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Buckle

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Buckle

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
Creative Writing
Poetry

by

Erin Gendron

B.S. Central Michigan University, 2006

May 2010

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Preface

Through the deliberate use craft, poems become beautiful, meaningful objects that create pleasure for the reader. In *A Poetry Handbook*, Mary Oliver writes, “Part of our pleasure in the poem is that it is a well-made thing . . .” meaning that it is deliberate construction that creates the most enjoyable elements of poetry. All the elements, language, content, style, and theme; must be considered individually as well as in relation to one another. At its center, the poem is a form of communication and expression; these are its practical purposes. In order for the poem to be pleasing to the reader, it must be thoughtfully designed.

This notion of the poetic is akin to the concept of craft that I associate with obvious types of handwork, such as cooking or sewing. These skills are grounded in necessity but can transcend their original purposes through intention and execution. Similarly, the impetus of the poem is to communicate, but it is the making of the poem that makes it pleasing. The connection between traditional domestic handcrafts and the ways in which my poetry deals with the sensory world is derivative of other female poets who have used domestic identity as a poetic device. The talents or skills that are commonly associated with traditional female gender roles make several appearances in this manuscript. In “Empirical Memory,” the speaker stands in her kitchen, dutifully preparing vegetables in the summer heat, but the paring and trimming of the vegetables suggests the ways in which she also feels diminished, into something smaller and smaller, as she is literally and figuratively consumed. “Beekeeping” represents the home and female body in ways that stretch the conventional notions about commitment and longing and about the female role of caretaker or curator. The speaker in that poem converts her body into to a beehive in order to be closer to a romantic partner.

The use of the persona and the confessional voice is another debt that I owe to contemporary female poets. The poet Ai's use of the persona has been a strong influence on my work. My poem, "Thread," is designed in a similar vein in that it uses an invented voice to represent a somewhat intimate moment from the first-person. The speaker begins by narrating a series of actions that are propelled by some sort of disruption, and then the disruption is revealed at the poem's end. Gwendolyn Brooks also uses personas in her work, though I would describe her persona poems as being more political; poems like "The Mother" and "The Boy Died in My Alley" come to mind. Brook's use of sound has had a noticeable affect on my writing in the poems, "Photograph of My Mother, 1971" and "Anchor," which don't use strict rhyme, but use repetition and other devices to create the sense of rhyme. Some of these themes are confessional, and part of the craft of these poems involves the creation of the character and the invention of the character's voice.

My poems are rooted in my own sense of place and identity, but my goal is that they become something greater. John Ashbery said, "I write with experiences in mind, but I don't write about them, I write out of them." The poem "Elegy" is written after my father, but in that poem, I am representing loss as a series of tasks, almost as a checklist, and the speaker's voice is one of duty, rather than sorrow. "Portrait of My Mother, 1971" is based on an actual photo of my mother, in her 20's, wearing hotpants, and she really was a knockout. In it, Brooks' influence and the play of language are the dominant elements of the design, so the experience of having read Brook's poetry is just as significant as the experience of seeing the photograph. Many of my poems rely on personal experience and speak from the first-person, and through construction, reach the reader as a "well-made thing," as opposed to a secondhand story.

John Ashbery also said, “My intention is to present the reader with a pleasant surprise, not an unpleasant one, not a nonsurprise. I think this is the way pleasure happens when you are reading poetry.” This notion about surprise refers to something occurring within, or as a result of, the poem that creates a sense of wonder within the reader and highlights what makes poetry worthwhile. The “surprise” that Ashbery is describing is that element that makes poems glow, float, or adhere within our minds once they are read. The surprise is the thing that the poet has in store for the reader, the elements of the poem that are designed with him or her in mind. In each poem, these elements are crafted differently; sometimes the surprise may happen on the page, before the reader’s eyes. Other times, the surprise may happen within the reader, as he or she reacts to the poem. In “Magician’s Apprentice,” the surprise occurs as the reader recognizes the poem to be about expectations rather than magic, but only after following the narrative.

Many of the poems in this manuscript contain themes of death and loss, but I believe a “pleasant surprise” is possible by representing these ideas as artistic creations. Through craft, the poet has the ability to make these poems beautiful. Ashbery warns against “the nonsurprise,” which refers to a poem that doesn’t provide the reader with any opportunity to feel a sense of wonder or astonishment. The “unpleasant surprise” refers to a poem that may contain elements that are unexpected, but the poem is not sufficiently crafted, so the trick or the illusion feels unearned. To reiterate Mary Oliver’s statement, part of our delight comes from the quality of the poem, that it is a “well-made thing.” I believe that it is the union of these two factors, the quality of the craft and the element of surprise, which make poetry enjoyable to the reader.

