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Maps on the Backs of Our Eyes

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MAPS ON THE BACKS OF OUR EYES

By

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1992

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1996

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Fine Arts - Creative Writing

Department of English

College of Liberal Arts

The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

December 2013



THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the thesis prepared under our supervision by

Joan Paulette Robinson

entitled

Maps on the Backs of Our Eyes

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December 2013

Abstract

A collection of poems related to places in the Mojave Desert and the Las Vegas area or in rural central Michigan. Most poems deal with history and memory and the overlapping nature of experience.

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Dedication

To Gregory,
whose love inspires and animates every word

Table of Contents

Worried About My Skirt at Jean Women's Camp.....	1
Morning Routine.....	3
Boulder City.....	6
Babel In Bloom.....	7
The Corner of Calumet and Commonwealth.....	9
Hot Night in Naked City.....	10
Bar Vertigo.....	11
Bum Magic.....	12
Roadkill Shoe (Intersection of Spencer and Maule).....	14
Enigma Garden Cafe, 1993-2000.....	16
It Happens in Pieces.....	18
Glitter.....	19
In the Absence of Shadows.....	20
Moving Out.....	21
1825 Darling Road.....	23
Auschwitz Summer.....	24
The Farrs Take in a Visitor.....	25
The Lonely Street.....	27
Bedbugs.....	28
Highway Passage.....	29
Windows.....	30
A Conversation with Grandpa Farr's Ghost While Driving from Indian Springs Middle School to Las Vegas.....	32
Bee Savior.....	35
Rusty Gigan.....	36
Chloride, Arizona.....	37
Morning Song.....	39
Dearest G—.....	40
Marriage.....	41

Mira, The Wonderful Star.....	42
Our Lady of the Rains	44
Thunderbirds	45
Nostos	47
Tule Springs, Floyd Lamb State Park	49
Laura Names the Bones.....	52
Evening Grace.....	54
Vegas Drive	55
A Declaration for the Desert	56
Small Death on the Sidewalk	58
Raven	59
Winter Seed	61
St. Thomas, Nevada.....	62
After Basho	64
Moth One	65
Moth Two	66
Pet Cemetery.....	67
Black Madonna in the Prague Loreto	69
The Desert is a Good Place to have a Vision	70
Frogs.....	71
My Breath a Sacred Harp.....	72
Transplant.....	73
Air	74
Fire	76
Water	78
Earth.....	79
Curriculum Vita	80

Worried About My Skirt at Jean Women's Camp

—rusty peach. The women,
dressed in white t-shirts and
blue track pants,
fondle large dogs
and back away from them,
crouching.

The mutts sit for the whistle
then bound toward the uniform line.
Their tails high flags
paws prancing
through the only strip of grass
into the row of open arms.

The guards speak through
the loudspeaker, announcing.

Worried about my skirt,
I push it down against the lifting wind.
Andre is ahead of me
I am not worried about him seeing my underwear.

Maybe the guards
will kick me out. My boy shorts are blue.

Priscilla is behind me
her tightly curled white hair unruffled,
red lipstick crisp.
She has seen much worse than my knickers.

The wind dies
the sky has gone crimson
the last light shines
gold on the razor wire.

Morning Routine

Lungs constrict breath all night adrenaline jangle
at least the sheets are clean but so much why
did mom send the old bowls from home, their backs yellow
with hard water? I have bowls. They aren't even nice ones.
Abundance candle backfired. Plenty yes, but plenty of what?

Light another candle in dark room. Sit. Breathe.
Nadhi Shodhana. Skull shining breath. Bee humming breath.
Meditate on light expanding within. Light heals. Light protects
Worry about calendars. Worry about missed deadline. Worry about
Gregory going back to bed. Note worries. Return to Light.

Just a moment's ease. Enough to write one line, then another
Each stacks on the other just enough a breath a word
Find it, Mark it, and move on faith: slow, yes; painful, sometimes.
Keep going, keep going, keep going,
almost~

Much later, I figure out the bowls.

Mom was eating soup one day.

Probably either Sea Crest Soup, named

after the motel at Hilton Head

where it was invented

or cabbage soup—depending on whether she had

chicken noodle or bean with bacon

in the cupboard.

She was eating this soup and marking the newspaper with

her pen. Something causes cancer. Something

cures cancer. Something grows better in June.

Something you do all the time is killing you.

As she cut out the article to copy and

send she thought, "This bowl is really nice for soup."

"Joanie should have this bowl. I will send her

another, so Gregory can have one too."

And so they arrived, wrapped in the Lansing State Journal,

wide, Sears floral, orange with decades of rusty well-water stains,

ready for soup. Where they wound up:

under my white IKEA bowls, hidden

in the back of the cupboard.

