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# The Waiting House

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THE WAITING HOUSE

by

Erika Mueller

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
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ABSTRACT

THE WAITING HOUSE

by

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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016  
Under the Supervision of Professor Kimberly Blaeser

The poems in this collection, *The Waiting House*, use techniques associated with an evolving elegiac tradition in their portrayal of anticipatory grief born of terminal illness and impending loss. Like the melancholic mourning of modern elegies described by Jahan Ramazani, my poems often resist consolation even as they borrow from elegiac conventions like poetic substitution and repetition. Additionally, they utilize strategies and patterns of literary anger outlined by Alicia Suskin Ostriker as common in postwar American women's poetry, to express anger that is also anticipatory grief. Finally, this collection uses illness metaphors to question the well being of a larger body, house, and ecology.

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~ for Tree, Bear & honey ~

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## Contemporary American Poems of Anticipatory Grief

Everything I love, I will lose. That's the harsh truth. You either have to shut down your heart—and miss the love that is around you—or wrestle with that truth and come out the other end. There is indeed such a thing as joyful sorrow.

-- Francis Weller, *The Geography of Sorrow*

The tradition of responding to the experience of grief through poetry has long been associated with the elegy. According to *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, since the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, English elegies have been primarily understood as concerned with “lament for the dead and the search for consolation in the contemplation of some permanent principle” (Brogan, et al. 324). Critic Peter Sacks asserts that the traditional elegy basically reflects Freud’s ideas on healthy mourning: the poet mourns in order to accept a loss, withdraw emotion, and reinvest it in some substitution (6). He explains that in this elegiac tradition as well as Freud’s psychological theories,

successful mourners ... accept their loss and can retain their identities by what we may call a healthy work of mourning, a work that, as Freud points out, requires a withdrawal of affection from the lost object and a subsequent reattachment of affection to some substitute for that object. (6)

However, scholar Jahan Ramazani argues that modern elegies often do not engage in compensatory mourning but instead embrace what he calls ambivalent and melancholic mourning by fusing the anti-elegiac with the elegiac, borrowing from conventions while simultaneously resisting them (1). He claims, in fact, that the “modern elegy is not transcendence or redemption of loss but immersion in it” (4). While Sacks leans on psychological theory to better understand elegies, Ramazani suggests that we should also take into account traditional

social mourning practices and their decrease or change in American culture since the industrial age (10-11). He points out, for instance, that for “the modern funeral business, death and mourning are occasions for extending the reach of impersonal and objectifying institutions into the most intimate recesses of human consciousness” (17). He suggests that there is a relationship between changes in social codes of mourning and poetic practices, like the rise of death in literature as communal mourning rituals become shorter and more impersonal (10-11). As the ways that we understand and cope with grief and death continue to change, so too can our understanding of poetry of mourning. Ramazani’s approach might be extended further to reexamine grief in contemporary American poetry by taking into consideration anticipatory grief born of living with impending loss. Contemporary American poets writing such poems engage with poetic conventions of both traditional and modern elegies to portray the specific experience of anticipatory grief.

Erich Lindemann coined the term anticipatory grief to describe the way one woman grieved the (imagined) loss of her soldier husband while they were separated by war. He explains the experience in part this way: “grief reactions are just one form of separation reactions. Separation by death is characterized by its irreversibility and finality [...] Separation in this case is not due to death but is under the threat of death” (99-100). Anticipatory grief is now commonly understood as a different experience from bereavement or post-death grief, and is reexamined as such in recent studies. A psychological study conducted by Susan Duke with adults whose spouses were terminally ill, found that anticipatory grief largely impacted their lives in “their relationship with their spouse and others, their role as caregiver and receiver, the way in which they experienced and integrated memories, and how they felt” (832). Duke also identified four themes that characterize this experience: feeling that one is in suspense; the

overwhelming desire to focus on and be with one's loved one, both to value time together and to bear witness despite dread; negotiating the role as caregiver with an increasing need for care; and the heightened awareness of events as future memories and symbolic of changes in circumstance (832-835). On an interpersonal level, Robert Fulton and David Jay Goettesman explain, griever feel great pressure to hide both their anxiety and grief from those around them at the same time that they experience loss of support from friends and family whose own discomfort causes them to withdraw (51).

Traditional and modern elegies address the question of how to survive grief when faced with the finality of death or another loss. The traditional psychological structure of the elegy suggests that in order to overcome grief, one detaches and reinvests emotion in a consoling substitute. The modern elegy declares that this is impossible to do and so remains immersed in loss. Poems of anticipatory grief negotiate slightly different terrain; the catastrophic event has yet to occur, and so the question becomes how to survive another kind of grief while great loss is impending. Someone with anticipatory grief most often does not want to withdraw emotion from the dying or those at risk, and cannot afford to get lost in their own mourning. Duke's study emphasizes a desire for closeness or emotional attachment alongside increasing responsibility for care as central to the experience of those with terminally ill spouses (833-834). These characteristics, as experienced in response to the terminal diagnosis of a loved one, are reflected in my poems that follow. Contemporary poets Mark Doty, Frances Driscoll, Elyse Fenton, Natalie Diaz and Donald Hall also address this question of how to survive anticipatory grief while living in suspense. The psychological studies provide a frame for identifying anticipatory grief as subject in various circumstances including terminal illness, addiction, wartime, and sexual assault. These poets employ various poetic strategies to depict this state of suspense, its

legitimate demands and challenges; they embrace noncompensatory substitutes that anticipate greater loss, utilize dark humor or repetition to emphasize shock and tension, employ a repeated direct address to voice angry resistance amid threat and uncertainty, and even forego lamentation to present impending death as potentially compensatory in relationship with living with anticipatory grief. As they engage the subject of impending death, Ramazani's claims about modern elegy allow for examination of how poets borrow from and employ different elegiac conventions and rhetorical strategies in service of representing anticipatory grief, while also subverting expectations and altering traditional understandings of the elegy.

Contemporary poets, like Olena Kalaytiak Davis, continue to employ traditional elegiac tropes while subverting others. Davis' "A Few Words For The Visitor In The Parlor," for example, is an anti-consolatory elegy that refuses the convention of finding consolation in nature. Its speaker also references anticipatory grief and its effects as part of her depiction of inconsolable grief. In the poem's first stanza the speaker proposes two losses: "Every time you wish the sky was something happening to your heart, you / lose twice"(1-2). Both nature and art, traditional sources of elegiac consolation, seem to fail the speaker in her grief. The sky does not mourn or reflect the speaker's loss: "Today, the sky just wouldn't happen" (11). Later in the poem nature does reflect death momentarily in a description of her mother as "a branch covered in hoarfrost" (21). However, using this trope of connecting a human death with seasonal change proves to be a second loss. The speaker quickly voices self-reproach for doing so, and admits guilt: "I must forgive myself" (21). This concern with the exploitative aspect of writing about the dead is a loss expressed more adamantly in modern elegies (Ramazani 5).

Toward the end of the poem, the speaker suggests that her mother's time of illness and anticipating death was distinct from other times or "lay differently on top of that year," affecting them both:

Dear visitor: you divide your age in two then  
square it by a dying mother. I am always gathering her up in my arms.  
Believe me, you never forget someone that thin. You start remembering the  
way that summer lay differently on top of that year. The hood burns you. I  
tried driving as gently as I could but you know, the road had last winter inside it, the  
winter before. That drive was painful, just look at her face. (21-27)

She acknowledges this experience as painful, aging you, and as inciting effort to proceed with and provide care. The description reflects several aspects of Duke's study, such as the common experience of grief, stress, and an increasing need for care (833). In traditional elegies, the road with "last winter inside it" would be understood as reference to vegetative rites and a cycle of death and renewal. Sacks asserts that in employing some elegiac tropes one can "borrow the ritual *context* of consolation," placing a single loss in line with past losses (23). Here Davis uses an image of the road that, in another poem, might provide some comfort by alluding to one death in connection with nature's seasons and so regeneration (26-27). Because the speaker's mother is alive (though dying) at the time of the drive, Davis' connection foretells her death and speaks of death's looming presence. Instead of console, this image and context further elucidates the pain of anticipatory grief. Finally, rather than nature suggesting a sense of renewed closeness with the dead, the poem ends noting a separation or divide between sky and ground, heaven and earth: "Today the sky was white. And the ground was white, too. Yet, I could tell / them apart. They were easy to distinguish" (31-32). Along with the loss of her mother, this melancholic grief is

portrayed through loss of the consoling power of these elegiac conventions and the pain of anticipatory grief.

The act of substitution or creation of a consoling sign for the dead is a main convention of the English elegy. In the elegy's movement from anger and despair to consolation, this act allows the grieving speaker to reinvest emotion in some poetic replacement. Sacks identifies this as central to the elegy's tradition, stating, "it is this substitutive turn or act of troping that any mourner must perform," and he offers the Greek myth of Apollo and Daphne as one example (5). When Daphne is turned into a tree by her father to save her from Apollo, Apollo creates a laurel wreath from its branches to wear, thus creating for himself a consoling substitute (6). Modern elegists, Ramazani argues, tend to resist solace and closure by rejecting many of the conventional consolations "in nature, in God, or in poetry itself" (4). When the substitute for loss is more loss, this act that is so crucial to (poetic) mourning is no longer effective. In Ramazani's model such an exchange often confirms absence and an irreplaceable loss. However, in poems of anticipatory grief, the strategy of refusing to detach from those at risk or to accept consolation within mourning functions to affirm an ongoing, if tenuous, presence. In Mark Doty's "White Kimono," for example, when the trope for an ill beloved is not the dead or spirit, but a mere garment of spirit, the speaker confronts an even more ephemeral presence rather than finding comfort. Thus, Doty creates a poetic substitute with an inverse function, a non-compensatory substitute or sign, in its rendering of anticipatory grief. Rather than console the speaker, it further characterizes or foretells the progression of his loved one's state and his diminishing presence. It does not further bereavement or console, but instead emphasizes the grief and loss inherent in anticipating death, avoiding traditional resolution.

“White Kimono” introduces this literal kimono, later a poetic substitute for Wally whose death is impending, before readers are aware that Wally exists. The poem begins with an elegiac tone; its speaker and Lynda move quietly inside a kimono shop while outside, “[i]t’s raining, off-season, / nearly everything closed” (8-9). In this somber setting, one kimono is described in great detail as a fragile body “so delicate” and as “a slip of a thing” that it seems barely present (24, 28). In fact, several phrases suggest this outright, naming it “an artifact // of dream” and “mere idea of a robe” (21-22, 27). This fragile or vulnerable image, quiet setting and elegiac tone emphasize Wally’s absence, an absence readers are only explicitly made aware of later in the poem.

At first the idea of the kimono as substitute seems consolatory. When the two friends select kimonos for them all, they describe each color as stand-ins for their personalities, such as “scholarly gray” for the speaker (38). They select a green kimono for Wally that is “the color of day-old grass / wet against lawn-mower blades” (41-42). This natural image of cut grass, green although dying, serves as an explicit allusion to Wally's physical state. Wally then appears at home and sits with them “though he’s already tired all the time” (46). This suggestion of a quick progression of exhaustion, when paired with an image of cut grass, alludes to a state of physical decline as reason for his earlier absence. The poem draws further connections between the kimonos and people, linking their work of ironing with the work of spinning silk and linking their “restoration” of these silks with the renewal of a shared sense of loving community among them (55). As the three iron together, they “fog up the rainy windows,” and with Wally’s presence even the kimonos become more energized and enliven as “nearly animate stuff” (50). This intimacy and joy in the kitchen has definite presence and appears compensatory:

We’re pleased with our own calm privacy,

our part in the work of restoration,  
that kitchen's achieved, common warmth,  
the time-out-time sheen

of happiness to it, unmistakable  
as the surface of those silks. (54-58)

This seems to fall in line with some expectations of an elegiac poem in its apparent movement toward consolation, here the renewal of intimacy shared among them. This valuation of shared time and experiences with an ailing loved one is a key trait of anticipatory grief (Duke 832). But this renewal of intimacy is also flawed or impermanent, the silks an “artifact of // dream” (Doty 21-22).

Rather than inventing a consoling substitute for Wally's (impending) absence or death, as a poem of anticipatory grief, it inverts this particular elegiac convention to reflect the continuing advance of a very real loss. So when the poem actually performs its turn or substitutive act, the trope presented is not consolatory but is instead only an aesthetic figuration of impending loss. The speaker reintroduces the frailest kimono and asserts “all the while” it has been present, “stirring” (60, 64). This substitute does not reconnect them with the dead, because Wally's death is yet impending, and so instead it reflects instability and an uncertain existence, which is in no way consoling nor does it provide closure:

all the while that fluttering spirit

of a kimono hung in the shop

like a lunar token, something  
the ghost of a moth might have worn,  
stirring on its hanger whenever  
the door was opened—petal, phantom, (60-65)

In this moment, as a poetic substitution, it stands not only for the future lost object, but also “carries in itself the reminder of the loss on which it is founded” (Sacks 5). The kimono becomes a non-compensatory substitute for Wally, and also for the speaker’s loss with the awareness of this approaching death, including this desire for intimacy. The ongoing state of suspense or this “fluttering” of anticipatory grief is portrayed as another loss in itself (60).

