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Martin M. Cain

*University of Mississippi*

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THE WOUND IS (NOT) REAL

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

by

MARTIN M. CAIN

May 2016

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## ABSTRACT

Invoking “the wound” as a space of semiotic, subjective, narrative, and hegemonic rupture, *The Wound Is (Not) Real* interrogates trauma and its effects on the formation of adolescent masculinity. Synthesizing and rejecting the conventions of lyric-narrative poetry, the prose poem, critical prose, and the memoir, *The Wound Is (Not) Real* ultimately attempts to link “woundedness” to poetic language itself, suggesting that poetry rises out of rupture and trauma. I seek to give poetic language its own form of agency; one which resists contextualization or New Critical modes of explication.

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[GOODBYE ARCADIA]

Goodbye Arcadia, holy paroxysm, blue-breasted bird adrift in the rafters where it made a nest and rose a home, my bluebird SHRIEK, my morning SHRIEEEEEEK my fragrant days raised like a calf in the sun for all night we dreamed in the front of the bus, our future husbands, our future land, the future bodies we could call our own and moneyless lovers with kneecap stars and gars in the ice, we scrubbed each other's backs in a tub of brown water and the plaster fell from the ceiling and sank...

One time I was young. One time I drank gin. My body rejected fashion and the violence of skin and I saw a horse with a hard-on look my way, goodbye my semen, goodbye warm feeling which riseth from my rib and drifts like a fox to the frosted window I WILL TAKE YOU AWAY I WILL MAKE YOU MY OWN. We slept all night in the pickup bed. We made a fire inside a tent. God paced with a flashlight thru a stranger's kitchen, and when he opened the fridge the woundlight came and the lettuce wilted and children died. Everything I saw when I woke was white. Everything I loved when I woke was white. Everything that sprouted hairs in its regulated crotch was the color of the belly of the dried-out toad. I mew like a kitten who prowls in the womb; the Lego house killed us, our driveway killed us and the marks of the peepers were flat on concrete. I sleep in warm water. I sleep before money. I sleep in a pixilated pasture that smells like joy and when I hit the switch it flashes gray... O don't tell me you don't know the finger of god, don't say you were asleep when we walked in the room, you float like a gator, you play like a possum. You smell like a wound. You fingered the red. I sank into your soul from the ceiling supports. I was scared of sleepovers. The roads were poor. Life was mostly boring but in a beautiful way. I dreamed of a conveyor belt with my supine body in a upstate junkyard and it

was nearly dawn, it stretched for miles, it rang phallus production, it rang I was crying, I rang the policemen's doors and hid in the bushes and those sons of bitches they licked the soil. The mouth broke me down into smaller cells. The mouth broke me down into off-white letters. The mouth broke me down for it knew what to do and when I rise from the grass I am nearly laughing, goodbye fake nostalgia, goodbye gay body, they paint lines of flour along the trails, I swear I despise death and what it does and the shoe growing moss I will not forget you.

## [I WAS BORN]

I was born in an airduct. I was born on a schoolbus. I was born in a dirtmound. I was born in the innards of a dog asleep on the carpet. I was born on a platform. I was burning in the woodstove when I looked in the glass. I was born in a yurt on the side of the road. Death was my father. We had no spigot. He gave me a spongebath when we woke in the morn. I was born with a splinter. I was born with a flower. I was born in the day and fell asleep in the dark and when they left the room I hollered for help. The wolfspider bit me. The manchild bit me. My father pulled the fish onshore and tore open the gills to get to the lure. I was born in the bloodspool of the calf who was spilling. I was born in a spark. I was born here. I fell asleep in the rafters. I was born in the moonflow.

## TO MAKE THIS BANQUET MORE STERN & BLOODY

I am alive for a second, then not, then burning,  
then my subject is ruptured with its halves covered  
in hair in the light of the swimming pool, O unborn daughter  
can you hear me now when I lie on the floor  
with my head to the heater and the wind thru my sockets  
I bleed by the river from my open chest  
to contaminate the hole at the center of town  
where the men scream from pickups, you fucking beast  
you hallowed object ordained to crawl on all fours  
when you present your own self on the slaughtering floor  
they hold the bolt to the side of your skull, they hold the bolt  
and you're on your back for a moment kicking  
the underbelly of the gravitational pull, then nothing,  
then they track trails of monochrome blood on tiles  
then white snow with flecks of blackened flesh  
and an ecology of fingers comes up through the ice  
they hold the bolt to your belly and charge your nipples  
and your wretched sternum, and you feel semen run  
through the greenish tunnel then you're spat to the curb  
with the Bud Light bottles, then your body is emptied  
of first its sweat blooming through your cotton shirt

then the other fluids follow suit, then the primary parts  
of your autonomous self melt down in a puddle  
which makes its way to the sewer where roaches converge  
where the abject children are touching themselves  
where the milky mouth of the roach senate is writhing  
like mites in your eyebrows, like the involuntary flicker  
of your post-coital eyes, the economy of ants which crawl  
on sticky plates on the counter in spring, you're listless in bed  
you're thinking of God, the light flays the rumpled sheets  
and bisects my shadow as it crosses the floor, it crosses my eyes  
for my birth was a crime that split me in half  
for it was this banquet that made me this way

[I AWAIT A GOD]

I await a God in the back of the bus. I await a blue hand to come through the curtain. I await the rain once I roll from the truck and dream the letters all burned in trees. I dig my feet at the base of the lake. I summon the leeches between my toes. I walk this highway with a pillowcase of clothes and await wild horses from the back of my skull. I close my eyes. I finger the red. The ferns they caught me. The police they caught me. I conjure the crawfish at the base of the brook. I conjure the frog in the houses we made. I await the snow and a muskeg of voices and the radio crackling for cancellations. The transmission it comes like yellow fluid. The transmission it comes like a ribbon from my chest and circles around my parents' bodies... *You're staying home today* spake the Lord and slid his blue hand through the half-open door, he wrapped his hands around my neck, he slid a finger in the hole of my chest and fingerbanged the thicket of my humming heart, the thrushes flew, the dappled light, in my dreams I play all day in the snow and jerk off silently in the dark. The cabins they dim; the holes they shut; the yellow eye of the snowplow coming up the drive, for electrified birch for an inch of ice for an earthbroke heavy and about to come I CLOSE MY EYES I FINGER THE RED. For oil glands rupture my febrile skin. I sit on a milkcrate drinking gin. I await a lancet to break me apart. I await the snowsuit and the immoveable arms, for I looked like Christ when I slid on my belly. For I have the knight and the princess both inside me. For I was a king of infinite space. I came in a jar. I buried it in snow. For I bought an eighth of weed and paid in quarters. Forgive me my mothers and trembling brothers. Forgive me for drinking your mother's liquor. Forgive the bully who hung me by my ankles. Forgive my snowy sepulcher. Forgive my dead goldfish in funereal snow, for the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh my fluids. Forgive the waters of Youth and Death.

Forgive me my host for trying to breathe. Forgive the bears lonely in yonder woods. For boys showing their cocks at the bottom of the road. For the sled comes hard when it comes in this way. For my land is my land you indolent fuck. For my town had nine-hundred living individuals. For my town had one-thousand undead dogs. For my Arcadia exists in my hallowed head. \*brain matter splatters the bathroom wall\* For my Arcadia exists in my internal lake. For my Arcadia is snot in the back of the bus. For my Arcadia exists in the eyesocket of a doll we found lying in a snowbank by the post office wall. I close my eyes. I finger the red.

