

1-1-2000

## The Seer's Abacus

Sasha Megan Steensen  
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.25669/w1fo-2xaa>

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**THE SEER'S ABACUS**

by

**Sasha Steensen**

**Bachelor of Arts  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
1997**

**A thesis in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the**

**Master of Fine Arts Degree  
Department of English  
College of Liberal Arts**

**Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
May 2000**

UMI Number: 1399912

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**Thesis Approval**  
The Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

April 13, 2000

The Thesis prepared by

Sasha Steensen

Entitled

The Seer's Abacus

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Examination Committee Chair

Dean of the Graduate College

Examination Committee Member

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative

**ABSTRACT**

**The Seer's Abacus**

by

**Sasha Steensen**

**Professor Claudia Keelan, Examination Committee Chair  
Professor of English  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas**

**Negative Capability is the capacity to subtract the self so that there is room to add the other. Simone Weil, John Keats, Jack Spicer and Emily Dickinson suggest that the poet ought to renounce the self so as to offer up her own voice as a sacrifice to the world. The poet who hopes to speak for others must become no Body so that she can become every Body—she must subtract so that she can add. Weil insists that in order to annihilate the self, one must pay close attention to something other than her own ego. The poet must fix her attention on her subject so much so that the identity of that subject becomes her own identity, even if only temporarily. Attention is the self's abacus. For the poet interested in Negative Capability, there is no subject, save the self, that is off-limits. As Emily Dickinson points out, poetry is the space in which negative capability can occur—it is full of doors and windows through which the ego can go out and the other can come in. *The Seer's Abacus* is my struggle to open all the possible windows and doors, to rid myself of myself so that I might let others speak.**

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Claudia Keelan, whose poetics and pedagogy work to compassionately allow the other a voice. I would also like to thank my parents and my brother for their long-standing support and encouragement. Lastly, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the three individuals who taught me the importance of loving the other as the self—Becky Abraham, Gordon Hadfield, and Jenni Hass Romano. Without any of these individuals, this book would not have been possible.

**“Two tendencies with opposite extremes: to destroy the self for the sake of the universe, or to destroy the universe for the sake of the self. He who has not been able to become nothing runs the risk of reaching a moment when everything other than himself ceases to exist.”**

**—Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (128)**

**“Let me see: every ‘leven wether tods; every tod yields pound and odd shilling; fifteen hundred shorn, what comes the wool to?.....I cannot do’t without compters.”**

**—Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale* (1587)**

**“Courtiers are but counters;  
Their value depends on their place:  
In favor, they’re worth millions  
And nothing in disgrace”**

**—Eighteenth-century French saying (Menninger 366)**

## The Seer's Abacus

"We shall have to make an account of ourselves on the red-hot counting board in God's chancery." —Swabian saying (Menninger 376)

They wear robes  
in the spring  
of his step in the black dark easter  
there is fastly becoming

openings to burn burn  
and level the ground so that  
none live on a hill  
so that Thomas has to get on his knees  
to reach the wound.

In the village, the weaver  
yells as I walk on:  
"Let me level with you,  
you are fastly burning."

In the spring of the lower  
continents my counters  
my beads are ready to leave me  
my laurels

have grown too out of hand  
is worth none  
in any bush below.

See, I am burning all on my own  
and in comes what is not  
in comes what is vital  
and in I find not me  
and everything besides.

# **I. L a n d C o u n t i n g**

## By Land: A Poetic

### I. Tread

The small space between is so real, black with tiny lights peeking through each crevice, swerve back and forth, pace or climb snowy hills. There is this other. You. Fellow Icelander.

(And then there is. Unreachable.)

This space pressing is the verold, that verr and old, world. Over the other side of the space. Forming a new island, Surtsey. Communion is neither body nor blood, but something warm creeping in between, or no, it is nothing warm, but cold.

### II. Upshot

You crowed about this child stillborn yesterday, spring warmed by her conception. Bathe in it. Coming during egg month, this floating. Bundled wool in snow caves, because in the blanket, between us, our son is alive while our daughter drifts slowly southward. Greenhouses, growing melons and bananas and grapes. White markers resembling military graves but smaller and plastic are future births: seedlings. Sorry, two moose locked antlers and were devoured by one bear. For a moment she is in the ice storm I am in.