The poem builds this parallel between the vulnerable state of this particular kimono body and Wally’s body through description of its delicate nature as well as its relationship with an afterlife. What first had a worldly presence, although it seemed like it might “shatter at the weight / of a breath or glance” early in the poem, becomes a “fluttering spirit,” and finally “something / the ghost of a moth might have worn” (25-26, 30, 62-63). The kimono is assigned an increasingly intangible existence. With this final description, “something / the ghost of a moth might have worn,” it is no longer clothing for the living body nor is it spirit, but instead a possible garment for spirit and sign of what “might have” occurred or existed (62-63). If the reader attaches any emotion to the kimono as proxy, it is not consolatory but anticipatory grief. The focus of the poem’s substitution is not traditional compensation as renewed connection with the dead (or dying), but the assertion of an encroaching separation. While modern elegies often refuse consolation in order to emphasize or insist on separation and loss, this poem of anticipatory grief provides a non-compensatory substitute that figures approaching loss in order to also affirm connection and attachment to the living.

While Doty borrows from this elegiac convention, he also reinvents it, presenting the dilemma inherent in the anticipatory grief that it portrays, resistance to withdrawing emotion from the dying, despite desire for relief from ongoing grief. In the final lines of the poem, Lynda and the speaker resist this substitution for Wally and his impending absence. The kimono's presence is described as so tenuous that it is also symbolic of life after death, a "phantom" (65). This final emphasis makes clear Wally's impending death without having to state it more directly. After the speaker and Lynda both value time with him and bear witness despite their grief, the poem continues to portray the experience of anticipatory grief clearly by including their fear of the moment Wally's approaching death might actually touch them. The speaker admits of the kimono that it was something "even Lynda, slight as she was, / did not dare to try on" (68-69). Although the poem tries to hedge against his future death, it ends with this resistance instead of consolation, as they cannot accept comfort from this symbolic exchange. While several poetic strategies might prove useful for expressing the wish to simply spend time with an ailing loved one, Doty's adaptation or inversion of the elegy's consoling substitution conveys the non-compensatory reality of living with impending death or terminal illness.

Frances Driscoll's "Difficult World" employs two strategies, a direct address and repetition, in the recollection of a rape and anticipatory grief for the self under duress. Addressing an absent party allows for expression of fear and anger while the speaker faces the threat of death, and repetition conveys the speaker's shock and growing sense that her death is near. The poem reflects the anti-consolatory stance of modern elegies by refusing closure or resolution, and critiques the rationality of male domination, which is a pattern of literary anger in American women's poetry.

Driscoll uses repetition to communicate the specific shock and loss of hope that occur as the speaker confronts what she believes to be the irreversibility of her own death. Sacks suggests several traditional uses of repetition in the elegy; repetition creates a sense of pattern and so acts as a barrier to the trauma and randomness of death; it helps place one loss in relationship with natural cycles of loss, rebirth and therefore consolation; and it is used to convince mourners that a loss has really occurred by repeating the fact of death to move the griever toward healing (23-24). In Driscoll's poem, repetition does not naturalize death, but underlines this reaction of shock and fear to the sudden threat of death: "I am even more afraid now. I am / so afraid" (10-11). It also conveys the speaker's increasing perceived proximity to her own death. The speaker recognizes, "This will not work. And when this does not work, he will kill me" (21-24). In fact, what begins with the possibility of survival, "maybe he will not kill me," becomes the clear conviction shared in her final thought, "I am going to die, Kate" (12, 30). The motive differs here from that of a more conventional elegy in that the repeated phrases don't advance some consolatory resolution but build her conviction that her death is approaching, which avoids traditional consolation or healing.

Driscoll makes the subject of her direct address a close friend, and this substitutive act allows the friend to serve as a barrier and witness to her fear, anticipation and anger. The traditional use of apostrophe, or direct address, in elegiac questioning means simply that questions are "addressed to a particular auditor" (Sacks 22). When addressing the dead, it allows the speaker to "convert their relation to the dead from 'I-It' to 'I-Thou'" or increases closeness (Ramazani 280-281). Sacks explains that some elegists repeat the name of the dead to create a kind of presence or "substantiality" in the person's absence (25-26). Driscoll's speaker does call on someone not physically present during the attack, "Kate," the repetition of which invokes a

kind of presence (1). However, this does not fill space left by the dead, as no literal death has occurred, nor does it express an angry reproach of the addressee. Instead, her use of a first name suggests familiarity and, as a personal address, takes on the pretense of speaking honestly and in confidence. “But really Kate, I am not / running” the speaker confesses (25-26). The elegy’s directed questions function to deflect what might otherwise become self-directed anger and resultant guilt, by suggesting that others might have prevented death, or address mortality more generally with an underlying question like, “Why will no one or nothing save us from death?” (22). Driscoll’s repeated address is followed by statements (rather than questions) that document, authenticate, and testify as record of this grief and crime; “Now he is using his hands” (12). By addressing a dear friend not physically present at the time of the attack, the addressee is made witness to events and the speaker’s internal dialogue.

Repetition of the direct address reveals her mind’s attempt to mitigate trauma. Sacks suggests that restating the shocking event or death might “retroactively create the kind of protective barrier that, had it been present at the actual event, might have prevented or softened the disruptive shock that initially caused the trauma” (23). Here, repetition of the addressee’s name grows more frequent as the speaker’s conviction increases, appearing twice in this short line: “Kate, he is going to kill me, Kate” (17). This act of reinserting the familiar name into the anxious account of the attack signifies the speaker’s psychological shock and desire to protect herself at the time of the attack as well as during its retelling. It lends the speaker the pretense of a speech act as a way to record her anxiety, and angry resistance, even in the midst of physical submission as she reacts to the threat of death.

Driscoll’s use of apostrophe and repetition also conveys anger as an expression of anticipatory grief. Anger has a place in grief and also in the history of the genre. This expression

of anger often accompanies repetition and an address in elegiac questioning, which directs anger away from the self and helps further the consolatory drive of the traditional elegy. It plays a much different role in modern elegies; rather than anger and grief as something to get past, these emotions “become the psychic tissue” (Ramazani 4). “Instead of resurrecting the dead in some substitute, instead of curing themselves through displacement,” modern elegists criticize themselves, the dead, and literary traditions, and then write of these losses also (4).

Feminist critics like Alicia Suskin Ostriker investigate anger and its expression in women’s literature. Ostriker contends that there are three patterns of anger in women’s poetry in America since 1960, one of which is a “victimization scenario and attack on domination” (127). These victimization poems offer portrayals that angrily challenge the male narrative of a “rationale of rationality” (133). When Driscoll uses a direct address to convey anger she departs from the elegy’s convention of angry questioning in favor of making clear statements that refute the rapist’s reasoning. The speaker’s internal dialogue at the time of her rape shows that she resists male domination even as she is forced to physically submit; she testifies against the perpetrator’s reality. After describing the rapist’s calm appearance as he relaxes for a moment, “stretched out, propped on one elbow,” she confronts Kate and readers with the implied abnormality of his behavior: “He looks like everything is normal here, Kate” (15). She provides a record of the rapist’s violent use of irony and his perverse rhetoric of feigned empathy during the rape in fragments of his dialogue. She records him saying, “You’re going to have to,” alongside her thought that he sounds “so sad...Like / if it were up to him, he wouldn’t be saying this” (Driscoll 18-20). The speaker’s choice to use “like if” as a subordinate conjunction here, highlights her recognition of his feigned rationality and empathy as incongruent with his brutal acts of domination. While the speaker physically submits during the attack, this presentation of

her inner thoughts challenges domination, as does her assertion, “He’s crazy” (20). Ostriker explains this use of captured dialogue and revealing gestures as a common strategy for creating “a documented authenticity” in such poems (130). Theorist Maria Lugones writes of the way anger echoes across worlds of sense in her examination of different models for anger in coalition building, and she suggests that while the cognitive content of anger may not always carry across worlds, its emotional echo often does (117). While the speaker’s repeated assertions are directed at “Kate,” her clear direct language offers angry testimony and the poem as public lament for the victimized self, and ongoing opportunity for such echoing.

One might expect Driscoll’s poem to move toward consolation because it begins with a confession of its subject as too difficult to convey and then takes up the task. This may also seem likely given that movement toward consolation is conventional in poems of grief. But this poem is an anti-consolatory poem of anticipatory grief, and at poem’s end, both speaker and reader are left trapped in the continuation of the rape. The rapist’s “palm pushes [her] head / down” and he threatens, “You’re going to have to” (32-33). This prolonged state of anticipatory grief is the aspect of this experience that the speaker and poem intend to leave with both “Kate” and readers. Driscoll adapts these strategies to create a portrait of anticipatory grief for the self, one that articulates resistance in seeming submission and defies mournful closure by trapping its speaker and readers in the assault. Unlike the tendency of self-elegies to be more consolatory than not, this portrayal highlights death as frightening and unjust. It does not attempt to heal or resolve emotional tension but emphasizes its severity.

Linking death and grief with seasonal change is another key poetic strategy that allows mourning to move through loss toward a natural rebirth, renewal, and consolation with the appearance of spring. According to Peter Sacks, “the greatest influence on the form of the elegy

has been rituals associated with the death and rebirth of vegetation gods; and features of this influence are to be found even in those elegies that are not strictly pastoral” (19). It increases a sense of ceremony, motion or progression that can also be figurative and psychological, particularly movement “through grief and darkness to consolation and renewal” (19-20). Sacks posits an important question in understanding the function of this convention when he asks, “Why, after all, should man so bitterly lament the passing of a season that he knows will return unless it is his own unrelenting nature that he mourns?” (20). He suggests that this helps create a fiction which “naturalizes man” and connects us with regeneration, in order to give a false sense of control over our mortality, the sense that we are not submissive to nature or seasonal change, by implying that the mourner or human death causes nature to change (20). A conventional elegy aligns a human death with cyclical and sympathetic nature. By aligning death and the speaker’s grief with winter, the elegy moves through mourning toward spring, a sign of rebirth or revival of the dead and feelings of consolation in the speaker.

In Elyse Fenton’s 2010 collection, the title poem, “Clamor,” reverses the direction of the elegy’s seasonal trope, moving from spring to winter, and therefore nature’s reflection of the dead and the mourner’s emotional state, creating a portrait of irresolvable uncertainty and grief. She begins her poem in spring, as the speaker installs “fencing along the border of the spring / garden” overwhelmed by concern for her partner from whom she is separated by his deployment during wartime (1-2). This spring moves quickly into loss as the speaker soon describes the pear tree’s blossoms as winter-like, each petal “one blade of snow” (8). While the speaker moves further from contemplation of language to recalling her central worry and grief, the image of snow echoes in other failed sources of consolation, the television’s “late- / night static” and the “white” writing page (10-11). Nature and art, two of the most common sites in which emotion

might be reinvested, are joined by a third as the poem updates this traditional list by imbuing technology or the modern environment with the same (failed) potential. In building this description of an inconsolable state, the poem reverses the seasonal and psychological direction of the elegy, moving from spring to winter and ending deeper in the soundless “clamor” of grief.

Fenton uses this connection between the physical world and the speaker’s emotion to portray a particular aspect of anticipatory grief, a prolonged and exhaustive state of anxiety. The literal situation of the poem is her contemplation or thought as she pounds fence stakes in “along the border of the spring / garden” (1-2). However, her focus, and that of the poem, is her effort to tune herself to “a register” she is unable to grasp (5). This register creates noise in the speaker’s perception that resonates as images of recurrent snow or white noise. Its speaker admits to her repeated act of looking for reassurance of her lover’s life in the news, “to find the promise of evidence of you // or your unit’s safe return” (12-13). This hyper-vigilance or anticipatory state is heightened when confirmation is not found, and she is instead met with further evidence of threat, “the newest image of a war” (15). Not only does the speaker not receive reassurance, but the poem moves further away still from consolation as the speaker acknowledges the situation or war as one “that can’t be finished or won” (16).

With the seasonal and psychological structure nearly reversed, the poem moves further into grief. Without assurance that her lover is safe, and with the “newest image of a war,” the speaker grows more self-critical and troubled (15). In modern elegiac fashion, she directs anger toward the self as cause for this separation between them: “And because last / night I turned away from the television’s promise / of you, I’m still away,” she confesses in self-reproach (16-18). Rather than moving from psychological crisis to uplift, the poem moves quickly from contemplation downwards into more grief. The speaker cannot afford, however, to fully

complete this reversal or the poem might end in her lover's death. Living with imminent threat leads to thoughts of grief and then winter, and nature now appears to be lamenting human death. So rather than risk imagining her loved one's death, the speaker returns to and provides more detail of the war image from the night before:

turning over in my head: a white twist of rag  
pinned in the bloody center of a civilian's chest,  
a sign we know just enough to know it means  
surrender, there in the place a falling petal's heart would be. (21-24)

The fallen civilian is "pinned" with a "white" extension of the poem's seasonal sign for death (21). The white "rag" also invokes a traditional symbol for the desire to surrender or communicate during wartime, a white flag, as the speaker implies that "we know" or recognize the civilian as an innocent casualty (21). This doubled meaning is pushed further as she returns to the natural image of blossoming pear tree, and links the fallen civilian with the "falling petal," thereby connecting human death with a natural cycle (24).

