

Souvenirs of Sleep

by

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ABSTRACT

Chris Miller's *Souvenirs of Sleep* is as serious as it is whimsical, if this is a possibility. The "Museum of the Zoo-real" may be an equally appropriate title as animals are often in performance. In this visual and spiritual investigation, childhood, dream, and the loss of a mother to suicide are the currents. Miller's work is informed by the cinema of Werner Herzog, Andrei Tarkovsky, Robert Bresson and beyond. Miller believes in the power of implication. The poems begin with intense focus, but are often in the business of expansion. *Souvenirs of Sleep* is a journey toward sense-making, a search for language that might allow it.

DEDICATION

For my Mother, Carol Jean Miller.

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Compelling Sediment

May we categorize a jawbone or a skull wound—
a kind of crush?

A boy engages his poster of dinosaurs,
its spans and names. I eat
my weight in nails to satisfy
the boat. The expression
I can't make, a branch
between the lips. Will you pull
me to you like that? I sleep
with this sense, make things...a wing, a finger,
a jewel. Perhaps we wed under a nest
of owls colored with oils.

The Alpine house in Groveport, Ohio

It was the day the country had been born.
The family of four gathered
at uncle Andre's alpine cottage
to watch the fireworks.

After the explosion the relatives took refuge
in a game of cards.
The calm flame of the hearth and the duck decorations,

quickly dulled
to the adults; eye-level with their knees
I asked, "*What are you playing?*"

"*It's not for you son,*" was the reply of the absence
of a chair at the table.

I heard the baseball glove that rests
near the entrance below the car port
tell me it hadn't caught a ball in years.

In that moment *Euchre*
had the power, like the mystery of *sex*

to keep me quiet for two more years.

The Canvas

A tired wasp curls on a wooden sill,
near a folded spider. The collapsed
heart of a barn.

In an unkept field,
a mother rests her son's head
against the cloth of her breast,
the unshy skeleton in her arms.

Water seeps from his lips
like painter's oil. Staring, he sees
cottage smoke lift into trees;
two callous chickens, with their
necks twisted in wire.

His eyes shut...

A man carries a cross
on a snowy mountain pass.
A procession of robes wave,
scatter the bodies
of flies.

At the edge of the field, a white spirit
watches the woman
tuck the boy inside.

The Numismatist

He circles the fountain
looking for uncommon coins.

A dime with a missing mintmark,
Washington with two heads.
An eagle's wing stamped
into protruding teeth.

When he finds one he drops
it into an envelope.
He lets the others sink
or throws them at crows.

He is rarely noticed,
pacing, thinking.

When Loss Becomes Worship

Thus to be adamant, to ignore
larva gestating beneath the fur
of your dying Newfoundland. The reverence
of the last movement of skeleton and all
that is wound. To lie with one cold ear
suctioning.

Strenuous Quadrangle

After *Barry Lyndon*

There is a need to study and know words
in a boy whose wooden shoes extend
above the floor. He can have all that he wants,
in so much that he speaks and spells
what his orange-haired elder wants.

Let's say we'll have a duel in an empty church
now strawed for horses. The light will
embody three crosses that serve as windows,
and a goblin will beat a drum
far away.

After neither of us have ended
our lives, we will sit
at a table signing endless papers,
fulfilling ceaseless debts, almost
as if by rapid candlelight,
transported into an enormous frame.

Follow Me Out

-For Carol

I. Perception

The trees are coming toward me
in storms of green.
My vision is the glow
of a bulb
hanging in darkness.
Let me sleep.
When you speak
with me you shrink
like a pinhole
steaming through
a crowd,
a fog of dark laundry.

II. Reconciliation

In the brain there are gaps
for electricity and chemicals,
the system collaborates
to let us perceive. We are
in a relation of gap.
What is it, Christ,
that you do inside the brain?

We try to look
through the hole our eyes deny.

New creatures surprised.
Please,
give us language.

III. Release

The trees are lying
their leaves down,
and the ocean is drawing
around us. Listen
to the water pulled
back like a bow.

Your eyes are young,
elegant.

Follow me out.

