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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jonathan Joseph Brehm entitled "The Hungover Romance of "We"." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Marilyn Kallet, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Arthur Smith, Benjamin Lee

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

The Hungover Romance of “We”

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jonathan Joseph Brehm
May 2014

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DEDICATION

For my mother and father,
Jessica, my professors
and friends who continue
to inspire me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the professors who helped lay the technical and stylistic foundations for my poetry. Specifically, I thank Dr. Marilyn Kallet for teaching me the economy of words and the greater energy of saying less. I thank Dr. Arthur Smith for supporting my early investment in strong imagery and teaching me the importance of the sonnet impulse. I especially thank Dr. Eric Smith for first inspiring me to write poetry, supporting my earliest talents, and unknowingly carrying me away from the dreariness of physics and chemistry labs.

ABSTRACT

This collection of poems attempts to capture the author's inner life through a specific perception of his own generation as energetic, ambivalent and lost. The poems, while sometimes personal and autobiographical, portray dreamlike and surreal conceptions of twenty-first century twenty somethings and their landscapes: rocky deserts, expanses of water, and the vibrating city. The poems track the speaker's transitions to and away from a hectic life of drinking and celebrating unspoken and unconventional forms of beauty. The collection concludes with a meditation on the video game *Hotline Miami*, which reflects the collection's interest in alchemical imagery by transacting this often disregarded art form into the high-art of poetry.

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INTRODUCTION

Starting with my earliest attempts, I found myself driven to write poetry that innovates, surprises, and aggressively confronts the reader with evocative imagery. I rarely aim to write poems that meditate or calmly reflect; instead, I yearn for descriptors such as “explosive” or “dynamite” to be applied to my work. If poetry's primary purpose is to make personal experiences universal and relatable for an unknowable audience, then I want my poems to reinvigorate and inspire readers through energetic decontextualizations of the world – through mysterious, surreal reconceptions of public and private life that root both author and reader in new, exciting landscapes. *The Hungover Romance of “We”* attempts to meet these goals by tracking a fluid speaker from a period of youthful exuberance and abandonment through anxiety and disillusionment. However, the poems often resist overtly personal plots or narratives, instead skewing the speaker's perceptions through a generational lens. By often replacing the “I” of these poems with “we,” these poems attempt to root the dream-like settings in a specific context that reaches towards the personal and relatable and attempts to define the millennial generation. Several recurring themes work to construct a conception of millennials: urban landscapes, alchemical imagery, spiritual disillusionment and the elevation of video games into high art. Frank O'Hara, Brenda Hillman, and Arthur Rimbaud serve as my primary sources of influence and inspiration.

The form and shape of the poems in this collection also play a primary role. My general style consists of staggered lines that play with white space and timing. My decision to indent a line further into the page stems from my desire to surprise the reader;

lines with which I hope to confront the reader hang away from the left margin, forcing the reader to travel further into the page in order to locate it. However, my poetry also makes use of more traditional forms. The sonnet impulse, for example, can be seen in a few poems, including “Megabats,” which uses the sonnet impulse to emphasize its rhetorical turn toward a concluding resolution. I rarely begin poems with a specific form in mind, because I want meaning to carry forward without concern for strict conventions of rhyme or meter. But occasionally, in revision, a completed poem reveals an inherent tendency toward the sonnet form. I find that allowing for these tendencies without forcing them enhances the overall effectiveness of the poem, by imbuing the poem with a sense of literary tradition and rhetorical structure, without sacrificing the freedom and surprise of the language.

The arrangement of these poems loosely constitutes a narrative, in which the speaker, both communal and singular, moves from excited abandonment of responsibility into resulting anxieties, and ultimately develops larger, more mature interests. Early poems, such as “Serrated,” “Yuengling” and “The Cask,” make house parties a shared setting, with alcohol highly influencing the poems' content. Specifically, “Serrated” and “Yuengling” convey a positive, even victorious tone that celebrates youthful vitality and communal identity. “Cobblestone,” on the other hand, finds anxieties beginning to emerge in the speaker, noting a perceived desperation in the millennial generation. “The Cask” later solidifies these anxieties, as the speaker confronts the historical significance of a drunken guest asleep on their basement floor. These anxieties continue on the surface in the paranoid “Once the Busses Go Home” and work into the subconscious in “Sandstone” and “Bad Dreams,” where internal fears disrupt the surface-level pleasures

of previous poems. The collection then transitions into memory and attempts to recover the speaker's identity and place in society. For instance, "Remembering Maryville" and "Early Junes" work to reconstruct images of childhood, but only manage to conjure surreal reconceptions that build on the speaker's anxieties. The speaker's desire to reconstruct a personal identity does not yield successful results until the later poems, where the speaker finds a more stable "I," in the second "I'm a Pigeon" poem, for instance. "Calculus at Night" introduces a more stable "we," one grounded in the intimacy of an identifiable couple.

