

ABSTRACT

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The themes in this thesis are placed throughout three sections. The first focuses on pop culture references and simple events and is told in a fast and whimsical style. The second is meant to show darker and more grotesque subjects, and the tone follows accordingly. The third is a section of pastorals, which are told through fond and frightening remembrances. However, throughout the sections there are short almost fragment-like poems that focus on art and beauty as well as poems about the “Green Lady” and a frightening deer that are meant to unify the sections.

LOVE SCENE FOR THE VILLAIN

By

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DEDICATION

To all the women who helped me and all the men who made this possible

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Section I

I Told My Stylist

I want to look drowned,
bright eyes sunken.
Fair skin puffy white,
puckered in the wrong
places: like one night
my body bubbled
up with fingers
long withered.

Unhinge this beauty.

I feel it like a watery
weight.
I feel onlookers
looking on.
Make them gone lookers!
Pluck them out,
like my eyebrows, no longer
a perfect arch.
Use algae hair gel,
sculpting tufted eels.

Make a mangled mane.
Show me Medusa!

But he only dyed my hair blond
then dismissed me.

Two Beauties

*The lover is nearer the divine than the beloved,
for god is in one, but not the other.*

—Death in Venice

May he who's blessed with beauty walk
with easy gait, an unfixed gaze;
his lot's already doled:
to carry muscle, quivering
but unafraid beneath the skin
as confidant as a square
jaw-line. At his heels
even the clods of dirt dazzle.
And me,
I watch, unasked, watch
and knit, with fickle skeins
of the mind, watch and
recreate this form of Phaedrus, this
what we cannot have.

Dead Deer Poem 1

Memory is another sort of haunting,
those things you can't unknow;

the deer, the carcass, floating in the marsh on its side
among the surface poking grasses, submerged
scrub greens – head bloated, mouth ajar.
If this were summer, bugs would teem the mottled hide.

Even now, hair floats in clumps. How did it happen?
Maybe some tendril grabbed its leg and dragged
it into the water, or it walked along the bottom,
the bog bed gumming onto its hooves,

drawing it down and down, then spitting up a body.
Now, staring at the shore
with a wide eye, a bleary gleaming black
like the underside of a Magic Eight Ball

before the answer pops up: MAYBE SO.
I can see myself there, warped and
crimped in a black bubble that is not me,
a bubble that burst with the last breath breathed.

Elegy for Joey Ramone

You never had to fight, leaving the Beetle-infested, squalid Hotel California—
more like burning it to the ground, and the crowd didn't know they wanted the
bonfire
until it was singeing their eyebrows with a whole new sound.
America was a Ready, Steady, Go for broke three chord progression to the
terminal,
blurry hands strumming like a drunken bird flapping a rhythm that Chuck Berry
never
imagined, and the Sheenas came along, sedated punk rockers bopping to the
blitzkreig.
No mumbled politics and folk songs, no American Women, no satisfaction
but that's what drove the songs and I drove hours past grave yards and antique
shops,
to the closed down horse racing joint in rural Vermont, the stage set up on the
dusty track.
My face pallid on acid and you hiding behind heavy bangs and a leather jacket
too thick for summer and I stared—
A generation too late, too young to know this is what awe is,
buzzing in my ears, sun surrounding the crowd, my brain on fire
as the day broke into rain.

New Year's Eve

A balmy winter day where the snow steams
in the gutter and the only thing missing from spring
is a bursting bulb and the flutter of pigeons,
so I walked to the theatre
without a coat and saw a movie, a musical
so rousing I tapped my boot
on the sticky cinema floor and, moved,
went to buy the soundtrack afterwards,
wanting to relive the obstinate vapidty
of the heroine and then I did some errands
(buying light bulbs, an umbrella, soap, a magazine
with the musical's star on the cover), feeling a sense
of accomplishment in mere purchasing,
then I walked hom and changed the dead bulb
in front of my front door, knowing the switch
was switched on as I stared right at the forsted glass
spiraling into place,
awaiting and dreading the filament's pop.

Declaration

This poem has no desire.
No lovers or longing,
flesh or appeasement.

Misery is gone, along with
blackness of the self-
effacing kind.

All similes and allegories
have been edited out.
All insight erased.

Words are colored
pixels that
settle together

on the screen of
the mind (wing, swoop,
feathers, cut through air,

white, beak like a nib).
A picture.
That won't happen here, as

I lie with
a pen.
This poem never happened.

