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In the Dead Season

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IN THE DEAD SEASON

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 Fine Arts
in
the Department of Drama and Communication
Creative Writing Program

by

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ABSTRACT

In the Dead Season is a manuscript of poetry that explores, through family narrative, the tensions between ignorance and truth, between honor and mendacity, between violation and veneration, between love and loss, between grief and transcendence. Set in rural Texas, the poems in this collection describe a harsh and unforgiving landscape seen largely, though not exclusively, through the eyes of a central child narrator. Rattlesnakes, tarantulas, drought, flood, birth, death, the poems present everyday occurrences and suggest that we often experience events before we have the context, knowledge, or emotional maturity to make sense of them in any reasonable manner. This discontinuity leaves gaps in understanding that we fill with mythologies of our own making, mythologies that both masquerade as innocence and lead us too early to toxic truths. In a world where death is commonplace, true wonder is found in surprising places.

“Between grief and nothingness,
I will take grief.”

William Faulkner

If I Forget Thee Jerusalem

“What’s the world for if you can’t make
it up the way you want it?”

Toni Morrison

Jazz

The Doorway

A woman with two wombs stood in the doorway.
What lies between truth and ignorance, she asked,
and how can I know one from the other?
Is one tall, the other fair,
one zealous, one cold,
where will they be born?
She placed a hand upon her right womb, questioning,
is this one ignorance, this one truth,
stroking the left, a smile tickling
the corners of her lips.

The child in each womb stirred, stretched,
pushed against the dividing wall.
Did either know the answer
or did they harbor other questions—
not who would be, but how,
two wombs and only one
dark passage into the world.

Summer Squall

Her head on his knee, the woman huddled
on the truck seat. Bluebonnets had given way
to buttercups, still she shuddered under the quilt.
He drove fast as he dared, unseasonal rain
cutting visibility, concentration split—
wife by his side, crops that'd spoil
if the rain didn't let up soon,
munitions factory explosion
where her brother-in-law worked.

He drove by instinct, memory— hairpin curve
by Swinburne Creek, bank of mesquite near
the turnoff to the rendering plant. Water mixed with
rolling black smoke headlamps couldn't penetrate.
Another explosion lit the sky—

“Breathe through the dishcloth.” He spoke to her,
fearing she wasn't breathing at all, cursing himself
for not staying with his mother's boiling kettles and towels.
But her bleeding, the fire, Paul's chances worse even
than he'd thought from her sister's call.

Her body jolted, lay still.
Pulling to the side of the road
he helped the infant's head push through,
cleared its eyes, pressed lips to lips
willing the tiny lungs to breathe.

Out

something heavy pushing
squeezing me make myself big as I can
shake my head side to side push
shove slide hard purple red
rolling stench flames
knees elbows light
sound "hold on"
push
push

Mother Hunger

who is that woman
who comes every day
she doesn't live here
like the mothers
who feed me fix my
box so it's warm take
the wetness away
who is she sitting there
—almost reaching—
close enough I smell
—almost remember—
her hunger

Man, Woman, Mother, Father

She's here again.

There's a man with her.

His face is kind. He smiles.

His eyes crinkle at the edges.

She twists her hands, calls
me "her little pink mouse."

The mothers take a cloth
from her, dress me, stroke me,
"How pretty, how pretty."

One of the mothers
swaddles me
picks me up—

His arms reach out,
hold me close, closer
than the mothers.

His lips touch my ears,
my cheeks, my nose,
and sing

"My baby, my Cassie,"
all the way home.

In the Days After

In and out yellow after blue
her fingers work the threads
until patterns appear—lilac
bluebonnet rosemary rue.
The one called sister
sits beside her, hands clasped
across a swollen belly, quietly
weeping. She loosens a hand
to stroke the orange hair of the boy
leaning across her knee, keens,
“Paul, Paul, Paul.” Mother’s fingers
never stop—coral seagrass cornflower
rape. Fresh images adrift, ash and bone
flames her retinas reflect roiling black clouds,
my nostrils fill blood hair flesh.
Silently I too call out,
Pa Paul.