The speaker, clearly aware of literary conventions of mourning, does not offer this reversal of the seasonal trope unabashedly. Instead she offers its further depiction here as a hypothetical possibility; this is where the petal's heart "would be," the speaker claims, if we were to continue the alignment of human with nature, civilian with petal (24). She reverses the seasonal and psychological motion of the conventional trope and then stops it here, much like she stops the television's news. Herein lies both the speaker's drive to grasp the compensatory allusion afforded by the seasonal trope amidst her anticipatory grief and also her resistance to it as implied by the added hypothetical. The poem ends with this poetic questioning of whether naturalizing this loss, which in some sense alleviates human responsibility for it by aligning it in

a natural cycle, is really a viable option. The speaker does not know what to do with the endlessness of war, or with the endlessness of her anticipatory grief during this time while her lover's life is at imminent risk, for which there is no reassuring "promise" or "evidence" of a consolatory resolution (12). The poem argues that what she does know, in fact what "we know," is conventional practices of mourning prove inadequate (23).

The final image of the poem betrays the speaker caught in the uncertainty of both her literal circumstance and inadequate modes of mourning. The speaker struggles with images of impending death "turning over in [her] head," a continuation of the speaker's anticipatory grief (21). Articulating this particular clamor is a rejection of social pressure for compulsory happiness and suppression of this grief. The poem ends with her questioning the expression of this pre-mortem grief in relationship with elegiac conventions, an answer which she only provides in the poem's own balance of inheritances and departures from these traditions of poetic mourning. Fenton leaves readers grappling with this fraught compensatory equation, in the midst of her own balancing act, a reinterpretation of the speaker's literal circumstance of uncertainty and anticipatory grief. "Clamor" contests the idea that to mourn or elegize is to enjoy and wallow in (anticipatory) grief.

Anti-elegies defy social and poetic pressure to restrict grief and conform to ideas of "normal" mourning. Arlie Hochschild, in "Exploring the Managed Heart," explains of emotional labor, or management of public expression of feelings that,

[t]his labor requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others—[...] This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality (7).

While her focus is on the work of people employed in the service industry, she acknowledges that social pressure asks us to manage emotions as well; “The party guest summons up a gaiety owed to the host, the mourner summons up a proper sadness for a funeral” (18). With an increasing denial of death and both literary and social directives to embrace compulsory happiness and consolation, anti-elegies are generally poems of mourning that resist tradition and so refuse to lament and honor the dead and/or console the mourner. Ramazani coins the term “melancholic mourning” to further describe such modern elegies, adapting Freud’s ideas on healthy mourning and melancholia to account for this as a difference in focus (29). He explains that such elegies are full of ambivalence including self-criticism, guilt, and melancholic anger; they resist the consolatory drive of traditional elegies and express “unresolved, violent, and ambivalent” mourning (4). In *When My Brother Was An Aztec*, Natalie Diaz provides an example of how to express this ambivalence and mourning within an anti-elegy of anticipatory grief. Her speaker directs melancholic anger not at the dead, but her living and imperiled brother, imaginatively killing him off. She also directs this anger inwardly in moments of self-criticism and guilt. Finally, the poem judges the act of writing about death in its resistance to poetics of healings and its criticism of the speaker’s act of imagination.

Diaz shares the experience of living with a loved one’s drug addiction and its effects on one’s family. In “No More Cake Here,” she deftly negotiates inheritances and departures from multiple elegiac traditions, including those of modern elegies’ ambivalent mourning. Rather than compensatory mourning, the poem moves from unconventional or strange work of mourning toward a larger portrait of exhaustive hurt, for which the poem ultimately offers only the (imagined) separation from the dead as consolation. Elegies may be meant to lament the dead, honor the dead, and console the bereaved, but in this anti-elegiac poem of anticipatory grief, the

speaker resists all three. From funeral preparations to the elegiac procession of mourners, Diaz mocks social and poetic conventions of mourning. She uses humor and understatement as distancing techniques to deflect from the underlying anger that is an aspect of her anticipatory grief. Contrary to the elegy's tradition of renewed connection with the dead as consolation, she breaks taboos and presents separation from the dead and dying as consolatory. In living with the painful and ongoing uncertainty of addiction, this (imagined) separation through death consoles by offering a sort of imagined finality.

Her poem, "No More Cake Here," rejects normal social mourning practices by seeming to create space for them, then promptly mocking them instead. The most obvious example is the way the poem reinvents the funeral. It begins with an assertion of the speaker's brother's death, her worry, and her phone call "with the mortuary" (4). This establishes an expectation that normal mourning practices will soon commence. However, she invents her own celebratory almost circus-like funeral party, the bizarre nature of which becomes apparent as she orchestrates everything from invitations to "scarlet balloons" and clowns (14). As she details tasks she seems to undertake in surreal dream-time, the pretense of her preoccupation with these creates dramatization or a sense of progression key in elegies, but altered by the introduction of the unconventional or absurd. The upbeat energy as "clowns played toy bugles" and the speaker herself banged pots and pans "together like a New Year's Day celebration" is certainly odd and does not represent mourning norms (24, 56). In this way, the poem employs humor and the unexpected to mock the institutionalized or impersonal ceremony with its festive reinterpretation of the funeral party. By forgoing lamentation, the poem suggests that this death does not create need for consolation but instead is itself relief or easement.

The poem also rejects conventions of poetic mourning, including the elegy's psychological structure of moving from grief toward consolation, which parallels Freud's idea of the healthy work of mourning (Sacks 1). The speaker suggests that there is an opportunity for conventional grief work to play itself out, but then quickly employs humor and understatement as poetic strategies to mock it. The speaker claims that she gave her parents the task of blowing up balloons to rid themselves of as many years of her brother's offenses, "jails, twenty-dollar bills, midnight phone calls, fistfights, and ER visits as they could let go of" (12-13). She promptly undercuts this potential healing and move toward consolation or closure with sarcasm and understatement, claiming her mother "blew up / so many that she fell asleep. She slept for ten years-- / she missed the whole party" (15-17). The speaker further resists this psychological structure by refusing to praise or idealize her brother, instead speaking directly and unsentimentally about details of his life like his crystal meth addiction and its impact on his family. Not in keeping with the honorific stance of the elegy, she's very particular about her dislikes including all that he's broken: "remote controls, the Polaroid, stereo, Shop-Vac, / even the motor to [her] Dad's work truck" (40-41). Rather than directly stating the existence of her mother's anger and the impact of her brother's many offenses, the speaker implies them by alluding to the severity of her mother's therapeutic balloon-blowing exhaustion amid an already unexpectedly merry funeral party. The absurd or humorous is paired with emotional understatement in a way that both conveys anger and makes it easier for the speaker to accept.

Diaz also employs humor as she recasts the elegy's chorus of mourners, whose voices usually join the bereaved in expressing grief. Here they become representative of a communal or shared refusal to lament. As untraditional as her setting, her chorus includes her "giddy" siblings, her parents, one of whom is sleeping, clowns, a mariachi band, and a magician (18). They are

joined temporarily by firemen who drive by “with the sirens on” as promised, stray dogs who want cake, and two mutants who inquire about their possible inheritance of drug paraphernalia (30-48). Rather than cry, the mourners make festive music and complain only about bathroom acoustics rather than loss (32-34). Of this large and unusual crowd, only the mutants express any sadness and it is for the loss of her brother’s “cooking” (49). The speaker insists on his “horrible” cooking skills to make clear that even this lone lament is not an instance of healthy mourning by any of Freud’s standards, but instead a dark pun about her brother’s drug use (55). Later, when it becomes clear that this is all imagined, this creation of a non-grieving community might also be understood as a poetic strategy to defuse the speaker’s frustration and guilt.

Diaz frequently utilizes understatement to convey underlying anger, including the speaker’s own as she imagines her brother’s death and her guilt. First present in her lack of lamentation as she manages the odd celebratory funeral preparations, her anger is also evident in a deeper betrayal; she admits that she has not only celebrated his death, but that she’s imagined the whole scenario (63). This account, which first seems anti-elegiac in its resistance to conventions of mourning, reveals itself as anticipatory grief and an imagined death:

The worst part he said was  
he was still alive. The worst part he said was  
he wasn’t even dead. I think he’s right, but maybe  
the worst part is that I’m still imagining the party, maybe  
the worst part is that I can still taste the cake. (60-64)

Readers, who have been anticipating an expression of bereavement, now realize that her emotion may lie elsewhere. While the act of imagining or anticipating a death is common among those living with uncertainty, the speaker’s enthusiastic response and then continuing fantasy does not

convey traditional lamentation. The speaker first proposes possible agreement with her brother's accusation and therefore guilt, before confessing further that her act of envisioning his death and funeral did not just occur once but is ongoing. On the one hand, the speaker proposes self-criticism and guilt for regarding his death as consolatory or cause for celebration: "I think he's right" (62). But without a temporal reference for how much time has passed between this initial dream or act and her confession, she also frames this emotion, act, and coping strategy as an ongoing experience and presence: "I'm still imagining the party" (63). Small moments of affection also appear amidst this death fantasy, such as the speaker's effort to bake his favorite cake (27). This portrayal of ambivalent anticipatory grief and mourning, including the vision, the guilt for and the attachment to the vision despite the speaker's proposal of self-reproach, makes space for a more complex and nuanced response to the emotional upheaval that accompanies the trauma of the anticipated death of the addicted brother.

Diaz strategically adapts elegiac conventions while employing humor and understatement throughout to make this happen. Ramazani writes, "increasingly questioning, immediate, and personal, postwar American elegists rely more on their own feelings than on communal codes and religious structures, even when those feelings violate taboos against the exposure or degradation of the dead" (223). Diaz exposes the (imagined) dead or at-risk living, but also implicates her speaker. And while elegists often express guilt for writing about the dead for aesthetic gain, this speaker expresses guilt for imagining the living as dead, for killing her brother imaginatively, for actualizing the ever-present and possible impending death of an addict. Thus, Diaz ultimately offers an example of how this literary guilt might be extended and appear in poems of anticipatory grief, while death is yet impending. Also, while Diaz delivers the level of emotional intensity readers expect from a poem about a loved one's death, the angry

resentment of anticipatory grief that is delivered here is unexpected and complex because she is not reverential, and because of the flat tone and understatement with which this is presented.

This poem rejects the premise of grief from the start, beginning with death as consolation or occasion for joy, and amusing readers with the unexpected and absurd in order to work its way toward characterizing its originating anger. The speaker's frustration with living with her brother's addiction is taboo, and so is dwelling on the celebratory aspect of his death while he is still alive. Ramazani claims of American family elegies that separation from the dead can seem more pressing than reconnection (220). Diaz makes clear that for this speaker, separation from the still living is more desired than reconnection. The poem creates a new psychological structure, working from death as consolation to living with the continuation of anger and the management of guilt amid the ongoing project of anticipatory grief.

Donald Hall devotes his entire collection, *Without: Poems*, to grappling with the anticipatory grief and bereavement of a man whose wife is diagnosed with and dies of leukemia. He presents both types of grief as equal components of his speaker's experience of loss, and the book's structure helps portray them. It has no sections, although the speaker's wife dies midway through. Two long poems in sections appear in the first half of the book, "Her Long Illness" and "Last Days," along with shorter poems. Written in third person and the present tense, the long poems allow the speaker some distance from which to look at the self and convey the reality of ongoing loss during the progression of illness and anticipatory grief. Shorter poems appear between sections of the first long poem, while the second long poem remains uninterrupted. This reflects the experience of increasing isolation that often accompanies the severity of the situation or one's proximity to death (Fulton 51), as well as the narrowing of a partner's scope of attention and focus on the ailing loved one (Duke 833). Shorter poems like "The Porcelain Couple" also

convey a narrative on grief and loss with topics like the death of loved ones that overlap with his wife's own illness (Hall 10). These poems, written in first person and the past tense, address losses outside of the intimacy of their own immediate relationship, which creates a broader picture of familial loss. They help establish a sense of what Sacks explains within the elegy as "each loss recapitulat[ing] a prior loss" (23).

Hall's long poems are quiet, made of ordinary speech and daily actions, even as the speaker grows busy with the immediacy of caretaking. The first section of "Her Long Illness" conveys dread, repeated declarations of love, and admits small comforts available amidst anticipatory grief (page 1). Written in plain language, the poems present daily ordinariness like having to urinate, but also betray how the couple is impacted by illness, like his wife's repeated shock of facing "the bald woman" in the mirror (31). He avoids sentimentality in this way even while he conveys aspects of anticipatory grief, like the way objects and events take on multiple meanings during this period. In one section of "Her Long Illness," for example, he gifts his wife an anniversary ring while she's in the hospital, and explains that she "immediately named it Please Don't Die" (58). Susan Duke describes this type of response as being "conscious of events as future memories" and understanding things or events as symbolic of one's experience, especially defining moments like diagnoses (834). The second long poem, "Last Days," conveys the time from his wife's terminal diagnosis until her death. The couple attempts to prepare, from planning funeral arrangements until "the last hours" of her life as he scratches her "big bony nose" and sees her "chest go still" (116, 123, 126). Hall employs repetition to recount the shocking impact of living with terminal illness in "Without" as he recounts the prior year of losses. He lists all of what illness took away as a multitude of small absences, such as "no rain no peony thunder no woodthrush," during the time that his wife's "body was a nation...assaulted"

(16, 27-28). He explains of this final year of anticipatory grief that the “year endured without punctuation,” illuminating or underscoring the ongoing reality of living in suspense (9).

