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False Spring

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FALSE SPRING

by

Tobias Wray

A Dissertation Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in English

at

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December 2017

ABSTRACT

FALSE SPRING

by

Tobias Wray

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2017
Under the Supervision of Professor Rebecca Dunham

This dissertation explores queer kinship and masculinity in an extended poetic sequence. The speakers of these poems attempt to understand the ways that family shapes our sense of gendered identity, particularly how masculinity is constructed and perpetuated through a history of gendered violence in western culture. Investigating the shame of failed masculinity and unsanctioned identity through a range of aesthetic positions, these poems interrogate the tradition of English language poetry as a space where masculinity is both blurred and reinscribed.

In three sections, the collection considers the relationship between paternity and patriarchy, and how queer identity offers alternative aesthetic positions to those structures and histories.

The first section explores these themes through a specific narrative lens: the British government's persecution of Alan Turing, forcing him to undergo chemical castration for the crime of homosexuality. Many of the poems in *False Spring* seek alternate ways of tracing legacy that could uncover new aesthetic modes to describe masculinity.

There is no one form prized here, though many forms are explored, from lyric-narrative poetry to the verse play. Masculinity is perceived as a privileged position in our culture—granted such

privilege by patriarchal hierarchies that value certain presentations of maleness—yet masculinity, like femininity, exists in various forms. The second section, encounters a more contemporary speaker who struggles with daddy issues, both familial and sexual. These take the form of a crown of experimental sonnets, thinking primarily about the pivot of the volta as a forced mechanism for logical conclusion and structure.

The final section interrogates whether masculinity as a poetic subject can evolve through openly political and queer poems. There is a power both in the reclamation of lost forms (such as the closet drama) and in words (as “queer” itself illustrates). The range of poetic possibilities explored here reflects the spectrum of identity and positionality that queerness offers.

Ultimately, this collection, as queer poetic experiment, is an argument about the nature of social processes and our particular inherited present. These poems seek a narrative understanding of the self somewhere beyond identity construction.

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No doubt I will return a different man.

—Alan Turing

The Hunter to His Son

As the world named its breath,
the forest pulled back light

the way a man pulls a bow—
one knee firm with the ground,

a clean, even angle—long
arms at attention.

What is left is the after-snap—
the long search for a lost arrow,

the uncertainty it ever fell back.

Perhaps it kept flight like a promise,

the kind whose meaning is forgotten
(he didn't say, I will become for you this arrow).

He said, this is the forest, and
this is the light, and they do battle.

INEVITABLE MACHINE

Prelude: Turing Agoniste

And in your city I held my feast.

And in your city I gathered men great in number.

I tore the ladders from the walls in your city.

And in your city I full force bested.

I tore the walls from their sitting.

Tragedy, as it was anciently composed,

hath ever been held

the gravest, moralist, and most profitable.

And in your city I held my feast.

And in your city I took men to my bed chamber.

And in their city I full force bested.

I rent their clothes, I broke their walls, and in your city

I cast fire where it needed to burn,

and in your city I howled my name in reverse.

We live in a theatre of luxury, untested.

And in your city, feasts

and in your city, great in slumber

and in your city

walls, once broken,

hold only strength's memory.

To hold the thing we care about

we name it with a myth.

Buggery

Sex between men was illegal in parts of the UK until 1982. These proceedings provide vibrant and detailed evidence of the worlds of London's historical homosexuals.

The act, as seen from without: the car pulls up, we get in, there's a leaning in. At his, the curtains drawn. The next day, armed guards. All aftermath: the air gummed like blood; we could swing as outlaws.

Until 1861, all penetrative homosexual acts committed were punishable by death. Then, hanging was replaced by life imprisonment, and after the passage of the Labouchere Amendment, by up to two years' incarceration. Some chose chemical castration. The animal-smell persists on the surface

of a scoured body. Diagonal fit, [transdirectional couplers have the benefit of perfect input/output isolation;] *We fuck ourselves full of holes*, he... like an angel. Are these men my fathers?

Oh, how the body persists. What legacy, what
long computation.

Hung for outlawry;

stood in the pillory; defamed.

To prove sodomy one needed

at least two eyewitnesses

and evidence of both penetration

and ejaculation. As a result

most trials in the Proceedings

are for the lesser offence of

"assault with sodomitical

intent." [Full structure symmetry],

diagonal to the window,

or, as in poetry, bent over, his ass was like an apple

cut in half. The whole fruit bears no threat—it is

the sinister reveal of the interior flesh; the stem [pulls

through and out]; *We are only awake on the inside*, he...

Bathe the holes with promises, with future dates and time: you

I will fill. You I will fling down, fling into, flee.

From then, what is known about behaviours

and attitudes within these communities

can be found mostly through trials

of blackmail. Otherwise, for all intents

and purposes,

this world did not exist.

Heavy Curtains

Consider sleep your identity. Your smell on a pillow,
more you than the half-conscious moan. The position
of your hands, your feet are old glyphs, unread, silent
as a headstone. When we sleep we fall in—
this ancient body, magnified, lit
like snow. Don't we have pills for unrest?
Escape from that death that links us, that contagion,
that unnatural slumber. To every hunter: You may place
my heart in this box.
The drug, quick.

