

Abstract

Title of Thesis:

YIELD

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This thesis is composed of three parts, the first and third containing prose sections and verse, and the second an experiment with pentameter. The verse highlights language and line as mediums which can produce an understanding of themselves and a world, and work between couplets and varied strophes. While the couplets offer one kind of order, the variation in strophes offers another between line and space. The prose sections are counterpoint to the verse, the field of text working without the conventions of line and stanza.

YIELD

by

Karl William Zuehlke

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
2009

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Ink

All that divides
shadow from shadow

in a filament.
An indelible

seed over the
field charred in furrows,

blue set against blue.
And the wind rewinds

itself on the ash.
Against the dubbing of

field over field,
and the perpetual

dial tone swelling
to all sound, there are names.

Unless resigning
to moments before

saying this, scrawl of
this and the riving.

Against what wind draws
out into, against

the smell of blue ash
memory dyes itself with,

set words against
themselves returning white.

Book of Fixtures

There is a penny on the carpet, a spot of cold that clings to the skin of my step for a step, and then drops again on the warmer pile of carpet. It's the cold before a morning of work, moving jealousy about the woman sleeping for another two hours in the next room before she too gets up, goes to work. All that is is the present. And the past is within the present bodily, and does not exist outside of it in some shoe box in the closet. What we think of *as* what was, and what we think *of* what was, is only what remains present. That is, a 1972 penny does not stay in 1972. And memory makes present. The vodka I can still taste like a mouthful of pennies has little to do with last night, and more to do with waking. I am depressing the floor. I mean it's bowing in under me. If the penny is set on rim, I think it will roll toward me.

This is a State office. Gray walls, no windows, gray cloth cubicle walls, gray two-drawer filing-cabinets under gray desk counters, gray baseboards, gray flashing in corners. Everything should be empty and turned off. The telephone and internet cables run along the bottom of the walls. Telephone is vermilion. Internet is royal blue. Call multicore cables *snakes*. They can't be seen until the baseboards are taken off. The top-cap hides the screws that hold the walls together. First thing, take off all the baseboards and top-cap. Pile them separately by type and length. Unscrew all the desk tops and remove. Lean them in a stack in the hall. Call filing-cabinets *peds*. Remove the peds. Unscrew the cubicle walls, corners last. Corners keep a whole wall of ten panels from falling over. Stack the wall sections in the hall. Coil the cables by color. Once the room is empty, get the new stuff out of the just arrived eighteen-wheeler's trailer. Follow all steps in reverse.

Sitting back to strain a full dolly of walls up a ramp in the drizzle, I slip and a prong slices my skin on the bulge between the pit of my elbow and elbow. When I extend my arm the cut opens on pearly muscle grained with slight reds. Because I see what panic secretes into and winches up, but calm loosens, I think *my brain fills my skin. My body is only a thought.* If it helps you believe that I'm not just being macho, I'll say I don't have insurance. Or I'll say I am constructing the stack of walls in my head when I slip with the dolly, so it seems I am following instructions to keep myself present when I am sitting in Phil's truck, Phil behind the wheel, at a Rite Aid, heavier rain cooling and darkening. *Use hydrogen peroxide. Everything's clean. Take the pliers. Take the threaded needle with the pliers. The needle is a stronger, steadier thought than the flap of skin it is piercing, pushing through.*

Photo of a Bridge

Held so one eye sees
cabling in the gray

print, and the other
eye the tone finish

the parabolic
line to the tower.

It is as much bridge
as quay and mooring;

standing where one may.
The gulls morn the strain

of road, their crying
streaks from hands of maids

drying down mirrors.
How assumable

halls in dreams, carpet,
plaster, can refuse

into an arcade
of white marble with

whittled cornice, wells
and casement;

the bridge is a notice.
A desk is cleared and

hands are wiped on each
other, commuted

across the river.
A child biking

has applied her spokes
to suspending wire.

In an album a
place is being kept

of unshifting loft.
An inverted harp.

Residence to this
overexposes

the thru lanes as if
caught in a window,

then seeming nothing
a pane might reflect.

