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A Montage in Its Leaves

Andrew S. Nicholson
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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A MONTAGE IN ITS LEAVES

by

Andrew Snyder Nicholson

Bachelor of Arts
Lawrence University
2004

Master of Fine Arts
California College of the Arts
2006

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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Department of English
College of Liberal Arts

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THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

Andrew Snyder Nicholson

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Donald Revell, Committee Chair

Julie Staggers, Committee Member

Claudia Keelan, Committee Member

Attila Lawrence, Graduate Faculty Representative

Ronald Smith, Ph. D., Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies
and Dean of the Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

A Montage in Its Leaves

by

Andrew Snyder Nicholson

Dr. Donald Revell Committee Chair
Professor of English
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

This dissertation consists of a series of lyric poems preceded by an introduction to those poems. The introduction gives a background to the method of composition and historical precedents to the poems, connecting the lyric poems to the writing and thoughts of William Blake, Martin Heidegger, and Robert Creeley. The poems are presented in three parts, and cover a variety of subjects, frequently favoring the presentation of subjective experience over an imagined objectivity.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing of his painting *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, William Blake differentiates between two ways of seeing: his way, which emphasizes Imagination and Vision, and the standard way of seeing, which is antithetical to his art. Imagining his opponents, Blake gives their view and his reply: “What it will be Questiond When the Sun rises do you not see a round Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea O no no I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight I look thro it & not with it” (565-566).

Blake’s comment continues to surprise me and continues to instruct my writing. It continues to surprise me because Blake refuses what one ordinarily sees when looking at the sun: an object, round in shape that seems to glow or be made of fire. Refusing a basic fact like the sun’s appearance makes Blake a writer that it is easy to discount, and it does not surprise me that this writer, who refused the ground of the standard accounts of the world, was for years dismissed as insane instead of a poet that should be taken seriously. Blake, though, is not unaware that “a round Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea” is the standard account. He does not give a different description of the sun under some delusion that his understanding is the common understanding. Instead he places his vision against the standard description, repeating his refusal of it as he marks his account as one to contend with the usual understanding.

What Blake refuses is the imagined objectivity in the standard description of the sun. (This is, after all, the poet who railed against Newton and faulted Voltaire and Rousseau for their belief on logic over spirit, warning them, “Mock on, mock on; ‘tis all

in vain!”) Blake’s imagined opponent seeks to give that objective description of the sun, employing simile in order to clarify how the sun can be recognized. The result rhymes with the economic guinea: like the guinea, the sun is presented as an object separate from consumers; while the guinea can be exchanged between economic agents, the simile exists so the sun can be identified and exchanged between speaker and audience (compare the sun’s exchangeable identification to Blake’s untransferable rapture); and while guinea and simile exist as rhetorical fictions, based on socially agreed upon values of money or language, Blake’s reply is belief—it gives only a glimpse of an experience that innately holds value for Blake, regardless of how it will be socially experienced.

Blake’s alternative privileges giving an account of the experience of the sun over imagining an objective description exists. His alternative depicts an excited relationship with the sun, an excitement where not the viewer but the viewed intones “Holy Holy Holy.” The choir sings as viewer and viewed enter into a relationship built on the shared spiritual ground upon which their experience stands. No one exists outside viewer, viewed, and the ground they share, and the viewed stands as an equal with the viewer, not a reproducible, exchangeable object but the unfathomable (“Innumerable”) face of the overwhelming other.

Blake’s alternative is a kind of phenomenology: He knows the ordinary understanding of the sun but has bracketed it and set it aside so that he can report his experience of its phenomena. He does not give an objective account that imagines itself apart from the subject-object relationship or that imagines the subject can dominate and know its object. Instead, his account is consumed by that subject-object relationship. Experiencing the overwhelming otherness of the sun, Blake reports that the sun has a

power and glory that is not only *like* the Heavenly host shouting, it has such immediacy that he must say it *is* the Heavenly host if he is going to be honest about that immediacy. (Charles Altieri has succinctly makes a similar point, writing about the Modernist poets: “Perhaps where the passions are at stake radical metaphor is closer to the unrepressed reality. Perhaps treating someone as a lion eager to kill serves better than simile to capture the intensity, and even the ontology, of rage” (39).) He writes what the sun *is* in its most immediate sense; he is ontologically honest and gives an account of its being.

As I have written the poems of this collection, it has surprised me less and less that most of Martin Heidegger’s late lectures begin with a consideration of a poem, whether that poem comes from Höelderlin, Trakl, or Novalis. It has surprised me less and less that on his post-World War II trip to France, the person whom the German ontologist most wanted to meet was the great French poet René Char (Of course he wanted to meet the author of those fragmentary and axiomatic poems that have so often been compared to the pre-Socratics philosophers to whom Heidegger pointed for the birth of ontology). The best lyric poems enact phenomenology and ontology, not dogmatically but as a result of the poet’s close attention to the world.

In American poetics, this attention to phenomenology and ontology is most fiercely maintained in the poems of Robert Creeley. In “A Sense of Measure,” he writes: “I am more interested, at present, in what is *given* to me to write apart from what I might intend. I have never explicitly known—before writing—what it was that I would say. For myself, articulation is the intelligent ability to recognize the experience of what is so given, in words” (487). The poem cannot be pre-determined before its composition because this would be to ignore the ontological and phenomenological fact of the

moment of composition. Using the poem as a vehicle through which to present an already determined idea effaces that moment of composition.

Poems such as “Midnight” demonstrate Creeley’s attention to the moment of poetic composition itself:

When the rain stops
and the cat drops
out of the tree
to walk

away, when the rain stops,
when the others come home, when
the phone stops,
the drip of water, the

potential of a caller
any Sunday afternoon. (209)

If the poem had been “explicitly known” before its writing, surely this result would need to be read as a disaster. The poem lists a few facts that occur one afternoon, loosely strung together in roughly two beat quatrains, but cannot maintain even this simple organization. Instead of maintaining its organization, the poem irregularly moves between a rhyming structure and no rhyme, between its semi-regular two strong beats and

all the rhythmic exceptions, and by the end, even the quatrain has broken down to a couplet.