Terrible Twosome

Twirling on the kitchen tabletop, blonde curls
bobbing, Polly and I shrieked in time
to Skipper's barking. "Get down before
you hurt yourself," Mother called,
snapping the dishtowel at me.
"That baby can do what she
wants," Grandmother said
as Mother backed away.

Clay

Texas afternoons squatting outdoors
my fingers molded whole worlds.

It didn't matter if there was rain—
a tiny teapot could flood that dry dirt—

and I could carve canyons, dam
the Ganges' flow, people kingdoms,

feeling God's pleasure
when he first reached into clay.

The Road to Grandmother

The dirt road between our house and the highway,
a good mile long, was plowed twice a year,

winter ruts so deep cars got stuck and spring
floodwater rose high as the truck's doorhandles.

In summer, crossing the cattleguard to Grandma's
edging past sidewinders and spiders—tarantulas

scared me more, so big they crunched under the wheels.
My brother kept a drawerful of dead rattlers.

In fall, Mother said I should take the path
through the henyard but Grandma's chickens could fly.

Maybe

Maybe it was *Bambi* or *Dumbo* or *Cinderella*.

Maybe I was three or four, first time at the movies,
dark as our room with the blackout curtains drawn
rows of seats wider than the rows at synagogue.

Maybe it was *Fantasia*. Rows and rows of them,
dead eyes staring out of gaunt faces,

ashes, bones, everything grey,

“their eyes shall see the glory”

seeping through the theatre.

Grandpa loved Franklin Roosevelt

for getting them through the Depression.

Mother hated him. Maybe that was why.

Cassandra

Some stories you remember because they're etched
deep beneath the skin, others because you've been told
them so many times they become your memories.

This one I don't remember, I believe.

Aunt Billie said it shocked her pants off when,
at four, I looked up from the morning paper
and asked, clear as crystal,

“Aunt Billie, what's rape?”

She hummed and hawed and even retelling years later
never said, perhaps fearing for me my namesake's fate.

Touching Wounds

She came home, green operating room cap
covering her shaved head, brown eyes too large
for that face, mouth a soft bow of composure.
I was too young to even wonder what she felt
behind that stitched wound across her brain.

“You’re too noisy. Go on outside
with the boys.” Mother said. Four and
five, Polly and I never played with the boys,
not even the little ones. An older one
took my hand, “Come on, baby.
We’ll find something to do.”

The hulking one I called my little brother
stood over me, pulled my panties down,
touched me, nodded at the orange-haired one
I called cousin, “Your turn.” Light broke through
the outhouse roof leaving only me, my cousin,
the god. His stiff pink flesh moved against me,
softer than my brother’s rough fingers.
I squirmed, jerked free as he tried
to push inside.

“Cassie.” Mother’s voice sounded across the yard.
Zipping jeans, their faces tightened.
“Cassie.” I raced toward the house.
Polly was dying.

Grandmother's Garden

Grandmother's garden was paradise.
Sunup to sundown she planted, weeded,
pruned and picked vegetables, fixing them
for lunch or supper for the mess of us.

When Polly died, Mother squeezed my shoulder,
handed me *Angels Unaware*. Grandma took my hand, marched
me to the garden, showed me how
to pick beans and tomatoes: "Twist a little—
never snap it off. Leave it till it's ripe
enough to fall into your hand."

Electra

Mother started bleeding when she shouldn't
so they put her in the hospital. I must have missed her
but the month dragged on, Daddy and my brother Jake
out in the pasture or at the barn, me alone in the house. I
wasn't allowed to use the stove, but one afternoon I peeled
and sliced potatoes, heated grease in the skillet and fried them
crisp, so he'd know if she didn't come home
we'd get along just fine.

Turn to Dick and Jane

Not that page, Cassie. This one. Read the first chapter, not the last.