Poems of bereavement fill the second half of the book, written as long letters to his now-deceased wife. Hall borrows elegiac strategies, like the procession of mourners in “Letter In Autumn” who appear and leave tributes on his wife’s grave, “chrysanthemums, / cosmos, a pumpkin, and a poem / by a woman who ‘never knew [her]’” (88-90). Time, as is so often true for the bereaved, becomes measured in its relationship with death: “This first October of your death” (1). And like the poems we’ve examined up until now, he also resists elegiac conventions and finds no consolation amid the hell of grief as “[t]he trees go on burning” (100). In “Letter In The New Year,” he even tries to make himself the consoling substitute by taking over her former tasks, the futility of which he recognizes with the statement, “Next week maybe I’ll menstruate” (108). The final poem, “Weeds and Peonies,” embraces an anti-consolatory stance; yes, the poem admits, there is “contentment recollected,” but it does not belong to the speaker or his house of grief (6). All of this is to say that Hall ends the book without resurrection or reconnection, but with acceptance of the finality of death, that she “will not reappear” (11). In its final image, spring does not console but instead half of its peonies, like this separated couple, “topple” (21).

Much like Hall’s collection, my poems also explore living with anticipatory grief, bereavement, and terminal illness. What begins with my stepmother’s terminal cancer becomes living with my partner’s diagnosis. So while some of the poems do portray grief that is bereavement, my collection largely investigates living with ongoing anticipatory grief. The poems look beyond the speaker’s immediate family to a larger environment and express concern for a greater state of well-being. Sacks suggests that elegists place their own lamentation within traditions of mourning in different ways, such as repeating vegetation rites, to feel that their loss

is part of a larger order or cycle and not simply a frightening random catastrophe (20-24). Hall's speaker, while denying this potential consolation during his bereavement, comes to a simple acceptance of the finality of death. My own speaker, after many poems of anticipatory grief, comes to accept that loss is catastrophic and unpredictable, and that we must somehow live with this, by suggesting a continuance undertaken in the face of particular familial losses but also larger world ills. Rather than focus inward and detail only the transformation illness causes in the physical bodies and lives of individuals, this collection presents a wider perspective of connection with the well-being of a larger landscape, one that speaks of interconnectedness and a sense of greater ecological awareness. This awareness extends beyond the self and personal grief and trauma to acknowledge ills in the social and natural world, as well as social responsibility beyond the personal and familial.

My poem, "(Step)(M)other After Surgery," is a definition poem that employs repetition to convey shock and the insistence on being present with a terminally ill family member in the face of looming loss as a collective response. The poem's form allows some distance and the pretense of relaying facts through which to present this difficult subject matter of the progression of illness. My stepmother's loss or change in cognition is presented in the very first line, as part of the definition of "Mother: Moth. Her. *Mo ther than missin*. She was." This picture of her illness grows more complex as the poem's definitions build:

Formally: Terminal.

Terminal: Space where one transfers. Between. Where one starts or stops, at the same or different locations.

Terminal: Our mother? Which terminal(s)?

The poem relies equally on this use of near repetition as a poetic strategy to make plain the shock and resistance to facing an impending death. Here, when the poem promises a second definition of “Terminal,” for example, it arrives as my siblings’ disoriented questioning. The poem carefully defines and locates my family in the particular experience of anticipatory grief, facing the progression of my stepmother’s cancer: “Terminal: Space where one is. Other (m)other. Avoid confusion with. *Missin*. Surrounding your. Moth Her.” Through definitions and repetitions like this, the whole family is characterized as traumatized witness to the advancing of their loved one’s cancer. After several near repetitions and circling back through phrases, the poem ends without resolution, instead directing readers to “*Go back*” to one of its earlier definitions that it then repeats; “Mother: Moth. Her. Mater + t = matter. Something the.” It leaves readers suspended with the family facing my stepmother’s changed and changing state. Thus, the poem adopts this received form and the elegiac convention of repetition to express this aspect of pre-mortem grief. It works to redefine mourning by incorporating anticipatory grief into the narrative-as-definition of their particular experience and relationship.

“Winter Illness” adapts the elegy’s act of substitution by recounting how the speaker transferred anticipatory grief for a dying parent onto a secondary situation. The poem begins with the speaker’s confessed focus on hikers lost in the literal wilderness as my stepmother suffered consequences of prolonged chemotherapy and disease. This substitution parallels my stepmother’s reality and proves non-compensatory, much like the substitute in Doty’s “White Kimono.” The secondary situation did allow the speaker distance to express and feel hope, to dream of “helicopters, a red boot / shoved in snow,” as the search for the hikers continued alongside the progression of cancer. She primarily recalls her intense concentration on those at-risk as she became “obsessed,” “watched,” “kept dreaming,” and “researched” their possible

circumstance. This obsessive focus and withdrawal from usual behavior, along with feeling in a crisis, are common experiences of those with terminally ill loved ones (Duke 833-834). As the situation of both the hikers and her parent became dire, she admits she “stopped answering / friendly phone calls.” The poem invokes the elegy’s seasonal trope, aligning human and seasonal death, as they all seem overwhelmed by snow. She testifies that they found one hiker “body beneath snow” and her stepmother “seemed brighter / somehow, lighter even as tumors filled her.” The poem juxtaposes these two scenarios, suggesting that the speaker’s focus on life-threatening uncertainty and circumstance, part of living with her parent’s illness, became trained on reports of lost mountain hikers. As a substitute, the hikers’ death foretells her mother’s and is, therefore, not consoling. With the unconfirmed but assumed death of the remaining hikers, the speaker states that she knew first “they got up...and walked on.” In this way, the speaker avoids direct mention of her loved one’s imminent death, instead fixating on images of the hikers’ likely fate. Rather than a direct statement on the impending death of her parent, the emotional weight lies in the speaker’s indirect acknowledgement of her will to live and “walk on.”

Looking at human society in relationship with how it impacts the well-being of individuals as well as a greater ecology is often the focus of environmental poems. In fact, Alison H. Deming and Lauret E. Savoy, editors of *Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity and the Natural World*, attest that American “nature writing” has shifted away from Romanticism toward showing that our “uniquely ‘American’ relationship with this world has become unsustainable” (5-6). Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street, editors of *The Eco-poetry Anthology*, also contend that environmental poetry is “committed to questions of human injustice, as well as to issues of damage and degradation to the other-than-human world” (xxix). Whole poetry collections, including Patricia Smith’s *Blood Dazzler* and Allison Hedge-Coke’s *Blood Run*,

characterize this interconnectedness and invite recognition of responsibility. Both poets present a myriad of voices of those at-risk, survivors, and the dead, to create a community of griever even while individuals might be focused on their own threat, loss, or death.

This also explains why the poems in my collection portray a landscape of grief that includes the personal of lyric but also something of the world and forces of which it is a part. The poems' energy of anger and reproach is directed toward investigation of social ills and threatening circumstances surrounding illness. Fueled by the unknown cause of illness and the anger of anticipatory grief, the poems function as the collection's angry finger pointing and present a greater lack of well-being. When faced with my partner's cancer diagnosis, for example, my poem, "Anger," is quick to admit that, "[t]here is no one / to blame...Or it is all of them." Its fury rises from a place that understands it cannot cast blame without looking at a larger picture of potential causes. It posits many possible culprits including some commonly addressed in elegiac questioning like the gods, fate, and even the melancholic self, but also human and / or natural disaster, and environmental contamination.

One of my poems, "Geese," weaves together two seemingly disparate news stories. While geese begin dying on their migration north, a young girl is bullied by her peers, and the poem parallels their desire to return home as the girl "imagines flight, lifting // herself away and heading home again." The poem implies connection between both species when it imagines of the bullied child whose family was threatened, "what it would be / to stand in the cold, watching everyone / she's loved drop, one by one, around her." The final lines make clear that lack of well-being threatens not just individuals but whole communities; an image of the geese, heads thrown "far back" as they succumb to sickness, echoes the callous people who laughed "wildly" earlier in the poem. In this way, the poem alludes to a foreboding and even deadly correspondence. It

proposes illness as metaphor in order to suggest that this social ill is, like the birds' disease, also fatal. To speak of society in terms of its relative health or well-being through the use of such metaphors is present in political thought dating back to Plato (Sontag 76). Here, too, the disease of a damaging social reality exists in relationship with physical illness or disease.

My poem "The Deer" also addresses human impact on the well-being of both the human and more than human world. Its speaker investigates the perspective of a deer and challenges male domination. Ostriker explains of writing anger in victimization poems and dominance-submission scenarios, that women focus on undoing the belief that males are superior because of their logical, rational minds (132). From behavior commonly attributed to the deer, like stopping "in headlights," to what it might understand as it encounters two people in the woods, my speaker reflects on possibilities of its consciousness or what "would make sense." She employs a rational tone and logic as she builds a case for what the deer comprehends: "she doesn't see the car, its color / before we collide. Just feels the heat / and mass coming toward her and freezes." The speaker realizes the deer does not see or evaluate the woman and her predicament the way humans might in terms of her impoverishment and "missing doorknob," or in terms of victim-blaming rhetoric like she "let her boyfriend back in / even though." In this way, the poem critiques such rhetoric under the pretense of resisting personification of the deer. As the hunter approaches the woman, the speaker posits that it is likely the animal associates the hunter's presence with violence beyond threat to itself or including the woman. Since the deer senses this impending danger and "[k]nows it was not / the truck ... But the hunter," the poem suggests that this threat of violence is in some manner habitual or predictable and can be anticipated. This accusation of habitual violence is another common expression of anger in such poems according to Ostriker. Here, in particular, the anticipated violence and impending loss is shared by the

woman and deer (134). The poem ends incorporating a piece of dialogue, which Ostriker states is a strategy to lend a sense of documentation (130). The hunter threatens, “There’s no one is sight, / dear. Hold steady, daddy’s here.” The poem leaves readers in this pressurized moment of anticipatory grief, facing the hunter’s threat. This dialogue is specifically upsetting because it presents a connection between “contempt and violence” and highlights what Ostriker later names “the paternal demand for submission beneath the idiom of affection” (133, 161). Along with the fact that the male figure appears, at turns, as boyfriend, hunter, impending abuser, and metaphorical father, this violent contempt points toward the gender polarization Ostriker finds common in women’s anger poems that describe entrapment (128). The poem argues, with a logical tone from the beginning, for the rationality of the deer’s (and then also the woman’s) perspective, which includes their response to perceived threat. The speaker adopts this perspective early in the poem in order to assume a new rationality that later betrays male domination as real and violent.

Modern elegists often address the exploitative aspect of writing about the dead for aesthetic gain. Artistic guilt appears in poems of anticipatory grief as well. However, with death impending, expressions of such guilt address profiting artistically from the tenuous situation of the living, rather than from the dead. Diaz’ speaker admits guilt for imaginatively killing her brother or creatively “causing” his death (61-62). In my poem, “Last Hours,” with the immediacy of a parent’s death, my speaker also admits to earlier imaginative acts or the creation of metaphors for illness, “The tumor as *dandelion*, metastasis / as *gone to seed*.” The speaker then rejects them as always false: “There was never a metaphor.” With an increased proximity to death and need for “specific answers,” the speaker admits this inadequacy or false gain of inventing metaphors for illness or dying. In poems of anticipatory grief, such guilt often

functions to return attention to the uncertainty of living with those at risk and, because it is ongoing, resists a full or greater condemnation of the self. Diaz' poem ends with the speaker's continuation of the dark imaginative act, as she "still" can "taste the cake," only after the poem's largest drive first argues with humor and understatement for understanding (64). My own poem ends with the speaker's questioning: "Just how long / should I let him sleep?" Her earlier confession leads to this focus on continuing uncertainty and a growing sense of urgent attention that accompanies sitting vigil. In modern elegies, addressing the exploitative aspect of imaginative acts leads to great self-reproach and furthers expression of irresolvable mourning as poets face the finality of death. In these poems, admission of guilt does not focus on self-reproach, but on an ongoing state of suspense and anticipatory grief as poets confront living with the anticipated death of loved ones.

Contemporary poets continue to negotiate borrowing and departing from poetic and social conventions of mourning. In their resistance to the poetics of healing with the immersion in grief, they contest the social suppression of grief, death, and mourning along with anticipatory grief and dying. Ramazani acknowledges that many of these poetic strategies were long present in English elegies, but they reached new heights, expressed as ambivalent mourning, as poets including Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath enlarged the genre's affective parameters and wrote elegies he claims are more aggressive and melancholic than others (Ramazani, "Daddy" 262). Anticipatory grief has also had a presence in elegies of the past, but as medical advancements allow more people to live and live longer with terminal diagnosis amid the growing environmental crisis, and as our relationship with death, grief, and mourning practices continue to shift so, too, do poetic expressions of anticipatory grief. "Scorning recovery and transcendence, modern elegists neither abandon the dead nor heal the living" (Ramazani 4).

Poems of anticipatory grief express melancholic mourning, and don't abandon the imperiled or dying nor heal the living, but do offer the poems themselves as temporary and sometimes problematic relief or stay against melancholia itself.

The following poems present a self amidst ongoing anticipatory grief born of terminal diagnoses. In this collection, the angst and hyper-vigilance of living with disease and the chaos caused by physical illness, exists in relationship with and within a sometimes damaged and damaging world. The poems contest the idea that grief only follows death, and also resist the conflation of illness with death, by sharing pieces of what it is to live with terminal disease. One can better understand the representation of this experience in part through the poems' adaptations and inheritances from an evolving elegiac tradition. The poems employ various poetic strategies like repetition, understatement, and creation of non-compensatory substitutes to characterize the experience of anticipatory grief, the state of uncertainty that accompanies terminal illness, and realities of living in suspense including a resistance to emotional detachment despite dread. The following poems, with grief for the loss of immediate family members and the troubled well-being of a greater ecology, provide one portrait of anticipatory grief.

