1-1-2004

Ten Percent to Light a Desert Sky

James Cory Ness
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds

Repository Citation
https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds/1672

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
TEN PERCENT TO LIGHT A DESERT SKY

by

James Cory Ness
Bachelor of Arts
Bucknell University
1998

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2004
INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI Microform 1422805
Copyright 2004 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Thesis Approval
The Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

April 20, 2004

The Thesis prepared by

James Cory Ness

Entitled

Ten Percent To Light A Desert Sky

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

Master of Fine Arts in English

Examination Committee Chair

Dean of the Graduate College

Examination Committee Member

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
ABSTRACT

Ten Percent to Light a Desert Sky

by

James Cory Ness

Dr. Aliki Barnstone, M.F.A. Examination Committee Chair
Professor of English
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Ten Percent to Light a Desert Sky is a collection of poems written during my four year residency in Las Vegas, Nevada. The collection is tied together through prevailing themes of communication and a collage of the desert imagery scattered throughout the work. My many influences include W. S. Merwin, Federico Garcia Lorca, Lorine Niedecker, and Bob Dylan—as well as lessons learned through careful study with Aliki Barnstone, Claudia Keelan, Douglas Unger, Mark Irwin, and Megan Becker-Leckrone. The thesis is organized in four sections: Mojave Lowlight attempts to define the collection’s physical vocabulary; yes... dives into the thematic examination of communication; Living the Catalogue attempts to expand upon the preceding two sections and interpret my surroundings; and two ends the collection on a personal note of self-discovery.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................. vi

MOJAVE LOWLIGHT ................................................................................................. 1
  Mojave lowlight ....................................................................................................... 2
  Her desert night ....................................................................................................... 3
  La Luna Cuenta ....................................................................................................... 4
  Acting out ................................................................................................................. 5
  The poem uses color .............................................................................................. 6
  A Gamble ................................................................................................................. 7
  Excess ....................................................................................................................... 8
  My Pregnancy test and guacamole ...................................................................... 9
  You should be able ............................................................................................... 10
  Your Note ............................................................................................................... 11

YES............................................................................................................................. 12
  yes............................................................................................................................ 13
  She says.................................................................................................................... 14
  Speak ....................................................................................................................... 15
  Reading ................................................................................................................... 16
  Lover, ...................................................................................................................... 17
  What we’re saying ............................................................................................... 18
  When we talk about love .................................................................................... 19
  The Love Song of Adam and Eve ...................................................................... 20
  Exposition as composition ............................................................................... 21
  Why the well lit elephant .................................................................................. 22
  Believing moon .................................................................................................. 23

LIVING THE CATALOGUE ..................................................................................... 24
  Living the Catalogue ............................................................................................ 25
  Girl misses bus ..................................................................................................... 26
  When you order scrambled eggs ...................................................................... 27
  Just spinning ........................................................................................................ 28
  Advertising ......................................................................................................... 29
  The infatuating fluency of fingers .................................................................... 30

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plywoods</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand Job in the back of a Taxi</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formalism</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study on the ADD School of Poetry</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWO</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sick Story</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caesurae</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kell</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shutter speed</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesdays</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motioning</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You come in later</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry, love</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank the contributions of Aliki Barnstone, Claudia Keelan, and Douglas Unger, whose time and effort in workshops made this collection possible.
I.

Mojave Lowlight
Mojave lowlight

I walk Red Rock during rush hour. Rocks that looked white only an hour ago now swell and blush, this air feels smooth and black bananas pull around the loop, the women get out first, followed by Izod shirts tucked in plumply around the waist. “Sure is beautiful,” I say and they agree, though there’s nothing here as spectacular as an arch or a massive dome of Navajo Sandstone, whimsical hoodoos, hogbacks and spires chewed into stone and no human remains to marvel at aside from the many red faces.

The park rangers discuss the Pinion Juniper and a tea made from Brittle Brush used for “good health” and with adequate rainfall the spring brings a burst of wild flowers and native tribes named for their white explorers like Freemont and the Owens Valley Paiute, every tree

in Las Vegas has it’s own garden hose, the grass glows like a sports car, the faces are dull by day—bright people working the ciudad, a nighttime of gold psychology, a mirror saying that this is you and you are everything you are seeing, and because the mirror cannot talk we continue walking.
Her desert night

fills with light from a yellow sun
filtered red through
an atmosphere of car crap.
She tells me

Daddy had been a Republican
until the war and some labor issue
so now he votes for Democrats —
says they're "more democratic."