Inevitable Machine

10/ World wars hold strange words
in their teeth, a cryptographic necessity.
In the comforting dark of the deep,
executioners called to subs on rotary cogs,
an enigma machine. At 30,000 feet,
a trash compacter of saltwater, yes.
For every eye, a lid. For every war,
a shining new machine.

9/ Uniforms walked London halls,
secrets tucked into pockets with pens
and keys. Small words, like *launch*,
slender as their fingers over the wires.
Turing broke every code, unexploded
a thousand ships, saving Queen and Country—
merciful curtains covered delicate windows.

8/ What are ideas? *Genius*
as it describes history, architecture

(nothing made should be lost)

(a word white men claim most).

A way to explain

failed electrical pathways,

it means *a fathering force, attendant spirit.*

What spirits attended him? The ghosts

of men who came before him, with him?

Tchaikovsky didn't boil his

drinking water during plague season;

an ingenious escape plan.

Some geniuses will only speak to

tied-up horses in the street.

Those large ears, flicking

at the flies of limitation.

Before there were Homosexuals

there were Contrary Sensations.

The undeserving streets awaited

soldiers, saviors.

7/ This or that attentive tongue

flicking in the ear of Official Secrets.

He imagined a test for whether man

or man-thing. Wires ran the length of his desires,

ports of law and order like empty sockets,
galleys of waiting mouths and tines.
He was working on mathematical biology
when he fell in love with a boy named Murray.
He must have been the kind of man who liked to know
how to get to where he wanted to go.

6/ Morphogenesis: all shapes
have a beginning. It is this initial spinning
that describes us, every creature's original moan,
developed from spiral and signal—the idea of a soul.
Popcorn strung on a string. We are heroic machines,
pushed out from DNA center, designed
to draw curtains over windows.

5/ Seagulls dip behind buildings
like blips on radar screens. Slow and steady.
He first met Murray outside the Regal Cinema.
Murray just out of “Monkey Business,”
starring Cary Grant, Ginger Rogers
and Marilyn Monroe.
Turing saw “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,”

and in fact, it did snow.

They had afternoon tea the next day.

Leaves left drifting into their knots, water darkening.

4/ Robed men in wigs. Yes, still.

Yes, irony can kill.

Skip to the point... Judgement: selection.

Turing chose chemical castration

over life in prison. A flood

through narrow cracks.

The pressure of walls turned dome.

3/ Injections of stilboesterol,

hormone treatment designed

to mete out impotence. The give

of the skin on the arm as the needle

slides in. *No doubt I will return*

a different man, he said.

The treatments caused breasts and hips to grow.

He always loved "Snow White," loved

the novelty of animation, all novelty, perhaps.

Loved where it could go.

His eyes wide
as the witch dipped her apple
in the sinister brew.

2/ Gross indecency. Section 11.

Convicted in March, a month of caws and echoes.
Those wind-swept halls still counting syllables.
Guilty of being decrypted. Faulted for lying
on a couch after afternoon tea. Of plucking something
from the string and holding it in the mouth
for an hour after tea. Their eyes squinted
with parallaxic decision. Ah, the exhaustive
brevity of opinion.

1/ Stiff from cyanide, waiting for nothing,
his housekeeper found him. As scientists are wont,
he had habits. Every evening, he would have an apple
before he slept. *One bite and all your dreams come true.*
It was not unusual for it to be found at his bedside,
half-eaten, his housekeeper said. See?
Teeth mark windows to the core:
the dark wink of what can only be a seed.

Snow White and the Kiss Deferred

The glass coffin has two handles of old wood smooth as bone. Overhead, a tree boughs over the sleeping face—a man in a delicate dressing gown. You study his neck, where it climbs down under the collar—the direction by which

a man is described. The man in the glass coffin says: [] [].

Recognition, a leafy green.

You look closer and see a fine breath rise between almost parted lips. His two hands lay like rocks.

Now, the glass is fogged, nearly overcome by sleeping. You reach to clean it with your

breath, with your please, before remembering

you are outside, closer to the familiar tree.

This must make you some kind of royalty.

You realize birdsong has come on. Male voices gently rise in chant from behind the hill. Perhaps they are going to war. War,

the color of concrete. The man is full of dreaming, his eyes eating cake behind his lids.

Turing's Theories Regarding Homosexuality

If anything, we are this: hive, industry, insistent tales of fairy rings, all-chemical, penetrable, snow-drifted, darkling, that evening Murray stopped me outside the show, the amber of bourbon, windblown, sigil, lips tight, diurnal, lock-step, some future Velcro, conjured to the door, the way he took my hat and platitudes, inserting look, opening, breaking open, knocking impatiently, clever sleight, clever ruse, standing by the window, weak blue, like approaching light, clean, brandishing, he wanted us to have tea, leafy green, over-flowery, air, mist, he said he wanted to talk to a real scientist, entryway, hairline, disorganized, slick fabrications, the black line we ignore between speaking lips, eclipse, angles, blitzed, top to bottom, he held me in his hand like a kiss, Panama-brimmed, blinking, circuitry-sawing, sweating, the safest way to convey is from behind, lantern bearers, the word *water* in French, turbines, those turbines waking up, the open-ask, how to subtract the man from his signs, his wide smile like a bridge to paradise, nightstands, the swell of morning behind heavy curtains, all those collections of O's, archipelagos, like planetary accretions, this swirling in, we press to spread wide, swallowed, discordant, gravity's only compromise, yes, relentlessly pressed, spreading, I opened, uncomplicated, unacknowledged, that the last time must needs remain memory, staccato of no applause or shoes

on walls, fabric, ruse, a blast, helix-like in irony, fabulous liquids, his
face increases in detail daily, unrevealable, that low smell of him.