Wind off the river
tunes the rusting tier

of fire escapes.
The golden stipes that

top the black gating
of alleys. We see

each day tickets of
what we daily see.

Alate

That things can be praised
for being without.

That there is a world

to go out in. That
beyond it is the

gasp of perfect vacuum.

Or, not having song,
what chrome throats of flutes

jot at staff and bar –

we are without song
waking from dreams

of birds with black feathers.

We cough at their down,
catches on nightly

barbs in voice boxes.

They have never sung
and are praised for this.

The notes are too low

and of a neck that's
clenched until the pulse

falls in the body

the falling hollows,
as a thrown pebble

resting through a pond.

These birds have no hands.
But we do, as if

admitting so makes

this as casual
is to casualty.

Because having hands

means that they can kill.
As the birds circle,

sharing their flight path,

they are cutouts
we fold and flatten

with tweezers so they

seem to fly. Tie
wings to shoulders.

Praise unfinished scores.

Letter

A building panels
in orange the night

flattens and suspends
in itself. Up to

the walls, all unlit
things have been merged.

Into our hours
we each carry a

mark night presses on
the backs of our heads.

It is always dark
there, the part we rest

on shoulder or lap.
This is why there is

a we – because words are
what combine us.

Because night is here.
Through the cone of light

a streetlamp caps, a
figure has walked and

back into not being
told as walking or night.

It could have been you.
As if you walked out

and back into my
head. Tell me if we

close our eyes, if it
is night we see there.

Or if we open
them to see what is

on our faces, what we are
standing in front of,

if night is sown in
germs of light we walk

among and between,
into flashes.

Tell me if we put
out every light between

us and slept, if we
would wake in bodies

just after they touched,
or groping the sheets

we have found
we are altogether blind.

Book of Fixtures

I am 16 with hair blonde past the middle of my shoulders. At a restaurant in the mall, I am sitting at a two-person table with my mother, just about to look at the laminated menus. The waitress walks from some podium with pitchers of brown and clear colas behind me, and asks *what can I get you girls?* Her face flushes when she sees my hair stippled chin. Why do we feel this is the Diet-Coke version of betrayal? This is the moment when from all our complexity we seem to reduce. Or, we reduce someone as if she were an equation where we divided and should have multiplied X. Henri Lézaro writes of this – *the self is best represented by zero. Embarrassment reveals this fact, when the number at the center of the body can be read in two people at once.*

In the square pressed on the carpet where someone's office was, there are sometimes pennies, paper clips, other squiggles and clamps to hold paper together. Otherwise the room is empty. There is clattering in the next room, occasional thud. I have to pick the floor clean and vacuum because I can't lift anything with my left arm. Here, on the floor, in the accreted gray, maybe clamped in the space between a wall and shifted desk for years, there is a photograph. Only a mother could think this up – the whole family in blue jeans, whitest shirts, standing barefoot on something like a dune, the smallest child straddling the father's neck. I can't tell if the sky is a backdrop or sky. It's breaded with the shed flecks of someone's skin. Ecdysis. We have this in common with snakes, they're just better at it. Some things just are, by intent or consequence. If I could slough off my skin, pulling it over my head like a sweatshirt, it would be the size of a blanket.

The past becomes material. I collect this. Otherwise, in the present the self is math and aftermath, a zero, always giving you the same thing over and over. From the Arabic *sifr* – *zero* and *cipher*. And memory does this. The cross section of whalebone has nothing to do with this story. This is right before my grandmother dies. I am 6. She takes me to visit a scrimshaw artist, and he has harpoons hanging crossed on the wall, opposite his TV. He shows us the tools he incises lines into the bone with, and pours a little ink in so the unfinished whaler with three masts appears like fog is clearing over a harbor. Then he takes down a jar of bone pieces from on top of the fridge and unscrews the lid. He gives me the bone that he says was found in an 1890's sewer and is a cross section of a whale's smallest rib. I keep telling myself this has something to do with her. But looking at the piece of bone, I do not experience it.

Caption

Almost a handle
or binding resolves

from the table. You

were reaching for

what is not now there.

