

Senior Project: Prospectus
Chancellor's Honors Program

Student

Name : Jessica Pollack
Major : Geography
ID : 000 21 3084

Faculty

Name : Marilyn Kallet
Discipline : English
Rank : Professor

E-mail : jpollac2@utk.edu
Phone : 615 513 0004

E-mail : mkallet@utk.edu
Phone : 4- 6947

Tentative Project Title:

Poetry Manuscript

Project Description: Please attach a typed description of the proposed project.

Will the student enroll in UH 499? (Y) N

If not, which equivalent departmental honors course does the student propose to fulfill?
(e.g. History 408, Arch. 482) _____

Projected completion date: Dec 8, 2009

CHP student: Jessica Pollack **Date:** Sept 2, 2009

.....
I have discussed this research proposal with this student and agree to serve in an advisory role, as faculty project advisor, and to certify the acceptability of the completed project.

Faculty Project Advisor: Marilyn Kallet

Date: 9/2/09

Return this completed form to The Chancellor's Honors Program, F101 Melrose Hall.

(Updated May 2007)

University Honors 499: Senior Project Proposal

Student: Jessica Pollock

Faculty: Marilyn Kallet

Project Area: Creative Writing–Poetry Manuscript

Description: Student will complete 15-25 pages of publishable poetry with a short critical introduction of 5 to 8 pages.

Estimated Completion Date: December 8, 2009

Senior Project: Approval and UH 499 Final Grade Form
Chancellor's Honors Program

To be submitted to The Chancellor's Honors Program.(CHP). **Please note:** the faculty member should submit this completed form **DIRECTLY** to CHP, either at F 101 Melrose Hall or by fax at 974-4784.

Student

Name : Jessica Pollock
Major : Geography
ID : 000 21 3084

Faculty

Name : Marilyn Kallet
Discipline : English
Rank : Professor

E-mail : jpollock2@utk.edu
Phone : 615 513 0004

E-mail : mkallet@utk.edu
Phone : 4- 6947

Project Title:

~~Poetry Compilation~~

Vessels, a poetry compilation

Is the student enrolled in UH 499? (Y) N

If so, what is the Final Grade for UH 499? A

If not, what departmental honors course has the student fulfilled? (e.g. History 408, Arch. 482) _____

Faculty Approval:

I have reviewed this completed senior honors project with this student and certify that the project is complete and commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in the field.

Marilyn Kallet
Faculty Member's Signature

12/2/09
Date

Recorded by:

Rebecca B...
Chancellor's Honors Program

12/15/2007
Date

needs
scan

(Updated May 2007)

Senior Project: Advisor Progress Report
Chancellor's Honors Program

Faculty Project Advisor's Name: Marilyn Kallet

I have met with Jessica Pollock and reviewed the progress being made on her/his Senior Honors Project.

Progress is satisfactory ☒

Progress is unsatisfactory ☐

If progress is unsatisfactory, please note here the plans that have been made to move the project forward.

Excellent, inspired poetry
manuscript. The long-lined
poems are a triumph.

Student's Signature: Jessica Pollock Date: 11/09

Faculty Advisor's Signature: Marilyn Kallet Date: 11/09

Student should return this form to Chancellor's Honors by the ninth week of the term.

(Updated May 2007)

(2)

**UH 493: Independent Study
Application Form**

Please return to: The Chancellor's Honors Program, F101 Melrose Hall
Tel.: 974-7875 / Fax: 974-4784 /

StudentName: Jessica PollockMajor: GeographyID: 000 21 3084E-mail: jpollock@utk.eduPhone: 615 513 0004**Faculty**Name: Leah PinderDept: DanceTitle: LecturerE-mail: ljrdancer@comcast.netPhone: 4- **Course Information**Proposed Title: Dance Performance and ProductionSemester/Year: Fall 2009Intended Number of Credits: 3 (Note: A minimum of three credits is required if this Independent Study is also intended to satisfy CHP's course requirements.)

On the reverse or an attached sheet, please outline briefly the requirements and goals of this Independent Study. If available, please substitute a course syllabus.

- What will be required of the student?
- How will the student be evaluated?

