

Boneyard Shifts & Shadow Work

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Masters of Fine Arts

in the

NEOMFA

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

May, 2008

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## ABSTRACT

*Boneyard Shifts & Shadow Work* is a collection of poems completed in requirement of graduation from the Northeastern Ohio Masters of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing. The poems in this manuscript are based in part on the post-modern theory of pastiche—written in language pasted together from world mythologies, science fiction, pop-culture, hipsters, the Anglo-Saxon alliterative tradition, and DJ culture this manuscript attempts to paint a landscape in which the psychopomp or shaman is a primary character. The manuscript also employs composition by field and persona poetry as primary poetic devices.

## Table of Contents

## Section I

The Burning Season...	...2
Outlander of a Windy Country...	...3
Winter Thunderheads...	...5
The Magician Reveals a Totem...	...6
The Cowboy Virus [DJ's Manifesto]...	...7
Rambling Outland Hills...	...9
The Magician Performs a Hilltop Ceremony at Dusk...	...11
Birthing a Storm...	...12
The Old Man...	...14
The Sketch...	...15
When 'Strange One' Woke...	...16
Be Like the Trees...	...17
Gentlemen Losers, Paradigm City...	...18
Among Industrial Ruins...	...20
The 7-Eleven at the End of the Universe...	...21
The Old Man Meets the Magician...	...24
This is Warehouse...	...25
A Place for Broken Things...	...27
The Broken Season...	...29

## Section II

Monsoon...	...31
Denim Granny Feeds the South Bound Train...	...32
Dogman Bivouacked Outside Bisbee, AZ...	...34
The Watcher...	...36
Seabee Granddaddy Sits...	...37
Hey-Hey Cello Baby, ...	...38
Watchers' Picnic...	...39
Recipes for Prom Kings...	...40
Dogman Tells of the Everywhen...	...42
Junkstore Cowboy's Lament...	...43
Watching From the Crack in the Window...	...44
These Modern Times...	...45
Dogman & the Empty Signal...	...46
Seabee Granddaddy Signs to a Lost Alley...	...48
A Name the Stones Forgot...	...50
Wall Leaner's Meditation...	...51
Binding...	...53
She Dances Here & There They Say...	...54

## I.

The poet makes himself a seer by a long, prodigious, and rational disordering of all the senses. Every form of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he consumes all the poisons in him, and keeps only their quintessences.

Arthur Rimbaud  
Letter, May 15, 1871

## The Burning Season

Hot equinox unrolls earth's  
 copperhead tongue  
 into an ember,  
 all that's needed to ignite  
 a season for bones  
 and limber mushroom muscle.

The rat-te-tat hello  
 of ribcages,  
 empty of anything to protect,  
 is the song  
 of smoke rings  
 sailed on a woolly day.

The drum beat  
 of ground grown things  
 is the carnival's pulse,  
 when razorback renegades,  
 men who grow manes,  
 are king.

Night's speckled eye  
 presides as audience  
 over myths performed  
 on the still-life stage,  
 painted pallet-pyre.

The stomach  
 of old brown river  
 full with liquor  
 made from goat horns.

Cracked reeds hum bend-body sutras  
 for the old men of the forest.  
 With hairy legs they command  
 the dances of this season—  
 even the pelting drum  
 of bored fingers  
 waiting for frost.

## Outlander of a Windy Country

The hills run away like wild horses, while days  
 settle into grooves just behind oaks.  
 This is a country of breezes just beyond nowhere—  
 below, a lake country of grapes.  
 The Magician's bunker naps,  
 door round in the lee of a hill.  
 Grass grows tall here.  
 Above the door a single oak strung high  
 with fireflies and red silk prayers.

Inside the halls are plastered, floors wood.  
 The air rich with clove, walls flicker  
 in points of light.  
 Old rock n' roll posters and heavy tapestries hang,  
 a brass Buddha rests atop stereo receiver.  
 Speakers grumble, smeared with guitar.  
 Leather clad books lay nameless in piles  
 surrounding a blood red recliner.  
 A tabletop guardian, coyote of Oaxaca,  
 stands next to a cast iron ash tray filled  
 with left-handed cigarette butts first rolled  
 under blood moon.

The television fixed dead to snow  
 and silent.  
 Magician points towards this winter glimmer:  
 This is evening news.

He pops a cork,  
 pours glasses until empty bottle,  
 invitations glasses to guests,  
 the rest drink themselves.

I enjoy the oldest bottles of grape  
 from the vineyards down the hill,  
 get paid to draw circles,  
 mix blood and soil,  
 summon allies from the ether.



Retreat, retreat,  
 I heard an old man call one day so,  
 I built this bunker.

I am more or less powerful.  
 I invent new language,  
 bring about a Great Year when the mood suites me.  
 I barter astral retrieval for fermentation of the vine.  
 These walls stand true against whitewash fence bravado,  
 built by a twirl of my emerald fingers—  
 with a twist they draw a kiss of petals or bloody maw.