This rickety poem can only be appreciated by appreciating the moment of its composition. All the structural failures I just described suddenly become the poem's assets: no regular rhyme, no regular meter, and no regular stanzas become pragmatic decisions made in the moment and later abandoned—*pragmatic*, as opposed to the prefabricated organization of set meter, set rhyme scheme, and set stanzas. This pragmatism can also be found in that repetition of “when the rain stops.” The repetition begins the poem again. Having followed the “given” outside with the cat dropping from the tree, Creeley reaches a dead end and starts over, this time seeking what is “given” inside the house.

The poem starts over again. It starts in a new direction, but starting again does not erase what has come before. As much as I can, I have sought to find where the poem starts over—starting over from sentence to sentence, line to line, word to word, even syllable to syllable. The great poem strives to be entirely new in each moment, not for the sake of surprising with novelty but to recognize that it *is*. It is not a product of fancy. It is the child of imagination, newly born at every moment.

SECTION 1

DIDYMUS

1

A twin to me,
beyond the catch
of my eye. I know a little bit
about my ghost and me.
We see the same thing look back
from hills to my eye.
We never tell the truth of it
but try and find imagination where
the dream slides further.

Say chariot and it races.
Say a cherry and feel sweet and red and tonguey.
The tongue is in, is here, and in
here is the world. My ghost
puts a hand on my face, doubling
my touch: I too am here.

2

Hills and furrows weave the muscles'
warp and weft.

Ley lines entwine me, draw me,
open and hold a hand, a face.

The red cloth speaks inside its fissure,
opens and holds another body.

The red cloth folds and unfolds multitudes:
it is both crowd and shore.

3

We came to the shore and saw a boat approaching. It carried a dozen passengers who stood while the boat sped over the water. The hull barely touched the water's surface, the keel cutting through. The water briefly parted, then filled the cut smooth.

The ship reached the shore, and when the passengers unloaded onto the sand, the boat turned and soon passed into the darkness. The passengers approached us, talking and believing we knew something about this place, but we too were beginning.

One knew me and called me by name. He was a friend I had last seen years ago, a dear friend who stood in my memory and now stood here in the sand before me. I knew he had a beautiful voice and asked him to sing.

LENYA TO WEIL, 1928

Tucked in a long sunrise that rose
to where the midday sun was waiting.
The bass notes' low tide still wiggles deep
in my smaller toes, a grasp—
that first grasp still holds.

If you cast me back inside, cast me
back inside. The future is a new idea,
a truth arriving unannounced. Your fame
will go through my voice.
Why not sing a duet to
the morning's birds, perched and ready?

THEIR ROOTS RAIN DOWN CAN RAIN

No ash or dirt.

The white wood is perfectly uneven,
ready for the goldfinch's soft claw.

My hands are empty and open.

I am surrounded by sunflowers—their smooth
perk brought by hands
that aren't mine, hands I love.

One star frays in a sun,

one flower

frays, stars: its colors

run a river.

This is my grandfather's river, sunflower,
and your disheveled adoration smirks,
burns and burns and laughs.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Promenade with the white candle,
he inches from puddle to mud.
The coat covers,
then bares the wick the hand shields.
The wind can't disturb the flame
that plucks
to nothing. Relight. The wind
is a MacGuffin in the enduring film take.

I watch his chalk-streaked
hair under Italian clouds
on a screen, twenty-eight years later.
I am just a pinch in the smidgen left,
the nine-
minute shot in the darkened
room, lighting the room with whittled-

down splicings. The pickpocket
rehearses his trade on a hanging
jacket in another film, for instance:
this is all
that's left of the last century
that we drove to the edge of the scenic
overlook one Sunday
to show it the distance from one to one,
brick to bedrock, towhee,
through the urban backdrop, darting
up into the relit exposure.

ASK THE CUCKOO

for Sylvia, Laurel, and Chris

I leave the library and the lunch crowd
is outside, mulling around the sidewalk,
and there's Laurel leaving class
for the office to see Chris and eat lunch,
which I already had so I can't eat with them.
Saturday, we say, we all could have lunch
and see birds at the preserve when Sylvia's around,
but her family comes in on Saturday but maybe
Friday will work if Laurel checks with Chris,
if I check with Sylvia, if the birds aren't busy.

Laurel walks for the office and I walk
toward my car, a little aimless, mostly thirsty.
It's hot and sunny, and I'm thinking
about the birds, how I got to the desert
in summer when they were somewhere else,
somewhere less hot, how scared I was to not see them.
I know these birds' names, I don't know those,
I know a couple Medieval poems
with birds in them—*Parliment of Foules*, "Loude
sing cuckou!"—the only cuckoo I've seen,
singing six centuries the coming summer,
the same song in vowels I love
because they're unsaid and mine.

FOR APOLLINAIRE

1

My tulips push for the bedspread,
the light blue walls, the stained carpet,
reach, fading, for anything
after the thick-lipped vase, too wide to stop them.
Their browning leaves are a first condition,
the dirt, the bulb's skin writing at last
a starting place, home marking them, writing
a poem, Guillaume, I read again,
a first condition, another decade wrote me.

From red to green all yellow dies,
a new bird in the morning, translated
on a worn lobby couch one Ohio winter.
I read your "Fenêtres," ice thickening on the sidewalk
the year the wind grabbed my small umbrella
and sailed me away from my destination,
Paris, Vancouver, New York, the Antilles
sailing through your poem to end with ripened sun,
sweet in the mouth, several mirages.

