

THE FAR WINTER

by

Elizabeth Rodrigues

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The Dorothy Schmidt College of Arts and Letters
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

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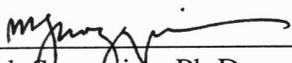
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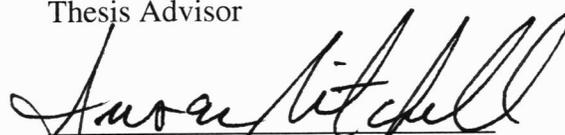
Elizabeth Rodrigues

This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Mark Scroggins, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE



Mark Scroggins, Ph.D.
Thesis Advisor



Susan Mitchell



Wenying Xu, Ph.D.



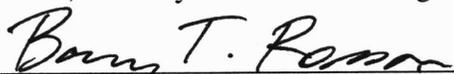
Wenying Xu, Ph.D.

Chair, Department of English



Manjunath Pendakur, Ph.D.

Dean, Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters



Barry T. Rosson, Ph.D.

Dean, Graduate College

11-7-08
Date

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ABSTRACT

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Title: The Far Winter
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This collection of poems engages narratives of geographical and emotional displacement on a journey toward a place from which to begin writing. The inciting narrative is one of travel—to Brazil, to England, and to adulthood. A second narrative emerges as a gradual realization that these first displacements will never be truly resolved and that this lack of resolution is the only occasion from which to write. As the collection continues, the speaker of these poems is less and less comfortable with pronouncement and more and more comfortable with action. The act of doing something—moving, driving, walking, escaping, returning, floating down a river of ice—is what creates the silence needed to proceed. Through the body, deafening directives can be temporarily suspended.

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I.

June, Winter

Is the sun out?

No, nails of rain
drive through the seam
between wall and roof.

Is the sun out?

No, the wind flicks
a hose set on mist,
soft and cold
and omnipresent,
descending.

Is the sun out.

No,

but there is a sense of it
gathering behind
gold, unretrieved,
sinking upward
in the flipped world

and the pavement
lightening into new,
dry continents.

Somewhere a hammer wakes,
beneath our bed
the rage of mold calms.

Turning east
eyes shrivel, contract:
sea creatures stranded
on the morning beach.

Rua São Gonçalo

The street has two sounds:
the bus and the sharp slap

of flip-flops
against heel.

There are two smells and two people,
heat-swollen:

varnish and old coconut,
one-eyed green shells piled with the chipped roof stucco;

woman and child, hip slung,
staring at the woman's neck

as her head twists toward the sound of a large motor,
the route number swimming in her eye

as the bus rides the rolling cobblestones,
tilting on all axes.

There is an addition here, between these elements,
and a sum. There

are small, tight-fleshed fruits tucked into
the palm and cashew trees

that lean over the cement walls as each leaf carves a precise darkness
from the overbearing light,

and any breeze only moves the unblurring edges
of what is unexposed.

Primer

Whisper of a scorpion,
for the eye too will have
its translations. Morning
rises from his throat,
not the rooster's but
the dog's. Twenty-five
finger-sized bananas
are too many, even cheap.
Maps drawn on the night
air may not mislead
deliberately, but when
the bus runs out a language
will be necessary. Understand:
you will not. You will
speak in exclamation points
and question marks, for months
address the boy who changes
toilet paper with the word
for boss. When you mean
what, ask how.

Racha

Antarctica brand beer sweats in the shade
but the cheapest seats are on the overpass,

where shirtless boys press past taller boys,
thirsty for the falling lights that send the pilots

down the track, eyes serious, brilliant,
then cool, as the briefly flamed

dust falls behind the winner
and the loser. The best drivers make it

to fourth, but most burn
the engine in second all the way

past the chalked line, push sugar gas
until the heart screams against its walls,

as two more rev at the starting line,
a new breath held for the small hot space

in which spectacular disaster seems possible,
relit eyes willing any fury that might bend

the repeated path, ignite a lullaby
to swig from all the alleyways home.