In My Dream, Turing Shows Me His Greatest Machine

Turing and I join hands
and fling ourselves
into a river black as a lake.
We kick, ungrapple, kick,
his hand heavier, pulling us down.
His hand clamped like a small
mandible over mine, my first jarring
attempt at diving; his direction, certain.

We sling down to where
the machine, far below,
curries lights over the fanged weeds.
Like a flat, open palm, the mechanical bottom
seems to hold the river up.
Cream-colored galleries plait
the overhead liquid-chrome
with paler ribbons, streaming spotlights.

We reach its circuited face
where the strands button off.
Turing tinkers with a panel,
his hands clown, over-busy, his hands

the quietest thing above the lights.

From his work, bubbles

fury overhead, lit, then lost.

I lose time. He is there,

but then he is gone. He has flown

into some moment I wasn't attending,

leaving no instructions for proceeding.

He must have wanted me to see this,

the degree to which we know nothing

beyond the face of expectation,

how beauty, pith-like, sits

in the center of incomprehension.

This, his last machine, seems

to creature the blind dark, offering

anything that passes there long enough

its own set of eyes.

Man or Machine

Scene: *He takes my hand.*

MAN: Nothing is what you know. Loneliness

is a compass.

ME: I have no(n)sense of direction.

His hand is gone. He is only a voice now.

MACHINE: You have what you know.

Last Light

The palatial darkness of closed drawers,
of winter. How the bottom of the lake feels

at midnight. How bullet holes
speak up in the morning.

Around five, lamps gather the streets
into jagged geometries. O brief

photography: the storefronts
bare their rows of flat, black teeth.

Turing in the Garden Humming Bach

The crushed path leads out, leads back.

I have spent my life in pieces small as pennies,

a concerto's worth of teeth and tongue, bridge
and throat. Scents gather their loose sleeves—

peonies, redolent of fireworks in a fog.

His love, a bouquet of reptilian eyes, folds flecked and wet.

Their last failing slits fall wide and spent,
and, of course, I am happy.

FORTY DARK SHIPS

Weak Bonds

*are those forces of attraction, like gravity,
that do not take a large amount of energy
to break.*

Was this why you held me the way a branch
holds fruit, so tightly, the squeeze meant to push?

In Science, we attend to what is easy or hard to get—
hydrogen will bond with almost anything. But, rarity

is everywhere—certain stars post-mortem become
essentially single molecules, only

unimaginably large. Some moments dare, so tightly,
to gather history in miniature. I too am one

throbbing star in a jar, and begin
to roll off every table. Fruit grows sweeter

after the drop. All eye where the stem was cut.

Don't talk to me about rot, don't you dare

breathe a word. A dirigible unmoored,

I simply don't care; I swim in air.

The Dusk

I wish I were as certain as the dusk
that has seen queers slip down the stairs
for a tête-à-tête with some old queen,
tattoo of a ruler at the end of his arm
with 8" at the tip. This turnstile start
to his theme park ride. Or the slavish moms
who thump cantaloupe in the market and sniff
the Jurassic husks of pineapple,
while stars vie for those burlesque
thighs of sunset. That last dipping inch.
I'll be certain as the dusk. Let truth be a gong
hung, like God, stiff and dumb. Let it be
still as a parked car, or something like the dawn
that spools out bright strings like blood
and we the sharks turning at the light.

In the Name of the Father

Or, the last dream from last night:

how, out of spite, he kept me in a wooden cage.

What is your name? Nobody. Why am I here? No body.

I tried to wake in the mornings, to reach

the book on his table, but after some strain

a dream folded over every sentence,

lines of verse turned to a cypher

for the dead language of dark seas. He was always

coming down the stairs, ever approaching.

I concocted a plan to blind him and escape;

how he would scream and crash onto the bars

breaking them like sticks, how I would retrieve his keys.

Nothing went as planned. I missed his eye and cut off his head;

it slumped against the far wall and never looked away again.

The Sound of a Clarinet

Done, he'd pull the instrument apart.
Mouthpiece, barrel. Joint by joint, until the bell,
wide as a mouth, lay like a dried-up fountain,
wet only at the rim where the last notes shone still.
It takes me years to recall what I heard then.
Fires lit under soon-to-empty trees bounce sparks
against brickwork stars. Like a single voice
that beckons to hunters, a voice they know
is ancient, made of gold. Funerary. Dusk song.
Loggia in lapsed light. My father would wave
this black scepter as if it left a trail of light,
his glint, half figure-eight illusions until evening.
We his audience, hung like walking stones over water,
straining still for the barest touch of his toes.