Yes a broader, more collective and inclusive "we" remains a central aspect of the collection. Poems such as "Serrated" and "Mothership" fully demonstrate the force of the collective, personal pronoun in this collection. Both poems present a speaker fully immersed in a collective consciousness and without a coherent, singular identity. The tension in "Serrated," a heavy storm bearing down on a party, confronts the entire group, and they respond and accept the threat collectively. "Mothership" similarly presents a generation huddled together for survival, relying on each other. As anxieties emerge in the poem, the speaker's commitment to the collective continues, even as the peaceful nature of this relationship dissolves. "Redstone" and "Alexandria" draw on surreal and alchemical concepts and demonstrate the speaker's attempt to define his generation in stable terms. Of course, the presentation of the millennial generation remains entirely subjective, but, for the speaker, millennials harbor a great deal of restlessness and disillusionment. "Enchantment Table" perhaps establishes a working definition of the millennial generation with the most clarity, depicting a rejection of anything other than the strictly practical and physical.

The collective, personal pronoun serves functional purposes as well. For instance, I've found that it allows for a greater sense of tension and consequence. Personal narratives and concerns can be embedded in generational threads; common notions of the millennial generation as disinterested or disillusioned allow for a heavier construction of the speaker's individual personality, which remains tethered to the actions and mentalities of a larger context. In this way, the poems aim to strengthen the connection between author and anonymous reader. The collective subject also allows cultural assumptions and images of the millennial generation to be supplemented or challenged, allowing for the poems to hold greater cultural, even political ramifications without explicit engagement on these grounds.

A collective subject also functions well with my consistent interest in urban landscapes, Knoxville in particular, and allows for the city to function as a coherent figure in the poems. Fortunately, my interests in the collective subject and the city grew alongside each other. As a younger poet, I lacked consistent sources of motivation and inspiration for my writing. Generational themes slowly became an interest, but the objects which attracted my attention were sporadic and often led to uninteresting poems. However, moving out of the University Housing system and into an old house in the historic 4th and Gill neighborhood drastically reinvigorated my sense of Knoxville, shifting my once blasé opinions of the city into a passionate and sometimes difficult love affair. With a popular night club next door and a train crossing down the road, a flurry of romantic, urban inspiration suddenly surrounded me, and from the quiet of a small balcony, I gained access to the pulse of larger community. Soon I found myself frequenting Downtown Knoxville on regular business, buying beer and food, visiting my

favorite stores. Gradually a bond formed between me and the space around me. A sense of ownership developed as my knowledge and familiarity grew; as a result, Knoxville remains a source of intimate reflection and a way of generating new poetic frameworks.

My admiration of Frank O'Hara's work further stimulates my interest in urban landscapes, as well as my continuing, desperate infatuation with New York City. In O'Hara, I see a similar desire to merge larger settings with deeply personal content. "The Day Lady Died," one of my favorite poems, depicts the city as a source of distraction and physical nourishment. It reduces the speaker to an ebbing, routinely functioning member of an alarmingly anonymous society, which enhances the sudden trauma of a distinctly collective memory of Billie Holiday: "she whispered a song along the keyboard / to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing" (27-28). My poem "Oranges" plays with this quality in O'Hara's work (as well as O'Hara's poem "Why I Am Not a Painter"), by positioning the speaker in the anxieties of a large and anonymous city. However, "Oranges" further emphasizes the bodily nature of a city's functionality and draws the city as a site of intense, even frightening levels of consumption.

One additional aspect of the poems directly interacts with my interest in the collective subject: alchemical imagery. The emergence of alchemy in my work initially stemmed from my deep admiration for Brenda Hillman's collection *Loose Sugar*, a collection that makes alchemical and scientific language key to its extended metaphors. Ironically, my first readings of *Loose Sugar* focused more on the scientific aspects of her work. When I realized the full weight of Hillman's argument for alchemy as a metaphor for the poetic process, I became suddenly resistant to her work, and I set out to counter *Loose Sugar* with poems that place alchemy and the poetic process in a millennial, anti-

spiritual perspective. However, in doing so, my reticence toward the poetry-as-alchemy metaphor faltered. Even from the cultural standpoint presented in “Enchantment Table,” alchemy retains its value as a metaphor for the poetic process, in that the practice of alchemy contains a great deal of hope and idealism, but also signifies a melancholy search for something new, God-like and impossible, a search which is destined to fail.

Alchemy and alchemical imagery appear frequently in my work. Certain aspects of its usage derive inspiration from Arthur Rimbaud, whose poetic project of dismantling the self through mind-altering substances reflect key aspects of the millennial mindset I attempt to convey. The act of drinking as a generator of poetry works in an alchemical sense, using chemical fact to uncover new poetic avenues and forge more surprising imagery. Another, stronger facet of alchemy's presence in my work stems from an intense focus on raw materials and bodily need. In Hillman's poem “Cheap Gas,” she says of a drop of fuel that “pink dominates for an instant, / then forgets. / Doesn't look like the blood of young men, liquid from bodies: tears, semen, blood, urine” (23-26). Hillman sees pink as a shade of red, which in turn represents the final stages of the alchemical process. “Cheap Gas” demonstrates her success at using alchemical metaphors to represent political ideas through primal, bodily imagery. Similarly, alchemy plays an important role in “Yuengling,” a poem which incorporates free-form “sampling” from various stimuli into a party scene and uses laboratory imagery to construct an animalistic image of the partier: “my head bubbles over / ... / a sticky glass rod / at the window steams” (31-35).