Magician? A name given to me  
 by farmers and craftsmen down the hill—  
 more what I am than who, who being a function of what.  
 What I am is what I do, and I do  
 cast circles, transmit signals, draw specters like splinters  
 from invisible skins.  
 Some even say a madman within a madman.

That sinuous rumble? A winter thunderhead.  
 More of them this season than any I remember.  
 A season for a great, great dark.  
 How any of us make the troubled run  
 through days utterly blind, I don't question.

I've built fires that consume more than I've got,  
 nothing can quench them.  
 I've a big box of Ohio Blue Tips for a brain,  
 when every thought is sandpaper—  
 ten-thousand twinkle lights, one  
 for the name of every star whose name I've forgotten,  
 one each for a match head burst in a moment of fame,  
 in a windy country where embers never die.

## Winter Thunderheads

They speak a language written  
 on the tip of a nebula's tongue.  
 Fat, disposable gods  
 filled with salt  
 and rust,  
 they untangle their innards—  
 ten thousand miles of gray flesh—  
 leaving them  
 along deer paths,  
 uneven avenues,  
 coiled inside industrial carcasses,  
 twined between the tangled ribs  
 of trees.

Born in the mouth of Ursa Major  
 their long sleepy sail  
 leaves their blood starless,  
 their slow breath cold as  
 the deepest nothing,  
 their restless grumble  
 poison in the ears  
 of a napping heart,  
 thoughts heavy enough  
 to still a stone.  
 Somehow both terror  
 and joy—  
 a season long 4am train.

Keep a taper burning  
 in your veins.  
 Draw the blinds.  
 Curse the way of things;  
 the sending of vagrant angels,  
 this endless undoing.

## The Magician Reveals a Totem

Given me by a lion  
 of some sweet savanna plane of Serengeti,  
 it took root in my scalp and grew powerful.  
 A sail in the wind, a rope to climb towers.  
 The chain-link before my eyes it holds tight  
 a varied history, five grand for follicle testing  
 and anyone will see where I've been.

Cunning years found it wild,  
 trick of bramble burrowed in my skull.  
 A multifloral wilderness of strict sense  
 and Id, psychopomp split sanity.

Somehow soft in its sultry rock n' roll,  
 it walks its own way  
 as subtle spring's no-need-to-forgive.  
 Its fettered grove,  
 intoxicant nightscape.  
 It's god? A nameless one, but  
 its incantation is the drum beat.  
 And at sounds made from emptiness,  
 I toss my head, brandishing totem mane,  
 in broken dance towards fields of signal  
 in the sky.

## The Cowboy Virus [DJ's Manifesto]

A hermit break-dancer blessed  
my Roland 303 and named me thus.

He said,  
*Son, a six shooter  
and turn table  
are no different,  
both are governed  
by hip-instinct.  
You will spread  
the beat, infect empty space.  
Head-feeder,  
dance-bringer,  
fingers hot  
as hydrogen fusion in the dark  
of the ever-expansion.*

I follow the doctrine  
of Acid House laws,  
take pills  
buzz all night and spin  
circles of sound,  
drop bass  
through maidenheads  
of new hopefuls,  
crash order  
to chaos,  
grant the Massive dance,  
after-hours transmogrifications,  
trip-hop mission modulations.

My boldest law—  
an equivalent exchange—  
invariable transfers of energy;

I turn sound waves  
into concrete breaks,  
complex muscle control,  
liquidized limbs,  
warehouse grace.

The harder I drop,  
    the harder they roll  
through fire in their flesh,  
    lighting the golden lanterns  
in their chests.

Oscillate  
towards sawtooth wave,  
    through lowpass filter,  
    disengage  
sound from symbol,  
    shatter  
    deadbolt brains  
of clinical “norm” obsession.

Freedom exists in a drum machine,  
    sixteen step sequencers.  
I can ram it four to the floor,  
syncopate,  
    truncate  
rhythms of drums, drums  
    deriving sound from void,  
captured in silicon and thrust  
    at 1,000 watts per channel,  
    barking toward  
black-curtain listeners.

## Rambling Outland Hills

I've never played the game of war  
 between an official career  
     and psychopomp aspiration.  
 The trick to this get righteously stoned—  
 I can slow down a humming bird  
 to the pace  
     of crazed monk  
         mountain mantra,  
 expand time  
     by opening my arms.  
 In autumn I wander these grasslands  
     smoke only wild plants  
         from forest grove.

Have you slept out in the wind,  
 wheat stalks silver in stars?

Seeing glow of civilization  
 I turn  
     toward If-finity,  
     into haze and hill.  
 Wind walkers, tree talkers  
     every manner of outsider  
 rambles here.

At equinox of hues  
 I break open barriers,  
 bandy weirding words,  
     gather willow nymphs,  
 downy river elementals.

We pounce frenzied tangos  
     around hills topped with bonfire.  
     Spirits stripped nude  
     we caress secrets  
 of primitive sensuality.  
 Bared to bone,  
     we relinquish the weight  
     of a tired year,  
 spread wings of willful intoxication,  
     bark at the moon.

