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## Fabric of Thought and Other Poems

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Fabric of Thought and Other Poems

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

Andrew Kindiger

B.A. Truman State University, 2011

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## Thinking in Writing: A Preface

My creative interests manifested before I even thought to take a creative writing course. I was fascinated with the power of language, but had never invested in studying the craft of poetry until well into college. However, I started writing much earlier as a columnist for Liberty High's school paper *The Bell*. I never considered my column a significant extension of my creativity, but looking back I remember being fascinated by writing. At the time my opinion pieces were a simple conversation with myself, and I was surprised that other students were as interested as they seemed in reading the black and white packet our staff circulated each month. Soon, the writing process became routine so I never quite engaged with the thought of how interesting it was for our class to put that much effort into writing. Even in college when I continued writing opinions as a columnist, I felt that I was simply doing the job of a thinker and writer. While interested in the enterprise of writing, I hadn't read with the depth required to understand the history of literature. I was stuck on Kurt Vonnegut and short stories in the *New Yorker*, never having studied literature beyond an abridged anthology. It wasn't until I stumbled upon a literary theory class during my second semester of college that my view of writing started to expand. As my study of literature became more intricate, so did my attention to my own poetic voice. Poetry became a deep meditation, a new way to greet language and think in writing.

Continuing my study of literature has greatly enhanced the way I view poetry and the power of language. Studying James Joyce's "The Dead" helped evolve my perspective on writing and led to studying great writers like Kafka, Mann, and Mina Loy. Once I landed myself in a workshop I was hooked on writing poetry. Some friends from class formed The Rag Tag

Attorneys, a small group consisting of myself and two other writers. We met in living rooms, in bars, and on front porches to experiment with surrealist writing strategies, which we later revised and published in *Windfall*, the undergraduate literary magazine at Truman State University. We were influenced by the philosophy of perception, especially ideas about the imagination and how we perceive reality. Before I began writing poetry regularly, I was fascinated by the mind's abilities, especially the concept of memory. Kafka's "The Trail" and Mina Loy's "Lunar Baedeker" cemented my interest in modernist thought, but made me wonder if I would ever be able to produce something as captivating. My interest in writing then blended with my study of literature and the history of philosophy, which later opened the door to an MFA program at the University of New Orleans. In graduate school, the poetry of Emily Dickinson and W.B. Yeats illuminated my interests in phenomenology sparked almost unknowingly when I first began to study David Hume. My poem "Fabric of Thought" deals with the idea of perception as it is influenced by time and the concept of memory. Writing poetry has become a way to study language and how it furnishes thought. If life is a stage, so is the mind.

In New Orleans, I began taking writing seriously as an artist, and expanding my understanding of concept and technique by continuing to study literature. Thinking in writing makes me feel connected to language, but has also made me feel connected to art. I have always envied painters and musicians for the creativity in their techniques and greatly appreciate the way other art forms influence my own work. When I'm writing, I feel like a painter, with language itself as the medium to be explored. James Longenbach claims in his book, *The Art of the Poetic Line*, "Poetry is the sound of language organized in lines." Poetry has always served as a philosophic outlet as well as a way to feel connected to a conversation throughout time and



history. The craft of writing is something that is opening to me still as I encounter a greater appreciation for the tradition of literature and the minds's ability to trace time. Voltaire's "Candide," an exciting portrayal of enlightenment thought in Western Europe ignited my interest in the history of literature. When I first encountered the text as a freshman I merely glossed the first few chapters, dismissing the brilliance of the text because I presumed it did not relate to my life or the way I thought. However, I returned to discover the philosophy and history associated with the story in a graduate level comparative literature course. By examining the text closely in relating to the philosophy of the period it was written I gained a new appreciation for the history of philosophy. The intersection between philosophy and literature illuminates the past so that a contemporary audience can connect with another time. This intersection has also influenced my thoughts on time and creativity, allowing me to be less presumptive and more curious in regards to how I conceive of the past as well as my own existence in time.