Alchemical themes are most explicit in the “Stone” and “Ore” poems spread throughout the collection. These poems reference the video game *Minecraft*, a fact that

further contributes to the use of alchemy as a metaphor for poetry. *Minecraft*, an indie game released in 2011, places the player in a virtual world and asks him to gather resources to survive. The player begins on randomly generated terrain and, from the materials around him, constructs a functioning, nourishing ecosystem. The game's focus on raw materials interests me most: the player mines ores, builds a house and lives directly off the rawness around them. The “Stone” and “Ore” poems make this into a metaphor for the millennial generation. For example, “Diamond Ore” refers to the precious, end-game ore in *Minecraft* and communicates a sense of lack in the millennial generation, transmuting the importance of diamonds in *Minecraft* into a reflection on spiritual disillusionment and soul-searching. As such, the final line, “crossing the red,” metaphorically relates the dangerous process of gathering diamonds to the last step in the alchemical process (a metaphor which also refers to poetic craft).

Alchemy further relates to *Minecraft* due to its crafting system, which takes on special importance for game players. More than simply collect materials by which to build, players are tasked with converting materials into new, better forms. For instance, the player uses stone to mine iron, and iron is required to mine diamond. In “Gold Ore,” the speakers find themselves confronting improbably good fortunes – days ending early, danger becoming a thrill, the poker player drawing a flush – which reflects the free alchemical exchange of one thing for another. “Redstone” brings electricity and technology into the mix, where the exchange of coal for diamonds transforms the setting into a landscape of binaries.

Finally, *Minecraft*'s history and popularity reinforce its relevance as a metaphor in my poems. *Minecraft* gained massive popularity and sold millions of copies long before

the developers released a finalized version. As a result, Minecraft was arguably never finished; it had a vast, addicted and loyal fanbase, but its developers neglected to create a fully realized objective or scaling challenge. As a result, players continue to lack a purpose for their efforts. For me, Minecraft thus serves as an apt metaphor for the millennial desire to make up for spiritual disillusionment. *Minecraft* quickly became a craze; it promised grand adventure and a chance to start over in a virtual. However, *Minecraft* as a goal-driven game never fully coalesced, leaving the project, and those who continue to play it, somewhat lost. “Iron Ore” contains some of these themes; the first part shows a group of people living off raw materials and acting as aggressors toward their neighbors, yet their motives remain unclear; they simply exist in this state, sharpening sticks and drawing lines in the sand. Meanwhile, vapor trails collide and life moves on without them. *Minecraft*, in this way, fills a gap in the collective consciousness, but fails to satisfy a deeper yearning.

However, the *Minecraft*-based poems are intentionally designed to function apart from their source material. The reader need not understand the reference in order to understand the meanings contained in the poems. This speaks to another purpose of this collection: the incorporation of video games into poetry. On the surface, the two media often seem entirely exclusive. A vast majority of games, in fact, would yield little of interest to even the most observant or reflective poet, due to the dull, generic expectations levied against many big-budget, or even independent games. However, some titles, such as *Minecraft*, yield new lenses through which to view one's surroundings and society.

The same can also be said of *Hotline Miami*, an indie game released in 2012 that forms the concluding section of this collection. *Hotline Miami*, set during the 1980s

Miami crime wave, makes ultra-violence and a lack of self-identity central to its story and gameplay. The player, an unnamed protagonist, must clear various rooms of enemies as rapidly and stylishly as possible, while an 80s-themed electronic soundtrack plays and the play area rotates drunkenly. Once a level is cleared, the game then forces the player to re-exit the level, walking past their enemies and surveying the destruction they left behind. In this way the game meditates on virtual violence and the nature of the player-character relationship. My series of poems based on *Hotline Miami* attempts to follow that theme by placing the speaker in the protagonist's later perspective, tracking his thoughts from before, during and after the events of *Hotline Miami*. Furthermore, the individual poem titles derive from songs on the *Hotline Miami* soundtrack, and the poems aim to capture the energy and mood of those particular songs. "Electric Dreams," for instance, plays with the melancholy mood of the song by Perturbator, which *Hotline Miami* places during the final cinematic sequence and closing credits.

Going forward, I expect that my poems will evolve and perhaps move away from the chaotic and anxious forms in this present collection. My future interest level in millennial themes and the collective subject also remains uncertain, even likely to diminish. However, I believe that my interest in merging the low art of video games with poetry still holds a great deal of potential. The task shares some similarities to the New York School's poetic framework: all materials present in daily life, including popular culture, belong in poetry. While I still argue that a majority of gaming indeed repels exploration through forms of "high" art, due to its reliance on genre and mechanical addictiveness, video games remain our only medium that attempts to physically immerse an audience. Regardless of video game's continuing status as a somewhat niche market

that only marginally interacts with the typical audience for poetry, the nature of the relationship between player and game holds, for me, a great deal of consequence and begs for further exploration as a literary theme or framework. The work of finding new ways to merge these disparate forms will likely define my future poetry.

