a sun  
covered in the haze of last night's fog  
which hangs around its golden chin like the dark  
circles cradling our eyes, which have suddenly  
disappeared—either drawn within and consumed  
by their sockets or plucked by the stewing, lingering  
moon. Turning the corner, we brush up against  
the side of Gallo's sub shop, dimly lit by the faded  
blue neon still flashing "World's Best Subs"  
despite being closed since two in the morning. Thinking  
of the spicy Italian with extra cheese and pepperonchinis,  
our tongue recedes and leaves the taste of early morning to  
blossom on the naked palate. With a nose lost to the brew of cool  
sand and La Ventana's pizza, without lips to suckle the empty  
wine bottles surrounding the trash cans,  
we are lost. We can no longer hear the ocean with  
our ears baited long ago by the jukebox hook and  
hooker catcalls cruising the alleys, also without a face  
or shame. Blind, deaf, nearly dumb, we heave from  
a gray mouth the burnt-orange glue of our mind,  
and cross the street searching  
for the comfort of sand beneath feet,  
between toes. Tripping over the cement curb,  
we crawl along the short brick wall lining  
the summer rentals. We know the beach is near on  
hands and knees until our fingers are retracted, knuckle  
by knuckle into our palms, and they too, sucked  
into our skinny wrists, arms and finally shoulders,  
leaving us to our feet to cautiously smooth over  
the rise and fall of crooked cement planks. As our  
shoulders devour neck and head, as our ribcage unhinges  
and collapses, we shuffle across the boardwalk.

Hips give in and release our tattered jeans which catch at  
our ankles and strip us of our flip-flops, toes and the soles  
of our feet, as our teeth, chattering, scatter into the sand.

We slither across the beach full of shit and piss  
only dick and bowels; all mouth and ass, all  
we need to survive, to bury ourselves

in the last bit of warmth, waiting for the sun.