IV. In Expectation of Healing

The shoulder of passage
nudges me in night,
after, a swell of wine
retracts the thumb
of my heartbeat.

I siphon
a note of light.
The morning,
her death,

my unfamiliar womb.

Verse

The bodies
of dark fish
shiver
out of shapes,
posture the water
while it opens its gills
like shadows
of blinds in film noir.
We are on the train between,
a record of Vikings
crowned in white stone.
Someone
mimics the throat of a jaguar.

Armadillo in the New World

When we arrest the bomb
where will we lock it up...

If we unclothe it
will it rat out its friends?

Like a shimmering porcupine
it will urinate in its cell.

We will beat and bathe it in ice
cursing in many tongues,

“What was your part in this?
How did you help?”

We will know
when we examine its hands.

Ars Poetica

It was stile and notched, the doors held heavy to the heavens.
-Circa 1611

Pass the ink of inhabitation
to the speaker
leaving. Why must
you go?

Carry me off, like
pins to keep the name
in place.

This is Neptune-
A nept oon

Keep your pouch
of animal crackers
back. The

giraffe's tongue is sore.
Is it fancy? Are

the words working?
Do you see it

neck out and aiming?

Paradise of Stone

I.

In a workshop, two boys are moving paintings,
footprints in sawdust, and cuts of old board.

One of the boys looks up at the black hair
of a woman drawing with charcoal

in a long window,
the light picking beauty, daubing shadow,

drawing him in...

here the orange fish with lower fangs
swims over cement, into his house.

II.

The boy gazes into a blue cave
where a conveyor belt is piled
with cubed eyes.

III.

He is in a room of giant maroon walls,
where a film has flicked on,

a rumor of wasp-like humans,
and cities on a map lit by flames.

Janus' head splits in four

IV.

and the boys are sweeping school projects,
colored stars off the floor,

debating how to shay a pepper,

remembering the nest
they once saw full of wings,

and how their mother hugs them,

off to the next.

Rockets

For Brandon

At some point we decide to un-box them.
They have been stowed in a closet
next to a dormant toy clown
that wheels on a piece of string.

One is yellow with a red scorpion
climbing its side. We attach
a parachute to its tip and poke
the burn paper between it
and the engine.

We jump the fence into the field.

I scan the rows for arrowheads
as we distance ourselves from the houses.

The legs of the launch pad tuck into the soil,
we slide the rocket down the metal lift.

We stand back and scan the tree line,
empty of deer. You light it
and it streams up into a speck.

Later, after giving up the search,
you find it surprisingly
downed in your backyard.

*

At our second launch,
the burn paper is missing,
and the rocket separates
fifty feet up, one end
twirls violently, the other
drops like a heavy cigar.

*

Another time, we prepare

to ignite the R2-D2 rocket
my mom bought me.
Its maximum potential is
two hundred feet,
so we decide to set it
in my uncle's un-mowed lawn.

R2-D2 starts his ascent
and then ballets into a curve.
He suddenly re-ignites in decline
and flares down near
the willow. Smoke flutters
over the green.

The Guillotine

A severed astronaut enters my dream,
part of him, that is—
I can't hear through the helmet,
what it looks like he says...

and then off he goes, momentarily
an octopus.

I've been warned
before, by worms with red accordion brains,
robbers, rioters, even wolves
on Christmas eve. But

somehow this never quite distracts me
from water buffaloes laboring
under your body, trying to bring

you back.

Beheaded

The attic was emptied of bumblebees.
My cradle was safe from the dead. The eggs
had burrowed in boards, and been scraped by
the skiff of a broom. In this struggling

icicles formed that winter in the joints
where the bees had lived. I was crawling
now on my knuckles. A ladle of snow,
my open eyes, still mostly a mimic.
Our Newfoundland dreamt of the sea
on the edge of the carpet.

Oranges were set in a bowl on the table
for the people who were visiting.
I was lying on a quilt upstairs.
Should we read our childhood? The sway
of the toys was enticing. I noticed something
unusual.

A tuck of dead legs.
I reached for the object and examined
its xanthic form. Bit its thorax.
Happy.