THE POEMS

I'm a Pigeon

flocked and cooing
with my endless
fluffy kin,

who scrape their claws
on concrete, pick crumbs
beneath bickering couples
and lonely lunch hours.

Our black eyes jiggle stupid at dusk,
make the least
of crumbly strip malls,
avenues of restless fast food,
deep fried corridors
of stormy throat.

We modern-day doves stabbing holes
in plastic wrappers –
gentle boot dodgers
bobbing our heads down gutters –

powerline dancers, strung
across streets
like post-war banners.

Mothership

We drink beer as the city grows,
weeds of steel, concrete tubers
heartburn fizzing in the dirt –

its corrugated skirt hems
around tetanus thighs that quake
to the tumble of Pretty Lights.

We cracks in the pavement,
last specks of sulfur. We meet
in the glow of a taco truck,
hands in our coat pockets, heads turned

against the wind. Ground beef
and winter, turmeric and the first days
of city. Breathe the ambivalent snow,

the faint trails of liquor up and down
the street. Before tonight, we only had
the whistle of bare plains and unpolluted starfield –

the milky way stretched like a pale midriff.
Only the cold beat of flint on steel – *crack, crack, crack.*

Enchantment Table

No magic

in these cobbled-up walls, tumbling
clucks of jeans and neoprene
tick-tocking down the hallway

No spirit

orgone, mana in the hands
that cut the grass
that catch drunk flipflops at night

Only level-ups, fire damage

3 hits per second:
flicker-flicker-flicker

Only the hot goo of cookies in the oven –

so stoned the smell floods the nose
like a judgment day
of wine and roux

Only winter on the verge of snow,
air like slush.

The playhouse emptied: bundled-up necks
and flush cheekbones, balmed lips
pursing for steam
and cardamom

Snow. Only clumps of gray

drifting limp –
naked torsos
twisting
orange
under streetlights

Serrated

We milk the universe,
bite too hard,
nerves crushed under greedy jaws –

we saw the storm,
the microburst.
The radio's whizzing blares

unheard: the pop
of beer cans,
slicing of limes

(juices spark,
citrus tongues).

We stepped outside,
a humming in our gut.
Limbs stiff
for coming floods –

we throw ourselves into cold
climax rain,
tank-tread wind.

Diamond Ore

Somewhere, in the scrambling darkness

the finger stretch of tunnel after tunnel,

those perfect facets —
dim magma glow

we sniff historic dust
engines bored

we strike iron hands
against flint and cobble
crossing the red.

4th and Gill

A half moon strokes
our house – rotten fence, yard

bare – bellows cow-like
behind smog. The drunk

distance glows – crowds
slip from bar to bar,

coats dusted with snow
 moonlight on their lips.

We chose the thrills
of bipolarity: paragraphs

and boxed wine, lopped heads
and lollipops: now we speak

in chemicals. Fire a fluorescent
light cloudy with smoke. Our lungs

collide, the buzz of soft hands,
clean December air.

We sit in the street. The moon, slice
of sunlit judgment, speaks

in tectonics, barking dogs, plates
thrown at far-away floors.

Gold Ore

Purple the sun sets early, summer swims
 at our knees, car tops dizzy
with yellow –
 metal sheets and wheel-arch
hum, on-coming stars
 full of danger
you spin toward nightfall
 electrons forming bonds.

Shadows stretch cat-like you blow
 bubbles in melted
sand, collect smoke
 in the rafters.
Night the garbage
 disposal, the sudden quake
of mantle we sit naked
at your table, draw one card,
 another,
my entire hand fills
 with spade.

Yuengling

2 AM in glass bottle glow
the street outside swirls
headlight and hipster,
epics and embers
 trickle of molten feather
 down our faces.

One last Pompeii night
before kitchen doors
 crumble, mice breed
 like samples
 streetlights break,
steel avenues low, O'Hara's lunch
hour lower cradle death-car-girl's
fantastic hurdle, always sample

I pop cans like peeling
to novel ends down fizzy amber
 gems,
 metallic hop stings *until*
our new culture curdles in the sunny heat
of market share and E these feelings
 (what feelings)
belong deep in finger-rich dirt
 this mouth belongs
in trenches clutching a Garand
 quiet while shadows
 plow the ground
 historicize, always
Blade Runner glow, late bucolic drives
down Kingston Pike medusa, greys
the cybermen laugh
my head bubbles over
 stirred
 stirrrrrrrrrrrred
 a sticky glass rod
at the window steams
 counting beats
 per precious minute beat

Cobblestone

Our quivering
canyon breathes
shrubs, dead trees,
hormones tuned
to strobing
radio towers

ethanol rolls
down our walls
like desert flood,
mouths agape we
thirsty birds
turn arousal

into lead, shy
bones to quick-
silver. The rain
dries we lumber
as one, overturn
rocks, lips pressed
to dark sands

The Cask

He fell asleep in our basement,
lotus pod of coal shoots

and cracked floors. A rainbow
fed him pheromones – his brainstem

Svedka. There he snores
in the ancient mold. A dream
 runs fingers
 through his hair.