### III. Cast about

I was told the freezing mark is this and recorded it myself right below my knee. Forgotten, it shone the day my son was born. The blood washed away the degree, diving into the snow, finding only yester-----.

You sent a photo from a magazine of five flower pots on a roof, the line of a city, every other color but white. I glance at everything. Tulip. Looking in the water in all of its lightness/ reflective whiteness, I saw instead a backbone floating, belonging to something much larger than you could ever be. Still (myself unmoving) have you fallen from the sky, coming together at the seams? Those fish washed up with the tide, trying to get some of your light, to take it back with them, each moon washing them further ashore.

Norwayward. The direction of color. Being pushed out by the Atlantic, the Pacific loses an inch a year, carrying landmasses like passengers.

### IV. Pass

Walking on nests. Caused me to leave by more directions than which I came. A drip by the aching point of a third, a perfect circle, before falling through to the frozen palmate. Your hardhead emphasis—"why her and all of this?" These and other words followed past the fortnight, where you slept icy with our boy. A silent separation blanketing the ditch where we might sleep. Floating down the river, Thjorsa, nothing is lush. After some

traveling. The cold may have sidled into my ears, whispering things stillness could not. Hills clothed in moonlike dirt and steam. A punt my pillow, I fell asleep and awoke sometime later to a small jolt, the nuzzle of a single flake. The bow positioned between two pieces of earth whose heart had split,

a patch of moss.

I had hoped the island had drifted, communing with a more sympathetic land.

## VI. Shade

Pushed on by the land tip, swung around to upset its neighbor. Water. Back and Forth, up the downward slide, around a mirk of track, my foot too small to cross or bridge  
 “Dig too far and it may sink.”

Much too wet to

live three for long,

my shade a sort of south greenland of man or boy or dog or the something in between.

A giving forest and a pack of peat for larger animals. Leaving lumbering, the three of us, absenting half the world's newsprint. Weave through the streetgrass, leaving rubbish to follow onward, her small nose still pressed to its flying. Gifting forward in wooden boxes of the few things land wants.

## **This Shore**

**The water was put here.  
A speed boat came round the bend.  
The lowlying clouds stop us  
from speaking and leaving our cove.  
It laps, we lap, at each other's tails.**

**On the next shore is deadliness.  
Death of sound:  
horseshoes, drunken yelling,  
those who have never kept night  
in a lake storm.**

**Cloud cover.  
Words above.  
Two blankets we are given as children  
have their holes:  
Language and that with which we sleep.**





## Searches

Playing at camp, alongside the river,  
runaway children now run to the hills,  
the changing trees, toward the water source.

The skunk weed has been trampled,  
the shoes thrown in the river.  
Trees are losing their leaves.  
And smell is must.

Their parents looked for a day or two  
in dumpsters, in hospitals,  
on the cityriver's banks,  
for bodies or shoes or anything but souls  
searching out the water source.

The moon knows where they are,  
gods' lamplight,  
sweet white air of the hills, water source,  
smelly skunk weed, the river  
searches them out each evening  
and brings salmon for their dinner.

moon air on the river  
water painted by leaves  
cooked fish on the skewer  
city shoes float back to sea.

## Driving By

### I. Being her:

Words from the car window sound like *woman, mamma,*  
 and then of course, *sex.* He never knew  
 that giving birth, a certain death, was the supreme effort.  
 One he is screwing is becoming no one so  
 he can become someone for years after death.  
 If I live too long, I'm afraid I'll have to die again and again  
 for him  
 or someone else driving by.

### II. All that through the window and this:

Nudes, Faith.

My daughter asks about the flyers:

"These woman are naked, mommy, why?"

And the chaplain can't sweep them away fast enough  
 or he doesn't try. I tried  
 to call my child something else besides mine.

A boy put a shopping cart in a tree so he could have a tree home,  
 and then his brother— a car so he could move,  
 maybe to his own tree home.