Jessica Pollock

Student's Signature

7/30/09

Date

Leah Pinder

Faculty/Instructor's Signature

7.29.09

Date

Dixie Flynn

Department Head's Signature

7/31/09

Date

Recorded and Approved by:Kathryn Delper

Chancellor's Honors Program

8.09

Date

(June 2007)

UH 493: Independent Study Application Form

Please return to: The Chancellor's Honors Program, F101 Melrose Hall
Tel.: 974-7875 / Fax: 974-4784 / honors@utk.edu

Student

Name: Jessica Pollock
Major: Geography
ID: 000 21 3084
E-mail: jpollock1@utk.edu
Phone: 615 513 0004

Faculty

Name: DR JOY T. DeSENSI
Dept: EXERCISE, SPORT, & LEISURE STUDIES
Title: PROFESSORY ASSOCIATE DEAN - GRAD School
E-mail: desensi@utk.edu
Phone: 4-1282

Course Information

Proposed Title: Dance Performance and Production
Semester/Year: Fall 2009
Intended Number of Credits: 3 (Note: A minimum of three credits is required if this Independent Study is also intended to satisfy CHP's course requirements.)

On the reverse or an attached sheet, please outline briefly the requirements and goals of this Independent Study. If available, please substitute a course syllabus.

- What will be required of the student?
- How will the student be evaluated?

Jessica Pollock
Student's Signature

7/30/09
Date

Joy T. DeSensi
Faculty/Instructor's Signature

7/31/09
Date

Doris L. Tyson
Department Head's Signature

7/31/09
Date

Recorded and Approved by:

Chancellor's Honors Program

Date

(June 2007)

UH 493: Independent Study Project Proposal

Title: Dance Performance and Production

Purpose: The intended goal of this independent study is to gain insight and experience in the production, creative, and management processes involved in dance performance and dance company management.

Requirements:

Attend regular company meetings

- Experience how a company is managed from a business/organizational standpoint

- See the work involved in the production of a show

- Learn about the creative and choreographic processes involved in dance production

Participate as a guest dancer in a piece to be performed in the fall show

- Attend company classes regularly

- Participate actively in rehearsals

- Show artistic and technical growth as a dancer

Be actively involved in the Public Relations committee, which includes:

- Writing and contacting media for press releases

- Creating a promotional brochure

- Soliciting donors in advertising sales

- Collaborating with the website designer

Be actively involved in the production aspects of the show

- Learn how elements of lighting, stage, sound, and dance create a unified piece

- Work as a stage manager

- Assist in stage creation and set-up

Evaluation:

The Student will be evaluated based on her active participation in company affairs and the completion of her assigned work. These requirements include but are not limited to the quality of and timeliness of assigned public relations work, her active participation in company meetings and events, her technical and artistic growth in her role in one of the company show pieces, and her role in the production process.

Vessels

a poetry compilation

Jessica Pollock

Fall 2009, Honors Thesis
UTK Chancellors Honors Program
Advised by Marilyn Kallet

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Fall 2009, Honors Thesis
UTK Chancellors Honors Program
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Critical Introduction

When considering the flesh, one is ultimately considering details. Physically, flesh consists of the softer and finer things that make up the human body. It is the parts that adhere to the skeleton. Figuratively, we "flesh things out" to add more to pre-existing structures and outlines. Flesh is capable of response—a spasm in the hand, the digestion of the stomach. We see something and the retina contracts; thoughts are generated. We read a word (silently or aloud) the vocal cords engage, something is communicated. It has breath. In Christianity, the flesh represents the fallen quality of human nature. What is ultimately in our hearts when circumstances squeeze in. Flesh is what we will always carry with us. It is death. It is life.

This manuscript is a compilation of work spanning my college career in poetry. Though this time I have learned that as in life, poetry also has its own kind of flesh and structure, root and limb. Imagery in particular has been something I have gravitated to in my poetry. Often it is the things our minds take time to notice that are a reflection of our current state of affairs. It is the combination of these noticed details with emotions, events, and personal values that make up the meaning or flesh of the poem. Such meaning is enhanced and interpreted through a set structure and rhythm. The reader experiences the poem physically with inhale and exhalation of words, the movement of the mouth, the engagement of the body. Small details come together in the reading of a poem to make up the whole.

This engagement of details, imagery, and structure are exhibited in several different ways throughout the manuscript. One recent technique I have been utilizing in my writing process is the creation of lists. Through lists I am able to see how a single word with its symbolized connotations can in certain orders create meaning of its own. In *Sieve*, I strove for a short line length to allow single words and short phrases to speak for themselves. This series of poems is, in a sense, a mere skeleton. Fleshless,

the meaning being conveyed is more broad and universal. It is ultimately up to the reader to fill in with their understanding of the words and phrases. Many of my poems started out as mere lists of words yet the end result varied. In *Don't Blink*, lists and fragmented phrases have more substance than in *Sieve*. Line length and structure are more consistent from poem to poem—there is more flesh. *Don't Blink* focuses on utilizing imagery in specific events. Some of these experiences are small, insignificant moments like brushing ones teeth, while others engage broader time frames such as holidays and seasons. In either case the uniformity of line length and breadth of each poem has an equalizing affect on the meaning of events—how every detail in life is a significant reflection of how one is engaging, living, and valuing.