Our house warming party
crawls overhead – anxious
centipedes, ping-pong
balls and bonfire.

Questions drip
from his limestone lips.

What long-ago smoke
brought him here, torchlights

trickling down the hill, doors
locked tight. What hungry

revolution, Roman lay-
waste, amino acid pools

boil in his bones, in
the body I drag upstairs,
 shoes knocking.

Once the Busses Go Home

I've owned this town in the sunlight,
my footsteps a beacon of taste
and asphalt knowledge. Tonight

A dark railyard howls beneath me –
crumbling bridge, the other side gasps.
Drunken midnight / alleyways

rustle, the anxious myth of streets
unbound. Orange city, torchlit
city, quartz panes curtained don't watch,

not willing. This journey home beats
hollow the chest of another night,
my city's radio heart growls

bat-like, its ears and jawline
quiver with metallic waiting.
Shadows dive down alcoves, ready

as the glass that forged me,
the pint after pint of echo
inside me: digestion tearing
compounds apart.

Tavern Pantoum

Tonight the brew stops foaming.
We ask each other drinks in hand
if the bar is safe to leave yet.
The barkeep cleans a new glass.

We ask each other, drinks in hand,
if time has finally stopped.
The barkeep cleans my glass –
turns it back to sand.

Time has finally stopped,
left malty stains on our jeans,
filled our pockets with sand.
It left the door bricked-open

with a sneer, malty stains on its lips,
we can still smell the hops
as snow enters the door bricked-open,
our drinks dry as laundry sheets.

The brew stopped foaming,
stopped being beer. The floor
welcomes wooden and stained,
the bar unsafe to leave.

Sandstone

cinderblock cars the block
 I live on beat
beat beat alive with weeds red
 the neon colored
dreams of nightmare Feds
 fists cracked ready
to blow their knuckle bones
 hard as bulkheads
swallow anything sand-like,
 subversive, quick
to smother floors with gold.

How to Boil Lobster

Once at the doorway
enter. Kitchen incandescent
glints you hear

spiders in the walls
their happy teeth –

never mind. Lift
the pot lid lay
the flicking legs

downward. Stairwells
cracked walls unlit
 attic - dreams
 out of date.

Press your chin
to floor boards,
 the mildew
 witness, beneath
the basement

creeks toward cliff
tops, roots dipped
in air. wait
 for a whistle

Bad Dreams

I.

Can opener crunch
cold hotdog
 mornings

 I join leery-eyed
 friends hauling
 trailers with Lambos thighs

horsepowered back heavy
bedrooms, our day-
 to-day selves

in circuit-boards
 buzzing
we speak in runny
 print quiet

boarded windows
plywood ready
to unfold
 my job
 is to break falls.

II.

Seven birthdays, matches, candles
oozing onto golden frost
 seven sweaty glasses

A moan, a shiver the spine arches
 upward a birth certificate's
railyard drawer creaks

four brake lights shattered
 on the street
sprays of kerosene
 oozing down the walls.

III.

A hollow ding in those martian
woods, dimly orange, firelit. A cowbell
with no cow. *Ding*. Smoke turns
to face me, eyes wet –

something out there plods, lumbers,
the ground quivers. *Ding*.
Palms held to the flame, muddy ground
bare legs. It rains again, will go on raining,

only birds know common ground.
Ding. There it stands – a lion, flimsy
on old paws, brass bell around its neck.
He lays at the fire,
milky stare groaning
in the dark, his breath ghostly.

IV.

Bend against the grain, the white current,
to free a hand, a wrist,

an arm. Rise through empty space,
a snowy field, white sheets

across a table. Lift from salt, sugar
into being, arms wide, shake off

the paper afterbirth, a gray cloud of graphite.
Straighten the cuffs, the tie, the pale look of surprise.

Remembering Maryville

Raccoons part like swipes of fog as headlights
beam down your road. Late now and the air breathes
foreign – this stretch of unknown doors, porch lights
full of tiny wings. Darkly an oak tree

flaps shade against your house. The neighbor's pug
circles barking, chain wrapped around her waist.
Two knocks and the street quiets, a loud hush –
airlock doors unsealed – midnight's slowness.

Your house creaks in the air growing colder.
Lawn mowed thin as the weathered surface
of your door. Two knocks, the pug pants sitting,
porch light darkens. The knob rustles. Lock slowly
clicks. Soon the skittering of raccoon feet
returning to piles of trash. The pug falls asleep.

Early Junes

We clap our feet
in thick pavement puddles
muddy – laughing
 mud
 in juicy streaks
 down our faces
 black coats wispy
 young arms
we smile and stomp
shove bodies that clap
 muddy
into plumes of silt
 jump
 and laugh

our forms wriggle across the pond
 tread water like smiling dogs

 handfuls
of muddy flood
 glittering

 we backstroke
Gods
 in the first hot springs
 minerals roiling
down our chests

Coal Ore

Flies to a goldrush,
 tongues
dry for tungsten
 neon
 midnight blur

 an orange hums
 on the counter.

