

A Field Guide to Adaptation

By

Benjamin David Cartwright

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Chairperson : Joseph Harrington

Kenneth Irby

Laura Mielke

Iris Smith-Fischer

Stanley Lombardo

Date Defended: 05/21/2013

The Dissertation Committee for Benjamin David Cartwright
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

A Field Guide to Adaptation

Chairperson: Joseph Harrington

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Abstract:

A Field Guide to Adaptation is a collection of satiric and elegiac poems, prose poems, and hybrid image/text poems, which explores various types of memory (personal, historical, cultural, and political), and human processes of memory (construction, interpretation, commodification, and loss).

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Satire and Elegy as Adaptive Responses to Memory in *A Field Guide to Adaptation*

I. Overview

A Field Guide to Adaptation contains poems that exhibit the properties of both satire¹ and elegy², as they respond to various types of memory (personal, historical, cultural, and political), and human processes of memory (construction, interpretation, commodification, and loss).

The dissertation title itself announces the satiric impulse present in much of the collection, as do the titles of the three sections. If the collection is a field guide to adaptation, rather than to wildlife, then adaptation is being *observed*. It is the subject of the guide, which begs the question of who, or what, is going through the adaptation process.

¹ "Satire" here refers to the notion outlined in *Bedford* of a literary genre that makes use of irony, wit, and sarcasm for a moral purpose, and that has, as its primary goal, not ridicule or abuse, but the provocation of some kind of reform. The satiric poems included in the dissertation are an example of indirect satire, and function using methods of presentation and representation, rather than direct condemnation. All of this is typical of the genre, as defined by *Bedford*, as is these poems' use of exaggeration.

² "Elegy" here is used in the sense common in English language poetry since the seventeenth century, also outlined in *Bedford*: a reflective poetry that has, at its heart, a lament for something lost. Two poems in the dissertation, "Migration Patterns" and "Another Dave Elegy," do share qualities with the tradition of the pastoral elegy, in that they are both poems mourning the loss of a dead friend, but these poems do not follow the conventional pattern of the pastoral elegy, which typically moves from an invocation, to a statement of grief, to a description of mourners.

One possibility is that the subjects of the poems are going through processes of adaptation, and readers of the poems may observe these adaptations taking place. Another distinct possibility also exists: that the poetic adaptation of material, enacted by the poet of the collection, is the subject of observation.

The distinction between a field guide and a "how-to" guide is also important. If one uses a field guide (to observe birds, for example), one relies on the expertise of the author to provide labels, and categories for what is being seen. One takes part in the fiction of objective, repeatable observation. With a "how-to" guide, the reader also relies on the expertise of the author but becomes empowered. After reading a field guide and identifying birds, a reader might successfully match observed birds to those depicted in the book, but only because of the author's authority: I saw a yellow-bittern because this guide says that bird is a yellow bittern. With a field guide, the emphasis is on using the specialized knowledge acquired by someone else to aid in the process of identification; a hierarchy is created in which the writer of the field guide occupies an implied position of authority over that of the guide's user; the field guide user may be able to reproduce the identification process, but it is the authority of the field guide writer and his/her knowledge of what is to be identified that makes this identification process possible. In a "how-to" guide, the emphasis is not on an object to be observed, but on an object to be *created*. This is a small, but important distinction. The implied promise of the "how-to" guide is that, once the guide has been read, the authority of the guide's writer will no longer be necessary; the reader of the guide, once finished, will occupy an equivalent position to that of the writer, in terms of authority on the subject. The reader will become a creator.

The title *A Field Guide to Adaptation* draws attention to this issue of authority, and how it affects a reader's experience of a text; it invites a reader of *this* text to consider, and possibly

interrogate, the poetic authority of the text's author and, by extension, the kind of authority often claimed by authors of collections of poetry. If this collection of poetry is a "field guide" rather than some other type of guide, then the aforementioned hierarchy is in place—a hierarchy in which the author of the guide claims authority on the subject and in which the reader is relegated to a subordinate position. This type of hierarchy is ubiquitous in many contemporary collections of American poetry, particularly in collections that might be defined as "mainstream" or that consist mainly of lyric, referential, narrative poems. This collection's title playfully seeks to draw the reader's attention to the hierarchy common in such collections of poetry—to "show the hand" of this common type of poetic posturing and, through satire, to subvert that hierarchy. The technique of using titles to enact a kind of satire appears in other parts of *A Field Guide to Adaptation*.

Each of the section titles in *A Field Guide to Adaptation* begins with the phrase "The World of," which carries with it the connotation of a documentary classification (the "Wide World of Sports," for example, or "The World of Nanoscience," or "The World of Fashion"). These phrases, when used in texts outside of the dissertation, pretend to wholeness in a manner similar to the field guides. They seem to imply that after watching a documentary on "The World of Nanoscience," one would possess a complete, albeit introductory, understanding of the topic. This is often not the case, however. After watching a documentary of this type, you may learn some things about the topic at hand, but really, what you are viewing is a fiction, an artistic construction, shaped by a director. You may have an introductory understanding of the director's *version* of Nanoscience, but not necessarily anything more than that. Titling the sections of *A Field Guide to Adaptation* in this manner is an attempt to capitalize on this tension—between

objectivity and artistry—extant in documentaries and other forms that masquerade as objective truth.