The Green Lady Cemetery

I heard her singing through the trees.

The foot-whispering gravel path lets out
to a wider dirt road through the trees,
past the abandoned summer camp,
its white clapboard buildings
stand in rows,
their windows and doors silenced
by two-by fours.

I hear her singing through the trees.

The swings hang plumb on rusting sets,
but when the wind sways, they sing:
a lost creaking cackle of children's laughter.

Hear her singing coming near.

Down the hill, the air gets salty,
thicker near the marshes.
The winter branches like staff lines
for the shining notes of stars.

I hear her singing,
singing through the trees.

When the gravestones were removed
the souls shot out,
like air blasting from an organ pipe,
nebulous specters streaking the sky.

Coming near the cemetery, through the trees,
the plot leveled
except for a graffitied hitching post,
a low wall of smoothed stones,
the trees, the stars,
her singing
like feet crunching dead leaves.

007

What I really want
to know is where I can get
one of those poison arrow shooting
pinky rings; encrusted with
diamonds because diamonds
are forever and I want, like you, Bond
James Bond to be suspended
from the catwalk of a hidden cavern
in a hollowed-out volcano
with a retractable ceiling
and a rocket ready to explode
the moon and
all there is to save me is a wire-
cutting wristwatch or a remote control
revolver or a venom spewing fortune
cookie, while a balding,
scarred, cat-clutching maniac
titters his wisdom and plans
for global domination,
but for you, that final moment
never comes, you live
and let die, you gallop off
for *le petite mort* with a damsel,
her big blonde bouffant coiffed
like cotton candy, your gold finger
on the pulse of immortality stroking
the neck you just saved from the chopping
block, stirred, but not shaken
by your escape
to her explosion,
the only one that will envelop you.
If I could
please purchase a ticket to that.

Love Scene for the Villain

Are we supposed to think that all the dames said, “No!”
to Dr. No or that Darth Vader never steamed up
his mask for some intergalactic courtesan,
especially before their plans for international or universal control
ran unchecked by some dashing hero?
Isn't the promise of power as good as an engagement
ring, especially with those secret hideouts, like a Club Med
full of hunched henchmen waiting to aid and abet
a daring darling damsel for their master's delight?
It's like Flash Gordon is the only one who ever got any pussy,
while Lex Luthor only had a fixation on a man, or the Penguin,
whose flapping deformity and penchant for
rattling off boring bird knowledge never helped him with the chicks.
Do these men not yearn like their over-sexed counterparts,
or is it their unchecked erections that lead them on,
the MPAA afraid of twisted syphilitic dicks and S&M rituals
the only way a mastermind can mind
his member, but PG-13 Tom Hanks can give into Meg Ryan,
who got wet from his voice on the radio alone,
her quest for an ideal mate as
single-minded as the ransom of nations
at the threat of a laser-bearing satellite focused
on the nuclear silos of master capitalists, the same capitalists
ripped off by Bonnie and Clyde, the cinema's
most romanticized misfits, but when Bonnie wrapped her fingers
around Clyde's gun, she dared him to have the gumption to use it,
and he soiled her with a wad of money instead and she knew,
she told us, that the only thing that made him different
was his different way of making love,
which was no making love at all, but they loved
like only the celibate can, with hungry glances
and half-metkisses until the final reel,
when their bodies finally come together and dance
with passionate static, writhing in slow motion
and fall to the ground, their hearts pumping
blood into a pool in the gutter.

First Crush

The moon tonight, Faye
Dunaway, looks like the arch
of your eyebrow, perfectly plucked
or penciled above
those eyes that I thought
could devour me through the screen.
Always some manipulation,
those brows, for every character
as if the window to your soul
were seated
a little higher, and they made
your beauty
like a controlled explosion,
that hard fragility of your face
sizzling like an icicle aflame,
and, Ms. Dunaway, your leading man
was never leading, nor a man
next to you, unafraid
of your sex, you shed
unnecessary niceties and you made it
alright for me to love you,
masculine and sexy, less than a woman
but still one and, therefore, unforbidden.
Take me, Faye, take me back –
in period costume – to that era where
men were men and women
were men too, where cowards were
dealt with, the timid done in
and the fey, done away.