Mother declared herself
a "born-again Republican" after some story
her sister had told
about illegal immigrants.

We follow I-95 into Arizona.
Trees arch in red geometry, the snow
ruminates white, wind slides
the small car across the chessboard.
La Luna Cuenta

The moon is counting dogs.  
She slips and starts over.  
    The moon is counting dogs.

Caught in the sage brush,  
screwbeans hug their seeds.  
They remember how the swelling began,  
    caught in the sage brush.

The rocks grow cold.  
The stone-cutter, the fired stone and slate,  
drink in the breeze. Down here,  
    the rocks cool quickly.

The moon is counting dogs.  
She slips and starts over.  
    The moon is counting dogs.

    Nombres.  
Wolves and tea kettles.
Acting Out

When you learn that your father
is dying you hang up
the phone and get in your car
and drive into the desert before rush hour
while the sun still blinds
but promises soon to fall off.
You choose a familiar hike
because you recall that familiarity
provides a catharsis but really
you decide that you just don't want any cause
to contemplate direction.
The sound of your steps is
loud where you grind soft sandstone
and shuttle beneath sun.
Philosophy is an easy distraction
that dissolves into a line of images,
distant movies about fathers and sons
and the walk you are taking—taking,
defined as something we remove—
eight years removed from the last time
you acted out your father's death, as the boy
needing crisis when they removed the first
tumor and the pituitary he rode in on.
But now you are poised
to become your father's man.
Of course curiosity demands
you imagine the moment he passes
(isn't that why you're here?)
when you are unable to call simply
about yesterday's Yankee game or whether
his computer is working right?
And a movie appears more relevant,
not because of landscape
but because of actors
forced to imagine a path regardless
of what they are ready for.
The poem uses color

compact tufts of compressed sand burned violent maroon in spots revealing a pink stomach through scrapes of disturbed earth that need almost fifty years to re-cement and calcify

dry twisted roots exposed between dissolving rock hiding Greasewood a teal variety of Fighting Yucca dressed in red powder shoes so little to love here so little hiding beneath desert personified by lack of personification I don’t want a Woman bleeding

in her footsteps her cuts mediating midday air brushed with auto excrement coagulating on black floor mats under the silver gas pedal no less vocal than the priority of the earthbound poem and the modern sodality
A Gamble

When I try to describe the Mojave desert to a friend in Austria
I use an equation of color schemes:

Seventy percent brown.
Twenty percent blood red.
Ten percent dull green.

I expand on how mountains
to the west deplete the
weather system of palpable moisture:
The entire southwest is
actually a dry ocean, I say, but it is
the ten percent green that really makes
the region “special.”

This point is lost on her.
How can ten percent of anything
be special? Ten percent is always
too much or too little.
Perhaps it’s the other ninety percent
that makes ten memorable, the mix
of browns, indigenous sandstone
and granular shale, mingled
with scarce cement and glass, pocked
together, determined and strong,
jockeying for position beside
the random Greasewood, Blackbrush,
or the flamboyant Banana Yucca.
Even in Las Vegas, all it takes
is ten percent to light a desert sky
and if I said I loved you
once in ten days,
you could respond
with nine more.
Excess

the new moon felt
cheated and lifted

her skirt
until the sun

baked lizards on
sleeping rocks

with pleasure
Yucca spike

out into
blue making

distance in
the distance

engines
roar and

explode

woooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo
My pregnancy test & guacamole

Two jars of yellow and green rest
on the shelf above the kitchen window,
over the sink. They are translucent
for the most part and make waves
in the tan stucco wall appear
larger than necessary, her words
bounce off each boundary,
past the rotund ornaments
in the expanse of room.
Outside the desert animals are
hiding for good reason.
They’ve never seen grass so commercial
but they won’t bite or
scratch their ass in the cool green
bath of necessity.
You should be able

to raise an animal and not kill it
water plants with some frequency
cook eggs for a lover’s breakfast

drive an automatic
ride a bicycle
walk legs
over desert ground while the violin lesson
follows the wind and you arrive at a cactus
stand selling more plants than you could ever need

listen!
airplanes are sucking air
cars are whipping violins
as if they were late for work
Your Note

Then sorrow slowly cradles
my frame
lies beside
me and quickens the breath
I sleep in.

