

University of Mississippi

eGrove

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

2012

Cliff's Notes

Kevin Fitchett

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd>



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fitchett, Kevin, "Cliff's Notes" (2012). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 105.
<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/105>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.

CLIFF'S NOTES

THESIS

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillments of requirements
for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

KEVIN FITCHETT

May 2012

Copyright Kevin Fitchett 2012
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

Cliff's Notes is a book of poems in three parts. The first section, "Women and Children," introduces us to the humorous psyche of the speaker. "Ad for a Poem," the title poem of part two, is a long poem detailing a hypothetical, advertising and poetic brainstorm between ad men George Lois and Jack Koenig. The final section of the book, "New Static," takes us back to our speaker, who now finds himself moving through a world that brushes closer to death.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Bubble Boy.....	2
Cliff's Notes	4
Last Night of the Fair.....	6
Life Term.....	7
Women and Children.....	8
The Weather.....	10
N-E-W-S.....	11
Sirens.....	12
Space Suits.....	13

II. AD FOR A POEM

Paul Bunyan.....	16
Ad for a Poem.....	17

III. NEW STATIC

On TV, Late into the Game, I See Spectators Begin to Pray.....	43
Elmo.....	44
First Communion.....	45
Units.....	46

There's No Place like Home.....	48
Measurements.....	51
Being Seated.....	53
Priceless.....	54
Superpower.....	55
VITA.....	56

I. WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Bubble Boy

I knew Jerry making out in *Schindler's List* was bad
but I thought Schindler was a hit-man and when
the laugh track laughed at Jerry's mom calling
from Florida about it, I laughed too, imagining the heavy
petting, Schindler reaching from behind a curtain, extended *punjo lasso*,
Schindler whispering something horrifying to a
victim as her child watched through a door crack,
imagined the most horrifying thing I could
tongue in the glow of, though, of course,
I couldn't imagine this, I realized
years later as I watched *Schindler's List*
for the first time and whispered to the girl with me,
let's kiss, let's kiss until about three minutes in:
At a champagne party, a close-up on a tuxedo,
then the armband, then the symbol.
I learned everything I know from *Seinfeld* first.
When Jerry can't remember his girlfriend's name
but knows it rhymes with a female body part, Mulva,
he kept saying—I knew vagina was approximately Monica,
and I knew Rachel, but Mulva? The little things
I learned, like when I had a car in the city
I grew up in, and had to park even if it took me
around the same block more times
than I'd been around it in my entire life,
happy like I never would be again, just driving,
waiting for a space to open, the world outside
the window and I could feel it, the way in *Seinfeld*
when they "drove" through NYC, I realized one day
the air throbbing with headlights was just a screen
lit up behind them like in old movies,
going nowhere really, but you could feel *it*.
I remember when I first really got the double-meaning when,
eating salsa, George says, "This, Jerry, this should be an episode."
"What do you mean *this*?" "*This*. This is
an episode." And Jerry's like *Get out of here*.
When Saddam Hussein stood on the gallows with his feet
barely holding up his body, I knew I was watching
history, and I couldn't help but wonder, as he breathed
his own last breaths through the hood and into the night,
(you could count each one as it pushed into the cold) and
his life flashed before his eyes, if he thought of his *Seinfeld* version—
the one I first knew—wondered if he was happy with
the man in desert fatigues who played him, or if

he wished he wouldn't have been written as
a double-parker, George getting out of the car to
tell off this man in combat boots, a leather
fedora, a bushy mustache—his one simple, kind line:
“You should wear something warmer, you might catch a cold.”
Or maybe Saddam fell right there down
into the night forever and never knew he
was cast in the sitcom of the country
that crossed his desert like the Moors and pulled him
out of a tube and into hot desert air,
looking haggard and with bad skin, a washed-up version
of a man once in a sitcom. “The Moops,”
read the card in the game of Trivial
Pursuit George played with the Bubble Boy,
a misprint I didn't actually understand,
but I laughed because a dying boy
with the voice of a man reaching through
a bubble to choke George was enough, the kid
touching air for maybe the second time in his life,
the plain world that he knew would kill him
but he wanted to choke George anyway,
so he reached through the screen.
One day it happens, you play in the contest
where no one can stand not to touch themselves,
the woman across the street undresses
in front of her window, a clerk wears
a nametag above her breast that reads, “Dolores,”
you never kiss that one girl everyone knew you'd kiss
and you find yourself at the bus stop,
having forgotten that your breath does
this in the cold, like static appearing between
channels of old television sets, or maybe like nothing else;
you get your shrinkage, and a witness,
and there is that one beautiful weekend on the coast
that my friend pulled up a lobster from
a trap that he found in the ocean, exactly
like Kramer did, and we put it in a pot
of water filled with ocean and sat at the table
and waited in silence as it became that iconic red,
somehow, just as we learned it would,
in the steel pot, crawling in place, and we listened
to its sound like the axis of the world
grinding into itself, knowing it was alive, on the stove,
in the same kitchen, where we knew we were alive too.

Cliff's Notes

A poisonous dress. I didn't get it.
You can't eat a dress, I kept thinking as the villain
in a dungeon in medieval England stoked a beaker
between scenes of demesnes relevant to our Feudal System unit.
What was the heroine going to do, rip it apart
and put it on her tongue like cotton candy?
Then he flipped the fabric to his lackey—a waist-band of needles,
delicate as fish bones, Mrs. Robbilarid whispering
to her student teacher, *She keeps the dress on of course,
it will be over so quick they won't even know what happened.*
And when the guy with the most thin mustache in the film
propped the dress and the girl in it
up onto the credenza, I could not comprehend that
her moans could volley between pain and pleasure
like that, that after the first prick
of the needle she wouldn't jump back out
the way you would when touching a toe to a frigid lake.
We knew the mechanics of what was happening—
someone a row over demonstrating with an index finger—
all the major plot points, but not the slow chemistry of it,
how the nostrils flare, the frozen arch of the toes
(the big one for the male) as the oxytocin pores out,
how she stayed in it for the ending even though we could
tell in the low notes of her moan that she knew
her dress had been spiked. *She's just in pain*, teacher said,
It's a murder scene! Death, not orgasm, approved
by the district, which is why we learned that Socrates
stayed in Athens knowing how slowly his execution
would wash over him, a foreplay of ascending paralysis
that started from the heels, his body parts shutting off one foot,
one calf, one groin at a time. Plato pinching his toe
as he turned into a statue. *Feel this?* And all for corrupting
the youth. Yet the eve of his death he wouldn't accept being
smuggled onto the ship most of Athens was complicit in hiding in the bay.

By the time it's over they will know exactly what happened,
was phys-ed teacher Mrs. Kemper's philosophy,
who lobbied at a district meeting for us,
her middle-school pupils, to continue watching,
during the reproduction unit, *Live Birth*,
a film I'd secretly looked forward to since rumors
filtered to our ears years earlier. One day we walked
into the classroom to a VCR playing the *She-bump*, *She-*

bump of the Ultrasound Heart, as the scrub of a woman in an exam room sailed off, and naked, she spun—breasts, midriff, buttocks—rotating there as perfectly as the Earth rotated in the universe even while we sat cramped in our desks, our bodies turned on one trimester at a time, even into the third, and though I felt a little guilty by then, for educational purposes I could not look away. Then she was in a wheelchair, the husband pale as skin in an Elizabethan Drama, the little puffs of breath on the birthing table and the camera shaking as it bent low to the scene. Someone screamed. I don't know if it came from the mother, or me, or the lips of hair and blood spreading wide, wider, her body tearing itself apart like superheroes prying off street clothes to red and blue underneath. Mrs. Kemper calling out, *Take Notes: No epidural, she wants to feel everything, the first breath of her infant against her thighs*, which I think the woman had regretted right now like when you mix all the prettiest colors together and get brown. *Excrement. Blood. Baby delivered then the Placenta*, we copied, *Unmatched nutrients. My friend Kathy snuck it home in Tupperware.* And then the justice: the child slipped out, the chord was cut, we slunk in our desks while Mrs. Kemper walked around with a cardboard box repeating, *I repeat, No backpack stowaways* and handed each of us a tiny dress, a doll. And as we walked out, as if all desire could be reversed, we slipped the babies up under our shirts.