Print. First graders don't write. Raise your hand if you have a question.

Don't ask questions when I'm teaching other grades. Go to the book shelf quietly but only if you're in third grade or higher. First graders sit at your desk. Practice your letters. Capital letters take two lines, lower case one. j and y take the line below. Only the dot goes above the line. k and f take two lines, Cassie. Print. Fill in all the lines. Don't color outside the lines. The sun is always yellow, never green or purple. Never pick your nose. Never— oh, Cassie, why didn't you raise your hand?

Look at the mess you've made.

That Summer

The summer Grandpa died was like any other.
Daddy cut wheat and Mother cooked big pots of stew
and red beans and fried chicken to take to the field.
I don't remember the day he died
but I do remember air thick with dust
covered dishes at the big house
crouching by the bare cistern on the back porch
where no one would ever churn ice cream again.
I don't know if that was the summer of *Anne Frank*
or *Alexander the Great* but I know that after Grandpa
died, at dusk when Skipper should have been home,
he wasn't. For three whole days and then a week
I called and called. The eighth day he turned up
in a ditch. And I thought he was my dog.

Thornberry School

In first grade I sat behind Aubrey Rogers who couldn't read or spell. In second, Tommy, Jimmy and I played red rover and pop the whip and talked all day over the party line when we got measles and mumps at the same time.

I liked third grade best. We got the big red geography book to study and when the fourth graders were doing their lessons we could slip to the cupboard in the back of the room and read any book that was there. We didn't worry about

what went on in the big room or who'd be chosen last for softball and when Jimmy's sister Jenny fell through the hole in the girls' outhouse Mr. Jackson came and fished her out.

Blueprints

At eight I knew I'd marry Tommy
had blueprints of the house we'd live in
all sketched out and family trees well past
the year 2000 with our twelve children's
names, where they'd go to school, who
they'd marry, even the grandchildren.

And so when Jenny lied after Tommy's
mother told how he'd slept with the flashlight
I gave him for his birthday, claiming
she gave him boots he slept with too,
I felt like I'd been slapped.

Texas Winter

Mother told Daddy the twins needed
winter coats and, no, she couldn't sew
them and run after two. Jake laughed—
who needs a coat when it never snows?

The twins said they wanted bells like
the people with buckets rang in town.

I never owned a coat or scarf or gloves,
but I had twenty-six panels twirling

“The Night Before Christmas,”
my second and my favorite skirt.

Burnt Offerings

Two summers after grandpa died
the combine Jake was steering
caught fire and burned. Daddy
fought the flames.

Nobody was there to stop
Jenny from climbing
the stove for the cookie jar.
Nobody was there to fight the flames.

On the Transmigration of Souls

Baptists don't believe in reincarnation

but Mother did.

Evenings sitting quietly on the couch

reflected in the mirror

the lone Chinese porcelain urn resting on the long low lacquer table

she'd be and not be with us in the room.

One night ironing in the kitchen

I told her I sometimes felt I'd been alive before.

She looked at me from far away

then said, "you too?"

Apollo in the Wheatfields

He leaned against the threshing machine eating
the beans and cornbread she'd brought him.

Even in the shade his golden torso glistened,
muscles rippled as he raised the metal cup

of sweetened tea she handed him, eyes cast down.

He knew that look. Had seen it many times—

evenings with a shirt and clean jeans covering
his bronzed body. He knew how to read a woman,

whether they dared look into his blue eyes
or — like her — glanced away. A twitch

in his groin would tell him how great their desire
to knot fingers in his fair hair, measure their weakness

against his strength. He knew which ones would warm
to his touch, welcome his body—and this dark child was one.

Catching him off guard, the combine engine her father
shifted into gear roared into action. "Back to work."

He watched the truck leave the field, her face pressed
against the back window until both were out of sight.

Smoke

At the dining room table, red metal
rolling machine in front of him, a pouch
of tobacco not that different in color
or texture or fragrance from Daddy's
Lucky Strikes, Sonny sprinkled just
the proper amount of tobacco
across the top of a hopper
like the red hoppers of the combines
he and Daddy drove in the wheatfield.