Boulder City

Six Companies marked these streets

According to their plan,

A clean and wholesome city,

Built complete on rocky land.

'Tweens bow their heads and thumb their phones

While walking into traffic,

A mother jogs her infant stroller

The widow sits on her porch alone.

Ravens cry from palm trees,

Bells ring the hour's death,

Twin pugs bark helplessly,

While a toothless youth cooks meth.

Babel In Bloom

I thought maybe I would buy myself some new tits

but then I thought naw

Sparrows loop the sky between branches

Leaves sizzle green electric growth

It's not going to work It's just that its

Beam Hall shadows

Our business plan will show

Hey can you wait a minute

Emerge into glare

TODAY IS THE START OF EARTH WEEK COME JOIN US

sycamore maple russian olive fruitless mulberry

roots invisible entwine under sidewalks under grass

something blooming butterfly bush chaste tree french lavender

sprinklers mist

evapcorp coolers drone

breeze in my palms

leaf in your hair

What is your world?

The Corner of Calumet and Commonwealth

Detroit branch sifted light
spreads on tufts of herbaceous
tousled lawn pink hydrangeas
nod blowzy blossoms thrust
through soot-blackened window frames

a poplar fountains through the parlor
pierces the rotted roof beams and
arches its branches blue

a man with grey felty dreadlocks
walks his kindergartner in the middle of the quiet street
"Howya doin' baby girl?"

a pheasant strides
across the cracked chicory fringed boulevard

Hot Night in Naked City

Stratosphere's neon needle

 stabs the thick night smoky with California

 forest fire carnival

screams float down

 between the 38 Buick on blocks

 and the Ingersoll Rand compressor

 through the open rollup door

table saw shrieks

 he is splitting a board in two

 sawdust piling around his feet

smoke rises in a thin white plume

burning cigarette poised

on the edge of the saw table over

sawdust piles around his feet settling

 on leaning stacks of bicycle frames

Austin rims clock gears flea market family albums

 first edition *Gangs of New York*

Mother's ashes in a box

forgotten in a dark corner

Bar Vertigo

Just past the intersection of Charleston and Eastern
on my way to the Straight Pepper Diet meeting,

Glowing doorway of Bar Vertigo beckoning,
behind it, the Blue Angel stands above barely
visible in the shadows, but inside
the red vinyl booths glow.

Stale beer, vomit cleanser, and whiff of sewer.
Eighties R&B on the jukebox or if I'm lucky,
it's Hank, but that would be too much
for me.

Bum Magic

Somehow

we match frequencies

at the precise moment

The Number One Muni

stops at the intersection

of Frontier and California

He is sitting in the bus shelter

Me, I'm on the bus

in the rear facing seat,

next to the far window.

We lock eyes, and I laugh, because

he is some hobo-clown

King of the Bums,

a curly haired, bushy-bearded

no-front teeth, urban camper.

Waving his plastic 7-up bottle

Grinning and shouting

Yoo-hoo! I look away,

afraid he might get on—

then what?

I look back.

He's still flailing.

I laugh,

and the bus pulls away.

Roadkill Shoe (Intersection of Spencer and Maule)

For most of a week,
it lay in the crotch
of the same curve where
the man died-flung
from his scooter and
headfirst into the yellow
fire hydrant.

His grandson behind him
landed unharmed.

I saw
the black plastic shrouded body lying
at roughly the same spot
the shoe lies now.

In fact, I can see it from the break room window,
while my Teriyaki Shrimp Rice Bowl rotates
in the humming microwave.

Later, I will pass it while driving

home. It is a high-heeled women's shoe,
an anonymous black leather pump
lying on its side, its footless cavity
gaping at the pavement.

Perhaps she caught it on the car frame escaping
a drunken argument with the driver,
or maybe she kicked it off fighting
someone who grabbed her from sidewalk
and pulled her into the open door of a van,
or most likely, it occurs to me the next morning
as I pass it again, the shoe is a castaway,
fallen from the top
of an overstuffed garbage bag,
collateral damage of a hasty
break-up move.

The shoe offers no answers as it shuffles
slowly between the yellow turning
lane markers, until one day, the street
sweeper claims it, and it disappears.

Enigma Garden Cafe, 1993-2000

Enigma—

oasis in memory

green-hearted shady respite

from glaring Las Vegas sun

shadowless TOO MUCH LIGHT

unbearable witness

a much needed place to hide.