There have been several poets that have had particular influence in my writings over the semester, each bringing different things to my plate in poetry. In particular, I have been struck by the explicitly and unexpected imagery of Yusef Komunyakka, the spiritual qualities and content of Marie Howe, the sense of place and lyricism of Mary Oliver, the intellect and complexity of line in Barbary Hamby, and the honesty of CK Williams. Hamby and Williams were of particular significance to my most current work, which are marked from the rest of the manuscript by their long line lengths such as the *Vessels* series. This long line length is the most recent introduction to my poetic attempts and I have found it quite liberating. One can say these poems are the more fleshy ones of the manuscript. Ultimately, what I found with the long-line length was a new ability to be more intimate with my reader. The language is more conversational yet I still have the freedom to use the shorter broken images like those found in *Don't Blink*. This structure resulted in being able to associate events, images, and communicated thoughts/feelings together in such a way that is more personal and transparent to the reader. My concept of lists, however, does not disappear with two of these longer line poems, *Mercy in Black*, *Gold*, *Bronze* and *Feast*. These poems also started as lists, moving from the abstract to the personal everyday. I left smaller lists of

words that didn't quite make it into the poem at the bottom of each page. While these lists were created for the mere process of writing, I found it interesting to leave these small lists of words. They are afterthoughts for the reader to chew on so to speak. Brenda Hillman used a similar technique in her book, *Loose Sugar*, calling the remaining words a kind of poetic ash that was not part of the poem but still relevant and appropriate to it.

This fascination with structure in poetic organization also travels over into the thematic inspiration in my poetry. Thoughts on the human body have played a particular significance to my writing this year. Physically, the body has been attractive to me in its complexity of parts that make up the whole, with its skeleton, muscles, tendons, etc. However, physical structure is not where this train of thought stops. In particular, I am interested in the physical in as much as it is associated with the transcendent qualities of the human spirit. The human heart has associations that are both physical and spiritual. Physically, it is a life force. It is a container for blood which pumps through and affects the entire body. In turn, spiritually, the heart is the root of human action and emotion. It too is a vessel, a container for our inner dwelling, which motivates all outer action. Thus, in addition to an interest in the physical human body, I have also been interested in other vessels in general. What is the physical structure, yes, but what does the vessel hold. What do those held objects bring forth to the vessel itself and its interactions with its environment. A vessel in a sense is only as worthy as what it holds. This idea of vessels in combination with my attraction to imagery translated into another theme in my writing—place and geography. My earliest works being included in this manuscript, *Returning* and *My Father's Childhood*, are a diptych on place. Places are more than their physical attributes but hold mental and emotional associations as well. Physical geography denotes a mental geography that plays in the mind. These two poems in particular focus on familial associates that relate specifically to the places of my parents' past. Parts of lives lived before I came into existence. Family ties and ties between people in general are

not specific to these two poems, however, but is another theme found throughout the manuscript. Some of these ties are more specific, like family, while others are broader, like tribes and lineages. One could say family lines are also a type of vessel holding traditions, heritage, genetic coding, skills, and names. Not every theme of place is explored in this context however. Other explorations of place engage shorter time periods, such as the street scene in *Mercy in Black, Gold, Bronze* and more mundane environments found in *Don't Blink*. In either case, place is utilized to understand broader human experience.

Ultimately, when considering family, places, and events, one must look equally to the past and the future. The human body changes with age. It is a result of past experience, multiplied habits, and lineages of genes. Personalities are grown out of strife and experience to what they are now. Everything is in a flux up to its ultimate apogee. Perhaps what I found most interesting about the flesh or the human body is how it is equally a holder of life and death. It enables life, but it is ultimately wearing down day by day. This will always hold true to existence. Thus, as travelers of life, I hope to apply in my poetry this sense of archaic truth to the everyday distractions of living. Thematically, I express this through my exploration of life, death, vanity, and faith. Stylistically, I express this through word choices that create a sense of mysticism in everyday scenarios and places. This quality can best be seen in the shorter imagist phrases in *Don't Blink* or the archaic ideas expressed in *Sieve* and *Vessels*.