The whirring circles of the thresher,
the blades that somehow scooped
up wheat, separated it from stem
and chaff and shot a perfect arc
of grain—just such a mystery
this small red machine
that spread tobacco
across a thin fine piece of paper,
wrapped it tightly for the tip of a tongue
to wet and seal.

Sometimes he'd let me pour or when daddy
wasn't looking he'd let me wet the paper with my lips,
my tongue. I'd catch a thread or two—it was as close to him
as I ever got. But when they were in the fields and I was all alone
in the bunkhouse, the straps of my sundress falling off my shoulders,
cool air framing an afternoon haze against the burning sun,
he felt much closer.

Cassie's Dream

Each daughter must have longed
 for a mother whose love for her
 and whose power were so great
 as to undo rape
 and bring her back from the dead.

—Adrienne Rich

“Don’t squirm. You’ll get soap in your eyes.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I mutter, arms tight against my side
 straining to rest my neck on the counter.

“Stop fidgeting.” Her fingers massage
 my head, I relax, fall into a dream—

plunging

into darkness

thighs burning

Mother!

Where are you?

Where are you?

Where am

Aaiiyee!

“Cassie, are you hurt?”

“No, ma’am. Sticky lemon juice
 tangles my hair.”

His Eye

The blood dried to a crust
before the truck got out to the road.
Thirteen miles to the hospital with an eyeball
on the side of his face, pupil resting there

no lid to shield it from the sun from other
staring eyes. Each crossing a threat—slow down!
What might a sudden stop do to that delicate sphere connected
by what thin strands to vein muscle nerve.
Would he ever see again?

It probably wasn't the first time
a man had been kicked in the eye by a calf
but it was the first time I'd held my daddy's hand
to soothe his pain, not mine.

Prairie Afternoons

Opalescent discs radiate
like a corona
through closed lids—

salmon
indigo
vertigris
honey
sand

—life spinning beneath the open sky.

Barefoot

At home I always went barefoot
even when the dirt was hot enough
to walk on tiptoe and stickers so thick
I had to stop every few feet to pull one out
but the time I dreamed I'd gone to school
without my shoes I was mortified. At recess,
like boy's at a pissing contest,
I shared my shame.

A seventh grader, Carrie who usually didn't talk
to younger girls, scoffed, "That's nothing.
I dreamt I went to school without drawers,"
and with a flounce of her full skirt strolled
toward the baseball diamond
to watch the boys.

Ballroom Dancing

There were no Mrs. Parson's Tea Dances after school at Thornberry
but Tuesdays and Thursdays after my brother Jake got home
from driving the school bus there were Arthur Murray

dance classes in town. Mother and Daddy signed us all up for a full slate
from two-step to tango. Carrie was there and Jake always danced with her.
Mostly I stood along the wall practicing the two-step, watching the twins.

Every evening, the instructor would take Carrie's hand and say,
"Now everyone, watch how it's done." They'd glide across the floor,
her full skirts dipping and swirling, dark hair swinging just like Natalie Wood.

Surefooted Jake would drag me onto the dance floor
where I'd stumble, forget a step, improvise. "You're trying to lead,"
he'd growl. "The man leads, the girl follows," eyes never leaving Carrie.

Her Mother's Knitting Needles

Twisting to talk to Tommy in the seat behind me,
I snagged my knee on a broken spring,
watched the blood run
when she screamed.

Jake pulled the bus to a stop in front of the preacher's
house and ran inside. The older boys huddled
around the emergency door muttering
“oh shit,” muffling her moans.

Behind us, the sixth graders whispered,
“She sat on her mother's knitting needles.”
We sat dumb until an ambulance
came all the way from Wichita
and whisked her away.

I couldn't figure out how knitting needles could hurt.
I'd sat on a spring—why wasn't anyone
watching me bleed?