[MY DESTRUCTION]

My destruction, I take it with me. I breathe in whole numbers. I breathe in a dream with a gun to my head, and upon my waking, I stand in the shower and kneel in the stream; a field of flowers, the allergens enter, I expectorate softly with my mouth to the drain, I suck in hairs, I suck in piss, I suck in fear that fills my body like an egg and when I slice my arm the yolk comes running. I need a pill. I need a pill for my frantic intestines. I need a pill to replace my meals when I stuff my mouth and my esophagus clenches and I puke upon the family china and my sphincter tightens and the clouds turn hollow. I need a pill to swallow my mother. I need a pill for my body of dirt and saltwater and electrolytes and the nights are long on this side of the river when I call to the man who sits on his dock and he points a gun at my head with his one good eye. My destruction, I take it with me. My destruction, I burn sonatas. My destruction, I dream the car off a heaving cliff and I enter the void and turn the key and the car stops midair and I climb on the hood and dangle my feet and the earth it turns and fissures lengthen. The cows turn over. The trees turn over. The cows turn over. The trees turn over. The cows turn over. The trees turn over. The cows turn over when they rot in the bog and produce a nitrous singing from the orifice of God. The pill sticks in my throat still and burns a hole and seawater emerges and I drown my remainders. My destruction is the bass on the sweltering lawn. My destruction like a bomb. My destruction like a flower. My destruction is a motherfucker. My destruction, I retain it.

## ANALYTIC

*Is the existence of the wound self-evident?*

It appears the existence of the wound is self-evident.

1. Whereas the wound is the space where the subject collapses, where the stone wall collapses, where the arbitrarily delineated retainer collapses, where the subject joins with the body of a genderfucked fawn and sews its skin to its earthen dreams.
2. Whereas the wound is text like swallowing stones.
3. Whereas it leaks fluid on the seat of its mother's car.
4. Whereas my wound is art, for art is a splinter, for it throbs beneath the membrane of the body (it hopes to repel it) (it cannot repel it) it swallows artifice and turns a greenish at the surface in its futile attempt to expulse the Other. My wound was the already-decaying cow the drunk teenage boy tried to tip, his nubile fingers diving through rotting flesh and wrapping around an epiphanic gem that rested uncomfortably in the web of bovine innards.
5. An injury to living tissue, caused by a cut, blow, or other impact, typically one in which the skin is cut or broken.

*What is this poem, and what is its contract?*

6. The poem is air with a hole in the center.
7. For the lights in the rows they lead to the hole.
8. I swirl my fluids in a metal pail and the milk it forms a more human heart. I will break the glass. I will step on shards. I will bleed my insides through the macular drain.
9. A written or spoken agreement, esp. one concerning employment, sales, or tenancy, that is intended to be enforceable by law.
10. I exist because I own this land. I exist because I own your body. I exist because my name is written. I exist when I drive my car and look in the mirror and see the faces and close my eyes and hit the wall and close my eyes. I exist: for I am real.
11. A wound surrounded by mountains which are made from paper, which float on nothing, which make thin moats around yr heart, and the throbbing knight comes to say we are dead.
12. The wound is not real.
13. The land was a godsend. The fence was an opening.

[WATERFALL]

Waterfall. Backseat. Synthetic cotton. Deep-breath. Pine. Fieldmouse. Deerbed. Bird-nest, people-nest, mess-hall, mead-hall. Orchard. Orchids. Barn-owl, oaktree. Cleft-palette, laughter. Pinetree. Shoe Tree. Christmas Tree. Global economy. Bob Frost. Christmas Tree. Bob Frost. Birch Tree. Bob Frost. Regional values. Bob Frost. State terror. Bob Frost. Pet store. Corpse-rot. Copse-rot. Dryrot. Barefoot. Beowulf. Littlefoot. Lakewater, red squirrel, drainwater, pisswater, rosewater, Town Commons, deer-daughter. Heart-belly. Dear-honey. Dow Jones. Woodstove. Christ-rose. Rosewater. Bose Speaker. Taxform. Eclogue. Taxform. Soggyboot. Deadroot. Diversity Education. Dead-log. Lycidas. Handwarmer. Bus route. Root Glen. Kirkland Glen. Marlboro. Brattleboro. Wardsboro. Skate ramp. Radio. Mini-ramp. Radio. Handjob. Human Resources. Handjob. Dark-Ward. Rimjob. Deep-shit. Blue-Lily. Treefort. White-lily, wound-lily, light-fort, Cabin Living. Heifer-march. Deep Woods. Classic Hits. Foreign oil. Snowfort, lily-fort. Warthog, BluRay, red squirrel, Renaissance, pregnant-thought, opioid. Train-tracks. Walmart. White-lily, Aragorn. Mini-Mart. Opioid. Bad-Art. Pregnant-lady. Truth-matter. Train-tracks. Shoewire. Vodka jug. Opioid. Lumbar support. Large dick. Volvo. Backyard. Tie-off. Lumberyard. Black-eye. Rainwater. Drug mule. Pinewater. Dirtfather. White-lily. White-lily. Waterfall. Bob Frost. Mayfly. Autopsy. Bob Frost. Waterfall.

[WOULD I BE HOLLOW]

Would I be hollow if I knew where I was. Would I be full if my bones absconded. Would I sediment in bed to exfoliate my flesh and marrow my ferns and swallow the pills and lie in the sun until my body is bronzed and I feel exposed and coloured by the clouds abound until my lover knows me as a whiskey hollow, until my father knows me as the string that I am, for the Lord plucks me when he plays a tune, for he glissandos the days that blur together when I lie drunk on the couch and feel a ball turn in my chest and call it a fragment and call it a planet and call it a cosmic drowsiness that encompasses my frame of speech whence I breathe and piss and write and break down the burning fences around me and stand in the yard and say *I am hard* for this thunderous field in the dreadnought morn when I stand with my coffee I am headlights round the corner the crickets chirping like a crazy man scratching walls I piss in the hole I ford thy stream I culture thy barn my juggernaut gullet my lily anus the wallpaper peels the breakneck speed my chickenblood runs when it beckons a moon more lovely, a purse like an organ. A bodiless canoe. A curse undead.

RURAL THRASH VOL. 3

*after Frank Stanford*

I SPLIT OPEN WIDE YR TRANSPARENT EYE  
I CUT IT BUÑUEL STYLE WITH A PARING KNIFE  
WHICH I FOUND IN THE DRAWER BY MY COPY OF *WALDEN*  
THE BLOOD STREAMS DOWN W/ BITS OF CORNEA  
& CONGEALS IN A STREAM ON YR FOREIGN SWEATER  
THE CROWD GOES WILD, IT SWALLOWS ME UP  
I WRESTLE IN GRAVES W/ BASS IN THE GRASS  
AND WORMS ABDICATE THE SOCKETS OF EVERY SKULL  
OF EVERY LANDOWNER OR SMALLTOWN MOGUL  
YES I CUT MY EYE TEETH ON FLIES FLOATING IN SHIT  
FOR I KNOW WHEN YOU STAND YOU STAND IN DIRT  
FOR I KNOW WHERE THERE'S DIRT THERE'S SMOKE OR ROSES

≠

THERE'S A BODY IN THE BACK OF THE FIELD YOU OWN  
THERE'S AN UNWHITE BODY IN THE FIELD YOU OWN

[WHEN I OPENED THE BOOK]

When I opened the book, my lips went numb. My face went numb. I spent a weekend ghosting in an attic alone, a spell came round the room and took the feeling out of my legs and sliced open my eyes and I tasted the locker and cried on the bus and the sun reached inside me and scattered my innards. My eyes turned backwards, the bus turned backwards, I spoke in tongues, my hands were shaking, *Sit the fuck down* the driver said, I was banished in the ditch, I broke right open, a older boy pressed me against a chain link fence he said *You're gonna die* I said *I know* he said *Shut up* and stuffed a tube sock between my lips, he dragged his finger down my neck, the sores burst open, the moths fluttered out, I was tethered for days, I came on myself and bled from my eyes... I spent my adolescence sleeping in the bed of a truck with a pouch of Drum and the stars split open and my parents wondered where I was. I slept in the river. I slept in your barn. I spoke to horses in the dark and they uttered my name, the moon dripped down from the hay in the rafters, I was buried in soil in a cornfield maze and the spirit it rose as a smell from my gymbag and the spirit it moved as smoke in my room and I left my clothes on the roof to aerate the bodies, for will my parents know me by my awful stench will the woundchrist know me by my hairless pits now I have waited for you Lord with my hands in the snow I have waited for you Lord with the yellowy eye my throat slashed open and a small goat trembles I am pregnant with the void of a high school dance with the empty center and the circling bodies, I come as convergence, I come as a splinter, I churn my fluids in the punchbowl and rig the votes, the band goes silent, I come on stage, they say *Welcome your reigning king of the body*, I stand for a second I shout LONG LIVE THE WOUND I run for the exit, I squat by the dumpster, I reach through the snow for the grass beneath I reach through God's mouth for the frozen stream,

when I fall asleep my parents are dead when I fall asleep my unborn children are dead I have waited for you Lord inside the aorta I have waited for you Lord inside the ice.

[WHEN CAIN STATES]

When Cain states “the wound is not real,” he does not mean to disparage or discount the “realness” of physical and cultural violences. Rather, he suggests that the wound simultaneously functions as a condition of hegemonic oppression (i.e., we are *wounded* by the glassy fingers of the State), as well as a space of ECSTATIC PERMEABILITY. Not violence, but contamination; not transcendence, but an orphic entry. The wound disrupts the compulsory hierarchies of post-Enlightenment humanism—that is, anthropocentric dominance, patriarchal subjectivity, rationalist embodiment, white notions of transcendence, and the entire category of *human* altogether. Within the wound, narrative *realness* is a fiction: the wound undermines any notion of ontological primacy, rejecting the autonomy of the absolute author—i.e., the subject who inhabits the superior position—and foregrounding the extent to which narrative and notions of objective REALITY are oriented around the LAW.

In summation: Cain’s text reveals taxonomy to be inherently violent, but it also lends credence to Jameson’s claim that pastiche—and other postmodern attempts to replicate the conditions of late capitalism, to reframe violence—are ultimately a dirt road that dead-ends in the woods. The mouse enters the bag of wool in the barn; it makes a nest, it makes a family, and it eventually dies. ~~All we have is pleasure.~~ I want to be home.

[I WILL KILL THE ELK]

I will kill the elk or else not exist. I will birth a child or else not exist. The sky is gold, the wound is gold, the yard bursts ferns and billows of smoke from the sapbucket swaying, will spread seeds, will be spat from the woodstove and glower a moment on the hearth like the static of Time before turning black, will burst flowers from the dogs decomposing, their bodies piled on top of each other, their bodies methodically kicking in sleep, I will paw in the air of my bluish nightmare ankle-deep in the stream of the wound, the standing water thick with flies, the bodies like flowers dried on the wall, when I get a hard-on I will dive in the pool and sink to the bottom with infinite light like a circle of young boys cumswapping after class, I am forever young waiting for the bomb to drop and turn gold in the sun, when the man comes toward me he slices my arm, the blood runs out, he holds his arm to my arm and tethers us together and the blood of each body fills the vessels of the other, we are a geyser, we are the innards of a sparrow wrapped with thread, our parents are dead, our gender is dead, I will lick yr fur, I will eat yr young, the heads of our children are fused together, the hearts of our children are fused together and when they pulse the blood spurts fast from their ears, *You were born to be a father* you say in a dream and slide a needle through the hole in my cock, I love you wholly, my wound was my lungs, my wound is the sun I see in the shell and the walls turn red For I Will Spill I am seventeen and prepubescent I will slide the dagger through the beaver's brain I will see the walls feelingly with my ridgéd tongue I will walk in the woods with your dad's assault rifle and switch the latch and hold my breath and when I shoot the stump the woodchips fly, the kick hits my eye and breaks my glasses and the sky turns the color of a robin's egg

I will wait for you softly inside the body

I will wait for you fragile inside the hull

I will wait for you quiet inside the hole.

[THAT THING I CALL]

That thing I call the Death Apparatus: that thing I call the Swallower of Life: that thing which says *The library is closing* in its languid voice adrift from the intercom, which lines us up by the door & holds a gun to our unblinking eyes, which sees Indeterminate Light & quivers & triggers our skulls into moss, which has spun blankets from unwhite flesh hung like a beacon from its balcony in the square: which makes a white square with its membrane of knives: which believes in frames with a membrane of knives: which lines bodies lengthwise upon each street, which marks in ink its favored parts: which drools upon its favored parts: which keeps in the kitchen closet its favored parts: which with proper technique saws open its favored parts: which one day eats the corpse of the young with the apple in its mouth & toasts its goblet to the chandelier: which says *We've done it boys we've really done it*: which sees no blood from the chandelier: which sees no blood from the chandelier: which knights itself as Accountable Fairness: which identifies with the bird it is swiftly killing: which refers to its daughter as its God-Given Pony: which eats its turkey & falls asleep on the couch with the TV light on its meaty fingers: which wakes up shivering with its meaty fingers: which the next day alurch from the shower pukes upon its bathroom rug & washes fast its meaty fingers: which gets in its Lexus: which gets in its Mazda: which gets in its Prius: which gets in its Landrover: which turns on the seat heater & waits at the light: which sweats a dark death from its venerable hole: which turns the brightness swiftly down, for every screen is afire today: which says GOOD EVENING which tramples unfed faces on linoleum floors: which tramples unfed faces at a midnight sale for the flat screen for the rifle for the Large-Size Pool for the leather boots polished with the trampled faces staring back: which stares in the mirror & speaks to itself: which says *I am no*

*abuser* which says *I have several small demands* which says *I have learned to live like this:*  
which has drank its young within its frames.

WHAT THE WOUND SUCKS IN  
DOES NOT RETAIN  
THE ACT OF TRANSFER AS  
RADICAL REFUSAL, NOT EMBRACE  
FOR PRESERVATION OR OPEN ARMS  
OF AN EARTHLY MOTHER  
A BODY WITH A HEART IN EACH APPENDAGE  
OF A JUNKYARD LUNG  
OF A HIGHWAY STRUNG  
THE GLINT OF BOTTLES  
& OPEN OVENS  
MY FEET THEY SKITTER IN HORNY DREAMS  
I DON'T MOVE OR WANT TO MOVE  
THE GROUND SPLITS OPEN

≠

YOU WHISPER MY NAME FROM THE OTHER SIDE  
I RAZOR THE FLESH BETWEEN MY FINGERS  
I RAZOR THE FLESH & THE WOUND BEGINS SINGING

## TRANSCRIPT

This is your host Fish and you're listening to WTSA-FM, your number-one radio choice in Brattleboro, Vermont, and we have WINTER CANCELLATIONS in the Windham County area coming up for you in just one moment, right now we want to remind everyone to donate to canned goods to the Project Feed the Thousands food drive, Christmas is right around the corner and we want to do our best to help the needy; drop-off locations are at the Brattleboro Post Office, the Stone Church, Hannaford, and Brattleboro Union High School, again, Christmas is right around the corner, get in the holiday spirit and give to those less fortunate, we want canned goods, we want tuna, we want Campbell's soups, we want your dry pasta, we want your dry cereal and laundry detergent and Borax, we want any non-perishable goods you may have; Christmas is right around the corner so get in the holiday spirit by giving to Project Feed the Thousands; local sponsors for Project Feed the Thousands include Hannaford, Ace Hardware on Main Street, McDonalds, Horizon Dental, the Brattleboro Union High School girl's lacrosse team, your friends and local saviors at WTSA-FM \*host coughs audibly, his voice contouring into a smile\*, Big John's Area Ford Dealership, the Walmart across the bridge in Keene, New Hampshire; please make those less fortunate happy on this cold December day—on that note, coming up right now, we have your WINTER CANCELLATIONS for the Windham County Area, we're going to run down the list—there will be NO SCHOOL OR AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS at the following schools today: Marlboro Elementary, Leland and Gray High School, The Compass School, St. Michaels, Little Sprouts Daycare, Vegetable Life Daycare, Seedlings in the Earth Daycare, Your Commodified Unfettered Skin Daycare, Brattleboro Union High School Senior Unified District Number 6, Bellows Falls Regional School Number Seven,

Brattleboro Area Middle School, The Putney School, Shackled Wrists After School Program, Boys and Girls and Inconsolable Genderfucked Beings After School Program, Skate and Learn After School Program, the Guild for Sheltered Homeschoolers, the Future Business Leaders of America Young Squirt Development After School Program, Mt. Anthony Middle School—there will be NO SCHOOL TODAY OR AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS today at the aforementioned schools and programs, so put on your snow-suit and head to Beacon Hill with your toboggan or just stay home and sip hot cocoa with lots and lots of delicious pillowy marshmallows—but folks, if you’re going out on the roads, please be careful and drive slowly, you’re best off waiting until the afternoon after they’ve sanded the roads, it’s icy out there and the snow is coming down—myself, I’ll be watching TV when I get home this afternoon while my wife faithfully brings me plate after plate of her famous homemade brownies—wait, folks, we have an update here—there will be CANCELLATIONS AT EVERY SCHOOL AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM IN THE WINDHAM COUNTY AREA TODAY, I repeat, EVERY SCHOOL HAS CLASSES CANCELLED TODAY—for us older folks, doesn’t it just make you wish you were young again? I remember back when I was a kid and the day before big snowstorms we’d steal lunch trays from the cafeteria and sled down Beacon Hill, in the afternoon I’d fumble with Becky in the backseat before my mother called me home to dinner—THOSE WERE THE DAYS, folks, we’re going to have a music break and we’ll be back in a few minutes with more WINTER UPDATES, this is your host Fish and you’re listening to WTSA-FM, your source for community news in Brattleboro, Vermont and the best Christmas hits from the fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties, nineties, AND TODAY—\*cuts to silence, then bells begin jingling\* *do you hear what I hear? do you see what I see*—alright folks, we have more Christmas classics coming up, but for now we’re going to continue with the top of the

headli—\*SIREN GOES OFF FOR SEVERAL SECONDS, THEN FADES OFF INTO THE BACKGROUND WITH SLOWLY LESSENING FREQUENCY\*—folks we have an important traffic update, Route 9 is COMPLETELY CLOSED OFF for the time being, I've just been notified by the Brattleboro Area Police Department that a school bus driving down the hill by the high school hit a patch of black ice and went careening into the school gymnasium; sources are unsure at this time if anyone has been hurt—it's anyone's guess why a school bus was out this morning at all, given the ice, given the cancellations, given the massive banks of snow that are rapidly piling alongside the roads—folks, we just got another update from the police—it appears that a fire is breaking out in the gymnasium and the fire department is on their way, but oddly, no bodies were found in the school bus—authorities are guessing that the driver fled the scene, or else there's been what authorities are referring to as a “supernatural error” or a “glitch in the fabric of our collective existence”—authorities are asking all individuals in Brattleboro and surrounding areas to PLEASE STAY OFF THE ROADS TODAY, please stay in your homes with the blinds shut and your heaters on, if you don't have a heater, please open your oven and lie in front of your oven, if you don't have an oven, place your feet in tepid water, if you don't have water, lie before your shrine, if you don't have a shrine, may God have mercy on your soul—it's *really* coming down out there folks, and authorities are telling me that it's expected to be coming down for the next week or so; there's talk of a shelter being arranged at the local high school, more on that at 10—again, authorities are telling all Brattleboro residents to PLEASE STAY OFF THE ROADS TODAY please heed this call, if you do not heed this call it's possible you'll be driving and will hit a patch of black ice and your car will begin turning, you will spin at least seven-hundred-and-twenty degrees as you frantically grip the wheel attempting to regain control, you will crash into the side-rail at the edge of the highway and your forehead will smash

the wheel or dashboard and any unrestrained infants or pets or groceries or unverifiable objects in the front seat will be ejected through the windshield into banks of snow, you will feel the cold from the outside rush through the shattered glass, you will stare in disbelief in the rearview mirror at the bloodied mush you believe is your face, you believe you are lost, you believe a pop song is playing on the radio and you don't know who you are or where you've been *You are everywhere to me and when I close my eyes it's you I see* the world grows dark and headlights visible in your rearview mirror are coming from behind and a crunch of metal collides with your car and the heater's still running, our parents are dead, our cats are dead, there is no future, the kids take over this blanketed town and make tunnels from their houses to a space in the center and a light burns inside your chest like a garbage fire within a cave and the preteen boys eat each other alive \*host clears his throat\*—ah yes, folks, authorities are asking that you PLEASE STAY OFF THE ROADS TODAY or risk being eradicated \*host pauses for a moment, the air is silent, then the host's voice is audible but clearly distant from the microphone: *yes, what is it? Bob, what is it? What does he want? Wha—look. Look, get him out of here—get him out, we're on the air\**—folks, please stay tuned for a second, we appear to be having some technical difficulties—\*clunking sounds in background, sound of muffled voice shouting *I will stuff this miniature Christmas tree down your goddamned throat\**—folks, please don't be alarmed here, please don't be—uh—ugh \*sound of choking\* \*gun shots\* \*more gunshots\* \**how do those fucking pine needles taste?*\* \*sound of body landing on floor\* \*cuts to silence for a few seconds before returning to Christmas music\*—*do you hear what I hear? Do you see what I see?*

## ROBERT PENN WARREN POEM

On my computer hard drive, there's an untitled .docx file from August 24, 2013. It has one line of text: "I love narrative poetry because I want to live forever."

/

Robert Penn Warren has a poem titled, "There's a Grandfather's Clock in the Hall." Warren begins by invoking a patrilineal conception of narrative and Time, a force that is vile, violent, and fragile: like a sad man masturbating off the edge of the cliff: like white masculinity as an ugly delicate loneliness: like after I come and cry into my pillow while light comes through the blinds and makes bars on the bed.

*There's a grandfather's clock in the hall, watch it closely. The minute hand stands still, then it jumps, and in between the jumps there is no-Time...*

For Warren there is Time and No-Time, there is masculinity and its infinite ego but also the threat of the abject woman... Warren's speaker—addressing the reader in the second person—discursively shifts from the image of the clock through a variety of moments throughout a person's life (ostensibly Warren's). He begins in a presexual, oracular space: *You are a child again watching the reflection of early morning sunlight on the ceiling above your bed...*

/

When I'm 18 years old—two months before I leave for college—my father tells me.

He's reading a draft of a terrible novel I wrote. The protagonist is bullied (like me). The protagonist is in high school (like me). The protagonist feels unmanly (like me). The protagonist has hairless pits (like me).

One of the characters says to the protagonist, *You're a faggot.*

My father reads this passage—I'm standing in the kitchen, he's sitting at the counter—and he looks up at me:

He says, *You know this is an offensive word, right?*

I say, *It's in dialog.*

He says, *It's like the N-word for gay people.*

I say, *It's in dialog.*

He says, *I mean, you know I'm gay, right?*

And I stagger backwards.

/

Warren hits puberty. Warren holds his breath underwater. Warren holds his breath *just long enough for one more long, slow thrust to make the orgasm really intolerable*, and we know now that Time is a violent white cock, that narrative virtue lies in its control and its colonization of the abject other, with the unwhite body & the dickless body, with the orientalist sweep towards *the night-swept steppes of Asia...* And Warren's gaze now turns towards his mother, who was married as *a virgin, and your heart overflows, and you watch her with tears in your eyes* & then Warren fucks thru time and finds her rotting on the death bed finally, *She is lying on her back, and God, is she ugly* and the male poet *hurts* and the male poet *hurts* and is a solid body who jerks off alone into a bowl of raw meat.

/

A month after it happened, I sat on the porch with my friend Genna. We were smoking a joint. I felt depressed.

I said, *This sucks dick.*

She said, *So does your dad.*

/

When I find out, I spend three days hyperventilating. When I find out, I don't even speak. When I find out, I dream about saltwater and swimming to the bottom and touching a face and it

being my father's. When I find out, I ride the bus. I walk through mud. When I find out, I write MARRIAGE on paper one hundred times and breathe like a dog in the phone receiver. When I find out, I break up with my girlfriend. When I find out, I intermittently cry and watch pornography on the sofa while my parents are at work.

It eventually surfaces that my father had come out to my mother—and virtually everyone else—five years before. My parents had made the decision to stay married (in an agreement roughly resembling an open relationship, though they're more like best friends), and they both agreed not to tell me for several years.

For the first time, I find myself attracted to threesomes—with two men and one woman—and I can't discern whether my arousal comes from a fetish for male dominance, from a latent bisexuality, or from both. I tell my mother, *I like men*. My mother says, *No you don't*.

/

I said to my father, *Why didn't you tell me sooner?*

He said, *I didn't want you to be the guy in high school with the queer dad.*

He said, *I did this for you.*

/

Is childhood Arcadian? When I look back on my youth, I remember snapshots that hang in my head on a clothesline over a tub in an apartment that shakes when the train comes through; the afternoon shines through the dirty window and dapples the photos with a membrane of gold; the moving walls, the cracking plaster. I woke up sad. I woke to dust floating in light. I woke up in the middle of the night and felt empty inside but in a joyful way, I started smiling, & the moon was a sheet on the midnight snow.

/

If there was ever any sense of narrative continuity in my life (and I believe there once was), it collapsed in the moment my dad told me. As I staggered backwards, there was only No-Time. As I staggered backwards, something died and rotted in my upper chest. As I staggered backwards, I remembered the yellow slide spiraling in the yard and yelling inside with my shaking voice. As I staggered backwards, I remembering saying *Where's dad* and my mom said *He's at the pool*, and my dreams that night smelled like chlorine in the dark.

As I staggered backwards, I remembered Bob, a Canadian physician, a friend of our family. Dad and Bob had gone skinny-dipping, and came back dripping from the river in the middle of the night, *Don't tell your mom*, my dad had said.

As I staggered backwards, I remembered going on my father's laptop when I was nine years old. I saw a chatroom for gay outdoorsmen left open on his browser. I asked my mother, *Is Dad a pervert?*

As I staggered backwards, I remembered how my parents had been married twenty years, I'd never seen them kiss. I'd seen my dad make my mom cry on Christmas once as she ran up the stairs and slammed the door, I remember how we visited Bob until one day we never saw him again, I was with my dad, we were in the car, he was listening to Wagner, I said *Why don't we see him anymore?*

He said *We're not friends. And it's your fault.*

/

I love my father.

/

When I first read Warren, I was 22, in my MFA program. My first graduate workshop was taught by XXX, an elderly Southern white male poet. He was an infamously brutal workshop instructor; a former high-school football coach, XXX would take a highly evaluative approach towards discussing our poems. Virtually every student in our class cried at some point, and our stress developed to the extent that we'd often show up to class drunk or high.

XXX rarely dignified our work as “poetry.” *This is not a poem*, he’d say. *All poetry is narrative poetry*, he’d say. *Art only exists if it’s repeatable*, he’d say. *“Philosophy” is an ambiguous word, and I distrust it*, he’d say. *You seem to have feminist urges*, he’d say.

On the rare occasion that he actually liked one of our poems, he might say: *This is a poem, Marty, but you’re not yet a poet*. His veneration of the title “poet”—and especially “poem,” as a static, autonomous object—struck me as revoltingly New Critical; a disjunctive collision between Romantic conceptions of artistry and institutionalized, capitalistic values.

Despite essentially being a has-been poet himself, XXX had been friends with Robert Penn Warren, James Dickey, Larry Levis, and numerous others. Some of these individuals—especially Levis—were poets who’d been very influential on my work, so in some way, I felt compelled to listen to what XXX had to say. In one of his favorite stories, XXX would tell of how Dickey, on his death bed, had kissed XXX’s hand. *What do you make of that?* he asked our class, both visibly insecure and curious of our opinion. *What was that all about?*

When I’d meet XXX for office hours, I’d sit in the corner. He’d face me in his chair with his legs open, the outline of his dick bulging through his business shorts. One day I told him, *I’m starting to feel limited by the constraints of narrative. I want to write something more explosive.*

He said, *You’ll grow out of that.*

/

*Describe your poetic lineage, the white male professor says.*

This is my first poem about my father.

/

When I consider Warren's relationship with Time, I often think of his desire to step outside it—to hover above it like film on milk, like a membrane of fog on a pasture... To give the illusion of relinquishing control, but in actuality, wielding it authoritatively—as if to say, *I can step outside this poem, BECAUSE I OWN IT. I can survey this Arcadian field from afar, BECAUSE I OWN IT. I can conceal process, blood, and bodies, BECAUSE I AM A GOD. I am a white man who owns Time. This is for me, and I WILL LIVE FOREVER.*

/

After it happened, I knew there were secrets. I projected backwards. For years I'd been lying on the porch in summer with the worms beneath and the soil churning, but there were no levels, there was no Time, there was no air between me and the grave.

/

When I was in middle school, I remember leaning over to retrieve something from my locker. A circle of larger boys came around me, grabbed me around my waist, and took turns pummeling me with their crotches, pretending to fuck me in the ass, breathing heavily. I half-smiled—I may have even laughed—because what else do you do. *How does it feel to have lost your anal virginity?* one asked. And they walked away.

/

After this happened, I ate my lunch (gluten-free mac and cheese). I showered after gym class. I bought weed from a guy on the track team, who stealthily placed it in my bag. I rode home on the bus, and I stared out the window. I fell asleep.

*Young lady, the driver said, this is your stop.*

*I'm a boy, I said.*

Nothing about the locker incident seemed traumatic that day. And I'm not even sure if it qualifies as trauma now, but I do know that when I think of my middle school years—when I think of the bullying I endured, my body and masculinity issues, my aversion to food that verged on an eating disorder—I return to that moment. I think of that moment always. I even remember,

a few years later, joking about it with another boy—*How does it feel to have lost your anal virginity—isn't that funny?*

Does anyone own their memories? How do I write like I'm going to die?

/

**Q:**

If, as Lee Edelman suggests, queerness means *no future*—an embrace of the death drive, a rejection of the heteronormative thrust through Time and No-Time and the phantasmagoric feminine, of the endless desire to procreate—what does a queer narrative poetics entail?

**A:**

A POETICS WHERE PROPERTY DOESN'T EXIST

A POETICS FLOWING FROM THE NARRATIVE WOUND

## SELF-PORTRAIT WITH GO FUCK YOURSELF

I shut myself in a dark room and make  
the door-seals melt away, I swallow everything  
in the medicine cabinet and sink in the tub  
and spit up black bile and let it drip down my chest  
and flow the length of my abscessed legs  
the black nebula mingling with blood in the water  
and sweat of comets and toenails and bits of lint  
when I write I crawl angrily out from myself  
I pull a black ribbon from my innards and call it virtue  
I call it a mother fox rooting through piles of leaves  
I call it a dying planet I knew as child  
I was born to breathe and kill my parents  
and bury my possessions in fecund earth  
I have black bile dripping from my ass and staining  
the sheets and my words let me break inside my neighbor's house  
where I drag my ass on the carpet and leave black treads  
I break and slide I empty the wine I flush my body  
I piss in bottles I speak to the houseplants I play the records  
I shatter the glass and cut my skin I stick it with knives  
I stick it with pins and eagle talons and become a God  
and smite the oceans and drown the cities and pluck

each hair from my crotch in the bathroom on my back  
like a baby clutching my ankles with elevated thighs  
I sniff my asshole I see the fields I break the skin my ruptured fabric  
this poem spoken by the radiator broke and dripping  
in the corner of the house where we lived all winter  
and had no food and had no water and had no heat  
and watched crime shows on daytime television  
and slept with the oven open and roaches cooked  
my chest a den in a lightless cavern I am a loveless beast  
at the base of the pool I am a sleeping dog at the base of the well  
and the sounds come round me when I wake and see stars  
and moon filtered through and I smell the ocean in the distance  
and taste the salt and taste the blood and when I speak black bile leaves  
my mouth and when we kiss black bile leaves my mouth  
and touches your lips I leave black prints on glasses of wine  
and I left black prints in the corporate halls  
and I left black air when I breathed in my school  
and when I hit the locker and licked the linoleum  
like they said to do I pulsed black inside when they pressed me to the wall  
they said we have now tainted your virginal asshole  
you have now been fucked in the rear by the son of a cop  
who was high on coke with hell in his eyes  
I am only black waters of a churning ocean

I piss currents like Niagara I burn betwixt layers  
at the home of the preacher I ride up on my bike  
and throw heavy rocks and break each window  
I walk inside and the door to the kitchen is shut with light  
flooding from the crack I kick the door down and the preacher's wife  
is screwing the boy from down the street, I know him from class  
I start back and leave the room as they start shouting  
*Get the fuck back here* and I'm out of there, I'm not thinking  
about the bile that leaves my mouth before it leaves my mouth before I  
lick I break I open up I swallow the feathers of birds of fish  
of deadtree current the elm hollow the silver prick the sweat  
of the moon soaking through the pants of god as he stands nervous  
before the Delphic realm, he says *Today we will dissect the body of a frog*  
I rode in a cab to the center of town  
and the man he held a knife to my neck he said *Don't you move*  
and he pulled each coin slow from my pocket and he kicked me down  
I hit the concrete I sniffed the gutter and no one saw  
my body as they passed I decompose I grow to nothing  
which is to say I do not grow I lick black bile I spit black bile  
when I yawn I splatter the blood of hogs I sing of God  
who rips wings from pigeons dead in the park I sing of God  
who bleeds from each orifice and snorts pebbles from his nose  
I sing of God who is a flicking tail of a horse for love is a horse of course

whose gas fuels the stench of hell whose trash and toxic waste  
end up in hell the project is unsustainable the light from  
the peripheries the gas station clerk with a toothpick  
hanging from his lips the current of bass in my head as I walk  
to the register the black bile behind my eyes  
inside my ears I hear a drone I wake everyday to the sound  
and sweat through the sheets and drill a hole in the wall  
which I fuck I cannot even speak until I have fucked  
the wall in the morning until I have dressed and petted the cat  
and fucked the wall and showered and eaten and spit up  
black bile in the base of the tub and on the tiles and burning  
and burning and burning and breaking and burning and the smell  
of hair burning left on the stove don't fucking tell me  
I have nothing blue left to say or my bile means nothing  
to the bodies piled before the void to the titans trading cards  
in the yard after class to the broken marbles at the base of hell  
to the drawers where the devil keeps confiscated toys  
I snuck in at night I stole everything I saw  
I got a slingshot I hit God in the back of the head  
I stuck a shiv in the paw of Peter's cat  
I bounced a rubber ball against a painting of Mary  
I broke open the caskets filled with the sinners I rounded the wagons  
I filled them up I left lit candles and didn't give a shit whether

they burned all the tents down, so of course they did  
so of course I spit black bile and spiders left my throat and laid  
their eggs and took their drugs and made mazes in skies  
and the swallows kissed paper planes as they crested the air  
and I ran out of things to think of as I laid on my back  
as I thought of the stars

[AND WHERE DID DAD GO]

And where did dad go when he left the house, where do birds land when they land in the snow, how did I feel when I fell through the ice and my skin turned blue which is the only way I can match the sky, the dogs followed suit, they jumped thru the hole, we swirled in a circle till we reached the bottom and in the eyes of trout I saw the unified field, how when I stared at the thermometer I felt suddenly dead, how when headlights crossed I felt suddenly dead, when we drank whiskey in the woods on a rotting log and you said *I will love you now* and we both felt dead and linked our fingers and the blood shot from our toes to our skulls and capillaries in our eyes exploded, how your eyes are hung from wires in my dreams and they shake like a mobile above a baby's crib, I love your laugh, I love the sunspots that swim in this town, we saw a pack of hounds get hit by a truck and the driver stopped and cracked a smile, he said *God is watching*, he backed up fast to kill the last dog and I still dream about the brains coming out thru the mouth, I would pull out the sword, I would sob in hope, I am chained to the bed when I think of my father, I remove my tongue when I think of my father, how the holes in my fingers are filled with teeth and my retinal heart it hangs from a string, how we drove until we saw a frozen cow, how I stuck an icpick in its hardened gut and broke the crust till the meat was tender, I fingered the hole and I looked in its eye, I procured a coin and the cow fell over, how black fluid leaked from the colander skin and the silos were beacons on the heralded lawn, I miss my dad, I miss every retriever I've ever owned, I miss the projector dust dream that never was and the invented prom queen who lives in my skull, the past like a dollar I left in my jacket, the dick like a memory I found in my throat, I miss the lawnchair yawn on my bedroom roof, I miss the horsehair static as I switched the station and the foil I used for better reception O

MOUNTAINOUS FATHER CAN YOU GIVE ME A SIGNAL I miss my dreams of endless snow and the roads blocked off until further notice, *Have you been drinking son* the policeman said, you started laughing, the lights were flashing, I miss my calf-muscle spasm our first time in bed, I started screaming, my god is a plow, my god is a birch, *Was it good* she said, the dark came free, the bats came free, the moths left my mouth for the mouths of my lovers, when I came to my heart it was filled with suitors, the tables were full, my heart is a cavern but I mean it is tender, I cut my tendon with my mother's cleaver and something snapped in the blue sky above, you used every scrap the body yielded, you smiled as you stuffed your fist in the bird, and I finger the sore and my god are you living.

THE WOODPILE BURNS  
BETWEEN MY HOUSE  
AND MY BRAIN  
BETWEEN MY BRAIN  
AND PULSATING LINES  
W/ WOLFSPIDERS INSIDE  
AND ROTTING MICE  
THE FEVERDREAM TURNS  
ITSELF ON ITS BELLY  
I SEE BLUE NEURONS THROB  
WHEN I TOUCH MY EYE  
I SEE MILKLIVER FINGERS  
WHEN I TOUCH THE BAG  
NOT A SITE OF VIOLENCE  
BUT AN ORPHIC OPENING  
FROM THE HOLE IN MY HEART  
W/ A DIAMONDBACK HISSING  
I EJACULATE SOIL I GROW CLOSE TO THE EARTH  
≠  
A DIGITIZED TOMBSTONE ON YR BLUISH SCREEN  
AND THE EXCAVATOR WEEPS ALL NIGHT ON THE LAWN

[DARK CLOUD]

Dark cloud. Skinless grape. Heaven-finger. Snowplow. Lawnmower. Landfill. Dead beaver. Landowner. Dead otter. PRIVATE PROPERTY. No Children. PRIVATE PROPERTY. No children. Sapsucker. Hot spasm. Hot flash. Derelict. Belted arm. Derelict. Red dress. Derelict. Lupine lady. Wolf Lady. Wolf Daddy. Melancholy. Milk bottle. God-nipple. Shirtless Neighbor. PRIVATE WALK. Year of pond-scum. Spotted skimmer. Drunken babysitter. Garter snake. Garden stake. Tomato wire. Tree of nails. Bark letters. No father. No cable. No friends. No beer. No flock. No Arden. No daughter. No gully. No tracks. No border. Dark cloud.

NARRATIVE POEM

They wanted a baby

They loved each other

The woman ovulated

She smelled like ocean

When they drove their truck they listened to static

*We do it*, said the man, *Because we love the baby*

They desired a child in their likeness

They desired a child with unwrinkled feet

They desired a child with lobes like the father

They stopped the truck and stared down the ridge

The waves were crashing

The moon spilled over

/

A pack of hounds came down from the hills

*You do this*, said the dog, *Because you want a baby*

The wounds of the dogs were painted blue

The hounds were barking

The man was laughing

A gold ring hung from the ear of the dog

He left a champagne trail wherever he went

Like a slug on the door, a cloud by itself

His balls were enormous

*I love the baby*, the woman said

A gold medallion hung from her breasts

She ovulated, washed her hair

She turned on the TV and drank hot milk

She slept in her bed and dreamed of foxes

/

She dreamed a car humming on the ridge

With teenagers smoking in the backseat

And the chassis squeaking: the howling dogs

And the smell of pine

And a crow eating the life in the branches

/

She dreamed she woke and walked to the ridge

She dreamed the landfill from where she stood

The seagulls circled around her house

And their caws came thru the holes in her head

And whistled round the medallion that hung at her chest

Her landfill dream was parallel

To cul-de-sacs in the folds of her brain

Where children played on plastic slides

As the afternoon turned slowly to rust

And men were leering from the drainage ditch

Each dream overlapped with dreams

Of other dreamers and cosmic funds

And she saw their fluids intermingle

And she saw the piles grow and grow

The caws of gulls filled up the dark

The world in her skull was a slab of earth

Surrounded by clouds and open waters

Divided into squares with plastic labels

The hounds ambled softly across the borders

*We do this, said the dog, Because we dream*

When the woman woke up, a black stream poured from the hole in her skull

She dragged her finger along the sheets

And lines bisected the northern mountains

/

The man lost his job

The man began crying

The man looked in the mirror and drew a line with a marker

His body was split now down the middle

He laced his boots

He started walking

He laughed to himself

He came to the building and stopped to look

Moss was growing from the cracking plaster  
He saw the exposed steel and blown-out windows  
He walked inside and looked over a ledge  
He masturbated and watched it fall  
And stared down a hole with a ladder to nowhere  
A face from the dark was whistling back

/

He remembered the Volkswagen he'd seen as a child  
When he walked with his sister through the copse of pines  
The car partially buried in weeks of snow

*Go look*, she said

He walked over and scratched with a stick through the ice  
Until he could finally see inside the glass  
The man's face looked like tenderized meat  
Or the open cave of a dead hog's mouth  
And a crusted stream was on his shirt  
A gun was sitting in his half-open hand  
The fingers were thin and white

*Let's take the gun*, his sister said

/

It is Thanksgiving

And the woman sticks her fist

Inside the turkey

The TV is on

The man is drinking

The branches of trees scratch the glass

And solar fingers shimmer on the kitchen walls

When they sit down to eat

They toast to the baby

With a single finger

The man touches her belly

*We love you*, he says

He looks up in the woman's eye

*I want to fuck*, he says

She doesn't speak

Crowds of hounds run thru her head

And the table in the kitchen trembles

/

She dreams of a bridge getting swallowed by water

She dreams of blood from her lover's eyes

She dreams of a landfill that runs for miles

But the cars are women

And the pipes are lungs

And the transmission a heart

That is disemboweled

And the rust is the haze

That remains when she wakes

And walks barefoot across the room

To leans her head against the wall

Breathing heavy

She laces her fingers

And dreams of God

And life insurance

And a discarded tire from the interstate

Where vegetation

And bird nests grow

The baby kicks

THE LANDFILL GLISTENS

The stretched-over flesh

And a black stream drips

From her open eye

A fawn comes to her window

And steps inside

And sits down softly on the bedroom carpet

With its folded legs beneath its body

She lies beside it

Its bones protruding

And looks in the ocean inside its skull

The fawn licks the fluid that drips from her sockets

And gold yarn unravels from the woman's mouth

/

Her dreams don't stop

The wind whistles through one of her ears

And erupts from her lips

The landfill glistens

And a river shines

She looks up from her coffee

She looks up from the landfill

*I don't want it*, she says

She begins moaning

It begins in her belly

Softly at first it grows into tulips

And grows into screaming

Cracks run thru the walls

And every window shatters in their rental home

The landfill glistens

The landfill is violent

/

I don't want it.

[WE FEEL NOTHING]

We feel nothing gentle induced by a pill. We feel nothing gentle induced by a god. The walls of nothing came around like black meat and they dripped their juices in the back of my mouth. I grazed the grass with the tip of my cock. I gagged at the juices the woundchrist made. I drank the blood the robin dripped and when the coyote came, I became his breeder. When the coyote came, I swallowed his young. I held a leash. When the coyote came, he stood on hind legs and dressed as my mother, he fidgeted the grass and lives and weeks away. The termites broke us. The snakeholes broke us. The teeth of the foxes bare in the back of your head when you wake in the morning and stare in the mirror and brush your incisors softly for your gums are swollen. For the blue pools hang in the firmaments of your room. For the blue pools hang when you sit in traffic. For the blue pools hang when you fly on the plane and drink your gin and you slip from the hole and are flattened by sacramental clouds. And how you always wished to be flattened by air. And how we brainlessly walk our way on the trail. And how the smell of meat alights on the crest. The coyote gleams when he opens his jaw and with the broken latch our knees all buckle.

## HOLY VALENCE

Holy valence, my lover sick in the tub  
in the bathroom of our rental home  
I'm sitting silent by her thinking  
of our unborn daughter, of ceiling rot  
and broken plaster floating in water  
she slides down in the tub and soaks up  
to her neck and closes her eyes  
shaking expectorating phlegm in a can  
I don't have a job and keep odd hours  
I wake at four AM drink coffee and think  
of young bodies buried in banks of snow  
and unwrinkled flesh at the bottoms of feet  
and what do we do if our child is born sick  
or lacking limbs or is a victim of a plague  
that comes in like a shadow crossing the county  
I carry both autistic and schizophrenic genes  
my own brother was born sick and my parents  
devoted most of their adult lives to ensuring his well-being  
I dream I'm a piece of meat in amniotic fluid  
I dream I soak on linoleum all night the convenience store  
with muzak on the radio and the teenage boy

he cleans me up and squeezes me out like a rag  
and puts me in a bag of trash and draws the strings  
and throws it to the curb and the truck it comes  
and sickens the air, and a man throws my bag in a larger pile  
and I eventually convene with a larger order  
and suffocate in a sea of raccoon bodies rotting  
and scrap metal and computer monitors  
I dream of water birth and water burials  
I dream a deer with a skull split by an arrow  
I dream hedonic eyes and wrinkled flesh  
I dream the phenomenology of a weeping body  
and we're driving on the highway at dusk  
and a fawn writhing on the side of the road  
and we pull over to the shoulder with cars swerving  
each time they pass I take out my phone  
and touch the bright screen and while I'm breathing  
thinking of who to call you run out in traffic  
and grip the deer round its belly and it goes limp for a second  
in this second I know I will always love you  
as cars weave round you, you make it back  
to the shoulder and set it down and it kicks manically  
on its back with its three good legs past the bags of trash  
piled in the ditch and it kicks its way down

to the thicket and disappears and we walk back  
to the car and sit in the dark and say nothing,  
turn the radio on, a Baptist preacher screaming  
of holy violence, I dream of my manifest body rotting  
and coexisting with toxic waste, I dream of cops  
who murder babies, I dream of teachers who murder babies  
I dream of a doctor who says *You want a boy*  
and pulls a cock from his drawer and glues it on  
and it dangles flaccid and huge from our infant's body  
I dream of a spinal injury and punctured disks  
and fluid dripping on sheets and cum on my pillow  
I dream us both hooked to an IV that runs from the moon  
and you're running more water into the bath  
and you're soaking your body, and I'm telling you  
about a video I saw where a baby elephant  
plays in water in a moment which appears  
to be actual bliss and the dream of possible joy  
and our desire to replicate that joy though we know  
no numbers are even though I will love you all  
my waking days with no more dying in this womb-like room  
the walls swell and I remove my clothes  
and join you in the bath, I remove my clothes  
and sweat runs from the pits of my withering arms

and I lie in the water and put your ankles round my head  
and kiss you up your thighs and between your legs  
and I dream leeches from the Delta that cover my body  
I dream a field of tubs that are covered in rust  
and I dream we make love on a towel in our sunny yard  
with its lack of partition from our shitty neighbors  
who sit on the roof in plastic chairs shouting and drinking beer  
and the rows of pickups lining the lawn, and I dream  
we rub menstrual fluid on all their windows  
the cicada drone the sound of rainwater  
in the drainage ditch, we collect rotting rats  
and slaughter roaches in the middle of the night  
I dream I adjunct for the rest of my life  
I dream we come home drunk and lie on the floor  
and stare at the ceiling, you soap your body  
you say *Read me a story*, I know the story  
of the bird who learns she is a mother  
but is terrified to have an egg and wakes shrieking  
each night dreams of it breaking on the pavement  
and the yolk running to the gutter, so she goes on a journey  
and crosses the ocean and dives into the mouth  
of a shadowy face that fills the Pacific  
and in the moment of death the water is revealed

to be a cloud, and in the falling-through she feels actualized  
and the egg leaves her body and the shell cracks open  
and the egg leaves her body and the chick is screaming  
my lover an actual child will live in your body  
and a symbolic child will live in my body  
and eat thine food and drink thine water  
and our embodied fear it burns out at sea  
and I dream of frames that surround our bellies  
and I dream of a hum that wakes us at dawn

## VITA

MARTY CAIN

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### EDUCATION

B.A., Interdisciplinary Studies, Hamilton College, May 2013

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor, Spring 2016  
University of Mississippi  
Course: Introduction to Creative Writing

Instructor, Summer 2014  
University of Mississippi  
Course: Early British Literature

Teaching Assistant, Fall 2014- Spring 2015  
University of Mississippi  
Courses: Post- Civil War American Literature, Early British Literature

Instructor, Summer 2014  
University of Mississippi  
Course: Introduction to Creative Writing

Teaching Assistant, Fall 2013- Spring 2014  
University of Mississippi  
Courses: Post- Civil War American Literature, Pre- Civil Ware American Literature

### HONORS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Dissertation Fellowship, 2015  
Graduate School, University of Mississippi

Excellence Fellowship, 2013  
Graduate School, University of Mississippi