Enigma—

soft whispering mornings

staring into middle distance

steaming Webfoot crazing the air

while hollyhocks bob

bright gangly blossoms, and

vines trace a curlicued net through

brightening air,

Enigma—

afternoon Julie holds court, her filmstar

hard-bitten glamour enthralls, her vulnerability

hidden behind dark glasses, red lipstick and

ever-present cigarette, then

Len arrives huge and solid in his
Hawaiian shirt and shorts, tenderly greeting his
plants and reeling off stories of old Las Vegas
and dusty California

Enigma—

evening poets at the podium on the porch
giant black June bugs
terrorizing the audience, and words floating
into the night only to be cut with the blunt
knives of helicopter blades as they hack the
bluing dusk.

Enigma—

midnight conversation one last cup of tea
strange shapes hide under the leaves
bird-women, satyrs, drunkards, painters
flickering candle, goodnight, goodnight, goodnight.

It Happens in Pieces

A poem is a mirror
walking down a strange street.

Out on the sidewalk
reflecting light and heat.

Bouncing fragments:
elbow, nostril feet.

The body caught in fragments
on its silver sheet.

Then gone, carried under an arm
the world moves across its surface
catching light:
a momentary blinding.

Glitter

Afternoon shower of light
you loosen from the clouds,
spilling between my thighs—
oh it rains mirrors, bouncing
reflections, cosmic fragments
comet-dust, meteoric mica flakes
Tremble and pour forth, oh my earth
spinner oh my star shaker, oh my.

After the bang, the swirling subsides
pooling, coalescing in repose
your face dusted with diamonds.

In the Absence of Shadows

In this bright city shadows take flight
it is difficult to differentiate in too much light.

Some prefer mystery, things out of sight
Here our history suffers from too much light.

Expose every naked corner of flesh! Every skin so bright
Still, a little dignity is welcome in too much light.

The sun beats down the day, electric signs defeat the night
Our poor eyes weaken under too much light.

To appreciate God's Gift of rest, to prefer darkness we might
Rather than face the day squinting in too much light.

Moving Out

Hot, purpling dusk,

the shirtless youths throw

a football in the parking lot.

A girl in a green tank top

descends the stairs and climbs into the

car her lumpy boyfriend drives.

The sun will come again tomorrow,

the ball will return to earth,

and the girl will emerge from the car somewhere.

The players in the parking lot will go their

separate ways and become pit dealers,

construction foremen, certified public accountants,

and massage therapists.

I will keep watching from this window or another.

Tomorrow I will be waiting

and the day after that until this vacancy

becomes familiar and your face blurs in the distance.

You could be the guys playing football

or even that car-driving boyfriend,

your absence—

1825 Darling Road

1973. My mother stands in front of our yellow Duster with the black vinyl roof, her auburn hair pulled back with a navy silk scarf. With one hand she shields her eyes from the shade-less glare, and props the other on her hip as she stares at the Cinderblock jawbone jutting from the gray-brown mud that indicates the perimeters of the hole that will become the basement of our new home.

Meanwhile, my brother and I squat over the cracked and crazed clay, and peel off its top layer as if it were our loose skin.

Auschwitz Summer

We toured the museum.

This is what we saw:

college students posed for pictures

underneath the *Arbeit Macht Frei*

bullet holes, mud, dead grass,

faintly scrawled letters, poems, drawings

left on the flaking walls

a mural of frolicsome children and animals

decorated the communal toilets.

Pictures. Black and white snapshots

rows and rows of shorn heads and

terror blackened eyes. And

one woman, her still lipsticked mouth

twisted up in one corner,

a small red flag,

raised in defiance.

The Farrs Take in a Visitor

An Easter morning in the early years of this century, a knock came at the door just as we were about to sit down to supper with gathered family, friends and welcome strangers.

Just as we were about to eat the offered lamb, potatoes, green beans, hot rolls and tossed salad, we heard a rapping at our door.

Sun City was dusty that morning, our skies hazed with the yellow dust blown from the Gobi Desert, blown from Asia across the great Pacific to this tract house in Nevada, to this door.

When my uncle opened the door, we saw the figure of a small woman silhouetted in that hazy frame. She had wrinkled brown skin and a crown of white hair lit from behind, lit from the dimmed sunlight.

Her black eyes frightened and her cheeks flushed, sweat dripped down her face, and we were all in a wonder that this woman would arrive on this day.

On this day, when the dusts from Asia coated our grass, on this day when we celebrated The One who was not there, she appeared.

We could not understand her, and she appeared. We could not understand her, not all of us, one did, my brother's fiancée's father.

He came from Korea as a young man, before that, he studied Mandarin Chinese. He studied Mandarin Chinese in Korea, and now lived in Chicago, and on this day, He dined with us in Sun City. He could talk with our strange visitor who would only drink water and would not eat our food.

