ABSTRACT

Poetry written between March of 2009 and February of 2010, exploring conceptions of home, specifically the author’s house in Tuscaloosa, his hometown of Lincoln, and his home state of Nebraska.
DEDICATION

My mother, father, and brother are the reason I return home—whether in my mind or by airplane—and Kate has become home to me, wherever I am. This thesis is dedicated to them.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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And again, and of course, Kate listened to me read, type, sigh, and swear for the nine months of labor it took to finish this manuscript. My unceasing thanks and love go to her.
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House

Three sides,
four
windows. Four
doors, three
hands.

ROBERT CREELEY
Sick of the half-assed levitation down staircases, our enthusiasm filtered through pillows, static collecting in our socks, we flee from the first floor Russians, become the refugees you see in newsreels, shuffling past fences from some famine to a new land, shivering in coats that tent babies, tabby cat in his carrier cage as jackets thrash and toilets flush for the last time after ten, when we were often seen as poltergeist, rousers of rabble, jack-hammers, the second coming of Jacob Marley or second cousins of Ron Jeremy, made to feel abnormal, inmates of some embarrassed family attic with chains and chest to rattle, but the residents in this complex had built their own mythology of assaulting repairmen, of violin strained through the bathroom vent like gruel from a gulag, the spit-thin walls permitting wiretaps by our very own Saturday night secret police, the neighborhood KGB of sex lives and inside jokes so even tirades we spoke in confidence became common knowledge, cause for a story’s worth of stair-stomping, door-flogging melodrama, dead-bolted lips Chekhovian in their silence; our nights became scenery for poisonings until door mats no longer slept on keys, locks were twisted in ritual, lights and blinds did their fair share of dimming, so the sight of cats was sharper than ours, we were kicking bedlegs with our multicolored toes and then one post-curfew hour came when I said to her “no, we are not suspect, we are not sick, so let’s finish this subterranean escape tunnel with our spoons,” and oh that breath once we ducked out smelled of railroad air and dust singed on a space heater.
On my knees, I salt the porcelain stains with abrasive and work against its rings, what’s accrued, like a tree’s, over years, a buildup of rust and of scum, the green-blue of copper that lolls from the faucet to the drain, the iron oxidized pale pink, this ugliness painted invisibly, minerals and bacteria that compose the bathwater left to blemish the tub for so long I scrub until muscles burn; the project of erasure is a physical one, as we’ve proven now over this week of defacing and refacing a home so many have occupied, filled with little scars, pins setting the fracture of a curtain rod, grafts of contact paper taking her days to apply to the leprous kitchen cupboards, because what hangs in these rooms is moisture, breathed in and bred without the vents or windows needed for escape, wet bending books, chewing paint off the walls, the ceiling scabbed by mold that has lived healthy above the bathers; I discover it over me like an ominous weather, like invasion, and am goaded into a last scour, gloves damp with the humidity of my hands, working for something, a blank slate, a clean bill, so she can soak after work.
Our microwave collects the liver spots of pasta resuscitation, and at the spring of its front door springing, a faint must bumbles its way into the kitchen, says something sad about a solitary dinner, and leaves me to two minutes of heat.
Our first place of combination, a catch-all filled with different degrees of nail and screw, dry wood-glue, a variety of tape meant for every species of split we may be called on to mend together, and tools we only use when something breaks, neither of us qualified enough for creation or maintenance; we build like a storm, through an accumulation of wreckage and energy, and then rest comes as a pile, but inside our detritus I have included your flashlight, bright yellow and black, that we can excavate while waiting for the electrician to fix our squall-snapped lines after a night when everything breaks, and we sleep.
I find her secret hardpack tucked in a desk stuffed with other things to burn: a photo, her paper-rolled budget mummy, vampire, her ex-dwelling, smoky.
I sealed my sweaters tight in Tupperware without knowing this state would call for them, would forget some months its promise as subtropic, its pledge to never freeze the soil, concrete the streetside leaf piles into unmoveable masses, turn transparent things opaque, what’s let out of the lungs, or rain in its pelt cloudy like milk that only occasionally stiffens to snow (so rare the locals stay home or, curious, hold five-second old flakes like ladybugs in their palms); I don a cardigan outside and in, the home sorely unready for frost, walls solely insulated by the dead or hibernating animals that exploit the holes and cracks, antique heater’s gush running a bee line to window gaps that did not hold cellophane in the face of a sill-bound cat who cries his fur is not enough, just as ours is not—we live in our sweaters, we sleep in our sweaters, nothing and no one well-adapted.
Months pass without powering down, and the fan becomes the low paranormal hum of our dwelling, haunt-talk pushed in thin susurrus that is the music of this place now; unplugging would not subtract the sound, but add silence, for this hush has come to be the default, the haint made our house guest, inextricable even in a winter when the wind runs in thick thrum above our roof and the loose teeth of transom let leak our heat—we just shake more blankets out and over the bed, then fold what can on a body, our hands between legs, legs to chests in sleep that looks like hiding, the smallest shape we both can take, and fill under cover with warm exhalation, the fan outside our flannel and down drowning the night in its sibilance, and us in it, boat people tossing back to life on a dead air sea, sending a signal of wind in dedicated frequency.
I buy a Buddha Machine
to humidify the bedroom
in sound, but its batteries
bow out, the few circuits
lose their grip, its speaker,