Starless night

the city blocks
bend away.

Foggy town where
dungeons overflow
 porkchops
in furnace holes brown

 only gems
 can say
your true name.

Oranges

Drip drip coffee
steam fshhhhh
constant crack
of glossy cups

*pink polished fingernails
tearing the rind*

downtown december
the backpack sags, beads
of thmp thmp sneakers

*waxy peel sheers –
snow to the plow*

farmer's market tents
terrapin bearded men
strum guitars sistine
and smiling

what sunlight
drops of sticky

citrus

stopsigns droooooooooop
aluminum ale

*what omnivore teeth
crack membrane
and crush*

knoxville
sunken jawline
the hollow bones
of soon to be business
lofts plush – plumping
for christmas

banjo snow, rotisserie turning
trrrrrrrn

*Terrible white stones carve
their way home*

Redstone

We animate coal,
chalky voices
 echo gold

suck of a bedroom door.

Diamonds see black
 and white,

emberous paintwork cities
 gorged on yellow

drills cranked.

The chest beats
zeroes ones.
 Sparks a magic trick
 spoiled.

The last traces of coal
 stained on our lips, we kiss whatever
stands still.

Rock Tumbler

We threw stones
at old glass, snap
by snap, threw stones

at rivers glossy
fat, the years
of ozone splash.

We threw stones at passing cars
to hear them honk

birds
to hear them honk

other kids
to hear them scrape
toward home

with other kid cries.
We gripped old granite
our chap-knuckle hands

gloved and young –
we chucked them across fields
to find the best arm.

Alexandria

Until the lighthouse stops, we leap rock to rock like crazed electrons, leap towards horizon always reproducing. The ocean cellular, fish striking sparks of green as they squirm in biotic stew. We pluck our feet from moss covered stones and breath, we salt shakers plunged, cannonballs given alveoli, fingers. Red prongs of lichen across the ocean, the lighthouse licks a yellow arm across our hair.

Waiting for a Ride

The tremoring
 taste of glasses
 full of gold,
storefronts'
 fishy glow –
crosswalks and
 brakelight
 flares shot
 from lifeboats buoyed,
flooding submarines,
 a dryer spin
 of Warhol cheeks
 red to green
my attention
 a rainbow splat
 of Tarantino
 flash across
the wall – sidewalk
 tide //each rise
 a free dash
of salt.
Big budget
 meteors
 brought to bear,
 nukes drilled
 their smiling streaks
dash eager
 streets with shadow.

Drunk at 3 A.M.

Tonight a murky bed bodes
sour beer and Netflix. April sores
ping the window, hours undone,
the beach a dark brown flooding,
clumped and muddy with you.

Tomorrow, you say, moans
a fresh winter pour
sweeping glow at my feet – frozen
voices full of cotton sleeves
and new bodies cool.

The rhythmic phone's
other end grows over
night. Soon the cluttered floor is
all bras and belts, – you a snowy
barefoot jewel

on the beachhead,
amber puffs and sandy pores,
slatboard stairs, mixer fizz
and open windows, tides foaming,
a limbful, goose-feathered pool.

Black IPA

A poem dissolves in swamp water –
poetic acid, muscles come alive, oxygen
broken over and over. My glass rimmed
with Belgian bikes, fizzy gold Atlantic
maw sprays sulfur in careless coughs: relics
of Denver so far away / a stain
that won't lift. The poem is hardwater,
showerhead lime – tomorrow morning drains.

Thursday Nights

A moon strokes
Old City for us
neckbeard kids,

puffing cigars in the rain,
christmas light trees
and trimline women,

sweaty synthetic
beats. A tide of downtown
strobelight rolls on

and off the street. Trains
shatter the crossing
behind us, horn like a rain-soaked

Sure. Let's dance and do whatever.
Tonight flees
down a wired track

until morning, when the cats
yawn behind curtains
and all day my housemate

sits in his sleepwear,
fermenting like a grape lost
beneath the fridge.

Smooth Stone

I dig the earth
 muddy,
the quivering mantle nerves
bowels of a generation's
 chewing,
the hungover romance
 of “we.”

Lips pressed to the drip drip
drip
of trickle-down theories

I hear their howls
 echo – a twig's
 give-away snap –
 spear tips – heart beats –
come closer.

Bridge to a tower
that digs the earth,
beacon choked granite
shale,

loose cobble years
the four walls, stony lungs

smoke gels like pearls.

The haze of a sunday dream
spent naked, digging, teeth
stickied at the bartender's
spout –

the shared oxygen by “we”
desperate for a blanket,
the folds of a womb.

Megabats

Packed bars full of Irish
punk and sack-faced boys
limp in their own puddles
of limb; tonight

no eyes remain
to crowd lofty windows,
dark and shaded, downtown
a funnel for the flushed

and lonely, eager
for bar-top smooth
beneath their hands. Glasses
full of murk at their lips; tonight

no strangers drink among the sagging
young. No strangers lurk around the corner.