Our visitor took the bus to the wrong Lake Mead Boulevard, got off at the wrong stop,

and walked to the house that should have been her daughter's.

It was ours, instead. A policeman drove to our house and took the woman to her

daughter, many miles away and glad to have her home.

The Lonely Street

after William Carlos Williams

School is over. It is too hot
to walk at ease. At ease
they roll the street on skateboards
coasting the time away
They have grown brown. They own
their summer bodies, loose
t-shirts draped over shoulders
broad and slumped, they push
off with one foot, then stand
and sail with slightest momentum
down the lonely street.

Bedbugs

encroach on white sheets.

Unbidden, hungry

for my blood.

Unaware I

listen instead to the muffled

jet engines as they descend

over my empty apartment complex

destined to convert

to failed condos next month.

The Elvii float on parachutes past the Stratosphere's

screaming spire. The jets

hover in a twinkling string,

and crisscross over my bed

and disgorge rumpled passengers,

as the insect bodies suck

and fill ruddy abdomens

on my sleeping neck.

Highway Passage

Raven dips over the cars
black wings spread,
toothed feathers
comb the blue morning light.

Sunlight glitters on the armature of the gravel mine
that scrapes the cliffs red and raw.

The dry lake bed filled with last night's rain
mirrors mountains and sky
an inverse world,
a gateway shines from the valley below.

Windows

I have spent my life sitting at desks, looking out windows

Today's window behind the computer screen

Reveals portions of chaste tree, its leaves twitching

in mid-July Nevada monsoon weather,

back of iron chair on the porch

where we eat dinners when it is not too hot or cold

a low horizon of wall, which borders the sidewalk

Across the street, a white car parked. Not the one

the neighbors usually drive, must be their niece's

gone to the mountains for the summer.

I have spent my life sitting at desks, looking out windows.

The same desk then, but the childhood window

Always washed in the spring, double-paned

Showed our grassy Michigan acre, then the tarmac road

Then the whole of the Hitchcock's house

When it still belonged to them, before it became

"The Hitchcock's Old House" next to the "Perleberg's Old Place"

Both inhabited by strangers. Hitchcock was an ag engineer

grew winter wheat on his lawn. The Perelebergs

were farmers. All of the land around used to be their land

now it's parceled. The woods behind, Frye's Woods, hasn't

belonged to the Fries for years but still, it is a woods.

Before that it was Dexter Trail, an old Chippewa path

Through the forest before it was farmland.

Alone in those trees, I practiced walking quietly,

quiet as Minnehaha in doeskin moccasins.

Looking out windows, I have spent my life.

A Conversation with Grandpa Farr's Ghost While Driving from Indian Springs Middle

School to Las Vegas

You and your buddy

Joe Costello drove across this desert

in a 1928 roadster

followed the grooves Mormon wagons

cut through the unforgetting rock.

Planned to spend your future

in voluptuous darkness

directing the beam of

light carrying the flickering images

of the Modern Age.

Once your older brother died,

your sister died

and your other brother married,

you couldn't find

your heart

in Henry Ford's paradise.

You left the Russian girl

behind the counter
of her father's store,
reading Tolstoy between customers.

See the sky as I see it now.

Joe couldn't get a job
so you both came home.

You made your life
and your family
on Three Mile Drive

After you died, we found your tools
the ones you made
for engineering school
after you came back.

One engraved *Lydia*
another engraved *Mary*

My grandmother
the Russian girl
and her sister.

Look up
at the clouds
hovering over the valley
like airships, sun-fired
orange, gold and red.
Shadows settle into the shoulders
of the mountains
sleeping pantherlike.

Throw up your hands
and exult—
The Almighty God did this!

If all of your dreams came true
Who would I be?

Bee Savior

Yellowjackets creep to the edge of the mountain pool
dipping mandibles and forelegs for a drink
the overeager slip~
caught in eddying current,
tiny limbs flailing.

A workrough hand descends and lifts
each waterlogged creature
on a brown thumb
steady, waiting for its wings to dry
until it flies again.

Rusty Gigan

One man's trash is another man's treasure

No need for fences here in the desert

Piles of rusty twisted metal

Stacks of corroded wheels

Parts of airplanes tractors washing machines

Graveyard of useful objects made useless

No way to fill up all that space

Built of leaning, wind-bronzed boards

Light riddled shack stands behind

The solitary doublewide off the two-lane interstate

One man's trash is another man's treasure

Graveyard of useful objects made useless

By wind and time and sun and water

By that wide space between mountains

Chloride, Arizona

garlands of broken

bottle necks

threaded over

rusty chain

clank and

shimmer

laced over fences

hand painted signs

advertise curiosities

for sale or

beware of dog

padlocked chain link

gates and vacant

yards suggest

otherwise

wind lifts

corrugated roof

flaps and bangs

wisps of dust

spiral in the street

on the playground

cluster of children

some brown some white

pile on the swings

twist their chains

yellow dog trots

circling silent

tail erect

Morning Song

Will you come sit with me?

