

The Scattered Brain Convalesces

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The Scattered Brain Convalesces

by

Sam Eliot LaMura

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Creative Writing
in the College of Arts and Humanities
and in the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
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Thesis Chair: Terry Ann Thaxton, MFA

Abstract

The intent for each poem in this thesis: To write without intent. I, ironically, intended to approach the writing process without considering the outcome of each poem. Some of the poems spiraled out of control, while others spiraled into focus. I do not always know what I'm thinking. It may be unfair to impose clarity on poems when clarity is not always part of experience. Each poem took self-examination to understand in the context of my own life. The proposal for this thesis, entitled, "The Unintended Approach," did not mention the unintended consequences of writing poems in such a way. Bursts of energy found their way into the writing. Only in reflection, did I realize that these bursts of energy were understandable in the context of personal memory.

This experiment in crafting poems, at times, left me confused. There are images I still can't seem to decipher. I have kept my belief that concise meaning in poetry is not the most important aspect of verse. With rapid urbanization, increased distortion created by fast-paced leaps in technology, and the evolution of celebrity awareness, the world we write in, is not the world we were written into. I have written each poem into their own place on page—allowed them their own discoveries without my approval. People behave in a way that is often erratic. My experience is intrinsic to what I have observed in my life; a schizophrenic cousin, a slurred maternal mouthing, uncles addicted to drugs or hope, for fame. My life has been a series of disjointed events. This thesis is a composite, not a copy. Genetic code is also a composite. Each poem has a life unlike my own. The goal of this collection was to allow these poems their own struggle to understand.

Dedication

For the one who snapped his belt to strike the air with pressure.

For the one whose name fell from summer.

For you, in all those photographs.

For you, in all those photographs.

For you, who taught me how to place these letters.

For you, with the engraved name.

For every strand of twisted helix that carried me here.

Acknowledgements

These poems are the result of memory. There are many people who will not flee from a place so rooted in the cables of synapse. Terry Thaxton gave time and warm-hearted welcome to work that left others, myself sometimes, shivering in doubt. Her drive has inspired me to renew my poetic license. Travis Kiger used pliers to pull a frog from my throat. I was afraid of the pliers. I was afraid of my voice. There were many people. Each name has been a gift.

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La Mura, The Wall

there was
a war in which a king, carried
by my name, swallowed fists of snow and told men
with frost-limbed uniform what they would face
the wind and its silk
slur, a demon coughing
the souls of many others
shivering also in their bodies
the fruits of the soil
and the blood that will
feed the roots
we are that which falls upwards he may have said
even then not knowing he meant heaven

we must swallow our swords, we must bury the promise
of home not knowing if they would return, not knowing
again that home meant heaven
we are the coffin splintered and hot
iron smoldered
we are a memory that will stand like a wall
because we are
forever stapled into those who succeed us
we are the apotheosis, the godsend grown to god,
the fear instilled then spilt like refuse in our gutters
he may have said

this name did not end tragically in a fight
or a white field stained
this name remembers how some have
held it like a child in homes too small
and dry to cook with fire
this name has been cradled by
walls or rather saved them from falling
this name did not forget itself, it did not shake like a dog
in the rain
it is brick and mortar, concrete spilled through a funnel
mud and shit dried in the sun, a thousand protesters
arms interlocked, it is stucco homes in suburban neighborhoods
it is many dead men in a pile,
royal crown gold and royal crown red hovering
like fog in San Francisco and just as fast and just as thick

it became a father who was beaten by another father
became a father who left home when he was doused
in gasoline, it became a mother who died too
young and every person saw the opened casket

this name is a jaw unhinging
 meaning to swallow all it can, so long
 as it can still swallow
 meaning to speak itself over, to iterate
 the way it has withstood the erosion
 of movement, it sinks into pockets

like smooth stones rolled from the river
each tooth and lip that holds it back
and also those that loose it

once built by a king
given to a soldier
given to each that came after

it is laminated and static in the folds
of my wallet, bulging with the footstep
of five-hundred years marching

Yukon Gold

I peel each potato and apologize
for being so brutal. I say sorry
for stripping the skin. I imagine
there will be bones beneath
as if the film of flesh is a sheet of dirt
above a body placed in a hole long ago.