A Meditation in Braille

(*Note - My mother was a schoolteacher and later a cop)

I only knew it in elevators,
the bumps below the numbers,
the glowing seven without
glow. She told me she taught
the language. The closest
I've learned, the fret board,
invites movements similar
to my vision of her bending
down beside the kids, guiding
their fingers along the print.

Inside her stomach, while still
on duty, she took leave
just a month before my birth.
Is it in me; that need to see
justice carried out, to reform
the addict, visit
the homicide?

I feel along her coffin's walls
in a pitiful hug. There's no
writing on this box
that will house her,
no music to underscore, to feel

the separation between the dots.

Build a Bear Bourgeoisie

After *The Exterminating Angel*

A black bear paces near a room of dinner.
I have seen this bear once before; followed
it in the woods, and discovered, in a shrieking
growl, its mother, a horse-headed beast,
warthog-like and on two feet.

So, when I see it again, I wonder
how it found me first? The diners
trapped like a dream, some making

love in closets, others smoking,
caressing the furniture, imagining
the bear batting a lamp shade
down a hallway above them,

each hour, another violin string
plucked with a saw. And three lambs
pouncing in the foyer, are making
the guests salivate,

for clean vests, and ironed dresses,
but I am worried about the hand
coming for my socks.

The Groundhog

is not a treasure hunter, but it will begin a hole
you might need to see. If you
smoke its home, it will make its way out.

Embrace this hefty squirrel for its patience,
its disregard for traffic, its capacity for shagbark hickory.

Admire the dreams it dreams inside the earth...

of a beach lapped with oil and the titans that ooze up,

of a large white bee.

Lying Calmly in a Metal Clock...

I have a recurring dream that I am a soldier.
(As to my duty, I have only signed the forms,
listened to a Navy man.)
I fear death and am often shot. Sometimes
I'm a leader. Often I'm confused.
Occasionally, there are trolls or beasts.

I prefer this fantasy war.

How am I to write this poem? I dream,
who hasn't served? I feel
like a lucky cow abandoned in the wake
of Armageddon. As this cow,
I peruse the grocery, become
one scale of a highway dragon,
defecate in public with no concern.

Midwest Concerto

For my sisters

Wind prints leaves on the earth,
into the air as the squirrels
look up at a sky of quiet lightning.
They are headed back, maybe
with a scrap or a walnut's top,
as are deer, to the whistling of rain.
And our children are roaring like big cats,
filling in the flashes.

Stubborn Magi

To his sides
sway, like theater curtains,
the garments of whoever does this.
In the light of a minimum forest
a moose tosses rocks at tree trunks.
For New York by bridge
the skin of the staircase looks,
as the black sky nears. In a dark chair,
troubled by a recent merging of hotels
a father waits for his son's return.
Silver dollars flake into the wind,
collections of pennies. To their lips,
in grass, passersby lift cheese
as the mother is stretched out. In the marketplace
young cheetahs play behind vendors.

The Choice

I'm not sure I trust sense.
Sense-making. Maybe
petals in pool light are jellyfish
in the bowl of my focus.
Can we accept this?

The night before she left,
I felt the sense of what it might be
to die. A similar sense
met my father-in-law before
his nap that afternoon.

Some would say, "It was
energy in the air."

"Okay," I'd offer, "and why
was this energy so specific
in choosing?"

To which one might respond,
"It's in your head
kid."

II

The Tall Man

The swan's wings rise over rippling pond water,
as wind directs needles and cones.
Trying to stay in place,

a lantern's lid is blown ajar.

I walk along railroad beams that skirt
the water, with a woman and two sons.
The oldest calls me *the tall man*.

I notice their house
looks like an alien face in the water,
but can't get her to see it.

Neighbors let six golden puppies
run in the grass.

I imagine the woman's husband
inside the face,

wonder how it was

we fell in love.

