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Hello From Across the Past

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Hello From Across the Past

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
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts
Creative Writing

by

Sidney Scot Setzer

B.A. (History) University of Tennessee, 1994
B.A. (English Literature & Art History) University of Tennessee, 2000

December, 2010

Acknowledgments

Poems from this collection have appeared previously in the following publications:

“Leonardo,” “The Land of Nod,” “World View Next Door,” “Communique to the Aerial Host,”
“The Downtown Wigs,” and “God’s Speed John Glen”: *The Phoenix Literary Art Magazine*

“Zombie Convention at Sevilla”: *The Hobgoblin and Entelechy*

Dedicated with love to my father and mother Mr. and Mrs. Frank David Setzer Sr.

Contents

Abstract	iv
Introduction.	1
Leonardo	5
Sudan	6
Zombie Convention At Sevilla	7
God's Speed John Glenn.	8
The Palace At Four AM	9
Choc-mool	10
Man Boy Love Association.	11
Land of Nod.	12
A Gift From The East	13
World View Next Door	14
The Downtown Wigs	15
Impressions of River Life	16
Monte Carlo.	17
Communique to the Aerial Host	18
Patron Saint of Impossible Causes	20
Of Summer Long Ago	21
A Wood Nymph From Samsara	22
Pol Pot Takes A Holiday	23
Maladjusted	24
Telescope	25
Sibyl	26
Mea Culpa	27
Bobby	28
Home For Friendless Babies,1925.	29
Fort Sanders.	30
Our Tierra: A poem in the manner of Barbara Jane Reyes	31
Morgan Street	32
Champale On The Block	33
Tazer International	34
If Found	35
Vita	36

Abstract

Hello From Across the Past is a collection of poems written either while I was enrolled at the University of New Orleans MFA program or before, in Knoxville.

Keywords: Poetry, Knoxville, Houston, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Bursky, Esmerelda, Conquistador, Jilotepec, Mexico

Introduction

My mother, when I was a little boy, would take me to the children's reading room at the Houston Public Library, a Churrigueresque Spanish Revival building that contained a world of wonders for me. From a book on dinosaurs, an ichthyosaurus peered quizzically from the glossy pages; there were minerals with crystalline surfaces, picture-books with palaces from Prague to Angkor Wat, books in which the young numismatist could place his bronzed bust of Belshazzar.

This was my *wunderkabinet* for the imagination. It was a place for dreaming, as was the rest of my world, a prelapsarian, golden place, with returnable pop bottles. These gleaming treasures in the ditch, if you gathered enough of them, could be traded for a grape Nehi and some balloons to put between the spokes on your bicycle to make it sound like a chopper. It was the Archies and Honey and the roller rink every Saturday night, a time before computers and money-lust came to dominate nearly every aspect of life. I passed my early years believing that I was the son of a patrician finding lonely amusements in my own mind, in the pleasant melancholy of books. Those trips to the children's room at the Houston Public Library with my mother were canoe trips to the "inner station." We would stop for donuts in the morning at the Woolworth's on Main Street. An old man stood by the door with a sign that said, "I am blind. God bless."

My father was a kind, burly man, who worked as a shipping clerk for the Shamrock Hilton hotel. He had straight gray hair that he raked augustly behind his ears so that he resembled Buffalo Bill. He had a beard that he always reminded me was a goatee. He wore a straw Stetson. He married my mother in Knoxville, Tennessee, but he had to move to the Mojave Desert for his asthma, and later we moved on to Phoenix, where he accepted a job with Railway Express. It was here that my brother, Frank D. Setzer Jr., was born. Daddy was not an educated man, but he was a common-sense man. He was gregarious and could talk to anyone regardless of their station in life. All during my life the family never owned a car, and this always made me feel like an outsider. Daddy once drove, but he had an accident and driving made him nervous, he said. Consequently, he took the bus into town before dawn to receive milk from Oak Farms dairy for the hotel's guests. I used to love going with him early in the morning. We would walk past barking dogs and sleeping houses to catch the Humble Road bus. We would walk past the bayou and the truck stop. There, some of the trucks would be parked idling, Merle Haggard playing somewhere, a mass of amber running lights, the diesel engines rumbling in the night. Then, one would slowly creep out onto the feeder road and the Eastex Freeway. Where would these world-tormented men go in the cool velvet darkness of a Texas night?