I derive a significant energy from philosophy and literature, borrowing from a range of ideas to excite my own imagination. Poetry is a journey, as well as a way to measure distance and trace time in writing. I'm often asked why my subjects are so muted, as if they must be people, or a relationship opposed to memories or fragments of thought. I'd like to think that I write about energy, or the potential energy in meaning and speech. Both poems in my collection, "Passion in Speech," and "A Palace in the Mind," focus on the energy and imagination involved in speech and what the mind perceives. Poetry is a study of language as well as study of the mind. I feel like I have been invited into a culture of thought by reading great writers. Jorie Graham, a contemporary master of language and perception, illustrates the potential of the mind in her poem "San Sepolcro":

...How clean  
the mind is,

holy grave. It is this girl  
by Piero  
della Francesca, unbuttoning  
her blue dress,  
her mantle of weather,  
to go into

labor. Come, we can go in.  
It is before  
the birth of god.

In my own work I seek to harness a similar meditative potential, reaching to foreign landscapes and the personae of the characters I both meet and imagine. I have been meditating on nature, philosophy, and memory as well as drawing from the techniques of many different writers. I am still experimenting with a variety of conceptual lenses. To quote the Spanish surrealist Joan Miró: “My figures underwent the same simplification as my colors. Simplified as they are, they are more human and more alive than they would be if represented in their detail.” Abstraction in writing is a way to untangle the mind and see what exists beyond the level of the image.

Thinking in writing is not only a way to learn about myself and the way I perceive the world, but how to communicate that knowledge. When I am in workshops and literary groups, knowing someone else’s work is like getting to know how the poet is thinking. Poetry offers a view of the world as well. As someone traveling to a country where you don’t understand the language, you are immediately aware of what isn’t accessible through translations. Traveling in a way is like dreaming by encountering the art of a city, or even thinking about the theories behind how that city was formed and the social fabric woven deep beneath the surface. To balance this tendency, I’ve tried to etch the natural world while challenging the limitations of perception to

help ground the image. I am left with impressions, a collection of moments in order to reflect and engage with my own conception of memory. A poem becomes something similar to an abstract painting. A collection becomes a museum of thoughts as each experience fuses to expose experience. My work is less of a photographic encounter with my subjects and more of an epistemic journey. The image is a starting point, a mass that helps situate the philosophy I attempt to engage in my work.

## I. A Color Held Abroad

A Thought went up my mind today—  
That I have had before—  
But did not finish—some way back—  
I could not fix the Year—

Nor where it went, nor why it came  
The second time to me,  
Nor definitely what it was,  
Have I the art to say.

But somewhere in my soul, I know  
I've met the thing before;  
It just reminded me—'t was all—  
And came my way no more.

—Emily Dickinson

## Tabletop Ontology

Across a table in an obscure  
Midwestern town,  
the physics routine floats  
through the rounds. Another  
is ordered over a casual lecture  
on gravity and our place in time.

Can it be figured exactly?  
Not without drawing equations,  
so another round is ordered.  
We ponder what a picture of the universe  
taken with golden discs may hold:  
a ghost—a container of arbitrary space?

Our space in time  
seems finite.  
Our objects define  
themselves in moments.

A camera may capture this scene,  
but what will it capture? An obscure  
table, a Midwestern town?

## Bad Monk

Too much to drink in Paris, a few years back—  
There's too much to do,  
it will leave you vomiting  
discretely in a museum between  
Renaissance lectures.  
Oh, how would she?  
That's right,  
she'd correct  
our speech with the conviction  
of a Sunday school teacher,  
but was well-versed in metro connections  
and snorting kick off John the Baptist's spine.

It was sweet that Mary encouraged  
long walks through the night  
down seemingly endless streets:  
“Bad Monk,” Ray had been known to say.  
Admonishing his youth with a smile,  
a reflex of a retired dharma bum.

He spends his Sunday's teaching  
students how to sit still. He teaches chants  
as slow odes to awaken, lightly,  
past suffering.

I wish to have such  
fragments to sweep  
in a garden full of leaves.

## Road to Nowhere

Led to a Barcelona hideaway, complete with cellar door, we climbed a winding staircase to a window overlooking the city. The sky poured onto rooftops, onto terraces, revealing the city at night. It was a disco, a dance, a party, it was a few friends getting together: bottled beer, sodas and liquor. No one was talking, everyone was dancing. We left with a bottle for the road and another look at the street, past shops that had closed and those that had stayed open as we made our way out of the city to the beach. The city was alive at midnight, alive in the early morning. As we left we thought of nothing more than leaving.