ceaseless, takes laryngitis,
I don’t know—only once
the ambience dissipates,
we realize that we make
our own, balance of sigh
and creak, sine waveform
and circadia, at all times.
The running gag is that she dreams of feeding coals into a furnace, only to wince awake and find me exhaling heavily from my mouth into her own, doing my best space heater imitation, an unconscious impression of the one she sits cold in the corner like a child pyromaniac, far from curtains or bed.
You forgot me, the oven says every midnight, and this among other things perpetually pulls us to the kitchen, where we sniff for gases, canary our own mine shafts when I do not turn a dial completely, let the venomous asp of our stovetop maintain a low hiss for some two or three hours since soup; she will ask me, detecting maybe a new dizziness, nausea just now burgeoning, if, in this slightly scented sleep, we are going to die as we breathe with naïveté, or maybe just wake up to find our tabby a corpse sunning under his window, little lungs not as tolerant, mewing as futile as alarms built for this sort of warning but equipped with dead batteries (maintenance like this never comes to me, only in too-late panic), and I will say I don't think so, I'm not sure, I will surely abstain from a callous yes, someday, because we lay every night in the design of hypothetical burial plots, and to come across us in the morning, chests motionless, the paramedics might remark that the sight of us was a peaceful one.
I am always up ten minutes before
the alarm triggers, and this is why:
strong sun, insomnia, a discomfort
from rough sheets, the cat rattling
our loose door, a combination of—
and then, on time, I hear the buzz
fighting through my shower shush.
Boxed tea: one way of obsoleting paper calendars—its slow disappearance takes the blame for a ring around every cream coffee cup that sits documenting days and nights we left half full, untouched.
All we get is mail for former tenants—every postal worker ignores our return to senders, insists they still live here, and communication intended for others keeps to itself; flag raised, we surrender our lives alone, admit the former residents to come in and out our empty rooms.
In the Southern fashion of decrepitude and neglect, my car forms a carapace of pollen spread from dandelion and ironweed, from boneset and elm, thick and the color of tea stain, spores adding golden green which makes the body almost an environment, thriving with spiders that disperse as I turn the key, swing the door, kick up a haunted house’s web and dust, breathe a basement must filtered through my pulled-up tee shirt, turn the key, hear the dead creak of battery, and leave to spring the trunk lock, spilling its leaves and seedpods over the forgotten belongings: muddied clothing quarantined, a newspaper marking the last date of sunlight, sporting equipment, tools produced at last time’s attempt to fix this—the contents, topped with new dirt and the dead shed of trees, are what’s left of an apathetic time capsule, a half-looted tomb.
Spent glass builds up to its breaking point, and eventually we load it like luggage—month after month of drunk—and drive an hour north; we are ready for the redemptive act, that shattering again and again as we pitch each jar into the vast crackle carpeting the bin, shielding our eyes, though we wish we could stare, slow the moment down, watch each bottle in its disassembly turn from geometric to geometries; their contents never gave us such clarity, though they lurched our movements, made witless pilots out of us, navigating our hulking vehicles through doors, out of shoes, off of cliffs, and our mornings worse for it, regret-glowing and televisioned, spent washing out wine from glasses, washing mouths out with the shower water, clean of residue and ready to be broken down and recast.
The bandage seals so tightly the skin beneath it shrivels up without breath; I tell her it did not shrink but swell—and she says skin is an organ as one's liver is, one's lungs, only covering you.
If the window is a mouth, the air conditioner is a breathing machine, almost medical, pumping in struggle until it gives up the ghost, dies down in seconds of song from a weakly wound music box, the melody begun and then done, asleep as sudden as narcolepsy, unwakeable though I prod all of the buttons in every combination, just hoping for its shuttering respiration to nebulize my bedroom lung, medicate this record heat wave the house has swallowed along with me; I planned to sleep tonight on the floor, my air mattress flat on its back next to me, (the inflation machinery had failed), but after a last tap rattles the cockroach intrusion from the unit and into the open, I lie on my side, 5 A.M., and blow the bed to life, the one apparatus able to use this air for something, the only frightened engine.
In your pewter jewelry box is one intricately glass-gemmed bumblebee pin.
A buzzing begins from behind the speakers at the ninety minute mark, splits in hairline zags right through a Woody Allen diatribe until I rise, untangle, and rap the television like a neighbor on the thin apartment wall parting people from a party, *can it buddy*, still the sizzle spits in its spurts, shuts up at my fist long enough for me to retangle our legs, resign the night; behind my eyes, I give the sound to your bee pin, and drift.
In lieu of photo albums ripening in ozone and fluorescence
keeping track of past fashion and shape, faces and growth
and bending of bones, instead of snapshots we complained
about when our mothers insisted, sitting on laps on couches
on holidays, or occasionally pointless, moments we slept in
the open, came home with hair cut or from a dance, a date,
or a birthday posed, lit by eight, eleven, seventeen candles
below my face, in place of those glossy documents, we stole
away with our fathers’ vinyl; the LPs then like carousels
of photographs in rotation, projection simple, the slidelight
finding our ears, leaving our mouths as nostalgia as we flip
sides, or through a library that finally necessitated a crate
as we have mixed all we have into one collection, her Dad’s
Steely Dan discography interrupted by mine’s only Spring-
steen and *Endless Summer* pressed against *Harvest Moon,*
*Songs from the Big Chair* and us slumped in our own, low
candlelight, being told and telling histories, me rooting out
records, opening her jackets, her sleeves, play this, oh this.
Home