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## THE WAITING HOUSE

## Before Moving Home To My Dying Stepmother

That afternoon heat held  
    over the city. Women with children  
        moved slowly between  
shops. I had come  
    with what I had, hoping  
        to find beauty in the small  
    community pond.

The nutria rat approached  
    through water, was the dark  
    motion I knew  
        beneath sleep that left me  
tired, chose the same  
    shadowed space.

And though he shook his scaly tail  
    at the palm-size ducklings  
who appeared soft  
and slipped away silently  
    across the orange water,

and though he convinced  
    the stubborn swans, who stomped  
    their large feet and hissed  
loudly, to leave the edge, I could not  
    hate the ugly, red-eyed  
    nutria enough.

I feared him  
    even as I bent ever so slightly  
    toward his yellowed teeth, uneven  
        claws, and terrible muzzle  
as he gnashed his way forward  
    out of great need.

This was the first time I opened  
    my hands and it let me in  
        with one quick movement,  
even though the bread was stale,  
    and my horror just beginning  
                                to surface.

## The Pass

Driving through the Siskiyou at night, darkness so full you can't stop trying to see into it, as if to find some flare to keep you alive, the smallest hint of brilliance, a lost bead in the wool of night.

Meanwhile the car's mechanical hum works beneath you, propelling you from and almost into sleep. Where mountain walls surround highway, all you see is yellow striping

on grey asphalt, until the uppermost curve, where a semi's white sides are lit by the shock and dazzle of patriotic lights. As you flash past

cop cars, still peering into the damn dark, headlights catch and shimmer on fragments, a thousand crystals, a crumpled car at the truck's end.

You must drive down the whole way in renewed darkness. What you remember is the straightaway, acid burning your throat, lights quietly patterning town after town in the waiting valley.

## Homecoming

Closed into the house, smoking all night long,  
no windows lifted, my mom on one floor,  
her father on another with careful  
stacks of bound newspapers, trays of seedlings  
he'll tend all winter beneath indoor lights.  
Watching the weather channel for hours,  
he'll leave his recliner for the kitchen.  
This is how I learn to hold it all in,  
be still in a place named home though I feel  
foreign here. Everything's laid out: the black  
dress, bouquet on the table. I've turned off  
all lights but one. If you look into this  
quiet, you won't know I'm terrified of  
me tonight, clock ticking, what I might house.

\*

## Blind Man Found Dead

still seated before his TV. How strange,  
its drone coloring him with violence  
and lost love for a year, the mailman  
struggling to press stacks of sealed letters  
and bills through the slot into his long vacant  
hallway, until water pipes burst beneath  
the yard and his utilities are finally turned off.  
Sometimes I feel my hands against the chilled  
doorknob, the remote that releases too many  
stilted voices, light moving through  
me, and then through the house. I don't know  
what happens to the soul. But after  
weeks in front of the TV, he mummifies  
while each relative and friend puts off  
visiting, lets the usual weeks  
become months without a phone call.

## Father

What this boy wants  
to make sense of a father  
departed is the whole world  
in a moment, a story  
of light and unexpected  
stones. He can imagine  
anything. Sometimes  
the shadows become  
jungle vines to swing  
from, the clearing a ship  
surrounded by green.  
Cement warm beneath  
palms becomes a path  
toward something like  
prayer. It is not always  
this quiet. As a man,  
the boy will tell us  
these graves belong  
to early settlers although  
he knows better, knows  
this is an incomplete  
name. We hear the lie  
edging his voice, the want  
for myth, for the brave  
ones who set out  
toward better lives,  
even if he must erase  
what they did, erase  
the whole world  
as they arrive, to  
keep them in pursuit  
of happiness, praised.

## The Fossil

-Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma

He'll spend all day  
outside smashing rocks.  
In one hundred degree heat,  
he found this one. Inside.  
It's part of his story.  
More than once men broke  
his mother this way  
and she got back up.  
The fine spines  
of the shell build over  
this boy each time he  
has to watch their fists  
from the doorframe, his  
mother crying out. I  
will not say her tears  
are part of an ocean,  
although we know  
there was a sea. Her tears  
came after the water  
left and the land dried,  
and mothers were forced  
to walk long miles  
while their children  
and husbands, their own  
mothers and fathers  
walked too. Not many  
would expect to find  
a shell inside the memory  
of this rocky mountain.  
No one should expect  
to find such terrible  
hardness inside another.

\*

## The Waiting House

On the small porch, squirrels eat away  
at crossbeams just under our roof.

My youngest sister bites her nails  
all day while her mother bends over

radiated bones at 52. Once I thought  
I solved it, covered holes in siding with aluminum

scraps. I decide against rewriting my resume.  
The streets busy with couples

in clean cars, matching sweat suits. My sister sits  
behind me, wind coming in from the north.

I could tell you I called the trapper, the roofer,  
my father at work, but what's the use?

The squirrels prepare all night, roll acorns  
inside walls, along our framework.

## The Salmon

No matter what stream  
you follow out or the years  
spent at sea, you find the way  
back, always, to the river  
place where you were born.  
Scientists offer little  
explanation. They've no  
words for it. It's taken me  
months in Iowa's wind,  
which tears through layers  
of clothing and bone,  
feet blistering over half  
of the Swiss Alps, days  
resisting the damp  
Oregon winter, and later  
the practice of letting it all  
in, to follow my own trail  
back to Milwaukee,  
its spoiled waters  
and breweries, separations  
and condo trends. Most days,  
I wonder what I'm doing  
here. Most days, I wake  
into callings I cannot name.  
I'm learning to do what I do  
not want, move a woman I love  
from one hip to another  
to relieve bed sores, clean  
the sink full of butter  
knives my siblings left out  
on their way to school,  
because I change. I don't know  
what happens to most of us  
but you, in particular,  
sliced to ribbons, smoked  
over apple wood, so still  
inside the canning jar's glass,  
I know you were caught, packed  
into ice before I found you.  
I'll be caught too, beneath  
cold Wisconsin clay, already  
more frozen than I remembered.  
Some say salmon die by the mouth  
but are silent. Your lyric

nearly invisible current  
and just as dangerous; you put  
your whole body into the making.  
Smarter than me. Stronger.  
More willing to listen.

## The Waiting House II

Before I leave, I make sure my youngest  
sister stays focused on her school's food drive,  
the kitchen warm, my stepmother seated  
at the long table, crutches propped against  
her chair. I retrieve all the hard to reach  
cans, then walk out past baskets of mittens  
and shoes, hooks holding coats in five sizes,  
and I almost believe she will do it,  
live on for a complete lifetime. They call  
a few minutes later to say his labs  
came back and our father is in good health.  
They don't say more. Still her cancer splits thru  
air— *cerebellum*, *astrocytomas*—  
sharp as tinsel this terrible winter.

\*

## The Funeral Queen

*Survives* inside walls, climbs into  
and peers out of sockets, sizzles there  
as you prepare dinners, set timers,  
switch between channels. Sees you swat  
your children, skip answering phone calls,  
send your boyfriend/girlfriend out  
for pizza. Some nights sends signals,  
rhythms that ring your ears until morning,  
quietly handles strings you'll set  
in motion once you wake. Sometimes  
trades places, slips through light  
fixtures on ceilings, stencils  
herself into signifiers in your mind.

## Well Child

No one is here with you in this late hour.  
Your heart is a lightbox, yellow.  
The rest of you, neck and fist, stressed tight.  
You roll over but look no different,  
used to turning. You never thought  
of illness as a place you'd live in,  
of the yard as flower and rot,  
lift and wither, all around the house.  
This is it. Wrapped around you now  
like a small shirt. If you could just flip a switch.  
You stay awake, eyes set far into purple,  
gold as a bat's. There's no trade off  
you haven't tried twice. Leaving, praying,  
forgiving every hour. A plum's sweetness  
bitten open beside you, its white slumber  
thick in the air. There will be the long months  
you need to recover. Until then, this light  
in your chest tries to catch everything moving past.

## The Main Character

The directors will tell you she got off  
the train in a little town. It was windy,  
and she was broke. The only thing  
she could do was bend down into  
that hot crotch and take it a minute  
longer than she thought she could  
to eat somewhere later. Then her job  
in the diner for years, three  
aprons, countless cigarettes,  
when he really did walk in. Just like that.  
The man she always wanted  
to meet. She was still dishwasher  
blonde and older; he paid  
and left before she brought dessert.  
They say there's always a way out  
of love. We take it. None of us survive.

\*

### The Waiting House III

It makes her feel better  
to be in control, deciding whether

to tell us the stage  
of her cancer. The news

highlights a guy who says,  
*It's gettin' old,*

but he means snow.  
It's been a hard winter.

Even now, outside  
JoCat's pub, wind rushes

flake on flake, wipes out  
every other sound.

If she's died already,  
I do not know.

## Things We Bury

Once I arrived bearing pistachios  
he no longer remembered how to crack open,  
or could not see, or did not care, throwing a handful,  
shells and all, between dentures, and I was forced  
to stick fingers into his clattering mouth.  
Another time I found him seated with three others  
in the dim cafeteria, spooning gravy into his mouth,  
his fingertips and nails covered in dried feces.  
They'd brought him down this way,  
some overworked women in maroon scrubs,  
drew his chair to the table, tucked a paper napkin  
into his pale hand. And how pale his skin became there,  
all flesh tone leaving until it took on the grey translucence  
of the fish he'd clean once each summer, always the same way.  
A practice like years spent training to press  
the right buttons in flight, release bombs, or the detailed  
records kept of daily rainfall, Republican candidates,  
and later medications. He never once asked to go home,  
but spent hours wheeling down halls to close doors  
the nurses kept leaving open. My grandfather liked his wife  
better than himself and when she died, we still  
found the handwritten notes she kept last year  
to remind herself of each time he threatened her  
into corners, hit her. Tell me, who wants to watch  
as he carries on with routine, the careful ritual  
of tapping fingers on each photograph taped  
around the small blue room, twice on the table,  
twice on its drawer, of checking the day's date  
penciled beside the last on his Styrofoam cup,  
while his children, his granddaughters,  
fail to visit again for weeks.

## The Surgery

Before they cut into her skull  
it is dark

inside, like the ocean at night.  
She cannot see

the huge body but feels it  
crashing

against some edge.  
Inside,

although she tries to  
stop them,

great whites.

\*

Sign: Apple/s

Them

As in: *How do you like them*

As if a stepmother would bewitch, in this climate,

Not a rotten one in the bunch. Oh, but you! You are a rotten

Nothing like a few bad

That's right, I rolled into town like a bad

of my eye, you must be of the family rose

What if you became the vessel, the poisoned

Once upon a time you were the thing bitten, the burden, the dark magic

You were every , an orchard of vessels at night, a sea of entranced

Held inside you, , such wild and potent slumber

Last winter I trimmed trees that bear

All summer deer lazed in the yard, unable to find

When there is no , no vessel for the unimaginable promise

Who will gift us sleep, the last clenching of teeth, the telltale

Beyond leaded windows, this glass coffin, trees sans

No matter how much sun or rain, not one on the ground, not one single

## Disturbance

In grade school, my reoccurring dream:  
    a bridge collapsing into water, land shifting  
beneath waves, people struggling  
    to stay on high ground. Now Japan is  
drenched in disasters: earthquake, tsunami,  
    leaking nuclear power plant. Already cows give  
poisoned milk, spinach bright with radiation.

America's most severely disturbed children,  
    sans empathy or remorse, slam fists  
into me daily, try to smash their first grade faces  
    through windows, whisper of cutting us  
open and want to carve deep boundaries  
    into their skins. In training we're told about domestic  
abuse and torture, attachment disorders, brain  
    waves of children who hate themselves and how  
we can build new neurological paths away  
    from the nightmares they've lived.

In Japan, they've doused the reactor in seawater,  
    buried it deep beneath sand. Sometimes the children  
spill aggression out slowly until we feel it  
    enter the cold living room and look  
for the source. Other times they explode  
    out of nowhere, break whatever is at hand.  
We guide them outside, wrap them  
    into themselves, hold tight for hours  
until they burn out. There's no proof  
    these methods work. Off the east coast,  
oil slicks again, the west coast lined  
    with toxic rubble. Meanwhile each day  
they promise they'll do their best to kill us.

## Geese

This spring two thousand snow geese  
drop from the sky into Mud Lake,  
Idaho, and a young girl believes the sky  
really has fallen, the beautiful cloud

of bodies drifting slowly in deep gray  
water. They were trying to return  
for summer, to the spot where they first  
opened eyes. They can do that,

find their way back. They also commit  
to one life partner. So imagine when  
one falls first, breathless on the steely  
surface, cirrus scuffing its ebony eye.

And the other feels illness inside  
herself, too, but must first mourn  
her love, this departure, having to  
face the last stretch alone.

In Alabama several teens tell a girl to commit  
suicide or her family will all be killed.  
Surely the teens are ill. Surely the young  
girl, thirteen, imagines flight, lifting

herself away and heading home again.  
Imagines too, what it would be  
to stand in the cold, watching everyone  
she's loved drop, one by one, around her.