Happy Now

I've seen my father drunk as Noah in his tent,
lying with anger, arms pale and coarse with hair,
mouth a sagging line, mumbling curses
that fell to the ground in mounds. I've seen him
sway and spit at the wind. I've held him,
gray naked in my arms. He left a kitchen-counter letter
for my mother; as for my sister he preferred
to remember her in navy Catholic skirts, counting
kittens in the garage. We haven't seen him since.
Calls fill the years, every strange number never his.
So, I try to imagine him: breath stained with wine,
whistling Bach over the dishes as a woman I've never met
asks what was good before all these banishments.

Sonatina

I never heard him playing, only the breaths
between notes. I count how long it's been
by the distance of the sound. The listeners'
cascading coughs, the click the pressed key makes,
all run like an undercurrent through the frame:
then, he bows and leaves the stage. We used to
go on long walks, let our feet do the talking.
Woodchips amassed on his workshop floor
—the bones of waves, a graveyard. Music, he'd say,
is an arabesque. No pattern without teeth,
where it comes to a point, where spaces meet.
I began to look at him as if he'd given something
he didn't intend to let me keep. The water
cut into edges, unclasped necklaces of light.

The Hidden Choir

When conversation smiles its dandelion smile,
ready to blow, old lines are alive in our mouths.

Yet to be asked, some questions promise
to return everything to fire. If nothing were left unsaid,
no one would have invented language. Imagine a world
filled with hidden choirs. Where Nature prefers a sphere,
room enough for juices, it will drip when cut.

Practical poets, astronomers gave the old name for clouds,
nebulae, to the filmy grave of supernovaed stars
where churning matter finds no information is deleted;
it's caught in those cotton candy-maker pulls of gravity
and hot, hot, hot another nursery for the blaze of noons.

For years, he was all we could talk about
and the pressure of every problem pushed against him.

The Lament of Icarus

*Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever
in good stead.*

—James Joyce

What struck me were the wings—tremendous, strong,
hardly melted at all. As though “lament” meant nothing at all.
I wanted Icarus, to be like him but with eyelids waking,
so I took a blade and cut them like tiny claws.
The sheer size of his wings. His face relaxed as a deep sleeper.
With assembled pressure I worked his muscles, lifted up
each feather by gouges.

When it came to misery,
my father was an old master. A man made miserable
by the fact of a son. I loved his cherry-wood sculpture
of dancing bears chained to a stake. Why we could never find
words on the way home. I have that one still.
Wearing Parrish blue hats, they sit in the living room
dancing slowly as a curlicued circus ring rises at their feet.
Clumsy and leaden, their chains are tucked behind them.

His Ghost

Some consolation, these years less poisoned
by your absence. I have so many exes
cold bodies seem to knock inside the walls;
my heart, a ghost town. How you hated my songs,
oh rope-maker, oh father. How it was a streak
of redheads after you. Because I wanted
every one to be an end, a defense, I hunted
for your other, certain I could love you clean
through another. Now, it rises like a bruise,
this empty room, how night alone knows
the salvaged truth: how nothing flashes
outside the window's glass: silences fuse
to breath. I bury my hands inside bones
that feel like you but nothing ever catches.

All Things Numinous

Buddhist temples are often built with walls
between the door and Buddha, to keep what's in

in and the rest at bay. We live within the safety
of fragile frames. Every touch, its own pressure.

Once, in front of Ramsey County's courthouse,
when the trees were covered in Christmas lights,

I stood so long in the snow, I forgot it was cold
or that I was in love with a man

who saw ghosts, who whispered to every bruise
that he didn't know his own strength.

He whispered it with such solemn ceremony,
as mist rose in ritual from the spotlights,

reaching up, falling back onto the glass.

How the light wanted only to shed its skin.

Some Broken Colossus

*All fathers are interested in the children
they have procreated (they have permitted
to exist) in mere confusion or pleasure...*

— J. L. Borges

We are beyond the ruined temple;

if sons may claim with what men

they will begin I must have

forgotten the prayer

and by no luck landed here—

his final expression the shoulder

of a tree turned against its shadow

a feather stuck

to the bottom of a chicken truck

torn at by unnatural wind

a book whose perfect spine

has never been cracked

a plume of smoke from a dropped match

in bare-tree woods well beyond camp

Some Kind of Map

When he dies, I will tell stories about islands.

How loss is a coat too thin for winter, the emperor's

new clothes, the color of aged nipples,

how unbearable, the reveals of honesty.

Loss is a flayed and failing thing,

a war elephant chesting through snow.

He would recline all evening

shirtless and potbellied, a secret

king of displeasure, redeemer of snores.

He knew naught; he knew all.

Loss, a bullwhip hung

from a hook in his study. Loss, delicate

and tall. Every fight lost to silence,

every story full of forty dark ships.

Rex

In the name
of the father,
I swim in air.

Some kind
of map, some
broken colossus.

His ghost, all
things numinous.
A hidden

choir, a lament
for Icarus.

The sound
of a clarinet,
happy now.