So I am a ninth generation German-American who is not a patrician but was raised as one, and I was indulged in every desire despite our working class station. Momma and Daddy, bless their hearts, gave me an excellent education at the University of Tennessee, University

of St. Thomas, and the University of New Orleans. While at U.T., I joined the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity, went to mixers with pretty sorority girls, and lived a bohemian life on James Agee St. in Fort Sanders. I worked for various antique and art dealers. There at U.T., I took a poetry class that got me interested in writing. I submitted my first poems to *The Phoenix*, the literary magazine that once published Cormac McCarthy. I was delighted to see my words on the page, and to attend readings at the Torch. It felt great to find this mode of self-expression. Later, I attended the MFA program at the University of New Orleans. There I found Professor Bill Lavender a good mentor and guide to my exploration of writing, criticism, literature, and life. Professor Lavender's workshops helped me to discover my own inner voice and to sharpen my critical ear. The result is poetry which is at times Dionysian and at times sentimental, tempered with a post-modern edge and a love of the absurd.

In my undergraduate years, I was drawn to the urban pastorals of Walt Whitman and his long lists taken from the American scene. I loved Whitman's vision of democracy. He ennoble his strong, simple workmen, gilding each one with the dignity of a saint. The knife grinder in "Sparkles From the Wheel," for example, imparts to us a calm admiration, and the character becomes iconic. Whitman's characters are the working poor of the urban pastoral; each one is heroic. Poems like "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," "Orange Buds by Mail from Florida," and "Base of All Metaphysics" emphasize the philosophical currents in American life. In Whitman's world, it is the philosopher or poet who, while admiring American technological achievement and progress, discovers a metaphysical reality. "Orange Buds by Mail from Florida" is a hymn of praise for the American technology that can move the produce of a tropical climate to a cold one, a heretofore impossible thing. Contrast this to the old professor, in "The Base of All Metaphysics," who lectures about Fichte and Christ, demonstrating the importance of the unseen to his students, leaving them with ideas rather than the tangible produce of a thriving America with its heroic mechanics and clerks of the urban pastoral.

Another poet I admire is Wallace Stevens. His very American high Modernism looks at the elemental "through the glass darkly." Its epistemological questioning concerns the nature of appearance and reality. His poetry is lush with exotic imagery that is at times lyrical and at times illustrates the function of art announced by Arthur Schopenhauer, as a new substitute for religion in a world where it is conspicuously absent. Stevens seems to be a new priest in this secular religion of art. Such poems as "High Toned Christian Woman" echo his doubt of the Divine and find transcendence in art and the philosophical mind of the solitary man. Poems like "Academic Discourse at Havana," appeal to my love of exoticism and the language for which Steven is famous. His masterpiece, "Disillusionment of 10 Ten O'Clock," seems to indicate that only the solitary man living on the margins truly knows reality. It is the "...old sailor,/ drunk and asleep in his boots..." who "catches tigers/ in red weather."

I would add to this list of poets whom I admire and have great influence on my work the contemporary poet Rick Bursky. His book *The Soup of Something Missing* (Bear Star Press 2004) exemplifies the out-of-the-box thinking and clever juxtapositions that I admire. He works in an aesthetic that could be characterized by Pascal's famous maxim that I use in the epilogue

for this book. It is the juxtaposition of the irrational that through randomness creates art that transcends reason.