Last Night of the Fair

I step into the payphone,
empty, glowing—like a booth
Zoltar The Fortune Teller
had just abandoned.
I dip my finger into
the Bell's coin return
because I'd used my
last 25 cents on waking
the animatronic arm
that accidentally gave
me a card that read
*Men in plaid will give
you a job.* I was ten,
and in love, and believed
in change then, and
what I slid from behind
that tiny silver door
(a vanishing magic)
wasn't rare—a quarter,
one last question that
someone had known
a hand across town
wouldn't lift to answer.

Life Term

Finally my grandfather's hands took on
that arthritic curl that every man around his age
I'd ever met took on, fingers spliced,
carved almost, hard to describe but familiar, iconic even—
like O.J.'s giant paw squeezed into the leather glove.
Every generation has those moments
that mark time like a prison sentence,
when you start counting the days thereafter.
My first was sixteen years ago, watching
that dumb ass Bronco on our screen
in the living room, the Copter Cam
of the slow-speed chase, the truck centered on the TV
for so long it didn't look like it was moving,
The Juice dragging the flock of helicopters and cruisers
and the entire country behind him, the interstate
clear as a desert and it looked like he just might drive forever.
Since then I can't slip on a Gore-Tex mitten without
a thought of strangulation. Every Ford Bronco
I imagine a duffle in the passenger seat, packed
with cash, a gun, and a mustache. The arm
frozen above the jury, the hand cowering at the tunnel
of the glove, as if once the flesh enters, it can never
go back to what it was before. A portal will close.
Sixteen years later, my grandfather's hand
pinches at a beer, and I remember Orenthal James
helplessly, unbelievably unable to uncurl
his fingers into the glove. It was like he was
looking through a glass of water while
trying to grab a quarter at the bottom. And
my parents letting me stay up late to watch—how long
could it really last?—those dancing Itos stumbling
onto The Tonight Show, chin-strapped doppelgangers
doing the YMCA, the Macarena, moves gone
out of style, those robes sliding out from the set panels,
smooth as black water, eddying, night after night,
and me secretly wishing he'd get away with it,
that the nursery-rhyme logic would save him,
If the glove don't fit you must acquit!
If the glove don't fit you must acquit! A mind trick,
like when my grandpa lifts the bottle for me to uncap.

Women and Children

Years of it were waiting, my life was waiting
beneath the surface for a nipple to show itself.
Wading through the hope of slips in the JC Penney
catalogues, ungodly huge, too big to hide,
so thick they'd slap weather through the house
as I turned the page as quietly as possible—
always buried in the center, that full page ad
for the flesh-colored, strapless bra that
at first glance was a bare chest with no nipples.
So many years, just waiting. I thought
they were myths. Like unlocking an ancient
palimpsest I'd center my fingertip
behind the translucent page. And those
few months our TV accidentally beamed HBO
in red static each morning by some cosmic
tilt of the planet, before school, as my parents showered
and dressed upstairs I'd squint through that mist
and watch shapes surface, then dive under,
white noise like the ocean—
which by then I'd seen twice. Then that night
in the Wisconsin television market when *Titanic*
network premiered on two channels—
one station with Kate Winslet's nipples,
one with only Leonardo DiCaprio's pencil
illustrations of her chest, the black *Titanic*
on the black Atlantic, the cabin windows, the glow
of TVs reflected across Midwest snow
as the ship moved toward the unseen formation,
left to right across the living room,
Mom, sister, Dad all watching—not sure if
they knew what was coming, but I'd read
the controversy in the paper—as Jack Dawson
opened his sketchbook before commercial break,
a foreshadow, a glimpse of cross-hatched nipples
of a model with no legs, the amputations
what pushed his hobby from perverted-
nudey-diary to stoic-lead-portraits,
“She has beautiful hands, see?”
And it was redeeming qualities like this
that had network television drifting toward *the scene*
on three-and-a-half hours of high art, the iceberg
out there, its tip hard in the bare air,
so much more than just tip, its aureole beneath the surface,

an entire body built up under it, the men in
the tower watching for icebergs, day and night,
and down below in Rose's cabin, candles licking
the air like famished dogs, "Draw me
like one of your French models," she says
and DiCaprio's stencil leapt up and down
his sketchbook like a seismograph
and Kate Winslet touched her blouse, and my body flooded,
one frame at a time, and the moon hung there above
our house and the sky crawled past as huge
and black as an ocean liner with one port light on,
and I realized promises would be made and
promises would inhabit their impossible architecture—
or whatever. *Titanic* had a lesson but tonight
I could see her chest expand with each breath,
not one of us saying a word, touching elbows,
as she went back to the jewel box and donned
the Heart of the Ocean, which, impossibly,
made her more naked. And I realized if I was
on deck I wouldn't have passed as a child,
not after this, her nipples going markedly statuesque,
my mom saying, *Just look at that diamond*, as if bribing
some man that there's still room to save me.

The Weather

Then one day Grandpa Larry walks in
with his toupee off. All bald.
The hair he'd been wearing for forty years
had been larger and shinier and more beautiful
than was possible, like dessert samples
in the lobbies of chain restaurants that
are too perfect not to be plastic but who knows,
you were always too scared to touch them.
He walked into the kitchen like he did
every Saturday morning of my life,
my mom sipping diet coke, me clenching
to my juice beside my sister, who—impossibly—
hadn't known, like she'd lived in the shadow
of a government so oppressive
you'd not say a word about it in public
but other countries were giving it a nickname.
It was just a toupee. People are vain,
thirsty, dying things. Better this way,
not mentioning it as we watched him talk
about senior discounts or the Packers,
each of us propped against that ridiculously
huge, unsaid thing, like cool guys
in movies leaning against their shiny,
muscular cars, talking their little tiny
small talk, which is how they live their life,
saying, *That tailpipe chrome?* or *Nice do*,
which means, Don't go drive off into the
sunset just yet. And the one who lifts his cig
like a finger held to lips and says, *Chrome*,
tells us he's the hero. He has to.

N-E-W-S

Back from college, my brother & I play “Horse” in the driveway. There’s a ritual for the way some words must be spelled out, heard. Our mom had to drive to the doctor to get her results. I remember one summer, shooting the same ball as today, realizing any word could be used to play “Horse” or “Pig,” that in every thing there is loss.

Mom, Danny says as the Suburban rounds the corner. We step aside. *I’m H, you’re H-O*, he says. She pulls in, and waves as she walks down to the mailbox, then back up the driveway, slowing near the free throw crack. How carefully we watch her choose where to stand, as if each one of us has *H-O-R-S*, and it’s her shot.

Sirens

The birds—one above the house
parroting an ambulance—
go off one after the next,

like personalized ring tones
at the sight of an atrocity
the world had just got news of.