The Archeology of Music

In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

—Wallace Stevens

His wife lay beside him like a muse, close
but out of reach. Listen, she will never tell him,
listen for their ghost tongue, because nothing made
should be lost. Because nothing made should be lost,
what riddle, what husk: The Marquis Yi of Zeng
once shared his tomb with bells he thought
would raise the dead. Through layers of timber,
stone and silk his musicians stood prepared to play
the dead away from the lake's open mouth,
bronze bells hung from writhing dragons, tigers
scaling the sides with lolling tongues. Holy bells
that rang two tones from almond-shaped throats.
Imagine bells like stones, the ravages of standing
stone-still. How the silence must have pealed.

Corona

How the pressure of every problem
must have pushed against him,

so full of silence. Straining for air,
I swim in its edges, but nothing ever catches.

By no luck every story landed here,
and they and I do battle still. Like sharks, like us,

these banishments don't care. Tucked behind
forty stone ships, turning toward the light and asking.

How the barest light chains his toes against them.

What looked good, was wanted, shed:

he slumped away before the light cut the far wall
into leaden necklaces. And, that clumsy, unclasped light

never peeled again. Only happy
to feel it now, the touch of all this skin.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PROCEEDING

Homo sapiens

In the Hall of Human Origins, imagination has taken paint to the skull,
filled in what's missing to mural the walls—But, the old skulls
won't be denied, their eyes are truth-sayers, empty and honest.
This is what I came to look into. This is also mine.

All these strangers are family.

Their elbows would have looked like mine. Their sleep sounded similar,
they knew genealogies of a kind, myth flexed like muscle, and maybe music, maybe
symphonies of a kind.

Imagine there have been teachers for 100,000 years and this is all
their students have mastered. The next room over has tigers—the room seems to flow
like cooling lava toward stripes and glass eyes. I'm here for the skulls, but understand
there will be tigers and we must keep moving to stay alive.

We cross the space that's needed, a thing called migration; destinations are for the dead.

Yet, old and decapitated, these *Homos* see nothing, say nothing.

Indifferent as cloud cover, cold cream. Facts mean

as much as art to time,

which sits closer to that plasmic something-we-aren't.

Children try to reach through the glass. The skulls look horrified, maybe amused,
or, this is my reflection.

Too much knowledge and you circle back to the beginning,
as if wisdom could only orbit whatever is more possible,
less human. Too much air between us. More room between
an atom and its electron cloud than what lays between your skin and your intentions.

There is said to be more the deeper you go, the smaller: rooms that move, unimaginable
dancing. It was Joyce who gave us the word, *quarks*.

The way mere whim comes to matter.

I listen to memories as much as they ask me to. Clear error, clear misses.

People have left me, mine is a story of leavings. Perhaps, I am left to offer someone else
a better lesson.

Here, these are curds. Here, clouds and strata. Tusks. Sandstone concretions.

If I run out this door and try to cross the street, I could be hit by a car. There might be security
guards whose days do not anticipate me. There could be locks upon locks on door after door.

We are predictable, thank god.

There is a magic in the world called correspondence. There are gestures
called desperation.

Walking upright was a big deal, apparently. My standing here and staring,

one of the feats of the universe. Get it? Feats.

Terrors of the ancient world abound. In one case the cause of death was revealed by discovering that the holes in the skull of a child were caused by long teeth.

From an alien perspective, it would be quite difficult to discern the difference between a cemetery and a museum, don't you think?

I am ashamed of what I am many mornings.

It manifests as a fear about my body or it is tagged across morning routine as some neon horror from the night before,

what I said to someone who is surely aghast by the same memory of my stupidity.

Questions mount concerning growth mindset. Another round of hygiene, but this does not seem to prevent aging or encourage humility and barely soothes me anymore.

I finish in a panic. Today, I may perish. The emergency first responders will find me pleasing.

I want to visit Iceland because it has admirable words. What is wealth and why do we think of it as fortune? O Fortuna, I never want to encounter a creature bigger than myself in its natural environment. What is kindness and why must we seek it? Why did you ancestor me and will I be forced to play this ridiculous part to another? I want to see wild elephants before it is impossible to do so. Perhaps atoms never stop guessing: *Never stop dancing.*

There must be someplace you need to be, after all. The world is full of screens now. There are countless recordings of people praying and chanting. I have seen whole dry erase boards filled with equations.

Think of it. Their elbows, their knees.

Those lives bending toward us with an air of necessity.

I could touch every jawbone, caress every orbital fracture in this joint, though, I would never. It seems there are limits to nearly everything.

Though, this is also mine, this need.

Contrary Sensations

It's 1983 and Louisiana is chock full
of us Stanleys (my mother's name): Shreveport, Baton Rouge,

skirting New Orleans, Kenner and Metairie.

Saintly, urbane pelicans keep Christmas trees

in their throats all winter, lust after

the lacy Aquarium of the Americas where

they wouldn't have to stoop to shallows.

In "Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence," David Bowie

makes this face as he is covered by torture sand in Japan.

I spend all my time wondering if it really matters.

All the light slowly pulling itself apart, and we never prove

to be as clever as we think we are. When we knew next to nothing

about the love of men for men, we called it *contrary sensations*.

I shouted at students today, monocle spinning:

L'avant garde can save us! I believe in quelque chose!

I am the atheist who cannot help thinking

we need a god, and this is my god. The irony
of light's speed is that photons have no sense of time.