This morning on our cold, wood floor,

Sit together, face to face and knee to knee?

Will you come breathe with me?

Let us shut eyes, clasp hands, and be

Together while the cat rattles the door

Will you come pray with me?

This morning, on our floor?

Dearest G—

I left the dove

for you to pick up

when you get home.

Forgive me,

I cannot bear to do it.

It is so lovely,

its rose-grey wings folded,

its head to one side.

Marriage

How I came to live in your house and call it mine,
How I came to share a bed with you, a garden, a yard,
How I came to love your dog and two cats
May I never forget what an arduous journey it was,
So lonely and severe at times so wayward and wandering
I feared to live alone the rest of my days
In empty rooms with echoing hallways
Only the sound of my own voice muttering bitter regrets

Now I set at my desk, the old pine one
And look out your window, our window
You are away at your own work,
But even in your absence you are here.
Even in my solitude I am met with your love
And so your house becomes our home.

Mira, The Wonderful Star

She

glows in colors numerous and changing

Flux is constant: sometimes Red Giant,

she swells magnificent

sometimes white dwarf

tiny but powerful-

no one before

Fabrizius

noticed

Her remarkable ways,

an amateur who watched the sky

with the eyes of a lover,

delighting in each revelation:

her true nature exposed.

Our Lady of the Rains

Her golden hair flows
around her face as she
proffers one perfect, round
breast to the parted lips
of the Christ child.

For centuries they came,
they left their fields
to kneel before her,
fold their rough hands
and pray for rain
to save their crops,
their starving children.

Thunderbirds

Everyone looks both ways before crossing.

The trucks roar their engine brakes
as they roll through town.

My class throws stuff in each other's hair.

My butt hops a little off the wooden bleacher. I get a splinter
through my rayon skirt.

My body fills with vibrations

and there they are.

Silver streaking hulls glitter in the sunlight, flying together, apart,
passing one over the other upside down
high in the air and spiraling nose first toward the grassy field.

They converge and land. Wheels skim the runway.

The cockpits open in unison,
handsome smiling men dressed in red jumpsuits shake hands
and give pre-signed photos. Each signature covers a plane in flight,
so we could tell whose was whose.

Lunch, then classes.

Bomb tests continue and my portable shakes while

I write the parts of speech on the board.

Nostos

Sunday light beams through Jesus at Gethsemane,
the stained glass window between congregation and traffic.

Golden locks pour down his back. He prays on

My child body waves and sways

against my mother's legs

in time to a Bach prelude.

The light, may the

light come into me, may I

rise. Oh God, here I am

among these legs, find me,

love me, lift me close.

These dirgy hymns in this church

built from field stones

the farmers carried to town

a century ago, farmers whose

great-grandchildren I stand

shoulder to shoulder with in this church

under its famous windows

and oh Jesus

I do not want to be like you.

Tule Springs, Floyd Lamb State Park

In North Las Vegas, water comes
from deep in the earth.

Ancient spring-beyond ancient, before any human could tell a story about it-
it rises, fills pools lined with tall grasses

filled with park service fish

Some fishers sit

in nylon webbed chairs,
with coolers at their feet.

Other fishers dive or wade,
as water jewels their feathers.

where there is water

there is life

or potential of life

even on Mars or Jupiter's Io

even in the Mojave desert

pah means water

Tonopah

Pahrump

Pahrnagat

Paiute means Ute who knows how to find water

Peacocks peck the ground tails folded
outside the whitewashed '40s divorce ranch.
Photos of trim, smiling young women
horseback riding in pristine cowgirl outfits,
curled hair cascading from underneath white hats.

Around the corner, a father places his tiny pink daughter
in the crotch of the graying tree
he will not let her down, and holds her

singing, A!

she replies, a!

 B!

 b!

on through the alphabet as the Canadian geese sleep together
on the grassy bank
each balanced
on one webbed foot
each neck turned back
each head buried in a feathered back.

My husband and I take pictures:

trees, geese, ranchette.

Not our faces.

We look out together.

The little pink girl, freed from the tree,
runs squealing up the path
scattering geese in a beat of wings

Beneath us, the caliche basin holds this water.

Built in layers: mastodon tusk,
sloth claw, lion tooth. All drank here.

Another layer-bonfire ash, arrowhead,
bones of Tudinu, who fished and sang with their children.