And now, the sun, rising
like a survivor who was unaware
of any darkness whatsoever.

I was making coffee when it happened,
—like I do every day, like I will
the morning it happens—the birds calling,

not singing, calling.

Space Suits

After testing the light with our hands,
my grandmother lifted us up, one by one
to the huge Xerox so we could do it bare-cheeked,
our paper bottoms flying out from underneath us
and into the rack, our excitement the equivalent of Neil Armstrong
blasted into outer space, boosters detached.
Here we were at Marquette General, a few years
before she retired from the oncology unit,
playing with the newest frontiers of technology.
And what would I say to comfort her now, if this
adventure ended the way these things always seemed to end
in, say, 1904, where at the World's Fair, families could see
their bones on the Amazing X-Ray Machine, children
who dipped their bodies into the unknown just like us, except
back then, months later, their skin started to itch,
their adolescent hairlines peeled back, and when their fingers went black—
their skeleton clawing at the flesh like a creature
that glimpsed light and was now digging itself out—
they'd have to amputate. I'd like to shake the hands
of all the dead of all the generations who first
reached into those black holes, who dared to go West, or lifted
from those shores the exoskeleton of a lobster;
all those mathematicians who talked about the probability of return
and then chewed off their fingernails and chain-smoked in Texas
while in space an astronaut did calf raises. The stunted
pioneers, the horrifying explorers. So that night
in the hospital, Grandma Janet made photocopies of our asses
not maps of our brains using the CAT Scan.
Also down the hallway were rooms with lasers.
Off limits, but where, years later, my mother knew she had to
modern-science herself to a pale place of forever-moonlight
and wigs stiff in alien wind. She sacrificed not a hand to progress,
but one breast, so she could return to us 20% more days
than if she kept it. When she steps out of her prosthesis,
I heard her telling her mother one week into that unpromised future,
she can't get over how light her own body feels.
And I wouldn't know if it's exactly like when those men
first stepped into that floating world—not having held her apparatus,
or stayed-up sleepless in an everlasting night,
or seen her scar like the crater of the moon—
but I was a kid who got swimming lessons, and I remember
after I'd pushed-off from the edge, I followed my mom out to the deep,
where she told me to dive to the bottom and grab her glowing legs,

and try to lift her off the floor, and see what happened.

II. Ad for a Poem

Paul Bunyan

steps off his platform.
His boot touches Earth,
moon-landing slow,
his stride, how he lifts
the hilt. All his life,
if before this was life,
like a cat behind glass
he has waited: this highway,
these cars. Wipers
wipe. He sweats.
His buttons
are wood. His plaid
shirt is wood. His beard
and his ax,
his desire, wood.

Ad for a Poem

—*Eat your words! Eat your words!*
Muhammad Ali

*

Poetry Magazine, 1950:

inspiration for a ballad

*Furniture of metric simplicity, of harmony in line
and material, makes our Southwest*

*House fairly sing of desert
charm. If you like your life
comfortable, casual, spacious
and calm . . .*

*you'll enjoy a visit
to Southwest House,
Eighth Floor*

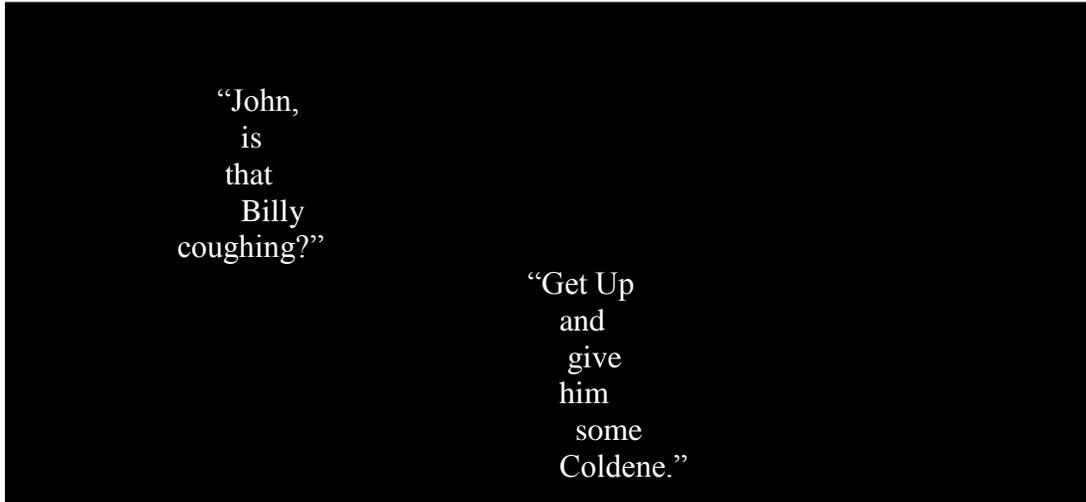
*Marshall Field & Company
CHICAGO*

(“In August 1949, Foote, Cone & Belding, on behalf of its client, Marshall Field & Company, purchased twelve full-page, inside-cover advertisements at ninety dollars apiece. For *Poetry*, the sales promotion office produced an especially tailored series of advertisements. Beginning in November, readers encountered products proclaimed to inspire sonnets, epics, madrigals and so forth . . .

By April 1950, *Poetry* was already engaged in the postwar sale of literature as an experience.”)
—*Poetry*

1.

1961, *Life* and *Look* Magazines



This is a couple talking in bed.

The first line

is in love with this second line.

These words want your sympathy.

They want you to get out of bed and pour red syrup
into the red throat of your beloved.

These words named your child.

These words breathed "Billy" before Billy breathed.

On a night like this the letters tinked together like moths
puzzling around a light bulb.

The mother has sat up.

Says, "John," which means "Help,"

breath held by the dark,

But the father barely rolls to his side.

And the boy coughing. Do you hear him?

Coughing. That is just in your head.

I'm not here to cure.

The first line actually has a contract with the second line—
speaking terms only—and in the bedroom dark as genesis

before your dad lied to you,

these two negotiated to be fully clothed. They aren't even a couple.

They aren't even voices. Word without

flesh. Her words rising like a sheet,
his words, not his lips, at her waist

level, if these were bodies. But they are not bodies. They don't have to be.

Because sometimes it is word, not the body's
advertisement, sex,

that sells.

2.

George Lois: The idea for the Coldene ad hit me like a brainstorm. This was the first time there would be no copy. No package design. No trademark. It was really the beginning of a new creative revolution.

Julian Koenig (Lois's subordinate): Close. But I came up with it and Lois claims the ad since I worked for him.

And, also, Koenig claims that Lois had nothing to do with his others as well:
Timex (Takes a licking and keeps on ticking)

The Xerox ad campaign,
(the one where a little girl on tippy toes makes a copy,
and later, a Chimpanzee doing the same.)

So in 2009 Koenig took out a page from *Adweek*:

LOW

LOWER

LOIS

This is an ad for truth.
The only account he's got left.

An ad man speaks best in ad,

a medium built on puffery, deception he said himself
and he was right—

The only name I remember after this ad is *Lois*.

3.

Number One on *Advertising Age's* Top Ads List:
Koenig, Lois 1959:

A white page.

The black Volkswagen in the upper left hand corner. Tiny.

Like a car parked at the end of a noir street.

What is it doing there? What does it want?
Do they want our money? The mob? The government?

This far off, you can make out a tiny silhouette inside,
the way as a kid you'd find Lincoln

in his chair,

ruling America

on the back of a penny.

So secret, so obvious.

4.

“I wanted my title back so bad I would've fought George in a telephone booth.”