Shadows are under five billion trees …

RAY BRADBURY
Welcome, from the Ghost Town Tourism Bureau

As one of America’s most haunted cities, we are known for feng shui. Neck kisses. Strings instead of switches. Basements here are spacious, unfinished, and full of grave flowers. Choral chambers. Nails may be exposed on the steps. This city is a stockyard, a video arcade. It used to have a stronger smell. Doesn’t come up much. The dumbwaiters can accommodate your infants for easy bedtimes. Just keep the door clear of obstruction, pull firmly and sing while you do it. Here, the trees die and become newspaper. Here, a whole home will hollow out like a cared-for skull.
Independence Day is Mostly Evening

July sees the thicket spilling with botany, like the produce of a man, too ambitious with his groceries, coming home.

Florets of fireworks bloom as if the roofs are having spectacular ideas. The lawns singe in this brainstorm.

The sun lingers over warm beer. In the streets, mothers picking up kids and bigger debris by growing headlight,
fathers busy touching wicks to cigarettes, flicking both into the grass like stunned crickets coming conscious.

Their shirts, for a day, are collarless. Kitchens sleep, TVs sleep, the bathroom sinks scintillate with candles.

Though the local stations wind down, boom boxes continue to harmonize with canine wails and report.

Families flank the blocks in rare symmetry. The sons and daughters juxtapose, some taller, more handsome.

Dark no darker than dusk. Whiffle balls and brothers invade and abscond from the conifers and shedtops.

Names later diffuse through the night’s new opacity, many ending in Y or the stop of a consonant, vowels held out in polyphony, something like a storm siren. Not even the dog visible. Not even the bush it was in.

But the square of turf blots, again a square of turf. Children, invisibly inked, reveal then in the heat.

How their clothes are gunpowdered, how their burns are minor, whose eyeglasses are crushed in a fray.

No one ever thinks that the neighborhood shadows can feel so savage, take what they want to take.
Capitol Beach

Again, the lake must be seen to by scientists, as it's intoxicated. Walleye bob to the top, oopsy-daisied, overturned, gas, bagged.

Again, the lake must be seen to with dredgers, chugging aerators, a necessary quorum to provide its chlorine levels, party plans.

Again, the lake must be seen to be believed, wide as the houses that gang up on it allow. Its skip-stone wind is a weak fist whiff.

Again, the lake must be seen to prosecute it for any crime, must be caught in the act of capsize, of undertow, or edema, to drain.

Again, the lake must be seen to exhibit psychopathy, trying to drag a tubing toddler down. Try to drag its bed for bones. See.

Again, the lake must be seen to its conclusion, be site of its own shaken cremation, until, turbid and thick, it refuses speedboats.
How a Summer Coda Goes

First, you are barefoot upon departure, grip with your toes pile of shaggy lawn. The toolsheds are feral as they crouch

in the darker fade of day like predators, only seen in cautious states. Unkempt arbor, bike chained to an electric meter,

the path home acned with goldenrod that rings a school bell. With a trowel, you till the funereal dusk in patches

of action figures and housecat bones because some mistake has been made by a younger self who kept a diary,

practiced, clumsily, mourning like this in August and thick insect glossolalia. Clouds break open like rot wood,

water beating the street in a holy din you listen to with the eyes closed tight, without talking. Still unable to grasp

the sundial nearby with its movement as decipherable as a pond’s altered blue algae levels, its body no better to anyone

than a poison vat, come to near-nude by children in various stages of sumac. A tire swing brings to mind a car wreck.

Post-curfew hours, like television sets, are stolen as the teens move in and out of windows. Their baby siblings know

but keep mum. Crystalline grass and jagged asphalt say get your shoes back on, where two boys stoned
a bottle with fervor, conversation
all arc revision and then shatter,
raze the season if it can't be kept.
Shadows are Under Five Billion Trees

You are fifteen degrees colder below the broad elm stretch. Your skin tremors, then tightens, as when, nights, you suspect your solitude.

Either in pain or pursuit, children are shrieking from a sandlot obscured with a fastness of pine. Their yelps peal at you like fawns off-course.

Hours pass. The children exit the curtain of wood like shadow puppeteers at exeunt. Silhouettes, their rabid fans, reach to tug a jacket or hand.

The glow you leave in is exhausted. Nothing has a twin. Now light signifies an oncoming. Now light throws shadow like a secret, accidentally.

