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## Instant Conductors

Mary Petralia  
*University of Central Florida*



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INSTANT CONDUCTORS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing  
in the Department of English  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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Major Professor: Russ Kesler

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## ABSTRACT

*Instant Conductors* is a collection of poems meant to engage the reader in conversation about the imperfect nature of the world in relation to the imperfect nature of readerly experience. Walt Whitman wrote, “I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop / they seize every object and lead it harmlessly through me.” And so the things on these pages are intent on transmitting what one experiences in the minutiae of memory and routine: the sounds that surround a blackwater tidepool, what one imagines happens behind the closed doors of the friendly neighbors, or what’s heard in the whispers of an elderly man sitting in a waiting room. These pieces are situated along the spectrum of narrative and lyric, between self and other, around various speakers and listeners. They flow through the sensors of Florida swamp, pray to the train ride of some nebulous god or lack thereof, and comment on the artifice of social media. They visit the transient nature of relationships and interrogate how one comes to know, or not know, the self. These pieces speak to old form and new verse. They touch on place, and time, and timelessness. They attempt to reimagine the negative space of individual, sometimes muddled, histories, into some understandable or at least familiar, organic, whole. Universal truths or no, these are the electric currents of language. They are hazardous. They are harmless. They are instances and instants.

For Angela and Peter.

Special thanks to Jude Roney, Vonnie Amey, and Russ Kesler.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

These pieces, or versions of them, originally appeared in the following publications:

<i>99 Pine Street:</i>	“Rust”
<i>Anamesa:</i>	“Linguisticity”
<i>Brickplight:</i>	“Father Constructs a Tudor” “Grow” “Love Poem For My Husband (Love Poem)”
<i>deadbeats:</i>	“Swing Split Scene”
<i>Eyedrum Periodically:</i>	“Gentrification”
<i>Hitherto:</i>	“Exercise Semantic”
<i>Ishaan Literary Review:</i>	“Beached” “St. Johns” “The Light, The Choir”
<i>Kentucky Review:</i>	“Econlockhatchee Song”
<i>The London Journal of Fiction:</i>	“Birthday”
<i>Shooter Literary Magazine:</i>	“Tiffany Takes a Selfie”
<i>Solarwyrn Press Latchkey Tales:</i>	“Lunch Break”
<i>Tincture Journal:</i>	“Afternoon Interlude, In Cubicle”

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## INSTANCES

St. Johns

Your curve  
of upper basin  
wet in the dark,  
cushioned bank  
of cattails;  
you kept company  
with Mocama  
and Seminole—  
your swan neck  
ligature  
keeps me  
company now,  
holds me together.  
Grandma had  
a fish cabin  
on Lake Harney  
gone to rot;  
moist *madera*  
crumbled underfoot.  
Your anhinga,  
snake bird,  
you curve  
—like a sentence,  
carry me north.

## Tropical Depression

In the morning  
—top of the stairs  
we fallout  
of love,  
trip steps  
like  
a giant oak's  
root-ball the size  
of a small planet,  
tipped,  
ripped up in backyard dirt  
mirrored  
in hurricane-force wind  
as neighbors happily  
kayak  
down the street—  
our feasts are long gone,  
long lost to unfisted fights  
down  
in a basement  
shelter,  
where we stay,  
damp,  
unmoving  
and windowless.

## Specimen

This body needs HBV protein  
as in High Biological Value,

as in high albumin to obstruct  
this low albuminessence

to fight this lack of effervescent breath.  
O light as of the inner kind

O time as in rosary blue  
cameo soapstone box filled with ash,

timber of vitamin and bone,  
this body needs to be tacked

to corkboard, a pin through the chest  
to dry in the sun,

an imprint of borders,  
O light all that is left.

## Father Constructs a Tudor

A metronome click-tock killed us  
softly in songs by our father—  
1973, wet smell of wood truss triangles  
ramped together with spit nails, bruised fingers,  
good for construction.  
Sticky orange-grove-anthills run over by a hoary  
surrey in the yard, its smell like horse leather  
and damp hair, good for time travel.  
Cigar fumes like locust wings, plague-colored,  
under our feet a forest of garter snakes rope-thick,  
good for omens—  
inside his hidden forbidden music room,  
rheumy clarinet coalition squeals, Glenn Miller's *String of Pearls*  
anti-crescendo roped into concrete-loop foundation,  
good for scabbed skin. Our tudor house  
is baked full of dead fish,  
sting bees in the half timber,  
his wood reeds tongued thin,  
the moss green Karmann Ghia  
parked under a dead navel tree,  
Roberta Flack on his radio.