Before Apple-picking

We sway like two twines of the spider's silk
Touching in the softness of the calm
And there are hushed bales of hay
Around us, maybe several pails of milk
That I didn't fill upon some giving
But I am off to apple-picking now.
Foggy undertones of light appeal the dawn
Some crescent moon: A shoveled peach.
Hurry the nestling owl and wakened fawn.
I cannot undress your presence from my skin
I got from dreaming on that tranquil reach
In that *Rivendell* of urchins where our bodies
Went to sleep.
But we revived on the other side of oceans
And I could feel what form of spirit
I would breathe. In that new existence
Somewhere reaching into my body
Picking my most delicious pear
Consuming all except its seed
I forget the apples of my working.
Two seas to tame the tempest
Rising up between us
The weathering of conquest asserts no claim
For we have had all of apple-picking: of death
In the spans of breath and long awaited winters
To the harvest we tended in fall.
Were he not to be seen,
The ghost of the hummingbird might say
The picking is good here, where there are no seasons
and ripe apples, when picked in sleeping,
create an Eden.

Ghost of the Woods

For Matt

The story will need clones
since there are only two of us.
Maybe we will use Cinnamon,
my obese cat, as an entity
that one or more
of the main characters
can become, as a means
of working our way
back to the pool,
for a wet finale
where, of course,
the henchman will die,
by bullets
to the chest,
or a jump-cut explosion.
Either way, the cat lives,
still unable to lick
the dead skin
on his lower back,
indifferent
to the edit.

Altar

After *Diary of a Country Priest*

The young priest solely eats of the Eucharist.
He will add sugar and let the wafers sop in the wine,
but his figure is frail. A companion holds
the ears of two dead hares he has brought for stew,
but the priest refuses.

As he walks the stone streets of town, two men release
a banner like a guillotine. By evening, he must visit
the woman who has lost her boy.

She tosses a medallion, the last of her son into the hearth.
The priest bends to remove two logs from the fire,
and gently reaches to slide it from the ash
with a bare hand.

The following day he receives a letter
informing him the woman has died.

The priest is questioned about their conversation,
believed to be a drunkard. The town resists
simplicity.

He travels into the forest, remembering
the glass-blowers he met in the mountains,
the hypnotism of liquid glass, the mist,

how they are inside the cancer that is eating his stomach,
and experiences violent revulsion to prayer. Alone,
he wraps himself in a gray blanket with tears. He is found,

surrounded by wine, the glass of a broken bottle
and placed in bed.

While walking in the forest, he rests his hand on
a tree that has grown sideways for much of its life.
He claims to have seen the face of Christ, a child's
without the slightest radiance.

The Tree Spiders

We meet up and carry a raft down to the river's edge,
past the no trespassing signs and the fragile grass.
I have never done this.

The air is cold, the tree spiders are anxious.

We have come to our imagination.

We will chart what is left of Canal Winchester.

The water's risen
since the last time you were here,
so has my passion
for things not quite named.

The Heineken we brought along reminds me of fishing
and I still don't like the taste.

We take the river as she takes us, and two herons
become our pillar of smoke.

We stop at a fallen tree splitting the water.
The sun, glorious.

An old man gazes at our folly from the bridge above.

We take in the falling of the night sky
from the muddied window of the old man's truck.

He mentions the alligators, the Chinese man who carried the torch
and points to the lonely white house of a man who
thought there was some sin
in fishing on the weekend.

He reassures us,
Christ is the only calendar.

The West

An entertainer lights zebra
juggling pins on fire
and begins to toss.

A bulldog is transfixed.

Walkers avoid thrown up fries.

Along a stretch an art sale.

Orange blue birds, something
for the home. Clint Eastwood
on discount, and his cigar.

Tails of Useless Rope

Two humpback whales sleep upside down.

Multicolored crabs wrestle on the rocks.

Gulls canoe into a tornado of fish.

*

I am in the water with my mother. She pushes
a shopping cart. I hold a glass cup and book bag.
We both believe the objects will not sink. The ocean
a teal green as under the lights of a fishing pier.
Do you remember when we both hooked sting rays?
As we swim further the cup begins to drown.
The shopping cart does not support a miracle.
She tells me it is too deep to find the book bag
that has carried below. I decide to test the depth.
My limbs shovel me down to where I can see
the floor layered in sand. A sea snake like an extravagant
straw lingers at the surface. I retrieve the bag,
return for breath. Defending myself
I am poisoned. I separate the snake's body before I begin
to lose strength. Mother helps to shore.
She brings me to a dim seaside bar.
It appears the bartender has prior wisdom. He uses a knife
to draw out the venom and blood. It is too thick,
so he takes my hand.