The word “craft” will always be connected to the physical act of creation, and my poems reflect this idea through their emphasis on sensory experience. Ashbery’s statement about experience highlights where I see myself, in that I am mining my own experience in order to use

it as a starting point. I have spent years working as a teacher, a cook, a waitress, and a housekeeper, and I bake and sew for fun. These kinds of tactile pursuits have led me to emphasize sensory experience in my poems. However, experience includes not only what we have lived, but also what we have overheard, dreamed, stolen, feared, and imagined. Writing “out of” these experiences refers to many kinds of explorations. The poet is free to delve into an experience, to unfold it, or turn it inside out, but he or she may also cut and paste experiences together in ways that are not realistic or logical in order to create something new. The poet may inflate a minor experience with fabrications until it explodes, or hack a seismic event down until it is a notion so slight it gets caught your teeth.

While I hesitate to bring up mimes, there is that moment during the illusion when the act becomes real. As the viewer, you see the rope or the door being opened, even though it isn't really there. I'm interested in a similar type of illusion, in which the reader experiences the sensory events or images, even though they are only reading words from a page. In the poems that employ surrealism, the use of sensory details is essential for making the world of the poem believable. As a result, many of my poems rely on these kinds of descriptive images, the weight of a spool of thread in an open hand or the smell of stagnant water. Ezra Pound warned, “Go in fear of abstraction.” By representing these intricate images, tastes, or sensations, I work to create some pleasant tension and to compensate for the limits of language.

Craft resides in the interpretation of experience into something greater, and this opens the door for surprise. Through this poetic rendering, mud clings to your feet because it's lonely. Your own teeth become your most prized possessions. The role of the Band-Aid seems suddenly enviable, and you can sense all those recycled atoms falling back down to Earth.

The Magician's Apprentice

“And now, a magic trick,” said the magician,

as from his satin-lined pocket he pulled an eye,
setting it aside, and then, he handed me
a piece of string, with, at the end of it,
a rabbit's foot, dangling. Touching
his gloved hand to his mouth,
he then produced a stone. First,
I looked directly into the eye. It stared back.
I held the rabbit's foot, and it flashed
hot, twitching in my palm, then bounded
across the parquet floor, disappearing
behind the red velvet curtain. Next,
the string coiled around my finger as it swelled
into a snake. Finally, I clutched the stone
under my breath until it softened
into a human heart.

Disappointed, my master looked down
at the cold, fat thing slumped in my hands
and sighed. “The trick is to make it beat.”

Earthly Sequence

In the movie, when the couple finally make love
in the burning house, that's a metaphor.
And when the woman stands up, looking for her shirt,
that's the *dénouement*. After a burn,

there will be tingling, then numbness,
until the skin sloughs off
with a twist. These symptoms of climax,
the suspension of pain, the impending
release--become *le petit mort*, your own

little Death. Imagine the stem of any fruit
as a nipple, the weight of a breast as you hold it.
Place your thumb over the nipple, the stem; this first
touch is automatic. Bring the fruit to your lips,
recall the phrase, "good enough to eat," and imagine

who might have said it first. When you watch
the film, do you want the house to fall in on them
or to write yourself into the scene?

Photograph of My Mother, 1971

Oh,
Mother, you

storm cloud, you
blackberry, you
cherry bomb, you
spinning plate, you

figure 8, you
tall drink, you
slick deal, you
silver fish, you
velvet seal, you

ticking clock, you
chopping block—

how the men could have nibbled those legs for days.

Beekeeping

When I saw a queen bee on the violet in the window,
I swallowed her, but in a few days, I heard the whine
in my belly and felt so sympathetic, I ate another.
You saw the pollen on my lips, liked the honey taste
in my mouth; after that, I ate only flowers. I even stopped smoking.

Honey collected like dew behind my ears, even in the crease of my neck,
and you could not get enough. My stomach ached. They never stopped buzzing,
but then I started baiting them. I would place a butterscotch disc on my tongue,
open my mouth, and wait. Then, I didn't hear their whining,
and I felt fulfilled. When my mother asked how we are, I said, "Great."