I dice the wet globes, pale as if in shock
and sweep the contents of the cutting board
into a pot of boiling salt-water. My face fogs
with steam and I wait for the oblong cubes
to soften. I strain it all. Mash it with two full
sticks of butter like my mother taught
me when I was six. There is too much to eat

and I knew this before I started. I apologize
for my violence while the ghost of her fingers
grips the back of my fists as I work.

Morality

Dogs chased me into a neon bush
where hands and thorns left ribbons of cells
on my clothing. I am not collapsing like a prisoner.
I am holding out for my future, full of heavy heave

and new phase. A killer by association, blue eye(s) in the knot
of my neck tie. Diablo sucking face in my near-sightedness
and flagrant myopia. Pictures of bodies with holes
are tagged with my teeth. I am full of saline ebullience.
At the end of a spotlight I placed my alabaster palm and watched

the light collide with flaked skin, my fortune
in the lines. I remember a scream unfolding into a face
I'm still afraid of. My childhood home has settled in my bones
and like a sturgeon, I harden. Like a dream, I fade

and cause confusion. These signals in my head are pictures
of the people I've wounded, their names on my tongue
like sawdust. My own name, a glitter tick. A trembling
handshake. A façade or a front. My swagger.

Absently Minding the Ghost

you settle over me
like a wool blanket

I scratch until blister
until crater
the jaw-clench leaves
me toothless
a mouthful of sand

sometimes you are oscillating
a still bark into the pillow

I am beside the same pillow
swallowing all sound
and sand until I am

inside rugged
my organs the callous
the gulps they take
to enter your still
born growth

water meets faucet
moths find glowing bulb

I am some statue with liquid
eyes standing guard
above a yoga mat

you exhale for the dead-line
in the cavern voice

of your father

What Hunger Causes

A constellation falls from its proper place, collapses in the mind of Jupiter, lightning crushes a skull, tick chicken, snapped bones with the marrow sucked out. America with stained lips, grinning. Florida tries to pull herself off the mainland, drifting into the Atlantic. We beat each other with blunt objects and fall forward into prisons where penance is expected but never given. Prisons revolve until each prisoner reeks of freedom. Makes the jailbird's skin crawl. My limb departs like a parent. My skin unhinges like breakdown. I am six and stealing pencils to build fires for the lead poison bloom. I am crossing over the border where lockers hum and dogs explode. A scissor cuts a sound from the air, like a chunk of flesh, it is cooked in a skillet until the pitch is golden and crispy. On a plate the sound is not thunder. On a table the sound is crashing into the porcelain beneath it, cracking the heirloom, ruining the dinner, bleeding into the cloth an orange stain.

post[maternal]
feb. 8, 2005

i haven't seen the box but it's born
a tempest.

my eyes swell with
storm & cigarette

ashed & failed heart.
my apartment is a box
my head is a

box, for every fleeting
soul I feel misguided skin &
red-lipped promises.

she promised the pills
away & they listened.

my ear to the wall, a shiver.

The Meal

I want to be a bastard bomber that sets
the bastard bomb adrift.
I want tiny flakes of gold to move through water
 where the tips of fingers touch,
reach up to a tongue and release.
I want feather-light to lift me the way mold
 spreads across hunger.
 It's tension, knotted wind or a kink

in movement from home to hallelujah. All the people
sing it, some with glass eyes spinning in their caves,

 a god's way of saying,
eat the meal. Eat the plates and the glasses
and the silverware. Eat the table. Eat the chairs.
When there is nowhere left to sit
 swallow space
 swallow void
 swallow swallow.

 Blood moves with you
 and through you
swirling in the melt of things, in the stringy
tendons that make us move.

I want a ghost in the attic to keep its ghost-mouth
shut. I don't want wisps
of words slipping through the ceiling.

I don't want the pain of being pure at heart.
I have no heart I can see without radiation.

I am pure like a home. I am cell-struck. Each one rattles
like an iron knee. Each knee built with six-fingered hands
 held in the heat.

I am sun-blistered, mouth open
and full of empty light, pulling
at the parts of myself that swing
out like a child
 or the legs of fish

when they tried to bury themselves in mud,

when the mud
was made a mix of water and old stone
stunned to bits by time.