But these themes of the archaic, vessels, and the human body are secondary to and a reflection of defining themes in my life—concepts of faith, truth, and the human connection to God. Thus, in addition to the influencing works of Oliver, Hamby, Williams, and Howe, biblical chapters, in particular I Peter, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes, have had both stylistic and thematic causes on my poetry. Structurally, *Sieve* is meant to be a shadow of the Psalms with its carefully laid out line structure, emphasized offset words, and the driving assonance. Concepts of the human body as a temple, the meaning of sacrifice, and the vanity

of life in death were inspired by specific verses in Ecclesiastes. Finally, I drew from I Peter in its themes of suffering, glory, and human life as an act of spiritual worship.

Throughout this critical introduction I have expressed concepts of the body, flesh, and vessel and how this inspires my poetry thematically, stylistically, and structurally. My view of faith is a driving factor in these themes. I see faith also as a thing of the flesh. Our bodies are our vessels to utilize unto ourselves for life and death. They are encoded by familial lineages, lived in specific environments, are the result of our habits. Our bodies have a structure that holds what we fill them with, physically and spiritually. Our minds hold what we see, read, and feed them. Faith is a thing that the body can be filled with and is an outpouring off. But our bodies are also an outpouring of our darker nature. Ultimately, in this body of work, I strove to capture both the vessel and the outpouring therein. A book or a poem in and of itself is a representation of a body, with its letters, words, and structures. These vessels of poetry and our vessel of the body are a result of this outpouring. We are the result of what we carry, both life and death. Faith is something I will always carry with me.

...As we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

~II Corinthians 4:18

Mercy in Black, Gold, Bronze

your dark hair curls under raindropped umbrellas that open and close on top of sidewalks and the iron crosses of patio furniture, grey.

feet walk from café counters to the padded floors of theaters, black curtains, bicycles locked with baskets, hands worried with the placement of nickels and quarters, the weight of a ring

your father is Jewish, your family from a blank place called Prussia, and there is so few of you left, like the arrows in a quiver after a long day of hunting.

precision is the ability to hit the same place between the ribs of a deer over and over again, but what does it matter if that place is not accurate to the taking of animal hearts.

looking back and looking forward, the hobos fall out of side streets, a man strikes soft-shoe on the corner, and rain scatters like seeds sent forth from the hand—in yellow, beige, topaz.

sundry faces, the paled light of sun through damp sheets pinned to cotton lines, bulbs blink on and off and on and off between wooden veranda posts, subtle conversations.

yet eyes catch me across the square, body compressed like a discarded paper bag—brown, cornered, corporeal—she wants two round pennies and a place to sit next to me,

as if I was a fountain of light amongst the evening's storm, a queen of continence, righteous, commanding the authority to condone wired seats to undeserving buttocks.

a ghost that asks permission for the haunting of a window, but
my mouth was barren, I had nothing for her, not even words,

stems of glasses twisting into pink-petaled wine, salads hedge
soup bowls and spoons reflecting various qualities of light,
gardens and gardens, we till each other's plates with our forks.

Mercy you say is a position, like sitting at a round table, you
break the bread, she phantoms past the ironwork of the patio
into the grave of the evening

Mercy said softly off the tongue, between chews, held in a wet
spot as we speak with our enemies at the gate

coriander purifies the blood
a man lowered down through the ceiling tiles
potter's wheel
giving everyone a new name

Don't Blink

precision is the ability to be in same place between the ribs of a deer over and over again, but what deer is smarter if that place is not accurate to the taking of animal hearts.

looking back and looking forward, the hobs fall out of side streets, a man strikes soft-shoe on the corner, and rain scatters like seeds sent forth from the hand—in yellow, beige, topaz

sandy faces, the paled light of sun through damp sheets pinned to cotton lines, bulbs blink on and off and on and off between wooden veranda posts, subtle conversations

yet eyes catch me across the square, body compressed like a discarded paper bag, brown, covered, compressed—who wants two round pennies and a place to sit next to me,

as if I was a fountain of light amongst the evening's storm, a green of continents, right, wrong, compass, the pushy to exile wire seeds in unending hushes.