Listen

He may endow you with some diamond  
ring and of course you will say Yes;

you may then wonder if the feeling  
that you can no longer breathe is so much jailhouse

stink or love love fabulous Kung Fu chop-love  
my dear, the love you've been waiting for

since you played the *Bride Game*  
in second grade and knew you must have

something lacy and blue to bestow  
upon your virginal thigh. He will peel

the garter off your upraised leg  
to pacify the mob;

he will tell you I Love You Forever.  
It will be wonderful, really.

But later you may fantasize  
that you fashion a tomahawk

out of your prison razor  
to slice his face in retribution

for the time he called your cooking *ass*,  
no really, he called your cheddar biscuits *ass*,

or you may vow  
to Kung Fu chop his throat

Ip Man-style (as he sleeps)  
for saying your horsemouth

could eat corn through a fence.  
Your teeth are only slightly bucked after all.

You may finally  
find yourself

sitting on the porch after the kids  
are asleep, cursing

his ungoverned mouth,  
not knowing that in a few years

he will call you  
a low caliber whore

and though you know  
there is no

instrument as lovely  
as a voice, you listen

for his silence.

## Grow

grow me birthchrist,  
your deep plan your lineaments.  
    cry cry the other line,  
the coffin the dogfog  
of this divorce—  
him was then,  
a close man of light light  
sky blue Paradise,  
godwant of the century.  
    his name  
    twists again  
against my body a canoe  
of one water, blue stones  
finished  
diagonally finally,  
intolerable  
this liminal headache  
    of something.

Semi-Sestina on Six Words by Donald Justice

I thought that to erase the past  
I would think of thinking  
about things passed, the forgetting  
of the past which I always think  
about, I asked, to think of  
something other than the past.

I asked to think of a different past  
but what I thought had passed  
had only dug a way deep, of  
a deepness that kept me thinking  
of who the past was, to think  
a map, to forgetting.

I became a gap of forgetting  
what passed,  
an erasure, to think  
that the past  
was only about forgetting  
things I remembered, of

people, I remembered, of  
cloth placed atop a light to dim the forgetting,  
to nebulize what I was thinking  
of the man in a past.  
The non-memory passed.  
The shadow, gray, to think.

It grew dark. I had to think  
of grimed hands that smooth hair, of  
smoky sour hours passed  
through time. I became the forgetting  
numb of a past,  
of a girl thinking.

In that ice tingle of thinking,  
in the numb, I began to think  
of a map to nowhere, an age of passed  
time in a mind of  
caverns that led to forgetting  
what lingered of the past.

But the man—on the hill—makes me think of  
the past, will always imply the forgetting,  
always, present, when thinking of things passed.

## Flight Distance

This is just to say  
I have taken  
measure  
of a country  
mile  
in which  
I perceived you  
an enemy  
at escapable nearness

Forgive me  
as the crow flies  
with wings only partly opened  
above no warm fire  
is too short an augury  
too close  
too cold

Love Poem

-Of Victor Jara's *Estadio Chile*

He remembers  
Jara's smashed wrists,  
when he was young.

Death in the Stadium,  
the broken  
moan song.

People disappeared  
at night.

Now he believes  
in tiny trolls  
that run along baseboards,  
sabotage  
water lines and light switches.

*Pero* we don't wonder  
how many we are, *dos*  
*juntos*.

We are found  
in starry night space

without silence,  
without screams.

Poema de Amor

-De Víctor Jara, *Estadio Chile*

Él recuerda  
de las muñecas rotas de Jara,  
cuando él era joven.

Muerte en el Estadio,  
la canción triste  
fue alterada.

Las personas desaparecidas  
en la noche.

Ahora él cree  
en duendes pequeños  
que corren a lo largo de los zócalos,  
sabotaje  
líneas de agua e interruptores de luz.

Pero no nos preguntamos  
cuántos somos, dos  
juntos.

Estamos encontrando  
en el espacio de la noche estrellada

sin silencio,  
sin gritos.

Trans: Lisandro Perez Debelli

Past the Southern Andes the World Opens Up

Unto the sound of rain,  
of tree leave shifts

on a breeze, like the sound  
of a quiet grin.