Those mornings, I sat perfectly still while you gathered the bees
tangled in my hair. I knew you loved me as you undressed me,
then peeled back the skin from my stomach to study the geometry
of the comb. People asked us if we were expecting. My stomach
was swollen, but I knew that autumn was coming.

The cold killed the queen, then the colony collapsed.
Now, the excess honey runs down my legs, squeezes out
when I sit. I've ruined our sheets and the floors, so I've moved
into the shed, with the dormant hives, until I dry out.

I sleep on a cot between two tarps. Your beekeeper's suit hangs
on the wall like a former self. The dry leaves on the ground are useless
as I cross in the cool dark toward our house. On the way, I see you,
glowing in the bluish light of your greenhouse, as you examine
your infant plants beneath the fluorescent bulbs.

Elegy

For Thomas Gendron

The world lacks paper enough for all the words
I've wanted to say or hear. There isn't enough
land for all the seeds to take root, nor sky
for every bird to take flight at once. The world

needs its space back, so your cough resettles
into the wind, so your unused exhalations
can fill my lungs to bursting. At night,
your empty atoms fall silently as dust. By now,
your clothes have been given to worthy charities;
the knowledge of your death distributed
efficiently, your name polished

by our grief. I show reservation, self-control:
these lessons you taught without, first,
learning. In spite of your television's continuing
narration, and your meal, untouched, perhaps
left to cool on the counter, I sit on the floor

of your empty house, dissecting your wallet, silently
cutting up each hard credit card into smaller
and smaller pieces, reorganizing the pocked
photographs of my childhood face. Though
there was too little time to show you, please
know your intentions were not lost on me.

Bedside Manner

I want to be as steady as the drip
of the I.V. bag. Like the chirp
of your machines, I want to sound
the alarm that makes someone come
running. I want to work like the nurse,
wake and put on the uniform, nod, and know
what I'm meant to do.

I want the bandage to adhere
to something. I want the trache-tube to listen
to every sigh. I want to do something useful,
and do it perfectly, the way the pump of the respirator
expands, then collapses, then does it again.
I want to know what your heart monitor must,
how much longer it has to go, before there is no work
left to be done.

Revelation

I've come to tell you that he was cruel
when he could have been kind, was sharp-tongued,
never forgiving those who slighted him.

The money he spent was not his own. His
monologues rattled against the chatter
of ice cubes in his sweating glass.

His slurred voice roared like a lion's in the stairwell,
and his stumbling kept his family awake at night.
He wrote notes, asking for cigarettes, for me

to take into the liquor store, dug his fingers into
our armflesh to wrench comfort and car keys away
from us. So know my father was not a man to miss.

We Go to Algiers Point

We want to leave the city
to look back at it, so we take the ferry,
and feel ourselves moving further away.

We go so you can discover
every quaint corner; so I can stand
on one riverbank, barely recognizing

the other. Then, on the return,
we hear the ferry's turbine heaving
under the water, that familiar
sound of something being pulled under.

Marriage

To build an envelope,
collapse the thing
to give it dimension.
I have practiced this
reconstruction. Folding

the four corners in
to marry them
at the center, I know
the edges, eventually,
will meet. First,
it will envelop,
then enclose.

Heart Condition

I held my heart tightly,
the way the flesh of the nectarine
clings to the pit, but it broke loose,
and rattled within me,
like a clapper swinging inside a bell.

Then it softened, pliable as birch bark,
it stretched and stretched until it sagged
like an windless sail.
Now it gorges itself on anything it pleases,
swallowing hard, taking all the space it needs.

If I could unburden it, I'd jam a lever into the sternum,
and crank it to the left or right to relieve some pressure,
or maybe puncture it, the way an abscess is lanced—
but I know now that the heart does not break;
it explodes, though not until you're already crushed beneath it.

Anchor

Like the boy on the beach
Imagine each hand as a paddle

If you are a boat, I am
going under,

I watched you waiver.
in deep water

down to the bottom,
where you won't need

you tried to bury him beneath a castle,
his body stoic as dead weight.

an anchor. So now,
who will sink faster?

waiting for high tide
to race me

to the darkest part of the lake,
anyone to hold you under.