Type

sequencing, in and out
words on a page sliding in rivulets
condensation on cerebellum, brain steam
dense, interlocking phrases prowl the deep core
flash across like the sweep of a lighthouse
the tap dance of typewriter keys
rules, proper placement, punctuation,
words in ashtrays

Piano

soul stretched body in a five-pointed star
mastery of chord progressions, finger peck on piano keys
black keys sail through whites, pounce
like a lab's head fur above the water
coffined keys, each note a death to its last
sitting tall, a long blade of grass, pox on the staff
mean nothing to you, I slide into the curve of a treble
listen to you play by ear

Dawn

even the birds do not fight the silence with
their bombing twitters, avalanche of a wing flap
objects sharpened by the cold, every angle contrasted
definition between thing and space,
where the unmoving molecules pour in.
color slowly seeps in the slices of pineapple
on half-eaten pizza, unopened cans of sweet-corn
reflect and take a stitch from the sun,
trash heaps, paper bags, newspapers

Morning

I whisper something into the ear of my mouthwash
fills a designated space, blue froth sticks to my teeth
precise like the placement of a postage stamp
and send spliced saliva down to the understory
hanging garden of pipes, plastic, and feces--the raw soil.
Stir in feathered laundry sheets, lint sticking
to vent like small punched out stars.
In the kitchen the tomatoes are scheming
sliced them into fine cutouts like the letters on a license plate

Joy

hangs out, peripheral, the punched spaces unnoticed
between strands of hair, right before your eyelids close
a blush of red--the opening of a teeny paper umbrella
the hairpin hole of a cheap aluminum bottle of hairspray
It spreads out in the heat of stove coils,
a minute before you notice. It occupies space,
passport pages, this place in my sentence.
takes me by the elbow and whispers letters
between my fingers, centers on the spleen and
unexpectedly arrives in the silver click of a door handle,
tacky snow globes, iridescent disc backs
spreads in watercolor's paintbrush, a guitar's fret board,
fat silver dollars slipped into the smallness of a
child's hand, the start is small.

Lunch

air particles in the room tighten, rub on another,
exchange sweet, the fridge wrinkles up the corner,
white parallels breathe on me in ice retreat
my carrots, tomatoes, and squash are forced out of
the glacial till, set my bowl down, a cirque in my counter,
long simple apple outline, I take an impregnated bite
listening closely, hear seeds grow,
outside, birds silhouette on the snow

Crash

a push slightly off course, fabric pull, merge from one
celestial plane to the next, stitching strand snap,
oblique to the netting, right tire well a needle to fabric
between worlds, slick curve of highway side, table runner,
marker in time to be reckoned with, chromium remnants
hang like plastic bags in thorns, dew quilts itself in my lungs,
rain, jungle highway, treetop patchwork, redirection of
character, the long ribbon to home, life compressing itself
in a thin list, hard to see beyond events
much larger than myself

Print

I weed dandelions off this page in quick quill blade cuts.
crushed peacock feathers, diamond dust, glass glint
finish the incantation, poetic ash burn curl
paint flakes, chips, word clay splatters in gray creases.
For extra light, I pull the sun in on some string.
Serif fonts have little spurs, walk in from stage right,
twirl a gun on a T. R trembles and becomes a Sans.
The other letters learn their place.

Talk

you're marrying in the summer, a May marriage
--outside, warm, antique wedding gown.
color secrets in cans we used to paint
our bedroom wall, we talked and I told between the
up/down stroke, dripples on the floor scraped up later.
Late nights, words shine through sheets and ping off
your Tiffany lamp rims, the vanity's worn hardware.
Stationary held straight in the woodenslots on
your desk. Days spent reading in the porch swing.
As you swept and watered flowers, sun peaked the ridge.

Walk

gingko and maple stain the ground yellow
water gathers in road cups and saucers
wind blows between silhouettes, keeps pockets
empty vacuums of words never spoken between strangers
sidewalk stammers and musings smear on concrete,
a continuous dotted line

Kitchen

egg timer curvature, rubber gloves hang by the sink,
bread exhales paisley breath, incremental.
bright banana tips, little stars stuck
in peanut paste, honeyed, whole wheat bread.
rainy faucet and I spill the soy,
bean green capsules on the floor.
Everything wrapped in plastic and cardboard
—cartons and glass, papered butter sticks, bottle caps
recycling
our own smells — you: vegetable soups, rock dust, grass, me:
dance shoe sweat, computer keys, charcoal. This year you
want the bend of a puppy's tail on a box's inside corner,
but all I have is knitted scarf threads in ember, cedar, topaz.
Can I give you that love back? memory shards,
the best of what we are.

Holiday

houses hedged on hill make
paprika patterns—orange, burgundy, rose
wooden floors and hand painted siding
boat docks, birds, dunes, water wrinkles.
Stalks of pepper and salt sit firmly on the table.
Gilded virgin mary sighs on the wall, purse leather
and bronze zipper. To be for once anonymous.
A traveler's city. Something on a calendar page.
Tiger prowls under the four-poster bed softened in fleur de lis.