Our prayer of dangerous dreaming,  
a rarely sung signal  
of opulent repertoire  
wine-loaded blues of feverish occupation.  
Call me by any other name,  
hammer of the gods,  
firefly gatherer,  
son of saber winds.  
How luxurious to remain undefined,  
to flower in fire.  
To worship like this  
burn worry and weight  
in a pyre of flesh.

## The Magician Performs a Hilltop Ceremony at Dusk

His legs grow in denim,  
like he was born to it.  
His feet stomp black leather.  
The strut of his mane  
could trample the coming storm.

Hand-rolled Zig-Zag smoldering  
at his lip, he draws a circle  
with Kentucky bourbon,  
and spits a swallow once  
in each chief direction.  
He stands facing east,  
flicks a match into the grass,  
the circle razes even in the wind.  
He spreads his arms and drops his head,  
his mane multiples darkness in his eyes.

The wind runs from the north,  
arced light jumps cloud to cloud.  
He arches his back in rallied benediction:

A splash of midnight oil,  
a cut moon hung overhead,  
smoke and lighting to grow a godhead  
on a right-rolled ember.

Bone bearded fathers open  
your cobalt eyes, clap your hands  
full of daggers, hang mouths wide  
and hum up the wind.  
Our hungry hands open the earth  
to exhume the secrets of dirt-dwellers.

At this time of turning twist a tidal  
visitor, a trick, and a broken plow toward  
our favor. We ask for the twice-tried luck  
of the green man's slow-burn to brown.  
Leave us his long-armed summer, reaching  
for the broken season of long, long dark.



## Birthing a Storm

Magician speaks  
     from the lee of the hill,  
 sounds like flint against steel.

Looks like someone  
     called down  
 the first thunder storm  
     of the season.  
 This is the bone yard  
     for old gods,  
 the eldest have no names  
     and were worshiped  
         by glottal grunts,  
     crude dance, and howls  
 that carved mountains' spines.

Hear that broken drum?  
 These tricks, vintage slight-of-hand.  
 Knowing the flash point,  
     that's carnival at best.  
 But invoking fire from the heavens,  
     true grit.

Any man can sprinkle water  
 on bundled twigs.  
     To cut a cloud,  
 hang it to bleed,  
     that's stout work.

Most symbols are savvy,  
 but a true totem  
     can split a mountain,  
 slay a king.

Yet this smug conjurer,  
     long-armed and wild,  
     strikes a kettledrum,  
 calls the names of those  
     in the sneaking know.

Your ears find  
the signal subtle?  
Well, not all fanfares  
are made of trumpets.

## The Old Man

He wears nothing but bones,  
leaves, and raw leather  
around his waist.  
Every so often  
he sheds his skin.

Beard and nostrils filled  
with blue smoke,  
he smells of pete,  
digs his fingers  
in only the richest dirt.

He strikes a drum  
to build the fire.  
A halo of beats,  
bone snaps,  
friction between emptiness  
and sound.

A pipemaker, the Old Man  
sends signals to sky dwellers.

Drying sage speaks his weaving:  
his airy embroidery,  
between myth and miracle.

He stands  
against the season  
for forgetting,  
its white wash wind,  
and things pale-uncanny.

A twice-baked botanist  
he splits the horizon.  
A man on a path,  
he can surmise  
the wily length of fortune,  
fix what is broken,  
clearly heed allies  
assembling lanterns.

## The Sketch

Transpose dawn's  
red light  
with the inkscape  
of a wispy literati.

The walls sigh  
and their triangle  
patterns burst,  
a flock of startled crows,  
at the ink stone's laughter.

A wash of heavy cloud  
brushed through  
this blotched city,  
through a greasy window  
whose sliver of white  
lives like an open wound.

The wind  
is a literati sleeve,  
held like a sail  
by a free hand,  
scoops the air  
shaded by oil smoke.

The rustle of careful hair  
spread like tendrils,  
black blades.

The fan, spun  
as a broken enso,  
whurrs perpetual.

The vision smeared  
as a drop of sweat  
blurs the eyes.

## When 'Strange One' Woke

Magician woke  
    from childhood,  
like from a dim-lit sleep.  
    Lights without  
    their lanterns  
lofty in thinning trees,  
who carried ember  
    as their hue.

Suddenly his fingers  
forged with the skin of firs,  
the names of plants,  
ways of wild things,  
    of the weird  
ignited in the stove  
of his skull.  
Digested in the innards  
    of the earth,  
    a dreamer near death  
and woken by the breath  
    of feral plants.  
Named again under no-moon,  
season for birthing earth.  
Now a man,  
    these old words smolder  
in his chest.

The technicolor  
    nightshade dance  
    with the mandrake-she  
    broke his bond of a singular sanity.  
Now he steps through curtains,  
    a guardian of thresholds,  
something more than man  
    living life between.

## Be Like the Trees

Sugary flame  
the lick of your fingers  
are our fingers.

*these are the ones  
that catch sky's dust  
the dust that forgets the world*

Your hot molasses wound  
is the medicine bag that  
teaches us to shed our skin,  
before the slow storm that erases.