A trace in the reach

your hand still holds.

You might guess a book
a passage blipped from.

Or the coffee you

forgot you finished.

If you knew what it was
you might retrace

a rifled shelf to

the bed stand to the
couch and underneath.

To know the object

absence empties.

But what is absence
without an object?

The room is slipping
back into the walls.

The breaching holds

like a staple in thought

because you are looking
the only place to.

Outside, evening would

focus a page to
the light the closing

of a book measures.

You have begun thinking
you can reach in

double negative –

for the not not found.
Balancing the space

above on your head.

Graft

Displays stepped in books.

The latest liquid
crystal screen, keypad.
A dress poses toward

someone who would
rather be talked to.

A negative of self.

She is a torso
turned away in sheets.

Sleep is a white bird
shying at the roof.
Click the lamp on.

Take a pill, and sleep

will rest the vowels
of its feet on your eyes.

Because sleep sells.
The world develops

as you click the channels.

It would move the
decimal point of your

heart ten places

to have someone moan

her waking to you.
To stock up how her lips
purse, note her earlobes.

There'd be times to feel
your breaking in a

thousand-fold cursers

ranging the city,

buildings in grids of
shine and iron came.

The columns at eaves

of the bank and court

leaf acanthus that
thirst light above roofs,

the dome tempered blue.

In a wax luster
the bodies struck in
silence and marble poise

through the museum

the late park in low
west light cast in

barcodes of shadow.

Layover

Tarmac like whetstone.
Tire landing chirp.

Debarking. Your ears
strain from the garble

of concourse, voices
parsing at the edge

of phrase. This is a
factor of words. They

amass in a mess.
Someone is speaking

to you who are
a you behind you.

You are a stand-in.
As exits to exist.

Wheeling luggage trails
across the light the

flight zones slick on floors.
Tined escalators

lift above the traverse
following some law

of dispersal.
The announced loop of

gates boarding talks to
anyone and not.

Struck chime attention.
You haven't learned yet

how to live in air.
This air is live

with throttles and flaps.
Live like a take

of the laboring
turbines scream.

Live like an album
how you yet might

chime in an ounce
item of aerosol.

Book of Fixtures

Throw away anything left on the floor before vacuuming. There's no telling if the person it belongs to is still employed. Imagine the mother in the photo is the only one still alive. The rest die in a car wreck off highway 319. She goes to the funeral. She stays at her mother's. Two weeks later she opens the door on emptiness, walks back into their home. She sorts some things, sells the couch, gives her husband's clothes to his brother, thinks whether she should live there or move. Her sister says *move* from the kitchen of her apartment on 75th Street, phone held with her shoulder, paging through a catalogue of pastels. She stays for half a year, and then moves. She still works for the state. This is the part where I find the photo. She comes back to work, and there on her new desk is the dead family. Or maybe I don't come in until later. In six months she gains 20 pounds and then loses it running on a tread mill. In another six months she finds someone. He is a spontaneous divorcee. He takes her rock climbing and repelling on the short cliffs outside of Birmingham. Once he tells her that his father raised rabbits when he was a kid, and made him carry one bitten to froth and spasm by a snake. He never mentions it again. He might have just needed her. They get married. Then he starts asking for things that leave her stained with ache and fucking. Or he never wants to. He comes in late, sometimes drunk. Seeing the photo will make her remember the fingertips of her first husband. When he touched her it was like a thought.

I have a problem. I can't throw anything away. I have a closet shrine. The folded mirroring wrapper of a York chocolate from the last stocking my parents gave. A snip of hair wound with thread at one end from when I cut my hair off at 18. My baby-teeth in a tiny plastic pin box. An owl feather found in Carolina on a trip the summer after High School. Milky glass fractures I found in the Ichetucknee spring. A glass pill bottle and a corroded salad fork from the lot where we demolished a house in the old part of town. A striated cube of rock found at the bottom of a hotel pool. A pyramidal knap of flint from a first trip to the mountains. A gold pendant in the shape of a space shuttle from a trip to Canaveral. The pull of a zipper from an ex-favorite jacket. This is mnemonic. This is a crib sheet for memory.