I'm A Pigeon

Five long days I've waited
at the Crown Hotel's feet,
 a red crescent
 of sidewalk rhythm.
My fluff waves hello
 as rush hour
turns the air
 magenta.

My bottom half in a terrier's
gut reduces. Proteins indexed
 and pissed away,
 he trods my gutters
 and spillways,
sniffs my pizza parlors'
 backdoors – the tap-tap-tap
his unclipped toes.

Now that dog,
his friends and every
other crosswalk idle,
throb-a-day boot
 kite shadows along
 the deepening days
 of my kin still full
 of flap –
 my sunset town
stretches downwind,
its brickwork gods
 like soda cans
 collapsing – saving space.

White House

(with Andrew Dillon)

I've got this intuition
 for the movement of time.
I fold shirts into squares, palms smooth
 against the kinks.
I fill the closet, the wardrobe –
 hours unlatched from their docks
 beyond the bedroom,
 Seoul, Miami, the Sunsphere
the windows darken,
 fridge hums –
all redshifts.
 All ultraviolets, aurora borealis
 the capital building white as raw glass.

Iron Ore

I.

They scrape territory
in river bank mud

and keep to themselves.

They bathe
in moony tide

handfuls of slosh,

wiggle sand
in toasted toes –

let ocean
linger on their lips.

They watch vapor trails
collide at dusk,

pick their nails
with driftwood slivers

while neighbors
sharpen branches
with their teeth.

II.

Handfuls of slosh
full of sparkle moon
silt –muddy
drain moon.

An ocean pillared
chalky wet
turtle green
those rusted hands
volcanic
mud
uncorked

red tongues
undone
bell ropes
undone
collared shirts –

feet cold on salty stone
neighborhood of timid
nighttime
feet.

III.

Neighbors,

imagine smoke stacks
voltage coils,

porch lights that domino down streets
scraped into veins of coal.

Imagine your hands cleansed
in hurricanes
of chemical snow.

Remembering How We Met

Was it a misty pool
in the woods, a circle
of naked howlers spreading
handfuls of magic,

a flower girl's shy whisper
and point across the aisle
you caught the bouquet
and shrugged, stained glass
cheaper than ever.

a lighter's flick
beneath your lips,
the blue smoke, wet
street outside a clinic
tires sluicing,

your sleepless nights,
was I the protein waste
building in your brain –

a dig through lowtide
sands, the jellyfish
in glowing piles

Calculus at Night

We howl with inertia
and trail ourselves into dust.

Twin stars
in the oily cosmos –

orbiting the first colossal
flicker of light,

the first gas clouds
calm and waiting to burst.

In heatless depth we spend ourselves
unaware, distant

a nightly streak for one, then another,
we erode in atmospheres.

We bounce around dwarf stars
and crumbling bodies

where oceans steam and tiny globs
begin to crawl.

When we collide,
tails crossed, voices full of

yes maker, yes maker:
then light, heat,

and shreds of age-old rock
coming clean.

Globetrotter

I.

I've never
flown
on a plane.

Only watched
others cross
the gates,

metal rods glazed
over totem pole
forms.

Only seen aunts
and brothers walk
the shadowy bustle
of turbine.

II.

She knows the way. Knows
the candied nuts
and swear words
of Europe.

She's driven the Autobahn,
swam Parisian smoke,

walked through Delhi
barefoot,
gold paint sprayed
across her cheeks.

Now she's with me, a rock
in contoured sand,
still as winter –

she misses German Christmas,
steaming mugs and cobblestone
streets, cinnamon air specked with snow.

III.

Manhattan you gorgeous
cliff, massive jaw
eager for the salty crunch
of the shy, drooling
for my brittleness.

You wonderful den
for bandits, bears,
erections. You drunk behemoth
of wombs, wading back
to your watering hole.

You distant glitter
on the coast, teeth drenched
high tide and diesel,
you howl my name – the wind –
the night, you hang
over lava pits, glinting.

IV.

Even boulders shift
glaciers

slide south
as water warms

the walls
of mountains

around me grind
lower

Even continents
groan

with tectonic thrust
even California

finds a way
across the ocean.

Tommy's Theme

Tommy surf-lit and pruny, row boat weathered. Summer day
Tommy your guts glow orange – the beachside house
whitewashed, Skyy draped from your fingers, the tide womb-like
you fell asleep on the floor. Tommy your face glints lost jewels
and red towers blinking. You treat past lives like voicemail. You
dream Manhattan, concrete hubris, deep Florida highways at night,
only moonlight and swamp gas. Tommy ears plugged with music.
The beachside rented, diners all full – you wait. High-tide will dig
you free. Plant you portside and sticky.

Time Traveler

Miami howls from inside
me. Skyline green and blue,

Atlantic jaw having its nightly
swallow. Chests steam

under streetlights. Beach-ridden
glares from strangers, neon

the knife's whiplash trail.
Always a beat in these dim-lit streets.