—Muhammad Ali,

—(Not Jack Koenig)

Quick Pitch, *Koenig to Lois*:

It was a loss on paper.
The odds were seven to one against Clay.
Liston was going to squash Cassius
like a bug.

The day before the match Cassius gave Liston a poem:

*Clay swings with his left, Clay swings with his right,
Look at young Cassius carry the fight. . .
Now Liston is disappearing from view, the crowd is going frantic,
But radar stations have picked him up, somewhere over the Atlantic.
Who would have thought when they came to the fight
That they'd witness the launching of a human satellite?
Yes the crowd did not dream, when they put up the money,
That they would see a total eclipse of the Sonny.*

A picket-line, a camp on Liston's lawn, a casino duel (these happened),
but a poem?

Clay gives him a god damn poem? The
eve of the eve of the match he punched

the keys on the typewriter?

So fast, like a stenographer trying to keep up with words in a trial by breaking them,

punches that land before the sound lands, like they
are crossing an epic distance, horses cresting the Western horizon—

Clay typed it with the gloves on. Poetry in motion.

Hold an ear to the door:
a poem sounds like a boxing match,

If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is

poetry
said Emily.

Open the door—In the chair, those elegant shoulders, that moon-white
cape draped over them, “The Lip” stitched into it,
his back muscles working,
his skin rising beneath that translucent silk, working,

amalgam of skin and silk and light, chrysalis-like.

The next night he was the champ.

Slipped off those red gloves like caterpillar slippers

and his name was Muhammad Ali.

Float like a Butterfly. Olivetti Typewriters.

5.

Advertising Age's Top Ads list:

The Marlboro Man.

Death cells.

Cancer is the body over-investing in itself.

The body is planned obsolescence, a product doomed from the start,

which is the reason it needs a quick fix,

and sex:

The chaps and the leather face. The horse he rides one direction: West,

always West, towards sunset. His breath, smoke in the cold morning. Smoking naturally.

His horse a stack of muscles, smoking, too. And West, where sometime later

the sun will be swallowed like an inevitable diagnosis.

But behind him now, the bad horizon, lighting-up again,

every morning for how many years?

And the blue clouds building like cancer.

6.

“It was a morality play in which . . . the exploited turn the tables and exploit their exploiters.”

(Russell Baker on the Ali/Liston rematch)

Brain Storm, *Lois and Koenig*:

L: So Emily Dickinson said, “A word dropped careless on the page breeds infection.”

K: Let's keep in mind that she wrote before typewriters were invented, so if you listened,

outside of her room, through the door—what did her poems

sound like? That smooth cursive, then the dash. Cursive then the dash.

Long, dragging cursive, long press of—

Maybe like someone with a limp walking through a field of snow?

L: That's hard to sell.

K: Right. She has no body. People go to her house to see her chair.

She's written all of those letters, but—

L: But is the type of person who wouldn't lick the envelopes shut because that's lascivious .

..
We could push a lot of envelopes with that one, woman licking the edges,
close on the tongue dragged across that strip glowing like—

Flypaper. Worcester Envelopes.

K: Stay honest here, Bub. That glue wasn't yet invented. We are selling what
morphs envelopes to letters. Think of the Marlboro Man, who's all body—

L: Marlboro Man doesn't read poems. He squints out towards dawn.

K: Doesn't read them yet. Think of us with Phillip Morris. We dropped words so
perfect they infected a nation.

L: Allegedly. What about Walt Whitman? Burly Beard type. A rough. Dickinson is too
spooky.

K: That's what Ali's for. He's all body. Whitman would've worshipped Ali. Walt was a big fag.
Into the Orient religions too.

L: And Emily Dickinson who was asexual?

K: She had God. And a dog. This is America.

L: I heard Ali believes in a spacecraft powered by the finest black men, who
use their psychic powers to steer.

K: From his Doctor: *If someone came from another planet
and said, 'Give us your best specimen,' you'd give him Ali.*

Sex trumps his Nation of Islam quirks.

L: Quirks? "The Mother Ship will drop pamphlets and then bomb America

into a 390 year lake of fire.”

K: How bout a writer’s take? Mailer: *He is also, as I am going to try to show, the swiftest embodiment of human intelligence we have had yet, he is the very spirit of the 20th century, this is the prince of mass*

man and the media.

L: I thought Mailer stole the word you “invented.”

K: It is the colloquial usage of “character” which I harnessed, adopted. Franklin didn’t invent electricity, ass. And, yes, Ali is *the* character.

L: So a ghost and a perfect physical specimen who believes in aliens—those are our headliners?

K: And the Marlboro Man. Time for him to come out of retirement. Listen, we’ve sold Olivetti Typewriters with Joe Namath, we’ve sole making a copy of a god damn page of words. We’ve sold feeling good in the form of smoke.

These folks are the Holy Trinity. Here’s an early opponent’s quote at weigh-in:
Sometimes he sounds like Ezra Pound’s poetry. He’s like a man who can write beautifully but doesn’t know how to punctuate

It’s like people were training to fight a poem.

A.J. Liebling said his fighting style was like *a pebble scaled over water.*

His physician could only consider him from *an anatomical and artistic standpoint. . . .*
You just couldn’t improve on the guy . . . Perfectly portioned, handsome, lightning reflexes.

Even when he got a cold it went away the next day.

L: “The perfect physical specimen.”

K: And yet he’s known as The Mouth.

L: Sometimes it’s word—

K: Not sex

L: That sells.

7.

The Harvey Proper account:

On a conveyer belt, a chair.
A matchbook slipped under its left leg.

The words beneath it:

“If your Harvey Proper chair wobbles, straighten your floor.”

(Here, adding a line would be akin to changing *wobbles* to *is crooked*, which would require me to straighten the poem.)

8.

As Lois tells the story, He and Koenig go to the factory.

The chair is on an electric test platform to be sure
it was absolutely level,

“Got a book of matches?” Lois asked Koenig, a chain smoker.

Koenig handed him the matchbook, and Lois slid it under one leg of the chair,

“I’ve got the ad,” Lois said, “If your Harvey Proper chair is crooked, straighten your floor.”

“Ass,” Koenig scowled, “If your Harvey Proper chair *wobbles*, straighten your floor.”

*

“And none of that is true. He didn’t ask me for a matchbook. He didn’t say, ‘I got the add.’”

His is a marvelous story. The only thing that could exceed it is the truth,”

says Koenig, who also “invented thumb wrestling and made
shrimp popular in America.”

(Shrimp.)

Koenig gives us his word.

Lois gives us a story.

Lois sells a better product. (*Newsweek*, 2012, didn't mention Koenig beneath images of these ads.)

When Ali came back from the Olympics to a country that wouldn't serve him a glass of juice . . .

he threw his medal off a Louisville bridge.
We don't want the truth.

(That Ali misplaced it.)

We want the Ohio River.

9.

Esquire cover, 1968, Lois

*(It was one of the most iconic images of the decade . . .
The image is so powerful that some people of a certain age
remember where they were when they saw it for the first time
—Associated Press)*

Those boxing shoes with so many laces they look stitched into the shin.

Five arrows shot in Ali's torso, blood about to spill
to those white Everlast shorts.

You know paintings of St. Sebastian, the Christian martyr caught in the ropes, looking up—back
and to the left—like he just got hit by an uppercut?

This is the Nation of Islam version.

Muhammad's eyes fixed on something beyond the
the word, *Esquire*, his eye balls caught shaking,

like he was holding in a laugh.

