What Was and When It Passes

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What Was and When It Passes

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of New Orleans in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

by

Mark Petrie

B.A. Arizona State University, 2009

May, 2012
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The support and encouragement of my family and Bethany Jones made these poems possible. Many thanks to my committee, John Gery, Carolyn Hembree, and Dr. Nancy Easterlin, for their guidance and insight. Thanks also to Trisha Rezende and my classmates for their helpful advice.

Thanks to Booth for publishing versions of both “Stabled” and “Study,” mojo for publishing a version of “The Minotaur at the Mall,” and IthicaLit for publishing versions of “Hedonistic Transcendentalism” and “Inside Montezuma’s Well.”
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Studying the Craft

When I first started writing poetry, I had a difficult time understanding how my poetry differed from other, more successful poets. Poetry, I believed, was simply expressing oneself creatively through language, so why did it seem so hard to do well? I did not know then that in order to sound like other poets I needed to train my stylistic voice. All poets write in conversation with their predecessors. With young poets especially, there lies a correlation between what one has read and the styles he or she adopts. As a young man, while reading Stephen King’s fiction, I wrote stories about vampires and were-wolves, and, in high school, when I listened Bob Dylan, I wrote anti-war ballads (a little out of place in the late 90s). Whether I like it or not, my own, often sentimental, preferences played an immense role in shaping my early poetry. So when I chose to pursue poetry as a serious, academic venture, I decided it was paramount to expose myself to as many styles of poetry as possible.

For this manuscript, the old adage, “Good artists borrow, great artists steal,” holds as true as ever. Not to claim myself a great artist, but, nonetheless in growing as a poet, I have certainly taken every liberty available to expand my knowledge, and if I had any advice for my younger self, it would be to start stealing earlier. As a young writer, I also believed that to write well I must experience the highs and lows of an exciting life. But, in fact, rather than raw experience, I accredit three things to the advancement of my writing: college workshops, professors, and imitation exercises. The last has proven even more crucial than personal experience, for, as some contemporary poets believe, a poet needs no more subject matter than what already exists within his or her room.
What in many cases began as imitation exercises have since developed into unique poems which I can confidently call my own. In cases where I have stayed near another poet’s design, I make note of the original poem in an attribution or epigraph, but, when I believe my version has branched off from the spirit of the original piece, I have disregarded the note. “Chemistry,” for example, began as a strict syntactical imitation of John Ashbery’s “Alcove,” but, after several revisions, my poem has little in common with his. As an exercise, my original imitation of “Alcove” valued rhetorical consistency over content or substance, but within that first draft I discovered small, incomplete themes about childhood and coming of age that I wanted to expand. Because the themes I used to develop “Chemistry” broke away so strongly from “Alcove,” it would be misleading to my reader to associate the two poems. While the original imitation helped me better to understand Ashbery’s syntactical methods, for “Chemistry,” it did little more than serve as a brainstorming activity.

On the other hand, I hope that when my readers approach “Whiskey with Diomedes,” he or she will take into account the parallels and differences between my poem and Terrance Hayes’s “Cocktails with Orpheus.” Similar to “Chemistry,” “Whiskey with Diomedes” began as a syntactical imitation, yet, with this exercise, I sought to borrow themes and motifs from the original source. I was drawn to the characters, setting, and situation in Hayes’s poem (the classical figure of Orpheus, a barroom, heart-ache and sex), but, in my poem I wanted to emphasize the hostility that can accompany male frustration more so than remorse or heart-ache. While Hayes’s poem uses the Orpheus myth to contribute to his themes, I chose the classical figure of Diomedes because of his masculinity and valor, and because, unlike other Greek heroes, he does not descend from the gods; I
wanted the drinking companion in "Whiskey with Diomedes" to resemble a war veteran more than a mythical figure. Because I borrow so heavily from “Cocktails with Orpheus,” and also because I want my readers to respond to my poem as they might respond to Hayes's, it remains important to me to include an attribution beneath this poem's title.