I hate the 80's, I tell some friends –
a part of me that fills fireworks

with summer nights, the calm
Pacific, turns the moon inside out

with tides trailing incense
in the dark – synthetic, glittering.

HOTLINE MIAMI

Look at my face. We've met before...
- Richard

You're no guest of mine!
- Rasmus

Do you really want me to reveal who you are?
- Don Juan

Hydrogen

Boundless bunsen
burners, knobs

spun beyond matter.
Marble counters,
graduated cylinders

lab notes soiled
with copper.

Dandelion sex fits a lock –
which lock I ask, room
by room

I used to party, drunken
swish of face after face.

Evolution's tongue.
The old garden

floods. A goggled man
lit rare metals
for a quick smile.

We burnt blue.
She knew

the caverns of my cells.
She pounds at my door,
cranks the knob. Years ago.

Now I see night
in fresh words. A precious

manifesto, a flask
passed over flame

Knock Knock

Miami's green skyline
 and steel drums:
the alleyways groan, beachside darkens pinkly.
Slap slap puddles,
the metal taste
 of diesel sluices past
with knife-like
 charm. Let's head home,
 heads down,
ignore the Miami revolutionaries
on their broken chair barricades
 who salute smiling.
Did we lock the door before we slipped
 into bed, cold feet cold
 against the footboard.
Can you hear termites in our walls,
 a silver-jawed disco
of pinewood slosh
 and tunnels growing?

Miami Disco

I.

Rat trails, chemical
blue flights
 hungry paws
 tails erect
stretch beneath our
feet
 a new litter spreads.

Miami told us take
and be taken –

eye the back
door. Know
the megaphone's owner
 night's far away
 whistle

night's refusal
 to wait for bad news --

trains on fire
 flash the station.

Yellow teeth
 at our window
 chip.

II.

garbage, oh god our burrows
extend so far, not far enough –

a shoveled man marched
down 1st last night my children, they

saw devil in his throat, a dragon
breath curled from years of pornographic

soil, they said garbage the god
sought, monsters can wait,

the shoveled man seeks high scores
and better highs, now we chant our sniffy

song and borrow. Miami knows
our family scent, home-grown

laughter from shadows, pups
buried in shreds of money.

III.

We powder gray the penthouse, dazzlers full of sleeves mouths an O shape finger-hole
pin – we leather-up cars and fuck puffs of glass (steel) – the Nova? Poor man's game a
pump away from fatal. You want the stars and stripes boarded elevators and scatter-shot
geese – lungs Cuban, clean muzzles, love us. Twist the silencer slow. Warm rum blue-
back fire, wine-soaked corks
 red foam red over crystal lips, broken bra hooks

Inner Animal

The earth has a pulse. I've heard its pump
in dreams, where neon is a verb and bare
arms glisten, a thump in the plaster walls
and shopping racks

piling into midnight taxis streetlights
beat steady, necks craned ambivalent
 brake lights an open forge, skylines
 a steel trumpet.

Cannonballs abandoned homes doors flung
wide flaws steady as drugs. I wear masks,
 hands flat as irons

 she tilts the pinball machine.

I wake, life and death a last minute
flex – heartrate the answering
 machine's terrible chirp

Turf

City a pink-green pool behind me. Tree-shaped shadows bloom. The streetlights end. To leave the car now is to walk a firm universe. Danger dangles from my fingers, moon a pressure pad, brakes unlit forest bends and black waters – the moist lungs pump.

Tomorrow

the lobby doors open,
empty, the elevator dings – implode / select a floor. Sidewalks pass unaware my feet
tread the office floor full of purpose. Wet apartment, pizza boxes / old stains
forgotten bra beneath the bed all shades pink / green, delicious. My car roots the skyline,
rattles earth into shape.

Loose bolts in my hands.

Tossed in the sock drawer.

Electric Dreams

I tried a normal life.
Quiet nights were a locked
briefcase. A dozen missed calls.
I killed the last villain:
his first kiss
 and night sweats
a marble floor, spreading redness.

Still my dreams
vibrate – thunder keeps me blanket
 to my ears.

A cold rain fell. Miami
bristled – pink
 glinting
 modern.
Her picture fell
 from the terrace, left
 an ozone trail
 I smell now, on your ears.

Know that each time we meet,
 you meet
 someone new.
Mirror in the cupboards,
 stormdrain mop.
Inner animals various
 in the corner
 of your eye.

Deep Cover

A year of quiet meals, car dents
and sweaty clothes collects
at our front door, dripping.
Still you rev the blender. The coffee grinder.
Put the kettle on, eye full of orange
and modern. Always staring.

Somewhere these spoons fell headlong
into a mold. I imagine you
did the same, before this house,
cupboards full of glass.

The basement floods.
Your letterman jacket
waves at the rafters.
Owl mask breaks
the surface,
smolders,
eyes a muddy gold.

Where were you last night –
the screendoor flapping,
street's cold breath
slipping down the showerhead –
what hunger drives you
through night's neon hum –

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VITA

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