This, I know, to be the start of something. Not fear
but it feels like dense iron and steel.
Taste the powder of it in a pool below
an electric saw.

You can promise away a kidney
and be proud. You can sink into the floor
of a casino and grip a coin tight

to your chest.

You can hurry for the bottom
with pale-blood that blurs every wall until you're drunk
and confused by the word sanctuary. Until a new language
leaves you shocked stiff
among the boulders.

I want pistons to push
me forward into this beginning.

This beginning may be difficult
to see through the window.

This beginning is starved, so a god says
eat the meal
if any is left.

Woody Allen is Afraid to Die

I.

Everything is black ink
dripping like a finger-tap
from our gutter-mouths.

II.

Everything is birdcall
and tapas, mother Gosling
and ugly Ducts.

III.

Everything wants to bite
at the feet of seniors
as they're wheeled from the plane.

IV.

Everything makes us
cheat on lovers while they ice
their lips with frost and froth.

V.

Everything created a boy with more grit
than granted. Forgive him for following
through, he only meant to break his knuckles.

VI.

You did not cause Everything. Everything
caused you, and this thinking—you
know

that after Everything, Something
new will give to sparks. Oh, dear Casablanca.
Oh, a deer. A stag. A stiff-antlered

face on the wall. Play it again, Sam—
I'm trying to talk
to myself.

Where We Place Our Prayers

The coffin wheeled to the mausoleum after the ceremony. The dirt from my hands delivered for her from the shore of the Dead Sea. This is holy, says the rabbi when he fills my empty hands like coin to a beggar. His fingers like arrows point east as he says the word Israel, the words Promised Land and *Zion* where prayers are pressed into the receding mortar of the Western Wall, pockmarked with the touch of humbled hands. The wall here is smooth, I may only bury my prayers in a palm, into the dirt packaged and sent to spread on her casket, to bring the Promised Land to her grave—a hole in the wall.

I imagine the Voice of Israel, across the water, in warped circles on the surface of the Salty Dead. This isn't a burial even though earth is in her tomb, so I'll wait for her ghost to return from the mausoleum, west from either wall, nearly new.

Jerusalem's faith

is the sound
 of a shofar
carried back
 across
 the Nile
 in a paper basket

He Calls Her Dead-Weight

Jessica says she misses me
before she breaks a hollow egg-shell
over my head. She is skinny noise,
the popping hum of cinema film-strip.
Jessica is hungry. Her mouth is reanimated
dead-weight. There are no stars,
only pinpricks of needle-light
from the neon pen she stuck firmly in the wall.
When she tells me she loves me I say
thank you, drive my car around
and park it in a fist.
Jessica wants to be cocaine-happy.
Jessica wants this all to be platonic.
Why bother with the damp body-tremble?
The bone-dry gut-sounds. The holy
hand placed to cheek in the freeze,
the movement static. The ear-bite
beside the budding no-name flower.
Jessica's eyes bloom wide with a dose
of molly. Wider with a bong pull.
All the skinny noise leaves her breathless
so she pulls and pulls, fakes a moan and pulls.
She is three-hundred fifty miles thinner.
I can carry her on a fishhook so I do.

Zombie References “*God is Dead*” to Justify Existence

i.

the first time she said hallelujah
 a dead dog
 fell from her mouth

 I tried to bury the dog
but it bit off my hand
 so I killed it again and

thus she spoke it once more, hallelujah

ii.

I found a knife
in my back

pulled it out slowly so I could
hear the metal grind

from the sound I could tell
it was serrated
like a good knife should be

iii.

if Nietzsche was right
then we were the ones
created in God’s image

iv.

the dog’s rotting mass has me
 thinking about
 going back to church
to drink the holy water