And what of the man whose job it is  
to lift each blossom of goose  
from the water, its long neck draped  
over his wrist or dangling like a noose,

drenched and sorry, its beautiful head?  
For all of the hours he must look  
for the white ruffs between ripples  
and grasses, his eyes trained

on finding each fleck, hoping  
the rest have made it. There are  
those who don't want to believe  
in such vulnerability, who laugh

wildly at the thought of this as a sign.  
Some of us watch still images flash  
on screens. A few see the call of spring  
plummet into the eye of the lake, stand

crestfallen near last year's milkweeds.  
The girl's mother contacts the school  
and media. The State Department of Fish  
and Game reports Avian Cholera,

contagion, quickly gathers the dead  
and weak. Nearly twenty eagles watch  
as the delicate meal they might have had  
is scooped away like late snow,

the taste on their tongues, watch as the man  
leaves and more convulse, surrender  
in mirrored water, where some swim  
erratic circles, mucous soiling their faces,  
heads thrown far back between wings.

\*

## (Step)(M)other After Surgery

- Mother: Moth. Her. *Mo ther than missin*. She was. Before light on steel tables. Parent. In the raising of.
- Step: To lift and set a foot. In a forward, backward, side or vertical motion. This, she may do. Still. From light or into. Realize
- Originally: Not mine. I had another. An other. Or, she became the other mother. The main other. My (m)other.
- Origin: Mater. (Latin) (not matter, more than) Formal term.
- Formally: Mother. or Mater. *See also*: membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord, dura and pia maters.
- Mater's mater: My (m)other's dura mater fractured. Interrupted. Cancer matter between maters. Chords along cords. *Go back to*:
- Moth Her: The moth in her, cancer. Dura. Durable. Flies toward light. Pia. From pins. Pricked. And sent through blood, enters membranes. Like pollen. Like steps. Mater + t = matter. Something the matter.
- Formally: Terminal.
- Terminal: Space where one transfers. Between. Where one starts or stops, at the same or different locations.
- Terminal: Our mother? Which terminal(s)?
- Moth: Associated with light and confusion. Maintains angular relationship to moon in order to fly. (her) Encountering another, artificial light, attempts to correct, turns toward and spirals, memory path closer and closer to
- Chord: Please mater and matter. Surrounding your brain, we. Remember?
- Moon: Measures time, stages of a woman's life. Month, menstrual. Also, traveled to and landed on.
- Step: Can mean dance step, the building block of many dances.
- Dura mater: Hard mother. Inflexible. Outermost. Touches some. *Go back to*:
- Originally: Dura = you. Be *Mo ther*.

Moth-ing: An activity. To watch the moth (her) or butterfly dance. Biologists and also

Moth-er: Someone who engages in the activity of moth-ing. Avoid confusion with usual meaning. Mother, we are moth-ing you, as moth-ers. We are your seven little moth-ers. Dad a moth-er. Do you know?

Pia mater: Tender mother. Is the delicate. Innermost.

Moth: Birthed the butterfly, which arose from within; mother of.

Metastasize: To break away, enter, circulate. Steps of a certain kind. Meta-sized.

Terminals: Traveled to and landed on. Place of many. Attempts to correct. *See*: moon, mother.

Terminal: Space where one is. Other (m)other. Avoid confusion with. *Missin*. Surrounding your. Moth Her. Activity. *Go back*

Mother: Moth. Her. Mater + t = matter. Something the

## Hospital Visit 52: The Strange Woman

*You were asking about her*, our father reminds mom,  
*said she was in our house*. Autumn colored flowers

fill this room between faces. My sister argues,  
*It did snow. I saw it. Today at two. I was in it.*

He tells mom if there was a woman, he did not see  
her. She frowns, wants to know what she should do.

Pulls an odd fleece hat over her bald head, turns  
around wide-eyed. Looks like she's impersonating

an old, old man. *That's tacky*, she would normally say  
about a hat like this. Turns toward the window

night has made a mirror. *Are you calling me*,  
she asks, *Calling me?* Our youngest brother shakes

his head while she points northeast, where  
*kleenex are everywhere*. We're not sure she'll make it.

*They keep moving the box*, my father explains  
to someone. *The nurse*, my aunt translates,

*she's probably been asking about the nurse.*  
*It never snowed*, our brother counters, *I would*

*know*. Our dad whistles at us like he's calling in  
the dog. It's time to go. We stand with nothing

to gather. *I forgot, we still have to do that*,  
mom frowns, *have to go all the way back home.*

## The Washington Cat

When she asked for a cat door, her husband cut a hole  
right through the living room floor, she said. I pictured the cat

in our Midwest basement, settled on top of the washer  
or dryer, my sister on the other, our parents listening closely

to the small radio plugged in between them on one of those  
humid summer nights while the tornado sirens blared.

But people do many things differently in the Northwest: their houses  
set on frames above land, their cats simply dropping down

and strolling off. Much like D.B. Cooper, who hijacked a Portland plane  
and then, in flight, opened a door into air and simply stepped out.

My friend's husband also cut a cat-shaped hole  
like a Halloween stencil through the door between living room

and kitchen. This, she said, was mostly to make the cat feel at home.  
And maybe this really is not about her Washington cat

but her husband who gave up most other choices for a twelve pack  
of Bush Light, constructing a pyramid each day. Or my friend,

who loaded her car and drove out the only road through miles  
of maples to Seattle, where she learned to make various bagel

sandwiches, whose names she changed to reflect her favorite poets.  
Or maybe this explains what happened to my step-mom

who slid into surgery and came back changed. Things missing.  
As if they fell out. Into light. Into nothing. Into rooms

which already had doors that stood open, into and from  
the very center. Not sandwich, but the word. Not her room,

but the children's next door. Not the house, but all the years  
spent living in it. Just before school, my siblings frenzy

over one another on their way out. My father's shouting  
bangs between them. My step-mom rests in a wheeled

hospital bed, the metal wings of its frame lifted to keep her  
in, away from any edge, keep her from leaping.

\*

## The Deer

*after Artemio Rodriguez's "El Venado"*

They say the deer doesn't see anything.  
Just smells the new rain you brought  
with you on your shoes, and knows to run.  
I've seen her turn towards me in the clearing,  
heard she stops in headlights. Maybe

she doesn't see the car, its color  
before we collide. Just feels the heat  
and mass coming toward her and freezes,  
hoping her stillness will make her  
unknown. The way a child closes  
her eyes and believes you can no longer  
find her. In the empty living room. In light.

It would make sense.  
The deer doesn't see the woman slide  
the baby's formula from the shelf, stuff it  
between belly and belt. Doesn't see  
the baby's lice as failure, the sink full  
of cans, the missing doorknob, her body  
huddled under an old shirt on the chair,  
the five-year old cooing, *Mommy*,

*it's ok. It'll get better.* Doesn't see  
the woman let her boyfriend back in  
even though the other woman, even  
though he once chased her out, left her  
asleep in bushes. But the deer knows  
the morning the woman bent her  
slender neck to the river, the trees  
grown toward each other, the submerged  
rocks, and before she drank –

the click somewhere in the muddied  
air behind her. Knows it was not  
the truck. Not headlights smashing  
her knees. But the hunter in orange  
promising: *There's no one in sight,*  
*dear. Hold steady, daddy's here.*

## Rape

To leave the body is easy.  
You don't even have to close your eyes.

Pick an age before. Pick a fireplace  
and someone safe in the next room, close by.

Later, the dryer will finish its cycle. The air  
will smell of his peppermint gum and Snuggle softener.

Sometimes you'll wonder what was found  
in the mummy of you, wrapped tight

somewhere, out of mind. Did you blink? Did you  
smell like peach ice cream? You were young

and could've been younger. Too many  
tell this story, wrangle it into a corner like a bar stool

to reach the small basement window  
that still hovers somewhere off to the right, shining

like a blind cataract in the dark. We  
reach up every moment, right now.

We're always about to get out.

## Driving in the redwoods at midnight

you enter another kind of darkness. Spray of fuchsia rhododendrons gone. Spring gone. Trunks billow up, live. Air shrouded by bark and made darker. Your headlights show fog settled so low it almost touches the asphalt, briefly, touches the thick legs of night and you between them, between heavy roots. There's more wood above: spruce, hemlock, a squirrel canopy, a broken dress, spines. This is old growth. You're the understory. Sword ferns like scissors ankle-level through the night. You only hear water trickling. Nothing has prepared you for the silence, their bodies' slow movement. Two weeks ago a woman was kidnapped, fast, right here, her car found blazing on the beach before sunrise, body thrown from an Oregon bridge. You have to know. Ask yourself. Ask your loved one at the wheel what she would do if a woman ran into the lane, bleeding and screaming, waving her arms. She answers without hesitation, eyes pinned, *hit the gas*.

\*

## The Waiting House IV

Iris blooms lag open.  
It's humid and barely  
June. Our hair stays wet long  
after showers. In this  
hour, no one inside  
will die, but we don't know  
it yet. She drools on light  
blue napkins. Elevates  
fractured bones, rests. The clock  
chimes every quarter hour.  
The iris yellow and  
bruise. Our bodies remain  
damp. We do not move.

## Attic Bats

Three specialists agree:  
They could install a one-way door  
heading out but it would go unused  
until spring. Found during their search:  
an old bird's nest, a loose soffit  
on the south-facing ledge,  
feces and little more.

I push legs beneath layers  
of blankets, attempt  
sleep – but their wings rise,  
flutter like black leaves  
through my veins.  
The rustling encounters eyelids.  
I remain the darkened house,  
hold all the shutters closed.  
If I open the mouth  
of the attic at this hour,  
all the sonar reels will whine.

All day I carry their hibernating  
weight. Inside this frame  
and insulation, little bodies  
noiseless in sleep, tucked  
between all my rafters.  
They swell and heave, so many  
hearts caught in my throat  
each time I think of stepping out  
among any of you on the street.

## Last Hours

My skinny, twelve-year-old brother, smallest  
in his grade, just finished a unit on world geography  
in school. He sat quietly  
on parents' day, in an auditorium full  
of poster boards and awkward displays, clutching  
a laptop as siblings circled him, our presence strange.

The nurse describes each physical step, blood  
in urine, her liver shutting down, the sound  
of secretions and held breaths. After the nurse leaves,  
my brother sleeps twelve hours in his newly painted room  
the color of spring grass. When he was four,  
I imagined the tumor as *dandelion*, metastasis  
as *gone to seed*, soft white floating throughout

his mother's body. There was never a metaphor.  
I'm no parent. I need specific answers:  
Should I wake him? Just how long  
should I let him sleep?

\*

## Rite

Sometimes the heart turns off.  
Opposite of fire. I sit at the edge  
of myself. Late. No smoldering.  
What do you do with a body  
like soot? Take it in hand.  
Circle ground. No birds  
lift from weighted firs, frost-lit.

## Rite II

They say the elephant explores skeletons,  
slips trunk over skull and tusk. Magpies  
surround the black feathers of their dead,  
shriek and snap beaks. We clamber  
into a minivan, watch a movie,  
smirk as grown actors cuss and fight.  
We are driven past fields like scattered  
scarecrow frozen in place. We cannot  
put her in. The burial man speaks  
of cold, unwilling ground, avoids  
our gaze. The pastor pours her back  
and forth like an hourglass, leaves a trace  
of particles so small we do not see  
our mother in this final stage. We shrink inside  
thick coats, climb back into the vehicle  
of our minds. A wind picks up pieces, fights  
the air, slams them back into her former face.

Secret

I'm convinced tumors are like forest fires. They show up when they want and we're not sure how they started, or we do know but it doesn't really matter. A man jumps from a burning building and survives. We watch our mother fight cancer for years. But it's like any trick – the first few times we stop, amazed; the magician stabs in his swords and the lady walks out alive. Even this gets old. We know there's a catch. We know there's something we can't control. Some fires keep burning until they're done. No one can contain them. What's left is ghostly, barely there. Before the hearse, the hospice nurse cleaned our mother's brittle frame, handed me a thin washrag.

\*

## My Father's Grief

I.

The snow has melted. The city has begun  
its annual uptake and renewal  
of roads. Before we've left beds  
the destruction wakes us, stays  
all day grinding like a bad dream.  
When we return to our kitchen  
past vehicles, hooks and large tires,  
it's already grown dark. No drivers  
in sight. The wheel loader's jaw  
gapes empty like a long howl  
set on cement. Perhaps it's too soon,  
I tell myself, the wrong season.  
I listen quietly, half afraid  
what's inside might take flight.

II.

After I storm towards my car, the humid  
night, thunder, he emerges slowly  
into the yard, moves sadly and alone  
with trash bags across asphalt, and I still want  
to give him directions. But to see him  
after a long work day and tucking in  
his other children, weeks after  
his wife's death, tired and intent  
as the sea turtle that counts eggs  
on the evening beach and covers them  
with sand, I watch quietly as he returns  
the bulk of himself, one movement after  
the next, to something far off and immense.

## Etymology of a Child

Wanting anonymity, I take an unwanted job  
in residential treatment. The kids easily forget  
my name, the staff focuses on modifying sports

to prevent physical contact. I avoid my friends  
whose names mean *fog* and *flour*, move through  
every day as if it were clouded over. All winter

my girlfriend's toads lay eggs that whiten  
the rocky tank. Soon there are tadpoles,  
then little back legs. I agree to surgery.

The doctor becomes a beaming blur  
over my face. My writing hand burns  
with anesthetic. He cuts my ovary

free. Afterwards, I feel numb, stuffed  
inside a teddy bear's gauzy filling.  
My abdomen burns. A child

at work senses this, socks me  
in the bellybutton. I sweep pain pills  
down with pineapple juice and cry

when a TV therapist leaves a hoarder's house  
spic and span. When the toads begin  
looking hungry, I move tadpoles

to their own tank. Linguists say it's my job  
to grind away every day at the mill stone,  
a *work horse*. Once healed I get pregnant

on the first try. I have friends who've taken  
new names, friends who can't pronounce  
their own. You could say grief takes mine

in its mouth, as I work all winter  
beneath clouds grey as stone,  
until something beautiful gives way.