My poetry is a calling, a *beruf*. In Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* we hear in the final chapter, "The Thunderbolt," when the hero, Hans Castorp, is treading over his fallen comrades in the rain: "And loving words I've carven/ Upon its branches fair." This is an expression of the cosmic. Also, I think of Archibald MacLeish's maxim: "Poetry should not mean anything but just be." I also would look at poetry from a more elemental, anti-intellectual view as a poetry of sensation. As A.E. Housman said, "I know that a poem is good when it makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up."

My works such as "Leonardo," "Zombie Convention at Seville," and "God's Speed John Glen" combine historicism and exotic imagery to create, I hope, a post-modern vision of the absurd. "The Palace at Four AM," is an ekphrastic poem that I wrote at Brunnenberg Castle in Italy. It was inspired by the sculpture of the same name by Alberto Giacometti (Swiss 1901-1966). This vision is particularly absurd and whimsical. Some of my poems like "Of Summer Long Ago" reach back into the past with its nostalgia and patina of sentiment. Poems like "A Gift From the East," "Land of Nod," and "Man Boy Love Association," offer less hopeful views of the world. I hope this darkness is glimpsed provides a contrast to the lighter pages like Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. May the darker pieces serve to let the sun blaze through with the sweeter ones.

I would hope my place in the world of letters be one that integrates the urban pastoral of Walt Whitman with the high Modernism of Wallace Stevens and the exquisite post-modern juxtapositions of contemporary masters like Rick Bursky. Whether or not this vision of myself is what others see, it tells of my influences and the sources of my voice as a writer.

Sidney Setzer, Jilotepec, Mexico, August 23, 2010

Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas.

—Blaise Pascal

Leonardo

Put the conch to your ear Leonardo
can you feel the trade winds astir
Will they raise your dark locks up like horns?
In what school do the mermaids paint?
Will you map the globe, circle in mid-air
and return with a flourish in your
sequined mantle?
Will you disturb us with lunar vistas and
wishing wands?
The bishop talked of excommunication
for hours you stalked Science about your villa
then donning gossamer wings you sailed
from the balcony like Icarus.
Will you call up flame from the underworld,
humble us with doggerel and sweet
flute music, find the mass of a proton?
Tell us of the sea Leonardo-
Dark blotches, pirates, their long knives flashing
just beyond the mangroves.

Sudan

Through the undersea clouds of jet
The grey metal leviathan had come to rest upon the Cycladic masonry
Beneath the shimmering forms that play on the surface
Victorian refuse out in the harbor swirls around a discarded artillery piece
And sunlight fills the deep like a cathedral.

Zombie Convention At Sevilla

Zombies stroll the arcade floor down to the cantina this afternoon.

Most are dressed in modest cotton gowns of gauze.

Others are in Nehru jackets and marigold leaves.

They prefer to dine alfresco sniffing solvents before show-and-tell.

Some have brought caged kittens, finger-paints, and pretty balloons.

Then waiters came with pewter trays heaping with kipper snacks of which they are so fond.

When the banquet reached a crescendo the key-note raised his tankard to the assembled shrieks and moans-“ It is sweet primavera again, our work is done, let us return to Port-Au-Prince.”

They adjourned to the mariachi’s drum of blue-grass gospel-“...leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms...”

God's Speed John Glenn

It is 1962 and it is monsoon season in the tropics
And somewhere clocks tick some lives away
And no one is up in Swinging London
To walk past the storefronts on Carnaby Street
Or haunt the shadow-world around old St. James.
Where have all of those solitary lives gone?
Down the tree-lined lanes of memory
The poet and his dream of love.
I remember that girl from so many years ago
When it was summer and John Glenn flew above the earth.

The Palace At Four AM

Pterodactyl snores over there beside the sleepy footman
Over there across the creaky wooden floor
And it is early morning at the palace
Before any woolly puppet stirs his horse-like head
And goes riding across a night time kingdom of indigo and crumpled foil.

Mammoth does not stir his languid tar pots
Nor shuffle to the hornpipes of the carnival train
The cardboard props of remembrance
Along a gasolier lit street.

Choc-mool

All the way across the Chihuahuan desert on the train
Menonita in her bangles and furbelows
Past all the cottonwoods and beehives
To a *cenote* near Belmopan
To behold a lone choc-mool.