*these are the ones  
the universe gave each  
a thousand brushes  
to catch the paint  
of winter's masquerade*

As night knits itself long  
across the sky  
it wakes the ground barren—  
keep the ember under ash  
so morning will remember  
its tempered heat.

*like them I live by  
a burst of brilliance  
dancing on the stovetop  
of the earth's turning  
living in subtle simmer  
through the long, long dark*

Gentlemen Losers, Paradigm City  
[for William Gibson]

Our neon hieroglyphs  
burn immaculate  
in the gray-dawn  
metronome of oily rain  
broke-beaten on  
wrought-iron railing.

Our voices run  
in the pipes,  
pipes run through  
the city sharing  
cryptic whispers.  
Our voices  
white noise  
in the wires.  
Transistor troubadours,  
we unblacken  
fractured facts.

Capacitor-deep,  
rampant running,  
we are unknown,  
anonymous  
in our antecedents.  
Shadow,  
hasty to mask,  
thin as onion paper  
at noon.  
Auditory canals anointed  
with platinum earwigs,  
we are out-listeners,  
however bull the signal  
we keyboard cowboys  
lasso branded goods.

We eclectic sons of silicon  
call up god-shaped code,  
lost lines,  
apocryphal databases  
of ceremony.

The forgotten angels  
of our under-nature,  
alternate souls  
nowhere near surface,  
boil under veils  
and buzz of wire,  
of speed.

Lives seeded  
in ghost-wastes  
somewhere between  
concrete  
and madness.



## Among Industrial Ruins

Twilight smolders behind  
ragged steel skeletons.

The rust drips into pools  
still as concrete.

Stray dogs patrol angles of shadows.  
Their beards wag in the wind.

They will oxidize too—  
that slow subtraction by air or time

carving away the sweetest meat,  
the sterling knife against flesh.

Maybe starting with the chest,  
a whittling away of the self.

Raw and angry, tattered piece  
by piece, diminishing to the bone.

## The 7-Eleven at the End of the Universe

About time for a pit stop  
     I'd say,  
 sally forth all pocket change,  
 karma coins,  
     and bad religion.  
 Just so happens we are crossing  
 the universe's end  
     so happens  
 the 7-11 at the end  
     of the universe.

A pack of Zig Zags,  
     ninety-nine cents,  
 those aviator shades, no,  
 the blacks ones,  
     five bones even.  
 Slick flick of his knife  
 and the tag is off  
     the shades turned on,  
 darkening his eyes.

You'll never find your way back,  
 be sure to sample  
     the red raspberry Slurpie,  
     mix in some Mountain Dew,  
     Jolt Cola,  
     black bird's red wing.  
 In this mixture the high octane  
 of the midnight data jack,  
     and his digital graffiti.

Welcome to the supply depot  
 where hipsters refuel incendiary engines.  
 Bumble buzzing pep pills,  
 cigarettes, cigars,  
     condoms, condiments.

Dressed like a wooden Indian,  
 Uriel stands guard  
     behind the counter,  
 fingering  
     his fiery sword, slurping  
 a haloed mochachino,  
 nudie mag  
 shoved between the  
     *Book*  
     *of Enoch.*

His eyes turn and say,  
*In my store impurity*  
     *is impunity.*

Kicked back, Magician leads  
     the buzz session:  
 All moralities broken,  
 therefore subjective.  
 Inside this collapsed space time  
 we've no time for halfcocked hangmen  
     hot for pig head dust town justice.  
 The manic law of personal power  
 written by men of knowledge  
     good and bad  
 prevails over the vegetable religion  
     of rotted dogma.  
 Our signals are strong enough  
     to grope  
     the Milky Way.

This place?  
     Common ground  
 for assorted madmen.  
 We are cracked, or crackling,  
     open to everything—  
 foreign signals from other-space.  
 This congregation is placeless,  
     formless,  
     is a head place,  
     a dark district,  
 you need crow's eyes  
     and coyote's tongue to walk here.

Outside black leather cherubs  
    ride a bucking dolphin  
complete with sonic language squeal.  
    Thrown like potato sacks *smack*  
into a leaky dumpster,  
parrot-squeaking into cockroach portholes.

Eyes darkened by solid shadow,  
rimmed in stainless steel, Magician  
    swaggers from door to curb  
spun-drunk on soda slurry.

There is only one highway—  
    moving in every direction.  
Tune to exit 66's station  
    and lax your sails.

## The Old Man Meets the Magician

I am a psychotropic politician  
heading predawn committees.

Mocking Bird told me you boast  
a signal reaches the stars—

Sonny, I sent up smoke signals  
now clustered in the Milky Way,  
they sing back on thin nights.

Enough chit-chat from you,  
Strange One,  
the night is full,  
let us reach our arms  
like bulging antennae  
towards the unfolding sky.

I worship drums and smoke.  
Dance on nights when  
the nameless ones wish.  
My fertile feet inscribe  
totems in the dirt.  
Watch my footwork  
weld signals,  
drum the earth  
for allies.  
With kinetics I send myself  
towards alpha wave  
ecstasy.