The past exists as a reflective plain in the present. When a van fishtails on the glossy road, glances a fender off the stanchion of an overpass and bites the concrete of the next, in your head there are at least twenty vans doing something similar, hoods wadding. And there's the way heads move in violent assent at the moment of impact, the seatbelts skin shoulders, the silence. The fire truck and ambulance park, lights going like disco-balls. *The driver's o.k. She's bleeding.* The traffic is being waved into the left lane. The drivers slow to watch the rubber gloves compress gauze on the woman's knee; Velcro her head down; the lift, they're sliding her into the ambulance. Now just glass spatter marks the outline of where the van was. And driving by there, for the next two weeks, it seems the shadows of the vehicles are still on the asphalt, dark diagonals.

The Phases

For deep reaches all but blue is crossed out.
The spectrum layers in decreasing depth
to where the surface sloshes the sky
in globs from below, above, in spread of
azure flecks the light of sheering pixels.
The topmost waters touching detach bonds
as vapor the marine gulfs are spared from,

the salt that glitches ions weights itself down,
and seams the beaches dry are blown inland.
Saltwater takes electrons iron keeps
as iron and cannibalizes the static
to oxygen. Some plates of zinc may be
bolted to ferrous hulls and charged as anodes,
the draft preserved to part the water

that zinc is offered to as sacrifice,
the metal bait corrosion gluts itself on.
The flux electric fields make liquid, gas,
match a shift the water forms a valence from.
As adhesive skin or stipples condensed
and runny on panes of building windows
the mist is lent to air, clear ribbons strain

the marsh's splay of reed and cattail,
canals with square cement retaining walls,
and bridges nearing white with crenulated
guardrails. A stoma lets some from its lips.
A glass is emptied when left to the sun.
The lowest stratum has the space and warmth
to keep this clear. On where the air divides

and thins clouds seed and rest flat gray bases;
the vapor taking nuclei of upwelled
dust and melding into spheres around them,
amassing weight that will pull them back down.
Until this equilibrium is met,
it will not rain, the parts are round and float.
Without regard, in where it lands land has

leaf-bed and loam to wick the water.
The leaves compost in heat decaying cores,
or mulch in ever shredded layers.
All matter keeps unto itself an equal mass.
Should one burn a sample diamond and coal,
then measure from the char and ash per gram
dioxide produced and lack of water,

cinder and crystal may be known to be
the shifted renderings of carbon.
The water steeps the leaves and so is solved
to carbonic acid, the ready bonds
vailing through bedding planes and finding
rock bed compressed of shells to calcite,
the slab a spit of white covered by the ground.

Fractures are wedged by the draining to fissures.
Puddles divot the stone to pocks and holes.
The land above heaves open sinks to this
or concedes dolines to deep collapse.
The rock becomes a comb of flooded vaults
and conduits, the lack of light and depth
refrigerates and staves against erosion.

A car a suicide drove in and sank
will seem parked in the black a tunnel closes,
and prickle out the panning, guided light
a diver scans across a fender still
almost freshly waxed, the supple seats
and rearview mirror, the white increments
and needles of the gauges fixed at zero.

They drive over the lip of a sinkhole,
gravel thrown and spattering under tires
turning air, nosing in, splash and fill;
the water rising up the driver's window
is the kind of sleep no dream shall find.
Inside the hive of pipes the cylinders
made to compress and burn hydrocarbons

mixed with air are stalls of dark and water.
The reservoir of gas preserves the chine
of carbon on which all cells are built.
Some creatures without recourse of sight
have learned to find the haywire charge
a muscle of their prey gives in being flexed.
An anode may be mistaken for a bivalve.

As we are fined by sight to physical
lines of reason, the charge all matter lives by
or a lack light might seem the same thing.
Each next black moment we might follow
through the liquid which extends beyond all
reason into farthest pores and crevices
is the veil which we must learn to see by.