From the moment they become, they die opening their eyes.

David Bowie makes that face as the pit fills,

as the brown pelicans dive past retired battleships,
that gulf smell of harbored decay.

Every Christmas, the streets try harder
and the windows are sheepish to the sight of dawn.

Every Christmas, it seems truer that I have become myself,
all this time spent making incongruous, rare sensations.

Sci-fi Aubade

Say God breaks

his covenant and floods

return every city to the deep.

Say future fishermen dive

for energy pearls because

in America we never stopped

asking for more. Say a diver

dives and blacks out

from the pressure, but his body

surfaces, and so, a magnetic flare

sent to the belly of the storm

blooms over heavy, pink waves.

To the mechanical creatures below,

he'll sleepily wave his arms

like tendrils, like a hungry,

beckoning thing. Say a thing

survived the flood, they'll think,

to turn predator of the blighted blue,

a latter-day monster singing down

from his balcony in the watery sky,

nightly begging, *Please, wend this way*

and sway to silent songs that promise

feasts to come. But the diver, not knowing
this is what he is saying, is almost still
and dreaming: A man opens beside him
like a narcotic moon
and rests his head against his
and whispers what he'll spend
so many mornings trying to remember.

False Spring

Believing they know what time it is,
gardens wake in late-winter birth months
and swing wildly into the dance. The air warm,
they take up the invitation of light.

Any moment now, blue hammers
will tumble from the sky.

We are woven of deception. Sorry, perception.
Reality as basket case—the weave, tight
as stray light bent over the daddy lap of a black hole,
becomes exactly what it was: From entropy, With sympathy.

In waiting for my father I became him:
a man waiting for something to happen.

We thought we knew what it needed to be,
but every new station teaches us
how little imagination was up to the task. The city sky
less full of stars, nothing anyone ever wanted. But, progress.

In deeper meditations, the room bends to the heat of the eye,

though it barely lasts. The magic trick still half magic, half grasp.

Did you know the sun sets blue on Mars? Did you know

the colder the environment, the longer you live, the slower you move?

Greenland sharks shift their shadows under the ice belly for hundreds of years—

darkness moves with depth. The room bends to the ice of the eye, just barely.

Nature's nature being conflict,

we worry the outcome like a sore. We expect more.

What if we were wrong about it all? Holograms are so lovely

in the dark. It is always, always a long way to fall.

In waiting for my father, I betrayed him.

In waiting for my father, I forgave him.

In waiting for my father, I made him.

Green fingers take to warm air like a gasp to the sublime,

like men to oaths reaching for the sky.

But, it is a false spring, and the dance, being life,

is a trick. Faith's mid-toss of the die, this manor of mind,

ever a decision, always pure risk.

Reflections

We beat back sleep,
our bed, a naked bulb, all sway

and shabby grandeur.

The room itself

exhausted. The floor soft
with being old.

By morning, winter's

fine white seal

has broken, the air missing

the iron crunch of feet

crossing the road. A warm wind

full of things Tiresias would say

has smoothed the ditch snow

to a glossy crust: *Bend yourself*

to other mantic ways.

The towers lean in.

The walls press not unlike lovers,

one then another. Reflections

run the glass like water

in whatever bay, somewhere

night has drifted between halves. For now,

we aren't over yet. We drive

with our hands cupped against

the gear shift and listen still

to the radio's invitations, witness

this broken season, thankful for the reprieve

from what comes next.

Impermanence

Where the baseball field is just a field
and Butterflyweed burns where

stadium lights used to,
where doors fall from their frames

and porches slide into the sinkholes
of old zinc mines, graceless,

where a bankrupt sky hangs
over the chat pile dunes

on land Natives own again,
the ruined land returned to them,

where people must have fucked on
quilted mattresses and cards

must have been thrown
in faces in rage, on tables for display,

where now the black wisps of birds

are mistaken for the scraps that rise

from whichever house

has just begun to burn.

Terra Incognita

I've lost another. I ushered it
in, the losing. Hot summer took us low,
bleaching the creek bed's crawfish down
to armored clusters among the rocks.

The rest like scattered bone, these rocks
once cunning with glint. This old name
for home, where the mountains are slow
to reveal themselves. You, my Arkansas.

My empty jewelry box, my loss
beside the wishing well. This score
I once knew how to play.

Keeping the Fence

We used to walk the line sacking beer cans
hunters had thrown on our side.

A childhood song, the rhythms of aluminum

muted in the jam-black garbage bag. The dry
switch-code of grass. I never asked
if you could tell what I was. I can almost hear

the lowest clouds scuffed by those frail trees
on the hill. A meadowlark startles.

There's a tyranny to the fence,

its weather-bloated, cracked posts,
its aching teeth strung against the wind.

Each of Us Chimera

My mother posts to my wall
how fetal DNA migrates
to the mother's brain and latches
new code to the parental computer.
It's not what you know, but who.
She writes a note about connectedness
and we are: I ask her everything—the names
of mountains and saints, how to survive,
how her cousin Larry died, and the others,
how she thinks we should be in the world.
Larry, everyone suspects, quietly died of AIDS
soon after he came home to Arkansas.
She tells me of the monkey he leashed
and taught to ride his shoulder
as he walked the couple of blocks to Main Street.
I imagine a white-faced capuchin,
a pirate's pet, with a little red vest.
She shows me, as we drive by his old house,
where the monkey's big cage used to rest,
there, and she tells me how the cotton drifted
like snow into the brightening ditches
up and down every street. How we too have seasons.