On the ride home
Jake told me not to tell Mother and Daddy.
No one at school talked about that day.
Carrie never came back.

A Fencepost in Texas

Straddling fenceposts under Texas skies
all through childhood, mud-pies and make-believe,
like Red River clay, cracked and dried up.

Wheatfields burnished with oil, with blood,
draw me, a certainty of something greater
hovering, out of reach, never out of mind.

Grandmother's Pontiac

The shade has to be just right, she said.
If the sun beats through the leaves
before the wax hardens it'll spot.

That car was her Bucephalus.
She'd carefully prepare to ride, tightening stays,
rolling stockings just so, cotton camellia
pinned to her collar, hat tightly tucked.

Sometimes she'd be gone for hours,
sometimes days. Selling eggs,
settling squabbles, soaring.

When she returned I'd gently scrub the blaze
of insects from grill and windshield,
mud from whitewall tires,
cleaning, currying.

Marilyn, Joe, and Me

Daddy loved to drive. Each fall after harvest
he'd teach us geography lessons
we'd never learn in books.

Swimming in the Pacific, riding donkeys
down the Grand Canyon, shooing bats in Carlsbad Caverns,
reading the Declaration of Independence

climbing the Empire State Building,
our dreams came true. Spotting Joe DiMaggio
at the Villanova Restaurant,

I saw my chance. "Joe, Joe. I'll take
better care of you than Marilyn." He winked
at Daddy, squeezed my shoulder, clearly beguiled.

Socks

Dreaming of boyfriends I didn't have, I stared in the mirror at my flat chest, aching to look like the movie stars in Grandma's magazines. Mother's Tampax boxes pictured curvy models in strapless swimsuits, proclaimed no belts, no pins, no pads. I pushed one in and waited. Nothing happened.

So I rolled white socks, stuffed them in my bra, and wore them to school. No one noticed. One night, lying on the couch with Daddy watching tv, he reached inside my shirt—"what's this?" Nothing, I lied, crossing my arms to cover my chest as I kissed him goodnight.

Kissing Grief

“No,” Daddy said. “I don’t care if he is
the preacher’s son. You’re not going off
after dark with some boy.”

I slammed the door, didn’t kiss him good night,
fumed till Aunt Billie picked me up
from school the next day.

Mother stood in the hospital corridor, didn’t look up.
I pushed my way into the room, watched green-clad
medics disconnect tubes, monitors, oxygen,
stared at how inert, how pale,
powerless he’d become.

The next day, Mother hunted
the right black dress, couldn’t decide,
paid cash for two. I got heels at Baker’s
I’d wanted for months.

Together we stood beside his casket,
listened as everyone exclaimed how lifelike he looked,
took our places in the first limousine all the way
to Wichita, walked together
into the First Methodist Church,
past the crowded pews,
perfect widows.

I glared at those cousins chewing gum
behind us, shouted at the minister,
“NO! You can’t have him!”

Back home, I wandered out to my favorite stretch of fence,
to the barn, the bunkhouse, found Uncle Louis
kissing Glorie, ran back to the house.

Just then Donny, the preacher's son, pulled up,
asked to take me for a drive.

Mother said yes.

He drove me to a place down by the river,
held me in his arms and kissed me
like Daddy'd never do again.

Days later on the bus I heard him whisper,
"I'll get her now that her old man's gone."

Seasonal Savor

Fall leafs its way into our hearts—

brilliant sumac, blaring maples, rusty oak,
baring limbs for a season yet to come.

Under leaves the mushrooms poke

persistent heads. We pick them for their flavor,
not their hue, poisonclad the brightly colored,
proof the universe will not die.

Winter Lament

Strains of Bach from a guitar recall a time
faith and salvation were important
as bread and comfort.

Did you know when Vatican authorities
refused Mozart a copy of the score
of Allegri's *Miserere*,

he wrote it note for note
from the memory of one performance
to spite them?