Man Boy Love Association

A city bus roars through the Tenderloin district
Zoloft at the saturnalia
gay boys from Lagos
enter a dark series of stalls
with coin operated projectors
black lights in underground catacombs
a man lurking in the hallway doing poppers
an exhibitionist showing full frontal views
of pre-pubescent cartwheels
a Berkeley trilobite and his cocker spaniel
the senatorial type grooms a boy for buggery on the couch
while a mixed generational couple cuddle beneath a blanket
a raunchy film featuring a bestial session
with a tortoise and giant tom cats.

Land of Nod

Esmerelda was rouged and bejeweled as she crawled like a battery operated poodle around the mezzanine

She had come to see the Ziegfeld girls –

At Radio City the flappers have always appeared in feathered boas, performing burlesque in harlequined cat –suits their silhouettes moving like jaguars against paper screens.

All the way from Nebraska in a Pullman, a second hand grip, four print dresses, a book of catechisms.

In Sunday school there was purpose in everything –

now she found chaos everywhere . . .in the purist things even snowflakes were imperfect . . .old people were not always kindly.

The tenement rooms were too dreary tonight; these days she sought her comfort among carefree thespians.

In the lobby a fat Greek grumbled about Coolidge; she knew him as Sappho—promoter of sordid amusements.

In the Bowery after dark, some kind of mutilation exhibit,

Edwardian pygmies, reliquaries where the tools of the Sadist are given a place of honor in velveted curios, twisted and deformed sea-creatures levitating like yogis in formaldehyde –

“ Nickle and dime peep shows “ she said containing her vomit.

Now upon seeing his loathsome face the early days in the city returned to putrefy in her mind.

Bath-tub Gin transformed sessions with the sweaty day-laborers into a breathless tryst.

Sometimes she even fancied them as film impresarios just as she begins to feel their weight pressing down into her pale flesh like a dreadnought.

Slipping out of the theatre, as he lit a cheap cigar, she ran down 42nd street into the darkness past the Jewish quarter and beneath the wharf she hid among worn out tires.

A Gift From The East

From the balustrade the doge looked out at the ocean so happy at seeing the caravels returning back from Tangiers he promised the Virgin an extra tallow candle and an especially nice prayer tomorrow at matins.

A cargo of poppies, honeycombs, and handsome negroes. Sailcloth white as an alpine glade flapped above the Adriatic blue. From the leeward side of the inlet, sea nymphs had come to play and to test their powers on young men drunk with wine and the tales of old mariners.

To the north stood the cathedral, the canals that reek with urine, and the showy gondoliers, the barcarolle that lures the maidens to their window seats, their leprous arms laden in posies.

That night on the decks the real practitioners of the black arts came to do their work –an African priestess transformed some of the good Christian burgers into thunderstones. Coal – black satyrs, wildly danced in incense clouds with amphoras suspended by chains from their necks, the jackal –keepers styled their beast in three tiered overlays, crowds of crippled idiots sliced themselves with knives and screamed blasphemies as they struck chimes and bells.

The doge himself being very cruel ran amok with a pointed stick gouging a few children at random. Finally growing weary of the violence he returned to the comforts of his study, his origami, his opium pipe.

World View Next Door

On my street stands a rather nondescript house;
tangled ivy cords cover the red brick façade.
Inside, fruit punch defiles starched, button-down shirts
and gravy spoils the sensible draperies.
The inmates there dislike the contemplation of nature
and do not read Nietzsche aloud.
preferring acceptance seeking, competitive sports, and
lots of television; they avoid unpleasant topics.

In this place, middle class men and girls with
their armaments sheathed-
wait until "it's right."
Planning out lives around soap opera plots,
exchanging cheerful platitudes-assigning
purpose to everything.
Wading through the centuries' accumulation
of heaped bodies with so much pride of place,
euphorically, painting a cosmos in catalog colors,
mocking the heretics who haven't converted
to ash bathing ascetics.
To them life is not reproduction, time clocks,
appliances, obesity, and cancer; rather,
It is a lovely ice cream cone.
And sometimes, when the weather turns fair,
they come out a-dancin'
in primate glee.