Outside your bedroom, the fir no longer claws your window. For pets, it kept drifts that fled to its apron, sometimes staying hid until April.
Now the snow, famished of dark, departs. Leaves duck into culverts, squat where shadows are best. You, too, prefer sleep in a citadel and darkly.
Unbroken Expanse of Snowy Grass is Scared

Quiet fills out the football field.
Where am I, it asks, hypothermic.

First it follows a teapot’s catcall.
Its eyes are very communicative.

Exposes its belly on the patio tarp
asking for a mouth’s halo of heat.

It’s a nice venue for pole shadow:
Frisbee skip of blocks-off sound.

Football field could be parking lot,
toppled drive-in screen, for you.

It likes your festive key ring jingle,
wishes for a marching band of that

walking back to the cars it atlases,
has no aspiration to be a blanket,

to catch in wind, to speak to wind,
to be features squeezing up in wind.

You get to be its first feet, a ruination,
For you, there’s short-term memory.
Bars Close to Closing, Night Loaded for Bear

Some men are at work in the alley
on signatures of urine. A promenade
of bars from which they lazily evacuate.

Many have government jobs. Many
wander in and out of denominations.
Noon fights back with Bloody Marys.

Midnight, though. The traffic in fits
and pedestrians taking risks with Red
Rover-like thrashing, no held hands.

The homeless talk at smokers outside
the upset stomach of a club. Women
regret their attire, focus on shivering.

Alleyway, then doorway, then stairway.
No one seems to use any of the three.
But, to be a city, these are requisite.

Rare taxis spirograph the city proper.
The pickups are phoned in and tacit.
Passengers sit obediently in the back.

Some drunks fuddle their cars through
the neighborhoods, the sleeping watches,
the blinds, shades, curtains of split levels.

Hospitals are suburban, inconvenient.
Helicopter lights keep a bored strobe
waiting for morning’s rural coronary.

Never does the city see a dormancy.
Hundreds of taquerias do not shutter.
Forklifts dodge shopping insomniacs.

Night, its cerements. Garage doors
descend. Whole moon a full-frontal
flashlight; clouds pass like hands.
Migration in a White Out

Snapped like picnic linen, a blizzard
puts its ghost costume on the block.
Pupil aperture widens like a yawn.

Rooms get separate light; hall, some;
bedroom, less; deep closet, none at all,
though it pines for windows full of field.

The week starts, shrugging its shoulders
at unclothed you and your frosted cereal.
Further in, the day makes a go of thaw.

You jerk to the mailbox, work a furrow
like a stop-motion snowman, all torso.
Migrating birds in flight close their eyes.

With hands like a conch, you blow,
make a little furnace and woodwind,
coupled like the TV’s glow and music.

Later on, brave the featureless lanes,
hunt for a pond to crack under your feet
or a drugstore holiday treat clearance.

As you go, breadcrumb your gloves.
(They’re too big for any bird to pick up.)
You’ll detect a distinct sound of rifles,

unlucky hunters taking more shots
at the Canadian geese sleep-flying.
Make for home in much the same way.
In Spring, Everything Must Have Appellation

It is April, as brutal as gums
teething. Contagions are trying
symptoms out on mall women,

who sneeze through the racks,
which sends their nasal droplets
dandelioning. You wish for May.

So your brow furrows. You silence
yourself, and pass like a Labrador
hand over tentlight. Half the week

you are a spy sent to a park bench,
instructionless. Not one briefcase.
Your job is to name everything—

Lucy the Lake. The poplar brothers,
Bo and Aggie. Wind “Walter” Gust.
A picnic’s swept-away plate, Emily.

Randall the Only Taxi, always idle,
popping meter gum in its cheek
to a steady waltz of three counts.

The fauna and industry. Gutterwash
of napkin mass. The high schools.
You give the city its nomenclature.
Work Around Water

A creek cuts like a side-lain split of lightning through the gut of town, its crooks accommodated, and even accentuated by bridgespan.

Today, a bulldozer ponders terraforming, cold-engined about the pulled-up piping of to-be-tailored arterials.

How best to shape the land to retain the shape of land—how best to flush the flood.

The city, its blight annexed, begins to beautify drainage.

To leave the waterbodies be like indigenes, like sleep-thick grandfathers, glided around. To respect the sag of shoulders and labored breath, the pause and creak.

This rift will exist to channel what we want to flow out, so we will lavish it. In rain, and rain event. In drought, when roadside flourishes.

*Each bank is beginning to fill with vegetation, as designed.*
Nothing Happened Today

You spend Wednesday with the window
tuned to gray, to a poor reception of rain.

The neighborhood is made an island chain,
a cul-de-sac atoll waded by the dog walkers.

You think of the socks sopping like sponges,
shoved in the shoes of commuters downtown

below sport coat and sports section canopies,
dashing past panhandlers to the flooded mall,

their children, home and drying and in tableau
around the kitchen countertop, backpacked.

When asked, they say, today, nothing happened.
No worms grew out of the blacktop's split lip.

No girls began looking beautiful, their clothes
ill fit on the elegant trees they're growing into.