The blue-tiled sky of Isfahan stayed
through the cold months, spaciouly arid,
and now my walls are that sky you wrote
between the Caspian and the Persian, the texture
on the walls—little clouds, long before the storm—
Tehran larger than Isfahan, tumultuous cords
trapping the shop-clerks with the bad kings,
worse than any war you could hope for, Guillaume,

friend I learned to sing, friend I read
to Dana, my friend who might be walking
again in that building where I find you, a first
condition, not stopping us,
just always there with love, with rough
remaking—the tulips into a tree, a montage
in its leaves, flipping through frames with the breeze,
your portrait there, between the leaves,
between the seas, asleep in the yellow desert,
between two cities, two stitches, or two Norwegian ships,
one life in another, among the lives of others.
I reach for you and everything arriving after.

2

I could have called to say
the cat wants out on the porch or say
you're still asleep, didn't this wake you up—
no, the poem isn't
loud enough to do that heavy lifting.
It was more possible than probable,
a dream I'm having while awake,
a rare book in a dumpy thrift store,
my cat's grace, which is how
she loves me, lying in the shade.

The doll bed by the planter box
is ragged as any telegram
come to replace the cellular phone
in my pocket with pure presence
of wires connecting this to that
on back to Chicago, to cottage days,
the dream to the real, which is what
André Breton meant: no division.
Utopia scuttles off to nostalgia.

That's all right, there's hope
for me yet, I'm coming to the day's
reckoning. The plane comes in
to land, new continent
glimpsed from the window.
It's a first expedition where flower
is fauna, animal a kind of construction, hotel
from words, the remnant
poem living.

3

I'm standing by your tree in colors
born in the mirror's cracking, light
hitting the edge with rainbows
around us as colors nestle
in the carpet
between the bumpy wall and the white
curve of molding running the floor,
and one arc flavors my hand,
ranging spectrum, settled, a sentimental
poem promising nothing will follow.

Nothing comes after you.
Because of you, I was never born, unsettled
in silent typographies withered on the painting's
inch of newsprint. Too many
languages for your last day to reach
the edge of your next day—France
disappears with sonorous chants
hooraying through the trenches, Germany
evaporates with its watery spirit
talking to itself, said to itself, chatting
echoes that drop and decay.

Nothing comes after you, and the moment
after that, your tree splits colors.
The world's silent text rustles
in wind, though the page doesn't turn,
the words arranged by chance, set here
by routes each letter allotted itself.

NEW PALS

1

This sad faced idol, dark-eyed, starting to smile (it's still just a hint), walks from chance to chance, the hornet's sting, the benevolent gossip. He runs the tortuous path halfway down the valley's side, runs through pearl and purple flowers, freshly broken grass.

The thousand verdant smells rush from the depth with voices behind them. First unseen, then as he enters the clearing, lost children peek between the trees: "Mother, where are you? Take us with you."

Don't look glum—now's the time for hide and seek.

2

Light broke the jade.

Who built the parade?

Paraders did, dressed as kings from once-upon kingdoms, from Habsburg, Bohemia, Aragon, Anjou. Names line up beside them, yelling their noises one after the other. The paraders yell their names, half-embarrassed and determined.

3

Night drags a thick line through the dirt. The spring night hides its flowers, and a snake darts past the campfire.

The idol can't go further by himself. It takes two generous hands, ghostly and strong, that bring a generous lift: he dreams a bird lifts him, flying while fire burns his shut eyes—he wakes up between a wall and the ocean.

The drop from the cliff is bright. The morning is bright. He yawns, and the gate opens for him.

HOME VIDEO

The child in overalls and Crocs
grabs the storyteller's hair before the party
begins chanting their song, and he tugs
her lock twice before returning to dolls.
I'm the audience of the audience
of the story sing-songing in Spanish.
I'm waiting for an airplane to place
my anxiety square across the table from me.
Its engine growls in the distance.

The kid

pulls a blanket over his head and jumps, laughing.
No advice from the peanut gallery. The domestic
newsreel rolls to aid our memory
like the plastic cup or leftover lemon cake
becoming an artifact to find in tomorrow's
treasure hunt of the treasured
story, today, we tell some grandchild next week.

It's the same in the country
as the city and completely different, likewise,
by the airport or at the base of the mountain,
in woodsy air, scanning each family
arguing between tent and propane grill.
The critter brushing past my leg, the squirrel
crawled up my shoulder, creature
comforts: *papillons* in the butterfly house
find the crack in glass and fly past
my table outside the welcome center.

I'm the audience of the audience of the air-
traffic riffing off to the city
I'll walk back to, to square my back
against the wall of my apartment
and watch the party's spiral candles
melt this minute before fingers
pluck them from the cake and tuck
their colors back in the cardboard box.

MEMOIR

My story is written by another poet,
and she is the kindest fury.

I can go centuries before this town
was built, if the flood comes
and reminds the lawns what a river is.
A river is never repeating and leaving
your history in others.

Leave your history to others and go
to the well-groomed gardens.
I rewrote my story in this grass,
running by this brook, and rewrote it again,
excited to find a red bridge or thin statue.

SELF-PORTRAIT WITH BRUSHSTROKES

1

Always there, looking,
sharp or simple as the instant struck you, striking
without staying the same, you brimmed
the ceramic bowl with apples.

Nothing gives itself to control, and care
rushes from one dusting to the next swiftness.
My life is more open than the openness I—
grabbing at detritus around me, helter-skelter
over the Byzantine stones—prick into poem.

You were always looking forward toward the
parti-colored portraits, red and pink and yellow
on her face, as modern
as her hat's barbarity—greenish
and orangey above her daughter's face.
You were always looking for me.

2

Writing everyone's biography, Stein found, to her surprise, that she could write everyone's biography. Biography finds surprise in turns and colors found in seeing what she writes. I write and surprise myself in making me from everyone, and everyone is there, writing, turning to colors and me with purple brushing over my brow.

Stymied, still, written already and there or ready before or there. Before me, born before making, is me in me, and I surprise me from me, turning upward, purple, already eye around me, over my rising.

Democracy tyrannizes long duration
like a dinner party where I forget
who I am and telling
who I am becomes a dopey game, relaxing
in wit and grandiose lies. Forgetfulness
sets Tick and Tock together, characters
likeable in their insistence that each
is honest, singular, while the other lies.