Balancing on a tight rope limb,

I leave myself,

go to the crane convention, climb one bar higher than my highest,

and give the effort to my children,

destroy my eggs

because here we cohere

on the street we are on,

we are now one.

I will follow here

and be her.

### III. Being That:

I came yesterday,

I'll have to leave tomorrow

for the sea or the center of this sphere.

Felt fishskin drums

left her here with him

playing strip poker behind a dumpster

and he can draw her beautiful figure from the curb.

## Lasting Breath

1. and now I am standing on the edge of the porch and now the instrument is air and now  
the air is spring the air is pink  
everything I have is left in the day

wind can change  
wind which carries trash from block to block  
wind which the birds and the insects must face  
must not ignore  
burns diffuses is comforted burns again

as I take in  
and let go again  
take in

let's

2. Bear witness.  
The ghosts that pass have a story to tell.  
Outside the city limits the coyotes' fur is mangled  
They step in. They bring with the current  
their burred howls.

When I cannot sleep,  
I walk out to the edge of the city,  
there the edge is blurred the edge is blank the edge is moving outward.

City. Poem.  
It seems to me the argument has been wrong.  
The loved,  
City. Poem.  
Is not running away  
but getting larger  
with each breath I let out

the taking in is the problem  
let's

breathe a little softer

3. I wanted to reach the end—  
 the border where the thinking stops  
 and real breathing begins  
 cannot take place in my house on my porch in my city—musty.

I can feel the wrong argument passing through me again  
 air: borders of air: us: city: poem  
 recalled all in the la la la  
 la  
 la  
 la  
 Have the birds bought it too?  
 That its too far away to sing our way?

4. Then all I had I knew was in the day in that: day's wind in that: wind's passengers in  
 that: breath caught by that: wind and taken to that: city edge and over that: lover that:  
 poem that: howl or that: tweet so leviathan arms won't reach around it. Christ! No, dear  
 god, *that* is all wrong. *This* is better. See this day. See it? Look closer. Walk out  
 further and over the borders—out.

5. Breathe in.  
 Sole witness.  
 There is a suffocation in the air.  
 Are you the type of girl to be out here?  
 I wondered as I saw a girl hopping tumbleweeds in the middle of the night.

*I didn't believe the argument.*  
*I couldn't sleep she said.*  
 Did they pass already, the coyotes?  
*Yes. They passed looking for the desert's edge.*  
*This. And she hopped.*

6. Through the city I see the argument rearranging itself.  
 Inside the desert inside the common grave inside the whirlwind ghosts run about.  
 A howl now—a human howl—a border's howl—the dying day's  
 more than howl: yelp.

She's in the city, the tumblejumper  
 and here she cannot recognize the argument hovering—walks right by—skips right  
 by—sees but

does not—exhales but cannot  
 she's breathing heavy—she's frantic—its hopping past,

the day, and what has she done—

7. Downtown.

Downcity.

Jumper is with the corner girls, learning  
to be a border stuck in the soil others take home for an hour and then thrown back from  
the alley, this day's alley, the junkies are pushed back to the building's matter  
her father died there where three walls meet.

8. Trying to take the border out of things.

You know what I am doing.

Trying to get rid of the black between,  
the dark matter  
the places small enough for ants to see,  
through the keyhole:

a dark room

through a city:

a dark desert

through a poem:

a ghost lover.

through the wind:

messages.

I could go on like this,

but you'd see the lie even without the spaces  
spaces: see: you'd: lie: even: without

9. But not still

not lie still.

How far and how hard air has to go!

tumbleweed turning corners,

reaching alleys

passing red lights, buses crowded,

yellow lines,

solid yellow lines,

double yellow lines,

dotted yellow lines

and off the road

onto the park

over the grocery store

to the coyotes

and now the air is yellow the air is mild the air                      knows no border

the jumper knows she cannot exhale

all her air at once  
knows she must take a little in  
be a little less of a ripple a little more of a space  
breathe.

this way, follow, the air you

**Conewise**

If I could  
pour you  
(poor you)  
from cup to cup,  
pitcher to glass,  
decanter to bonny little crystal,  
you slow as a drip  
I can see an eye through,  
I'd pour you down the drain.