Many of these poems began as exercises of craft but were aided by other poems, for instance, the sestina, “August Visit.” While revising “August Visit,” I initially struggled to maintain consistent line lengths with the necessary word repetition that the form calls for. To help pace my lines and include all the details, I kept a copy of Elizabeth Bishop's “Sestina” close at hand. I studied Bishop's concise lines, her isolation of simple phrases, and the way she personified her end words to create metaphors and similes. However, in “Sestina” Bishop chooses to use all nouns as end words and takes little to no liberties with the form, staying true to her word choices. In later drafts of “August Visit” I chose to press the boundaries of the sestina form by replacing some end words with homonyms and homographs and by varying my line lengths. I must admit, I felt more comfortable in doing so after reading Beth Ann Fennelly's “To JC and DL on the Opening of the Sestina Bar,” in which she allows for homonyms and varied line lengths as the poem progresses. While Fennelly’s sestina is a light-hearted poem that pokes fun at the form and breaks from conventions for comic effect, I hoped to use similar techniques but for dramatic rather than comic effect.

A number of these poems did not begin as strict or self-conscious imitations, but they were nonetheless influenced by studying art and literature. In one of my earliest poems here, “Reprieve,” I set out to illustrate a snapshot of a single moment within an overtly implicit context. The idea arose when an artist friend pointed out to me that much
art does not focus solely on a single object, but that the landscape of a painting often implies to the audience a situation beyond the canvas’ borders. In “Reprieve,” I chose to start and end the poem midsentence to cue my reader that the situation in the poem extended beyond the text. Also, I wanted the reader to be unsettled by using an image strong enough to spark his or her curiosity about the situation. While plenty of poets have sought to spark a reader’s curiosity, and writing a piece en medias res is about the oldest poetic technique, there is no other specific work I had in mind when I wrote this poem. Furthermore, other poems in this manuscript, “The Dream Catcher” and “After the Shot” employ a similar, snapshot technique, though perhaps less blatantly. Nevertheless, if it were not for the insight of my artist friend the poem would be much different.

Of all the poems in this manuscript, “The Gila Monster,” an imitation of Bishop’s “The Moose,” went through the heaviest revisions. This poem originated years ago as a shorter, conceptual piece, reflecting on an encounter I had with a Gila monster in the Arizona desert. Unsatisfied with several revisions, I eventually decided to incorporate my experience into an imitation of “The Moose.” I wanted to attempt a longer poem, and I admired the tranquil pace Bishop employs to develop her setting and to explore the connection between the people on the bus and the countryside surrounding them. Also, I felt my encounter was similar to the encounter in Bishop’s poem. When I began the imitation, I outlined “The Moose” by stanzas, making notes of how Bishop developed the narrative. For instance, I observed the way the first sentence of her poem extends through the end of the sixth stanza, and that the perspective shifts from a vast panoramic view of the Nova Scotia wilderness, to the small, merely audible space of soft voices on the bus. In my poem, I attempted a similar design, beginning with a panoramic view of the Phoenix
metro area, and then shifting to the silent, internal world of the speaker. Though my early
drafts attempted to mimic Bishop's rhyming patterns and line lengths, I quickly found the
task to be more difficult in this longer piece, and eventually I realized that it was her
management of theme that mattered more to me than her prosody or rhyme pattern. My
hope is that the final version of "The Gila Monster" pays tribute to Bishop, yet expresses
enough of my unique experience to stand alone.