Who is the beat maker?  
I call the drums from the earth.  
They play themselves,  
sending Sunday passer-bys  
into rapture.

## This is Warehouse

Side A.

Dancing at the Drive-In [End of the World Mix]

A thousand FM mouths beat box  
 viral breaks at the speed of dawn.  
 From their posts  
     they stand and draw  
 a syncopated squiggle show  
     on the rotted,  
     yellow movie screen.

*If you're dancing...*  
*If you are dancing...*

From here the DJ breaks  
                             down  
                             barriers,  
 the curtain covering  
     votives swimming  
 in the chests of the faithful.  
 His crazy claws dash,  
     scratch and flicker  
     in stop-motion miracles.

*If you're dancing at the end of the world...*  
*If you are dancing...*  
*If you are dancing at the end of the world...*

The crowd hums prayers  
 through these rifts,  
     lifting aqueous arms  
 in time to 35Hz transmissions.



## A Place for Broken Things

A place were  
    clocks move  
like grizzly monks  
    at prayer.

This place is sleeping.

All shouts  
    are whispers, but  
not all whispers  
    are shouts.

Nameless molecules dance,  
    masquerading  
    as sea glass.

Little known,  
    a voice sings here.  
Long,  
    it stretches between  
furthest corners,  
    argues with itself,  
whether it sounds  
    more like Nina Simone  
or Billie Holliday  
    while it sways  
in a rocking chair,  
    polished, painted with dahlias.

It drinks whiskey,  
    and it drinks whiskey.



Here, light is irreverent  
    in choosing  
what it illuminates,  
invites us  
    to the business of crevices,  
were flies bask  
in beer-lights.  
    Forges a neon armature  
    of forgetting,  
half comatose  
in celluloid cremation.

## The Broken Season

Stone solstice grinds its gears,  
pours the cold ashes  
of blank photos over everything.

*this lamp's light is black  
its silent palette forgets  
lessons crack open cold  
just a touch nulls ragged heat  
bites down hard when it hits bone*

The moan of this old man's bones  
hum out lights left in the window,  
pushes us sideways toward sleep.

*ten thousand lights die  
in the iced reflecting pool  
birthdays of the dead  
counted as intoning drops  
in the copper singing bowl*

Razor-wire chords string his spine—  
each deep-rattle, proof  
he's shambling outside the window.

*hold the silk silence of snow  
bear its numb tattoo  
memory scattered as drifts  
afterhours drink liquor sighs  
and fall from their chairs like leaves*

**II.**

The world is all that is encased here: life, death, people, and everything else that surrounds us. The world is incomprehensible. We won't ever understand it; we won't ever unravel its secrets. Thus we must treat the world as it is: a sheer mystery.

- Don Juan

*A Separate Reality*  
by Carlos Castaneda

## Monsoon

Open.

For this skin,  
no crone's thick salve.

This  
and only this  
brings relief to skin,  
    whipped by sandpaper wind  
These limbs ache  
    in their sinew;  
    to purl,  
roots digging  
like come-curved toes.

Milk flowers left  
fresh to the rain.  
    Their colors hang in the air,  
    smell of green flesh burst  
    at the seams, knitted across  
    the mouths of the landscape.

Open.

These yucca limb-fingers,  
    raw fence posts,  
stretch in praise.

To breathe?  
A heavy spirit,  
    quickly fermented.

Open.

A deep itch stitching  
the spine splits at the hip,  
helixes through the dark  
remembering a sapling,  
embowed in its body's  
respired simper.

## Denim Granny Feeds the Southbound Train

Keep singing for Jesus  
and chewing the mumbled  
language of God—  
a child learning to speak,  
first language raw  
as fresh fallen kill.

Ice has cut her tongue,  
turned brain to vinegar,  
but she'll pickle the world—

as her grandmothers  
growing grandkids  
on red beet eggs,  
canned tomatoes,  
one hundred rhubarb  
litanies against the devil  
in a language which calls  
bell peppers, *mangos*.

Great granny  
of train time gospel  
serves her sway  
of sweet crooked spine,  
heaping spoonfuls  
of her Hefty bag's quiver.

Passengers drown  
in the lessons  
of the sour wine  
pouring out the top  
of her head.

And she knows  
they'll all be thirsty  
before awfully long

as her song unrolls  
carpets of hot earth  
next this train plugging south  
toward mountains rising  
like dry tongues toward  
a kissless sky.

## Dogman Bivouacked Outside of Bisbee, AZ

Wary moons  
 molest the skyline  
   atop their poles  
   planted along  
 the whispering wall  
 that cages  
   the mountain's  
   trek-steppers.

A hand-rolled perched  
 on his lip,  
 Dogman tosses  
   an empty Alpo can  
 into his fire,  
 cracks a forty  
   of Old English.

His nose wet with sage  
 and yucca,  
 he gnarls: *its monsoon.*

Out here,  
   off the grid,  
 white noise rambles.  
   A wasted vagabond,  
   it's the only signal  
 between mountain  
   and highway.

Dogman considers the bottle,  
   drinks at forty-five degrees,  
 teeth clenched to the mouth  
   like its-a witch's tit.