There is this boy I love who climbed up an elm and there he could see you,  
in all of your youness, and he called down: "so lovely, so ugly."  
Afraid little me stays right, standing on its root,

where she is.



**Decentered**

**This center points to others  
to itself and others  
and shadows its own hill,  
it feels heavy, the logger says  
roll over out it and see where you've been  
this dollar is all I have to offer,  
but I can't give it, it is I  
it buys vestments, tee-shirt  
    gems, olivet  
    languages, Berber  
and it cuts down all that I will need for more  
over there the sun is gone and the tavern open  
I know because I do the same everyday.**

**Yourself**

No matter how much you want someone  
to put their hand on your head and walk beside you,  
telling you, yes, the poplar tree is beautiful,  
name and limbs and the topiary  
was sheered today for you.

Ask for nothing.

There are things you never want to be:  
one of many children whose god lied,  
a solitary sailor,  
the port to which he is in route,  
the last drunk on earth.

You can, I'm sure, walk yourself.

## **II. S u b t r a c t i o n**

### **I n t e r l u d e**

distribution

1.

i.

a bird hops from branch to branch  
 an entire tree sways  
 an entire life of reassuring has been lost

the jets shake the empty pantry  
 now more than the slammed door  
 now ore is being mined

for some purpose

i reach for the large letter (I)  
 and it flies away  
 out past the bird the swaying tree the lost life the jets

and finds hundreds of itself

i's buried beneath mines

i's eating dried beans

i's whose wealth in one day  
 makes more in interest  
 than the other i's make  
 an entire life

look ahead to the path of jets and see

something else has been flying around

ii.

my small bird goneway  
 them feed the backdoor rundown

dig-down and dirty nails

you are sick old man  
 shitting on yourself and still  
 digging still

fly

or

a kite

something

**and crashing and killing all its passengers all along**

**and i love something**

**sweet  
to take**

**i can't say what either is**

2.

I for the large letter reach  
something sweet to take  
the bird the tree the lost life the jets

i's i's i's  
i's whose wealth in one day makes more in interest than the other i's  
(buried beneath mines  
eating dried beans)  
make an entire life

for some purpose  
you still digging  
shitting on yourself and still  
lost  
love something

3.

and i  
look ahead to the path of jets and see  
an entire life of reassuring being mined  
dig-down and dirty nails  
and it flies away  
a kite  
something else  
the jets  
now is now  
more away than the slammed door

i can't say what either is

an entire tree sways

4.

or

**a bird hops from branch to branch**

**out past the ore**

**is my small bird goneway**

**and finds hundreds of itself flying around**

**crashing and killing its passengers all along**

ay

ay

**shake the empty pantry**



God

loafe with me on the grass

loose the stop from your throat,

not words, not music or rhyme I want

only the lull I like,  
the hum of your valved voice.\*

Child

I must lay my head  
in the mud

and comb for one blade of weed  
one unbendable green blade  
to name pillow.

sunless day in western New York  
my prayers:

Sun,  
Sun, Sun, Sun,  
Sun.....

now Darkling,  
will you return?  
Must *we* find *you* after all these years of

You/Us?  
You then Us?

Those settlers, those who stay,  
burning forests off their lands.  
*I don't understand where to find you.*

record this, eastern counties:  
the last wolf was killed today.

**Cowbird**

O, I know it  
O, highest nester  
could be different

when we are packed in  
wings to sides  
pages in a notebook  
in someone else's nest  
until we give up fields of chopped branched trees for future leaves,

O, through your words and mine  
I hear nothing  
but flight and claws scratching away

to another nation  
leaving small beaks to stretch  
in hunger  
asking: "are you done with this city?"  
"are you done with this nation?"

And everywhere you drop small twigs and veins of leaves  
(are you my mother?)  
but never nest again.

Lilies

To be public, writing is only.

Here he says his fantasy is copulating public.  
 Or be with other people within other cities.  
 There he says she won't mind will she if he is in other cities  
 on business.