Snow climbs furrows, covers borders,
thought frozen in its wake.

What sound is this—

I thought it had a dying fall.

What light or heat will keep it warm?

Spring

A honeysuckle blossoms—
The hummingbird drives its beak
into the center.

Pruning

Saturday. Summer sun clouds over.
Curled on the couch, fan blowing idly,
I sink into drowsy discontent.

Hours ago I woke, eager to start
a new day, pruned peonies,
cut back lupine for lilies.

Now I'm cut off at the root—
Emptiness in my hand.

Memory

Some days life's used light
swallows memory—
pitch dark of blackout shades
rich scent of plowed fields
musty storm cellars
dust before rain.

I wonder if I imagined Death
my nursemaid, my nursery rhymes
the stench of burning flesh,
my uncle Paul, Jenny,
nameless millions
haunting
like Furies
as Grandpa, Polly, Daddy
joined the dead.

Even grief recollected fails.
Some force now halts, keeps memory
from revising me, waiting
for the nothingness
to pass.

The Twins Tale

We weren't afraid of anything,
 barbed wire, acres of stickerweeds
 red ants, sand burning the bottoms
 of our bare feet. Not even snakes
 in the browning grass or hairy-legged
 tarantulas creeping out of the cattleguard.
 Not bulls running loose in the pasture
 or chickens flying around the henyard.
 Not even Cassie when she started spouting doom:

*Two-headed calves, fried sausages
 bursting with maggots, stunted wheat stalks,
 even the well crusted over with lye*

She'd mumble
 about "that woman from Chicago" Louis brought home after the war,
 stick fingers in her ears when anyone mentioned 'her' name, shriek
 curses until grandma'd wash her mouth with soap.

And 'her'?

Her name was Gloria but Louis called her Glory
 so we did too. She wore green or yellow or blue silk
 dresses and sometimes even red and high platform
 shoes with ankle straps and rhinestones on every finger.
 She dyed her hair bottle black, drank whiskey, smoked,
 even played poker with the boys. She talked too loud,
 her voice funny and nasal, and laughed at off-color jokes.
 Told them too. To us she was glamorous as a movie star,
 and Louis loved her something mighty.

Grandma said Cassie'd better make peace.

We'd sit around with Glory
looking at pictures in slick magazines
and she'd tell us about fancy restaurants and hotels
bigger than the state capitol. She put on fresh lipstick
every time she had a cigarette so there'd be a ring
around the end when she was done. Said that way
everybody'd know they were hers. Sometimes
we'd sneak a few to trade for gum and soda pop.

Cassie just glared at us.
Come winter, she mumbled
around the house, stalked across the fields,
shredding her clothes, importuning heaven.

No one listened.

Spring. Uncle Louis and Jake drove to the cattle show.
Grandma sent Cassie to "keep 'Glory company.'"

The next day around four o'clock
a sulphurous stillness filled the air. We rang
the bell by the cistern and Grandma lifted the heavy bar
from the cellar door. "Come on, come on," she urged.

We ran.

At the lowest point on the western horizon a dark funnel swallowed the yellow haze.

Grandma lit the kerosene lamp
and we huddled for hours in the musty air,
waiting, the wind engine outside pounding
our shouts into whispers.
Then silence.

Even when Grandma nodded,

something held us back
so she saw them first—

Cassie and 'her'

wind-driven into the cottonwood,
the heavy cellar bar
wedged against them
like an ax.

We don't go barefoot so much
anymore or walk the cattleguard.
Except for school we stay
right close to Grandma
and every day we pray.

Accounts Receivable. 6.13

Tuesdays and Saturdays Grandma carried eggs to town
and brought back oranges , movie magazines, *True Confessions*
she kept under her bed. Even if the hens were off their laying
her best customers—who paid on time—always got theirs. Jake says
Grandpa used to yell about mush for breakfast but she never budged.
When she had the operation we begged her to change the date,
expectation shrouded by his final June 13th.
She chided our superstition. We hovered,
seeking reassurance more than giving.
She shooed us out to supper.
He was waiting.