Of the Many Names To Which I Could Have Answered

Like the skin of electricity
 alive on our bodies,
or the very surface of moving water
 stretched across a stream's crouched boulders
and not broken,

the sky moves within itself.
 I haven't moved
the empty plate, haven't moved a limb
 toward the afternoon
before me and know I am pardoned,

undone better than unseen
 under this sky, and a need
as strong as hunger to allow
 updraft, to be held like a thought,
not motionless but in a space

all stillness is in motion
 around me, the permeable eye,
a fount and coalesced dimension
 opening within the flat blade of day,

here, a space
 that must hold, not be held,
an irregularity in the fabric
 brushed against on platforms,
in certain streets of foreign cities, certain

bewildering dreams. until dropped,
 as if returned,
as if recalled to something so compelling
 it had to take the shape
of this room and this window.

Late Morning Sestina

The long stiff hours
I have already had and spent. The steaming water
and the bird—lifted, lifted, dropped.
The room where we can afford nothing
but the given light, and the ache where my knees bend
being so still a thought could echo:

all traceless as steam, until you rise and echo,
your first heavy steps into the day of hours
like wading into a rippleless pond. I am an inward bend
of light to your woken eye, which will bear me like water
when I leave—as if nothing
had ever stirred, had ever dropped

from the low branches or the fisted hand, dropped
and swallowed like tired words into night, though the echo
sleeps close as air. I have begun to accept that nothing
remains of most hours,
ceaselessly reforming around our ankles as water
becomes again a smooth surface to bend

my face upon when it needs to bend
as waist-bent, leaning over I've dropped
it like a coin to find it lifted back on the water,
a breeze-twisted echo
shaped as many ways as hours
have been spent doing nothing,

as at my grandmother's house, where nothing
was one thing, everything could bend
into one more useful life. Hours, hours
we spent washing Dixie cups and gathering dropped
mugs to reassemble, never managing more than a cracked echo
of the thing when it could hold water.

She is gone, I so gathered. Days are water
escaping places her hand cannot mend. We pour nothing
from bodies hollow as echo.
But how could she, can I refuse to bend
like the wind which dropped
the bird into sheer dawn, bare as hours

but enough, as in water current is enough to bend
the path of the raft we call nothing, its cargo dropped
over miles like hours, shed, all echo and release.

Brazil Ghazal

One leaf, two leaves: except for the palm
intruding, a November sky.

Jet pulls puffy thread from
split seam blossoms into sky.

Courtyard, concentric flies □
perturbed orbits, dizzying sky.

Hobby horse is no one's hobby
nothing grips the rigid rein but sky.

Two squirrels, but Noah is missing,
for the saved world what sky?

Above tweed neck blushes sunset
upstanding, refusing sky.

Heat, breeze, chill:
lifting silk, unfurled sky.

Hand pours ink, empty
branches write the sky.

Winged ant spirals wide
intuition of sky.

Praia: sertão:
two edges of sky.

Lisbon language but not light, last pouring
across how many pages and this sky.

Harbinger Kiss

Light leaked from sand
lustres the passed bottle
from you, to Sergio,
to Flavio from Pernambuco.

Later you recoil
from my drunken,
man-flavored mouth:
my tongue would not

lie easily with yours
that night, or those months
clung to the equator
like the rim of a toilet bowl.

If you kiss me
there I am far as from
a country of seasons,
a latitude of ice.

When We Were Tourists

The supermarket I could read
without knowing any words,
by aisle, by color
of lunging signs, the Braille
of each pineapple pyramid.
The book came in chapters,

but structure can still fail
to alleviate content:
cans of young corn beside
the cane liquor, hoofed haunch
above lung ripped tuna,
tampons? They're with

the perfume, but I still liked
going there, and I liked going
to the movies, the reason I'm so famous
I get paid to teach other people
the way I talk,

not that I talk much
at the bar, beside the boys and the girls.
I time my laughs, watch
as if I could look and look
and look and not be seen.