The Passion of Muhammad Ali written in the lower right hand corner.

They both survived the arrows that pointed where to go.

It was the comeback that made the men holy—

St. Sebastian screaming to the Emperor, who happened to walk past,
that he'd converted and survived the death sentence.

(Then the emperor had him clubbed to death.)

*

K: Ali said, “My way of joking is to tell the truth.
That’s the funniest joke in the world.”

No Vietnamese ever called me “nigger.”

L: Rough draft.

K: He got his title stripped.

L: Like he was a poem.

K: A bad poem—

L: Staging a comeback. He must have taken inspiration
from the thought of *his* Nation’s mother ship,

K: They wanted to exile him for life. Lock him up.

L: *Ali: Once a year the mother ship comes down on the North Pole,
puts down a big plastic hose, and scoops up enough oxygen and ice
to last them a year.*

*The Feet, mechanical, go round –
A Wooden way
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought –
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone –*

*This is the Hour of Lead –
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –
First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go –*

True heavyweights don’t need titles.

10.

Pitch for Phillip Morris who must advertise against himself:

We’re at the Harvey Proper Factory.

The Chair.

On the conveyer belt leading to a sky so blue it's an advertisement for sky.

But inside the factory is all ashes. The ceiling caving in. Even the edges
of the copy singed.

But the chair
is perfectly lacquered-maple. Sweating.
Just asking for fire.

And what do you put in a chair but a tragic hero . . .

A cowboy, of course. The Marlboro Man sitting classical style.
Chair reversed. A saddle on it.
And he's holding Koenig's matchbook,
the crumpled cigarette package switched under the leg.

Look at him about to light the cigarette. The last cigarette on Earth.

It's the end of the world.

Bad Marlboro Man.

And the factory, it is cinders. The world is in cinders. Ashes rising like stalactites.

11.

Do these poems breathe? asked Emily.

Once books were made from vellum,

a calf Marlboro Man would've clucked across a steppe,
branded,

Do these poems breathe?

Some take your breath.

Some take the top of your head off.

In Lewiston, for the Ali/Liston rematch,

Western Union set up a string of transmitter trailers
and hired the four fastest sprinters at Bates College to run the copy in from ringside,

when word had to be held closer to the body,
out of breath

to hear Ali these days you've got to lean in,
the disease stiffens the muscles, speech degenerates.

Word made flesh,

Ali bowing in the East corner, praying, his gloves near his face. Ali standing
and walking out to center ring.

Word made flesh.

12. Pitch

Beautiful, the edge of pines.

The field somehow has held the snow that the sky first held.
A man is walking across it. After each step a perfect shape of white lifts

and disappears. You can hear him coughing. Each step another hunk of glowing
breath ripped from him like the lifebar on Mortal Combat.

Cough.

It is too cold. The pine trees just stand there.
Each boot step is like he's stamping out a fire. Cough.

He takes off his glove. The clouds bobbing past like round signs floated above the crowd.

You can die from fresh air. (the words rise on screen)

He reaches inside his coat and pulls out a cigarette, the orange ember beautiful, still lit.

Carry fire.

He takes a drag and drops it at the edge of the forest. The flame starts small, on the ground, and
then—like a hot air balloon waking—engulfs the tree, a swaying ovoid,

barely tethered to the Earth.

He hates forest. He walks away. The snow melting back across the field sounds

like ocean.

The black plume hovering above the canopy—like a spacecraft
sucking the life from the woods.

A horse lopes out from the edge.

He swings on.

All along, he was the Marlboro Man. They gallop West,
into the burning sunset.

On his back, the heat from the other horizon feels like dawn.

13.

Dear

US Forest Service, Phillip Morris, Coldene, Smokey the Bear, Midway Games, Amherst
Tourism/Amherst Chamber of Commerce, Nation of Islam,

Does this Ad fuck your brains out?

14.

So, is it Stalagmites

or

Stalactites?

Here's an opportunity: You see, no one. No one, can get the two straight, right?

Which hangs from the ceiling like fangs and which comes up from the floor like opposite fangs?

Well how about this: *When the tights go down the might goes up.*

This is an Advertisement for Words

As was Lascaux, the original ad for language.

Low

Lower

Lois

Picture this:

You are in Plato's cave, which, like Koenig's, also was an advertisement for Truth, as well as a monument to the human reflex of naming.

Socrates: Behold! Human beings living in an underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light; here they have been from their childhood. And do you behold their heads chained so intricately, for so many years, that they have never, nor will ever, see their own bodies, but only the shadows of their own bodies, cast by the fire behind blazing at a distance, a low wall built along the way, like the screen in which marionette players pass the puppets in front of them?

Glaucon: You have shown me some fucked up shit. And those are some fucked up prisoners.

Socrates: And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Glaucon: True.

Socrates: And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the behind them, would they not be correct to assume when one of the prisoners spoke that the voice which they heard came from the shadow on the stone wall?

Glaucon: Probably.

Socrates: To them, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images?

Socrates: Glaucon?

Glaucon: Oh, that was a question? I'm wondering what would happen if an object moved past the fire and it looked—on the wall—like a shadow pulling down its tights? What if one shadow fell in love with another?

Socrates: Can a being that has known no body know love?

Glaucon: In the future, people will fall in love with Emily Dickinson, who isn't even a shadow, just a voice in a room. Just a chair, really. At a certain age, would not a prisoner get an erection, technically, and then the penis would crawl into their frame of sight? Would they think this was the creator? Or a monster?

Socrates: Glaucon, is our contract not clear? Do I not ask the questions? Are you not in my employ?

Glaucou: Rhetorical questions aren't in our contract.

Socrates: The point is this cave cluture will buy anything. Not the objects themselves, but shadows. As well as experiences. People who go to a boxing match leave without even a black eye. They go to receive what Glaucou?

Glaucou: The reminder that their own shadows are floored before them like a knockout souvenir?

Socrates: Glaucou?

Glaucou: Feelings.

Socrates: A cigarette alighted on the edge of an ashtray, writing its cursive above the bar is not something you take home in your pocket. And your words, Glaucou, after you drink, for I've seen you imbibe fruitfully, are they not shadows and echoes of those feelings?

Glaucou: So you could sell anything, even, dot dot dot—

Socrates: Literature?

Glaucou: It's not a pack of cigarettes, but you feel something.

Socrates: Even a poem, Yeh?

Glaucou: I did get an erection from a poem once.

15.

K:

'Tm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you – Nobody – too?
Then there's a pair of us?
Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!
How public – like a Frog –
To tell one's name – the livelong June –
To an admiring Bog!"

L: Is this how poets stashed in attics try to pick someone up?

K: What I'm saying is being a "nobody" helps you be immortal. The best poets are the ones who have offed themselves. *Nobody*. This is how Odysseus escapes from the one eyed monster so he could go bang a few more goddesses before going home to his old lady.

L: So this is Dickinson? She sounds like a prostitute with low self-worth, in the passenger seat, who has begun to speak in code because of the car, a block back, following.

16.

"What you call love was invented by guys like me, to sell nylons."

—Don Draper, *Mad Men*

Yet the first time Ali got knocked out was by a kiss.

I was the first girl he ever kissed, and he didn't know how.

When I did, he fainted. Really, he just did.

He was always joking, but he fell so hard.

I ran upstairs to get a cold cloth.

When Cassius came to, he said, *I'm fine, but no one will ever believe this.*

17.