Democracy tyrannizes duration, forgetful
of duration until it sloughs toward return,
heralded by the city's varied architecture,
residences young
as the automobile, structural walls
inspired by Sears and Roebuck, reiterated
across the suburban mosaic.

Forgetful, forgotten, fervent, I
am the hand's true mark. May
equality exact the distinctness of
my nose, my nostril from tomorrow's, grown
slightly larger? Democracy knows
too little to be bound,
 and Tick and Tock sit
in the drawing room, smoking pipes.
One looks at the other, looking
in a mirror, lifts his right
hand as the other lifts his left.
Two thighs turn out, legs kick, and cheek
to cheek, the twins still look the same.
Tick grabs Tock's tooth, and Tock bites Tick,
and—*poof*—they vanish,
and the room, the house vanish.
Smoke, dénouement: too little to be bound.

AUDIOLOGY OF RILKE

1

If I shout now, who'd hear
beyond the hop-sage by the mailroom
boxes, voices written in dozens,
greeting, "Shirley, I miss your
anklet stepping from the tub"
or, "John, wish you could make it
to the mountain with Dad and me—"

Who'd hear: tiny
ears, I guess, varmints at night.
The city dots its way up the valley,
and I'm not tired,
thinking about sound, its travel, the way
I touch things touching my touching,
phenomena a neat
trick we get to pull off and get
to be a "we" that way.

I come
before tonight, prior to self,
decibels reversing their wave to the onset
phonemes, negligible
as I first think to say the word
before etymology opens its lingo,
saying what says me when I write it down.

2

“Shirley, I miss your
anklet stepping
from the tub,” he wrote,
and where’d she get
that anklet and why’d
she go from Matthew

to another city, a new 10:30 custom?
Eggs Benedict slosh their opaque emulsion’s
runniness across the plate—
mysteries of other personal lives
are impersonally curious like this fork
working over the melamine plate. Every
so often, loss
occurs in the guess of narrative, Matthew
gone in his argument while Shirley
goes on through dailiness. Loss

is terrifying. The face,
unaccounted is terrifying
profusion, unaccounted
story in pock, crease
in the jowl, terrifying
threshold with errands, a drive,

two kids smoking one cigarette
on the door’s other side,
past well-worn sneakers on the mat.

3

And us,
when we touch, we evaporate.

We breathe out. We breathe
us out, each other's breath, away

to the ceiling-fan blade.
Eternal recurrence: a garnish,

by two strips of salmon, nets
more attention than the rerun

she glances. The sidelong
flare's not for your sight, missy,

she thinks later that night, after-
hours once the house-

warming's finished.
The empty new house (*if you're going*

to build a house) and us
(*first make sure you have some guests*):

a nest of blankets: two dogs
paw and curl around their warmth,

form a linguistic community,
silently plaiting their

hairs' hieroglyphs
before they rush for the door-chime.

CIRCLES

Language comes into itself.
The hand arcs crayon over paper—
Waxy petal, verb potted
in the arrangement: it's her skin,
the sculpted forehead and cheek
of this studio model.

She sits by the window before
the pill-box planter.
Brought into sight by sign,
she signs herself like correspondence
found in the desk drawer.

And he's housed with her
in the rib under glass.
They wait with the butterfly
or the butterfly is him and the glass
is her glass, gripped
in her right hand, and the glass circles
the pillar of water she empties
where the planter walls its plot of dirt
and the blossom the butterfly harasses.

Hothouse and houseless, circle around circle
forms the horizon beyond eye's small ability.
The eye is the first circle;
the horizon which it forms is the second,
Emerson writes, *in the second*
my copy typos as *is* and *in*
collide their wording, two flat planes
collapsing landscape
to a battle scene painted by Uccello:

blow-by-bow inside the orange grove,
the white horse rearing above the dead grid,
dirt, lances, helmet grounding
the clash while the hill wavers
with peasants and varlets carrying implements
to and fro as two knights turn their backs
to the canvas. They ride between road
and spotty landscape.
They are going away from the orangery.

SECTION 2

CÉZANNE FOR THE NEW YEAR

The hill's pinkish solitaire lifts,
dreamier than the geometric house drawn
among the shrubs. Shadows burr
the valley, smudge sky, run alleys
through the town's off-arrangement.
Could I live in this country, dissolving
with proverbs whisked through gutters?
Could I understand a year's
convoluted measure, breathier than my music?
What does a year say,
smeared atop year, atop year?

These streets open the decade.
Rough colors roll the pinkish through
all hours at once, and roars
that must be mine don't bug the equinox
sleeping near the hazy road.
Near the road, the undercoat
makes the most of an empty gesture
near the mist of corner near the hand.

Behind the painter's bald head, light
from a boy's shirt catches in the shutter,
carrying the white gleam centuries beyond
the rag. Now runs
from chance, instanter to show
the doctor with the thin twig
charms longer than his girth.

WHY YOU, PIERRE BONNARD?

He paints water transmuting her body, her skin
transparent bathwater, precise
desire in thick saturations,
the bathroom wall built in blocks,
made from land from a Klee painting.

Bonnard, though is French, not Swiss,
no geometrician, more of a colorist.
I'm surprised my attention is caught
by anything other than the dachshund,
that biographical happenstance, stately guard
silly on his square of carpet.

The dog is me. I am these colors.
Nothing in the dazzling afternoon belongs to me.
I am here, gone, can't keep
myself in the stickiness, the warm
countryside and can't move from my eye,
which keeps me by the body's navel, her white
chain in white tub, while I squirm.

Tasty apple, suburban refuge, awkward
revolutionary right behind—
I left nothing behind.
Kept here, the tense knee kept me.
I'm pretending there's a story to tell.

Pretence means starting out from home,
and no one waits in that elsewhere.
Sink into the bathwater, any way is a way
to journey toward that joining
as the tub lip turns to gather her shape,
there and ready by the body going by.
The tub-water holds the sound of water
by her arms, the loved figure rushing by.