That this may open to a cave where schooling
catfish swim the rough circle of the walls,
or through a vent with flutes and peaks as white
of snow is cut. Even the rocks are charges.
Things are periodic; we respire.
Our breath electric. Within our veins is
carried carbonic acid in mid-exchange

of cells and lungs and atmosphere, the waste
that spars a body through with poison when
un-let. Polarity is of matter.
Were we given eyes that saw beyond
coronal hair set on end by coming storms,
or blitz that links a finger tip to metal
reached for, the most inert of things would crawl

with points and gale atomic light, a rock's
particles glitter, the hydraulic eddy
of rivers gathering unto themselves be
as though meander and fold of magma
passing under dock and cypress shadow,
the bridge in reach before the delta,
through the muddy flats of brine grass.

Compass

Turn a stone over

and a word will be
there. Ladle your hands

in a stream and lift

them and another
word will be coursing

from your hands. Say a

fox is running; its
tail will flick

like a candle held sideways.

Say this is nowhere
without screens and lights

taping over stars,

and that trees and stone and

water are words,
you will be walking

in a mute distance.

Name the birds in pines

cored by shade,
and they will fall as wings

and letters from a branch.

Say there is a stone
and there will be

a word you cannot turn.

Book of Fixtures

How it happened isn't important. It's like the montage after the girl runs into the guy again at a bookstore and they both want to buy the same book. *They run into each other again. He asks her to lunch. They take a yellow cab. They're sitting at a table behind a wall of glass. The flowers in a glass vase are central to the table. He says something. She laughs. They are walking. There is a fountain. He feints like he's going to push her in, she grabs onto his arm. She doesn't let go. Then they do something silly – bumper cars, or skee-ball, or eat ice cream. Then they go to a rooftop, and they are facing the sunset. We see their backs and the backs of their heads. The scene ends lifting above them, the horizon, sun off center to the right, the color of a lamp shade.*

We are sitting in a car, in the parking lot of a park. Down the hill are tennis courts, the bank lighting with pan shaped fixtures all dark. It's winter because she keeps starting the car and letting it idle. She isn't telling me that she married at 18. She isn't telling me the thing he did that makes her leave at 6 a.m. and about dawn on the bus ride. When she does, she is looking at the steering wheel, expecting me to react how she is to herself, like she just grew a sheen of scales. This is the part where we feel so far from anywhere that we can make up the rules. So I listen, and want to give her a blanket that a fireman would give anyone watching her house burning to a zero of ashes.

She walks into the living room from the kitchen with a glass of orange juice. I am sitting on the floor, using the couch as a backrest. She sits on the couch, puts her legs up behind me. We know each other's bodies – her habit of slouching, putting her legs up; mine of sitting on the floor, looking indiscriminately at the table when she's talking. A friend she's known since middle school is in town and coming over. They haven't talked in a while. When she gets here she's hugging us. And they're talking about things – who went where, what happened to Alan Dubois. Maybe she feels bad I don't comprehend them, but it's the way people talk who've known each other that long. She does the thing people who don't know each other do – when asking a question, says the person's name first. Only she says the ex-husband's name. There is acceleration, and I know what's coming. The explanation. She flushes. She is inflicting the moment on herself, rewinding her memory to watch herself fall down the stairs with everyone watching. Fall down the stairs. Fall down the stairs.

As a Thread

To have been of – a
place, a time, matter.

The wave spread sanded

through itself to
finer grains. In boughs

crimped by their growing

was a degree more

honed than desolate.
A salt-cured windedness.

The clean halting

a dream not known to be
so can have. And not

as a dreamer speaks

later of white
where a breadth ended.

Synthetically thin.

As if finally
words veer and belly

over the sand stopped

with vain likenesses.

How the dunes loped through
in swale and spillage.

How the bark of the

oaks there was chapping.

How the grass retted.

The sea is the oddest
of waters and

will never flatten.
The static kneading

along the stretch

and working into posts
of graying pine wood,

clothes hung on a rail.

A wake of song made
of all things nameless, water.

Municipal Yellow

The wear scraped in arcs,
and paint lacquered by

use and hands on doors,
a railing shined

to brass where it kinks.
Figures worn by being.