The Amalgam Attempting to Speak for the First Time

yeah. maybe. sometimes.
they leave a fresh/pulled tooth
in the microwave as a fair/well note
yeah maybe some times
the toilet lid wants to speak while you piss
sometime(s)
maybe later, sometimes a mammoth
is frozen like a Polaroid in ice sometimes
the door jams carpet gets all dirty
a finger's print spirals on the mirror
printer breaks then screams at you
for abusing it abuse the system settings
on a computer sum timez

we staple freshly skinned
furs to neighbors' doors
we shake hands until blisters fuse
we Google Bill Murray
maybeyeahsometime
we talk to Bill Murray in our dreams
about independent films becoming
the ironic new main/stream

yeahmaybesometime
we howl like closed windows in someone's
bathroom anyone/anyone
our throats so full of plate glass
when we speak we spread light

sometimes we die in a hospital
sometimes someone goes missing
and all we find is a molar

we've teeth enough for a denture(d) retirement

yeahyeahyeah
to the checklist of missing personas
yes to the unruly child pounding
his fists on the glass from
the inside of a mason jar
yes to the hip hop reference in the slip

of a tongue
yes to the howl of too many rogue scribes
yes, please, thank you for your time

yeah sometimes they shove
you out the door into *The Street (of Crocodiles)*
all asleep, that tension

sometimes you refuse to attend the wake

sometimes you visit a grave and still don't
die sometimes the grave is empty sometimes
you carve an epitaph in the trunk of a tree just chopped

it is a perfect epitaph
yeahmaybesometimes
it is a perfect epitaph

to honor a dish sponge you threw out yesterday

The Body: four patches.
The Stomach: one patch broken open.
The Autopsy: heart failure.
Buddy: You may only die of heart success.

IX. From the solstice, we recover
From the blue-tipped highrise, we recover
From our parents' death, we recover
Ash calls itself snow sometimes.

X. Titles: Glitter Tick(s), My Swagger, The Gun Jammed but I Still Ran like an Electric Cat
Anyway, I Don't Remember My Dreams, Patience Lost like Snake Skin, Skinning
Snakes' Skin, Cell Division and Limited Production and Formatted like Wall Paper.

X. Skin is a congregation of walls.

- The Flat Universe

To the queens who can't keep their heads
attached. To the flat-faced monsters we keep
from hatching. Build me an ossified fortress
from the remains of white stars—diamonds.

- The Closed Universe

A solemn dragon burns the air from a room.

- The Open Universe

Stretched into silence like ourselves
when all small-talk has shed into silk.
Our eyes to a wall of worry. Skin taped
to the dream where the body couldn't stand
the ghost falling like sand but the soul
stuck in the taste of water.

I remember them mounting the marble tile locking her box in a
spot no light could enter as if home was here as home was the
center.

Now

(,) regarding you (is)
(like) holding (a) lucid dream(s)
Day may burn them Gone

(home) ... (home)

... (home) ...

•

••

••

The Anti-Apotheosis

I do not know who follows my mass or snaps
at my static. Call 911. Call my grandma. Hold
a plastic bag in a windstorm. Grandma's jaw
is soft. Grandma's jaw is Jewish. It is still a jaw.
Call man with motor and drill-bit.
Spit in a pond by a boat.
Kill a duck with your brain and say sorry.
Roast it into crisp fowl until its skin turns to wafer.
Sing a song about ghosts
and sinking ships on a camping
trip. I can bring woman.
I can bring my body. I can play your part.
This part has you kissing your own lips
against a bathroom mirror. Saliva
and glass, DNA and passion, guts and groping. Tracks
in sand say lost and stay in motion. Do not grow
old. Do not let your grinding knee moan
for transdermal patches.

Disbelief

I pull the skeins at the peak of your amber protein
to find the place where we dream about animals

with no eyes and too many teeth. The hum
of wild washes clean impurity. Toddlers
question us with full-throttle grin, open

land into a mesh of forest,
winding roots and burrow,
wavering dirt and bug bite,

slipping sunlight, art bark and bloom. Those who call
our names swell and breathe without opines.

When chests heave with hunger, emptiness
becomes communal sacrifice. When the roiling

folds of valley-talk flatten into commitment
and the blessed bless the best in us, I will hold
you like a ball of neon light. You'll bloom into a burst
of energy. I will chrysalis shell harden and feed

parts of myself to the parts of you that went missing
when the light struck. We, as if dead, will rise
like the split bone of home. Behind the front door,
a platform for time to stretch and give us memory

of parents that pulled apart to keep their children
together, blood loose in a midnight ambulance,

carriages made from finger and nail. Our families
didn't mean to disbelieve. The others didn't mean
to fall like leaves from branches that hang

like the arms of famished children.

Reading List

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