Some of us will leave our plastic buckets,
fishing hooks to be buried,
while the spring eternally shimmers
reflecting eternal sky.

Laura Names the Bones

occipital bone,

left and right parietal bones,

frontal bone,

zygomatic bone,

maxillary bone,

—this is where I have the pins in my jaw~

mandible,

She touches each part of her head as she

walks her long fingers lightly

indicating: my friend is a skeleton.

She is standing straighter than she once did

when I first knew her she hunched her back

folded in on herself, protecting. Now she is

straighter.

We are walking the wrong way on campus

because King Lear sold out

(who knew?)

because we are so busy paying attention to each

other we don't notice at first that the stadium

is looming closer and Maryland Parkway further away,
because together we feel invincible
on the last summer night. “No man is going to mess with us,”
she declares when I laugh at my foolish suggestion
to walk down a dark alley.
Because when we walk shoulder to shoulder,
we are invincible.
We are also bones,
skeletons standing for only a little while.

Evening Grace

Their bodies rumple the grass in front of Grace
the old church on Wyoming Street.

Their pale faces, spotted with tree shadows,
their bodies at ease, no longer young.

Together they stand and file
down the concrete steps to the basement
talking and laughing, while

the street fills with murmurs,
dogs bark from hidden yards,
and shadows crawl across the sidewalks.

Vegas Drive

Life got in under the door:

white-kneed spiders hung their webs on the bathroom ceiling
a black widow set up behind the toilet.

We lived

an agreement:

do not fall in my teacup or on my pillow or pinch my big pink bottom
and I will not brush you away with the yellow yarn mop.

I felt something flick my ear in the middle of the night:

a beetle size of an old half dollar a momma
looking for a place to nest

the neighbor's calico slinked through my door while I did my yoga poses.

She sat next to me, flung her foot over her shoulder,
and delicately licked her anus.

One day, I opened my door to half a green lizard
agonizing on the threshold

the other half on the walk.

A Declaration for the Desert

This land is not my land, or yours either.

It lives for nobody but itself.

Its canyons wind and twist,

Carved by absent rivers:

Dry now, silent now. Places

so quiet the body's breath heartbeat

pound excessive raspy rhythms.

This body needs what this land

cannot provide: water, shelter, food.

On the surface: barren, indistinct.

Some look underneath, scratching:

silver, uranium, borax, silica, rhyolite, gold.

Some look above for Zion's angels pointing

through the clouds to salvation.

Most see a margin: a mirage, at most a waypoint

a way to get from one place to another

a place of forgetting. Escape.

Tabula Rasa: a place to build and knock down

dream castles on a whim, on a chance,

no consequence, except a few rotten
reminders, broken evidence of claims
lost or forfeited.

Small Death on the Sidewalk

Crushed

under the heedless heel-

Too quick to escape

and so destroying the

dreaming insect

its brittle carapace no protection

under unwitting tread.

How much has been crushed

out of unthinking words, gestures

Futile protections offer

nothing but a plosive crunch

as the softer feelings

smear across pavement

smear across pages,

smear across the coffeshop night-

A moment's groan-

the audience reflexes

before they return to their conversations.

Raven

perched

on the corner

over the door

at noon

my portable

classroom parked

on the blacktop

the

black bird

sits

on the roof

until I

step

on the rattling

metal porch

the moment

my foot

touched stair

the bird flew

black bird

yellow building

blue sky

every lunch

hour a winged

shadow

passed over me

Winter Seed

Buried in final earth:

quiet lips parted, eyelids met

hands folded, idle~

limbs cradled in Her rotten bosom.

Heavy the earth-pull and

dark the night—

Rest, white brow.

Release, white bones.

Roots hold in pale hammock;

worms entwine and devour.

All returned, all reduced, all reborn

in spring. The green shoots reach

for light, for warmth, anchored

in the remains of what was you, what was me.

St. Thomas, Nevada

The town is dry now; its crumbled blond walls
hidden in between the gray and black stalks
of dead marsh reeds.

We hold up the hand-drawn map we purchased
at the Lost City Gift Shop.

Is that the ice cream parlor?

Hey, I think that's the school over there.

You search your phone for the photos others took;
the same foundation on its small screen
and a group of bright-jacketed tourists
standing in a row.

For a moment, their image hovers
in the present desert
our desert
as we check the caption.

Yes, this is the Gentry Hotel

In 1938, the Colorado River bellied and stretched
became Lake Mead.

Flooded.

This valley and all its

features erased

Hugh Lord sculled away from his home for the last time.

Ten years later, two young women fished in a

St. Thomas basement, their legs gleaming

and their rods taut.