Each vowel reforms
the language it wears
The desert
    rocks whisper:

On October 23rd you will be leaving.
The decision is yours.
II.

Yes...
I smile and say I know her...the obligatory refrain follows the afternoon rain after a pigeon on 2nd avenue finds shelter in a stone church...everything is as she loves me because...she loves because...she said

yes...the parks could write themselves a newspaper...yes because she walks and never ends her voice in a pronoun...it begins how I write her...a change in tense...two Japanese girls sharing popcorn speaking

Japanese...then they were eating...now they witness the versicolor of our walk amid the clamor of pigeons pecking concrete...I can only smile and say I know her...she culls memory from rain water collecting to run off...yes she says paper covers are becoming obsolete...typewriters are outmoded because the ink is wet and violent...she writes poetries when she turns a page...yes what I know in words and not letters...the sky was blue...the rainstorm is on TV...the pigeon flies a robot...she repeats her walk...my heart going mad and yes I said...the parks continue writing headlines with water and birds
She Says

"Have you ever stared at a light bulb right as you turn it off? It doesn't just go right out. You can see it dim out. But don't stare right at it, wait until the exact moment you switch it off and then suddenly, turn your head."

I try this.

I turn over to her side of the bed. It works just as she said it would.

"Too bad you're not here," I say. "Think of all the lights we could turn off."
Speak

She lay still
    on the mahogany
    slope of her bed

    trying to expel
    the cricket

its terrified wings
    petrified in
    her throat

only moments
    removed from

the obscurity
    of waiting
Reading

stretching fabric over her body
tracing a poem in a small notebook

the same need for expression
her breasts rise noticeably through sheets

raising the vernacular bait & tackle
of an obscure town in rural Vermont

or maybe it’s Maine or somewhere flat
in South Dakota’s love of continuation

she’s speaking with a cricket in her throat
the distance is two

the heavy breath after touch
the purse lips of exact obscurity
Lover,

I want to devour
your arms
and run

head down the street
A wild
Hindu

hungry for more
parts.
What We’re Saying

She turns over and says “Be gentle with me,”
which I don’t know how to take

because I do not love her and
we have only known each other for three days.

Sometimes I remember the dream where
I compose an entire poem

for a woman I can never describe.
It’s these words, not her blurred face,

that I try to recreate. Did I really
compile the entire piece, line by line, or

was it the response that I admired?
I know what I’d like to tell her,

how I’m sure I love her red hair,
how our verse has too many verbs, but lines

cave with our breathing, together
with what could be words, the light

drawn between blinds
draws lines on the wall.
When we talk about love

Rain fell on the new car, rolled off to the ground, collected in puddles along the driveway and traveled the porous pavement towards the street. You could see the irregular patterns resist, a small stream swelled by the side of the road with water from driveways, and bright family vans. The rain reached the sewer a house down, dropping from sight into local creeks and ponds around North Caldwell, where it continued craving gravity. We sat staring through a picture window without words to describe what the rain ran from. “I love you” was all she said when I presented her keys, with a miniature plastic replica of the same ebullient vehicle, (though not the exact sky blue), with the dealer’s information on the back — a telephone number and website, in the event of an emergency.
The Love Song of Adam and Eve

I want to
fuck you

I want
to fuck
you I want
to fuck you

I want to
fuck you I
want to fuck
you I want
to fuck you
I want
to fuck
you I want to

fuck you
I want to
Exposition as composition

She blows phrases about love like tissues
and I've told her how uncomfortable
that makes me.
Nicole, I say,
Jessica, where are
we, Sarah, this is
not, Allison,
who is calling?

When the phone
rings, the call is
not the
person I have
met on paper.