The Downtown Wigs

I see in their ephemeral faces Mary Margaret in pain-
a long succession of Persia blue.
Those indolent chameleons who peer through storefronts.
A fat man declaims St. Paul dressed in a bass fishing shirt.
How the Monophysite has ran slip-shod over the Pre-Adamite
when the Nicene Creed is read!
In the afternoon, after the business man is ensconced
in his office, the top heavy, chemical scented, texturized
bouffant is pressed against the glass on the cross-town bus.
Elderly adventuress entranced by the working class parade
elderly ladies much agitated by the gunfire they've
seen and heard on television.
The Lollards have made shambles out of the doctrine of the
Holy Trinity, yet the street preacher doesn't know it.
He is ardent, and he is fat.
There are no indulgences, no pieces of the True Cross or
scarification.

There goes Beatrice and Cisalpine.
Elderly ladies are so lonely after their husbands are dead.
They ride the buses all day and buy two –for –one
at drug stores all day and return home with tins of Danish cookies.
Who knows where they go.
The disenfranchised transit riders pass along unnoticed.

Impressions of River Life

A gentle, fat mammy sang a lullaby
to the retarded boy
asleep beneath the mosquito netting
about how Moses was found
down among the rushes
by the Pharaoh's daughter.

A whore wept all afternoon
in the next room for methadone.
A barge pilot cursed the itchy upholstery
and fumbled through his wallet for a rubber.

Funeral trombones were heard on the West Bank;
children played in the drainage
beneath the bearing factory
smearing their faces in muddy war-paint
and striking fearsome poses against the sun.

A man in a turquoise hat
a mastiff at his heels
walked across the levee
and breathed in the heavy air.

Monte Carlo

Somewhere across town
A place never ventured
Laundry hangs among grimy yacht flags
Black girls offer their cadence to the street
Jumping rope double-Dutch and singing their songs
A sad old man in rags sways to the sound
There is freedom in his step.
He thinks of Monte Carlo, the billboards,
Smiling friends gathered at poolside,
An afternoon tea on the croquet green.
Confidently, he passes through the rococo ballroom
between dore candelabrum and platinum garlands
to a gilded lapis banquet table
where palm fronds and chrysanthemums are lain
as a shrine before a grinning Cannova trapped in ice.
As Turkish steward brings his goblet with Bordeaux
in measured tread undistracted by the antics of the magicians.
The orchestra, wearing powdered wigs, played an Ink Spots tune.
A mirrored ball cast dizzied spells over the parquet floor
and alabaster walls revealing frozen poses snatched from time.
He takes the duchess's hand and about her tiara he thought he
saw Orion peeking around the fire escape.

Communique to the Aerial Host

Inside the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe,
gaily colored candles
flicker on a trestle-table.
Women are huddled beneath corrugated tin.
In the lantern-light an old one
is a tightly wound chrysalis
in a Navaho blanket:
she awaits the Virgin's appearance.
Professor thought he saw dirigibles
tracing them with his finger
in the twilight haze.
He spoke over the wireless about monsters
and the Ferris wheel at the county fair,
about the matinee,
Emma and her Red Hot.
The day was spent and all that remained
Outside the mission walls
was a ranch hand holding a Kewpie doll
he had won for nobody.
Beyond where he stood
there was only sage brush and jagged rock,
and there dwelt the ancestral spirits
who wore magic cloaks that made them invisible.
From the pueblo he could telegraph
departed cowboy stars and
gallery owners in Bal Harbor.
Tonight he would rest beneath the
luminescent glow of his radio set-
the BBC was fading fast.
His sleep was peopled in majesty from a
technicolor projector-
in the late hours of the night he would hear
the cryptic sayings of the desert fathers.
In places out there, his disembodied soul
followed the satellites ' path as they moved
silently through a velvetine sky.
Maybe he would have a revelation
or see visions.
The Conquistadors had slept too much.
Tomorrow at dawn he would set off

with his burrow and Geiger counter
to reclaim a subterranean culture.