*

Flamingos congregate on a mysterious island of salt.
The algae they eat turn the tips of their wings red.
They raise their children. Marabou storks stalk like prison guards.
Lifting long orange legs, they strangle
the strays.

Some of the eggs, encrusted in salt, never hatch.

*

Over unanchored deep, an abandoned boat of sheep,
bleat beneath the swell.

Exotic

“Police Kill Dozens of Animals Freed on Ohio Reserve”

Zanesville, Ohio. October 19th, 2011

Eyes
in the night.

The bolt slipped
out of its casing.

The owner’s body,
his spirit leaving,
letting go. Out

of the cage,
the door, the lift

into the dark
the badger
the bare

teeth.

The scope, the aim
of tan clad

police patrol,
a tiger
in headlights

nearby
the wolf
eating anew

in the kingdom.
The giraffe
breathing in the maple.

Ambition

Since, Stephen, a friend in preschool,
confessed he had been born in outer space,
I have held the conviction that it might
one day be possible to personally travel there,
but I wonder:

Did a chimpanzee assist the delivery?
I should have asked him.

Another kid, we'll call him Drew,
confessed to me on the monkey bars
that we were x-friends.

I wasn't aware that I had been friends with him
to begin with, but

maybe we'd ridden red tricycles around the gym,
tried to shoot baskets into the infinitely high hoop,
lucky to scrape the net.

*

Now, I realize Drew's parents had probably divorced.

As for Stephen, perhaps he made it back,
into that childhood image of umbilical
leaking down a brightly-lit white ramp

or

maybe he's sitting on Pluto,
the dog of course.

The Two Houses of Verne

My poems often want to fall quickly to the next line.
What rose this axe in my writing? In a dream,
I am lost, but asked to describe, at night, the families
that live in adjacent houses, with high gold windows.
The shale hands of the inquisitor prod
me further. *I'm not sure, maybe a lean boy
with pale features and a small nose. I saw
a dog, skin folding over the porch rungs, also dreaming.
I would tell you they are the kin of friends I once knew.
I can't be sure, though, I only know I'm looking,
and it's dark...*

I watch corn stalks rise slowly under many yellow suns,
waiting as they obscure a distant village.
I tell the large farmer,
who seems indifferent to my search for arrowheads,
a pleasant enclosure of green is valuable,
something to disturb a point of view. A dark piece
of flint with a pink scab,
intact notching, is what I
loose from one of his rows.

Come Into My Wound

Through the phone I try
to resurrect your personality—

“Hitchcock. I remember.
That’s why I like Hitchcock.”

The imprint that pulsed somehow,
as I tried to find you,

the indescribable symbol, buried
in your skull, in my blood,
(You are in and not my eyes)

*

—The day before you die.
All I can tell you about is another
film.

All I am is film.

Ode to an Arrowhead

Shard of pink in the mud
with a point of rose.

Fin of flight.

How long did the bobcat
endure your reception?
—before lying down

to decay and turning
of the plow.

Hypothesis

A desert cat appears to deliver
cotton balls behind the brush.

I filter scenes this incites,
rabbits used in my science fair project on batteries,
wounded cardinal I was unable to save,
fox kit pats doors of our church...

Whose wounds will we daub?

I remember the finicky hamster I released
into our garden.

On decorative brick,
her split stomach rests.

The gigantic air
she must have sniffed,
the absent glass she didn't rasp!

Meadow

My sister and I split the Roman costume
I was given on Christmas. She has
the sword and helmet, I
the breastplate and shield.

We ride in a maroon Chevy van.

Our parents let us out to see
the two ponies my grandfather has purchased.

We are lifted on to their backs. Over
low grass, up the hill,

we follow a grey path into
a meadow. We

see the pale top hat of childhood
recede in another direction,

lead our ponies
to a thin pool.