In the sixties, water receded.

The town families returned,

spread blankets between the walls

of what was once their homes

and had a picnic.

After Basho

Mt. Charleston. Wandering car ride to the end of US 157 and Lee Canyon exit. Cool retreat for overheated desert-dwellers. Meandering path through public campground, behind Society for Creative Anachronism knights fighting with wooden swords. Steep climb. Wheezing breath. Used inhaler. At last, alone. This mountain ridge of ancient bristlecone and Douglas fir. Light dry earth, springy with fallen needles. Sun-freckled ground. Woodpecker knocked in the distance. Monarch flitted nearby. Rested under tree near the weather station. Exhilarating scene. Profound joy.

two city slickers

entwined under pine branches

mountain breathes us

Moth One

Alights on the office window

White body feathery, pristine

against the square of blue.

Somewhere behind, a Southwest

jet lowers its orange and blue hull

to the runway.

Moth busy with moth ablutions

Licks tiny forelegs, wipes first

one antenna, then the other, next

hastily scrubs downy abdomen,

tips backward gently, assuredly

to reach nether regions, stops,

puts all legs on glass,

pauses a moment, then wings away.

Moth Two

Perched, wings

folded, motionless

Mottled brown markings

perfect disguise for tree trunk, but

pathetically obvious on

beige stucco.

Pet Cemetery

small graves

some surrounded

with pickets

cement plaque

RIP Kitty

Love Tony (big hand)

and Fannie (little hand)

shattered

bunny toy

faded teddy bears

white mailbox

letters to Chief

a good dog

tiny yellow

flowers

cracked soil

Boris the turtle
buried near
the other turtles

the guinea pig
under a mound
of plastic flowers

wind blasted
stick crosses
names effaced

pickup
rolls down ruts
man steps out
in a dust cloud

to mourn?
to pee.

Black Madonna in the Prague Loreto

A rayed womb electric

with dark power

a flower opens

in the abyss.

She holds

her fruit

her child.

The Desert is a Good Place to have a Vision

on the flat rock

over the serpent swallowing the sun

in front of the brown and purple goddess

snake in one hand infant in the other

next to the red coyote with

black raven claws

and underneath Spider Woman

a labyrinth in her belly

revised in 2006

by the artist

the same one who

dropped out in 1973

and came here to paint

now returned a professor

on the other side of the path

the native petroglyphs

chipped fleck on fleck

traces of raincloud bighorn river

Frogs

Over there, she pointed
at a dirt road
etched in the desert rock
a trace already vanishing

Over there, we went there
when I first came here
years ago, before we married
That's the Sheep Range
and at the end of that road
there's a pond.

That pond was filled,
filled with frogs.

So many
in the desert
then.

My Breath a Sacred Harp

blue sky between the corn leaves green cool dirt shadows blue sky shining
here mommy's talking not to me
blue dress not a pink one blue crayons jesus loves me color him blue
i've got a joy joy deep in my heart blue walls stay quiet don't feel
that way blue notebook and blue pen write secret lock them away tiny key
blue veins white hall white sheets black
mark red stain green bracelet
blue book value pay cuts layoff blue not black not red
but blue monday workdays begin again
not to me brother runs shakes the stalks bright sun cool grass dandelion white
butterfly daisy black eyed susan
pink birthday crown pink balloons pink ruffles daddy give me a baby
doll one that drinks and wets
hard desk pencil smudge long division fly on my arm
pink eraser crumbs brush them away
blue black cloud billie holliday strange fruit
pink robe wine stain cry into receiver mom
wait and see follow seek accept
complete revise embrace

Transplant

Honey mesquite seedling split,
fat seed sending limber stem
toward the light, unfurling infant leaves
white rootlet corkscrewing
through potting soil only to be thwarted
by the aluminum pan.

If it survives, it will live in the desert:
split caliche with tenacious roots,
fan the wind with delicate weeping leaves,
drop finger-thick bean pods
with more seeds waiting.

Today, the gardener coaxes it free
from the pan to plant it
in a long plastic cylinder
filled with cactus mix and sand
at this moment its whole living being
held between finger and thumb.

Air

blows the neighbor's secrets
to my doorstep:
candy wrappers,
credit card receipts,
tissue wads.

Leaves knock at the windows,
scrape along the cement,
eddy under bushes.

Out in the desert,

the wind is free of walls.

It picks up dust and salts,
forms devils whirling spirits
that cut through the unlucky
and take
some soul piece.

Invisible power. Except
for the dust riding

its currents:

seed for raindrops

and snowflakes.

Each pure moment

encloses

a bit of grit.

Fire

penetrates

every cell, every particle.