His business requires being public.  
 Publically, he sells railways  
 he sells airports.

He sends lilies from wherever he goes  
 public  
 and writes:  
*Here I am working hard. I am in meetings and working hard.  
 I will be home after I sell this railway.  
 Please, love these lilies as if they were me.*

She knows publically that he is selling hardly.  
 The lilies arrive on a Friday.  
 He left, by plane, last Saturday.  
 Less than the week the fantasy is complete,  
 she thinks.

He is in Las Vegas, and the heat is now public.  
 There the lights come together, the way they are supposed.  
 This is another city, not like my own,  
 where the lights are separate lilies.  
 picked. public. Las Vegas is a place where conventions are held  
 people come together. Production is planned and taken home.  
 He thinks.

Copulating is not reproduction, though it can be.

Before his people arrived there was a crane convention.  
 All the cranes were lined up outside and so he hears the site was something.  
 From his hotel room, he tries to feel what it would look like if the railways or airports  
 were lined up outside the convention center next to the cranes.

He feels it would be too public.  
His job. Too private for lining up.  
As he thinks this, he sees a hooker pass,  
or someone passing for a hooker  
on the street downstairs.  
Downstairs on the street he feels he is already with her,  
he has already paid her.  
She won't mind will she if he is in other cities  
with other business people.

It is all public, isn't it,  
to send home lilies  
ordered online.  
Is it when ones' fantasy is to have already paid her  
is to have already purchased the public.

The poem is the only and even all lined up it has to be more public than her lilies:  
Railways/Airports.

**The Sign Read:  
"One Bleeding to Death"**

**From the parking lot, the cop thought it read "I'm"  
but instead "One."**

**One taught, loved the lake, boats, his family.**

**Before death the thought maybe something like:**

**The lake last summer,**

**the waves from each shore**

**meeting one another so that the center was too rough.**

**It kept One's youngest from waterskiing,**

**a funny little sport. A funny little coldness in One's chest.**

**Secure, not against its own,**

**the snow melted, the lake grew**

**and Colorado is itself a single square near the center,**

**westward, with One less left.**

**Subtraction**

All my brother's neighbors are outside,  
calling for *Laurie*,  
and a little girl and a dog are running  
on the rock lawn, trying not to catch one another.

We move forward by subtraction  
having to release ourselves,  
even if only briefly,  
from someone's care

the way we've said God died  
after this between world  
was made—  
is true to—

The mother stands on the edge of her balcony,  
not calling or gesturing,  
but smoking and waiting,  
not adding anything,  
but waiting

for her daughter or her dog to come upstairs  
and see how the perfect line of telephone poles  
stretches out to the mountains  
to see the chapel has finished its steeple  
and their sounds carry  
even where it seems there is nothing  
to hold them down.

## **III. Love Counting**

**Love Poem #1**

**Everything that shines  
(how many pieces do you wish?)  
Sun, moon, money, pine sap.  
Four wings:  
tap... tap... tap... tap...  
(You are it!)  
Everything that shines.**



**Love Poem #2**

**Is not Gold  
Your wings are silver.  
I'm sorry when they ache.  
Press a pink  
thumb, between the tendons,  
release your shimmy  
and hearts are happy, but  
not Gold.**

**Love Poem #3**

**Money,  
a silver piece  
a pocket watch,  
a shine in a well,  
(see the bucket?)  
Show, then tell the world  
all you have been hiding.  
It will be better off.  
I promise.**

**Love Poem #4****Talks****Big F,****little f,****Besides yourself,****a feather in the moonlight****and other nice things.****Talk today,****its always too soon anyway,****like flying.**

**Love Poem #5**

**Straighten up.  
For you,  
I could glide through the fissure,  
turn a peacock tail sideways,  
thin enough to slide its dots  
through. Sasha had a fancy tail,  
a fancy tail, a fancy tail,  
its feathers black and soiled.**