The Mice that Operate Snakes (In the tradition of food that understands its Eater)

We watch them sink into the drain of scales,
the tail beside the tongue, and continue
onward to the sidewinder's middle tum.
In this wrap of flesh we see, the fate
of mice declared: to supply the serpent
in its sleepy lair, but in this opaque
encampment, where digestion is the thought,
the mouse begins to hatch its plan, with tools
hiding in its fur, to turn the snake to
periscope, and drive the jeweled plot.
With internal charm, the mouse newly avenged,
shifting in its new form, remains inside the skin;
how we often disappear, packaged in titles
munster, mozerella, gouda, blue, swiss.

Out of the Darkness

For Sharon

We wrap beads of loss
around our necks—

red for spouse,
gold for parent,
white for child,
orange for sibling,
purple for friend,

and even blue for *support*
the cause.

We are here to walk a voice, to speak
for *us* and *you*.

As we wait to release the white
and blue balloons we are given,
I see the faces of people I barely know,
I knew would be present
in suicide's magnetic wake.

(I'm here for my mom. You're here for your son. They're here for a friend.)

The balloons rise, as we release
their string tails. They disappear.

Abel

A hawk settles on a highway lamp
as the breaks engage horses of sunlight
lost in galleries.

We offer a spoiled body.

An ice pick in the snow's brain
shutters what is now not Cain.

Revision

On a wet afternoon,

a stealth bomber, or perhaps a boomerang
of ducks

flap into a future

A Series of Stories Wearing Ballet

Conversation in the distance,
but it can't be heard because of the radio

or better yet a megaphone.

A pile of tires in the desert

visited by insects that exercise the dying in swimming pools.

Somewhere close by....

The cowboy lights his cigarette
in such a way, becomes jealous,

later melts in dying snow,
an honest coward.

And maybe an assassination is about to happen,
but let's see something else for a while,

thieves distracted in an earthquake.

Vague

*“There are many things under these hills we have yet to discover.
The skeleton of the moose is enough to envelop my consideration.”*
- German glassmith (circa 1820 A.D.)

Antelopes detach grass from the dirt.
It is sucked and folded into their throats.
The little nodes are the chest hairs of a giant.
It would not be accurate to refer to the antelopes
as parasites. The hill has not risen in many years.
You may ask, how is it that the giant
can live without heaving his breast?
The answer is: He’s dreaming
that he’s a dwarf.

On a cold afternoon, antelopes grazing,
bundled, he travels up a hill, not
to sleep.

The World in Another Foot

For two years I have regretted
the call I did not make
in expectation of seeing her
for Easter. The apprehension
of knowing, after, that
her age and the disease
were likely incompatible this time. I wanted
to learn the geography of the country
so I would fall to where she was.

III

Diversion

After a photo from The Philippine International Hot Air Balloon Fiesta

We watch Darth Vader's enormous head inflate.
One black eye peers into the ground. The hot air
exhales a long breath into the expanding antagonist.

Soon, the head will float in the Philippine sky.
We will snap photos. Our kids will jam cotton candy
into dog's mouths. Exotic lights will twirl.

As I observe him displayed like a bodiless king
I ask, how would we react if they were to remove the mask? —
fly the powdered white gash through the clouds.

Sasquatch II

*“...Anything approaching us we try to understand, say,
Like a lamp being carried up a lane at midnight.”*

Norman Dubie

Who carries the light that comes in night
or stores it in the genes of deep fish?

That red glow above the railroad
tracks might be a drunk miner,

or the loam on some grave-ghost,

or is it that cloaks are pressing
a coffin in the train's side

to chauffeur the enigma forward,

maybe to a shoal of saints
with candles waxed into their hands,
not

to disturb the flame.

Walter,

You married my mom when she was twenty-two.
You died in 1976, ten years before my birth.
You left my mom a quiet legacy of suicide.

The words you left your own father,
I always wanted to be a winner, but I was a loser.
(Then you started the engine.)

I'm used to violent stories, Walter, living in a family of cops:

"...found him with a shotgun in his hands,"

(imagine the blood, I did, leaning down the couch
and into the carpet)

"He killed them, sat down in a chair, and put a bullet
in his own head."

For some reason, Walter, I always forget that you didn't *go* this way.
You let car exhaust into your lungs.