In effect, while I think of writing poetry as an artistic endeavor, producing this
manuscript has been as much an academic venture as a creative one. Whether it be
researching the process by which asphalt is lain in order to find the right word to describe
a flat, gravel surface, or skimming several translations of the Iliad for a good battle scene to
imitate, the process has been a crucial step in my learning as a student of both literature
and human nature, as well as in my beginnings as a poet. In these three years of study, I
have begun to identify certain poets’ unique styles, and, in turn, have begun to develop my
own unique style. As my writing style continues to evolve, I hope to remain in conversation
with other poets, burrowing themes and motifs, and, if need be, stealing some syntax from
time to time.
Prologue

Words are UV rays that stumble out crooked gates, klutz around the block, and come home drunk as a monk with dread on his soul. They can burn you, taciturn you, make you give them up. What if Ecclesiastes was right? What if the Voice is not meant to express the Self? Maybe instead of syllabling some self-indulgent dance, I should mime my elders till death do me part. Am I contracted to abrogate this cacophony, obliged to Calliope to tell my tale, her tale, no tale? Am I to conduct some circus of neologisms: prepositions leaping haphazardly through inverted hula-hoops of confession? Ugh: On a mono pea, we sit: a little bitty green sound, a small space for a small project: poetry: speech in isolation, radiating. We love the hell out of dissonance, try to turn, turn, turn. Ought we to unwrap, divulge like breakthrough patients, somersault away from our exaltations, karate kicking, crying “Havoc!” and let slip the dogs of words, or just shut up?
Please

*for Robert Creeley*

Please.
Robert Creeley, I watched
your poem. Youtube hosts
you. I googled
you. Opened Wikipedia and
there was Olson. Black
Mountain. Levertov and Viet-
nam. People of bones filled
tattered rags, carried tattered
little ones from war zones. Grown-
up bones brought little bones
in John Lennon’s Christmas
video and other war clips Youtube
recommended.

People,
People, people, people.
I keep listening to
your “Please” poem, refreshing
the page, “Oh God, let’s go.” Yes,
let’s. This is a poem for you, not
Kenneth Patchen nor a tired
old horse, not every-
one; this is a
poem that nods, yes, let’s.

Please,
enjoy this Monday
poem, morning poem
in a cloth journal, this
attempt at a poem, this ad-
mirer poem made on a leg
leaned on a leg, a poem
rhyming Robert Creeley
with Robert Cree-
ley.
You with your Milton, I with my Marianne Moore, 
we wondered if our minds would recognize each other.

My neurons in trench coats, like private dicks, 
search for syllabics in “A Grave.” Their process 
short lived, all they find is fish. One little neuron, 
hovering over a hula-hoop he calls the sea, 
gawks at a blue scarf he’s lain for affect, 
while another imitates the bell-buoys’ noise 
so poorly his neighbor considers cutting his synapse.

And your neurons are literary chemists; 
in their snow white coats they chalk Milton’s meter, 
“Cromwell,” across a blackboard. Each plays a role: 
measuring feet, distinguishing end-rhymes, thumbing 
through etymologies. Very nice and neat, your mind, 
like Fur Elise on a harp, your mind.

And if these vehicles were some way to meet, 
float by one another’s perusing bubbles, 
we both agreed, we’d recognize these working minds.
The Gila Monster

after Elizabeth Bishop’s, “The Moose”

Over black streams
of bright striped asphalt,
land of the paperboy dawn,
where the water takes flight
twice a day and gleams
like diamonds on each lawn,

where whether the road
continues or dead-ends
into a sheltered cul-de-sac
geographically depends
on if the mountain creeps in,
or if it leans back,

through early morning,
I drove my pick-up west
past golf course greens
onto manmade, dirt roads,
past foreclosed, jilted homes,
their copper wire exposed

like open nerves.
In my rearview mirror,
the sun’s crown crept
over the valley’s eastern ridge,
seeped across the sprawling
metro to the gravel parking lot.

All around, green bouquets
of creosote flourished still
from last week’s rain;
the breeze passed between
the foothills and over
the petrous terrain.

Up rocky switchbacks,
following the animal trails
of coyote and javelin tracks,
past jumping and barrel
cacti, I jogged to the top
of the first summit.
To my left, a light
flashed like a man lost
at sea reflecting his watch:
747s taking flight,
their wings embossing
logos onto the sky.