**Love Poem #6**

**And fly right.**

**Don't leave the black dust, shammy,  
other things can't shine.**

**A sweetbitter thing you did down here,  
such a feather and no flight.**

**L'isola/the island, its all the same,  
all mainland to you,  
flying by day or night.**

**Love Poem #7**

**Throw yourself!  
I plucked my tail and waxed it all up again.  
(You are closer.  
Tell Him I tried.  
It's the fault, not yours,  
but of your's).  
Heat. A tasty thing you did for the grape.**

**Love Poem #8**

**Into it.  
A sticky sort of shine.  
Nearly a feather tree.  
I watched a Coloradan evening  
of kittens and baby sparrows,  
scratching my tail on your sap  
and then leapt  
into it,  
the world,  
braking my tarsus on its floor.  
The burnt child.**

## **IV. Reading Encounter**



**Grammatica Parda I.**

**To walk west means nothing  
other than to keep walking,  
from what part of the world have you come  
the country of the largest moon,  
beanfield, bog or pond,  
and did you use  
your tail  
for a sail  
to cross widest rivers?**

**Gramatica Parda II.**

**A noise that stays too long must leave and be at home anywhere. There is the sound of green thrush that has hurt itself in its sitting. An avalanche devoured her husband raw and its sound carried the message from rock to snow from crow disturbed. Someone had stolen her potted plants earlier that week and he had gone to the edge of the snow to find lilies. (Villagers sent messages she never understood, the dirt trailed from porch to road to town and then lost in the muddiness of it all.) Pardon the grammar of those who have not learned limits.**

**Eons of Pigeons Playing Dead  
for Sappho**

**For their wings don't freeze up, silly, they weaken  
and can't make it to work or play or to the bar where their friends wait  
for the wind to bring word of their hearts.**

**Never seen a better teaching tool.  
Never saw more wounds  
stitch themselves by watching and waiting all the junkies  
leaving the corner store yelling, "I have been beautiful in the city too."**

**Pigeons eat tiny pebbles.  
It's fact!  
Been going on for eons.  
Trains pass the information  
from state to state and soon you'll see children pelting stones at city birds.  
Christ, this world is syllables away from understanding,  
addiction is communicable.**

**Auden as Old Master**

About bearing witness he was never wrong.  
To get to the root of things, the mangled sweet  
licorice, yucca, all the potato plants.  
And now in a vegetable garden.  
He knows each ghosts' story for an onion,  
a barely buried truth.

In Musee des Beaux Arts, for example: how everything is followed through.  
Dogs and horses go about their business, an unembarrassment.  
Through snowcovered twigs we see  
children late for dinner,  
skating, ducks gone west.  
And through this we see the borders of water: ice: land: isle.  
Borders of a single splash coming from and going back.  
Sunk: see the rootedness: its ripples still go.

**And the Flames Rise Up  
for Emily Dickinson**

**You and Bruno knew  
this blue planet is indeed round,  
but they could only burn so many  
witches, warlocks, heretics  
to transform—saints might come  
and now this Sabbath I sit alone  
and light a fire at my feet  
as if I could burn one flower petal  
for every truth you told.**

**You and Bruno also knew  
this earth is not the center  
nor is it completion  
any more than a field of flowers is,  
for all our efforts to continue,  
we are three, going forward all along.**

**For Emily or For Emilie**

**Lighting lights  
and blowing them out at midnight**

**You  
a routine  
Yourself  
no mother but yourself a childless parent.**

**I had never met a day lily until your introduction  
and liver leaves finally seen  
as they are—angels, not goblins.**

**You put out Jesus, not with your face  
but with your movement.**

**These hymnals a new religion  
less swerving than the other**

**Reading you a plank  
in the middle of a sea you never saw**

**I fall again and again  
(Amherst could never have known you)  
in a new direction  
always toward Vesuvius at home.**

**For Emily or For Emilie**

**Lighting lights,  
blowing out at midnight.  
You,  
a routine yourself,  
have become my routine.**

**I climbed under the day lilies on the New York shore  
and fell asleep under the shade of your introduction  
and every lover I have ever had since then has been following me following you.  
Even when I stammer  
I stammer my fury  
and utterance fills a page.  
Standing on a plank in the center of the sea.**

**Hallelujah**  
**some poems for Jack Spicer**

1.