Soaked long enough, the boys will grow too,
like animals encapsulated, enough to fill rooms.
A Few Holes in the Roof to Breathe By

Late May lets spiders in- and outside.
The jambs are never well-weatherized.

Everyone swarms with their wine
near the stove. Or a large swaddling

of bath tissue. Your new lover lights up,
and you circumambulate June in tandem.

By the end of July, a tone fingers ring
from wine glasses begins to occupy

your days like gnats, hang over cores.
The only sound in July is the Black

Cat-like static of a shirt removed
after work, thrown to the carpet,

jaundiced. Halfway through August,
drunk, you tongue skin for blood

but get twelve volts instead. Finally,
mid-September knifes you a skylight.
And in This Corner, Twilight

8 PM slinks like a luchador
to the soft shore of hurrah,

enters to firework fizzle
your living room still unlit,

and sits on your chest,
limbs tied in sleeper hold.

Want flicks its body at a bulb
until both flicker out, tired.

You are just doing laundry,
just accumulating cat hair.

There is strength enough
for soup, strength to tap out,

to leave the weak AM band
its job of cheering fatigue.

Engines and infrastructure.  
This is gloaming’s tag team.

Joints groan. The water-heater
gasps, rises, goes silent again.
Variables of Light, Heat, Movement

Summer evening freezing. Cottonball exhaust lifts off from a heavily breathing bicycle pack.

Night disorients. It occurs before you leave the movie theater, the only light a sepia tone. Your car keys change pockets on their own.

The water feature's gurgle, pitched an octave low. The stoplights overhead, obvious now, and brash.

To make days longer, you are encouraged to take alternate routes to work, play songs, not albums, never photograph moments of splendor for proof.

In the low contrast of late afternoon, all the lines lose their weight. Nightjars and thrushes fade in.

Your eyes adjust to the new contours of night like a foot and then two into a hot bath, cooled by the body, always insisting its temperature.

Nothing comes to sit on the void of couch. A cat makes snake and rabbit sounds in the spare room.

Without vision, all is terse and unrecognizable. Sudden armchair, ruckussing stereo moving right to left. In the dark, you are new like a tourist.

In this, your home. Where can you go but through rooms, expecting none of the furniture you bruise.
Day Divided by Many Little Nights

Sleep is rapid transit. Its tunnel
lights flicker Morse code letters
until you reach the its sunlit lip.

This happens on bed sheet, grass.
This happens on mid-day laminate.
Afternoon’s tablecloth swiftly yanked
so the dinner placement of it wobbles.

Afternoon and its late postal worker,
blue in his uniform, frumpily martial.
He may be your closest human contact.

Water welcomed in through a faucet,
and then careful placement of water.
On bookshelves, below the nightstand,
where they’ll leave a lipstick of sweat.

What’s there to do before she’s home?
Express confusion with the tuning TV.
Cast a life study of her on the off TV.

After unlocking, arm full with mail,
she is fuming about a faceless driver,
who seemed asleep behind the wheel,
delivering roses to the wrong address.
Darkness is When

Windows down, gusty like a wraith,
you talk over clothing, a snapping
sleeve, the least aerodynamic thing.

Further on, you are shimmering washer-eteria as you spill like ash from an urn.
Orion is large and obvious. You are still finding sweetgrass between your teeth.
Six or so more blocks, wildlife safari-quiet, your mouth forms a long O

and does your breathing. A laugh you have grown under your chest
forgets gravity, pulls out like a weed.

Night is dissected, a birthday cake covered in the half loops of cursive,
illegible after the guests divide evenly.

Parked, your seat reclines. Whoever is backseat curls as if in a lifeboat.
You make as little light as you can.
Kingdom, Phylum, Family

Rhino-sized wall holes open
the family room to weather,
so the mist invites itself in.

Pathetic excuse for daylight
on a grade school portrait,
on a sleeping chimpanzee.

This is meant to make you
leave, harassing pythons,
a tower of giraffes cudding
leaves off a childhood tree.
You buck up to the inclemency,
drawstrings tugged, and peel
ex-girlfriend letters stomped
with ibex dung off linoleum,
pin them up like wet sheets.

A streak of tigers watch you
sleep in your adolescent bed,
but they putt-putt like mopeds
which you find soothing. Give
them the foot like dachshunds.
Without a roof, nights are dank
and canopied. Your humidifier
is now unnecessary. Like fungus
from an ant, you sprout memory
from the crown of your head.
There are millions of breeds.
This is a second nature to you.
Dispeller

In your hometown, you are absence of home. You are shortfall of awe. You are defog. Wiper blades raking a glaze of rain. You are the kitchen light mother kept on. Unlocked garage. Evening intersection’s non-traffic. You are what bends air so that it, tuning, forks. You are bed made. You are small business, alive, well, remodeled. New bike lanes. You are unchange. House phone ring unceasing, cutting a stage of sleep. Ghost uneasily roomed. Yearbook yearly removed. So you are removal of book dust. Carpeting, cleaned. You are no apple tree. You are quiet stair climb. You are far-off mowing. Hypnic jerk. Reason for moving.
Land

It is poetic, musical … of fugues without a skeleton.
Melancholy with vertabrae. That is why I can't live here.