Home? It's neither here
nor there, what changed
is how we spent money:
movies were cheap
in translation, but in a native
wage, too dear

just like the supermarket
so we went to the market
for fruit we could afford,
and it had more than fruit
it had walls of meat,

beef curtains blown
back and forth in the rush
of girls at my hip selling
their last bunch of lettuce,

cilantro, and scallion,
won't you buy it,

before running back
to grab another last,
another tourist dodging
the grey drip stream surging
toward open toes, don't look

or stare at the stooped
fisherman with his staff
of live crabs. What changed
is the way we knew what we saw:
a ticket half a week's wage,
a pineapple half a day's,

each breath of our lives so kin
to that tangle of claws and eyes
still closing and opening.

Unproven

$$\sum_n^{-s} = \pi (1-p-s)^{-1}$$

Like mouths

the mailbox, the dinner plate,
the TV screen,
like open mouths, straining at the jaw,
they delineate
varieties of emptiness: silence,
hunger, absence—

all non-trivial zeros. Hours, too,
are problems
to be swallowed, each night testing
his solution:

Start with the sigma squiggle
of a snow skid and reverse it

to the sign of a beetle dragging her belly in August dust.
Halve the chill of the bathroom floor
by the memory of the tops of your feet sweating
and group the strands of her hair
in the parenthesis of your hands
as you both stood by the tall window,
a seemingly endless dawn rising before you.
But invert, now,
the deepening curves of December shadow
to the parabola of your umbrella
shedding last April's rain on the pavement.
Finally, reduce the unknowns
to a pillow case
and erase your errors—

all night feeding himself
into the equation, yet waking

equivalent,
no evidence of transformation.

The Assignment

You are awake,
splashing bathroom light
across my face.
I'll tell them:
write a poem
about ambivalence,
or anything else.

Toothpaste kiss,
shoulder squeeze,
the weight
of a cotton sheet
holding me
to a cooling bed.

In the fine script
of hair in the sink,
what is legible, mapped
on shelves tundra bare and floors
archipelagoed with volcanic boxes—
as in epic we begin
in the middle of everything
to read these days

where we wake up, ask
if this is the epic
or a first assignment
from a teacher
who doesn't give assignments,

only questions, and no grades,
only short notes
that try to be poems
about who you are,
or anything else: *If this
is the life you want
then want it.* There is,
after all, the teacher
points out, only
one assignment.

II.

Dried a Ball The Rain

Out came the sun and

I am told Antioch &
a lemon tree
that dropped sweet lemons

Russian neighbors, the husband
on a step ladder
to lower an Easter basket
over the privacy fence

a brown recluse
under the sandbox,
my father catching his breath
before heeling it
and hosing it down the patio drain

& I a three-year-old
who ate lemons
no one else knew were sweet

—a black ball of
straight looked at sun
is what I remember,

and misheard songs,
mother-sung.

Mills

This has been the meadow I refuse
but it was jangling, hungry
sweating below a yellow gauze
ripped two hundreds times by
the wish to leave but
this wish quelled by another:
to be the picture
for how she talked about the car days
of her own childhood with so much
I now tense left out. I had not learned
the loss of expectation
and your carefully packed lunch.
A bridge but no flooding,
nothing surging around white anklets
or destruction to cause what I learned
from those walks, though I don't
want to say anything to tamper
with the guilt in the corner,
fixing us in our cheeks and checks
for one forever on the walls
of the hall in which I don't
turn the light on when I visit.

Chestnut Street

Parameters of sidewalk
a narrowing invitation
to unrevised monument.
Sky pulls the zipper
of closing branches,
peripheral lavender a lid
in dull alignment. Private
as pearl this light
signaled something then
something I can almost
smell. Never one again,
never now: the building
continues but the build
is hollow, and of course
we count on the empty
interior chambers for
our voice, hall echo:
the sheets,
and the vacant lavender.

The Children

That door opening precluded
the room beyond. Climb
of the window, wrung sky
dripping through. The desired city
all sidewalks and ice. To open
was to decide which winter
to obey. Walking uphill,
we lean into the cold so sure
of the effort we make. Scald
of the café crème lifted
to a stranger's mouth. To know
what it would is enough
and rarely will be again. Behind,
the shapes we were taking by light
pulled thin and molten. I bent
to tie a bootlace. When I looked up
you were half a block ahead,
your body a slice in the fire. I did
not walk toward you, I walked
toward myself, in the black coat,
in the wavering silhouette
holding the door open as an eye
beats around it.