Patron Saint of Impossible Causes

I saw her on the street
Hands full of drug store flowers.
Lovingly she placed them in her hair
as she moved closer to the window
to watch reflected the reflected ghost
come and go down the alley way.
“ Hello, my precious one,” she said.
“ So much time since we saw each other last.
I leave you again with this box with St. Jude’s
picture on it, these pieces that we made
that day we gave the clouds names.
When twilight comes I’ll sleep beneath
a big ole tree. I’ll dream of summers when
the world was bright and new. I’ll gather
these flowers for Momma, Papa, and
The Man of Sorrows.”

Of Summer Long Ago

“There will never be another day like this one,” said the turbaned sage behind the curtain. Fifty cent games on the Midway—the laughter of people in a ramshackle building. The toy crane reaches down into the gleaming treasure to grasp a nickel-plated Zippo that I prized only to drop its tenuous hold on my reward before it could be claimed, its value appraised, its loss felt. Disappointed, I turned about in time to see my daddy walking by the funhouse mirrors- his Stetson changing form repeated into infinity.

A Wood Nymph From Samsara

Lying in tall wind swept grass we talked about Ginsberg,
Favorite toys from childhood, and even old Nero's circus.
We charted the progress of afternoon clouds
Sending them on billowy sails;
One to Siam another to Madagascar
Where shaman have prayed for rain.
Unfurling every last mysterious codex-we ran
Grasping after gypsy moths,
Pretending to be conquering sovereigns
Transforming the world like alchemist
We never stopped to catch our breath
Until drowsy with wine
I fell asleep in your arms.

Pol Pot Takes A Holiday

Marble top tete-a-tete
a pack of clove cigarettes
the captain with xenon laser
light flickering off his epaulet
oolong tea aboard the gunship
the horizon in starlight
an ossuary in bamboo
the boys are in their cages
verdure creeps and writhes
toward the sun the shimmering
tropical sun.

Maladjusted

A crippled boy selling party favors
colored paper kaleidoscopes made at the group home
all the way from Tel Aviv in wooden clogs
waiting outside the door at the Sadie Hawkins dance
a girl in crinoline doesn't know that you exist
clouds breaking around the moon tonight
as they have done for ten thousand years.

Telescope

She is holding her hands with her fingers forming
a circle over one eye like a telescope to better see her rabbit-eared television set
with her favorite newscaster whom she imagines to be her friends
her bedroom might be a bromeliad forest in an equatorial region of the globe
a conservatory filled with ferns.

Sibyl

She talks in her sleep
and snores furiously through Lawrence Welk's accordion playing
Bobby and Sissy's homespun coquetries
Bojangles and his old soft shoe against the background of Maxfield Parrish colors
prayer warriors and diet plans pass her unconscious like ink blots of a Rorschach test
war time assembly line work at the aircraft plant at Lichfield Park, Shiva dreaming the
world into existence, the surplus population gone off to toil in the WPA camps, the
Guardian pre-paid funeral plan, a diabetic cookbook offer through the mail to shut-ins.

Mea Culpa

The clouds hang low to the earth dark and baroque over the city
wandering through the gravel lot in front of the bus station
there is a black man bearded like a Taliban
lying on his back asleep in a pile of garbage
a blue thrift store suitcase that is bound together with twine
a broken guitar that lay at his side
in the same spent attitude of repose as a shapely courtesan
a Bible lies open on the ground and is held open and weighted
down with a stone as if lying ready for the testimony
of some litigant to bear proper witness to the scene.