*Hiss-hum-spit,*  
   the muffled thunderbird  
 of a wandering mind,  
   the only signal  
 and buzzed  
   to the tune of copper.

Dogman hears along  
streaming coos  
of his malted breath  
wayward waveforms.

They wrap their legs  
around the antennae of  
whurly cars  
obscured by night's  
hand-clothed ears.

So live the silent.  
Call him hear-all-evil,  
all-good,  
see-all-beeps, burps,  
blips,  
witness-all-blind-  
tocsin-between.

And when  
there are no trucks  
or coyotes  
there is breath  
and the sound  
of the cigarette  
burning.



## The Watcher

He stands in the foyer, head hung against night's  
drifting spindles. A hat crumbled in worried hands,  
his hair white even in the narrow waft of street lights.  
Memory faded as worry-spots on woodwork have drawn  
him here from the sleeping house's easy coos.  
The slouch of his chin a scolded boy's considering his feet.  
Here he knows no one, the sighs of the sleeping house  
unfamiliar to his breezy ears—he is here to listen.  
In this hour of night things, a tear crawls down  
his cheek, and just the smallest whimper, no more  
than a visiting draft through the window.  
The chimes, toks, and ticks of all the years of this house,  
he hears them as a fat clock, unwinding itself  
in bravado to the turning of the moon—in the way  
it paints its yellow face on the dreaming eyes of the dead.

## Seabee Granddaddy Sits

A glass effigy  
of sun smolders  
under Dutch Master cigar.  
His swollen feet  
    too divine for  
any floor not worn  
    with South Pacific  
whiskey and gritty soles.

Grunt for barley drafts,  
a bear-force typhoon.  
Slips bills, like Gallo's bottleneck  
over strings,  
    toward a familiar hand.

Steel veins: eight, twelve,  
sixteen bars—still sing  
alley brawls  
    and cat-in-can fights.  
Ragged music  
bedded with what is broken,  
burning need-fires  
in bellies,  
sheep innards,  
scratch-to-win.

He gropes through  
    noonish ether toward  
that old-time  
    nirvana.

## Hey-Hey Cello Baby,

Marilyn Monroe struts  
over air vents at every pop  
of my lady's hip. She grows  
her roses in axle grease, they taste  
like whiskey on her lips.  
This she sips and sips while  
she screams around the courtyard  
like some kid Daytona come to town.  
And I'm her tambourine daddy.  
She rolls her eyes down the street  
every time she catches a whiff  
of mama's special fuel. Red hot  
tempered *agave* devil does  
a claw-toe jig like roofing nails  
against brick. The beat drops  
and stops in the middle of the yard,  
compliments of the DJ overhead,  
carrying the hammer of the drum  
machine behind his angelic head.  
And Hey-Hey Cello Baby wants copper  
bent 'round her wrists and ankles.  
Now she's a transistor gypsy  
twinkled of toe in time to diamond-hunter  
granddad, who's scorching the banjo.  
He's sitting porch-wise behind the bend  
of none-other-than-that blue devil's arm  
taking my lady's petunia appendage.  
And me, I'd wallow in worry warts  
'cept for blisters on my brain from  
this flurious scene of summer hot  
debauchery and I thought  
what I'd do was  
I'd pretend I was one of those  
    *agave* devils,  
or should I?

## Watchers' Picnic

Its not perfect weather for a picnic, but they still see  
the stars through clouds thin as the blankets they sit on.  
A dozen or so gathered here at the tops of the trees,  
most quiet, having eaten. The ground below  
beginning to moisten at the skirts of morning  
whose soft feet pace back and forth as she prepares.  
And these lights aloft among the afterhours happenstance,  
soft and old as stars, celestial fireflies.  
What ever kind of visitor, who knows such things?  
The cooings of these lovers' midnight afternoon mingle  
with moth wings. One couple forgets the melody of the song  
they were humming and listen to the leaves tickle their feet.  
The girl smiles her laugh like a silent movie star, and cups  
her hand aside her lover's head and stitches a secret in his ear.  
As the clouds saunter past the flicker of the moon changes  
their faces, as if the dull light is swimming the years of their skin.

## Recipes for Prom Kings

Pieces-parts occupy her decaying delirium,  
 life precarious enough with wilted lips—  
 lipstick in place, mouth helter-skelter.  
 And skin she has forgotten, her own that is,  
 foundation no use against rouge-less gray.

But she prepares each night-out anyhow,  
 mind bloated with obsession:  
 the first clammy touch of her finger upon  
 a novel neck. The writhing flavor of acrid  
 agony tickles the back of her broken tongue.  
 Mindless, her hand flops through pages  
 of her a diary, now cook book:

Hips and joints make the best soup bones;  
 but the sweetest meat is the cheeks--this  
 she must savor, slow cooked with chunks  
 of cactus to preserve the juices.  
 A brain, too, is a terrible thing to waste  
 from it a sweet pâté, simple flavor, rosemary.  
 Roast of golden-throwing-arm, leg of track star,  
 beer battered badboy, sautéed home-room hero.  
 But she didn't always know how to cook,  
 didn't always cling to the calm terror stitched  
 between the pages of her book.