The core,

the fire within:

the earth,

our blood,

our brains see light

color

even when our eyes cannot

light is our essence

each particle

of everything

once was

and is

light:

flickers

wave on wave.

Devours

all.

Consumes,

never destroys:

the sun

the body

the heart

the hearth.

It moves us;

we move.

Water

Fluid finds the deepest places,
fills them, and pushes everything
with it. Carves canyons,
mountains,
bloodlines.

Solid

floats
light-filled,
rigid crystalline
cover.

Vapor

rises moves
 excites scalds.

Earth

crystallizes.

Ideas

manifest.

A stone:

a thought.

An object

being

at this moment

touching this:

Curriculum Vita

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EDUCATION

M.F.A. English. University of Nevada, Las Vegas. December 2013. Phi Kappa Phi.

M.A. cum laude. English Education. Wayne State University. 1996.
Thesis: Cultural Communication and Composition

B.A. English, Creative Writing Emphasis. Certificate in Women's Studies. Michigan State University, 1992.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

College of Southern Nevada 2005 to present.

English Composition I, English Composition II, World Literature I

University of Nevada, Fall 2010 to Spring 2013

Las Vegas, Composition I, Composition I extended, Composition II, Writing Center Consultant.

Clark County School District

English I, English I Read/Write, Journalism I, Journalism II, English grades 6-8, 1997-2002.

GRANTS/SCHOLARSHIPS

UNLV GPSA Grant Summer 2013.

UNLV English Department Travel Grant, Summer 2013.

Western Michigan University Valclav Havel Scholarship, Summer 2013.

UNLV English Department Travel Grant, Fall 2011.

Nevada Arts Council Professional Development Grant, Fiscal Year 2010, First Quarter.

Nevada Arts Council Jackpot Grant, Fiscal Year 2006, First Quarter.

AWARDS

Indian Springs Schools Certificate of Appreciation, June 1, 2000.

PUBLICATIONS

"St. Thomas, Nevada." *300 Days of Sun*. 1.1 (2014). Print.

"Tule Springs, Floyd Lamb State Park." *300 Days of Sun*. 1.1 (2014). Print.

"Bee Savior." *(re)volv*e. 35 (2009): 156. Print.

“Bum Magic.” *Interim.* *Interim.* 27.1&2 (2009): 26. Print.
 “Mira The Wonderful Star.” *Interim.* 27.1&2 (2009): 27. Print.
 “Moving Out.” *The One Three Eight.* (2008). Web.
 “Desert Reverie.” *Neon Crush: A Celebration of Las Vegas Poetry.* (2007). Print.
 “Communion.” *Chance.* (1999). Web.

PRESENTATIONS

“Multiple Voices Surround a Singular Identity: C.D. Wright’s One With Others”
 PCAS/ACAS Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, October 7, 2011.

WORKSHOPS

Prague Summer Program, Summer 2013.
 Naropa University Summer Writing Program. July 6-11, 2009.
 Iowa University Summer Writing Program. July 18-22, 2005.

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Reader for Poetry Section of Witness Magazine, Fall 2012 to Spring 2013.
 U.S. Park Service, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Winter 2013.

READINGS AND PERFORMANCES

Vegas Valley Book Festival Poetry Readings	September 28 and October 4, 2013	Featured Reader
Word Up! Poetry Reading	September 11, 2012	Featured Reader
<i>Las Vegas Meditation</i> Documentary Film	release date: January 2013	Reader/appearance
Vegas Valley Book Festival Poets’ Bus Tour	November 4, 2011	Reader
Vegas Valley Book Festival Poets’ Bus Tour	November 5, 2010	Reader
Word Up! Poetry Reading	January 19, 2010	Featured Reader
Naropa University Summer Writing Program	July 8, 2009 July 10, 2009	Reader Performer, <i>Borders: A Poets’ Play</i>

<i>Estrogeniuses</i> Women's Poetry Festival, reJAVAnate Café, Las Vegas	September 16, 2008	Reader
<i>MM & J Poetry</i> reJAVAnate Café, Las Vegas	March 25, 2008	Featured Reader
<i>Neon Crush</i> , Reading and book signing Clark County Library, Jewel Box Theater Las Vegas	October 18, 2007	Contributor/Reader
<i>Hot Java</i> Women's Poetry Festival reJAVAnate Café, Las Vegas	September 18, 2007	Reader
M & M Poetry Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf, Las Vegas	June 9, 2005	Featured Reader
<i>Jitters Poetry</i> Jitters Café, Las Vegas	October 14, 1999	Featured Reader
<i>NeonLit</i> Contemporary Arts Center, Las Vegas	September 24, 2010	Reader