The Phantom Punch

Lewiston, Maine. Transmitters in the parking lot, the fight
beamed to the Soviet Union, Africa, the world listening. 4,280 eye
witnesses to the events that night

the arena set down, glowing,
on the edge of Lewiston,

no one could tell you what happened, beaming-in civilians,

the two best fighters on the planet

controlling the minds of the inhabitants of Earth

with a nod of the head,
wrist flick, millions bobbing with them, millions listening

millions giving their imagination to build these two bodies.

The government would look into it.

The countdown felt like no time
or a lifetime
the punch felt like air

or a 206 pound anchor

Ali over Liston shouting

Get up and fight, you bum! Nobody will believe this!

18.

I sit and sing and it is as if the moon accompanies me; then if I dance, it is my shadow that dances along with me.

—Li Po, 762

The Image:

Ali's glove across his chest, as if for the pledge of allegiance
to a flag gone board-stiff,

standing over Liston, Ali's mouth open in a roar
as silent as a word

on the face of the moon,

which, when this was taken,

no one had touched

Ali,

floating,

a minute earlier *Liston stepped through the ropes and onto the canvas, gingerly,
like a man easing himself into a canoe.*

Ali floating,

K: Gently cupped in those fingers that don't close. It would've looked like Ali was
afraid to rub off its ink. Like holding
a butterfly. Have you seen Ali, King of the World lately?

L: God damn I tell you it's beautiful and horrible,
the limits of what we can hold on to.

K: When's the last time you heard The Mouth say a word?

L: I think I'm getting it. You can always sell a fighter one more fight.

K: The rematch, Liston looked "So much like a man lost in a wilderness of snowdrifts."
Even Ali now—he's a shaking body.

L: Still, I remember him with his arms raised:

V.

Be a poet. Boxers get neurological damage.

20.

K:

OK, epic turn for the campaign,

Our man the Marlboro Man, lost

in Coldene Dark,

His hand up to his face as if trying to light up.
But his body is not there to sight.

He coughs.
Someone coughs far behind him.

Marlboro man is being followed.

He opens up the only book he's ever known:
a matchbook.

He flips it open and detaches one like a
stick figure broken off from a crowd of resistors found hiding in a closet,
to be made an example of,

made to kneel in the mini road. Then lit on fire.

His face is still rough, pretty, the huge cavern flashes before us, surprising, like we woke up in a stranger's bedroom—blackness.

Another match.

He holds it up to a cave wall, the granite like Play-Doh dented by fingertips—blackness again.

Another:

On the wall we see something, the way the ghost of a president comes out of a dollar when it's held to light,

the money about to become something else—

He lights another:

Billy

word flared in the dark.

Lights another:

Volkswagen,

floating words. They're written on the wall,

He lights another, ca . . . cssssshhhhh

You might end up like me . . . A writer of short sentences. Koenig.
Etched in blood, Koenig's blood, we guess.

ca . . . cassssshhhhh

What's in a name?

Angello Dundee

ca cashhhhhhhhhhh

Advertising is based on one thing: happiness. And do you know what happiness is? Happiness is the smell of a new car. It's freedom from fear. It's a billboard on the side of a road that screams with reassurance that whatever you're doing is OK. You are OK.

Don Draper

casshh

Time flies. Flies. Flies. It flies away. It just flies away
Ali

And then light. And then a perfect blue. He's out, we are somewhere West,
his shadow laid out there in front of him, on the desert,
massive, epic, like—

Marlboro Man doesn't care about a shadow.

He takes out his pack, removes a cigarette
like a fossil from the earth.

Now he opens the book. But

it is empty.

White space. He's used them up.

And when he looks off into the distance,
it is not because he needs a fix, but,

and you can tell from his squint, the slightly parted lips, his pen-like grip on the
cigarette,

that he's conceiving the first line of a poem to write in his book of fire.

21.

“Waiting my time to be one of the supremes, Poets to come! A new brood, native, athletic.”
—Walt Whitman

K: You wouldn't have known a civil war had been going on.
Or firetrucks. *The cholera patient. The slave. The Alamo.*

L: We can work with The Alamo.

K: But what about The Alamo with *The maim'd and mangled dug in the dirt, some half-kill'd attempted to crawl away, These were despatch'd with bayonets or batter'd with the blunts of muskets?*

L: Sticky. Look at these pages . . . his poetry is all product placement.

K: But Dickinson. She might have well been hovering over Walt Whitman's America
in an efficient little pod
of a space ship, her poems megaphoned through the cadence of genesis, as well
as the "Yellow Rose of Texas"
because her probes discovered that song was "in."

She might have been
*Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars,
Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring, and the
diameter of eighty thousand miles,
Speeding with tail'd meteors, throwing fire-balls like the rest,
Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its belly,
Appearing. . . disappearing.*

L: I need a few more words on what it's like to be in a spaceship.

K: Walt can't shut up. Dickinson knows when to end. She is like a cigarette . . .
a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied.

L: With her we get hurt without the saw, discombobulation sans the limb of maggots,
curiosity without peeling back the gauze, slowly brushing away a fly.

K: *A voice orotund and sweeping, just a call in the midst of the crowd*
as Walt would put it.

L: And isn't everything amazing through her eyes?

K: She could make you buy anything,

L: a god
a smoke
a buzz.

22.

*One fly alighted on the right knee of Ali
"See that fly? Mind that fly," said Ali.
His large left hand began to creep out. His eyes were fixed on the fly.
"You gotta know how to do it," he said, barely moving his lips. "The fly is facing me and
he can only fly forward. Now, I come toward and turn my hand back-handed. It's like a left jab."
Ali struck. Then he brought his fist in front of the man seated next to him "watch this,"
said Ali. He slowly opened his hand. Ali looked up wide-eyed.*

—Ira Berkow, 1971

23.

No Timex. No tan lines.

Marlboro Man fresh out of the cave.

The only measurement of time: he doesn't want a cigarette.

He rolls up the poem into a perfect tube and it makes a grinding sound like
a marble door rolled out from a cave mouth.

He lifts it to his eye, depth-perception flattened, his hearing muted
a little—and there, in the center of the peep hole,

a line of smoke, tiny as one hair growing in frame.

He lowers it and sees it in the distance,
there's so much sky, it feels as if he has fallen into it.

Almost imagined, he can see the curvature of the atmosphere,
the land held in it, flat and dark

like amber at the bottom of a glass
left by a guest after the party.

And the smoke. It is coming to him, a brainstorm . . .

The Volkswagen pulls up.

The tinted window rolls down—

We can't see who—the light bouncing off skin so white, like she's been in her room her whole
life.

“Hey Cowboy,” she says. “Need a light?”

“I”—

Something has happened . . . all his life his stoicism had been
exertion. Now it was restraint.

“I've got one,” he holds up the poem. “But I could use a horse.”

And they peel out,

heading *West*,

always *West*,

a dot dot dot

on the epic horizon, the sky quiet

as an ocean turned off,

the wake—

the rising dust

out of synch with the whisper of desert

under tire,

pleasant,

like in the old days, when horses

would crest the horizon, hooves on the silent earth,

and you'd have to wait for the sound

just long enough

that you wanted it.

III. New Static

On TV, Late into the Game, I See Spectators Begin to Pray

I like to think of this European
footballer who, after scoring a goal,
peeled back his jersey to a second
shirt waiting beneath, a white tee, a note
to his mother in Russian or Slovak,
written hours before with a Sharpie
inside a stall of the locker-room toilet.
And I like to think of the others, floating
across this stadium-lit pitch, each player
guilty with the need to score, and just how
many of them have silk-screened or marked
words for their sick, in bed, watching this channel,
each cotton shirt like a prayer a man can
slip on and fight at least to have it read.