Bobby

Will you carry the minstrel's lute
To beguile another hour of life
The sweetest airs that I've heard
To raise up some lonely, forsaken Lazarus from sleep.
For years you have sold your newspapers
Carrying tales of romance, a society gala
A court intrigue, war in some seldom heard of place
And who knows of lost loves-
Everywhere, everywhere, everywhere.
Do you weave them garlands with your palsied hand?
Do you remember your mother?
It was this day long ago when you when you went to the zoo,
It was sunny and you said that you liked cotton candy,
Its Sunday morning now and you have on a new pair of rhodium braces.
Its spring again Bobby and there is the sun,
And a cloud shaped as a rabbit, and a black man on his way to church,
And everywhere the bright new world proclaims:
"I have a secret to tell, an imaginary friend to waltz with, a story of the miraculous."
And lovers are everywhere once again beneath the trees in the park.
We look on together unnoticed and soon all will be forgotten.
Their vows swept into the ocean of time.
Now the rising generation, now one is falling away.
Bobby take my hand and we will go outside today you are eleven.

Home For Friendless Babies, 1925

The gramophone plays upon the front porch
And there is the smell of kerosene and biscuits from the kitchen
A picture of Jesus hangs upon the wall with his hands reaching out in passion.
Children are running in the yard beneath the magnolias
Trying to capture fireflies in tobacco tins
An old matron summons them to the doorway
They are the progeny of the mountains, the coalfields
And dusty mill towns orphaned early in life by a Mauser's bullet
Another by a bottle of rye whiskey, another by the promises of a dancing girl.

They all have memories of the hollows
Heard the sweetness in the sounds of the dulcimer
The shouting and hymns at the camp meetings
And know the sorrowful ritual of packing up and moving away.

In the parlor stories are read
I see their faces pressed against the glass
Looking into the cool velvet darkness of night
Past the rail yard and into unknown places
The houses of strangers down the shadowy streets
And among lonely factory stacks.
Peering into vacant shops and alleys where the ranging begger's sleep.

At bedtime prayers are said clean and secure under their blankets
They lay dreaming of people and places far away
Stonewall Jackson rides his horse into battle
The Carter family singing Wildwood Flower
The rustle of leaves along the street just before morning
The shuffle of the porters down at the depot-
"Hurry along the passages of time, hurry along."

They are all gone now the train rumbles along tonight
I lie awake and listen to its sad good-byes
I wonder where they have all gone
The light are lights are all out in the old house.

Fort Sanders

Will you walk with me again
Down the streets of old Fort Sanders
To chase the evening shadows down the side streets
And return drunk by to our rented room
We'll feast on last night's Chinese food
Make love and leave the window open
To hear the rain when it falls just before morning
We'll hide away all day and nobody will find us here
Among the ramshackle Victorians of 15th St.

Our Tierra: A poem in the manner of Barbara Jane Reyes

our tierra I evoke your mighty name impotently
our tierra thank you for the scores of functionally illiterate children
our tierra we celebrate your teach to the test education system
our tierra we thank you for jobless and hopeless college graduates w/worthless degrees

our tierra of 100,000 plus student loan debts
our tierra whose education system is a racket
our tierra that aids and abets a criminal/predatory industry that takes advantage of its "citizens"
our tierra that extends unprecedented protection to the mighty usurers
mi patri gloriosa, mi patri gloriosa, pray for us plebes

our tierra whose policy strengthen "the Man"
omnipotent force and fraud that exploits lesser beings
omnipotent force and fraud for indentured heredity

our tierra of PhD's working at McDonald's without health insurance till they die of old age
our tierra of quick talking student loan collectors who genteelly suggest that you could sell
blood
our tierra whose student loan system has made the prospects of marriage, children, a home 0%

blessed tierra who has made an entire generation into indentured servants
you are the embodiment of freedom for the very few and the loss of free status for many

our tierra of estrangement and expatriation
our tierra of bank garnishment and law suits
our tierra of a furtive life of living life in the shadows
ours tierra of predatory capitalist in cahoots with government lackeys who are out of control

pray for us who made some bad "choices" as consumers
and now we wait for our lives to whither as your indentured heredity slave forevermore
for some lives have less value than others and some must give theirs in debt peonage for life
amen.