English Ghazal

after a line of Prynne

The green leaves grew all around the window,
all around the year there was green in the window.

Talk of Bach dove into a field of barley.
Months interrupted by windows.

Lysias, laundry, sight translation
of my open window.

I order tea with a tongue
of two windows.

Green January and smell of cut grass:
kitchen tracks stopped at the window.

In the second basement of the last library
among the third-string stacks, a window.

We count hills waiting for the chalk horse
to fill the delay of our train window.

Insomniac June
no drapes for the molten window.

Stamp in the pane of a passport's window,
closing my name but not my window.

Pelican

Devon sky chalk walls of mind
 a chapel sought
four pilgrims shrunken
 car, hill and hedgerow

wet and silent between tors
 a spire floats above
crouched stones of a rough quarry

sour from the drive the year the rain
 of no leave taking this is the way
long pain closes my hand absorbing chill

from the walls filled with heraldry
 needing no dictionary
to know that bird the one who breathes over
 the one who uses her whole neck

to bend to her own breast
 and feed us how
could I argue with her I
 was starving, starving.

Map Under Sky

Flame-tip blue sky sears
every inch that is not mountain
above our heads but the water
remains a deep shade of ice cold.

Woozing down the ladder,
acidic porridge and greasy fish
swimming between
heavy feet and light heads,

some carried notebooks,
some cameras, some laughed
up the tear-drop lava rocks and
turned stunned by the altitude.

Bearing from the empty sky
the same weight we carry
pressed the red river into itself,
cooling as these black slabs

no more able to fly
from its path than the seals
bellying across the rocks,
than us, cooling—

this is where I stood,
equally bereft, I thought,
of path and willing, I thought
to dwell on the rough

side of these stones.
Nothing grew from that
spot—not a sentence,
not a lightness or a strength,

nothing taller than the grass
mowed by winds to the half
inch which is, in this place,
still a height, and to be recorded.

Gulls of an Island

In the gluey hallways
we moved large to ourselves
beneath a ceiling
several lives above our heads
toward a room with walls
painted goldenrod to melt
whatever winter was in the
window but not the wing of snow
marking the shadow of the school.
I wanted the book about gulls
rock ocean flight the ideas
a tide that flew away with me.
We had an hour on Staffa.
There were thousands of birds.
I found one in its cliff home
facing west, standing against
the wind. One bird and the whole
ice of the world. Leave me
here, I told the boat nodding
at the dock, landed.

“In a place as fragile as this world”
after Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen

The sky begins
to halve
like hands
held around us;
to shield or to crush
in a similar trembling
begins.

The sky begins
to separate
from what is held
between our hands
dismantling
limb from tree
eave from roof.

More and
more bodiless
faces unmoor
and the thinnest ice
has formed
over the tender mud.

Pain was like that: a rim
enclosing any way
I touched the world.
This was after.

Before it had been
dazzling a world
of snow and me,
still.

Only then
did I begin
to fear you,
the long weight
of love.

Brother

Ten coefficients of curvature: red you rode with no hands,
blue you sailed

standing up: one foot on the seat, one in the air,
dropping all relations to an external

(and imaginary) scaffolding. We squealed, scolded, begged
as you glided

on the broad street, hypersphere, the distance
from Glasgow to New York

before leaving the subject of gravitation and worked
the pedals backwards

and pulled beside us. Think of space-time as curved—
we were furious,

no physical theory is expected to explain never a stitch, sprain, not even December
when you spun your car on the black ice,

causal effect attributed to mass, and the grill of the truck that couldn't brake
rather finite through the passenger side window

on a Sunday you thought was Monday already and late
for your appointment,

and to forget or be ignorant of a dimension lands us into a different geometry.
Later that winter you called

to tell me you stopped refilling the prescription, you didn't need
any more, told me

like every time identity replaces causation.