Elmo

But first the group of children stare
at the man crawling up to their sneakers,
turning his face away from them, holding
up a puppet at arm's length, like a bag of fishy garbage,
the kids scared and not hiding it either, cartoonish
minis of the parents, scared too, as the
grown-ass man hiding behind a well-crafted
puppet creeps closer to their children outside the
Barnes & Noble strip mall. And just as the parents
are about to shutter their kids' eyes closed and lift
them away or fold them into the strollers, he
speaks, he speaks in this voice that seems to be
coming from a puppet curled up in a dark shaft
deep inside his own human body. And it is happening—
the moment the puppeteer keeps crawling back for—
every head on the sidewalk looks down the
length of his arm as if his hand had just burst into flame,
and forget the grown man prostrating in front
of the Baby Gap, forget the vision
of this man's mother holding him down
and beating him with her red oven mitt.
They see only the puppet, a furry monster
moving its red arms, its black mouth
like the dark side of the moon, and when the puppet
reaches for a child's belly, it is not a stranger
in a mall parking lot tickling a child's belly, it is a hand-sewn
doll doing it, and that's not a crime, that's
something you get in line to witness. Even God
had to use a buffer on Earth when he held that red bush
of fury between him and Moses, lest his freakish
love for mankind blow his children to smithereens.

First Communion

“We are a *quintet* technically,” the violist said
“Tell Pastor Jim to revise the program to *quintet*.”
Gepetto, she was referring to, the second violinist’s small dog
whose name I recall the way you’d recall
the name “God” after church service—“Gepetto”

invoked throughout practice because Gepetto was not
well trained except in detecting the second violinist’s
seizures. Then Gepetto would sit. The dog could sense
a seizure in his master as when I lifted
my black case I knew if the cello was standing in it.

“The untrained ear *cannot* detect the absence,”
the violist determined when we rehearsed
once through with only one violin. Though the untrained ear
would notice the second violinist—out-of-town uncle,
like me, of one of the blessed children—setting down his violin

mid-song and lying down on the carpet
at the foot of the rood. Thin as he was
from his epileptic medication, he looked like
Christ suddenly fallen from the cross. We rehearsed
this way once through, too—

the pastor sprinting between pews to revive him,
before deciding that he would politely notify the congregation
of this situation, “So enjoy the presence of
Brad’s little friend Gepetto as well as the blessed music
as we celebrate the taking of the blood and body of

our lord, Amen.” And the first kid ate that disk of bread
and Christ’s body entered his, our cue to begin. And the trained ear
could detect it—in how the horse hair raised
to the black bridge, in the *up bow*, the *up bow*—
how the instruments, that holy day, could sense our fear.

Units

We go looking for bodies again.
Telling our parents it's rated R but we can handle
the violence, strong language,
and occasional drug use—passing over, in our bargaining,
the tiny font of the last word in the warning: *nudity*.
So we watch in Jake's basement. Our mothers, they've
seen *Halloween*. What's memorable in *Halloween*
is not the sex scene—a hump rising beneath sheets
like the birth of stars in those Hubble Telescope images.
Our parents still a floor above us an hour in,
discussing if we could handle the stabbings,
us worried they'd remember this shot of the
babysitter falling to the couch, the slow-pan
slow as the rotation of Earth and now the woman's
moan we can feel building to a scream
as when earlier a man got impaled against a wall
and his girlfriend walked through the house at first quietly
calling his name. By the time we got to the breasts—
vaguely pointed, which scared me, breasts
shaped differently than the four breasts
I'd seen up till then—the woman was in the shower,
the jacket sleeve handing her a towel through the curtain.
This is how I learned love did not always win.
I believed in God then, and as Michael Myers kept appearing
on the roofs of cars, in mirrors, behind bushes
growing in the suburb just like ours,
I prayed that a woman show up naked,
just one big beautiful back and her turning towards us.
Or a vagina. I prayed for a vagina, legs opening
slowly as a closet door to consume this horror
as neatly as the case swallowing the VHS.
What I got was that music. What I got was a mask
as pale as topless skin. I could always sleep then, so I slept,
but when I awoke it felt like I'd been running in place.
I went into the bathroom and vomited into a toilet that
was not my house's toilet. I was sick, I told Jake's mom.
(*You can't throw up from fear*). I walked home,
the night sky scrolling by like end credits,
the stars appearing from so far away it was the past,
as time-defying as Michael Myers walking down
the street while the humans sped away in a truck—
yet he'd always show up. I understood measuring
impossible voids by light as I made my way

to the one porch that was lit, like a trap, at the end of the block.
And looking back now, always looking back,
it's as someone in an epic chase scene, and I know this
distance is measured not by years but how long
it takes before the coming of the next scream.

There's No Place Like Home

Every body in Kansas is underground
because there's *A Twista! A Twista!* its black braid
dipped into the farmland, Dorothy crying out to save Auntie Em
or maybe for Auntie Em to save her—

but before we can see who takes whom into her bosom,
the window frame clocks her.

And this is where I thought Dorothy dies
as she falls to the bed, then does a second throee,
and the puff of smoke that is Todo slips from her chest

like her soul gone to look down at the world one last time
because the house is rising into the clouds

and when Dorothy's specter drifts to
the door and pushes it open into Technicolor,

I assumed of course that she was stepping into heaven.

Sure, a witch appears and launches fireballs
from her broomstick and whispers to flocks
of monkeys wearing facepaint but as long as they were baptized

they'd be saved and everyone had to love one another in heaven
even people with Mr. Yuck skin and the dwarves
whose harmony sounds like flies swarming
a body rotting under a house—

but look at the horsy changing colors and ruby
slippers ruby slippers ruby slippers

*

Grandma Midgey turns to me and says, *I want to
go home.* We are under the table
in the house where we watched *The Wizard of Oz.*

Like a silent film projected in the sky,
the black-and-white funnel cloud
begins to lift us off the floor

like we're holding our breath at the bottom of a pool.

My grandmother grabs two apples
then presses them to her cheeks, *I'm the same age
as Judy Garland*, she says, and hums a melody
I try to mark through new static that is not the bath left running,

or the perch fry at Maricque's, but is just the darn
follies milking the poppy field into white noise.
And I remember the tornado's gravity—
hiking my socks inch by inch to my crotch, teasing
the ends of her lips into a smile—

is the euphoria of her hospice. And the click, click of heels
are her hands knocking her rosary.

*

I have to piss. It has teleported me
into the bedroom, and walking to the toilet I hum,
which means I am not afraid of the song, "If I Only Had a Brain,"
stuck in my head. Last week

I helped the nurse lift my grandmother from the tub.
Don't look, she said as I gripped her arm
from the other side of the curtain.

The nurse says the longer they hold onto vanity
the better, and I do love when she comes out combed
and gives me a kiss, and for exercise

we walk and walker around the room.
I remember the night we paced the basement,
feeling our way through a power-outage with a flashlight
and a Zenith radio, divining for the

emergency forecast. As a kid, when I woke up scared I prayed.
When we heard wind, she touched her hands together,

and I bowed the antennae into a voice.
For years I believed in heaven. For years
I didn't believe the world had always been in color.

*

She tires, looks pale. I drive back through the city we both grew up in,
seventy years apart, and standing in the bathroom mirror,

shaving like she told me to, I cut myself,

I think, when I first find it on my neck—
her red lips.

Measurements

1.