When I was a boy, I told mom I didn't understand how someone could
do it, she told me, "When someone is that low
there's nothing to tell them not to." (She understood you. Knew your pain.
Summed in a sentence.)

The little details I was given formed a feeble skeleton of why

family,
depression,
divorce
and the following Ohio winter.

(I know it's irrelevant, but you missed *Star Wars* by just a year.)

In photographs you wear muscle tees.
You are always smiling and much younger
than I will ever see my dad.

Walter, if you could see how fucked up she was by medicine, her fear of her fear anxiety
depression aging the death of her parents inability to recognize and pindownreality

Obsolete Water Pump Repair

The old orange truck,
with nothing in its bed.

The one javelina
at the zoo on Christmas.

The man and woman
who appear separately
to be conversing with the air
one evening in Boston.

I am here to listen to whatever
it is you are trying to say.
Please, look at me.

After *Dogtooth*

When the cat is an unfamiliar monster
that your brother kills with pruning shears,
it is time to leave regardless of the tooth,

language is confused
when the telephone is salt

there are zombies on your lawn

and the sea is not a seat,
it never was

nor were the airplanes in the garden
the ones from the sky, but

your father and mother promise
she is pregnant with two children and a dog

so you tell of oval fish, guests
in the pool

and your father beats you with *Jaws*
taped to his wrist.

Later you dance with your underwear off
deep in the beat

soon to catch eyes with the mirror
as you raise the weight to jaw,

break the enamel nuzzled in the gum.

Let the Locket Go the Alien's Magnetic

I open

to *filose*: threadlike. When my mother
opened to death I felt the unplugging
of a thousand cables.

Of a thousand cables
I felt the unplugging when my mother
opened to death. To *filose*: threadlike

I open.

our town: the mollusks

for Scott

an expanse the color of police.
lowering life support. three men of observation glass.
in a fishless opening. magnificent orb. the remission
of snow. appearance of squid-like appendages,
divers with underwater cameras. a photo snap to reason
the ancient eye. does it fall from a giant?
a ghost in the jaws of a shark. orbiting light.
soggy cigarettes in the pocket, a classic tune.
divers hover to attach
a machine to monitor, to caress the abysmal

film.

imbedded image— lost form of interpretive stars. an incline
in language, forty days like moes in whirlwind.
lizard with no conception.

Samson

sets the donkey's jawbone
in a field of scorched grain,
as a young Philistine
drops onto the head of a jackal
with no tail. A locust
on the ash skull of Samson's wife,
contemplates the jump
to the burnt wrist of her father.

The sweet of the lion's honey
is still on his skin.
He remembers the sapphire sheets
in his dream, a naked woman
weaving his hair.

There are numerous dead to think of the future,
only a thirst,

the locust makes his leap.

Summer of Fish

For Brandon

The pole lets line swing to the lake
like a slow gymnast,
in search of tug with a knotted worm.

We pull bluegill up in a twist of casts
and sort out the hooks,

another mishap, like the time I dropped

my rod in the water and lured a smallmouth,

or the balls of blood that didn't fool

the catfish: "Sunshine" Ray booked a blue one, twenty pound.

We caught a slew of branches, in and out of water,
lost several spinners to power lines,

always, on our hands, the smell of erosion, algae, and cold dirt housing
worms in Styrofoam.

We carved the calendar of summer
with the competition of tackle.

In late August, the snapper shows us his eyes

before gulping down, guiding

us to murk.

Laguna

You once explained
that barn cellars
are full of old scarecrows,
so when
my wife tells me,
the upper neighbors
knock
when she sings,
I imagine them popping
up and down
on rotting wood,
wishing
someone would
change
their rags...

Moscow

We saw you when you were younger
among the dunes of weightless grain.
The light cries of dust in light
along the barrier like the motion of a pawn.
The fox swims out of its likeness
in a ripple of weeds, as our tar feet
succumb to the body
of our mother resting.
Below,
her fists crack the tiles of the shower,
like white herons
disappearing over a forest forever
distantly coming.