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA
Locked land is still water-drawn. Bridges are the army corps’ craft work here, of similar disposition to the men riveting them. Build to a sea level given from survey after survey. To demarcate goes horizon far. The lines at times appear after mowing. And from mid-bridge. Merge west. The sun confronts all arrivals. Flanks of coal-burning engines gargoyle at the entrance. Monumenting the effort to blur through this. How fast cattle. Standing laws keep casinos to the other side, so Iowa gets to glitter. Tractor trailers void stomachs upon stockyards. Mile one is true
and humorless.
And as silent as
can be, divide by
barrier neighbor-
hoods bullied in-
to the interstate.

432

Young ones
howl from
a ball pit.
The outlet
embraces
like a cave.
As Roman
decay was
built in. A day
of snooping
through wind-
ows, or owl
necks always,
like jar tops,
twisting past.
This, haunted
by merchants
who hawk
deformed
corduroy over-
alls, archaic
floppy disk
edutainment.
Fed by its own
water tower.
Kept warm
by a shawl
of parking lot
pulled up to
hide acne scars.
The cars signal
their leaving
with seizure
episodes, rattle.
Two functions
here: departure
and effluvia.
The food court,
a failed utopia.
A place to rid
oneself. Weight
loss retail space
available. Women
in the karate suite
practice breaking
noses. Later walk
to nylon fire sale.

426

Grama field
is in italics,
emphasizes
the horizon-
tal current
of air. No
pause. Burg
is Atlantean
in a mirage
from heat
lying water
on pavement.
Slow to rise.
Structures
push against
the ground,
stand, tired
sawhorses.
Ranch homes
cower, afraid
to shoulder
another story.
A diamond
is ignored
in its weeds.
No. Boys
shadow play
an inning,
dust bases
off in blasé
archeology.
Are safe left
alone. Rarity
of pavement.
Roads forget
to be named,
so as not to
fray, lattice
a grid, tight
as two hands
churching.

423

Each barrel
greeds up
high beam,
moon, then
shines white
like miracle.
Antennae
begin here's
irrefutable
tempo. Their
red pulsation
in triplicate,
as vertical as
shirt buttons.
Kept in even
pace, pylons,
tines along
the dashes
delineating
lanes. Bathed
in effulgent
wash of work
light, a road
crew, mouths
masked, super-
vise steamroll
progress. As if
to greet some-
thing unearthing.
To the only hill
top, a temple
has climbed, is
glass and rafter.
Like ascension
paused, resting.
Mile markers
bead by, rosary.
Turn signal
clicks sync
then speed up
against talk
radio cadence.
That is given
by mast radiator,
air inspissate
with its gift.

420

Signs noun
and verb
with exits.
Here. Here.
Ascender
windbreak
a bulwark
for the cattle
scatter. Plot
of car parts
is growing
rust, is not
the antique store it wants to be. Porn barn, World War II library and museum once a truck stop. Still, three more for all those who cannot or won’t stay. Those things adapt, take credit cards. Without hills, the town still hides. Behind the high-rise grain elevators, quiet as cud-chewing, fume passing through a screen door kept latched, never slapped. Rare children make basketball hoops driven into concrete gratuitous.

409

Of dozens filling front seat legroom, a body shop receipt gets plucked out by carjacking
crosswind, 
rips across the redacted October crop, skipping shot goose, just as blown. Apartments, board game barren. No one buys trees for them. Clothing on lines break small sound barriers, pop at a terse gust. Little brothers smoking, sun lit vampires lain in empty acres. Bigger brothers recon on bikes. On tracks, penny savers flit. Ant hill and its BBs. A neighbor's grill is a blanket scent. The kids upwind of it, obfuscating.

397

Jagged graph-like skyline shows a city that peaked once. One skyscraper, limestone,
rust-domed,
blue bronze
sower over-
seeing leng-
thy plains.
Easy to make
this pinnacle
turning point
for a radius.
An ordinance
presses the rest
groundward,
says no taller
than. Expansion
must move then
like lungs, out-
ward. Towards
turbines barely
recalling their
predecessors.
Towards Cold
War air force
base housing
reincorporated.
Arterials dead
end in the out-
skirts. Hemmed
in by annex.
Highway barrels
through. Paddock
with guernseys
in its confines.
Silos increase
their ambition.

353

Now, a water
tower bullies
the scape. This one, in hot air balloon getup. Quickly, fast food options, Stanchion sky. Windbreaks along parcels say we got you surrounded in a posse drawl. Lots of ammo in the big box store. Parking lot perforates a barn shape. Still, corrals. Carts a sparse livestock loose, just periphery. Off-ramp motel chains. Days, Motor, Comfort Inn. Truck grunts can’t pass the ply of curtains. Smell of all the invisible gas expelled without an air-ship to buoy. Sour cubic tons. Scratch ticket mutilated, so soon useless, papier collé against gravel. Stop for snacks. Unisex bathroom, humid as June.
Kid platoons in a cornfield, detasseling. Their hands, like locusts, fidget plague. Set the stalks to blossom. Idle pivots are plesiosaur skeletons sat in the field, fluke echoes of here’s actual natural history. Once a sea. Rain runoff coughs flecked eras. Weapon tips, behemoth bone shard worked back like seeds into soil, under sneaker soles. Noon held aloft. The hay stacked with sack lunch ate bleeding from razor-like leaves. Four dogs running rings into the dirt driveway where a bus idles evenings for the flood of preteens.
Dust plumes
with departure,
a dissolve.