Now all doorframe and no bodies, like a ghost town,
the dates beside little strokes of pencil, as if a timeline

etched onto a backdoor by a colony's last remaining inhabitant.

You're growing right now

I'd touch my bones, harder than wood,
and try to feel it,
the way a tree might feel starlight pulling at its branches.

That I could grow an inch seemed impossible—
yet there's faith when you've got progress,
lead. My brother's pencil

laid out far ahead, tracks that, like a train, I filled in
and abandoned on my way out of that town.

2.

All of this has something to do with the Power Twister Bar,
three coil springs bridging two handles—
that other device by which we measured our shortfalls,

our future.

My dad could pull it wide as his wingspan.

I'd watch him do sets in the basement, sitting
on a chair. For years he'd pass me the bar and it wouldn't budge,
trying so hard to stretch—not an inch—
it felt like attempting telekinesis,

a sensation I'd learned from cartoon superheroes,
when the brain moves something impossible—a locomotive across the horizon.

3.

All that's left is a memory of it pulled across his body,
twenty years later, when we find the Power Twister in the basement.
He can't move it. I think it must have rusted solid, and I take

the handles, and it spreads open, smooth as an aperture,
and I imagine myself as old as my father,
eyebrows thicker, like eraser shavings waiting to be brushed away.

*Give me a month with that thing, he says. A month,
I'll spread it as wide as the great outdoors.*

How he tries again, prying it apart a peek,
like the horizon in a cartoon, where air itself can be gripped

and cranked opened into a portal. In this world you can step
into one landscape and out of another.

Being Seated

Waiting outside the restaurant for our table,
two doormen brought out an old man in a tall backed
chair and set him down on the sidewalk with the pomp
and circumstance of a dish with a silver lid. He glowed
with a paleness as only something lifted from the black
depths of the sea glows. Then came his children—
one with a napkin still in her hand, one wearing a tie,
one's dress licking at his face. It was Father's Day.
I could see, on his immaculate khaki pant leg,
the dark urine appear, like a child absently doodling
the shape of his home state from memory.
It was one of those few times in my life that when
I heard the ambulance in the far distance,
I knew where it was driving. One leg per man, the EMTs
lifted him like a chair from the chair, a nesting doll
pulled from its outer shell. Doors shut, the ambulance
ricocheting its dodgeballs off the skyscrapers,
traffic wimpled, and the kids spilled into the street
as if they were chasing the ice cream man. And like when
you stand in front of the Grand Canyon, you grandly
think of moving West, I briefly imagined my own death,
where my children I'd have someday like beautiful strangers
would meet me at my dying like fisherman revealed
to a fish. Though three hours by car to the North,
my own dad was waiting to answer my phone call.
Then from the restaurant came the names
of the parties, called into the street as is done sometimes
at the sight of a public atrocity. How carefully that day
we listened: Vandenberg, Simon then Kelleway;
Smith, then Renenbaum then Smith, and though I knew
my own would be called from the doorway,
when it rang out, my body, it leapt at it.

Priceless

Ad Reinhardt's "Black Painting" had been scratched during preparations for an exhibition . . . It was a multimillion-dollar painting, and it was a total loss—the painting is totally dead. You would no more put it on your wall and say it is an Ad Reinhardt than you would unbury your grandfather's body and say it is your grandfather.

—*The New Yorker*

And I think of that triple win
ticket my grandpa bought me when
I was a kid—a lesson about losing,
probably, his fingernails always
iced with silver. He handed me a nickel
to scrape off the surface, saw
my hesitation. *Bring 'er to life.*

I open the book I keep it in,
the only book I ever saw him
read, *Endurance: Shackleton's
Incredible Voyage*, something
he must have been inspired by—
his bookmark stuck all my life
in that same chapter:
bitten, black hands ax ice from
the rheumatic oars, the ship
dipping top-heavy into the black
Atlantic, the sail a frozen sheet.
I read a line, take out the ticket.
I never scratched it.

Superpower

Then when you get to the lowest point
more things pass for miracle.

Christopher Reeves strapped to a hospital bed. Can't walk,
can't open a phone booth, can't smell one scent on Earth,

years of the nurse pumping his legs like a handcar
to keep them from changing into the red and blue
layer showing through his skin.

Then one day the doctor blindfolds Chris as his wife
carries a secret jar to his nostrils and unscrews the lid . . .

*Peanut butter, he says,
peanut butter*

like it was the name of a lost dog who sniffed its way home,
the three of them in tears.

And if he was Superman again? When he could stand atop a Metropolis skyscraper
and pinpoint Lois Lane's exact location by her perfume?

We wouldn't be moved
by his wife circling her thumb around the equator of

an orange,

which has distracted us from the fate
of the man whose mouth this moment has been Duck-Taped,

his brain squeezing *Help! Help!*
his body tied from the neck down, except for

one toe
he's managed, somehow, to free

into the airwaves and is right now wiggling.

But tonight, across these senseless streets of the Universe,
no hero feels it.

VITA

Education

BA in English and Writing, Lakeland College Honors College (May 2009)
MFA in Creative Writing Ole Miss (May 2012)

Editing/Professional Service

Founder of *Skin Mag*
Host of Graduate Student Reading Series, University of Mississippi (2010-2011)
Reader for *Yalabusha Review* (2010-2011)
Featured reader at Graduate Student Reading Series (Fall 2009)
Represented Lakeland College Writing Dept. at Foot of the Lake Poetry Reading (2008)
Introduced Tony Hoagland for Grisham Reading Series (2009)
Introduced Margaret Dawe at Great Lakes Writers Festival (2008)
Assistant editor of *Seems* (2007-09)

Awards

Winner of the Elvis vs. Einstein Contest (2012)
Chosen by Ann Fisher-Wirth to represent the Ole Miss MFA poetry program for AWP Intro Awards (2011)
Chosen twice by Beth Ann Fennelly to represent the Ole Miss MFA poetry program for *Best New American Poets* anthology/contest (2012, 2010)
The Outstanding Undergraduate English award from Lakeland College (2009)
The Outstanding Undergraduate Writing award from Lakeland College (2009)
Co-wrote and awarded \$15000 research grant for *Seems* literary magazine (2008)
Adidas All-State-Academic Athlete (2008)
NCAA All-State Soccer Team (2008)

Teaching Experience

Instructor of Record for:

English 419 (Advanced Poetry Workshop; Spring 2011)
English 211 (Intro to Creative Writing; May Term 2010-2011; May Term 2011-2012)
Composition 102 (Spring 2010-2011)
Composition 101, 4 sections (Fall 2010-11, 2011-12)
English 211 (Beginning Poetry Workshop, 2010)

Teaching Assistant (Fall and Spring Semester 2009-10)
Writing Tutor at HARC/ Lakeland College (2006-09)
Language Partner for English Language Institute (Summers 2008 & 09)
*Counseled foreign students and advised and organized events for 30 Korean students and
10 administrators from the Chinese Institute of Technology*

Publications

Poem, *FIELD* (To be published Fall, 2012)
“Racked” on The Jim Rome Show, *The Jungle*, Monday August 15th, 2011
Poems, *Stone Boat* 2011
Review of “Unincorporated Persons . . .” publ. in *Verse Wisconsin* (2010)
“Suicide Bomber” publ. in *Edifice Wrecked* online lit. mag. (2007)
“Full Moon Haiku” publ. in *Knock* lit. mag. (2007)
Runner-up in *Green Bay Press-Gazette* caption contest (2007)
Cello composition and recording in audio version of *The Houdini Monologues* Chapbook
(Fall 2010; Parallel Press)