**Asylum sought,  
 but seeped through the boards of the boat,  
 the margins,  
 means no thing,  
 all loaded up and heavy, with shark-eaten holes.  
 Now the sea is red,  
 not The Red Sea.**

**When you leave the poem spooked,  
 Jacky,  
 in cards it equals 21.**

2.

**Saint Francis saved a tiny little soul:**

**He did not pray for him,  
 nor for his foes,  
 he laid his body on top  
 and took the blows.**

3.

**If Francis were here,  
 he'd let the dealer go first.  
 The sort of saint he was, he was  
 not a sort of saint who ached to be first,  
 and black Jack,  
 he probably understood how your liver hurt.**

4.

**Asylum sent the small boys back  
 to collect the bones and flesh of their fallen fathers.  
 It's pain to be part of the land  
 everyone else wants.**



5.

**Refugees: Rufus became Rodney.  
And then Rufus was never even Rufus anyway.**

**Holy: sent down from God.  
Holey: when they crossed the sea,  
the sharks ate a little part of them,  
and what's left poems can't protect,  
Saint so and so,  
people can.**

**Postcards From the Cruellest Month****Thursday, April 3****Dearest B.,****30 days starting today.****Knowing how you love Anne Sexton,****who invented the lie: "There is no other day but Monday."****I say: there is no other day but Thursday.****It is the coldest third day of April since 1976.****The cacti nearly stopped blooming today.****From my window I watch the living tuck their hands in their pouches and lower their heads.****She watched the dead "sitting side by side like little wrens" roll over in their graves.****Now I know why you hate her: cliques and similes.****Besides, who ever heard of watching the dead when those living are so beautiful?****Watch from the window of your truck at traffic lights.****Watch over your bottle of beer at the saloon.****Watch over your plate of fried chicken at the cafeteria.****Watch for 30 days.****Yours, L.**

Wednesday, April 23

Dearest B.,

Have you been receiving my postcards?

A Spanish farmer lost his crop.

His family was starving.

He felt he had no other choice but to contact God.

He wrote a letter asking God to send money.

He put it in an envelope marked: Dios.

I am on my knees daily: Abba.

Anne felt that He is gone, just as you are.

I am hoping for a response from someone within the week.

Yours, L.

Tuesday, April 29

Dearest B.,

A kind postman intercepted the Spanish farmer's letter.  
He sent all the money he could and signed the letter: Dios.  
The farmer, disappointed by the amount, sent God another letter,  
in which he called the postmen "ladrones."

Thieves.

Anne believed her mailman was an impostor.  
Today is not Thursday and you are the impostor.  
You are the thief.

L.

Thursday, May 1

B.,

There are no days left.

Because she was a liar, Anne's own voice shocked her.

She spent days trying to find quiet.

"Quiet?" she would yell, "is that you?"

Trees she felt were "quiet as the crucifix."

There is no quiet in "Lord, why have you forsaken me?"

For 30 days you have been quiet.

That has been the most terrible noise I have ever heard.

You must lack the language Anne lacked.

She wrote millions of words, but found none to save her.

L.

# **V. S p e e c h C o u n t i n g**

**Lontar Dance**

oilish, an offlet for the tongue  
rain  
spit each drop or spit  
just one  
in two leafs be two leafs  
pressed between two palms

and drop the handle abackwards  
(wipe your feet)  
each toe  
before  
you pit the fruit  
Laurie  
and galliard gallopade gallop  
roundelay  
each step punctuated  
with the of between we slipped.

Fair

Bits of pilings  
(lid up on lower lid)  
of openings  
of “okays”  
when what is really meant  
needs “nots”  
by its side.  
A borrowing for tonight  
given back tomorrow  
Find “yes”  
words’ smallness  
that is large in life.  
Forget it,  
that you have been  
dusted  
downward,  
(lid up on lower lid)  
and go back to seeing  
the eyes in things.  
The wings  
you wished  
were in a pile of hay.



Later

Had gone to the pilings  
of openings  
of “okays”  
abackwards  
woods  
that smell buried beneath  
the leaves  
the words  
when what was really meant  
needs “nots”  
by its side.  
Any way I went.