Take

Take that sucker out of your mouth when you talk
to me. Take that garbage out to the curb and that child
out back; I can't take all that crying. Oh, I took it back,

there's no need to take the blame, so take that low, dirty
look off your face. Take your medicine and this bad news
with a grain of salt. Take that cake out of the oven, then

take your time. Take care; you can't take it with you,
might as well give it away. Take me back to where we started.
Take a look at what you've done; now take this letter

to the mailbox. Take some time to think it over,
then take off your shirt. I'll take that for safe-keeping.
Take anything you want; go ahead, but can you

take this much pressure, take this off my hands? We can
take this together; you don't have to take those words to heart.

Dear American Ghost

Offer, counter-offer,
pending signature, but no interest,
as if we're in foreclosure.
Did you read the love ledger?
Don't you see what you owe?
Just meet me
under the money tree,
so we can both leave
lipstick on white collars.

Put your money
where your mouth is,
and say, "I accept
your bottom line."
I can be your consigner,
your inspector,
take into account
what you're after.

Like everyone else,
I'm pacing and wide-eyed,
holding on to my receipt,
while you float above,
your haunting complete.

To the Teeth

They work all day, whetting
against each other, sharp and white
as shells, and serrated, the way you
realize a shark's tooth really is

when you press one into your palm.
The hard, flat incisors pull back
the skin, the fruit from the pith,
the meat from the bone, then the molars,

pressing in, demanding the sweet fat
inside. When the kidnapped child gnaws
through her restraints, or the victim
castrates the assailant, aren't we shocked

to see that our teeth still work this way?
But behind them lie the tongue,
the throat, and then the long, unguarded
tunnel all the way inside. Indeed,

what else could be worth protecting,
worth killing for? And when we die
they remain with us, their fillings
and grooves, as telling as ivory blood chits.

Next, Please

In this pencil-thin room there is only one line to stand in.
Here, to ignore is your duty, with your forms in hand, your back
facing everyone behind you. When waiting, you must consider
only what lies ahead; this is the pure practice of distraction.
Goodbye, anxious or elderly. I can't hear you, or your laments.
Throbbing lovers, limping dogs, I'm free not to envy or pity you.
Starving belly, persistent swelling, gaping sky; can't you see,

I'm still waiting? Standing in line, I let my watch do the counting,
dial my ears down to *low*, my eyes to *auto-focus*, then set
my heart, decidedly, on *repeat, repeat, repeat*.

Empirical Memory

Somehow, I've retained the muscle memory
of working a water pump, though I grew up
in a city in the 80s. I know the taste of a panda steak
I've never really eaten, the weight of a trophy
I've never held. I know the cool,
round shape of the avocado green
salt-and-pepper shakers my mother assured me
were lost in the fire the year before
I was born. And in my kitchen,

where sweating glass meets sweating palm,
where every fat-faced tomato,
bitter broccoli stalk and long carrot finger,
is trimmed, peeled, and chopped, I stand.
Chewing slivers of red pepper in the summer heat,
I feel as though I am being consumed
by a huge, hungry mouth.
I am pressed between solid bodies,
compacted into something smaller and smaller,
the way sand is made. But I recognize
this familiar pressure, and know
just how easily I am digested.

Squirrel Faith

*“Their feet shall slide in due time.”
Deuteronomy, 32:35.*

Being agnostic has always come naturally,
in the same way I have always found it easier
to give up my spare change than to try to explain
why I am too damn important to be bothered, or why
I am exactly insignificant enough to have earned
the right to keep my money. What does charity

mean to me? Well, nothing, really. Just don't go asking
about it. Why bother to disbelieve anything;
doesn't it take the same amount of work as believing?
Who knows better whether believing is best
than the humble squirrel, whose life teeters on peril
and intrigue. You've seen them on power lines,

squirrels, and on the pavement, flattened.
Are squirrels Believers? What about their obvious
investment in the future, their Puritan work ethic,
their amorous nature? Do these qualities put them
in league with Faith, or do they only affirm
their faithlessness? With winter coming, don't pray;

hoard. What about the manic way they quarrel,
chasing each other as though they have something
worth protecting? It's in their self-reliance, their assumption
that you determine your future, that life is fleeting;
why not fight, or fuck? As I drop my quarters
into the vending machine outside my office building,
I look at them and see them differently. Balancing

their overfed bodies on tree tops, they stuff discarded Cheetos
into their fat faces. Their tails flick nervously, like banners
in the wind, well-synchronized with their chattering,
and they look down at me from on high,
their cheddar-coated paws seeming to gesture madly,
as they proclaim their *tickticktick* of damnation.