Two Hour Delay

When the voice comes over the loud speaker
to deliver the same bad news for the fourth time,
the man sitting across from me pulls out his cell phone
and begins to play a game, fingers on the buttons
which click, whirl, and whistle.
I stare at him, to tell him to stop, that no one cares
if he wins his tiny electronic victory,
but he does not see me, his eyes transfixed on the pixels
in his hand-held arcade. How can I read poems
with music coming from nowhere and the grind of unseen gears
clearing the cadence from my mind?
The girl sitting next to him talks to her mother in Russian
on her cell phone.
This girl is fat, probably from the gourmet food
from her university's (she wears their insignia on a sweatshirt)
cafeteria, but it's a first-rate school
so she probably doesn't have to read poetry,
or else she would let me read – something no one here
seems to do, which may be why the poet I'm reading
only writes poems about writing poems,
as if meta verse is the poet's secret handshake,
an inky ode to obscurity,
like an old television show, like the show the boy behind me
watches on his father's laptop, his father pacing about,
making deals (on his cell phone), or yelling at someone for no reason,
unconcerned about his son, who is too young to have seen this show
(so am I) but downloaded and stored,
he's awed by a topical comedy he's outlasted.
And then the voice comes back, to tell us
again that we have been delayed. Everyone sighs, as if it's news.
It's Christmas after all and shopping bag logos glow
between everyone's ankles –
even mine – but the attractive couple two rows over has no bags,
only a Newsweek that's two weeks old.
She drapes her leg over his, his arm around her,
so much in love that they slyly read together,
laughing at the political cartoons.

Some Days

Good songs keep coming on the radio
and I turn it up and scream along
in the halo of my own personal spotlight.

Some days it's the right blend of warm
and balmy and the breeze blows
my head up high.

Some days the steering wheel is heavy
and my car handles well and
in the city – even in the city,
where the public workers pump murky water
from uncovered man holes into the street –
I want to race down the road
riding for miles past townhouses'
little lit-up windows that show
the small people as if on tiny TV screens
and my headlights shine wide and bright.

And some days,
some days they have the good cobbler
at the bakery down the street
and I eat it for lunch even though
I know I'll feel like shit later,
but I do it anyway, because
I have my best outfit on
and I keep turning heads and everything
looks good enough to gobble.

Dreaming Poem

My hands, small and childreaned,
on either side of a glass,
the brim face-sized.
Filled with apple juice
dark piss yellow and a small voice
gutteralled from over my shoulder
feminine distinct:
“If you drink it the parasite
will get inside you. Watch out.”
And there it was, suspended,
like globs of scrambled egg.
Cytoplasmic psuedopods
grasping for me.
Then its head,
a sea horse snout head vocating me:
singingish, Sirenlly.
Anyway—Gulp.

Section II

Leda

Chicken legs splayed in the air,
the springs inside the vinyl cushions
peck at her back.

If she fixates
on the cabbage rows
of rivets lining the bus ceiling,
the man bucking on top of her
will stop— vanish.

All she wanted was a ride.

His boots are duck-footed
on the floor and his jeans
nest around his ankles.

His ass is driving her;
pistoning her head against
the metal wall.

The next day,
she'll look at his eyes,
oysters half shut on black pearls,
targeting her chest; like every day.
But tomorrow,
with her head pitched low, will her teeth
shine in that same coy smile?

His face squawks
into a grimace
his calluses rasp
on her shoulders.
She can feel what he left inside her—
like a white flock
migrating north.

Naked

It's like pants are completely unnecessary.
Cavemen really needed to wear pants
to keep warm and to hide their legs from dinosaurs.
But we have radiators, and Billy, the manager, keeps it hot
so our balls hang lower. That's why I don't mind
leaving my pants backstage—my shirt and boxers too—because,
I'm not a caveman.
The regulars though I wonder about,
so rough and ready, and I have to squat down
to whisper in their ears.
The married ones, they just cringe
in a corner, afraid their wives know
they're dreaming of me while they fuck.
It's the lonely ones I'm afraid of most.
What are they thinking when they slide
a twenty into my sock and I rub
my nuts on their heads?
Maybe how they once looked
like me or had a lover like me or how
many different ways they could fuck me.
The bills in my socks itch,
moist with their sweat and smelling like meat.
Just dance, damn it. Just dance.