For the Dead

The blender stalls then catches
pulls down another chunk of ginger
and grinds it whole. Soon it will

puree, become a liquid to bathe
a salmon in. Nothing but daily tasks—
chopping mincing saucing.

We're through with memory—
gaunt faces, the simple soup
you sipped. Instead we'll eat

and drink and sleep
rising again tomorrow
as if you'd be there too.

And We Danced

Again, she directed, as the needle found its place
in the vinyl and we arched, extended, returned to fifth position
to the count one-two-three-two-two-three-three-two-three-four-two-three
Turn and left-two-three-two-two-three-three-two-- as the body took over,
count no longer important, only the *need*—bend of elbow relaxed curl of wrist
fingertips lift of ribcage tightening thigh calf ankle slow movement of eyes
neck shoulders back thorax head arms feet in place. Turn. Begin. Need. Again.

Woman, Perfected

Hiding her blossoms, the daffodil shrinks
in the frozen morning air. Snow-covered mulch hugs
her stalk, roots warming against the chill. No lamb
grazes in the lion's empty lair. No crocus
keeps her company.

Alone she shivers
in her bed shadowed under the eaves dreams
she's standing in the blazing sun, slender body
arching in the breeze, golden labia beckoning
kissing bees singing the beginning of the world.

Reflection

But for the living breath of spring
the bees would surely die:
no longer free to fly the hills
they'd hover round the empty hive
in blind confusion until their wings—
heavy no more with pollen's load—
would cease to fan the air.
Their song'd become a dirge
and we, from all our fears,
would stand astonished.

In the Dead Season

In the dead of winter, the dead season
my heart soars. Gone confining leaves,
demands of lawn and flowerbeds—only the earth.

I love the musty smell of caves or cellars, cold
stone-walled cathedrals, quiet of cemeteries,
the sweeping austerity of the desert.

The twisted grey towers nature erects
in the midst of plenty reconcile us
with our past and all still to come.

Some days may leak a stroke of fine blue
breathing discontent into refinery
burnoff, luring us to escape

only to lead us in the dark to Elba,
staring across the Mediterranean
at the steelmills of Piombino.

We never leave the charnel house far behind
so we may as well make it a gracious dwelling place
when it comes to greet us.

All That We Are

Perhaps that's why art touches as it does—
after we have turned to ash or dust,
some crouching figure that we made lives on,
sits high upon a shelf of polished walnut,
speaks to a world of grief and sorrow,
cries out when a loved one dies—

We twist a figure from fine wire,
cover it with wax, cast wax in bronze.
It's never enough—we have nothing more
— *the core of all we are is time.*

VITA

Sonja Hansard-Weiner was born and lived in rural Texas until she was twelve. Since then she has lived and traveled across the United States, Mexico, Central and South America, Canada, and Europe. She received her B.A. in English and French from the University of St. Thomas, Houston, her M.A. in English from the University of Texas-El Paso, and completed coursework for the Ph.D. in English literature and linguistics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She teaches English, Creative Writing, and Women's Studies at Madison Area Technical College in Madison, Wisconsin, where she and her husband live and own a fine arts gallery.

THESIS EXAMINATION REPORT

CANDIDATE: Sonja Hansard-Weiner

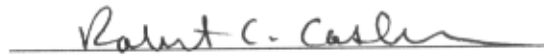
MAJOR FIELD: Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing,
Low Residency Option

TITLE OF THESIS: *In the Dead Season*

APPROVED:



Richard Katrovas, Major Professor & Chair

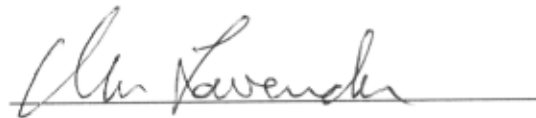


Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:



Anne-Marie Macari



William Lavender

DATE OF EXAMINATION: 4/8/2003