VAUDEVILLE AFTER THE MULTITUDE

Dürer drew the owl in unbalanced detail
in "...among a Multitude of Animals,"
the owl, among the unpatched fence
and hollow tree trunk, beside the foxy dog
with fur dotted like a leopard,
like dots in circles,
the owl's two eyes paired like two
vaudeville clowns standing back to back,

bickering on stage.
Each clown raises his hat from his head,
arms twist, each drops his hat
on the other's head, yawns and looks about.

Where has the audience gone, I wonder,
writing the space of this room—
I want to give these two someone who'll watch,
but someone was here and left,
the clowns not taking the hint, not leaving,
or ever performing a proper act.

They just go about their clowny ways
under a painted willow, by a lake
Dürer drew by the vanishing city.
The clowns' outside is inside the theatre—
winter wind, snow falling on stage.
Each snowflake is a tiny valentine
reading *Will You Be Mine?* or *Call Me*
or *Yours Forever*.
One clown scoops hearts into his hand
while the other shakes his cartoon shiver.

SHARED SUBJECT

The poet holds hands with an angel whose red wings slip through red clothes.
They sit by a well and a wall in Italy,
watching a beautiful disregard wander.
She is the dead English wife, sure
in her withering salutation—her look
keeps those Florentine bells from ringing.

Green eyes, firm and marble; watery face.
Cannibal dream with the red-robed girl.
One Dante overlays his life with poems
and legends from another Dante; pastel
romanticism glosses into elegy.

I know that elegy and its insistent stars.
Archaic desire, figures pulling
drapery through the overgrown garden,
figures with skin that escape the garden's
choking opulence—that skin
helps us, warm, even far away,
to wake up under a different sun.

Absence is only the remembrance of distance,
as the last page deduces the first.
It is only distance in memory,
and remembering distance, I enter bedrooms
heated by radiators, hear
quiet voices, the marsh terrain
of unfamiliar mirrors, and patchwork quilts.

A thousand lights unwrap in this city,
a thousand stars.
Go to the window.
Go to the street—
rain scents the pavement
with water flying back to the sky.

AEGEAN SEA, HIROSHI SUGIMOTO, 1990

Sugimoto steps through the two-toned sea
and vanishes in his *click*, in the sudden second.
My friend held here, reprint in hand,
and the photograph held time in time,
the small waves gray heaps enduring
to the horizon's mistake of moment and distance
for gravity and fact, wave's length,
smash and smack, wet on plunging legs,
my body plunging in the lake.

Sugimoto steps through the two-toned sky
to twined skyscraped ghosts behind,
monument behind act, decaying pun's two sides,
Duchamp decaying away where
the buzzing bee knows where to go.
Puncture after punctum,
I'm getting to the sting to bring me
in with eye through flesh.
It's a gift if I get here once,
if I get to the shore for what comes next.

She held his book out to me, and I looked
through it, trying to hold *Sugimoto*
by this picture as it slipped below the surface,
just forgotten, just easily
recovered through my loving, lifting from the skin:
Aegean Sea, Tyrrhenian Sea, English Channel, pictured
sky and sea, the hazy light
in gray, in space's shattered weight, in now and then
we moved to another locale:

I stood on this side of the door, and she snapped
my picture peeked around pillar,
then I stood on the door's other side,
and she kept me there at once with here.

COME IN FROM THE SHOWER

1

The birch tree does nothing for the industrial image
slipped into the too-long novel.

Too sappy, too decorous to leave me
with this tree, bad realism won't leave
the kitschy front room without producing a poster—
workers on this side, banner over there.

Like Modigliani amid cubist years
curving paint to the squiggly nude
in French attire, Parisian sex
like his Italian gait, brown suit sunlit,
like his great ribbons of her Bohemian sex,
tough and smooth and marble eyes
ashing eggy Sacré-Cœur,
like Modigliani's firm sentence—

this body

is here, here

continuing anima after mechanization—

this forest embeds at the city limits,
wildflowers thrown on the graveled front line,
insistent in its unthinking other life.
It asks nothing
from you, from me in myself.
It does nothing in willing and calls.

2

I'm writing first characters to ideographs
gathering the forearm to its flicker,
the flickering statuesque wavering
of Fenellosa's *no pure verb or noun in nature*.

Together makes the space thick between
them touch them, holding door
to door frame to their angled gap—
they, they're
there with sun-motes from the other shore
where actors stand without the hand's
slur and crease to touch their blotchy
peculiarities, the mole below my right eye.

Tenderness is one more checkpoint to pass.
"The is where my love, somehow, stops"
beyond my love and into another
being, bearing lily's bent stem
drooping dappled blossom over the seal,
head over heels over the vase's pink glass.

"This is where my love," larger
than my skin, somehow dappling, "somehow stops"
at a vista larger than I can throw my open eye.

3

My body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is perceived) and moreover this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world (the felt at the same time the culmination of subjectivity and the culmination of materiality). They are in a relation of transgression or overlapping.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

4

It does nothing
in cracking heat. The day's division
settles under tourists laid out
to lazy nothing going on all day
as the window dehydrates the napper through his nap,
and sparrows wing for the cove's
scenic lookout, telescope, and viewing
waves fill in breaks, the viewer releases
the self too, to submerge and float,
branching lives—one sinking, one bobbing—
two selves in a mirror, two totals spilling
twin puddles sopping the carpet.

It does nothing in willing
the spill this way or that.
Accident mislays no pure
necessity, joins the crowd crossing the street *en mass*,
blue sedan halting at crosswalk where necessity
collects with chance, the business lunch and missed bus,
grouped shoulder-to-shoulder in the walk home
from the park and its pond and the bench
where we sit, side-by-side, geese
waddling near the two of us.

I don't know you, and share this space
but not the reason you've come.
It hides from me, maybe under the bench
or in the orange ribbon wrapped around
purple sage on the playground's far edge.

It's beyond locating, the care coming
from the greenest spot for your feet, your toes
among grass blades by the pond, and the fish
know we're up here, another world
filtering through glare. It goes
on without them, going on all day.
It does nothing in willing and calls.