Blocks of buildings
worked into the air

stone by molar stone,
the walls parallel

across rooms and streets.
Right angles point

at the traffic lights
flashing yellow.

As if just in the
repetition of

corners one thing
of worth might be found.

The sidewalk's square out
to limit or shore.

The unbiased curbs.
Platforms and the tiled

columns, the train flash
in jointed yellow.

Compiling in
tenements, the first

offered corners and rooms
hoist up through the dark

girders and stanchions,
the scaffolded bank

of monitors.
Vaulting yellows wash

through to amber in
dilating pixels.

Left as the polish
hands wear into

wooden handles, the
grip and scuff and dent,

what if not self,
prayer is analog of.

There There

A closed eye. The lids
brush ends of lashes.

The duct squinted toward
in sail slack creases.

What was skinned and pinks

with ache, how this arm
can be held for sight

to oint with soothing.

Hold still. The dermis

like chewed bubblegum.
But now this is worse

than rugburn, this is more

sea-like, this limp
plea and your cradled arms

pushing in your

stomach. You wish your
body into glass,

or some assembly

with lettered tabs and
slots, you don't know how

someone will construct.

Strafing through crowds of
rests that each have caved,

you keep pointing at

yourself. And they look.

Pain tends to make all
things begin with I.

And all of us depend.

But you have made a
sail of yourself, as

if care were a wind,
craving someone take

over your abandon.

Show each pang, show them,
how your stomach is

pending; and some eyes

that open perfect
circles of their sight

shall see the cordage,
each gimbal and sprit,

as a name for you.

Book of Fixtures

There is a penny on the carpet. All that is is the present, and is present again. It's always the color of what came before. Orange zeros in the bottom of the glasses from last night; we drank how many *screwdrivers* could fill them. It's still present as I'm drinking coffee driving to work hung-over enough that stop signs are in italics; when I'm going from cubicle floor to cubicle floor filling one box with quarter-inch screws and one with socket faceplates; and when I've been doing this for a half-hour, when the gray walls seem what I have extended out into, and someone walks in through the doorway, it could be anyone, the whole room sharpens.

Bearing

The brunt rests a while,
then is flush with you,

a nettle point.

This is how it sets in.

And there is still slack
in kept routine, walks,

divvying, flipping through,
going to the store

for some bread and milk

or soy substitute.

Ball up a jacket
and rest your head.

This is a fit for you.
To true lives all

the struggle is to feel

both your head and the
bar of searing through.

If you must see your
self as a body,
it is an organ;

if a field of points,
one welling in them.

You can push this back

enough to gather
what is around you.

Give in as much as
keeps you giving in.

Things just keep going.

The clocks today are
silent realms of digits.

Stint

In white the sky neared
over the salt bay

a scope cleared of things.
The gray and froth

of sea sanitized.
As distance gathers

particles into
a single surface –

the moon, the sea from
an airplane, a hand.

Such width that we will
not survive. But the

small – the jettisoned
powder of impacts,

the spritz at rock shore,
the process forming

each irrelevance.
The sky will be white

again, an only sound
slop the hulls of rocks.

The windows this side
of the marina

are blind with white,
and above the warehouse

masts list from a stir.
Where the bay crosses

to harbor, the scrolling
things behind an

anchored boat lifting.
Pelicans in a line

skim the height of their
reflection crinkling

in wave hue. To look
away would pause them

in splay and beat,
almost specimen.

The water's surface
somewhere exactly

between bird and shade
if it could be found

and words tried to it
like swatches of off tone.

But they are skimming.
And they are so near

their wings might tap the
shadow wings rising.

Alba

If it can be called
light emulsed in the air.

The sky, a pooled cobalt.

Untangle and return
of the bine of stems

into a tree. Asphalt

lengthening in lanes
through a road.

It is the light that divides

the earth in nouns.
The field, the tree, the

sky fluorescing

in blue heat of ozone.
That is, for an age.

It is the light

like the pronoun thou.
From before this field,

this technology

of words that make the
sunrise, the rising,

hinging within leave.

From the sun
in a film of orange, the

horizon descending.
It is the horizon

that art descending.