## Parting

We don't get to it until late afternoon.  
As soon as you leave, the birds get loud,  
shaking leaves and calling each other.  
A goldfinch claims the giant fir.  
A squirrel throws nuts down over the back fence.  
It's mid July and ninety degrees.

The baby and I lie still on thin sheets  
to stay cool while I decide if we should sleep.  
In the kitchen, raspberries and blackberries rest  
in maroon syrup. Our mothers and too many others  
are dead now. And my old self, confident  
enough to walk into rooms. And the usual aubade.

I'm tired but get up to lift red socks into the washer,  
rinse knives, sweep together the biggest crumbs.  
I don't do the best job; I can't bear it. Your lung scan  
a grey yard full of thorns, and no way  
to leave mourning for awhile, even with  
fine droppings left along edges for tomorrow.

\*

## Insomnia After My Partner's Cancer Diagnosis

Listen to the trees shift against the dark.  
Rain gusts, lightens, then returns like too much  
clapping, a vertical river through air,  
the house a clapboard miracle of sound.  
Everything breaks apart with such ease. If  
I were younger, I'd call it luck or sex  
to be this kind of witness. Inside no  
one moves. Even the dog stops scratching fleas,  
lays like a lump in the hall. I've never  
been sure I tell the truth despite trying.  
In day, our son's laughter through rooms, the dark  
held like a ball somewhere inside me, kept  
at bay. And everyone I love, if I'm  
lucky, will greet sunlight in our old ways.

## The Job

All day the neighbors close doors.  
In a room of little light,  
my son sleeps around my waist.  
I turn pages quietly, with the precision  
of pulling a sliver from skin.  
I want to tell you more  
but most of what moves is behind walls --  
the blue fish off in its bowl,  
deer hunting the yard for apples  
never grown (it was a poor season),  
the gaggle of turkeys who run swiftly  
and usually gather on the gravel drive  
but who've been gone for weeks.  
One slip and my son's breath  
touches my skin, cheeks warm with flu.  
If I let it, fear will crawl over me  
like the brown recluse who multiply beneath our deck.  
Everyone else refuses, so I take up the task  
of killing. Each time I place a white cloth  
over them, hit firm, wipe away poison with Lysol.  
There are always more. They cling  
to all the stairs and rafters.

## Anger

There is no one  
to blame. Not the double  
full moon. Not the gods.  
Not the flood of dead bodies  
headed for the turbine,  
or asbestos clinging  
like cotton candy in attics.  
Not the sick little bird  
in the cuckoo clock  
that waits for big hands  
to unstick it, waits to cry  
to itself, *What'd you do?*

Or it is all of them,  
wrangling night into a fit  
of devastation. Into a wild  
trapping of imagined bats,  
wire mesh cemented  
over every vent and window,  
a littering of ant poison  
and mouse traps set  
like piano keys  
beneath the house.

Either way, the doctors  
pull knives from air  
and slice a sweet balloon  
from your chest, love.  
While I sit beneath symphony  
tones in the great white hall  
of despair, and plead,  
not for insight but repair.

Many times you stood  
at the edge of forest fires, racing  
to dig a trench, pushing back.  
But after this incisive fix,  
your trail is blanched, burning  
roots doused, and you lift  
through rooms like swallowed  
smoke in a figure of glass.

So I do what many women do,  
stand over the hot cauldron

of the water bath with an army  
of jars, pounds of sugar, berries  
brought clean to the sweetest  
red. Sweating and cursing  
in ninety degree heat  
until the last seals shut  
on thin wax. I line them up  
in dark rows behind the kitchen  
wall, pantry unlit.

\*

## Postpartum

The moon is as near to us as it will get  
all year. I expect a warm bowl,  
orange as a hearth. I expect to feel  
hope. But it hangs over the paper mills  
and further out over the fields, flat  
and yellowed as an outdated map.

The budding trees in rows sharp and black  
remind me of all my failures. The mills  
billow towers of white smoke, each  
a bleached flag lifting in the dark.  
Even with their few windows bright,  
the facades loom large and vacant.

I drive miles back and forth across town,  
and out onto hills. The baby does not sleep  
but talks to god both ways. I promise  
to turn all of this around: just north of us,  
past the holding ponds and security

guard walking rounds with his flashlight  
aimed across concrete, the trees are fat  
with leaves. The moon holds right over town  
while underneath I do my best to weave  
myself into a cradle for any lightness.

## Winter Illness

I became obsessed with three men  
reported lost on Oregon's Mount Hood  
because I believe some of us don't walk out

into wilderness hoping for adventure,  
but wake up into that blinding sun anyway  
and have to take it. When I moved home,

my stepmother's bones, buried under lengths  
of gauze and brittle from years of chemo,  
began fracturing everywhere. I watched

newscasts, scanned online videos of the search,  
kept dreaming of helicopters, a red boot  
shoved in snow. After four days of reporting,

in her 23<sup>rd</sup> terminal month, she seemed brighter  
somehow, lighter even as tumors filled her  
lungs, thickened bones. When they found one

body beneath snow, I stopped answering  
friendly phone calls, researched hypothermia,  
sketched every set of stopped lips I could

find, wanting to tear the lock-jaw frost  
from each stolen muscle. After two weeks,  
the news displayed family photos. Rescue

crews did not find the other men. A reporter  
said the mountains had been, for them,  
*previously unclimbed*. I understood no one

had told them how to go on, but I knew  
they got up, without measure or guide,  
a knot in their throats, and walked on.

## Loss

Sometimes the earth opens up. Whole buildings are lost.  
The pizza parlor. The pizza chef, who was parking his car  
when everything beneath him sank, who crawled out,  
stood on its roof, reached up toward daylight until  
some passerby, first frozen in awe, risked lying flat  
over the jagged edge of asphalt, pulled him out.

When my mother-in-law passed, something else opened.  
We're not supposed to mention it. But I'll tell you  
eighteen vultures circled through the air for hours  
just up the road. Even the children saw  
shadow beings move over thresholds all week.  
At the time, I didn't know what to make of it.

Sometimes a world inside you rips open. You feel  
a draft between your lungs, stunting your breath,  
and almost believe someone could follow it, slide  
a hand right through you. It stirs up fire  
in the pit of you with fallen trees like match sticks  
for this burning ritual and prayer.

And there are times we get what we want, a whip-sharp  
parent, someone willing to stretch across uncertain ground  
to take hold of us, pull us out of collapse. Even when  
the world is soluble and we know how far  
we can sink, the void beneath the surface, the river  
underfoot, the tension of bodies, the held space.

\*

## Running From Tigers

*Death, you say, put on your getup.*  
He shakes loose shadow robes,  
becomes the night's thin air  
until his long legs wield down into  
the cat suit. The orange stripes glow, dark  
transparent to more dark, the universe caught  
between flapping lines of caution tape.  
He zips up, stretches arms out,  
*Suits me.* His voice rushes  
like air following a roar  
that's already traveled miles away.

Piece of a Premature Obituary: I

*Survived* the winter  
when frost took words back  
from my grandfather  
one by one, beginning  
with *love*, each phrase  
became a sharp hook,  
*I... I...* Survived, too,  
the eight aunts  
pushing toward my  
stepmother's bedside,  
long weeks below  
zero as I applied  
ointment to bedsores,  
ChapStick to dry lips,  
hands to the collar  
of the phantom dog  
roaming beneath  
the cancer bed.

## Months After My Partner's Surgery

This morning, after days of rain, I stand in sunlight. Still young, three deer quietly return to apple trees even now, weeks after the last fruit. Much glistens. Grasses. Rhododendron. Slender iris leaves spin wildly in the small breeze. Water has returned to the pond. On its surface, sky and the furthest reaches of fir trees. I missed this all summer in the dusty rock bed without realizing. It's hard to walk anywhere through the yard without leaving a mark, a branch freed of shining rain, grass pressed into mud. There's rumor what we think returns to us. Beautiful fall, we're here.

\*

## Our Watch

We speak quietly, hoping  
the deer will nuzzle a carrot  
into his mouth like a cigar.

Each morning I make coffee,  
fill my cup and leave it waiting,  
throw several roots out across

the small pond, eager for my little one  
to join me. Our watch has little to do  
with the deer. He eats them all

in good time. One day my son may say  
of childhood: morning smelled of coffee  
in dim light. We looked from windows

into rain. There are fawn  
beneath apple trees who only want  
to eat. If your mother waits,

half-dressed, throwing things.  
If, from a high window. If cloud cover,  
wet leaves, or mourning.

If you wake hungry, a carrot  
damp and sweet. If morning  
begins. If your mother

is watching. If you are a fawn.  
If close by. If you breathe.  
If light. If grass beneath feet.

A Memorial Conversation (a cut-up after Thomas King and Olena Kalytiak Davis)

quick      before our bodies turn  
with a reverence for tree    so that tree doesn't see  
I want      while spring snows around  
maybe you would like some    on our windows in here  
because I want      woman and all sorts of  
urge to render      that tree    apples fall  
more fragile than this      why always  
the soul    the soul once again filling  
picks up all      with smoke      because an  
album because there's      between the pages  
what kind of      heavy frame      says that g o d  
weight of a dying mother    somewhere there's    a coyote  
this story is going to take long    because    I'm sure there's a photo  
in some drawer    all that      I want to devote  
everything    of this afternoon    tells the elk  
falling night      worship    tells the bear      where I'm standing  
says the bear      you with a taste in my mouth  
tells the cedar tree      that's yolk      the cedar tree  
with bob marley      coyote      on the refrigerator  
coyote      with the smell of spring

## Clear Water Park

Storms changed the cartography  
of the river, added a small inlet of round rocks  
that shift beneath us sounding of chalk.

Others here are searching for beautiful stones  
among the deposit. How smooth we've become.  
All of us. Even in old clothes and muck boots,

even in our awkwardness. We nod to one another  
shield eyes, teeter momentarily, unused to  
such brightness. Between the still bare trees,

damp and dull trunks, between rain clouds  
barely holding overhead and this woman's hands  
as she palms handfuls of silt, the river is brilliant

with sunlight. Our son wants to follow it  
out to the last rocky point, past all that's been  
dragged here. Who can blame him

for wanting more of it, so utterly unafraid.

\*

## Cleaning Up Camp

The briars grow in an amazing tangle, eight feet high  
and vicious. To cut right through sounds easy.  
Clip vines in front of your face and they bind  
arms, claw legs like the neighbor's cat. Mosquitoes  
smell blood before you've moved one step,  
whine over the corpse they hope you'll become.  
Even with new metal clippers and clean strikes,  
the briars hold. Clip what will be both ends  
of a tear-down, and other stems continue to hold  
the piece up. Eventually you will reach  
wild cucumbers strung like spring lanterns  
over the bushes, a cougar den with sandy floor  
part-way in, and, as you clutch the claw  
of your camping spork, pray over its shining  
prongs in the center of the tent, the black bear  
that will also retrace its track into camp,  
sniffing for smoked meat and beer,  
devouring all blackberries shook loose.

## There Was A Sea

### I.

When she pictures her youth, the moment of her decision, it's not glamorous. She stepped on board a boat with a man she barely knew.

Modern Americans with remotes don't have to deal with the sinking reality of the sea; we rewind to the shining Bon Voyage, to a lover willing to give up everything,

leave on a steamship, though it will take more than a board to stay afloat and there is no surety she'll have it.

### II.

Have you ever been in love? They say it happens when you least expect it.  
When you least expect it, you step onto a ship. Your heart is the sea.  
When she speaks, small schools move inside your sleeves.  
This means, the sea is already on board, your ship is sinking.  
And you left what you knew when she asked you to dance.

In one version, there is a masquerade ball and she is already engaged. In another, he whispers about the voyage, taking leave in a week, whispers her into joining him. *Der Dumme* she calls him for dying young. *Dummy*, we understand. Grandmother, my heart is a sea and my boat is sinking. I fell in love.

Each night our son, Bear, walks in a sea of stars. When you died, you left me like a board thrown out into darkness. This love appeared, anchorless.

## Learning How

We fish for fifteen hours straight  
on the mouth of the river. It's cold  
in August. Pelicans glide past the rocky bank  
over set nets. Sometimes sea lions  
follow salmon, tear big holes through webbing.  
Our cousins shout, try to chase them out to sea.  
One woman even shoots. The tide wraps seaweed  
around nets that are hoisted and whipped  
until it falls free. Other hours are quiet.  
Afterwards, we're ready to eat sturgeon,  
to lean into soft chairs and feel the fire's heat.

My mother calls from the Midwest and complains  
it's complicated to keep hummingbird feeders  
sterilized, entice them to eat. I don't tell her  
to take it easy, that birds swarm over this  
back porch where slender bottles are filled  
with sugar water and red food dye. Tonight  
at Corky's house, the bear might steal  
another chicken dinner from the outdoor freezer,  
carry off a bottle of peach schnapps. And two  
fathers will leave the dock, buy pitchers of beer,  
while someone at camp feeds the sons  
who've been left behind, invites them in closer  
to the fire. By morning the fathers will fix eyes  
past us, step back into their small boat, fight  
weariness and hangovers to set long nets.