5

It calls the world to come in from the shower
to the dinner table, wiped clean and bare.
Friend, we've met before and you're welcome back
to tell me your name this second time,
and I'll greet you again and meet you again,
opening the window to bring the rain in.
I want that ease, I want beyond
want where the word *world* opens clean
to the mark of its lively constituents.
Give me your name in another language,
you're here and I'm stopping to listen.

SECTION 3

MIMESIS

1

Rains mimesis, overtakes the field
with finger-thin pools, and the rosemary sprig
growing from its muddy twin. The ever-
green offers its symmetry
to me, if the torrent blowing into the drainage ditch
doesn't overwhelm the nascent
rooting, shrubby wooding, its narcissist bent, no,
there's time enough to dream:

No dream,

he's raindrop and the convulsive
awe of the raindrop. Narcissus
bends his way into the flooded plot,
and I can't get into the Greek
light. I feel bad for the pretty kid
too self-conscious to write a bad line and spy
art is water,
the mimic's miming face isn't mask,
it's the frank crease of pain for your pain,
for empathy like
the kind cat crawled to us from the farmhouse and any
art living by a living thing.

2

Imago Dei, made with god's face—
his covering hand veils the eye, and unveiling,
gives sight of his heel signing the unvoiced
name in silt. I have no
faith this mirage will shudder into scatter. There's no
problem—
the floating world comes to land,
the falcon perches on the tree branch.

I am image
in the snapshot slipped in your mirror frame,
imagining
your heat by my body, your body
my name, my
vowel is my mouth turned to your mouth,
and kiss and talk
rise and pass in waves of heat.
They take us here and elsewhere,

the muses multiple
barometric pressures squeezing our bones.
The romance writes by phone, O'Hara's
double, *Imago Dei*, "which met him as he walked
on the terrace & spoke," calls with god's voice:

it sounds like laughter
from the lake's other side.
A boy reaches
the edge with his toy sailboat with sails
of tiny geometries mirrored in the math
of the lake. Grinning to see
his teeth in the water, the boy waves at fish,
silver flashing inside *imago*,
watery fact through another dwelling.

APRÈS LE DÉLUGE

As soon as the flood passed from my mind with the last
drop of rain, quick smack on the dirt, quickly dry,
as soon as the deluge dried from my thoughts with the spring
rain, gone fresh, the quirk dirty
in my bad French, the bunny comes out to pray
by prism shining in a glimpse
from the other side of my window.

The myth is getting fresher
than the apple blossoms every time I get it
from the apple blossom. The forty
days lose track of time as the slaughter
settles into horror, forgets, turns peaceful
as the earth forgets the pesky folks it shrugged off.
Noah was a whale,

and the bunny ran down Mount Arafat
to the Splendid Hotel and her ghosts
of wicked people who had covered the earth and forgot
they were people. For the bunny,
they were friendly new clover, ghostly patches of clover,
covering the eastern side of Mount Arafat.

The myth is getting fresher
than the god who speaks at myth's end.
The bunny hears that whale moan off the coast
going further off coast, far out to the ocean's
unknown, a god unknown to itself, too big
for language. The god going off
gets a prayer from the bunny who loves until god
submerges in prose, as gray
as the newspaper as his shadow dissolves
far from the mountain crest.

PROLEGOMENON TO AN APRIL AFTERNOON

My friend's gone, and I'm tracing
goodbye, hello. Myrtle branches
bud. Rain
pings off the shed.
It's spring in the garden, hunkering near
the birdbath—that inkling,
never jumping off the letter with now's
spindly now pricking up through mud.

Once more, buried somewhere
among musk rose and Alpheus
river running rivulet
near flowerbed by the east wall.
Yet to one morel, in its coral pits,
and once oraled in the fungi named, I come
to gather by garden with little faith
in elegies—
I came to see me wrong.

See wrong, phenomenal fogged
like upwelling heat
bends, brakes light off waves.
Two islands sketch off waves,
west larger, east smaller, each dropping
fragments to sky.
Holes pock hillock.
Nature scatters over the bay.
Uneven eye fractures what it calls
to come back.

CURVE

Curve, urging all in
to blend *between* down to the playful
hand crossing the only
back—choice makes its own
necessity...

Curve, she believes you are free
in the edge of the lake, and in
her architecture, you are
flickering belief when she turns to...

The moth dreads tyrannical joy
and misses dread, the crush and cut.
The hand crosses
from play into play, feeling
like soft sand, one turned to the next
by hopeful heat.
Volition grapples insistence.
Volition grabs musk insistence.
Curve, you wash as you wash away.

WON'T LOOK AT THE DAY'S EYE, FRIENDS

Dust drifts a light covering
over the form we left to the desert,
already half-forgotten, already "the form,"
once noted for curve or texture or shatter
against the highway's divider as it sped toward town.
Light, mesh-like, in speeding
shine, it lifts the haze to tour buses' cameras.

I'm starting to believe you, Antigone.
The ethnographer visited my homestead,
walking past the apple-tree stump and the tooth
I lost somewhere in the hallway's mottled carpet.
It's a whole memoir of culture, and I can't
answer some questions about the big
amble I took from remembrance to the lake.
I was too young. I slipped on sidewalk.
That grit, that dirt mixing in blood.

The question called you
in your city, walled and surrounding
the central action.
The echo chamber, like a monotone choir,
stumbles over itself and circles and pounds
guardrails into broken brick
beside memory gardens, winding by the canal's
abandoned fragment.
My turn notices my daily walk by flowerbed.

My town layers breezeway on breezeway,
and the patrolman feels the radical scuttle
shudder the glass encasing his car.
There's no gate left as the Kafka myth of law floods
over the drainage ditch into backyards
where grass grows by the barbecue pit.
There will be nothing left but me and the answer

that leaves me by overheard conversation.
I'm too silhouette
to answer the voluminous question of rights,
but once a friend walked with me from school
to visit my house, unasked, and we
stood on the porch and made up a tune
before I met her brother, before I heard stories about her,
before she called her mom to name where she was.