Turning a corner,
the twisted trees bend
because the light
moves fast over bark.
Why the well lit elephant

between love and love
there is beauty in dissection
the striations running through

adjective and pronoun
degrees of isolated emergencies
an afternoon of grunting by the pool

eye are red
red they are
why red?
why they?

why not blue for
the well lit elephant?

does it matter?
your light hand
covered with my hand and light
Believing moon

My cousin says that homosexuals choose their life and even if they are “good people” they still choose sin in the eyes of God. She says a Eunich is born without genitals or sometimes they are castrated, so she says, she can understand how someone would not feel a strong attraction for the opposite sex, but they still have a great opportunity to do something that benefits from not having family or they can go somewhere where working alone is God’s plan—and I get the feeling that we are writing a guidebook to the moon, and I say what if she was attracted to a woman with the same desperate necessity she feels for her fiancée, to which she looks confused and I start to say something about love being God, and she says that a church should except these people with love and try to help them, and I accept her view with love and we are writing together fast with the top down, over craters and lunar graben, following our map of the entire mantle canyon, pausing to read descriptions of the indigenous grey stones and how they were once ground to cure cough for the children she will someday give breath to, inside the home she will tuck them in, and finally we stop at an unfamiliar wrinkle ridge which I argue must be a sinuous rille but we reluctantly ask directions because we are now arguing a belief with a belief, and it occurs to me that I don’t actually know one damn thing.
III.

Living The Catalogue
Living the catalogue

What if the street lights
gathered their legs and redesigned your birth place?

Drunk as a hoot owl thrashing in the bath
A woman from Flemington suddenly finds her home in Weehawken

We listen to Miles Davis play
so much so long
we translate the house cat
So What he says in so many words

Back in Weehawken they discover
that memory is just a prose technique
a solitude
a situation comedy involving a grocer the grocer’s friend and the daily hijinks of
grocing

I read Chinese for their silence she says
her small hands
on small paper
She practices small
moments

and loves
what so many handshakes hope to look like
through a fish bowl

love
minus the word
Girl misses bus

Girl misses bus, she sits
and waits at the stop, light
falls on her shoulder, the other side
is covered in shade from a tree above
her bag, large and blended in browns,
she reaches inside for a phone and calls
the man she lives with.
Two others arrive — an old woman with
a plastic bag from Vons, a young girl
with a green hat, they listen in
on the conversation.
Now I will be late, the girl says.
The older woman stops listening,
moves into the shade to count change
in her left hand, making sure she has enough
to get where she’s going.
When you order scrambled eggs...

The girl at the cigarette machine...her hair has two pink bows that match the dinner booths...pictures of Elvis, in Hollywood...a man outside feeds ice cream to a dog and on the corner there’s a corner man...the cashier says he knows what you’re looking for. ..you’re not the only one, tonight...the bus ticket burns the fancy shoes you got on...the girl at the cigarette machine thinks it over...but she loves Lucky Stripes...the sandpaper of smokes...so lovely in heavy eyes...man, you’ll tell her such poetrays...even if the song is a lie...*Hey Baby, I’m walk’n lonely tonight...* the Boulevard’s got more nickels for bus rides...maybe a car would just be easier...maybe her song says *Good Bye Donna Jean...So we’re leaving tonight?* ...I can’t argue...last time, I lost a perfectly good lover...in the way of quarters, nickels and dimes.
Just Spinning

in summer, fields of
corn stumps
dry, sun careens
overhead, looking

with one yellow eye—
through gases and bright explosions.

A truck stop in
Kansas, your
dress, blue and
frayed along the hem.

Cowboy hats, fat with
shadow, chew

the bright metal
used for street lamps.

The spade is dropped—
concrete loses its street value,

makes for a poor garden.
You smile in your brown meat.

I place a black-eyed Susan
behind each ear,

as you spin,
the flowers rotate off

and barely know
the wind they dance for.
Advertising

The greatest poem
I’ve read this year said
Fuck Bush on the red brick

of a Wells Fargo in Las Vegas.
I had tried for weeks to express
a similar sentiment, initiate

a conversation of ink,
the delicate nuance
of language riding the back

of a ballpoint ballerina.
And here was my idea, written
ostensibly in black spray

paint in the baroque style
common to this time and place,
the complete face flushed

against a backdrop
of finance
and refinance—

accepting the time
in which the poem
was written.
The infatuating fluency of fingers

plays all night across the bar, because
the band plays, they play and
you play and the night outside is lost
in a bottle only needing
the sound steady quiet like
lovers and morning air like trash
needs a can to crawl through,
the band needs you because
you're reading, not music or notes,
the indiscretion of time dotting
barbwire, it ends where it begins,
with the pit pit patter of what
the poet thinks he knows
of Jazz, thinks of a thing, what
you place on the table and
have no use for, because
you need and want and even
your sex is dripping with ink, bottled
up, calling out for
the composition to sleep off paper.
Ply woods