Christmas

mandarin oranges and cinnamon at the Chinese restaurant on 12th street, a noodle burns and sticks to my tongue. Later, midnight mass and snowflakes, the acolytes in red, smell of burning candles, the procession floats on incense, music humbles in minor keys, and I think of that homeless man--in front of the restaurant with greek statues and red, pink, green Christmas lights. We used to draw stick figures on scrape paper during physical science, blacktopped counters with fake wood legs--freshman year. Lately, we've been finding our own smells--you: vegetarian soups, rock dust, grass; me: dance shoe sweat, computer keys, charcoal. This year you want the beat of a puppy's tail on a box's inside corner, but all I have is knitted scarf threads in ember, cinder, topaz. Can I give you that love back? memory shards, the best of what we are.

Childhood

listened to the Beatles when we were young,
jeans too stiff for five year old legs, didn't like to wear them.
I played detective with the orange haired girl up the road,
Jewish neighbors and the bushes were planted in rows in the
front yard. climbing tree with two well-placed prongs, days
spent digging, burying plastic animals in the yard, one time
I couldn't find one. In the hallway—on the brown carpet—
I practiced soft Indian feet. Daddy was from Vietnam and
Grandma from the depression—converted garage, patio swing,
my first bicycle in pink, long twisting games of hopscotch

Masquerade

the dark fabric gathers in my hand, cheep zipper, lace,
orange and purple in the air, chandeliers, wine glasses
—white and red, ice and corset dresses, knowing people
hot dance hop shuffle, eyes peer through cutouts, steam,
feathers on the fringe, something else

Chop Suey

leafed coffee froth, key dangle, the disc player twists
old jazz music, green holly curl in flames on the banister,
lily's pollute their flower fume. We wanted rosemary and
wine on the ridge while looking at cookie cutter houses,
the church in brick. Warding off nightmares with flannel
hunting hats, garlic, I bundle the papers in a clothespin,
ready packages. Cold air makes the eyes round, rivulets
condense at the corner, elevators, metallic sheets take
to a portal, sun, body slides around like sand,
rock metal compression, tie it down in leather straps,
USB ports

Chop Suey

leafed coffee froth, key dangle, the disc player twists
old jazz music, green holly curl in flames on the banister,
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to a portal, sun, body slides around like sand,
rock metal compression, tie it down in leather straps,
USB ports

Seive

Seive women sowing fields
 seeds

 stone
rain in
 words
 blood.

loam ground children
 ulna and radius
 twisted roots

Satan
has asked to sift
 us as
 wheat

bone separates from the flesh
to dwell among us
 sticks in the sieve

being called
anointed
lamp stand
word
 flesh
 bread

expectant waiting
freedom from deceit

retina

cells

cones

rods

hanging on the branches of angles

Cedars Of Lebanon

deep roots

rain

stone seeds

Scythe

Garner

winnowed

chaff

offering swollen cups

to God

a spiritual war

wrath and clavicle

being fruitful upon the earth

cathedral

tabernacle

not just the clerestory

apse

Serve

feet

pestle up teeth
and grave stone
ware
travel
watchmen
in trembling towers
self-righteous
a child cries
on the back of his mother
planting seeds in Sodom
beautiful are the feet
who bring news
terrestrial
wayfaring
grinding dust
stirring salt

plaster fascia
arch ligament
knew
warp
weft
shed
shot

I should have died a few times
along I am less then the light of dust
Glory held camel-backing under pinholes
in an empty tents, ledger
stars

our way of life imbeds in the goods we bring

Desire

pestle and mortar

solar plexus
a reedy brassy timbre.

Phalanx

a group of people
or things

a bone
of finger or toe
Macedonian infantry

There's a place behind the house where a small room
sticks itself into pages of old and empty books
clay's fleshy fingers push against the wall
chocolate chunks caught in doughy kneaded bread
Grandma's leather pants

Sundays, hands clasped, turning the pages
pages between poems and white-washed walls
Voices drone inarticulate words
of the day. I sit on the front porch
my life at the wheel, soul flying in the wind

He misses it, life's alternate paths.

"Will you be there when I come back?" he asks.

A distant gaze, a distant smile.

"Yes, of course, I will."

planter fascia

arch ligament

loom

warp

weft

shed

shot

I should have died a few times

along the way

Glory held

in an empty hand

our way of life imbeds in the goods we bring

Desire

pestle and mortar

solar plexus

a reedy brassy timbre.

Returning

There's a place behind that house where slate
stacks itself into pages of old and worn library books.
clay's fleshy fingers push pages into shards, like
chocolate chunks caught in dough kneaded hard by
Grandma's leaden hands.

Sundays, hands clasped, turning the crisp bible
pages between pews and whitewashed walls.
Voices drone inarticulate in the heat
of the day. I sit on the front porch pursing
my lips at the quail, soul drying in the sun.