SCATTER, SCATTER

1

Glass breaks in a weird akimbo.
The flecks fall on the rug's knit spiral
and pall-mall go glancing off fledgling thoughts.
They break concentration, bring me bright
design, the thought of dissipating fog,
the structured spread
of the spider's web there on the awning,
or caught in coils, in weft and warp
spiraling out—the caught thought
of the universe, turning out too, I was told
on a day like today, years back, clamoring forward.

That was astronomy,
and you sat in back with your novel,
and I wanted to get gravity
to keep this clutter all together, all recurring:
And was I surprised. Was I surprised, Was I surprised. I was surprised,
an insistence splayed on the planetarium floor.

The difference is splaying, *the difference*
Stein writes, *is spreading*
in layer on layer, a paste-up collage
with mesh texture and black shutters tight
against wood grain, around the guitar's hollow.
Smoothed to one plane, and everything held in the hollow.

2

Sharp comfort as the hard-back chair
stings my spine, a point jabbed below
my shoulders, and falling down my back
(as mind traces skin, mole, white, raised scar
down back, it gets
drawn to some plungepool, some rushing mood,
gets in the undertow, engulfed
back under), as I fall down my back

I miss him. A hand, first,
reaching for mine, I miss him
doubling back to chance an encounter,
but here, at a
second reading of the narrative, it's
writing resolve, even as I translate the anecdote
a third time. Another life

lived by the telescope on the hill by the shore.
On the night by the chiming buoy:
the old watchtower whips its searchlight
in circles
on the sea-lions. Too long since I've been
on that beach, I'm here remembering
the white fish steak, flaking in my bite.

3

Hello, are you surprised to see me?
(Held echo against this making,
and the camera swivels to the painter's last fleck.)
I wanted to check that you're all right.
Since you've moved, we haven't talked much,
and I've lost the photos from our old place.
(And the biographer says there's no last fleck,
just the last touch swiveling after.)
I'm keeping my shutters closed these days, so time's
getting bonkers. Just happening outside,
I think, and the dishes rotate
from table to washer, get dirty, get clean,
come before me, go away,
and outside the ellipses, I hear that outside.
I hear kids in the pool, someone's laughter.

(The last touch, swiveling after
the fledgling afternoon, the Oakland ditty, its fête—
a pickup band playing loose on the side
of the sidewalk, between side streets, small trees
I walk beside. It's here
chrome and leaf, cloud and bakery coalesce,
the constellation breaking in Lake Merritt's waves.)

ATOMIC THEORY OF LANGUAGE

Democritus knew more.
A chasm by my hand, he begs
reading to peer over the brink
to fields thousand times larger than each
atomic speck inside the hand, book,
Tiffany lamp from last night's dream,
fields large as dream around geotic dust
that is tiny as memory, hard particle
to forgive and give to vertigo.

Sometimes I am permitted the touch
of sense of field, wide open.
Emanation grown to immanence,
tuft lighting meadow, fruit-lit bramble
in the new pastoral
blown to distance on every side.

There is room for the city
unfolding behind the telephone receiver,
room for the highway's white noise
before word by word shimmering on the horizon.
Every miniature in its adamant
image fits in the jewelry box,
enormous speckles being
for blank being, water I can't catch.
Packaged uncontainment, it sits on the blanket
near the makeshift lunch throughout the picnic.

CLUMPING A SPILLED SPICE

Gathering anise seeds off the kitchen floor,
I overhear your name
in a muffled voice from a neighboring apartment.
Muffled, as noise waving through water
lugs the pool's choppy filler
trying to get to an addressee
it doesn't imagine but moves.

Your name shares one *e*, one *s* with *anise*.
As I crouch over spill, it's a riddle
left open like the sliding glass door
the cat trots through, paws the porch carpet,
and tears off from the page—distance,
the distance sounded to call
from here to there, closer, while Pangea,
the egg cracking itself open,
opens onto itself, distance
in the miles between us, oceans, in pressing
distance to the tips of new mountains.

It's as natural as Coca-Cola ephemera
dressing up the living area
of the apartment complex's show room.
From here to there, from here
to Georgia, from company headquarters
to monastery in a 70's
kung fu film. The white-haired sage
is close enough to point
to the gray cat chewing on a warbler:
"Graceful cat wants—so she finds.
Grace dispels distance. Kitty
gathers hunger, unnames her way through air."

COSMOGONY UNDER THE COVERS

1

Arcs ink two ways
across my left hand, first figuration
of orbits—two shards flying through pull
with two hulks tugging them
into history—or sprouts
that black tree Piet Mondrian erased in curves
hazing off to night.

I fell asleep
with a pen in my bed, and now
post-literate blotching
floats through the empty window.

Red, dabbed
daydream and the utopic hunch
willow their branching promises with snow
outside. There's wind outside,
and a snowman melting his way to the gutter.
Shews the way out of the bottle.
The fly buzzes out of the bottle, the gulp
after emptying the wine-bottle's last dregs, and what's
an empty bottle?

Nonsense.
Rabble and numberless joy of doodad,
and the rock-face too
touches flat against the morning ruckus.

2

Buzzes life
hunkering in the hotel, presses against cold
window-frame, come cold
grey breath, and the fly
buzzes its noisy cloud, and winter
is a moon come dwelling in the streetlamp.

No need to renew.
December unfolds under the unread book flap,
and I'm cracking
tree-branch opening wood like pages
pried apart.

That crack, so fast,
touching flat against dream:
history fossilized on pebbles, in the river
rolling uphill through the mountain gap.
At the base,
I improvise a sketch of shelter.
A hitchhiker, a pug in his backpack,
washes suds in the sink.

Soap bubble, you're a film
jump-cuts play on and through, an eye
hollow and wholly planet.
Skyscrapers rise on your surface, newspapers
shift red, purple, green in your landfill.
Spheroid buzz, celestial hum.
Light flicks on at the fifteenth floor.
Pops out of language.