There are openings  
to “fill, fill”  
(“Yeses”)  
with something real  
for instance, the log  
had been burrowed  
and rotted passable  
by the small size of the squirrel  
“a borrowing for tonight  
given back tomorrow”  
the tail follows  
the something real  
the “Nos.”

It's hard to say

Fixed is a failing body, a lie  
 it's heart hair falling  
 so much so  
 it wants to say and to know that in this is left.

Painters

cover windows in my sleep  
 and now I see out, but something else  
 I meant to get up earlier.  
 I had a bird  
 its name was enza  
 full flooded mortuaries  
 can't make those boxes fast enough  
 and if you want to know how not to feel  
 steel, then love something on this earth  
 I opened the window  
 and in flew enza.

Fixed is a failing body, all I  
 swimming in the living sea,  
 leaves have not lost their light

It's hard to write

feel it's rising before it's louder falling  
 transfer guttural thing to this  
 dearly dying thing  
 not the word I meant, thing or stuff,  
 to this

fixed is failing body, lie.

If one could let go of this holding on,  
 but I deserve to be able to say it—you,  
 someone snipped its strings, the plastic the painters left falls,  
 and it's different out there,  
 fixed failing body, lie.

It's hard to say

I taught grammar cause I thought  
it would help the Need and/or Consequences  
of twenty loud centuries.  
To order it accessible, and put you where yours belongs.  
And now it's hard,  
to say any other way,  
but just say it!  
"This" is the biggest lie.  
The core is satin, slick minnows,  
liquid. The core is  
lift off the wrong way and you'll end up somewhere else,  
somewhere new, but it's so hard to do,  
my yet unruffled wing caught on one-shotism,  
as if the air-car can only go up once,  
what if the fish who get washed ashore thought there was only one tide.

## Fixed

Fixed is a failing body, a lie.  
 "It's hard to say," he said, "but true."  
 We taught grammar cause we thought  
 it would help the Need and/or Consequences  
 of twenty loud centuries, to order it accessible,  
 to bring this closer to this,  
 "this" being the biggest lie—fixed.  
 And we thought we'd live together,  
 too afraid to see our students suffer or ourselves  
 live apart.

Failing body to failing body: "Let's swim.  
 Here the core is satin, slick minnows  
 transfer guttural thing to dearly dying thing."  
 "Thing" being the wrong word again.  
 To this. It *is* so hard to say,  
 swimming in this living sea, leaves still with light.  
 Fish still with food, it all feels a world full of play-laugh  
 a real wee lie, fixed, failing body.

What can I do?  
 "Nothing," he said,  
 "just someone to feed quail and plums  
 to me before I die, then, move your arms and legs,  
 that's right. Swim away."  
 But I deserve you, no, someone snipped your strings,  
 full flooded mortuaries, gulls, in flew enza.  
 Sweet  
 fixed  
 failed  
 body  
 lie.

Fixed is a failing body, a lie.

**Properly**

To learn proper English,  
place a piece of bread in the palm of your mouth,  
round the muscle,  
and say:  
“It’s hard to speak.”

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## VITA

Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Sasha Steensen

**Local Address:**

1515 E. Reno D103  
Las Vegas, NV. 89119

**Home Address:**

1307 Alpine Dr.  
Boulder City, NV. 89005

**Degree:**

Bachelor of Arts, History, 1997  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

**Special Honors and Awards:**

Sigma Tau Delta English Honors Society  
Golden Key National Honors Society  
Phi Kappa Phi Honors Society  
University Forum Fellowship, 1996  
James Wright Scholarship, 1997  
First Place Prize: Hiram Hunt Poetry Contest, 1997

**Publications**

"Eons of Pigeons Playing Dead," *Denver Quarterly*

**Thesis Title: The Seer's Abacus**

**Thesis Examination Committee:**

Chairperson, Claudia Keelan, M.F.A.  
Committee Member, Richard Wiley, M.F.A.  
Committee Member, Alike Barnstone, Ph.D.  
Graduate Faculty Representative, Joanne Goodwin, Ph.D.