I won't tell her this either because she might  
become distracted by the flurried wings  
of a stereotype as I speak, feel it tap  
against my words like a hungry beak.  
Too often when others ask what it's like  
here, meaning they want an image of Indians  
doing Indian things, they aren't even sure  
what they want, just sense that it involves  
secrecy and something ancient.  
When strangers ask our cousin who feeds us  
generously tonight for the name of his dog,  
he answers honestly, "Askher."  
Every time they turn to address the beautiful  
animal, who he named so thoughtfully,  
he cannot help but laugh.

\*

## On Risk

Step into the woods in daylight,  
during drought, the big cats journeying  
now on our same pathways. Love  
yourself because, when the clouds open  
far above the old growth, and light  
falls through the canopy, red wood glistens,  
ferns lift, turn younger and greener  
for a moment, and it's as if you see it all  
from the solitary height of the thrush  
seated on the tallest conifers. Sturdy,  
steady, she has watched for centuries  
the transformations of these woods  
and sky until a single note rises again  
from her body, feathers the color of sunrise  
and sunset. Called forward, her trill clear,  
*Love*, she cries for all the miraculous growing.  
*Love*, she trembles, for the soft fur left  
beneath branches, all the messy decline.  
*Love*, because what else can the heart do  
when it sees how it might break open  
from such reaches, when even the small  
salmonberries tucked within brambles shine.

## Stories We Tell In Lesbian Country

Two women wake up in a house. They wake up in the USA, more accurately, in Kalapuya nation. One says, *The white girl makes the coffee*. When they tell people this, most don't laugh.

The two women laugh because she does, the white woman, make the coffee. Some mornings she grumbles first, clears the counter.

Oftentimes, a white woman makes coffee, breakfast, or coffee that is breakfast. Also, in many homes the woman is brown.

Of course, sometimes a man makes coffee. And sometimes there is no woman. Sometimes there is no coffee, no home in which to make it, no drinking water.

In this house, the Native woman says again, *Make the coffee. The white girl makes the coffee*. And she does, and they laugh, because

when these two women wake up, together, there is so much at play, coffee is never enough for that.

My Grandmother's Garden

*Attentiveness is the natural prayer of the soul.*

- Paul Celan

Strong stemmed cinnamon daisies warm  
green hosta leaves open like palms

touched with gold. Purple bell flowers  
bob on slender stems. Moths flit and dip

amid lavender blossoms which seem to drift  
like smoke above slender stalks of mint.

In shade, the begonia petals grow  
extravagantly white and still with dew,

the sky, heavysset, promises another rain,  
a songbird, convinced, calls *tzu, tzu, tzu*

as the moving truck thrums and nears  
the short sidewalk, almost reaching

where she came to rest, the bleeding heart  
pale and empty now of its early flowering.

\*

## Summer

Sometimes the children hang from warm railings  
and columns, long after watermelon  
juice dries into film on the porch, and wasps  
return home beneath eaves, a little Dachs-  
hund with torn ears tires of chasing heels  
for a fallen supper. After they shriek  
across the lawn in near dark, the eldest  
lifts a jar into air as they shake all  
light from a few fireflies. Their parents  
on chairs in hot grass near the hickory  
where all the dead return, their love hearty  
as branches that have not moved anywhere  
in this heat, despite all the sticky palms,  
the joy and calling, all the breaths released.

## The Gift

The first night I thought that was it,  
the blooming over and done with,  
every white petal lost before dusk,  
the ground covered. Mornings

my son chants *hungry, hungry*,  
circles legs while I  
shoo him towards the table,  
pour coffee and milk. Imagine

our surprise, when the thin-skin  
blossoms of the wild rose  
caught our eyes in full bloom  
again. As if we stumble,

reckless, then open ourselves  
all day the entire way.  
I have hiked uphill  
through forests with my toddler

and been amazed at how adeptly  
his small body maneuvers  
through undergrowth, over roots,  
his swift ascent.

In clearings, he lets himself  
fall backwards, easily, into tall grass,  
takes in everything with water  
offered before he gets back up

to continue on. I follow  
and follow his prints in the still  
moist earth all the way down  
again, at home for a time

working a path  
through the play of shade,  
the newly blossoming  
bramble.

## Brilliance

We might say fireflies are elegies,  
each appearing with dark over the still  
warm lawn. Wordless months after winter took  
all our dead, they alight. The moment almost  
miraculous. *Mother*, they say, *ivory*  
*soap*, and, *chicharron*. We cry. We do.  
Right there on the porch, leaning into  
the banister's rough paint, wiping nose  
on hand. Yet we don't want them to stop  
gifting us the end of our day at dusk,  
gifting into our unbearable sleepless nights  
that are just beginning again, the briefest joy  
followed by absence. What strange wings  
the gods give us to carry on. And we do.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### EDUCATION

Ph.D. in English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016  
M.F.A. in Creative Writing, University of Oregon, 2006  
M.A. in English, Iowa State University, Ames, 2002  
B.A. in Women's Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2000

### FELLOWSHIPS/AWARDS

Waldslaw Cieszynski Memorial Award, English Department, UW-Milwaukee, 2016  
William H. Harrold Memorial Award, English Department, UW-Milwaukee, 2009  
1st Place, Poetry Contest, *Contemporary Verse 2*, Winnepeg, Canada, 2007  
Miriam Starlin Award for Poetry, University of Oregon, 2006  
Associated Writing Programs (AWP) Intro Journals Project Award in poetry, 2005  
3rd Place, Poetry Contest, *Contemporary Verse 2*, Winnepeg, Canada, 2005  
Graduate Teaching Fellowship, English Department, University of Oregon, 2005  
Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Creative Writing Department, University of Oregon, 2004  
Associated Writing Programs (AWP) Intro Journals Project Award in poetry, 2003  
EnglQueer Outreach Award, English Department, Iowa State University, 2003  
Academic Excellence Award for LGBT Scholarship, Iowa State University, 2003  
Graduate College Research Award for a Master's Thesis, Iowa State University, 2002  
Associated Writing Programs (AWP) Intro Journals Project Award in poetry, 2002  
Graduate Assistantship, English Department, Iowa State University, 2002  
Hogrefe Fellowship, English Department, Iowa State University, 2001  
Women's Studies Project Award, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2000  
Justus-Liebig Universität Scholarship, Giessen, Germany, 1999

### PUBLICATIONS

#### Poems

"Rape." Ice Cream Poems. Ed. Patricia Fargnoli. Seattle: World Enough Writers, *forthcoming*.  
"The Deer." *Midwest Review* 4 (Spring 2016): 8-9.  
"Iowa." *Midwest Review* 4 (Spring 2016): 10.  
"Two Girls." *Midwest Review* 4 (Spring 2016): 11.  
"Secret." *The Grief Diaries* 1.11 (2015).  
"Gretel's Story." *The Fourth River: Queering Nature* 0.2 (Winter 2015): 48.  
"Disturbance." *Crab Orchard Review* 20.0 (August 2015): 75.  
"The Winter Her Cancer Returns." *Duende* 2015.  
"The Garden." *Hawai'i Pacific Review* 15 December 2014.  
"To Citizens Who Banned Same Sex Marriage." *Women's Studies Quarterly* (Spring 2010): 157.  
"Eggs." *Wisconsin Review* 44.1 (Spring 2010): 56.  
"Black Walnut." Eat Local, Read Local (Spring 2012).  
"Memorial in Conversation." *The Shepherd Express*, 13 September 2009.  
"Driving in the Redwoods." *The Literary Circular* (Spring 2009).

- “Gretel,” *The Cream City Review* 32.2 (Fall 2008): 150-151.  
 “Summer Before Divorce,” *Flyway* 11.1 (Spring 2007): 50.  
 “Plankton.” *Contemporary Verse 2* 30.2 (Fall 2007): 104.  
 “Sexlight.” *Puerto del Sol* 41.1 (Spring 2006): 223-224.  
 “The Dead.” *Contemporary Verse 2* 28.4 (Spring 2006): 67.  
 “The Red Tree.” *Lungfull! Magazine* 13 (April 2004): 118-119.  
 “Tonight.” *Gertrude, A Journal of Voice and Vision* 8 (2004): 61.  
 “Around the Mulberry Bush.” *Gertrude, A Journal of Voice and Vision* 8 (2004): 60.  
 “Cancri: The Fourth House.” *Shenandoah* 53.4 (Fall 2003): 159-160.  
 “Clogging With Crickets.” *Exit 13* 11 (February 2003): 60.  
 “Polydora ligni at Low-tide.” *Willow Springs* 51 (December 2002): 80.  
 “Driftwood.” *Des Moines National Poetry Festival Chapbook* (May 2002).  
 “Lunch.” *Sketch* 66.1 (Fall 2002): 53.  
 “Joseph Neville.” *Sketch* 66.1 (Fall 2002): 54.  
 “And I Did.” *The Cream City Review* 24.2 (Fall 2000): 80.  
 “Ode To My Period.” *Furrow* 1.2 (Spring 2000): 16.

#### Interviews/Artwork

- “Interview with Miriam Starlin.” *Literary Reference*, University of Oregon (June 2006): 3-9.  
 “Untitled.” (watercolor), *National Women’s Studies Journal* 17.1 (Spring 2005): cover.  
 “Interview with Mark Wunderlich & Ruth Schwartz.” *So To Speak* (Summer/Fall 2004): 86-94.

#### PRESENTATIONS/GUEST SPEAKING

- “Writing is Revision.” Introduction to Creative Writing, UW-Milwaukee, October 2009.  
 “Women of Milwaukee Hour.” Marathon Fundraiser, Woodland Pattern Book Center, Milwaukee, WI, 2009  
 “Leadership Training for LGBT Youth.” National Gay & Lesbian Task Force Creating Change Conference, Oakland, CA, November 2005.  
 “Political Poetry & Voicing Dissent.” Introduction to Poetry, University of Oregon, Nov 2004.  
 “Coming to Consciousness: A Reading & Discussion of Sylvia Plath’s Three Women.” Feminism(s) & Rhetoric(s) Conference, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, October 2003.  
 “When Alternative Culture Meets Academia.” Women’s Studies, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, April 2003.  
 “On Writing Girls’ Bodies.” Genitally Speaking, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, April 2003.  
 “The Politics, Poetics, & Pedagogy of Zine Production.” Iowa State University, Ames, IA, March 2003.  
 “Zine Production and Third Space Sites.” Women’s Studies Learning in Action, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, February 2003.  
 “Imaginolingual Poetry.” Latina/o Studies, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, Feb 2003.  
 “Inclusive and Emancipatory Pedagogy.” Multicultural Gender Fair Educators, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, June 2002.  
 “Contemporary Women Poets.” Women’s History Celebration, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, March 2002.  
 “Feminism & Freeing Mumia Abu-Jamal.” Speakers Forum, UWM, Milwaukee, WI Sept 1999.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2005-2006 Graduate Teaching Fellow of English Composition, University of Oregon  
2004-2005 Graduate Teaching Fellow of Creative Writing, University of Oregon  
Spring 2003 Lecturer of First-Year Composition, Iowa State University  
Spring 2003 Lecturer of Women's Studies, Iowa State University  
2002-2003 Graduate Instructor of First-Year Composition, Iowa State University

## UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Assistant Editor, The Cream City Review, UW-Milwaukee, 2008-2016  
Coordinator, Student/Faculty Reading, Woodland Pattern Book Center, WI, 2009  
The Cream City Review Representative, Shalom High School, Milwaukee, WI, 2008-2009  
Graduate Creative Writing Representative, University of Oregon, 2006  
National Women's Studies Assoc. Journal Board Member, Iowa State University, 2003  
Graduate English Association Representative, Iowa State University, 2002  
Graduate Student Senate Alternate, Iowa State University, 2002  
Poetry and Fiction Reader, Flyway Literary Magazine, Iowa State University, 2001-2003  
Writer's Bloc Representative, English Department, Iowa State University, 2001-2003  
LGBT Speakers Bureau Speaker, Iowa State University, 2001-2003  
LGBTQA Alliance Member, Iowa State University, 2001-2003  
Support Group Facilitator, LGBT Student Services, Iowa State University, 2001-2002

## SELECT COMMUNITY SERVICE

Volunteer, WellMama Maternal Health and Support Services, Eugene, OR October 2016  
Volunteer Editor/Consultant, Spiraling Toward Joy, Eugene, OR 2015-2016  
Committee Member, 30th Anniversary Fundraiser, The Parenting Network, Milwaukee, WI 2007  
Committee Member, Annual Art Auction, Public Allies Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 2006  
AmeriCorps Member, Public Allies Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 2003-2004

### Writing Workshops

Shalom High School, "The Cream City Review in Schools." Milwaukee, WI 2008-2009  
Urban Underground, "Writing Resumes and College Applications," Milwaukee, WI 2004  
The Workspace, "Poetry Workshop." Iowa State University, Ames, IA, February 2003  
Sawyer Elementary School, "Writing Our Dreams." Ames, IA, October 2002  
Young Writers Conference, "Poetry Workshop for Girls." Ames, IA May 2002  
Octagon Center for the Arts, "Poetry Collage." Ames, IA, Spring 2002  
Youth Shelter Services, "Zines for Teens." Ames, IA, Fall 2001  
St. Mary's Senior Center, "Writing Our Stories." Milwaukee, WI June 2001  
Phillis Wheatley Elementary School, "P is for Poetry." Milwaukee, WI, April 2000  
UWM Talent Search Program, "Unzip It." Milwaukee, WI, May 2000  
Woodland Pattern, Poetry Camps & Workshops. Milwaukee, WI, Feb 2000-Aug 2001

## MEMBERSHIPS

Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP)