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tree also barbed wire

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

by

JOE ZENDARSKI

May 2014

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ABSTRACT

The following imbroglia consists of poems that constitute a series of discrete worlds both finite and in flux; their function within the manuscript multiplies when read and considered as a whole or a hole. The creation and de-evolution of worlds parallel that of notions of the self or the “I” of these poems as well as the ambiguous “you” in their myriad iterations. Interconnectedness and entropy alternately and sometimes simultaneously attract and repel people, dreams, desires, natural worlds, cultural forces, and other phenomenon. What remains is non-linear time in the form of perception equally gauzy and infinite.

DEDICATION

This one's for everybody

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FIRST WORDS

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2. dear Mississippi
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8. on the crumbling
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10. you wake
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46. feel me
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“He was crazy when they let him out and he didn’t mind roaches the least bit; he would smile blissfully and, for him, being covered with roaches was being covered with butterflies.”

-Ernesto Cardenal

“On what is entirely lost demands to be endlessly named: there is a mania to call the lost thing until it returns.”

-Gunter Grass

tomorrow might be green birds and furious I'm so
furious and hungry sweating in fern-like patterns
hungry for something birdlike but green I've been in
headlocks I want to cry tomorrow tomorrow is a
word that means peace I will be televised and
Kentuckian sick my head sick sick my head so many
hawks floating in anticipation

I come to you with dirt in my beard and a bagful of
sadness a little ashy and shy like a jukebox with all
these dirty songs stuck inside me crying for a nickel
I come to you on an ashy road that begins and ends in
bagfuls of ocean which were and will be rain and rain
for days now slow bearded lightning
illuminating an ashen summer's last armadillos
flattened like nickels on asphalt so many as
if for
some *I came for you* sport sometimes I cry fuck
sadness like a jukebox but
I'm so tired I'm a dirty bumblebee with a string tied
around my bearded waist a little useless but

dear Mississippi I had a dog once and dreams I break
hearts it is 9:06 wet December is a red shoe the wild
grape has withered the cotton fields are disced and
dogs are stupid they break hearts it is 9:06 sliding
around in a bottle of wine I keep thinking DC is the
south too Dear Nothing it's cold in beige apartments
when bellies don't touch Dear and sometimes when
they do Broken heart it is December like wet shoes
dreams pile up in disced apartments red covers
dreams and days run like dogs slide away in a storm

I am a jackrabbit so stupid a rabbit waiting headlights
dusty a town headlights dusty a road stupid a truck
semi so head stupid with eyes I want to run I want to
run I want to runrunrun stupid god mosquito head
twitch light

in the pines running roots and moon running roots
and moan running dirt shadow worms now mud
running needle red bug worms begin eat shit eat
shit the pines running back branch sap in the
pines running warm darkness brown throat brown
quart running tar heart end pine end worm worm
bone snap branch sap teeth hound

whispers like water pooling in a hoof print whispers like the path of an earthworm whispers like a nail slipped into wood whispers like a bucksawing blossom whispers like a dust devil whispers like sunlight burning through fog whispers like the breath of a doe chased by a wolf whispers like wet streets before they freeze whispers like walking through nettles whispers like day old bread like a sleeping baby like an unread book whispers like two tooth marks whispers like pearl earrings whispers like unblinking eyes whispers like a swollen leach like the spasm of a moth's wings whispers like a silver necklace swept along the bottom of a river whispers like rotting logs like burning leaves whispers like a daffodil quivering in the wind

dying mules eat garbage in grey fields dying mules are
beaten with 2x4s barbed wire whines in the wind

on the crumbling steps of your home you are content to nervously drink wine and watch leaves fall while red wasps build a hive red wasps inches about your head thrumming red wings inches about your red head you place your hand on the half built hive and watch red leaves fall and trees collapse then years collapse hundreds of kisses and hundreds of *I love yous* and the stars collapse and you collapse and walk alone along streets whose names blackened by lightning mean nothing you walk nothing streets ripping out your hair and throwing it to the gutter wishing it was your heart but you have no heart

I wake pale-oat naked on a bed of moss from a sleep that lasted years firelight the whine of wet wood like the call of a distant hawk with a broken finger I write words in oily black clay a burst of sap the smell of singed hair the eternal drop of sweat waking under stars or splinters a dream like ash the terrible hunger of a dream I can't recall I wake to a terrible hunger and rake my hands across coals across oily black clay across words I can no longer understand scooping them into my mouth as though the trees will clap smiling because my words yes they are bitter yes yes go ahead and laugh

you wake in the burnt grass of a ditch itching at the night and walk backwards up a mountain she just walked down your feet facing the same direction the sun rising and falling but it's you who's spinning in bleating winds a fern sways a leaflet her finger across your back lying in the grass not knowing everyday you disappeared everyday the light grew vague not knowing the difference between a flower and a weed dragging a long necklace of doubt you stand on a granite crop under drunken hawks knowing you cannot fly listening to your laughter echo like shattered glass you do not hear her call your name

I made a man of myself on accident I make a beast of myself to forget I want to be a child four once was four but now it's six we used to walk rivers flipping rocks pulling crawfish from murky plumes six now is eleven I make a beast of myself we walked rivers drinking wine from tin cups holding each other's hair our fire burned through the night we laughed at lightning we laughed at thunder as the river rose my how quickly the river rose

like poking a lake with a stick like stirring murky water and not thinking of the one you love like sitting near a lake watching waves wash away the shore like being continuously wet like stirring moonlit water and remembering a crippled dog like a fish on sand purple ripping down silver scaled again and again until it stops like driftwood like throwing a stick into a lake for a dog and remembering the one you love like sitting on a rock in the middle of a river with the one you love knowing one of you will die first like sleeping in the rain like a rain that will not end like staring at your shadow in a dusty lakebed and poking it with a stick

we had peaches in summer apples in fall we lied together there was heat we pulled out our brains
washed the gum from our eyes hitched to West Virginia touching thighs in two states our bellies
glistened like fish in the delicate gesture of a river in moonlight in the sound of water trickling over
rocks I drew pictures in purple because my heart was an apple pressed between your palms because
you knew even a nasty apple makes a good cider because bees don't distinguish between mealy and
meal and sweet is sweet is sweet is sweet then seven years and I looked to lift you to light too little
too late

swirling in an eddy floating amidst rocks a drowned bear little silver fish like
lightning tear at its flesh hawks sit low in the trees I write my name in the river it
says I write your name in the river it says I say to the river tell us of time
that it is not a moan from the oily banks I feel you leave and plunge certainly
into

I grow a beard and comb it upwards to hide my eyes

I saw my reflection in your nipple ring as you crawled from under a doublewide purple-handed and covered in bloody Kentucky I'd never known I'd known poor people until Margie thanked us in lard sandwiches with red rings of tomato I slept in kudzu and had a vision of my grandmother's crooked finger around her crooked finger a zirconium ring it is strange to know my family is conceived not of love but fear and a little loneliness and do you know what that does love is not a ring but what a bell does

glowing orange ohms luminous limbs sheen in a bare bulb eye no cold drinks to drink no cold calm
to cool no cool coo to coo ruby crawls my skin in a season of shipwrecks salt is implied at a tropical
speed the laughter of tom toms glows the forest the deep dark ruby crawls my skin each blink of
your lashes stuttering leaves the newness and hugeness of eyes glide greedy swelter of touch the wet
hot ruby crawls my skin and lips electric rising tidally untied illumin'd gathering

I see you fingering arugula and laughing together in the produce section while cops block traffic outside the cemetery laughing about the chowder kettle about not being dead I must seem defaced to you I must seem unseeing and this is all even the brie in your pocket growing a little bourgeois who's that knocking do hear me knowing do you see I'm more than a taste of soap is not an idea it is an accident it is the dead coming back the bed the bug the mole rumors are not accidents and keep me awake I don't want you to eat your fingers but pulling them from your throat is different than you not starting to chew here take most of my heart

two cigarettes is a hot breakfast I'm milking a cow with still-born eyes it's cold farming a long ago
mother goodbye don't remember me arrows to ass goodbye crepuscular cupid shuffling rim shots
me don't me sitting at the foot of a table still being staring at a potato floating in a tin bowl in snake
blood goodbye dirty farewell liver laugh damned and undead a louse in this house

sweet dumb boy bag of nails waking to a not shot gun is no relief no pessimistic cartoon bag of nails
no hurdy gurdy no dervish whirling under a wailing moon open mouth sweet dumb vertical burial of
a boy act of hubris needed supper shadows are not closer than a bag of nails they appear unceasing
shadows unceasing sweet unceasing bag of boy the sound of falling

75 miles to your future this might be your lucky exit if you wait too long you might be brain dead
feeding squirrels wearing wool feeling guilty feeding squirrels who lose ninety percent of their food
you might be two aunts kept in attics on opposite sides of the same street who are these people
locking doors I don't mean to complain I keep scratching I don't want to complain I keep clawing I
don't want to be mean I don't I knock I don't I knock I don't I lock I unlock no one knows how
people die

punch of possum teeth to my peepers I was nearly ruddy a rude lie a coarse white glint'll filch a feeble flint poach guts and toast a gutted goat ain't no goat lazy eyed or good great goat on a neck a spit a spitspitspit I'd say let's spit but you've already spit I'd say let's go but you're already gone noisy eyes of joy tumble flower rolling along shearing black sheep and a best good dog tumble flower rolling along a wooden room fills suddenly with blood tumble flower rolling along like an almanac dropped upon a swan a mandrill taptaptaps my window seizure of sundown and that taptaptapping comes along memories obscene like limp handshakes linger last gasps linger last gasps linger on pale stars possum teeth good goat are those things dead

what do badgers do Tania what do badgers do they burrow and burrow down under the ground
what do vultures do Tania what do vultures do they fly for hours and hours and eat up the garbage
what do wolves do Tania what do wolves do they work together and train up their pups what does
the wolverine do Tania what does the wolverine do it travels long distances alone in the snow what
does the viper do Tania what does the viper do it rattles and rattles what does the fire ant do Tania
what does the fire ant do it performs a task what does the mako do Tania what does the mako do it
swims very fast and leaps from the water what does the earwig do Tania what does the earwig do it
eats up vegetables what does a cougar do Tania what does a cougar do it nurses kittens for about a
month and a half what does the grizzly do Tania what does the grizzly do it rears up to get a better
view what do humans do Tania what do humans do what do humans do Tania what do humans do

call me cube steak call me Salisbury steak call me Steak-umm steak oh Mike likes the way I sweep his garage oh hi how he'd steal off the job early oh hi how he'd drink a drink of iced tea oh hi how he'd peep at running ponies oh he could hit you for a dirt free floor imagine you're fiver practicing hard to handle a dust pan Mike hits you a grinning grin with a parfait with a red toolbox boy he could snap a belt his fingers too but those are plucked catfish whiskers plucked the once and only time he'd a tiny diamond gift in his hand that's a cold teevee dinner a crooked finger sticking it a # 10 can of creamed corn to the gut O-hi is ok gray O-hi is an ok place to be from pile of crushed beer cans cookbook of casseroles you chicken bucket you greasy hat O-hi is an ok idea a hotdog with cheese inside it roller skate sneakers a myna bird squawking DUPA DUPA DUPA car doors de-iced with warm water kneeling yer kid on uncooked rice 'stead of beating 'em in O-hi Nostradamus wears out VHS dreams of detailed cars remain only dreams I don't know why O-hi producer of plastics and crippling depression O-hi fabricator of metals and malaise O-hi you bottomless cup you buffet of sadness I'd to cut my fingertips off just to feel O-hi ye of loaved meats Beaver Wars burning rivers O-hi yer name means great river land of 200 earthquakes 13 aftershocks O-hi yer name means great river land of the buckeye cardinal ladybug pawpaw Cape Myrtal wall lizard wall lizard flint

a black dog comes to me at dawn with the leg of a
deer in his mouth

hello people you are breaking my blue-eyed heart I am coughing from all the smoke from the controlled burn near the cemetery today I killed the first mosquito of the season felt irony and victory inside the laundromat the smoke wafted like two large women wearing purple shirts like grapes laughing and if the lord blesses one of them with a grandbabe she will teach that grandbabe beekeeping about the beeping in here which a few years ago I mean days I would have found illegible today it's a symphony to which a beautiful blonde girl folds towels and old people eat crackers from clear plastic bags my neighbor washes bras in red hightops and outside a Gulf War vet twirls a sign for five dollar pizzas oh she twirls and twirls with unsurpassed enthusiasm and a sadness

I write lists I am good at it every new list I write is exactly the same as the last I learn too late my family disowns me I add *get disowned by family* to my list and immediately cross it off the plane lands in Haiti I wonder why I get on a taptap it is crowded it smells like mountains Gabriella Garcia Marquez is driving not so much driving as playing with a moustache like a mango it occurs to me sometimes it is always the rainy season

meanwhile back in the world the tree of life is teeming with termites I eat like I will hibernate but I am no longer a bear I lie on top of blankets and sweat I walk the cemetery a grave is marked INFANT 1891 elsewhere MOTHER I dream of alpacas spitting my sister's hand stuck in a car door one time a circus I have kicked a couple chickens outside the liquor store there empty pints of Aristocrat *when in Rome* I say to a dog tied to a fire hydrant I follow the pints to a church the game is rigged what game is it the air is full of words that contradict one person or another will get all the houses another person will smash all the houses meanwhile back in the world

I live on cigarettes and berries see a field of sunflowers every day think I'd like three of those I pull off the road a mechanic sics two dogs on me I haven't I think done anything yet two barrels are pointed that is also a first I think of Rilke he too loved flowers it was a rose that killed him well an infection he pricked his finger died wide-eyed in the arms of a priest slobbering dogs hurl themselves against my van *this can't be true* the dogs appear to be hungry the shotgun appears well maintained I have never touched a sunflower I have never been in love six cops frisk me in the rain

the park ranger is not a bear he says the forest is closed not like at dusk in the suburbs it's about some fucking eagle doing something no snakes in my station wagon so I go back the city I see a girl with nine pet rats she opens a bottle of champagne with a samurai sword which is sexy the rats crawl all over me in the morning I say *your rats are sweet* not like a skateboarder would say it she says I don't have any pet rats last month alone every resident of Washington DC fell out of a tree like a bucket which is why I'm lying on the ground

I put a beautiful woman on an airplane then Memphis tries to kill me it is the fault of jean shorts and racists DC a 300 pound steel I-beam one time a black bear and also love have tried to kill me I drink coffee racists throw a pancake at me I catch the pancake like a foul ball I look for a couch four immigrants hop in the bed of my shiny truck like agile zombies *lo siento no trabajo* I say thunder falls out of their eyes I write a note that says *figure out life* it is a good plan I sit on a fat stump like an opossum a purple flower sways under a woolly moon

I am in love on Sundays for like five minutes she works in a black uniform at the Dollar General no not that Dollar General she tells me every week in a voice like dusk *I tell you every week you have the prettiest eyes* I blush and it's ten years ago and the first five minutes of a million five minutes of loving a woman with blue eyes I feel like a river also a hawk *bip bip bip* but that's over *bip bip*

four bronze children appear at the edge of the
cave four bronze children dancing their feet the
sound of falling water *sleep well* they say *sleep well sleep
well*

once upon a time bomb is the most dangerous ox to box for a sheep hey sheep ye sheep beware
bovine fisticuffs are a chuffing matter beware sheep of 1973 and '85 other times I forgot that air was
a hot hit of a tennis racket I read on a placemat if you can't beat 'em tickle 'em it's only my opinion
but don't beat anyone just go straight to tickling rats are part of the finite condition so too with
snakes so fly thee where ye will you rouser of rabble knowing a deficit of empathy and a wheel
barrow plenty good barrow sparrow up some kindness double hugs and apple those seeds in this
roaring free for all

great gloam glows nevering dawn the deer days of summer I want everything twice tweet tweet
chirrup the moon the sun and everything else the most riverly lie righteously tightening between two
sures a shrugging nudge a knuckling nod pretty riverly prettiness in the not light in the light light
flowers are crisp hoisters of light tonight I smilingly stole a bottle of gin and stinkingly crash my bike
six times stinking stinkily flower stricken moon stricken stricken stricken I stumble my poetic
carcass profane being alive is a funny hat roads and heads are hard things something about a raised
leg and water angry candy blah blah blah chirrup

I'm a baby not a 727-pound alligator tell me what to do I won't do it ask me to do it I won't do it
I'm a fucking baby I'm a lot of homework tell me about crying alligators tell me is it worse to cry
fake tears or not cry at all I'd like to think it's about being sold out for chicken change for a rotting
chicken flung into the bayou but I think one time a baby and an alligator made a baby-gator and that
is me I'm a 100,000 year old baby just doing what I'm learned and sometimes I think I don't think I
think at all and think how'd I think that and say you're floating in a canoe and somebody offers you
a Coke I might just bite you in the neck

dirtier than a devil's underpants and bitterer than a ground mustard seed like I just got off a donkey and it kicked me in the knee 1-2-3 4-5 times just like that I feel like two tea cups fulla bumblebees with a tablespoon of doom in each but probably the sun probably the sun'll shine tomorrow and dogs'll eat cats'll eat birds'll eat worms'll eat kings and nary or rarely the other way around true as the average crazy increases only in a box with or without a bow listen listenlistenlisten the universe is expanding we should all say voilà whenever entering a new room let's have a parade but you know one that's actually good like we're inventing the high-five but you know something totally different

like a back flip on a ratty mattress in a rusting city on a Sunday a Monday a someday trampoline in Big Ugly Creek West Virginia or Jackson Mississippi maybe Tennessee maybe John Cash is squatting in some bushes wearing a striped shirt shoveling fistfuls of beans and cake in his mouth maybe loving June in June in heaven or hell the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom but it doesn't end there LOOK KIDS there's a trampoline next to some rose-of-Sharon there's some butterflies going wild in straight-piped sewage and maybe it's a front a double flip maybe you stick it maybe you break your face drink sarsaparilla two weeks straight I'm unsure of so many things like a nun who's lost her habit and tells you not to worry about a guy with dirt floors and laughs in your bloated face while an orange extension cord runs off into the pines

I got an 18 year-old mind and a thousand-year old body you see me like a masturbating baboon through a kitchen window puke twice frailing a mandolin with a buck knife I let myself in not so much in as through the window I knocked I knocked naked I knock everything over and soap up in the sink *don't mind if I do* that's an overdue library book a sinking library in Cincinnati I'm a known book thief with a \$29 library fine I contain like a dictionary contradictions I love you I love you pretty soon I'll be breaking things like a prizefighter like hearts in Appalachia like glass floors just saying I know I'm wrong I know don't make it right I gleam a \$7 ice-cube's gleam in somebody's eye in somebody else's a fern

the most common side effect is memories of cooking ethnic food with your grandmother staring wistfully out the window as Ohio burns another river or strawberry patch Colleen will trample with the tractor write about that Joe send it to Poetry Magazine it's fitting a dictionary defines your name first as coffee then an ordinary man then a nickname for Joseph where'd your dreams go how the fuck did a guy with a rainbow coat beget Joe Blow or if you're a Brit Joe Bloggs maybe that's just it a coat is a goddamn coat and people make distinctions between major and minor prophets think about that locker room think about startled giraffes it's been a while since I said YAHTZEE oh poor Joe too worried about poor Joe waking with a clump of poor Joe's inert floppy for a hand too worried about waking to wake

kicking about shoeless on a red clay kind of evening an unclimbed ladder kind of evening an un-sat-upon roof kind of evening when the afternoon was that tree for rent and a what-do-you-say cuckoo we build us a nest up high and shoddy in that there north pointing bough and buff up on baking and grow us a rainbow of tomatoes but you may or may not have acquired something neon and I may or may not have heard you cry out and you may or may not have punched a hole through my red shirt so shirtless and shoeless alone home I walk drinking beer *cuk cuk cuk* like an ant *cuk cuk* running the rim *cuk cuk cuk* of a white toilet bowl

your beauty eyes in neon sick cats in jungle lashes me I am falling asleep I change chairs to stay awake a fool I always a fool until we touch and then until we don't soft hands and fancy shirts looking at you at your shoes at your dancing thighs like the industry of ants that abandon a two foot tall hill the next morning I want to knock a dick off I want to knock it in the dirt I wanted to tell you I cried tearlessly today when I walked a field for beauty yes for truth yes for dying yes like the bitterness of a baby blackberry I didn't tell you because I saw a white chicken a crippled chicken and felt not a thing

morning's gory a liver pickling in whisky can't escape that bloody history can't escape that Kentucky
that raunch that rheum that rotgut on a Tuesday Tori gave me a shake a strawberry a seasoned fry
asking you know how people dip chips into shakes I dig say I dig though I didn't dig after a toe
broke off in my right shoe it's alright people oh hello people my blue my breaking my heart black
now rock now tomorrow if I make it a diamond but the rocks in this town are all plastic the water
the women the men bottled my unbroken circle now broken a disappointed circle my sister my
beauty-eyed urge to flee oh to go somewhere say Seattle say Foligno say Truth or Consequences
New Mexico oh rosebug rosebug in a rosebud lashing my eyes your eyes oh where have you been
baby eyed blue haired brown recluse I have been Basho I am not am I looking for a rainbow asks
the lady in olive and yas I say yas rubbing my belly and beard with rain hoping all the world's bellies
will soon be ablaze

it is strange how the water does not reflect the fawns
drinking it

rosebug rosebug shimmy shimmy rosebug
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rosebug

feel me I flee east finally and unlidded hungry I go backwards I go if I must and I must a wintered
mind a Midwestern dress a blue collar corset a yoke a trailer hitched and filled with mobius failures
flakes of rust each unique and cruel clocks heeling nips a cat's nip an almost gentle playful thing
lest that cat's a lion a hungry stump maker feel me I flee noddingly and snapping my fingers because
legs are for leaping towards an unknown one plus one is on my mind and ringingly the birds
shadowingly the wasps gingery the shriek of a two inch tall flower and white

the sun and moon bet on no one and oceaning green eyes dare I oh I wade out past breaking past
becoming in undoing is being what light what light never more now than ever I am if and only if
forevering green and no thing is feeling is upwards and upwards is always is hoping is ruby throated
and ruby throated is glowing is floating is loving is all

good news

VITA

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English 397, Intermediate Poetry Seminar, Instructor of Record

2013, University of Mississippi, 1 course

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2012-2013, University of Mississippi, 3 courses

English 226, British Literature from Romanticism to Present, Teaching Assistant

2011, University of Mississippi, 1 course

Publications:

Cutbank 79 Summer 2013, [Dear Mississippi]

Washington Square Review 31 Winter/Spring 2013, [I come to]

The Journal 37.2 Spring 2013, [Tomorrow might be]

The Journal 37.2 Spring 2013, [in the pines]

Tulane Review Spring 2012, December is a Dirty Glass

Readings:

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Trobar Ric, September 2013 Oxford, MS

Southern Writers and Southern Writing, July 2013, Oxford, MS
Broken English, December 2011, Oxford, MS

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Guest Lecture on Whitman, Oxford, MS 2013
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