My Father's Childhood

(after Alexander)

Canned green beans are cheaper than fresh
that's what they always bought,
peaches were from down the road,
fleshy and pink, pit between teeth.

the life he had there,
I can taste it, his father's old store,
men playing checkers, watching sputnik.
peanut shells and paper bags, glass bottled
sodas with slices of cantaloupe,
horses, hogs, bb guns, bobwhites —

He misses it, life's alternate paths,
'Will you visit me if I retire down there?' he asks,
a distant gaze, he's practically there.
'Yes, of course, how could I not'

we chew, we continue
spoons in empty bowls
stories told
familiar

a child's robe on fire

little red padding down the
baby births, peaches in jam, winter coffee.

we gather the food

we separate it

knives

the words of graduation, Vietnam, winter

I am hate

I am thankfulness

Sent forth from the hand

morning vigil light in teacup
amber-orbed against red sky

votive sips
prayers and smells of saints
hawthorne, rowan
rose grounds to the bottom

the spoon is stouthearted
not-honeyed
truthed
plunged

churned up by tawny limbs
bearing news
faces with bronzed brows
strife
demon howl
mortared stone

tounge trembles behind teeth
like gravestone stacked by slaves

they put breastplates on their young
they are set forth

inertia
heraldry
the active pursuit of love
a teabag to its string
supine and prostate
intrepid
stalwart
ask and it will be given
seek and you will find
knock and it will be opened

Thanksgiving was a dusty month

falling off the river oaks
forgotten spaces
spouses, birthday cards, middles names
what all was left
mashed potato mouthfuls. Voyage on a boat
from Scotland, farms in Carolina, wagon-loads, Georgia
turkey edges definable in our mouths

but the smells were not subject
to the gatekeeper, iambic system
cinnamon and sage

running in and out of the pumpkin path
me and my brothers
the fibrous orbs

the adorning and unadroning of the silverware
we chew, we continue
spoons in empty bowls
stories told
familial

a child's robe on fire
little feet padding down the wrap-around
baby births, peaches in jars, winter coffee

we gather the food
we separate it
knives
the words of graduation, Vietnam, winter weddings

I am hate
I am thankfulness

Vessels

I This toad buries himself in the darkness of dirt in winter,
melting with the soil, everything is brown, dark
what it is like inside when your eyes are closed or peering in a
candlelit mirror, looking down the road of rubble by my
grandmother's house, bottles and green glass, clay
curving down to a wood-framed church that holds the lot of
expired family members, chicken pot pie with the bones still in
it, I think about toads in winter
the silence of it, a beating froggy vessal, what more can it hold
but a deep, bitter croak that rises up like the steam from
candles, burning soil, longing to put on some drier clothes
December, frost blows through the non-stitched parts of a scarf,
bra-less under a heavy shirt, allowing my heart to breathe,
looking back, turning my palm over then face down again as
age begins to write itself in my hands, feet, bones

II This heart is a simple jar, full then empty again, capable of
eternity, vast, lion-hearted, beating

expansive, tocsin bell, being cut, seeing the inside of a vein,
this woman I meet once had a daughter with a mess disc in her
chest, mechanical, rusted bolts and washers, copper wire

used to hang up frames with sepia pictures, amber mornings
catching on the glass, the headlight of a train, donkeys and
plows, this iron, that nail, a child holding an inflatable ball

with two hands, bobbles then bounces on cement, car, grass,
those red balloons tied around wrists of youth

Thanksgiving, we adorn and unadorn ourselves with the
silverware, filling forgotten spaces in our mouths--anniversaries,
homes, middle names—mashed potato mouthfuls

The week before, my brothers and I ran in and out of the pump-
kin patch, each orb a soft consuming fire, entrapped, our names

Shadrack,

Mesak,

Abendego.

III Who told me death was this carry-on item in the body, not
defined like the principality of the stomach, a small weight,
anchor of life, buried as a troll in wet dirt,

leaving little thumbprints over the banisters when you're not
looking, We set up tents with iron spikes and wires, we set up
guideposts and consider well the highway.

and then the jaguars come, guarding this gate in Winter, 1997,
the animals gather in their preferred type of coverings, stripes
or not, spots or not,

among the tapestries of moss and leaves, ropes on walls, tree
roots fly their buttresses with the depth of black banners,
I think of the dark ugly,

we purpose maps, sew them together with cotton threads and
needles, the lines design themselves, ledger and compass mean
nothing to this path, this thought,

the flux of justice weighs all with an interminable scale

IV There are places we can't return to, infant's flesh encircled
chamber, a child's hand in small containers of candy