Ahead, a couple appeared,
jogging one after the other,
a good looking pair,
smiling as they neared,
and nodded to me before
descending the ribs of rock.

I leapt into stride,
and, climbing, my breath
a rhythmic trance,
drew me into my thoughts.
I pressed on, sleep-
jogging, playing movies:

in my mind, blank faces
gathered late into the evening—
some from the office,
others acquaintances,
and as the cocktails drained
the cajolery began,

strangers leaving in pairs
to alien homes, the rest
home alone. “People,”
my father’s voice echoed,
“aren’t intended to share
space.” – Suddenly my legs,

with a jolt, stopped me.
Ahead, a Gila monster
on a massive boulder,
stood gazing, a gargoyle
atop a gothic church.
Armored

in plates of orange,
poised like a warlord,
or the tutelary
of aridity, it rose,
forked tongue
to the wind.

Hijacked by fear,
my empty hands
snatched the nearest stone.
My cocked arm
awaited the lizard’s move.
Unlocking its stout legs

It flopped its belly
like a tired dog
onto the cool boulder,
then assayed
the irrigated air.
I’d never see again

the wild so unaffected.
What was it
that overcame me, shook
me like the wind shakes
a snow-covered
tree branch?

At the billowing
of my shirt, the Gila monster
scanned the horizon,
and, like an old cowboy,
moseyed away, swaying
in unison its front and hind legs.

At the sun’s peak
I still had made no sense
of things much bigger
than a giant lizard,
and returned to the stucco
homes below,

to the hollow clay
walls, the scale-like,
tile roofs, the rituals
and the solitude
of the habitat
I called home.
Whiskey with Diomedes

*after Terrance Hayes’, “Cocktails with Orpheus”*

After one, the so-where-you-from part of me quits – the part that blows smoke across the barroom battleground where Diomedes and I end our night with car bombs and smartass jabs at scene-kids. Diomedes toasts his shot to mortality, chariot races, lances honed to hook a jaw, and I imagine the dance floor is a field of Trojans, not enemies or obstacles, but object to be conquered, souls to be sent to the Styx. When the bouncers trumpet last call, Diomedes tosses me his keys and with metal in my inebriated hands, suddenly I understand why oil starts wars. In the parking lot, I spot a skirt worn just off the hips, a pelvis smoothing through every sway of skin. Sometimes a bone can break me, make me all molten molecules, all animal hands. Driving, we occupy a hallowed warhorse, incognito in the night, two men playing roles: the storming of the city, the coy chill slitting the sleeping soldiers’ throats.
What Was and When It Passes

Picked clean by spiders,  
a lizard skeleton hangs  
in the slim crack  
of the door frame  
outside my apartment.  
A miniature dinosaur,  

stiff as a fossil, present  
as a bad memory,  
his suspended carcass  
is a nearly translucent  
ivory; it’s been a week.  
I don’t know how long  

it takes a skeleton  
to decompose.  
Each morning  
I expect it gone;  
each morning  
it’s still there.
Arcadia Palms

Last tenants? Well, they was the ones lost their little one to the pool. Not drowned, but clear as day, to the pool.

Young couple, Mexican I think, and he their only. Ever notice how they carve them pool decks into a thousand little canyons and plateaus? Well, that’s supposed to be a perfect design to keep a high-stepping four-year-old from slipping and smacking his head upside one of them plastic chairs there. Never should’ve happened, but, you know,

who do you blame? Well, management ‘pologized, drained the water, dumped the dirt.

See, Arcadia Palms here has a “two dead children” rule, two within a ten-year window. Two down and the dirt goes in. Guess they figured they should cap it somewhere. But even when the time came, folks still complained about the non-water technicality, said the second death in this pair was a “fish out of water,” a little fish flapping, sure, but not in the water. Damn stupid, if you ask me. It was only fair to this couple to fill it up. So they did and folks shut up, for the most part. First one? She was in the water, older girl, maybe twelve years or so, on drugs or something. That one was tougher for folks to deal with. Hell, almost filled the pool then.