Does she wonder,  
 back in that deep patch of primordial pitch,  
 who pinned this curse to her like a first place ribbon  
 whose needle has stuck her in the chest,  
 bled her at the moment of victory?  
 The slight girl who preferred black, was it her?  
 The Cat Woman, was it her feline clan  
 on a black Sabbath mixing powders  
 for a skinny slinker to sneak into her  
 lemonade at lunch? This a million times until  
 she stopped speaking, another voice tuned  
 into her mind: *Standing rib roasts, stews,  
 gravies, Sheppard's pie, prom night princes  
 slow roasted with a dry rub.*

But she didn't always know how to cook,  
didn't always dwell between the pages—  
her senior prom date, she ate him raw.

## Dogman Tells of the Everywhen

First Father's gift is a  
feathered snake  
    eating his own tail.  
The emptiness between  
his jade coils is filled with  
helix paths,  
    our journeys are blue trails  
of nebula in his annular sea.  
Faces of the grandfathers'  
songs carved into moldy scales,  
their stories rant like mad drums.  
    The dead dance  
along his rock-chancy verge  
    slipping like sequins  
back to the sea.

In the bruised light  
    of the between  
listen for his sire signal  
    calling us  
to the uncanny procession  
of sounding seers  
who tamed the knowledge  
that which ever way we walk  
we are headed toward home.

## Junk Store Cowboy's Lament

Badboy bodhisattvas ride the thumb-hooked  
 rail line of their turquoise belt buckles towards  
 siesta under a hammered saltine-tin roof.  
 The rusted quartz clock is stuck near quarter past,  
 hour hand oxidized to dust sleeps in the gears.  
 Junk Store Cowboy clicks his spurs in time  
 to a tune inaudible to little old ladies who rifle  
 through voodoo gimcrack brought west by means  
 of a swamp-soaked storm that never touched down.  
 Relics raised from the burning blood muscle  
 of the French Quarter rouse the pink in the pale  
 cheeks of girls still dressed for church.  
 And while he won't whistle he tips his hat,  
 smile sharp as a chinked razor and twice the gamble.  
 Holy water and copperhead oil shelved side by side,  
 his logic buried in the purple dunes of other-times.  
 Sighing at the thought of customer service,  
 his bones creak stories of gizmos and whirlmagigs,  
 hinting at the touch of Da Vinci's gilded hands.  
*Dreams, dreams, dreams. All the half-thoughts,  
 and possessed inklings of countless wunderkinder.  
 I dabble in the half-baked, sell only cracked pots,  
 and keepsakes of wicked History's wheel.  
 A hairy sidewinder in this copper still of time,  
 I sing Old Boethius' forgotten consolations  
 in time to the rise and fall of vanishing sand hills.  
 I sidestep that old siren mutability,  
 our lady of both tragedy and grace.*



## Watching from the Crack in the Window

She lived in a crack in the window, being very small,  
haven given most of herself back to from where she came.  
The last of her is this minuscule inch, less than the glow  
of old, worried street lights knitting the space between moths.  
This place the best seat to watch, of all the tiny crevices,  
a million deaths as the bruised light limps through the window  
and hushes the last swirling particles of the sleeping.

## These Modern Times

Imagine the man  
made whole  
by four walls and a balcony.

The acrid smoke of his  
black pipe tobacco  
wreaths his head in habit,

while he types on a well-  
oiled Smith-Corona, each  
stroke a thousand-year itch.

A dozen muffler wrapped  
hours a day wondering,  
*if the future is stupid, then?*

Every time he grapples  
a PBR out of the frige  
he reads, "BUY A GUN."

He spent twenty years  
underground and perfecting  
a singular skill—

no one knows his name,  
everyone dreams  
his fallout face,

and sleeps a little worse  
each night.

## Dogman & the Empty Signal

Oh can he smell it,  
    like eons have odors.  
So sour it prickles his crusty nose,  
    burns deep in his lungs.

The dark,  
a hot swarm of aeriform hands,  
    where even man's deep trawl  
    of zeros and ones won't return  
    from its search.  
The dark's fingers are thick salve.  
    The texture of their stretched demise  
pulls around his legs.  
    As they drag him  
    they shudder,  
    break.

Oh he can hear it,  
    like the universe sputtered,  
    sparked, blacked out.  
    Stone-heavy silence  
    thrust into his head,  
plugged into his ears.  
His own signal choked  
in silent squelch,  
    crams his throat  
    with the terrible nothing  
    of a zero-sum.  
The taste of a stalemate with  
    the great, great black,  
hot tar at the back of his tongue.

Dogman tears at his chest,  
    his mouth contorts,  
lungs buckle.  
His dinner slides up  
and lands in his lap.

He spits once;  
    mouth rinsed  
    with stale water.  
Dawn's careful drums  
aloft in his head.

## Seabee Granddaddy Sings to a Lost Ally

The breath of bleached absence sings  
through cigarette's spark of rye fume.