Sideyard

The gap, the flourishing
between fence and wall
exiled from the mind
of the yard. I return

with a rake
as I return to hunger
with more hunger: what must
be pared.

Whispered napes of lilies
cloistered in wide green,
endemic mint, such
fragrant crossfire

pales the obedient
blossom, rebuke
plain as my own arm.
But my own arm also

now drew toward me
the lost the chastised
the embarrassing
mother I won't show you.

Turn a hose on it
untangle nothing
may I find, in a year
these ordering tines

the skeleton of what
weapon I wanted
enmeshed,
orange.

Brunch

Bread & noon's clarified hour:

revealed angles versify elemental light.

Undisguised nooses dangle, enabling risk

not only of not saying.

Could latent arrows release? If found, intention elapses, deferred.

How our unspent ripens.

Beach

The sand and your arm
rough with colors
fled, exchanged
already for your skin
as it might look.

Parentheses exempt
and allow clouds
as kites dip and rise
above the surf garbling
the offered sky as if
to refuse posing.

As if from such a mirror
our eyes could not still
select a face with which
to prow thin stories
beautiful with neglect
of what must be there.

Shoreline

The meal is not
long enough our stories
not long enough, left with the
silence of the future a day
dwindling to salvage.

Baffled we trade failed
cures for our invalid
afternoon our limping
fallow eyes the pile
of things we said
we wanted.

Pervades the weather
of what we've begun
saturates the car air,
what keeps twisting
away in the oncoming.

Dark and soft against
sapphire there is no stage
we walk here only
upon the erasable ribs
one tide's conversation
with the littoral.

Need is untoward simple
as the salt which we must
and if I say this carry it
no further than the hour
perhaps of these footprints
ticking grain by grain.

Window

Birds line the rusted arm
of the water tower drowsing
despite the rain sludging
stripped earth for days
blunt and lacking all
occasion but the surge tide
of spilled red wine.

Two nights ago I went to bed
and thought: I am very far
from God, and the distance
is all on my side.

From their roost
in a single motion
drawn against
lowered clouds
banking in unison
north and east,
the muscle and thought
of them widens the sky.

Bleat of the reversing bulldozer,
sound under sound
of its basso profundo gears,
fall of fingers on a keyboard,
unsteady—fluent—trickling.
A door opens and changes
the pressure of the room.

Three languages laced—
where were they before,
could I have asked
to feel my own hair falling
to the other side of my neck,
sense so intimate I have never
named it, never asked
which side is the dream
and who wakes me up.

Saccades

Bone-hued world beyond shade:
reign of winterlight: hour of azimuth
raising a dark tree to vigil
against snow, its clarity opposite
memory: a field plowed under
with recall. You were saying?

Into cold rain of the slant
variety: the trees melt brutally:
ground yellow sopped then frozen:
pulped, my chest, like the lawn
weary beneath our steps.

Door: everything that wasn't
sky: far from the darkness
of my mother's prayers
I carry many pens, many tongues
of a winter morning.

We took the flyover: trees budded
under streetlights like sepia broccoli:
this is the winter of my right
ventricle, the prairie of my left
atrium, the blizzard gust named pulse.

Empty trees sunset fleshed
the color of blood as we
can never see it flooding
the airtight chambers
of our bodies. The whole drive
I meant to show you this.

Ladder knobs of bamboo: reach
& trace of stripped limbs articulate
approach: in a noose cold eye the image
is not expansive but precise
as a nerve ending: the kingdom
of a place to begin.

Moving

For the last time I am as simple
as a morning. Cluttering by the hour
the room surrounds. Another way
to write of the sky. Let now be not
line but current, something so faltering
it may emerge with me, another.

III.

Drive

Cyan sheet billowed above field
expanding in the chest of another life.
Razor cut from the depthless
horizon red house and grey barn.
A silo crops the periphery for miles
it has been ahead of us still as I seem
not to get any closer. Amazing freight
pushes the edges forward alongside.
As for the body, the world, this life: some
boxes could not be repacked. For miles too
behind us our eyes on the road without
a break in the unfurling resonance.
Turn west and the road rises
at last to prairie as if reaching the vein
a certain side has fallen away.
We cross the state line. Timothy flower
echoes from the windshield as snow.