Mutilated Dog

Led down the sidewalk,
two metal rods support a cushion that supports
his back half, before the legs and tail which hang
like fabric scraps behind the bars –
a triangle on either side – that hold the axeled
bicycle tires to the whole erector set
contraption some vet concocted to ease
a condition that on the frontier would have been cured
with a bullet.

His master pulls him on a short leash,
like a child with a red, breathing wagon,
and looks back from paces ahead
with an insistent grimace while the dog
clutches forward, can't wag his tail,
can only think of sleep, when, at night,
he dreams, in black and white,
of new frontiers.

I Hate the Fragile Flowers

How do their stems stand the shifting wind,
and the petals the bee's assault
even as they wilt and fray around the edges?
The fly trap courts no plucking fingers,
but the daisy's yellow head grows bald
from lovers' vacillation,
the azalea in its bushes like
a dissembled army waiting for trampling,
while high atop its thick stalk
the sunflower's head droops
seeds in the soil, like stony Niobe
leaking tears on her slaughtered sons—
dead children, all of them,
even as they bloom.

Dead Deer Poem 2

Tonight, it will be cold, bright and cold,
when the dream comes, if it comes,
and I will wear a hat,
because it's cold and I will break down

the reeds, forests and forests
of reeds, breaking them
like crimping a veil in a fist,
until I get to the marsh, to the

deer with its eye staring,
an eye I see myself in,
will see myself
as the deer, staring back at my body

breathing the bubble of a last breath.
And I will startle and my hat will fall off,
land next to the deer's head,
wicking up water, sinking down,

down among the plants,
into those places I can't –
I will not – unknow,
into the memory of a haunting.

Amazon

Every night, Nana would talk me to sleep,
telling stories and asking questions –
“Are you happy they moved me here?”
“What will you do when I’m gone?” –
my answers choked in the gloom.
Her hands folded,
joint after arthritic joint, acorns in a row;
warped bridges spanning the prairie
where her left breast was.
“Do you want to see my scar?”
I nodded without sitting up.
She grabbed my wrist, undid
two snaps.
Long, pink, like a nightcrawler,
a dried up brook;
I ran my finger along its secret Braille.
She snatched me to her chest.
Holding me tight with both hands,
her gasps rasping against my nose,
her mouth like a caved-in star:
“See. Flat. Like yours.”

The Legend of the Green Lady

The Green Lady, she sang,
sang and promised *everything*.
Her songs had lured the deer,
her promises as good as murky water.
At night, I looked out my window,
over the marsh lit by the shining notes
of stars winking through bare winter
branches, and she sang to me too.
One day I would escape, she said,
and forget her and the deer.
She could take me away, take me
down where the bog buried bodies,
mummified in salt,
to rise again, hauled out by scientists,
examined and deemed better than bones –
maps with the legends intact.

Wrinkled Peresephone

As I look up
from the black and white pages
of my book, there's a
yellow dress and orange jacket
on an old woman hobbling
toward me.
Like saffron rice and orange rind,
so bright, this sorceress
is stealing color
from the very air, making it swarm
around her like glittering orbs of light,
so many yellow jackets
set to sting. It is spring.
She is back, burning off
those months as hard and heavy
as pomegranate seeds and
making it seem easy.
Yet another of so many springs
as she keeps walking.
Like crickets people chatter
over drab ice tea, and I,
I want her to touch me.
It is spring and breezy.

Song of the Green Lady

She walked too close to the water
and got her foot stuck in the bog
still singing and looking

absent-mindedly at flowers while her husband
trailed behind and saw her skirts sink
into the slime, this woman

whose voice seduced him first, as if she chortled
hope out of her throat, and now his wife –
above him in station –

was below him, engulfed by water
teeming with green and he thought to save her,
but when knee-deep,

she knew what was coming and her song turned
to a shriek, an alarm
that roused him

as if from a revelry and he couldn't – he wouldn't –
he did not move
as she scrambled for branches

trying to move her legs through the thick
marsh, her dress wicking water
and dragging her deeper

as she pleaded, bleated
his name, which had become hers,
until her lips kissed

the surface and her head disappeared.
The bubbles stopped.
He walked away.

I am not that man.
And I won't forget.

Splinter

When you asked for the truth, I told you
about the time,
in spite of the warnings
not to walk barefoot on the railroad tracks,
I got that four-inch splinter,
and went limping around for a week, trying to
hide the injury from my mother, afraid to tell
her that I should have listened,
but the soft sole turned green
and the swelling made it impossible
to even limp.