Morgan Street

Fare thee well Morgan Street
And the elms swaying in the summer sun
Those frumpy school marms with astigmatism
Ply those dusty tomes with care
Trying to find the secrets of life in a bibliography
Salvation given in a dissertation
Now they speak in loud affected voices
Of public television announcers
All of those plans to alphabetize came to nothing after
Marmalade, toast and tea.

Champale On The Block

Then he/she sashayed into charlotta's flop doing poppers treading upon
sordid laundry from last week dolce-gabana and maybeline bottles... champale denise
girl I see you on the block last night-those heels... nothing but steers, beers, and queers
I launched my new product line honey beneath the chevron sign... half the night
Lively john... they gentlemen too honey I got them to try... they ask you wanna date
I say yes darling...you see the old drag queens in the stalls w/glory holes in the sheetrock...
Sliding a jar of vaseline over the concrete floor... yes darling so I spent my time with
Some happy bucks... sniff around and then want you to go to i-hop after the club...
Hustlers still standing in the tenderloin in early morning... girl I tell you true.

Tazer International

At the Tazer International shareholders meeting-
Squeak dolls in their chemises.

There is a disheveled outpatient raving in front of the superette.

The focus group watches the take down on the tabloid show.

Another poverty industry sells lunches to enemies of the state in prison.

And would delight in making profits off the mentally ill.

A man has a complaint about social mistreatment
and jobs being taken by foreigners from Americans
which escalates into something bigger.

The surly resistor to store policies confronts the officious assistant manager
and conformity to the rational norms of group behavior.

Now he is twitching obediently on the floor with two guide-barbs
stuck in the "citizen" chest.

The reporters gathered around and offer happy talk
and tales of corporate growth.

If Found

If found return to the place
Just behind the turnstile at the bus station
Chasing pigeons in the park
Wandering the downtown streets aimlessly
To put a nickel in a lame man's box.
Ah my little friend of so many years ago
Your face still becomes freckled in the afternoon
Daddy will raise you high on his shoulders when you are sleeping.

Just a little further just over the bayou bridge and we'll be home
For our time has flown, I just remembered,
'tis only my musing of afternoons nearly lost.
You are old now and the long dead people of the afterworld have said goodbye.

Vita

Sidney Setzer was born in St. Joseph Hospital in Houston, Texas on September 25, 1962. He went to Johnson Elementary School, and later to Hambrick Jr. High. He was bullied and was taught privately in his sixth grade year by Ms. Burkett, a retired schoolmarm in her home on the southwest side of town. He later went to stay with his Uncle Victor and Aunt Fern Sherrod and six cousins in Knoxville, Tennessee. He returned to Houston and enrolled in MacArthur Sr. High. However, he was bullied and subsequently had to quit school because of the harassment. He returned to Knoxville and worked with his cousin Stanley Sherrod, a brick mason. In 1990, he entered The University of Tennessee and graduated with a BA in History in 1994.

In Knoxville he worked at an antique gallery, for a rare book dealer, and an estate jeweler. He re-enrolled in The University of Tennessee and received a BA in English literature and art history in 2000. He then attended The University of St. Thomas in Houston and graduated in 2004 with an MLA with a concentration in English literature and 18 graduate hours in art history. In 2005 he entered the MFA program at The University of New Orleans.

He made his first trip to Europe on the cruise ship Galaxy, stayed in Brunnenberg Castle with UNO's program for a month, traveled for 15 days via Eurail pass, and returned home from Southampton on the Queen Mary 2 to New York.

After 2006 he helped his elderly mother and did his UNO workshops online. In 2009, he married Cynthia Ortega Maldonado, whom he met in 2008 in Queretaro while traveling to UNO's summer program in San Miguel de Allende. They were married at her grandmother's home in Jilotepec, Mexico. Unfortunately, his mother died soon after. He now lives in Jilotepec with his wife's family.