Succumbing Attractions

The grumble of tectonic plates, I suppose,
or the blue zap of aphid
asphyxiation. Pooh and the honey.
The brain-prop premier: *Fiend Without a Face*.
Would you stab the automaton
who delivers fictitious news? The warm chest
of an alcohol sleep. Soft banana discs
in a peanut butter sandwich. The way
snow suppers at our feet.

Mazes

In school we wound them onto pages
in abundant loops. Our lead would lead
to halted trails, cobra coiled not-an-exit,
stops and jagged nopes.
These streams would wash onto four,
sometimes six or more pages.

So much debris from the tracer's pencil,
so rarely the one path.

The Walrus

“...acknowledges the mustache of Wyatt Earp.”

-Anonymous

is a pawn of Sea World, a step up from the seal,
and there is always only one to maintain
its appeal. It claps before it slumps

into the tank for fish. It is the foe or the butler
in the don't-sit-here-you'll-get-wet
spectacle. But the orca and the dolphins
get the shirts, drink topping lid,
the pick your name badge and spoon.

Sometimes...

beyond the saloon doors the walrus hears
the music of the colony

dense, lonely, a celebration of tusk.

This is what I know

Pandas are sometimes red
like caterpillars in the paint trough
or oxen in the summer

and the snow leopard outwits
the markhor's corkscrew horns

as the low moon is lonely...

we prowl through the sheets.

The Scientists

He looked like a monster behind a medical cloth.
But he was a small man. We found him curled
on scattered hay in a horse's stall. The broken
yellow of eggs over his beard and jacket.
We scrubbed him and gave him a bed. He didn't
understand the concept of coins, but generously
stripped himself for study. We admired the distortion
of his form: an abnormal bulge on the side of his head,
a strand of skin drooping over his breastbone.
He was escorted through a closed museum,
fascinated by the odd bridges of bones.
He gestured to the back of a stegosaurus
as if there should be a saddle. To conclude
our observation, we knifed the abnormality,
dropped him into a rectangle,
shoveled dirt, beat it down.

It happened that

a hawk swallowed a nail. Not knowing,
it tucked a wing to its breast like a geisha.
It could not heave up, or leave
and the hawk, taut on death's perch
loomed down, decayed

until the point
poked through the ribs. Broom ants
hauled the feathers like couches,
leaving the skeletal hooks reaching out.

A vagrant happens upon it.
He lifts his leg to crush
skull and cage. The nail meets the sole
of the boot, then the sock,
the skin. Then a scream. Wings
rib up, out, begin to soar.

It happened that...

The Uterine Wall

If the pope is from the Dog Star
the boa constrictor in my storage unit
will be pleased to hear. A prize
in the Cracker Jack box distorts
him. The gentleman in the top hat

now conducts electricity.
I was visited recently by a chocolate Labrador

wearing a coat, opening
an umbrella. His head was huge!
Perhaps these symmetrical donkeys
descending to drink, are the escorts
of a new Vatican breed.

The Ascent of the Symbolic in Technicolor

After The Decalogue Part I

In the film, the boy had slipped through ice
and brought his parents back.

I watched him crawl through
a tunnel of trashcans. He moved a bag of
popcorn and revealed another square cut
for passage. His father must have already
taken the tunnel. His mother savagely
telling him to return. I appeared, as the boy,
in a garden of muted greens. The pink
breast of a small bird resting in a dogwood
dragged my vision. I was beside the sea.

Maybe there were manatees yards from
the rocks. In the sky, two birds, clothed
like Joseph, with ribbon wings. I felt
my heart ascend with their dance. As if drawn
into a covenant, one of them fell toward
the water. The body spread across the surface,
wings dipping with luminescent fish.
Like the hurricane pattern of spilled ink,
or the hustling shadow of a whale, the sea
welcomed its colors. Where was
the father?

In an observatory, maybe a tower
with glass carpet, there were other travelers.
I think the father had led him to this place
to witness what the boy could only see alone.

I had wanted to hold on to the birds, but
as I waited for what would pass; once more
through the tunnel, I remembered
it would not happen this way again.

In

and out of language

wanting to keep the blanket over my back,
let the clouds of death pass over.

It's our first time, again. The seahorse
in the waves is ceramic.