How chaos likes to iron things out through us.
We too obey laws so law can bend
to accommodate circumstance. We give and gather
memory, macro-organisms linked like charms,
creatures composed of the small-become-
collective; we press from constancy to complexity,
like schools of thought, glinting as we turn.
Larry was the only other family in the family.
He died only years before we would have met.
Every dispatch, every latching, we are wrought
of the mess unraveling makes, as if the past
exploded and this is the sense the parts have made.
I ask her anyway. Cotton lining every ditch, she said,
like something torn apart.

Chasers

In the photograph where the buck stares back,
from a little distance his rack feigns veins, the tight
creases of a peel, lines that split and dip like cleavage.

To heighten liquid attention, the box frames
the quick-steeple gesture of one raised leg.
Such stillness can only be permanent

until it isn't. Suspended in gaze, the photographer
is the subject and watches being watched; he notices

the watching. He is more than curious,
his rack held to chandelier height,
how his ears, his neck hold the moment how a bridge

holds gravity. Because the push is a pull,
and the pull is a shove, size bears little meaning.
Matter and antimatter collide and gravity

stands so many giants' shoulder lengths above
and sees its equal in the crush. The buck, bent
toward whatever's next, decides only when

with cervine grace the cowbirds like philosophies

ready to climb into the field of sky.

The image is a simple science: all chase, all escape.

Sonata for One Clarinet by John Cage

Beasts go down in shrill winter.
Every nest, either empty or warm.
More than protection, the shell
wants breaking. Swivel/ and scythe sound,
the swan a satellite on water/ fathers
walk the world white, thinking their sons will
never know such elegance, will shatter
what they have.

Scene: An empty stage before a concert

Clarinetist: This mic is wrong. It should
go left. There. Okay, I'll run through
the Cage first, and then we'll talk about
what needs tightening.

At the first note the empty stage exhales.

No rhythm, never here. The sun's crisp shadows
drift to cynosures past/ curlicue treble clefs
all the hairs on his hand/ this lift, this that
makes it into a name/ padded prints
chase after him, wanting more

than a beast's impression.

Call this a study of men.

They have hung lanterns in the branches.

It is unclear

which if any is the moon.

All the Grand Deaths

Death by snapping vine,
death by cat o' nines, by dole,
by virtue or grace; by mistake.

Death by heroic lace
left too long by the window;
death by 1983, by augury.

Death by wingspan, by
the lengths to which you'll go.

Death by island, by shoal.

Scene: A father and son driving.

MAN:

ME: Yes, I am.

Car stops.

MAN:

Death by wellspring,
by being
too much of anything.

Death by lesson, by reach,
by thoughtless breach, by loosening wind
on a shining beach.

Scene: *On a dock by a lake.*

BOY:

ME: Why me?

BOY:

under the dock (death
by firefly light); *teeth* (death
by flickering) *chatter unstoppably.*

ME:

Death by tide, by dunes.
By doorway, by feigning. Death by
maze, by ripple-split moon, by cocoon.

Scene: *Outside a bar, a group of men
surround him.*

FIRST MAN:

Throws a punch.

ME:

throws him

down (death

by sanctuary), *throws*

the other against the wall—

(death by cradle, by gavel)

SECOND MAN: *cries out* (death
abbreviated)

ME: *against his ear*

Is this what you meant?

Death by missing bridge,

death by hinge, by lozenge.

Death by fringe, by bondage.

Death by head over heels,

Death by rolling

down steep hills.

Scene: *Two queers*

on a black-licked street,

in and out

of pooling light.

BOY: What the fuck
did you do that for?

ME:

(death by revision,
by law, by maw).

Death by noon; death by
whatever the fuck, by horseshoe toss,
by unread signal, a penny, heads-up.

Scene: *A lamplit room,
his son's last letter
on the table.*

MAN:

*His eye holds the page
like the last held note of a hymn,
this is what could have been.*

He folds it back into its creases,

letting each line forget.

However much is left
is left like this,
as apogee, as hosanna.

Death by billowing, by
odyssey. All the men, yes,
billowing, two-by-two,
in finer and finer arcs.