When Christmas still whispers, before it means long day's at
work for daddy, after joy, after happiness

Standing on step stools in front of a mirror, we flock our hair
with combs and ribbons, and it falls with the grace of wheat
kernels on stalks, scatters

seeds dried, cultivated in empty glass jars, masoned, preserved
for eternities, orange and green smoke, sparks, the glint of a
cigarette butt on the highway

My face catches in the rear-view and the road grows long from
the tailpipe, grandma put the garlic in special keepers with
holes in it, certain smells, I think

of the porosity of my soul, terracotta, it comes in browns and
skintones, horns and spikes try to fly in

✓ Doubt is fifteen feet tall, red, indeterminate face, notebooks
with crocodile covers

gathers wearing 1940s ties and silk stockings, in bomb-shelters
styling curved up-dos, fingerprint labyrinths, spaces

between held hands bridged with three-squeezed "I love you's,"
we eat custard in small ceramic baking dishes, yellow gold,
plum purple, red

in tooth and claw, forks lying casually with spoons, better dead
than the elegance in wine glass, chandelier crystal, men's hands

closing on whisky bottles, any port, left side when facing
forward, a vast opening in this city's walls, docks and facilities,
water

storms dresses bustled into curtains over windowless vistas,
a certain frequency of light in tocsin

VI forks laid on folded black napkins, cloth, stacked white china, Kahlua-filled mugs and coffee, conversation hissed through teeth

how light is squeezed through glass, not just the vessel but the way it spins and widens, skirts in proper motions, boxed steps and promenades

clouds chiffon an evening of white stars, stacked like stones, gathered, the way words only mean in certain combinations, streaming cords of rain

piercing tents in military arrangements, processional living, groanings of wind in and out of the tie-down flaps, up down,

pin-ball, that arcade just down the road, tokens multiplying in slots, playing DDR, zombies, unlimited ammunition reloads, longings

to dwell in higher places, not this wigwam, a grand entrance, the marquee of Gruaman's, our handprints in cement and metal poured names

VII I think of festivities, garland around banisters, smell of birthday
cakes clothed in whipped icing, we pour spiced drinks in

the triangle of our mouths, we lace our hands and make a cup
of thankfulness, sealed with a ring, flamed with diamonds,
medallions, bold in their darkness

of churches, people holding candles ringed in cardboard halos,
organ music and hammered dulcimers, ghosts escape from hot
cups in the cold of winter

new wine is poured into new wine skins, we are renewed day by
day, looking to the unseen things in this world, bodies and breath
transient, we fade

become eternal as silver, common as stone, I will show you a
more excellent way, as a camel travels through its needle of life

we reveal minor qualities to ourselves, reserving special parts,
being known deeply, our God, thinking of that day of rest,
preparing for an eternal weight, glory
carrying death,

carrying Life.

Feast

summer, Georgia, 1997, in a cornfield of hairy stalks, kernels
peeled off into beads of sweat, no room for pride,
no embarrassment about the subtler parts

I liked to curl up into a little ball amongst the rows and pretend
my body was a smooth and sacred temple of pliable limbs or
run with the elegance of armadillos, corporeal, hard.

in the windward silence one's soul takes structure, roots—
a frame—wings sprout from the scapula, the body falls away in
north, south, west

darkness gathers between the wings of the crows, bangee calls,
demons' shadows stalk in the morning, exposed in the field,
search for soft limbs, hair, capillaries, spirit strands

at home people gather and clean bloody fish with filet knives,
the flesh opening like a soft book, meat removed in perfect
pieces, skeleton shell discard.

the things of this world are made with the hands, carved
wooden boxes, pencils, vessels that hold food and water,
canteens, refrigerators, but they all find their way back to the
dirt somehow

the way the spine starts to curve to the ground with age, head
a hanging tassel, a cord of life, but we move forward and build
roads that desire and take possession of the landscape, careful

like the way we arrange things in drawers, the way we wear
this or that, when we put on clothes we are sent forth, at the
doctors office I wear that black fleece you gave me because

it was too small for you, keeping me warm in this chair as they
remove fluids of red and yellow, beige, looking at my hand as it
takes on other forms, birds, spiders, soft prayers, vanity

clings to my body with a grin of teeth, the white curve of a
fingernail like the evening moon we eat under, on the dinner
table a tomato lies in the center of my plate, steaming

amongst rice, vulnerable next to my coffee cup, beans from
foiled bags, but my mouth is an open grave as I think about my
blood in vials and vials