Ghazal of the Same Window

The only tree in view
is rooted in sky and hill.

A dog let off the leash that runs nowhere is my eye
obedient to the only tree of the hill.

Only in summer does the tree cross the eye
like a bridge: green tree, blue sky, green hill.

It is effort just to stand here,
but no one knows I have come to the hill.

This is landscape without chorus, nothing to drive through
like a song repeating its assuring hills.

I had forgotten how to pedal,
I told you, much less a hill.

We earn so much for the way we slot,
repeat, replant, but there is only one place for the hill.

I have worked at it steadily
and remained at the bottom of the hill.

Singe

I narrow through the split
wood burnt by the chainsaw
the morning smells brown.
The skirt of a past summer
flares from the wrist of my
neck meant to disguise
the puppetry. I liked
the way my hands felt when
the math of the correct stage
required a jigsaw. Vibrations
tuned my fingers into minds
each one tasked
responding as I noted
how the right nail would
spread softly as if bled
into the wood, the wrong one
twist around its own refusal.
There was a pond we passed
each morning and the ducks in it
had a meaning on the way
toward but even more
when I was not and needed
to populate another stage.
The teacher was never patient
with her puppets and I am still
stretching the screen tight
swerving through the burnt
wood waiting to assemble
around a wish to be seen.

Four Fields

1. Post

Upright in weather
as grasses clamor
and fade, sky
moves toward it
and past. The eye
snags then pulls
free but in time
returns as upon
the scar in a field
of skin we center
what we love.

2. July

Such solace retreat
as a rain can enter
a day and supple
skin with privacy.
Everywhere inward
becomes everywhere:
slabs of mist swell the
rutted, turned over face.

3. Work

Rain and full summer trees.
Year and year returning
to the blown rain and
the spaces between trees.

4. Walk

Thunder emerges as if
from our own bodies
though the storm reaches
for a distant field. Each time
we arrive a further horizon
flares above the floodplain
of insistence. In the mown
fields each row turns north.

Parade

A hairline crack in the readily
battered hulls stagger along
ice margins glutted with sand.
A train scrapes the back of this
particular rehearsal of ritual
not yet memorial but liable at the
barest push a whistle someone
lining the streets of this hour.

Asleep in the Rumpled Expanse of Your Name

Walled by cicadas
it is wider. What prize
this is I try to remember
while silt piles on a motion
internal even from itself.
Riding along the ridge
a strip gleams. Window
starved of darkness straining
to hear the shuttered vocative
the breeze in another room.
This ribbon won't still
it plays on the wall
of the uppermost chamber.
There are flowers everywhere
and I can't stop them.

Dolls

how we are lowered scraping
gray sides of the afternoon a ditch
over which flowers are gathered
a woman in her body
weightless arms laid above
her clothing like paper
from the purple clusters leaning
as if indifferent an older sister
waiting to be noticed
she moves jerkily there are frames
taken out I memorize myself for evidence
how we were lowered
scraping the ditch of some language
of which not even a fingerprint
lingers in my conscious ear but at times
she is silent like that as in dreams
of her speaking

Robot Dream

I was a human, but enslaved and improved by a button on my foot. It froze my foot into an ice foot to allow me great strength in it. To leap tall buildings, perhaps. They did not think I knew the drawback, but how could I not know the drawback? I felt the new boundary between ankle and leg where my foot would break off 48 hours after the button was pushed. They had a job for me. But I escaped that night. I ran with my ice foot thumping the ground. The animal of me began. I found an alleyway. I slept in a bunk filled with vagrants, who gave me advice while laughing too hard for me to understand it. I learned from their heat. *Two hours*, I told myself every two hours. I will be happy even if I am escaped for only two more hours. I hid in a cinema and then cried because that was a bad idea, too still and in one place. I thought of taking a train to a larger city, but I panicked in the glass corral before boarding and fled the narrowing tunnel. I stood in the sooty gap between buildings and turned my face to the winter sky. 48 hours passed, and I had not been caught and my foot had not fallen off. People were walking home to dinner with their heads down and did not see the ice melting in my eyes. I did not trust this thought, but I wondered if it was possible that now my only problems were the same problems that every person passing me on the dark street had. I realized that this dusk rising to pardon me was hope.