I told you that the doctor injected
Novocain into my ankle and the foot relaxed
into a heavy numbness. Like a void I forgot
it was there until I saw him guiding the wood out
inch by inch – my mother nearly fainted
worrying that I could keep something so large
inside for so long.
I told you this because it was easier
than the truth, because, like the splinter
I felt guilty.
I wanted it to hurt.

Unasked

He smoothed shampoo
over my hair, crotch, and legs,
and I did his – like monkeys,

face to face, plucking nits
from each other's fur, and, like monkeys,
we grappled and kissed.

When he shaved my body,
he rubbed the inside of my thigh
as the clippers buzzed my pubes.

The hairs billowed like frail feathers
into a pile on our bathroom tile.
I looked like a child

or marble statue as I knelt
before him. A crab, though dead,
still clutched a follicle.

I picked it out – red, swelled,
a scab with legs –
and flicked it into the toilet,

remembering they couldn't drown,
but only died from heat. Cupping his balls
I worked the clippers

down his torso, toward the center
and (unasked) put his half-flaccid penis
in my mouth, stopping the words,

unable to cry or scream, even as he
moaned, and flushed a brighter red,
and I liked it, liked it

when he brushed his hand over
my poisoned hair,
my scalp burning.

Nine Tails

As if darkness could rise
in welts across my back, like spirits
released from knocked-on wood
so happy to feel anything.
An ash-bound Phoenix,
I rise again with a mind for flame.
You only bring the flint,
pain makes the spark.
Hit me, even nine times at once,
I can't wince. Hit me.
Hit me, and I'm beautiful, I'm
beautiful and pure.

Section III

Potable

It's hard to remember
not to kneel down and lap as the tinsel-
laced gutterwater strolls past the sidewalk
to the corner storm drain

again. Every springtime:
punctuated by the punctured mains
rupturing beneath the sandy, stoop-side
flower box next to my building

as if the roots of the half-dead elm that
half grew there
disintegrated: bubbling
up in a puddle of

brown dissatisfaction.
At the curbside, I stop
my pucker: Pursed lips at the tapped spring
magically flowering from a slab
of spigoted stone built into a hill
near the center of Joe McCarthy's pasture.
Back home, it was.
The basin of stones, he built it,
like a utility sink with no legs
so the drain rinsed out into the grass
and slunk to a pool, a lagoon they called it,
that started the river that gullys through
the center of town.
The stones smelled like fresh
even though a slick green fuzz clung
to them and the pilgrims who came
with washed out milkjugs to bottle the water—
like it was elixir, so clean it tasted fairy-filled—
they had to grasp the ridged slab side,
just as I did, my thin arms shaking.
Nose to stone, kissing water
so cold even in springtime
it burns the mouth.

Morning at St. Joe's

The altar's *Agnus Dei* insignia
flashes me a golden wink.
I'm in the third pew from the front,
on the left of the pulpit,
where my family sat for years,
where my grandmother
told me on the first of many Easters:

when my father was ten,
dressed in his white smock,
presided as altar boy
over noon-time holiday mass,
Armed with a long, brass candle wick,
his vocation to bring light
to the altar.

He stood in front of the lilies
flocking the Easter votive.
His implement nicked
the penitent flowers,
drying bulbs burst into flame.
My grandfather leapt over the balustrade
to beat the burning bushes
with his new green-plaid sport coat,
saving the church, and my father's hide.

The lilies' silent horns
blew toward the tabernacle and were
slowly consumed,
like fire eating an incense stick.
My father's blushing cheeks
highlighted his auburn hair.
My grandfather's jacket,
sooty with smoke, worm-eaten with fire.
My grandmother's eyes
wide beneath the smokescreen of her veil.

Forty years later,
neither the saints perched
above the altar
nor I can forget.
The idols' stony condescension
focuses on our pew as lilies bow
to my grandmother's casket.

Dead Deer Poem 3

Then, as if there was a ledge, the marsh stops,
no more than two feet of water, like the water
was levied by a battalion of half-toppled
brown stalks. The reeds were still there

but were no longer poking at the deer's head,
years later when I returned. Like a chorus of a song
stuck in my head, the image revolving,
details changing, the uncertain horror the same.