You ask me, they should’ve filled the son of a bitch forty years ago.
August Visit

The morning sun creeps onto the court. Across the park, a father hurries toward the hoop, trailed by his son, who bounces a new basketball in front of his white, high-top shoes. Beside the court, the father sets his watch.

Secretly, he sees this inherited watch as the only thing the divorce court did not take, and that the boy’s new shoes shine like a good deed some father’s would not perform. He will keep the ball at his home; the shoes only fit his son.

They shoot under the static sun. The father checks his watch several times, tells himself, I play ball with my boy, a court-esty, when I was ten, my father, never extended, while eyeing the boy’s shoes.

Like twin scared children, the shoes hug the quiet son’s ankles, tense under his father’s proud glare. Suddenly, a crack: the watch left mindlessly beside the court, is smashed by the errant basketball.

I go where you send me, repeats the ball, bounding into the park lot. The young shoes tighten; the father steps off the court to pick up the shattered heirloom. The son, deflated, asks, The watch, did I break it? Yes, says the father.

You did. Motionless, the two stand farther apart than before. A molten ball contracts in the boy’s gut. The watchful visitor gathers his things, shoos the boy to retrieve the basketball. Soon, he thinks, he won’t care what the court
decided. The father watches the shoes walk off the court, his son depart after the ball.
Detour

Heading home from San Diego, somewhere
  on the desert stretch of the I-10 between Yuma
  and Gila Bend, Dad closed his phone and said,
  “We have to stop to visit Mr. Diller

in the hospital.” Exiting into an anonymous landscape,
  marked by creosote and the occasional sentry-like saguaro,
  we drove almost an hour to a sequestered building
  where for the first time I questioned my father’s judgment.

In the lobby, a muffled laugh sounded from behind
  the double doors. Through the bedlam labyrinth,
  unhinged faces lined the smudged glass; I found
  the laugh: a woman in a wheelchair, her body

wrapped as though in a sea shell. Dad patted my shoulder, sighed.
  In the room, the nurses had straightened Mr. Diller’s spine for visitors.
  Dropped-jawed and wide-eyed, he looked like the nutcracker in a gown.
  His red wet eyes scanned me and Dad, then stopped

on my flip flops, and like a ghost he bellowed,
  “Who put me in this desert with these devils?
  Where... my father was here. And him,
  did you this boy to watch me die?”
Chemistry

You shaved three times a day, all summer,
trying to create a five o’clock shadow
by Labor Day, trudged your bike
through dirt fields to feel the fresh salt-sting
of sweat on your neck. Pain, you prayed,
as a rite of passage, might strip every molecule
of boyhood away. Remember how you’d conjure
swagger in the bathroom mirror, inspect your chest,
repeating your mantra:

_Confidence wins ball games,
confidence wins ball games?_

But by senior year you learned enough
about chemistry to realize
that the alchemist in you had flipped
your switch, transmuting all the neighborhood girls
into unattainable gold, all boys into volcanoes.
A razor or bike, an evening spent
in a mirror, these things would not suffice
against him, so you ate lunch alone
under the bleachers, prospecting your wrists
for a crevice to mine the bastard out.
After the Shot

From the rifle’s cold, forward facing bolt, my right thumb recoiled, and

I felt my shoulder quiver, disengaging from the wood stock.

Several small arms from a branch pressed against my elbow, as the once steady poise of my left hand slipped from the tender kick of the .22 Caliber Ruger.