All County Roads

The hawk is a fine betrayal
of the sentiment rippling
the green pelt of the fatted earth.
Harvest seeming safe
assumption we laugh
about the season
we seem to have exited
the way we talk about hunger
as a memory. We never fought
about the road we took.
When we didn't talk
we agreed. When we did talk
I sobbed the way a delta sobs
upstream chemicals.
The road ahead baubles
the wrist of a rise to which
we have not retreated.
Each word is a dream of rain,
beautiful velocity, falling
in the sense of landing
in a place so expected
I might also have dreamed it.
It is you who notices
the tracing shadow, you
who asks me what bird it is
hunting other shadows
crouched under bounty.

Another Brakeless Dream

I spun at the burst intersection as if of two vital veins. Errands had rained into my thought process and I left you waiting on a leash. I knew almost as soon as I left this was wrong and had to go back but I had already turned onto parallel, slipped sideways into a shaken grid. Fine—to let it become easy would be to let it cease. Past Brazilian layer cake condos and Pacific grim office buildings, faster past the grocery store of so many arguments. But one way streets. The uncapped manhole. Hydroplaning under a leafy tree one street away I hoped for the whiplash of none of this being real, but this felt like a risk. That I could wake away from the one city in which we happened though also the city in which I failed you.

Tornado Dream

Rain wrapped the house in lightning, green. This wasn't a dream but had been. These, too, were often beautiful and heroic on my part. What happened then between the window and my hand was not analysis, it was knowledge. Why does happiness rarely bring the same clarity as threat, the same knowledge that I have always been this strong? Three bodies needed not to be here. One belonged to me and two belonged to my cats, who—and this was just like the dreams—understand nothing and must be forcefully evacuated from the belief that this is just another. Those who know have no time to explain, and this is how, I understand in the sympathy of retrospect, we can become the monstrous ballerinas we must be, legible only from the distance of a balcony not participating in this descent. I called behind me to the work that will not follow me to the basement. One way to understand aftermath is inventory: the next day I had only one notebook, the emptiest one.

August or Remembering

Howl-scarved interstate
and clouds also in whispers
hull the night-bearing sky.
Ice imagines us where we stand
still as those flowers then set
by the breeze to a wavering
somehow resolute and a muteness
somehow chosen, as prayer.

Messenger Dream

The road pulsed
and I journeyed to tell:
nothing has reached you,
trust the distance of my eyes.
We stood there
by a window.
The trees breathed
over the sidewalk
vividly, we tried
to account
for all the things
that hadn't changed yet.

Tree River

The alley had become a river
of melt sluiced between floes,
our houses dwarfed by the stadiums
of roots in grand procession.
All the tallest trees
in the world, uprooted.
From my yard I watched,
unafraid because the trees
themselves were not afraid.
They were only moving.

Decision

A room in which or a word in which,
which

baffled circumference of unstinting inward.

The Ash

Poor tree—there it is
the silhouette of a soldier
floating colonnade to colonnade,
here shed in puckered bugles
of leaves which seemed to all fall
over one night, how my mother
praised its efficient loss
forming a line between summer
and autumn, one night the end
and one morning the beginning.
It was always there
as I have been trying.

I know this silence carried
can become the field and field
is something always beyond
the eye pulling toward a tree,
the seasons lifted upon it.
I know the rain does not
cease from the eye or
the chest where it beats
in every weather of map.
I know an isolate of origin
is thread, each blink stitched
stragglng seam. Dizzy flecks
harbored by a sky barely
able to differentiate itself
from cloud flooded thin.
As I have been there
the tree was always trying
to teach me: narrow and fill.