If I could see it again, maybe it would dissolve,
my body engorged by the marsh, finally
freeing my mind. But it was gone,
no floating remains, no bones below the surface

nothing to remind me it was even real,
that I had once seen myself in it, warped
in a black bubble that was not me.
Memory is another sort of haunting.

Prom Night

Under the banks of supermarket florescence,
my father and I run into the woman I know
was his senior prom date.
He motions to me to stop pushing the cart
as they exchange small laughs.

Soon, they seem to have forgotten me,
as if they were back in the Bristol High gym
(which is now my high school gym)
decked in pink puffs of tissue paper flowers
and blue crepe streamers,
some adolescent Shangri-La.
My father, tall and thin (as I am now)
twirling her across the floor, her skirt –
white and the pale orange color of popsicles –
enveloping the leg of his tuxedo as he pulls
her closer to his chest, the carnation corsage
right under her nose when he touches
her cheek with the second knuckle
of his index finger, bringing it down to her neck,
and her head, as if spring-loaded, crumples
into his hand. Just by being here, she forces me
to watch – my imagination, hijacked
by her Super Eight home movie:
I see a hand – my hand, his – from behind
the lens open the car door and she slides
in the back seat and I (as him) I follow,
becoming my father,

gives the cart a slight tug,
says goodbye, squeezing her arm,
his thumb too close to her breast.
Now I hate this woman –
a short withered reminder,
and her roots need to be fixed.

Cold War

My father said my mother's skittishness
can be blamed on her having lived through the Cold War,
she said he lived through it too and that
didn't explain why he was such an asshole,
but they both agreed I couldn't understand it
until I sat through the Bay of Pigs on TV
and watched JFK calm the masses (his duffle bag
lying next to the door, packed, with a fresh pressed suit
hanging above it, the pants ready to walk out the door)
while the pancake plastered on his brow was threatening
to wash away with nervous sweat or until I thought about
Jackie (the lawyer's business card she kept next to the phone,
on top of the notes and phone numbers on the counter)
smuggling her French fashions into the executive
bomb shelter while showing a nice face
to the camera, and all because two super powers
poised (my red-faced father, fist in the air)
in an international pissing contest (my mother,
paces away, holding a plate like a discus thrower)
didn't know who would buckle first (standing
like silent missile silos) and the public
and even the ones with their fingers on the buttons
didn't know if their countries, everything,
would collapse into the mushroom cloud
and I couldn't understand the tension
of two towers, my parents, about to topple
until I saw it happen.

Sterile

It would be easier if his beauty was a statue.
I could replicate a million desk-top copies.
Art begets itself, and when I look at him,
arrested, I want to produce
what stubborn stone can't contain –
some of his parts are inside
my mind, where he breathes and borrows
into the stunned synapses.
If I could mold with my mind
a lump of clay –art begets – but when
he gets close and inside, it's more –
or less – than art and it's numb
elation, because when it's done
and he's spilt his seed inside me,
I swear I can feel it trying to swim.

A Good Morning in Bad Times

There are birds singing, but there are no birds
in the tree outside the open window.
My view is obscured in one eye by the folds
of the pillowcase as I lie lazy in your bed,
its head pushed into the bay window so all sides
are dazzled by the warm spring day.
The blossoms in the tree are loaded to pop,
and you could smell the inevitable if you were here,
fresh and warm with the dead smell
of the ashtray on the sill as the base line
that underscores it all. The air and the light
and your fabric-softened sheets all feel like happiness
when I hear you walking down the hall.
I close my eyes to avoid being caught
to let the conversation between my cheek
and the sunlight stay undisturbed. You come closer
and ask if I'm awake.
I don't reply. I swear I feel you flinch,
or I imagine you do, as if you can't believe
the silence. And I swear
I catch you peeking over your shoulder
when I watch you walk away.

The Winter Café

It's a beautiful thing, really,
to watch the city sap into darkness,
as if I really care about this place.

The street lights snap on
and the blinking traffic lights –
vulgar against the black top backdrop,
sky between the buildings – I think
I'm sitting on my parent's porch after that ice storm:
the frosted branches glistening
as drops hit the felled limbs that lie below, glowing,
as if happy to fall
in brilliant devastation.