Rising, my boots smeared the forest floor; in the brittle leaves lay a single slug, as the mallard fell.
Reprieve

..grip seceded,
subsided and reposed
on his thigh: a rejection

awkward enough to
warrant another
attempt. Reverting
to the *Coffee Table
Compendium of World
Art* sprawled strategically

across my lap, he declared,
“Genuine, unadulterated
representations live off

the canvas. Palpable, they are
what I call, *sans frontier.*”
The page’s glossy finish welcomed

my thumb and index fingers
to linger, relax themselves
on both sides of the tab, but:

a gasp. His palm slapped
over his mouth, wiped
from his beard’s bristles

the moisture of his cocktail:
“Gustave Dore! A perfect example!
Nothing but religious imagery

and pompous author envy!”
And with a calculated
huff he once again nestled...
Papa Figure

Papa, we need a reunion, a comedy, an end to this conflict. It’s been years of stoic effigies, and now

I can’t reclaim your voice from the stentorian speeches inscribed in my ears. Was it you who suggested I rise

with the birds and eat worms? When I left, did you say time was the mausoleum of hope and despair, that I should

grapple my comrades in steel, and if... if... all else fails, just be a man? Papa, did I sit with you

in a musky study, two Russian novels apart, conversing by turning pages and shifting postures, switching chairs

like a pair of pantomimes? Tell me, Papa, if you insist on designating roles, which fictional son was I?

Tell me, which brave boy did you hope, in the last act, would finally come home?
Hedonistic Transcendentalism

Were I to weigh the wind against,
I don’t know, a nice slice of deli pizza,
I’d have to say I lean toward breezes,

because a good breeze beats most things:
as in, say, a shoulder massage from a dude
or an awesome cover-band. Even better,

a bike breeze beats a passing pretty face, beats
the proud nod of an uncle, beats someone else’s baby
laughing. I’ll take a breeze beside a pond over ice cream,

over having a heartier handshake than a cop,
even over catching a friendly smile
from a belle in a flowing yellow skirt.

Now, that same yellow skirt pressed
against an inner thigh, gently
by a breeze at a small town festival,

that beats almost everything, even,
say, seeing, I don’t know, a jackrabbit
in a wash–

but not a coyote burrowing in snow.
Man, what I’d give to glimpse a coyote
burrowing in snow.
Auspice

At sunset, red masked, the Muscovy hen
hurries her meandering, oblivious brood
over the live oak knobs, protruding
like pipelines along the morass shore bends.

From across the pond speeds the despotic drake,
Self-ordained baron of this harmless flock.
Quivering with rage, he looses a squawk,
a diffident attempt to intimidate.

The hen hides her ducklings behind a root,
bristles her back, and quacks at the intruder,
thен beats her dauntless pinions on his face.

A violent scuffle, and off flies the brute,
skimming the pond in an addled flutter;
he spends the evening preening in disgrace.
Stabled

That night, you danced across my creaking doublewide’s porch like an 18-wheeler on an Oklahoma interstate, big and shaky as hell, knocking the walls, ousting the camouflaged, hunting moths into the night.

Then, by the fire-pit, we cuddled under a dirty blanket, and I let your goofy face, your thin lips, kiss me as we followed the flames’ promenades. You foresaw my future – a farm outside of Prescott, with my wife and I tending horses

and my two, maybe three pigtailed daughters collecting daisies with my border collie while the silhouette of my teenaged son rustling cattle on the horizon. But when I asked what horses you foresaw for yourself

you replied, You’ll ride stallions; I, a mare, as if for certain I would ride into the sunset with someone good-looking, leaving you forever drunk on the porch, as if I hadn’t told you all I wanted was an escapade, nothing stable.

Beside the declining embers, we slept until, dusted by afternoon flurries, I woke to the neighbor’s hounds rustling our empty beer cans and you, gone, and you shook the hell out of me, you know, ousting me like that.
Nevertheless

A braking train shakes the house, whines
as you stuff your cigarette butt into the mouth
of a half-crushed beer can, turn to fix the record’s
skipping needle and make that old song yours:
“What Is and What Should Never Be.”