Not the mountain
    cirque this morning
    or headlights on

A deer wild with
    juniper mail-order
    and fantastic trails of turd

I know this tree
    from a walk I need
    to walk from

I was thinking
    that I was alone
    except for the wood
Hand Job in back of a Taxi

The window,
    winter, slush and
    ice, passing 3rd, getting

Close, the
    animals carry quarters
    home, later left on a table, our

Smooth line
    down Manhattan maybe
    I should have agreed, passing

People, it's
    people watching
    the dull yellow shimmer by.
Formalism

In love with Chinese finger paints
and badly in need of some
reconstruction, most of the sounds
floating off the deck smell of raw
fish and raw seas. The larger hooks
catch larger fish, which sizzle and hot-cake
on the deck while they’re dying,
painting the steel with their scales.
Study on the ADD school of Poetry

There is one species of artist yet to be acknowledged for their contribution to the poetry community—remaining on the fringe of academic recognition, teetering on the seesaw of yes and no, how and why, left or right—This being, the ADD poet—And there are more of them than you think—at any reading, they may constitute upward of fifty percent of the matriculated listeners—make no mistake, they are separate from the appeasing boyfriend or extra credit hound, who have been ordered to attend—They may exhibit qualities consistent with listlessness or general lassitude or may resort to deep-stare tactics, i.e. the Professor Pause. But their stare is masterful—“Did I eat yet? Oh wait. Poetry reading. Focus. Focus.”—Of course, their continued interest may chemically require repeated bombardment of stimulation, such as barrelhouse antics, racial slurs, or nudity—uncivil remarks or even declarations of promiscuity may also achieve the goal of bringing the ADD poet back into your flock—It has even been proposed that Slam poetry was conceived to tailor to this demographic and that academia’s inherent distrust of the movement in fact stems from an apartheid-like fear of eventual rebellion—though performance anxiety might also have something to do with it, or perhaps everything to do with being a poet on paper—a topic we’ve all heard recited before, albeit a cathartic one—But shifting our attention back to the topic at hand, lest we deviate from the relative conundrum and lose the listener, we arrive at the question of Why the ADD specimen is so drawn to poetry? Why are the people least capable of paying attention to a phone call, attending an
event that requires such a stalwart attention to nuance, ebb and flow—Perhaps the grammatical freedom—the allowance of run-ons, comma abuse, creative spelling aerobics, hyperbolic misuse of the imperfect? Or perhaps boys go to meet girls who go to meet boys?

It remains anyone’s guess. In light of recent scientific proposals to combine excessive enjambment with electric shock therapy, and other attempts to chemically bind the listener to the poet’s performance, this excessive confabulation has hit a head—

**Why Are You Here? How can I help you?**

Perhaps the establishment is to blame? To compete with 100 channels and video game hard-ons, you might incorporate costumes or space-aged death sounds; advertise *ADD Readings* (or ADHD, for the more technically demanding in the group), include Ritalin with each book—But drudgery aside, why can’t we all just get along? Perhaps, in this case, seeking change is bad. I say, LET THEM BE! Embrace the ADD poet!

So while the Narrative Troubadour wrestles with the Language Metrician, the ADD poet slips in and out, unnoticed and unapplauded—While their attention may be skewed, their dedication for the spoken word can be unwavering. Remember, these are people that could not sit still for their mothers and now are willing to do so for a poetry reading—your poetry reading. So, to those of you only now rejoining the poem, stand up and admit your heritage.
IV.