As Barcelona faded into Montpellier, we greeted the college town asleep in the summer coming to the gates of the medical library. We made our way from charming haunt to charming bar. Waiting for the stillness of the evening to usher our retreat to rented rooms and hideaways. We were afraid to go farther south because of what we had heard. They said Marseille was the ghetto of France, said we should stay put, go to Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, stay safe and pay a premium. But we desired to feel the salt on our skin from the Mediterranean and would risk the warnings. Instead of sleeping, we danced. The sea was an eloquent bath. Still, we hungered for the rumored fear, we were curious to harvest the charm of the city center where we found a peace in existence that made us wonder why the North feared a city by the sea.

## Breakfast in Portugal

The water in Sintra is *magic*,  
flowing for hundreds of years,

between mansions  
and summer villas.

I wonder when we'll eat eggs on  
a Lisbon balcony again?

It's hard to answer  
and to leave.

The architecture holds the mind  
hostage, as you simply live  
with the city and the sea.

We sit gazing at a shade of blue  
out of an open window—  
we begin to talk  
about leaving.



## Madrid

The city is a series of voices—voices that do not exist because they are not understood. You unfold yourself into the night, back to the small apartment on the second floor where expats have furnished a space to call home. A mannequin is perched on a table, donning an Impressionist brassiere and velvet fedora. The space is cast in an aperture of adventure, as new discoveries are encountered as frequently as the ashtrays are full from nights of constant conversation. The table is riddled with bottles that will be swept before breakfast. Accents have become softer and circles have widened outside of the brunches with English speakers to hike in Granada, or bathe off the coast of Valencia, a quality that makes it feel real until you start thinking in Spanish, soon spending the afternoons in revolving exhibits at the Reina Sofía. Madrid has become notorious for violence, but the streets are alive, and really something different—a cosmopolitan theatre, the past alive around every corner. Abandoned buildings have been reclaimed and turned into public spaces: for art, for community, for order, and to keep the city alive.

Strolling on the Rambla in Barcelona  
[after Miró]

A heart, a flash of blue, in the mind,  
an object outside reality—an endless street,  
a depthless sea. A desire to dream  
captured in each step.

The world is disfigured  
with passersby, those who say hello,  
those who don't.

People are pressed into a portrait by the eye—  
a splash of color surrounding  
an opal breast, a cloudy leg, each impression  
is hued by nuance, by white space, warmed  
in every glance, in the glow  
of the blood orange disk.

## Reflection on the Rocks

Watching the sun set over a bridge, we leap into the sea. Tasting the salt on our skin, we forget our guilt. We let it ooze out as we bake in the sun. Our art seems separate from those who have no foreign holidays, separate from island factories and those caught by suicide nets. We try to melt our guilt on the rocks and burn off our post-modern necessities. We must remember instinct, not the cruel rule of commerce, draws us forward. Money numbs our desire to search for fruit. We are confused about what the television promises—what is truly necessary. We have forgotten that tilt creates the seasons. We move with the momentum of jets, searching for a peace outside of the mind.

East of Geneva

The turquoise lake is a jewel  
set in the French Alps.

It illuminates pockets on the hillside  
filled with peripheral summer homes.

The city walls enshrine a medieval  
prison as an ornament for sunny foot traffic.

The light is pleasing and this land speaks  
in a language of reminiscence, a time where  
nature gives the mind peace.

## A City by the Sea

Lisbon offers a hallway of light.  
From our balcony we watch  
the sun singing to the sea,  
its rays imprinting a yoke on the Tajo.

We walk to a fountain in Alfama  
and drink water as it trickles  
from a lion's mouth carved in stone.  
The water connects us beyond the gates  
sealing palaces, beyond private  
terraces that look onto the water.

As I wind the streets,  
my thoughts drift like watching  
a foreign film.

## Notes on Leaving

### I

We exit the metro around midnight to greet  
the Arab district of Paris, eager to get lost  
with purposeless friends  
in a feast of unknowing.

### II

I'm alone this weekend  
writing a letter in my head.  
My thoughts bend beyond  
the senses, but are formed from them,  
carved in the marble of my mind.

My thoughts are breaking through the stone,  
like an unfinished sculpture,  
gaining force through curiosity  
about a world to come.

### III

To know anything we will have to look back  
deeply at spaces created by others,

the people who spoke of truth and fantasy,  
the liars and the cleverly absurd.

A year ago we tore walls apart  
in a fit of forgiveness for failing.