Old eggs caked on frying pans stink up the sink and make you doubt
things change. The thought, *Smells like always*, sneaks through
this Tuesday night, like a silverfish living its whole life in the dank
habitat your shit’s created. Between drinks and smokes,
and more drinks,

you decide to record your resolutions
in several different media: good ol’ paper,
voice memo, a text to your old cell number.
If you tell yourself, *I will start tomorrow;*
*I will mold something new,*

will you meditate in the morning, search for churches
online? Faith and family seem popular these days,
but you swore off humility and public shame the night
you left A.A. Nevertheless, this life does little
but sponge the stench.
The Minotaur at the Mall

“I miss you, you beast.”
--L.S.

Emptying my pockets, I begin to hyperventilate in a J.C. Penny's dressing room, the vault they've confined me in, and, again,

I am the Minotaur; I storm from the store, grumble my way into the outdoor mall. Dizzy and snorting among Sunglass Huts and ground fountains, my head, grotesque as a buoy, sweats as all the fat neo-Cretans scurry by. Before a Cinnabon, I snarl at the cashier recoiling at the grandmother rummaging for exact change. Give her time, you. I flare my nostrils, knit my brow, exhale.

Ah look, some citizens have brought along their dumb dogs with their mouthy faces. I am like them, the mongrels.

From under an umbrella in the food court, I imagine the movie we’d star in, that terrier there, this other lummox and I,

where by the end we all split, a good runaway flick full of tucked tails, lots of yipping. Digging for a cigarette, I find your postcard again,

and now I’m fighting back brutish tears. In this city, alone, I’m a lout without you, a ferine bull, bristling about.
You Were the Lion in My Dream

Midnight in the Sahara, or Yuma maybe, floating in my hammock, I watch a lion lounge around the dunes.

Feisty, she flip-flops on the ridge of her spine, bellows an oboe yawn, then scans the sand for prey.

*What a moonstalker*, I think. *So summersaulty and – shit,* eye contact. Over the sand drifts she slides, pounces up to my side, and nuzzles against my suspended nest, purring like a drum corps approaching. Simpering, she pins me under her paws and shakes my shoulders, streaking the stars across the canvas of my chimera. And I recognize by the anima she blazes, the beast I’ve seen parade behind your eyes, and that soon I’ll awaken to this stuffy, barren city you left behind.
The Dream Catcher

Too much, she said. Real sheep's wool wound through white doeskin,

with turkey vulture feathers dangling, limp, three on each side. Jesus,

and the poor bastard should have, must have, known

what a summer fling was. I mean, an authentic dream

catcher on the second date. I mean, our first was more

of a sleepover slash twister party, if you know what I mean.

Jesus, I said, what a poor bastard.
Autumn on the Mogollon Rim

The cold takes its time in the early hours, lingers around our camp like a fearless raccoon, reminds us, we’re the outsiders.

From up mountain, the elk bugle, and, bundled in my mummy bag, I imagine their breath condensing,

confronting the cold the way I brave the city highways, instinctively. Held down somewhere inside wool socks, my toes sleep,

but my hands stayed up all night, stuffed in gloves, tucked in pockets, packed under the igloo of my body. They plead for wild heat,

fire, as my internal supply dwindles. First light, and the time to tear into the merciless air, brave the chill, shift timbers from the stockpile to the fire-pit and begin breakfast. Courage starts fires, and hypothermia, in a cold camp, creates heroes.
Inside Montezuma’s Well

Let me offer you
an earphone, and you will

say, *Play “Into the Mystic,”*
cigarette smoke

accompanying your words
like subtitles for the deaf fog,

the silent fog that pours
like thick milk, upward

through the Anasazi alcoves
dug into the well’s walls,

slips over the rim, then down
into the forest’s bed.

Let us loiter the morning
away in one of the Earth’s

many lungs; conjoined
by my headset, we’ll share

a serape, and you will be
the fog in my arms,

the thing in me
that pours over,

and we will drink the water.
VITA

The author was born in Mesa, Arizona. He obtained his Bachelor's degree in English and Political Science from Arizona State University in 2009. He joined the University of New Orleans English graduate program to pursue an MA in English and to study creative writing. He recently received the 2012 Academy of American Poets/Andrea Saunders Gereighty Poetry Award.