Night Work

During the night shift, it takes him seconds to attach the heel support to the leather upper, to stitch around the sole, to fasten the tongue in place. In the fluorescent-lit room, it's best that there are no windows, because outside, it's dark anyway. Insects orbit the light bulbs, one over every vibrating workstation. The shears' snip, machines stopping, then starting, the tinny radio plays Celine Dion, singing "Because You Love Me." The worker's hands flash in and out, like mice darting across the floor.

Have you considered the skin of the man, the jaundice

of his nails, the buttery sheen of his face and teeth, the sound of his open-mouthed laugh rising above all the clicking, whirring machines? His tongue bounces his cigarette like a kid riding your knee. What is worry to him, during his break, as he slurps his overripe nectarine from a plastic bag, or talks to his wife on the phone, pacing at the end of the corridor like a sentinel. Sandy crystals of salt materialize at his temples, his eyes condensed to two, dark buttons, his hands as leathery as a pair

of boots. And why should you worry about him

any more than he worries about your shoes? A sewing machine is not a toy. Your doctor told you to start exercising. When the man gets home, his wife will be asleep, and when you get home, it will be dark, and you'll go jogging alone. Once you begin, you'll notice that your laces are pulled too tight, but you'll force your mind away from the shoes,

and it will race along beside you, until it settles on him.

She Waits For Him

My mom said she had nothing against him,
but there was no place in her home for us. I don't
hold it against her. When the verdict was read,
I put my head down, held his mom's hand. They take turns
keeping our baby on Sundays. He says
the guards make them stand, handcuffed, against the wall,
like a bunch of kids, like they are going to stand there
and think about what they've done. My sister tells me I'm crazy
to love him, even though it goes against the Christian faith

to judge. It's time against crime, and a letter once a month
against a carton of Marlboros, or maybe some gummy bears.
The guard's hands are rough against my skin she pats me down.
When I visit, he says, "Compared to living on the street, this isn't so bad,"
and "when I come home, it'll be everything. Against that, this time
means nothing." He's shy, and it goes against his nature
to tell me the bad things, to be emotional, so I have to stay

strong, even if my voice scrapes against the back of my throat
as I tell him, "Good bye." I hang up the receiver and it knocks
against the cradle. When I want to give up, I make myself
remember the first time I saw him, before
he got caught, and weighing this time against that time,

seems to zero-out the scale. At night, you can't see a shadow.
As I walk out, I look for him in the prison yard. Against
the other orange suits, it's hard to find him. In there,
he's a shadow, and for the next ten years, we know
it will always be night.

The Painter's Wife

I don't say the words, then ask you to create them. I don't put my hand over your hand and make you follow. Nor am I your mother, demanding that you sketch for me, quizzing you on the likenesses of this cousin, or that neighbor, asking you to honor people you hate. I don't say

I have seen that same face or setting, but remember it differently. I don't ask where the horizon begins, why you don't foreshorten the figures, nor why you won't stand back, to see what I see. What colors you use don't matter, and I don't feel

betrayed when you paint a new nude on our old rug. I don't touch the places where there is paint, don't try to rearrange your brushes any more than your heart; I don't have to. I don't want to hear the story again, or reread the letter. I don't even kiss you with my eyes open,

nor ask questions, nor wonder what you see, or how you know what will happen next. I never tell you how to paint. Looking at the finished portrait, I know not to ask why you've made the sky so leaden, so dark, that the girl cannot bear to look up at it.

Thread

I bake things I can buy at the store, bathe the dog
vigorously, and find wretched comfort in whatever
I seem to know. I keep dreaming of holding on
to a spool of thread, but in the dream, I drop it, again

and again, and it unravels further into the night. Often, phone
rings, but I let appointments lapse, staying home
to sort magazines, or trim my nails to the quick. Every day,
I pile the unopened mail into a pile and consider inviting

our widowed neighbor to dinner, but never do it.
The radio rattles on, as I cram the broom into dark, cramped
spaces, or fold baby blankets into smaller and smaller squares,
packing them in sharp-cornered boxes. Last night, I followed

the thread until it led me to the knotted body of our
stillborn son. When I wake up, my hands cannot hold on
to anything. Coffee cascades across the floor, but I just step over
the shattered mug. My husband is in a meeting, cannot answer

the phone, so I go into the bathroom and shut the door. I fumble
at the faucet, run the shower until the steam fogs the mirror,
until the air is dream thick. Closing my eyes, I imagine the weight
of a spool. I slide down to the floor and weep
as the weight of the spool becomes the weight of his body.

A Soldier Says We Are Stubborn

He says, "They're like horses that can only see one way to go." But that's not true. Horses see two worlds, one with each eye. That's why what you teach to the right side, you must also teach

to the left. In the evening I climb on to the donkey's back while he grazes in the field. Combing my fingers through the mane, I think of my violin bow and how the instrument crunched under our feet, like a beetle,

as we ran. I rest my head on the donkey's long neck and drop the spiny sandburs into a rusty, American coffee can. I want to ask the soldier, "How long has it been since you drank from a familiar, ceramic cup, slept

on bed in your own room, or held anything as useful as a violin?" But maybe he understands too well that to be a refugee is to live in an empty house with nothing to rest your words or body on.

Hurricane Season

In the temple of the hotel, I have only
a suitcase and a willing body, and this coupling
is a model of concentration. In front
of the television's report, I track the path
of his blood, until it leads me to his mouth
like an unblinking, peaceful eye. This is what it means

to ride out the tempest: the willingness to lose
anything, to honor the true religion,
the religion of loss. In this strange bed,
grains of sand scrape against my skin
like the names of the people I don't know

I've lost yet. I say something he can't hear,
but we continue, as if this cycle were a ring,
or a symbol, as if the sign of the cross
could help anybody. Eventually, I work my way
towards the storm, pushing one wave into

another. I shove dark water into dark air,
like an ocean unloading itself,
I shove dark water into dark air--
into the black night.
Inside the funneling clouds,
we unravel, just as each turn
of the spiral gives way to the next.

There Were So Many Dogs

And they circulated like blood cells, mouths full
of the dead and discarded. After a few days, there were gulls
and crows, and they circled too, as if this land
were just another parking lot, another sun-bleached beach,
as if these things left on the ground
were just wrappers from Wendy's. All the trees
were stripped like corncobs with a kitchen knife.
Their trunks bowed over the street, towards one another.
Every puddle held things once beaten, now chewed, digested.

We abandoned the car to step out into the guzzle.
When the dogs ran by again, tearing apart some matted carcass,
I tried to turn back. But the earth sucked at our feet, loud, drunk
and needy, holding on, begging us to linger--
our footprints, like a beloved edema.

Flood Narrative

For and After Michael Ford

You'll find no manifestos in a flooded house, and in the stolen narrative
of *your walls, our neighborhood, that day*, I'm just a sandbag
with a mouth. My history is painted on a darkened window, where an unpeopled

landscape disappears behind my shoulders. Memory is a sentence
I must wrap around the spool of the moon. All its contents

must go somewhere: the thumb, the forefinger, the whole damned
hand. If absence floats, drink until you can't see. After all, isn't *this*

what we've been waiting for? The water steeped in its own reflective skin
catches and removes everything we've ever owned, until what's left

makes a kind of sculpture, until all that remains becomes something we must
lift--except for poetry, which floats, watertight.

About a Fish

I gut the fish, but it keeps breathing, so I stitch the thing up, neatly as a hem, and watch it swim away. Suppose it could all be undone,

every bite of the tongue, each wound of regret. If the heart's slowing were merely symbolic, and the last word, only a heavy breath, if we could

take the thing without worry, yellowed dollar bills would drift above like gulls, as obsolete as Bible study. Our ample mouths overflowing, our hearts empty

of apology. Then, you wouldn't even have to catch the fish, because it would come willingly and lie quiet, anticipating the cleaver, in that moment believing that even this, *even this*, could be erased.

Notes

Quotes from John Ashbery are from an interview in *The Paris Review*. The interview was conducted by Peter Stitt in 1983.

Mary Oliver's *A Poetry Handbook* is valuable and was published by Harcourt Press in 1994.

"Squirrel Faith" uses an epigraph from *The Good Book*, but it owes a sizeable debt to "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" by Jonathan Edwards.

"Flood Narrative" contains fragments from Michael Ford's very interesting 2008 book, *The House on Olympia Street*, which is available through Trembling Pillow Press.

Vita

Erin Gendron lived in Allegan, Michigan until she graduated high school. After brief stints in Detroit and Los Angeles, she moved to New Orleans with her husband, Stephen Wakeling. She works as a fulltime composition instructor at Delgado Community College and only recently gave up catering. She won the Gulf Coast Association of Creative Writing Teachers Graduate Award for Poetry in 2010. She hopes to continue the practice of poetry and feels very grateful for everything she has.