3

(...with a pen in my bed—
sheet tangled around the fresh form,
gather of cloth splashed over thigh—
and prints an ellipse down my index finger.

Smoke: an index for fire.

Spoke: an index for axis, for earth's
cylinder shape

as Anaxamander writes my second self
singing through Christmas at the darker pole.)

4

apeiron: into light, through to the sunbeam's pinprick.

5

And I'm face-to-face with you,
starting to name animals that crawl
across the nursery.
Ant, antelope, anteater—gross
misunderstanding; and sadness
creeps in, through the doll's widening seam.

Did she see it stagger
up from mud or, from twig-cracks, scurry
down the sapling trunk?
She shakes her head "no."

No, she saw Tom chase Jerry across the screen.
The milk tooth, safe
in the chase scene, escapes
the looped background for the linoleum floor.
Plays, limitless, phantasm
over dimpled grid, your leg
reflects its nova onto her trek to the dog bowl.
She wants to hear the love story I'll write:
the phone call you dial and wake me.

MAYAKOVSKY OFF THE SKILLET

I come from the sun. It is sweeping
through the first movement of Bartok's fifth quartet,
harsh as the browned egg white. You want
a breather from the cacophonous radio, and puppets
scuttle down the fire escape. It is wasping
stings on your eyelids, that tired
fever from being up too late, gone too far.

You could write me backwards, following words
back from the blinking crosswalk. To what
power station, settled along what highway?
Language in power lines connects cash
to talk and the untreated blister.
You want a breath, my breath, I want to
exhale you into your own, new governance.

It's better to have left where this sweat
settles atop lip, gone from trying
to come away from breakfast a Byzantine
negative space. Backwards, upside down—
any turn turns us back to philology.
It is sweeping crumbs from the table
to a white napkin held delicately atop the palm.

Sunburn, harsh as the violin's
rodent shriek, comes out from behind nostalgia
you left under the newspaper last week.
Time to tidy up. The city's coming to visit
us and our body. Shoulders, calves, jaw—
too tired to continue the ultimatum without
impunity—want a bed to restart us:
a yawn and what comes from the pinpoint gasp.

EYELID LIFTS

Your perfect eye sees
yellow December deep in the Atlantic.
Some stiff, silken thing rises in the Atlantic,
ignoring its shadow. You see
old boyfriends in shadows you sift.

This sounds like that poem about rocks and grass.
I'd write you one like that one, like
the bright colors you put in your poem—
already this poem wanders off with your words.
What lives huddles close to what is, so I'll
say this poem quietly.

Is a poem a lullaby?
Does the song do little while the sleeper builds
cities around cities and burns the earth away?
I'm glad my poem does little and glad
for the gap inside your song.
I hope you like the coast.
I hope you like the modernist's sappy flower.
The year's first snow ignites the New Year:
snore away the thoughtless frost.
I am perfectly late for you.

NOTES

(The following is a partial list of the major quotations and references to literary and visual works.)

Didymus:

3: *Purgatorio*, Dante Alighieri

Lenya to Weil, 1928: “Forward,” Lotte Lenya in the Grove Press edition of *The Threepenny Opera*

Their Roots Rain Down Can Rain: The title is after “Wystern Wind,” “The small rain down can raine”

Selected Filmography: *Nostalghia*, Andrei Tarkovsky; *Pickpocket*, Robert Bresson

For Apollinaire: “Les Fenêtres,” Guillaume Apollinaire

New Pals: “Enfance,” Arthur Rimbaud; *Purgatorio*, Dante Allegieri

Self-Portrait with Brushstrokes:

1: *Still Life*, Paul Cézanne; *Woman with a Hat* Henri Matisse

2: “The Gradual Making of the Making of Americans,” Gertrude Stein

Audiology of Rilke: *Duino Elegies*

Circles: “Circles,” Ralph Waldo Emerson; *Niccolò Mauruzi da Tolentino at the Battle of San Romano*, Paolo Uccello

Cézanne for the New Year : *District of Valhermeil near Pontoise*, Paul Cézanne

Why You, Pierre Bonnard?: *Nude in the Bath and Small Dog*, Pierre Bonnard

Vaudeville after the Multitude: *The Virgin among a Multitude of Animals*, Albrecht Dürer

Shared Subject: *The Salutation of Beatrice*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Aegean Sea, Hiroshi Sugimoto, 1990: The poem refers to a number of Sugimoto photographs, primarily *Aegean Sea*; Dana King

Come in from the Shower:

1: The section refers to a variety of Amedeo Modigliani’s nudes

2: *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, Ernest Fenollosa; “Six Poems for *Poetry* Chicago,” Jack Spicer

3: *The Visible and Invisible*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Mimesis:

2: *Imago Dei*, “image of God,” refers to the doctrine that humans are created in God’s image; *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*

Après le Déluge: Title and references are from “Après le Déluge,” Arthur Rimbaud

Prolegomenon to an April Afternoon: “Lycidas,” John Milton

Won’t Look on the Day’s Eye, Friend: Title and references are from *Antigone*, Sophocles

Scatter, Scatter:

1: “Cézanne,” Gertrude Stein

Cosmogony:

1: *Grey Tree*, Piet Mondrian; *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Ludwig Wittgenstein

4: *apeiron*, “infinite and boundless”

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VITA
Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Andrew Snyder Nicholson

Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts, English, 2004
Lawrence University

Master of Fine Arts, Writing, 2006
California College of Arts

Special Honors and Awards:

Schaeffer Fellow in Poetry, 2008-2009
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Publications:

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<http://www.idiolexicon.com/archive/nicholson5.html>

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Review*.

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bought in an antique store,” *Beeswax*, 4 (January 2008): 23-28.

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<http://theoffendingadam.com/2010/05/31/lenya-to-weill-1928-didymus/>.

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Dissertation Examination Committee:

Chairperson, Donald Revell, Ph. D.

Committee Member, Julie Staggers, Ph. D.

Committee Member, Claudia Keelan, M.F.A.

Graduate Faculty Representative, Attila Lawrence, M.F.A.