291

Birch trees
unemployed
on the creek
shore. Limit
load one ton
on its bridge.
This stretch
was elected
for bisection,
so its small
glitches go
below unfelt.
Curt names,
Germanic.
Rock. Elk.
In dialect,
the rivulets
are homonym
for neck pain,
clefts bent,
sedentary
sleepers.
Driven star
posts node
high-tensile
barbed-wire
into maplines.
Draped, they
are heavy with.
Are frozen into.
Winter flanks,
dun and crystal-
liferous. August
acre’s mono-
culture green
now a vast
dishwater,
camera film
sprung early,
washed out.

272

Trains incise
town no more
than five, six
minutes apart.
Meant for
empty, then
for mountains
that fold, rise,
breadlike.
Stone, grain,
ethanol tank,
some graffiti
go with them.

270

A monument,
straddling four
lanes, in hunting
lodge façade.
Majestic
overpass. Duo
of rearing steel
pegasi bookend
from the top.
Families there
by accident.
A re-enactor
tears tickets
at the mouth
of an escalator
lancet-arched
in video. Ear-
phones pipe
in ambiance
of calf bawl,
axel clatter,
the narrator’s
gravel, affect.
A walk through
abridgement.
Straw fire
is fiberglass
and begs one
to mime heat.
Volume level
kept low
in focused
wandering.
Once, mostly
bootees wore
the continent-
spanning paths.
But a placard
asserts speed
is a victory
underneath
a peephole
to the Dwight
D. Eisenhower
Nat’l System
of Interstate
and Defense.

259

A queue
curls into
the giant hog lot. How air is filled out here involves every sense. The retch of farrow topping constant pig burble. Heavy scent, at once new and an end, fogs off the clods of ordure and suffuses the unfurled cloudiness of so many steaming things. Huff of nostrils atomizing, feces heat, blood heat, the killing floor hosed. If the roof tore its joints and rose, the piggery would vapor like coffee from a mug, like geese spooked up, like ghosts set free.
Delivery truck dawn. Sucklings plug maws to mother (roughly estimated two, three pro-football fields long). The purpose is feeding efficiently. A dominant employer.

The homes in assembly form a sort of perimeter of hamlets. Clans pack as wolves do, cave in late night garages, open to the dead end street, batten ed, expectant of sprawl. In its shape, distinctly not grown but in a field. So bovine, a ruminant, its quartet of chambers
all process.
Back flat,
for stirrups.
Too, its sleep
same, stood up.

230

The pheasant
lift like hats
from wheat
half-life.
Thunder, then
a reminder
of gravity,
lead-riddled
bird tumble.
From the copse
one anomaly,
Orion, vest
bright orange,
plods en route
to new corpse,
guts it, hand in,
puppeteering.
Decay, a change,
as crops, erased.

222

Mildly, a boo.
Gently spread
air rifle seed
about a torso.
Calliope mu-
zak polluting
in big mono.
Town square
time travels
in the flood
lights. Less
sulk, sag. Lots
of walkeating
men off work.
They crook
dog-curious
for a corncob,
which tilts
the air force
brass band.
Amphitheatre
is fat mothy.
Same audience
a housefire has.
All children
freely wander
to the barrels
of syrup trash.
Yawn mothers
with turnstile
arms. Surprise.
Sun sets behind
everyone’s back.

196

In stretches,
the highway
runs along-
side cars
coalful.
A rapid
dragging
framework.
Scarves
of carbon
fade out
as speed
changes
other speed,
causes hummingbirding.
For those at a stop, fluttering zoetrope of opposite side. Candy-stripe arm claps down, signals a sync of flicker and bell and whistle, wags stiff to the train blowback.
So slight, parallel to commotion and its blur, juxtaposed.
A motion picture— composite of an iron horse, legs strobing below body.

164

Waves of soy green enough to be algae.
To elicit calenture, waves firm to the foot. Stray stalks of corn like
periscopes. How weeds ruin what they break into. This plain, a dress form, formal gowned, on arched back. With so many interruptions. A leviathan thresher ready with its baleen to tooth krill grain. Baler, hands nesting what’s dead, what’s left to lighten the lea. Near dusk, will-o’-the-wisp trucks flicker towards home.

143

The Midwest grows black hole-massive. Just enough tilting vista there to hide its few things, swung behind and clutched. Every curve takes minutes which disputes this as ocean.
Basic waves with only two fingers. Who these people are. Counties gather them like spilled collectibles. Drifted horse does not see a thorn-thick fence until it is fenced. Any thing would be crushed below this sky, as if another sky below completes a tightened vise. Rotunda. Posts but no lights. Like bulbless stems.