## II. Everything but the Sea

I see it all perfectly; there are two possible situations—one can either do this or that. My honest opinion and my friendly advice is this: do it or do not do it—you will regret both.

—Kierkegaard

## Order

Sweet conclusion, we do not  
always know why we've met.

Often there is little to do except  
wait to paint the chaos.

As you return my notes, I'd rather  
my haste be met with understanding.

I will caution against the apparent  
and attempt to seek stillness.

I will demand quiet as my mind  
confronts distraction.

If there must always be regret,  
I will remain patient.



## Over the Counter Psychology

The day is a series of rooms. Returning to work, measuring time in coffee cups, tracing time in writing.

The day is a hallway of thought, saturated with a walk in the park. Perception bubbles out in a soft cough on a long mahogany bar. Over the counter an agile mind tinkers with fragile seams unwoven from the streets. Routinely we are mended by casual conversations laced with subtle therapy.

Our days break in the wake of words—our thoughts, soft sculptures desperate for chiseling. We meet with friends over gin to speak of the city as if it were the sea. We speak of possibility, of lunacy, and laugh. A city ordinance prevents patrons from lighting up, with the exception of a theatrical performance. So we smoke in the bar, merely having to ash on dinner plates to keep up the ruse, to live on the stage. An act within an act enveloped in tall bourbons and the occasional panhandler, the dialogue—our art.

“You need to cut out the junk,” she may caution, or ask someone why he hasn’t been sober. She meets a variety of people by hosting a scene. Some of the players are cast by circumstance, I’m still unnerved by the swath of homeless in the downtown area.

*Why can't the world be more accommodating?*

“It’s a cycle for some—it’s all that’s known:

Never feel guilty for listening.”

## Hotel in the Constant Day

In the lobby, three suits sit slouched,  
clinking glass and counting  
cash. They decide  
to make a deal,  
thinking today a *dollar*,  
tomorrow a pipeline.

It might be on the North Slope,  
or along the West Coast,  
and it will surely leak.

The voices are confident  
they can't make a mistake.  
The business class routine  
ends under a buck's antlers,  
harvested as a trophy  
patrons find charming.

The suits consider everything  
but the sea, and what we  
need to breathe. They feed  
themselves for a few days  
then go their way.

## Momentum

A journey is heavy as dust in a room full of light. Traipsing between bars and coffee shops, bedrooms and slender grips, we journey. We journey through winding staircases and endless inclines as mounts open into valleys. We hit the coast moving through Valencia, Barcelona, and Marseille. The journey is a mirror. You leave to be transfigured, to be forgotten, to blend with the dream. The mind is the only sea you need in a city of intellectuals. I prefer tapas in Granada, where you get a snack with a beer. I feel welcome to become a galaxy of unknowing, to make my institutional education sentimental, to wander the streets. The experience comes in soft waves, slowly foaming on the rocks in a sea of thought. Our host has furnished a week for us in modest luxury. He's installing windows and painting doors in the three-room apartment of a restored building. A few more weeks to rent another palace in the sun, with everything one needs except the sea. The momentum carries you in the direction others see as careless, but a promise of a beach is reason enough. As you see the sky open, language dissolves the reality you've built in your head. It happens in a restaurant as you imagine what someone is saying by the way they use their hands. As you travel symbols float around in the corner of your mind.

## Fabric of Thought

Sense captures rest in a dull routine.  
Sense illustrates time as an empty pocket,  
filled with lint and key rings.  
Perception bends to fit its object,  
wrapping moments in moments.  
We feel the movement of instance  
like loosening fabric—collecting  
books to carry less of the self.  
Seeking wisdom from old stories,  
we are lost in definitions,  
in the moments of unknowing.  
The weightless and untraceable  
heights of the mind preferred  
to rationalization. We stack  
symbols to calculate  
what weaves eternity. I feel  
my mind unraveling from a  
pattern of tradition, but seeking  
a space for my memory to fit.

## A Space for Memory to Fit

There is a hole in the wall  
where my memory fits.

I have a habit of perceiving  
our bodies as planets circling the sun,

planets built to bleed  
the flesh we need,

sick with desire  
and designer TV.

Our thick selves  
plump on passion

seeking sweetness  
from empty rooms.

## Science in Sleep

Moving through the terminal  
I stumble into my living room.

I've forgotten my bag  
in the overhead compartment.