Two
Two

Morning.
If I could sleep
in the vacuum
    pores of her neck

Hide
like seeds
burrowed
    in soft fat winter.
Vehicle

She clasps the handle
tight and lifts

moments before
my keys

can unlock her
she then hesitates

for a time
after I'm in

to prove
she's not eager.
We made love the first night we met and again for three more until there was less love and more fucking and we had to acknowledge that we knew nothing of the other person. I suggested a movie — which we disagreed over, regarding plot and character development. No imagination could make me believe that the two characters shared love beyond the dramatic obligation for it. We struggled to reword our perspectives and just compromised over less important impressions of setting and film quality. But really, we felt more rushed to return to our fucking, the dumb language of flesh and night — where you become an ex-girlfriend in St. Louis, stripped of her fear of physical contact, and I must have been the relationship you said you were looking for — I hesitated at your need. Said there were two wantings: what you said you wanted and what experience says you’re ready for. I was ready to share the doctors, the smell of the cold floor, the CT scans, the MRI, MRA, Spinal Tap, Blood Patch — the latest, “Cervical Cobulation Nucleoplasty,” set to repair minuscule tears in discs in my lower spine. It was the back-story I couldn’t mention, the difference between our fucking and our love, procedures that both require follow-up.
Winter

each exhale pauses
in the frost

the plastered sands
think of summer

the dune's grass
stops swinging

the sun
has such little hands.
Caesurae

Her hands press against the wheel, listen
to Mozart question each New England note—
the drive, slow and deliberate, winding through

a wasping cold of oaks
and startled maples in their black-skinned darkness—a silent point

when nature loses its welcome.
I undress each finger
with a reticent procrastination.

"I'm pregnant," I say.
She accelerates, uninterested in how
I ever obtained the corresponding genitalia.

The violins needed sympathy for the impossible,
they motion toward a stoic gab
of cellos, while the momentum of bodies

collide with the shift in direction, you
off to Boston, while I
wait in the absurd clarity of waiting.
Kell

I touched her hand
  for a moment
thought
  that it was
not a hand at all
  but something
I might
  breath through
Shutter Speed

You scratch the back of my head and I
love that more than you could ever
really know or I can tell
because I just lie there cringing and still,
in pain perhaps. The morning light lofts
past the horizontal blinds
painting prison bars over
the bulging forms, caged
in a zoology of black and white—a rug
from Portugal hung on the wall and a picture
of four dancing children in Australia—
and it's frightfully clear that what's frightful
is not the motif of morning
but the accumulation of moments
of stillness, stalling for recollection,
the picture asking for its animation back—
while the breathing beasts try to blend
then with now in a foolish display of extremities.
Tuesdays

the pool is his bicycle
an extended

box retaining each
goal

his face tightens
he

breaths and crawls
forward

rotating
the introduction

trailing her image behind
him
Motioning

Again he imagines them together, lying naked, before he sleeps, coarse bristle against his thigh as she writhes against him, the fan buzzing his breath, and with each rotation, the faces change their distinction in the wet heat.

He thinks: So writing, is writing your pain, not as pain but as writing.

What would he say? He hates his words. There are too many to say, they own him as much as he owns them, or thinks he does, or knows that knowing his words too well may be the problem. Again they are naked and blurred, it doesn't matter who she becomes, the colors coalesce on the roof of his mouth as he hesitates to speak, turning over to hold her hand in his mind, pressing into the words he would give to her.
You come in later

The woman is blue sand
Her legs orange

Her hair huddles around
A thick white pulp
Where Knees forget

If the sky is blue today
It is a shaking thing petrified
In paint strokes
Satisfied with staples on canvas

The moon kisses her daughter
She is kind enough
To forget
She always does

And if you asked me what I saw
Standing alone
    Was I lost?
    You asked

It was the I
I was curious about
Poetry, love

Most of the poetry I read is never
as close as I would like to be
to you

I am frightened of everything
and a word is the only
anxious sound I have for this
VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

James Cory Ness

Local Address:
1515 East Reno Ave. #C107
Las Vegas, Nevada 89119

Home Address:
3 Old Farm Road
North Caldwell, NJ 07006

Degrees:
Bachelor of Arts, English, 1998
Bucknell University

Publications:
"An Interview with Mark Irwin" Summer 2002 Red Rock Review

Thesis Title: Ten Percent to Light a Desert Sky

Thesis Examination Committee:
Chairperson, Professor Aliki Barnstone, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Professor Douglas Unger, M.F.A.
Committee Member, Associate Professor Claudia Keelan, M.F.A.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Jennifer Keene, Ph. D.