What’s frozen thaws, so that preservations peel. Weather, house’s wood, do not get new paint. A family dwindling only sees. The filling station expects its elderly, so brews its coffee. Measurement here takes time as shape. Years, segments of.
At sixty-five
MPH, a town
is ten seconds.
A post office's
swift swan song.
Ruins of houses,
houses, trailers.
Town of twenty.
Seized highway
as main street,
propane tanks
slender as war-
heads sat next
to corrugated
steel everything.
Bar in a home.
Allotted only so
many structures
to purpose. Wide
load trailer extends
Ogallala's life
to half a minute.

107

Xed, extra
2 x 4s cross-
bar a drunk
fence, give
it a brace.
If any find
height here,
then slouch,
corsetry's
asthmatic
lean, or line-
man crouch,
legs and arm
in a tripod
to embrace
wind rushing.
A stave silo
like a jigsaw
puzzle mussed.
No piece where
pieces were,
so the osiers
of its hoop
skirt, exposed.
A willow limb
juts like bone
from the break,
a femur from
the thigh tear.
If an elm
should disease
from inside,
it will forget
give, so break
like a fullback,
no tackle, no
guard. Sapling
stakes, a corset
of three tethers,
teach how
to take wind,
not to bend.
backbone.

88

Rigs sleep
like steeds
hitched up.
Pneumatic
snort. Semis
are waking
with sound
like neighs.
A feeding
teen, spray
of sunflower
seed shells from inside a cargo van. Driver deep knee bends and ambulates mid-marathon while a game of tag swarms around steel community college art—here made oxidizing wreckage (an incident of aesthetic to interrupt the flushing toilet white noise). Ears pressed to crooks, how one uses sea shells, for a shh. Passengers, their cubist necks bent. A hundred miles, then next rest.

55

Zipper tooth shelter belts secrete geese, which spray into the clear designation
of above
at an air
horn yowl.
Only winter
sees surface
reflect sky,
both dirty
white. Out
in the open,
the fowl
spindrift.
A squirm
of muscae
volitantes
flocks with
this flock,
amoebic, in
marionettic
movement,
irreal glide.
Against taut
cyclorama
the wires
must hide.
Plain sight.
Afforestation foot-
lights this
theater full
of floating.

20

Hills are slow,
bluffs sudden.
SUVs instead
of pack mules
corkscrew up.
At the top,
a plaque notes
how one man
Loss

The silence of being full present,
an ache along the forearm, being fully home.
And let the fragments fall, flightless,
and went back in.

GREG KUZMA
I’ve come to
the plains. Back to
cabin fever
sleep.
A white drapéd again.
I went
to crawl inside
    an avalanche,
in the dim
    blue.
And felt
    the air
from my skin.
This place we have on the TV has come in,

far from us and inarticulate. We’ve conquered it,
like stray dogs,
brought back.
As well, I can add, the men and women who come out of the town.

In autumn I go hunt boys.
May.

Rob

the heat

kept

there,

the many

stars.
Nebraska’s dirt.
Out my left window
the fields scattered
no bigger than

sin.
The garden had luck before.
Had more than used, more than needed,
and more died.

I spread out underneath them.
December

sleeps now,

too fierce for me.
A rainy spring, and
dogs tracked down.

After the
first
stink
half digested. As the air
is.
Now there's no sign of them,
the bone, the sinews.
Being a father has meant being

the trees, the crops,
not so much

to be.

Lacking
hills.
Last week the wind called home.
Nebraska’s farmers
cough,
old and ready for cutting.
Their wives are
indoors more.
Girl Scouts

are streetlights
to be rescued.

Nebraska

is silent
listening to them.
Nebraska also has her hogs.
It is no lie.
I write this.

Sometimes it does not come,
like this year, at all.
This

place burned down,
  waves there, sad.

Autumn is

wreathed in gunshots.

  Then autumn brings
    the
dun-colored, pretty,
    dry-straw
Nebraska    out.
Russians
so full of
teeth like
Halloween
pumpkins.
There

dthere.
The problem is death, the laureate.
Was trotted out on
dignified occasions for
some paper work.
Death

on TV.

I can hear you

Nebraska.
I've heard. Mine was forced birth and long enough to know Oh it's enough to sing praises like this.
I

sleep in the woods,

have written enough.
Notes

“What Stars” mentions the name of Czech anatomist and physiologist Johannes Evangelists Purkinje. Among many discoveries, Purkinje is noted for identifying what would eventually be called the Purkinje shift, in which the brightness of red and blue colours changes as light intensity decreases gradually at dusk.


“Dispeller” is inspired by and adapts language from Mark Strand’s poem, “Keeping Things Whole” from Selected Poems by Mark Strand. Copyright © 1980 by Mark Strand.

The Loss section is comprised entirely of an erasure of Nebraskan poet Greg Kuzma’s 1977 chapbook Nebraska: A Poem, originally published by Best Cellar Press.