I go upstairs to my first  
semester of college, to Dylan  
stacking his books on the shelf.

Reaching into my pocket  
I pull out a map of Bohemia,  
a place I've never been, a place  
lost to the palace of the mind.

I'll go back down to see  
our tree on Christmas,  
my sister unwrapping  
a matryoshka doll.

In a moment it's over—  
in sleep an answer rarely comes.

### III. A Language of the Mind

If sleep is a truce, as it is sometimes said,  
A pure time for the mind to heal,  
Why, when they suddenly wake you, do you feel  
They have stolen everything you had?  
Why is it so sad to be awake at dawn?

—Borges

## Refraction

The feeling is as clear as the tree line,  
the desire to run, to climb higher,  
awakened on the cusp of the peak  
as hail beats down the pines.

We didn't make it to the top,  
but the day wasn't lost.  
It was full of light  
and dreaming.

We glimpsed frosted  
needles, breathing chilled  
as nature became a crystal.

The mind thawed in a healing stillness  
while the sleet turned to rain.



## Epistemology of Lost Time

We are forced to imagine ourselves  
eternal, in an endless flight of blank  
space—

bleeding into visions of paradise,  
ignoring the world of sacrifice,  
bearing the marks

of ceaseless craving. We invent  
new formulae for our tragic recursions.

Like perception, the spirit of the mind  
is infinite, consciousness glides in a flat  
circle seeking nourishment to match  
the rhythm of clocks.

## Distance in Writing

Collect the notes into something  
more than a stale promise to write.

The pen attempts to trace the past exactly,  
as you fail to meet the memory.

Another page crumbles under  
the weight of its own design.

It might be best to find  
the answer in sleep,

unraveling the threads  
you thought to wind.

Sleep counts the words  
piled by the door so

waste need not be  
a thing in dreams.

## A Monument to Unknowing

Spring will return with another meaning,  
the idea of wisdom as the moment  
you decide to write about morning.

The mind will revisit spaces  
where once you waited for the heat,  
or to taste a memory like sipping light,  
when an answer arrives with the mail  
on the front porch.

Train the mind beyond  
its ability to turn tricks,  
train it to be patient  
by focusing on the chilled glass  
after a snowstorm:

Think about love,  
is it merely something to say,  
simply held in a gaze?

## Casual Lectures on the Universe

“The soul is the illusion  
we take for a body,”  
John claims, as he burns  
incense to smoke the ants  
out of his apartment. His cats  
hop into the bath

for a drink. He  
turns on the faucet  
to a slow trickle before  
lighting a cigarette.

He says he’s  
been meditating  
on galaxies  
in his mind. I’ve  
come to love  
these casual lectures  
on the universe.

## Perception and the Lens

Memory is a camera,  
a photograph that speaks  
to a moment, like the right light,  
as magical as meeting a stranger  
you know in a past life.

The right light is mysterious.  
Focus makes the mind stretch time,  
as memory becomes an aperture.

A picture is silent,  
except to the mind.

## Passion in Speech

Is it a calculus—  
a delicate math?

Our ideas take  
shape in language,  
in swirls of words  
even before they  
glide off the tongue.

We swish meaning  
like wine in a glass,  
winding a lure to fish  
for intention.

I fail in faults of understanding,  
sinking further into notes  
woven syntactically.  
Churning the heat of speech with  
the desire to please,  
the art of conversation is an act  
within an act,  
so to speak,  
with realities  
revealed like sleep  
meeting a dream.

## A Palace in the Mind

The tale glimmers with energy,  
revealing a palace in his mind.  
Pondering the nature of being,  
the nature of unknowing,  
the tutor asks me to humor  
the guide.

He speaks of the flight  
of the mind—our thoughts  
a heat of words  
as the mind is mapped  
in language.  
How funny it is  
that time goes faster  
when you're speaking with a friend.  
He professes that we know more  
than we ever have—  
claims our mind curves  
with thoughts  
as they take shape  
on the tongue and are carved  
in the marble of the mind.

## VITA

After growing up in Kansas City, Andrew Kindiger attended college at Truman State University in Northeastern Missouri studying both literature and creative writing. While completing his coursework for an MFA, he taught as an adjunct instructor for Southern University at New Orleans. He also attended the Ezra Pound Center for Literature in Brunnenburg, Italy, and the Writing Workshops in Cork, Ireland.