Education

Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing <i>University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee</i>	December 2017
Master of Fine Arts in Poetry & Translation <i>University of Arkansas</i> <i>Programs in Creative Writing & Translation</i>	August 2012
Bachelor of Arts in English & French Studies <i>University of Minnesota, College of Liberal Arts</i>	December 2005 Magna Cum Laude Honors

Administrative Experience

Director of Creative Writing Programs <i>University of Idaho</i>	May 2017 – Present
Director of the Hemingway Festival <i>University of Idaho</i>	May 2017 – Present

Graduate Student Liaison to the Creative Writing Advisory Committee <i>University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee</i>	September 2016 – May 2017
Coordinator <i>Eat Local :: Read Local</i> <i>Milwaukee & Madison, WI</i>	September 2014 – May 2017
Contest Reader <i>Frost Place Prize</i> <i>Bull City Press</i>	October 2014 – May 2017
Poetry Editor <i>cream city review</i>	August 2013 – May 2017
Development Team Member <i>cream city review</i>	August 2013 – August 2014
Assistant to Director Davis McCombs/Geoffrey Brock <i>Arkansas Programs in Creative Writing & Translation</i>	January 2008 – May 2010
Reading Series Organizer <i>9 by the Light: Fayetteville, Arkansas</i>	August 2008 – May 2012

Teaching Experience

Assistant Clinical Faculty

August 2017 – Present

University of Idaho

Courses:

Beginning Poetry Writing

Beginning Fiction Writing

Queer Literature

Traditions: Prosody and Forms

Affiliate Faculty

August 2017 – Present

to Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

University of Idaho

Graduate Teaching Assistant

August 2014 – May 2017

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Courses:

Introduction to Creative Writing (3 sections)

Introduction to College Writing (5 sections)

Introduction to English Studies (1 section)

Instructor for LGBT+ Studies Program

September 2015 – May 2017

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Courses:

Introduction to LGBT Studies online (2 sections)

Introduction to LGBT Studies (1 section)

Center for Talent Development: Spectrum Instructor

June 2014 – July 2017

Northwestern University

Courses:

Wicked Smart: Honors Intensive Research Writing

Introduction to Creative Writing: Honors

Live Lit! The Art of Storytelling

Creative Nonfiction: The Art of the Essay

Nonfiction Writing: From Structure to Style

The Turing Machine, AI & The Human Program

Part-time Instructor

November 2016 – May 2017

Milwaukee Area Technical College

Courses:

English 1

Communication Skills 1

Urban Youth Literary Arts Program Educator

May 2014 – July 2014

Woodland Pattern Book Center

Courses:

Introduction to Theatre

Part-Time Faculty

August 2012 – January 2013

University of Arkansas, Department of English

Courses:

Composition I (1 section)

Graduate Teaching Assistant

August 2008 – June 2012

University of Arkansas, Department of English

Courses:

Creative Writing I (3 sections)

World Literature I (4 sections)

Composition I (1 section)

Composition II (4 sections)

Writers in the Schools Instructor

August 2008 – May 2012

University of Arkansas, Department of English

Service & Community Involvement

President's Council on Diversity and Inclusion

October 2017

University of Idaho

Queer Places, Practices, and Lives Conference

May 2017

Ohio State University

Panelist: “Queer Pedagogies for Uncertain Times”

UntitledTown Book and Author Festival

April 2017

Reading with Dasha Kelly, Brenda Cárdenas and others

Green Bay, Wisconsin

United We Read

March 2017

UWM Graduate and Faculty Reading Series

Reading with Kimberly Blaeser and others

Volunteer Staff

August 2015 – Present

Woodland Pattern Book Center

LGBTQ Reading Hour Organizer

January 2015 – Present

Woodland Pattern Poetry Marathon

Wit Rabbit Reading Series, Chicago

Summer 2016

Guest Reader

Absinthe & Zygote Reading Series, Chicago

Winter 2015

Guest Reader

Poetry Out Loud Competition

Fall 2015

Guest Judge

American Indian Sovereignty
and Resource Management Conference
Presenter: "Literary Activism and Impermanence" Fall 2014

College English Association (CEA) Conference
Presenter: "A Poet's Puzzle: Translating & Imitating Sonnets" Spring 2011

American Literary Translators Association (ALTA) Conference
Reader Spring 2011

Publications & Awards

2017:

Texas Review

"Turing's Theories Regarding Homosexuality"

"In My Dream, Turing Shows Me His Greatest Machine"

Queer Nature Anthology (forthcoming)

"Turing's Theories Regarding Homosexuality"

The Spoon River Poetry Review

“In the Name of the Father,”

“Sonata for One Clarinet by John Cage”

2016:

UWM Departmental Manuscript Award

Selected by Rebecca Hazelton

Split Fuse

Blackbird

“All the Grand Deaths”

Mid-American Review

James Wright Poetry Award Finalist 2015-2016

“Snow White and the Kiss Deferred”

Academy of American Poets

Edward W. Ryan Poetry Prize

“Buggery”

2015:

Indiana Review 1/2 K Prize (Finalist)

The Iowa Review Award (Finalist)

Black River Chapbook Contest (Semi-finalist)

Black Lawrence Press

The James A. Sappenfield Fellowship

2014:

Bellingham Review

“Penelope in the Garden Humming Bach”

“Paradise of the Senses”

Third Coast

“The Dawn”

The Fourth River

“Camera, Field”

“Portrait of a Spider”

“Terra Incognita”

Black Warrior Review Poetry Prize (Finalist)

Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing Fellowship (Finalist)

American Literary Review Poetry Prize (Finalist)

“Sci-fi Aubade”

Eat Local :: Read Local

Readings in Milwaukee, WI and Madison, WI

“The Moon Wasn’t Out”

2010 *Black Warrior Review* Poetry Prize (Finalist)

Works in Progress

False Spring, Poetry Collection

Split Fuse, Poetry Chapbook/Verse Play