He says, *we has to clean the houses of bird*  
and, *the best thing you can show these kids is play kite,*

*pero no worry, I forget you—*  
which means

he forgives me for letting the birdcage get dirty  
and allowing the kids to watch too much TV,

which means the sound of rain  
is only a transitive, the signified, one word,  
*understanding.*

## The Sound Needs Heat

- after Neko Case and Terrance Hayes

Love, I shovel gold into my ears,  
want to be real full, want to hear  
hot pink lips, the warm tone  
of together, the red round of the sound.  
Will you love me more  
if I puke up a sonnet?  
Abandon the couplets?  
Say a word-played mouth, swallow  
the sound of need,  
taste the feel of alone?  
I chew a thin melody  
of endgame, iced with the sound of quiet.  
Say I'm not starving;  
make the mouth move as it should.

### Third-Wave Loose Sonnet Run-On

“I follow politics to ball all the chicks, cross-pollinate then call it quits.”  
—MC Paul Barman, *N.O.W.*

MC Paul Barman has the goods to show  
that you can have a sense of humor while  
making fun of lower-case letters, though  
bell hooks might not like his writing style  
or what his intellectual rhymes say  
about uptight ladies that can not see  
love is an act of courage meant to make  
one find humor in a song by MC  
Paul about hairy armpits and belly  
necklaces at an N. O. Double-U  
convention, so grab the K. Y. Jelly,  
board the bus, re-ink your E. Jong tattoo,  
and let Barman's gut-busting witty rhyme  
on feminism grow on you in time.

## Gentrification

He says the potential hides inside;  
he says go into Brooklyn bars and take notes  
on the interesting stories people tell while they're drunk  
as if I did not already know the drunkest story.  
Mother retches into toilet at three in the morning,  
varicose-vein legs curl under the butt  
(then knee-push to chest like birth),  
mildew stain in the shape of South America  
like a map to so many nowheres  
(the Staten Island of southernmost Argentina a black  
dot between long toes that flex and curl  
with each convulsion). As if I did not know  
paramedics have a tendency to roll their eyes.  
I'm happy alone in my head—I gentrify me now—  
where I surmise that if I read about  
a Tom Vek concert in the "Night Life" section of *The New Yorker*  
then I've somehow actually attended it and thus I can join the ranks of those  
*musicians and night club proprietors lead complicated lives...*  
who oh-so-hip-ly know who Tom Vek is and isn't his music like so much shiny things?  
*it is advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.*

## Day Turns to Night

The weird thing  
was that I recognized her name  
on the paper after the doctor  
dictated his note and I typed it.  
The name was the same  
that hung on the door shingle  
across the street from mine.  
H\*\*\*\*\*D, it said, in yellow  
letters on a wood  
slat over the entryway;  
I saw it every day.  
The doctor dictated to me  
all of the strange happenings in her  
cloudy utero, *sarcoma*, *carcinoma*,  
*adenoma*, those crazed messengers  
of sure death. I knew she was dying  
as I drove by her house every evening,  
a day's work done. At night I would imagine  
her female armies metal-hatted  
and hunkered down in wet trenches,  
distracted by a small yellow butterfly  
flitting on a crushed can of peas  
while an invader fed on her blood,  
mutated cancer, genes gone bad.  
I dreamt I created a supercure to stop them.  
I wanted to shout out the window  
as I drove past her house, *Take your vitamins!*  
*Eat kale, Mrs. H! Exercise!*  
I would watch the miniature windmill  
in her front yard click out vacant turns  
and I would remember that line from some movie  
that said it's all about making peace with what you don't have.  
So now her car is gone from the driveway  
and there is only the lantana that strangle  
into tiny windmill slats.

## Birthday

I said thank you God  
and almost believed it,

then a woman in a riot stole  
toilet paper and paper towels

instead of a TV or cell phones  
and a radio DJ made fun of her;

you cretin, paper products  
aren't a benefit of SNAP

plus you don't even know  
how to pronounce "judgmental."

But really it's not so much that I want  
to preach to the choir

it's just that I hope there is a choir  
and it doesn't necessarily have to sing

but more, hear, and it would be good  
if the choir knew what it was like to be on food stamps.

I don't blame her for stealing  
those things,

I've done it; taken toilet  
paper rolls from the beach bathroom.

A woman in a park  
swung her dead child for three nights.

I stay up till midnight  
to instantly win a new grill

but what I really want is the free  
trip to Hawaii.

I love Hawaiian rolls,  
they're so darn sweet.

I hear Hawaii is no paradise,  
the flying cockroaches,

but that flowery blue ginger  
is like a purple heaven-bird.

I had a patient from Palau and that chick  
was nuts but sweet like an Almond Joy.

The Pacific must do something  
to create some chaos effect.

Maybe it's floating radiation.  
Maybe it's crawling disappearances.

Maybe they just want their spoons  
to not tarnish so quickly.

My daughter is upset because she didn't get a picture  
of the prison's pristine garden as we drove by.

Sometimes we see basketball players in the yard,  
nuclear white in uniform.

All it takes is one person  
to describe you as mediocre.

You lie still and dull-colored  
and think of that squealing skinned-alive rabbit.

Lie still and remember the way the Italian pines  
shushed and curtained just for you

because you were only Italian back then and the fortresses  
you built were in your backyard and not in your mind.

Peel off a vegetable's vitamin skin,  
your stone-thrown Medusa

snake hair only gray and soft wires.  
Peel off another month

on a Japanese woodblock-print calendar.  
Cherries still blossom. Warriors float.

INSTANTS

## The Winner

A hail-sail plunked on the hood of your truck;  
a bullet of wind came through the crack  
in the windshield to tie up your bad luck  
tight like a prizefighter beaten to a pulp,  
still trying to stand. The storm beat down,  
ice-nicks in the metal, chasing you through town  
in your already beat-up ride, hell-bound,  
whiskey bent—like the dent in the hood  
of your old truck—on destruction and rust,  
curved to hold standing water and driving  
dust, bent to skew a worldview thriving  
on impaired vision, crooked lust. You held  
the wheel tight, weaving between drops and stones,  
threw yourself to the sunlight just beyond  
the gray, beat the day.

## Beached

The sea appears,  
A blown sky.  
You understand me!

O mediocrity;  
A case of mistaken identity.  
You understand me.

Twined sea-berries,  
Understand me.  
Taste the salt of bad news,  
Phantom sea breeze says

Come here!  
A second-guess echo,  
The sound of blackberry waves.

## Exercise Semantic

It's like a meditation, him out there  
running by the water,

oceanhead barreled down  
like the bull he was born under,

one machine with the rhythm  
of that seawater, horns

cutting through salt air  
like so many pierced

skins ripped open  
to heal themselves.

## Royals

We take the Mercedes out for the day,  
wave to adoring fans who stand along  
the roadside of Calle de Rio Quetro  
all the way to his Concepcion seaside,

the king and his queen  
because this is the good life baby  
and don't we deserve it  
and isn't it fair that the buttery leather of these seats

smoothes under our calloused hands,  
dirty fingernails, like we belong to the other side  
where we don't have to return the Mercedes to the body shop  
where he works and eat expired deli sandwiches under the oak;

we wave away mosquitoes. He tells me  
*te amo para siempre* and I say I love you too.

Lantana at Night. After the Bar

I ran over an alligator,  
a giant behemoth of thud.  
Surprisingly, he smelled like citrus lantana.

My El Camino, *El Terminator*,  
mushed through mushy Florida mud  
as I ran over the fragrant alligator.

I was an immediate eliminator,  
though there was no blood.  
And the night air smelled of weeping lantana.

I was a murderous nature violator.  
My tires, crusted with crud,  
carelessly smushed the alligator.

Moments before, I'd derailed a salivator  
at the bar; maybe he begrudged  
my smell like white lantana,

maybe he was a prestidigitator,  
slipped into my drink some drug  
and made me run over the poor alligator,  
jealous of the lantana.

## Econlockhatchee Song

O shadow figure of Mary's  
white statue,  
greet us as we come up  
the banks at night,  
the blackwater  
pool of Shady Oaks Trailer Court.

Our ritual is to smack her face  
we're not the least bit sorry  
on our tiptoe home through the scrub pine.  
We shush cataract-eyed baby possums  
and locust trills. Blind swordsmen,  
we feel our way through evening-length works  
of mosquito song and swamp swims.  
We have need of no vision.

Our Man sings his whiskey woe,  
switch-whips us when we sneak back in,  
finds us wet and muddy.  
The saw palmetto scratches  
sting less, sing more.  
Sing the praise,  
pray to our sinners.

Rust

Two twined on a balcony,  
she believes  
it love, wrought with iron twills,  
    tendrils, balcony rail  
    pressed into her face,  
he is just that strong she cannot not stop

like arms holding her down  
the first time, like wrought  
    iron rotten, wet-gray  
    weather inside the body  
    of the word *no*  
that oxidizes into nothing.

Surrender, Memory

- after Edward Hopper's *Room in New York*

Does she need  
to say how she remembers  
his hands on her sharp,  
soft chin like pieces  
of white cloth  
floating, hands  
moving the flushed,  
pink round of the cheek  
out of the way  
to get to the mouth,  
lips not letting  
go until they were red  
as the lampshade  
lit up, electric,  
hands like white flags  
waving back?

## Lunch Break

An hour at the Seaview Hotel,  
again. She listened for the waves,  
dream-swam away in warm saltwater,  
far from where she was ten minutes before  
when the waves still pounded, but inside  
the room, over them.

A sip of water, her throat raw,  
they put things back where  
they should be, tidily,  
ratty covers on the abused  
bed, his red tie picked up  
off the floor, keys,  
lighter, silver change,  
a gold ring, a cheap  
wood nightstand.

Sometimes she would tie his tie for him, laughing,  
standing on the bed behind him, her arms  
around his shoulders to get the knot just right,  
sateen material slippery in her hands,  
her lips on the scruff of his rough neck,  
her hands, her face in his hair, laughing,  
pushing into him.

She held the ring out  
to him, singled out his finger  
like she imagined the priest  
did six years ago, held his hand  
upside down in hers, felt the meat,  
muscle of it, her smell  
that lingered on it,  
the hand that twisted  
in her hair, held her head down  
on the sweaty pillow.  
She wet his finger with her mouth, slid  
the metal onto it, whispered  
as she kissed him,  
took his hand,  
the circle of gold,  
his finger, took it,  
put it inside of her.  
Another of their long goodbyes.

## Hangover

Wake up throw up. Drive home, tight shirt lung-strangler,  
I thought it might happen. Giant snail consumes small skinny girl  
in dream. Man on hill watches, the protector,  
she said so, the awake head knew it while the asleep head  
played like a movie. A creek near the scene, the man on the hill is dead  
in the water. He floats. Snail mushes, slimes the girl,  
eats her. That's the dream.

My sister says dreams start as soon  
as you fall asleep  
(do not write about them)  
(she's older than me)  
but you only remember  
the ones that happen right before you wake up.  
I question  
how she could possibly know  
what brain scanner sees dreams,  
what x-ray machine. Show a picture on film—  
hold it up to the ceiling light,  
see the illuminated dream-shape  
giant snail eating a girl. See it right there?  
My finger points to the snail's swirly shell, white like ghosts  
on a gray sheet of x-ray film.

## Seismic Activity

There is a ridge  
in the short nail  
on the ring finger  
of your left hand—  
it creates a line  
like a cable's border,  
like a curled strand  
of her box-red hair  
hung out the window,  
wind in her teeth,  
pink-nailed fingers  
curled around the volume  
button to turn up  
Liz Phair's alligator  
cowboy boots on sale,  
the drive through  
saguaro henchmen  
to the Golden Gate strait.  
You are tall and orange  
in rusted suspension  
    just above the water.  
Look at the way you rise  
in the center to collapse  
on each side like some angle  
of troublesome air.  
Map out her tremors,  
brace for defeat,  
your right eye hurts.  
You mow the grass.

He Can't Breathe, I Can't Hold My Breath

- Eric Garner chokehold, Staten Island, 17 July 2014

Life is so you only live once,  
yo, so look inside his backward

civil choke headache—wait  
for the bus, take asthmatic New York stock

of his currents and indices—wait  
for rapturous misfire moments

of some historic difference, his static  
neurons alone in personal public insignificance

as he unfolds into reverse manumission—take him back,  
his breath hard to hold

like southern antebellum, suspended  
mouth foam, no inhale. I exhale, goodbye July.

## The Light, The Choir

The Trayvon Martin moment is just one moment in a history of racism in America that, in large part, has its underpinnings in Christianity and its history.

— Anthea Butler

Me and my wife Queenie have no children except the sleeping kind.  
Maybe that nurse, Miss Lorraine, the one that takes care of Queenie,  
maybe she has no babies too except the ones in Heaven,

maybe that's why she acts so crazy, so *cray* like my niece Sass says,  
maybe that's why she talks about *Jesus*  
and talks about that *guilt* and talks about she's *repenting*

and talks about the *Devil* like she's crazy like she doesn't know  
she's down here on Earth with the rest of us. Ignorant as the day we were born.  
I told her, I said, *Miss Lorraine, why do you have to talk like*

*how when you were young you ran the streets of Tallahassee,*  
*took on any man that wanted you and now you're paying for it, like when you*  
*were young you had a nursemaid that looked just like my Queenie and she*

*washed your hair and cleaned up after you like you were a queen or something?*  
Something is we all have no children except the kind sleeping in Heaven  
and my God of the Scriptures will forgive that man who shot that boy

in the hoodie and my God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob  
had a reason for the sickness that took me and Queenie's babies  
and I hope to God that Miss Lorraine will forgive herself

for her sins and quit all that carrying on  
cause me and Queenie just want some peace  
and quiet to hear our angels in Heaven sing.

Jeremiah Denton Makes Love to the World

- North Vietnam, 1966

You blink your Morse code, signal us your story;  
how low the moon, it hides away

like a fogged jungle treeline. We flawlessly trace  
borders of smoke with calloused fingers, all dips

and curves, the torture in your lines,  
the irons that sing the woe. Signal

us the solitary story, your secret language  
so heavy-lidded, dotted and dashed;

O now how we understand our lowlight,  
the nonsound, our flawed hearing

like a few minutes hidden together  
in a hovel while the world goes blind.

Afternoon Interlude, In Cubicle

May Day mayday osprey  
Honestly I want to shoot the thing  
It will not stop, its causal claws  
Outside my window  
Screech  
Scratching  
A mafia in the magnolias  
A siren like wires in the sky  
Fish in mouth  
Blood, *enfin*

Linguisticity

Dumb it down, slum  
it. Succumb to the sound.

Voiceless bilabial stops  
vibrate vocal cords.

Chorales voice three  
features of articulation.

The voice  
of labiodental

dirty things  
as in the places

they like to play.  
They tongue

alveolar trills  
in their manner

of speaking. They sing  
scientific round mouth sound.

## Talkin' Crazy

This our broken-hearted  
crazy day. We in awe, her crazy  
Colombian Felipe, touched silver  
barnacles on river rocks, said they were  
like gems, crazy for the Indian River,  
for the wind on it like her. We crazy, we say  
that Mario, that crazy Rican, had a mouth  
like a god, drove me crazy, like a god.  
They ain't gon' change, girl. They crazy, girl—  
but the moon's been hiding for a few days now,  
maybe they're okay these days, for now, maybe  
we're all okay, be okay for a few days, anyway—

A Circus of the Mind

- after Lawrence Ferlinghetti

a terrible island of the mind's soul  
your abstract landscapes  
the wing-tails of a spray-painted  
'50-something Cadillac so  
and so because it doesn't matter the name  
the game of the jetstream  
of oblivion wherein a wounded  
wilderness dreams of bird nests  
and old Italians sing on the streets  
of San Fran  
we are mindless prairies *in flattering*  
*falsehoods of sleep*  
the tender dogs huff and bay with belled  
antlers on their heads

## Slut Shamer

I stay in the shallows—  
everyone knows  
if fish are jumping  
it's because something  
is chasing them  
plus I saw a fin so I know  
there's a shark in the water  
(my daughter says it's only my imagination)  
but I know a guy who works at the hospital  
who flies in helicopters with doctors  
and he told me sharks are always  
right on the periphery of swimmers  
and I believe him  
so I have a plan.  
The eye poke is said to be the most effective.  
I stay in the shallows with the seaweed  
and when it brushes up against me  
I tell myself it's only seaweed  
not shark bait  
and I can even eat this seaweed  
if I'm ever stranded and starving,  
it's amazing, I can eat it  
with a little vinegar  
or hot sauce,  
but what about the other swimmers,  
what if the shark bites someone.  
I think it might bite that girl  
with the bikini bottom going up her ass,  
I can almost see her hooaha in front  
kind of like the suit used to fit her  
and she's hanging on to the last shred  
of youth she has but in my opinion  
time has not been a good friend to her  
and I don't know, I guess she could've been  
my friend at one point but who needs  
kinda skinny kinda flabby friends so I'm afraid  
the shark is going to attack her  
because her female parts are hanging out all over the place  
and he can smell them  
but then I'm jealous because she has blonde hair  
and why doesn't the shark attack me  
(it's obviously a male shark  
maybe a tiger or bull)

and I'm sure he's the mayor  
of his underwater town,  
I mean, these fish are jumping  
like crazy for him. He must be super hot,  
and you know, sometimes you're the hammer  
and sometimes you're the nail,  
so, hopes high, I swim out deep, big thighs  
rubbing together like a wreck of chunky meat lures.

## The Game

He eyes her in the WalMart shoe section  
She's fingering five-dollar flip flops

He thinks about Emily  
(The wife's name is always Emily)

But only because she's such a pain in the ass  
The husband's name is always Jim

But not today because he's about to get a blow job  
From the chick in the shoe section and she doesn't ask

Man she's hot and she's got a big mouth  
Goddamn Lake Superior big

Enough to swallow him up in the back room  
Behind two dirty gray doors that swing and slop

Back and forth behind tiny tanks of fighting  
Fish they float at the top of the water suck dead air

Iridescent purple like this girl's toenails  
He grabs the metal shelf full of boxes of Pine-Sol

Mountains of washcloths and not-quite Yankee  
Candles that smell like a winter cabin

His vantage point dazzles (the crisp part of her hair)  
This chick is good she's doing real good now

She coaxes him good he's swimming now  
It's snowing now snow on the lakeshore

His drops of wetness he's careful  
Not to touch her young smell like something

Sky blue this kind of thing really happens  
In a WalMart storage room he just came

To buy some chips for the game  
What was the name of the team he likes

Maybe he'll buy some charcoal maybe  
He'll grill she gives him her number she hopes

He'll call her tomorrow she's got a great set  
Of stemless wine glasses she's been dying to use

## What Ever Happened to Heather

For here were tequila shots  
and trivia nights  
so finely served to us  
on the finest of social  
media sites, I think  
we ignored the sadness  
effervescing weekly into her curly hair.

And didn't we take her word as gold,  
for there were tigers  
under story-beds  
and a blog of the finest  
quality ego-written  
cuss words, I think  
we deafened ourselves  
to the distant Twitter of some far off gun,

for pain is a doorway into the soul.  
For we thought she invited us in.

O axes of Heather,  
her Heather words,  
susurrus of Heather,  
Heather wine glass,  
Penelope-Heather,  
5K runner Heather,  
sky of Heather, blue eye Heather,  
the things we lost in the war  
of Heather, the fire of Heather,  
of overwintered Heather,  
Heather wife, our Heather yoga sister,  
how we longed to be  
Heather, to follow  
Heather migration patterns,  
cook Heather paleo-cups,  
wear a tiara as only  
the how-to of Heather could,  
for here we are abruptly  
without her, nothing but a salient silence  
of absence, the disappearing ghoul  
of our incommunicado  
Heather tomorrow.

For the myth of Heather,  
for a friend is a stranger.

## Tiffany Takes a Selfie

External connections pulse all up in this club.<sup>1</sup>

A Lazarus body weeps for what makes it worth rebirth.<sup>2</sup>

Reductive representations of signals signify arbitrary significance.<sup>3</sup>

A tattoo in the shape of a felted bird equals permanent ennui.<sup>4</sup>

Phrases of three predictably tell how to how to don't do.<sup>5</sup>

The most important thing is the feeling inside that you're going to win.<sup>6</sup>

Gala in Dalí wears fiesta time on naked shoulders.<sup>7</sup>

We hang on plastic clotheslines like white cotton shirts.<sup>8</sup>

#Hashtag cigarette Valencia filter.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Grinding; feeling one another; if only for a few moments.

<sup>2</sup> The perpetuity of the Internet will keep a picture alive forever.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Can the inadequacy of language<sup>b</sup> be replaced by the adequate language of the deuce in a selfie? Btdubs, nice nail polish, Tiffany.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>4</sup> A permanent picture of a real bird is more interesting than a permanent picture of an artificial one.