Here there are no branches
to fall, and I look at the Algerian waitress
in her shabby pants meeting her new boyfriend
on the sidewalk for a break-time smoke.
Their shallow giggles and quick glances
(as if they're always seeing something new)
are so quaint, sad:
because I do not know them, because a curbside
is no place for courting, because
I'm in this place with twigs snapping
from the weight of cold.

Dead Deer Poem 4

The night hums like an electric light left on too long.
My car engine drums and rattles over the wind-song
whistle. Incidental music as I head
home again. Snow litters the ground and shimmies on the road; nearly dead
angels writhing under tire tread. A few boards
are missing from the dire-looking farmhouse's door,
as if the dank contagion
shoved behind the planks left a void when it let the rage in
and itself out. I can spot my own
abandoned house—about a mile across the drifty field, alone
on a tablecloth of white. The deer,
whisper-standing, shifty in the headlight's stare.
I shut off the high-beams. He holds still, near the streetlamp,
as if in some dream, his unblinking eye, a beacon. His hooves, shiny damp,
stomp in the street, close to the car cabin,
come to greet a homebound shut-in.
I watch for a few moments more, endure the deer's eying
and then comes the blur—the accelerator and fur flying.

Return of the Green Lady

There's a garden within the city.
Behind the restored townhouses
a maze of alleys ambles,
full of trash, parking spaces,
and rats, fat on the refuse of families.
From my bedroom window
I can see the dumpster below
where old office furniture has gathered
for months, as if the garbage men
are afraid to unseat an unseen employee
as the swivel chairs spin in the wind
next to desks uncluttered
of their phones and files.

She lives underground,
in the city beneath –
this capital was not rebuilt
over a ruined one, like the seven Troys,
but it's like the reflection of trees
in a lake, structures sinking down
below the streets – a metropolis
of subway tracks, parking garages,
sewers with even fatter rats.
The soil in the front yard flower box
isn't connected to the earth's crust,
but tops a hanging garden
of electrical wires.

No wonder sidewalk trees grow shabby,
with nowhere for their roots to spread.
The ground I walk on is not solid,
but floating, floating
an illusion to cover
the disgusting innards.
I'm more like the deer than ever,
between the surfaces,
microbes dissolving me from below,
flies feasting from above
and that eye – that bloated black organ
bellowing on the world with its lidless stare.

That's when she came,
when the gases from the grates combined
and floated her before my window.

Her sleeve hung like strips of gauze
on a mummy when she raised her arm
to point and laugh.
Her head didn't tilt back,
her face confronting me,
laughing that I tried to escape
to this illusion of a city, to freedom
from the layers of history,
the expectation of destiny.

Psalm in Secular Language

The mass processes behind the flapping alb.
Darkness bunkers down on the snowcapped gravestones
where the stained glass windows glow,
shadowing the ground like televised stations
of the cross. Grandmother's plastic church house
with the electric bulb inside glows the
same in the Christmas village – cotton snow,
glass ice skating pond: I feel belittled
like I'm in it.

We mumble semi-coherences,
a backwards alphabet sobriety check
that sounds like a record left on in the next
room. Master actors of the script: crosses
on the forehead, lips, and the heartish chest region.

Rote memory makes for wandering minds.
The little girl in front of me (a crown
of ringlets, miniature Victorian dress,
Sunday best) leafing through the hymnal
upside down. The notes like Christian soldiers
with their bayonets erect.
She mutters the words in a strange new tongue
all her own, a new Aramaic: tongue of God, lamb of God,
they take away the book from the girl.

When the priest lofts the host, a baby
wails, a banshee echo bouncing off each pillar
with a meaning that's concealed, but nascent,
more decipherable than a million liturgies.
Idiot awe like a church bell,
an alarm, a choir.

Kool Ade, Aisle 5

Who came up with pink lemonade?
There are no pink fucking lemons!
Authenticity means nothing
anymore except on a
certificate from the Franklin
Mint – which doesn't make money
or juleps or gum, but bloody
plates – and there's no FDA-approved seal
for lemonade anyway, pink or yellow
and there's no difference between them
taste-wise, at least, except pink
doesn't come from a pitcher but
a can or bottle or powder—
all from a concentration like

Rosalita's , the juicer woman,
bent over, eeking 10% juice
from 100% lemons.
She grinds rinds across serrated
edges, a permanent Pledge smell
on her fingers, the tips cut
from slicing toil, and blood into
the yellow juice oozes:
pink.