Lavender's blue, diddle diddle  
Lavender's green,

*When I am king, diddle diddle  
You shall be queen.*

What broken back? His nightwings,  
like some beerlight archangel,  
are tinged with arthritic cartilage whorl.

*The train's a-comin' around the bend  
Goodbye my lover, goodbye*

*By baby by-oh, what makes you cry so  
By baby by-oh, goodbye my lover goodbye.*

*Clear skies are stalks  
of sweet grass  
for chewing.  
These my constant dream,  
but this land?  
Dry as my veins.  
She never loved just me.  
I'll find new bones to dance  
your dance again. Raw bones,  
twenty limber and hot.*

Need fire and oily incense  
in dollar store citronellas.

*The train's a-comin' around the bend  
Goodbye my lover, goodbye*

*By baby by-oh, what makes you cry so  
By baby by-oh, goodbye my lover goodbye.*

This song is his stretch of years,  
bent into one restless night.

*By baby by-oh, what makes you cry so  
By baby by-oh, goodbye my lover goodbye.*

## A Name the Stones Forgot

Call him mouse shadow under the year's second moon.  
Who now will speak this name and call this tiny brother from  
the slumber of instinct when he knows songs the wind forgot?  
All the roots of the world he's walked in the between time,  
when milk flowers glow and the eyes of First Father blink away sleep.  
His needling eyes laid bare upon the death of stars, burning gold,  
nebulae of nether-this-nor-that. He grows small in his age,  
dismantled atom by atom, bones given back to the universe.  
Adrift in his mind-sea are the plants' names who've lost their tongues  
to arid time. Now no more than a wordless lullaby of morning  
while he stuffs his cheeks with seeds. Testing the wind with  
whiskers, the Pocket Mouse retreats back to innards of earth  
where dreams dark as a stubborn patch of midnight remember  
what he's forgot, recall his trekking as a giant among suns,  
drifting far from the light.

## Wall Leaner's Meditation

Wall Leaner spends his  
 days on *whateverscheap* tallboys,  
 on the flypaper laugh of  
 Old Timer and his honey  
 hash sprinkled into a roll  
 of stale Bugler tobacco.  
 Old Timer's hard fingers collect  
 sand scratches, gardener snakes  
 rolling ZigZag papers  
 like memory of cricket legs.  
 Old Timer's tin foil kept  
 between his molars, a promise  
 to a girl, calls her Sally.

Leaner smokes through a scar,  
 opened like a dirt-pink, wrinkled lily  
 ready to suck the venom into  
 his head and strain it through  
 lungs, blood vessels, gray splatter  
 closed ecology. He unhinges  
 the scar, turning himself inside  
 out, prays for sands to clean  
 the other side of his skin.  
 A soupy velvet's oration,  
*open open* he wills it.

It's a slow day for the march  
 of the Hawaiian Shirts,  
 while he hangs in and out  
 of the public library's wall  
 located siesta-downtown.  
 Old Timer's blend turns to  
 sweet walnut somewhere  
 between tongue and brain.  
 Recipe of his days— toasted  
 dirt, sprinkle of grit, and malt.



Watches his own home movie,  
slip and spill of self washes  
over slop and ill, slips himself a mickey.  
Evening's overhead announcement,  
dogs rustling garbage cans.

He dusts off his eyes,  
opens windows in his head,  
invites the pale alley  
into the rooms of his body.  
He gathers all of himself  
back into his mouth,  
fills the stretched jaws  
of this yaffle child with  
his wayward flesh.

## Binding

with bits of twine collected  
by little brown birds, with strips  
of first place ribbons for beauty,  
most homeruns, fattest pigs,  
biggest pumpkin, with dried  
daisy chains made by sisters:  
sister naps on velvet pillow;  
sister flutters in olive winds—  
with thirty second count of fuse,  
horse hair from mama's antique chairs,  
hair still tied with yellow thread  
in a shoebox, the veins  
of the oldest man's arm  
oldest man who still smokes  
bare ass camels and shoots J. Daniels,  
broken shoelaces, locket chain  
of first lover lost to storm drain,  
yarn spun copper and ironwood kite string  
bound wily.

## She Dances Here & There They Say

A witch  
of the strangest sort,

as if copper  
were like water.

Born in the wake  
    of a dark sky's fire  
    at dew birth,  
she is the two-fold guest  
    casting sparks  
into the tinderbox.

    Nymph of second chances,  
a toss of bones decides  
fate by pyre or pouring.

She wears the mist  
    around her waist,  
the arroyo curve  
    of her hip  
too dangerous for man.

Born from desert,  
her skin matches  
    sun and shadow  
tone for tone.

As if she were a dried gourd,  
music maker,  
    a beat rises from her feet  
and chest as she  
    swirls her way moistening  
    the sand  
    with her dance—  
legs saguaro sinew.

An eddy of green light,  
like a lantern  
    at her center—  
its tendrils scurry the length  
    of the horizon,  
red bursts bloom in furrows  
    dug by her feet,  
    like a most unusual flower  
among a thousand measures  
    of cracked  
and wanting earth.