<sup>5</sup> Fiction writers frequently write sentences in phrases of three;<sup>d</sup> Tiffany is writing her autofictionography.<sup>e</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Believe in yourself, not your selfie.

<sup>7</sup> Warped wife-selfies.<sup>f</sup>

<sup>8</sup> We blur into sameness.<sup>g</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Per Wikipedia (the most reliable source of knowledge on the Internet), “the hashtag symbol (#) is a type of label or metadata tag used on social network and microblogging services which makes it easier for users to find messages with a specific theme or content.” “Valencia” is a photo filter that people use when they take selfies to make themselves look good. Tiffany looks good while smoking a cigarette; she must post this selfie to Instagram so others will tell her how cool and good she looks. She will feel better about herself if many people (preferably 100+) tell her how cool and good she looks.<sup>h</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." #OdeOnAGrecianUrn.

<sup>b</sup> Language is inadequate at times; it confuses relationships/people in general. All one has to do is look at a Field Service Postcard from WWI.

<sup>c</sup> A "deuce" in a selfie is when a person takes a picture of herself showing the "V" of the peace sign; a popular selfie pose. "Btdubs" is slang for "btw" which is an acronym for "by the way." Because Tiffany is throwing a "deuce," we can see her nail polish in the selfie.

<sup>d</sup> A rhetorical device called "tricolon"; the selfie generation is learning how to be human while living in these socially created tricolon media fictions.

<sup>e</sup> A made-up word meant to mean a fictional autobiography.

<sup>f</sup> Time persistently melts.

<sup>g</sup> Someone asked me if there are such things as plastic clotheslines. This person has obviously never had to hang clothes on a plastic clothesline to save money. #SomePeopleShopAtDollarTreeSomePeopleDon't.

<sup>h</sup> #HenryThoreauSaidTheBestThatYouWriteWillBeTheBestThatYouAre.\*

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\*#IAmNothingWithoutYou.

## Cemetery Flowers

I walk five hundred lines in my mind return to that story I've read a hundred times wonder how soon is now when will these drawers close right how now till black chalk images of murdered boys under floorboards fade into erasure how small we look when we die smaller than a fluttering wee grassquit wings tied to our sides the march of the wounded lost in a funhouse of nothingness an unheard throb of memory's scent of muddied and muddled histories dank against underground tombs and animal balloons Delta Dawn what's that flower you have on could it be a faded rose from days gone by did I hear you say love's unfolding dream is locked inside this tin of rosy powder that smells like your dead grandmother she was a drinker who wrote messages on paper napkins balled up in her dark coat pockets I use it every night move in the darkness like a sharp wind instrument but I'm only reminded of that John Wayne Gacy song a mellophone tone gone wrong with impatience.

## Swing Split Scene

Here, on the hammock, is the truth of things.  
She meditates, eyes closed, morning sun.  
She rocks back and forth, to and fro like a child  
on a swing, the sling's green and white-striped canvas giving  
way to adult weight. Big trees hanging above move  
with the ebb and flow of the wind  
as she floats in the curve  
of the hammock, a babe,  
crook of its mama's bent arm.  
The truth of her, her things, is here under the dancing  
oaks, waving leaves wavering in the wind's gusty rhythms,  
lusty rhythms of this place.

She begins the back and forth game she plays  
as she swings, her brain fighting  
*She shifts her weight gingerly, careful  
not to topple the tense-strung fabric and overturn...*  
her body, a duel to the death,  
to the truth. She is a shadow,  
*though the dewy dirt below the hammock frame  
seems almost inviting. She tries to think before...*  
her matter is over her mind,  
her sensibility versus sense,  
*moving her body, to control  
whatever strange urges might come over the thing...*  
her lust close, hard up against love,  
this forever shuck to the left, the left,  
*the body constantly defying her  
to let loose, lose control, for a little bit...*  
left, land of soymilk and honey in all its gooey  
forms, freedom, forgiveness, to the left,  
*harmless, heaven-less, it's all a mess, in her head.*  
everything she owned in a box  
to the left after he kicked her out. Her desires,  
indiscretions, her sex.  
*You're a cheater  
just like your daddy, girl.*

This is her last lazy morning  
under the oaks. The old, comfy hammock  
is his, and he wants her to go. She moves  
as the hammock's rusty metal chains  
hold the fabric taut,

echo deep tuba bellows  
with each swing back and forth.  
She swings, waits, one last time, for the truth.

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