What is designated as the purview of each the section of the dissertation, "The World of Beast and Fowl," "The World of Handcuffs, Anvils, Dynamite, and Steel," and "The World of Disappearance," cannot be contained, or comprehensively addressed, by a series of poems. In other words, the satire present in the titles of these sections allows for them remain open in the sense Lyn Hejinian outlines in her foundational essay "The Rejection of Closure."³ Therefore, the titles of the sections draw attention not only to the disconnection between the titles and what is contained within the dissertation sections, but also to the disconnection between *all* such titles and their content. The section titles of the dissertation seem to invite a kind of indexicality—to invite the readers to allow the disconnection between section titles and their content to blossom outwards, like stubborn algae, and infect the world outside of the text. Satire, as it is used in the titling of the dissertation and the dissertation sections, complicates the reading experience. Similarly, the satire present in the poems complicates how they are to be understood by readers.

Certain poems in *A Field Guide to Adaptation*, such as the ekphrastic series "Woman Trapped in Landscape," may be read as an attempt to tear down, through satire, that which is unjust about the memory-making, memory collecting, and memory interpretation processes. "Woman Trapped in Landscape" makes use of the extra-literary genre of the photographic caption to draw attention to the way different women have been made to pose, or have posed themselves willingly, in various landscapes. This posing objectifies not only the women, but the landscapes themselves. In Susan Sontag's discussion of tourism and photography, she describes

³ In "The Rejection of Closure," Hejinian introduces the idea of two kinds of texts: closed texts, which allow for a single interpretation, for example a detective story or some kinds of lyric poetry, and "open" texts in which all of the elements of the work are "maximally excited" so that multiple readings or interpretations become available. Hejinian lists some techniques useful for creating an open text, such as arrangement coupled with rearrangement, repetition, and compositional techniques that result in "gaps" in the text, which the reader must then fill.

the problematic relationship between actual experience and the collection of photographic images while on vacation:

A way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing it—by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir. Travel becomes a strategy for accumulating photographs (9).

The caption-poems in "Woman Trapped in Landscape" draw attention to this refusal to experience inherent in the collection of vacation photographs and satirize it. Ironically, the poetic voice in these caption-poems is also enacting a kind of commodification of the women depicted, performing a gesture of "salvage," or of special "understanding," but how is the poet to know these individuals? Is the arrangement of their images, in a poetic series, combined with the directing and linking power of a caption, any less violent than turning their images into souvenirs from a fond vacation? At the very least, the poetic treatment of these images is an adaptation of material drawn from real life, and the parallel between the commodification of the women through photography, and the commodification of the women through poetry, is no accident. Also, this parallel, if we follow Sontag's line of reasoning regarding tourism photography, introduces the question of whether the composition of poems might not also be a way to refuse and limit experience, even as it simultaneously certifies it. Whether or not the satire in "Woman Trapped in Landscape" is successful, this series attempts to make the poetic process, as well as the collection of photographs, into an object of critique.

Poems such as "Unlabeled 5" in *A Field Guide to Adaptation*, with its depiction of an Alzheimer's-like disorder on an aging, lyric speaker, are more sympathetic to the process of memory making, and the eventual loss of memory all humans experience. "Unlabeled 5" is

elegiac in its overall approach, in this regard, whereas "Woman Trapped in Landscape" is satiric. However, "Unlabeled 5" must still be considered as part of the field guide—as part of a larger work seeking to draw a reader's attention to the use and misuse of poetic authority. Because the elegiac poems in *A Field Guide to Adaptation* appear alongside more satiric responses to memory-making, and the loss of memory, in the larger work, elegy becomes only one possible response, and the gesture of elegy, as opposed to satire, also becomes an object of examination.

Other poems in *A Field Guide to Adaptation* do not fit as tidily, however, into the categories of satire and elegy as "Woman Trapped in Landscape" and "Unlabeled 5." A negotiation of the impulses to satirize, or to elegize, is at the heart of the collection, and is the reason for this vacillation from elegy to satire, throughout the collection, and for the presence of some poems in which satire and elegy are mixed. If there is an unspoken question informing *A Field Guide to Adaptation's* exploration of memory, it is whether satire or elegy is the appropriate poetic response to what humans do with their memories.

A Field Guide to Adaptation vacillates between the two modes of satire and elegy—modes which may at first appear disparate—because both modes correspond to common, human reactions to the processes of memory; a reaction of frustration and anger, on the one hand, and a reaction of reflection and lamentation, on the other.

Satire, with its techniques of presentation and representation, through exaggeration, is a form of rebuke designed to produce a reform. The satiric poems in *A Field Guide to Adaptation* were fueled by a reaction of frustration and anger to the processes of different kinds of memory (personal, historical, cultural, and political), and a subsequent poetic rebuke, designed to inspire a reform. For example, "Superman to Renounce U.S. Citizenship!" satirizes, in part, the misuse of memories of the American Civil War. The poem "Food Cart in Winter, Northern Idaho"

satirizes the "shortened" nature of human memory, which helps humans rationalize environmental degradation. The poems "Humans Taken Hostage in Dog Park" and "[Unlabeled 3]" satirize man's common assumption of superiority in relation to other species, which is a result of a conveniently selective human memory that allows contemporary man to forget mankind was not the dominant species on the planet in the not-so-distant past.

Other poems in *A Field Guide to Adaptation* are elegiac in their response to the processes of memory. The poems "Different Species in Hen Houses" and "Tapping for Syrup" are laments for lost innocence (the innocence prior to violence acted out against other species, on the one hand, and the innocence prior to sexual violence, on the other). The poem "Another Dave Elegy" resembles a pastoral elegy in that it laments the loss of a dead friend. However, with its offhanded-sounding title, and its acerbic, even self-mocking tone, "Another Dave Elegy" also contains elements of satire. The word "Another" in the title implies that this is one in a long series of poems. The tone in the body of the poem also seems to suggest a kind of exhaustion with the production of elegies, and perhaps even a slight turn to the satiric to mitigate such exhaustion. The lamented departed in the poem is even referred to in pejorative terms, such as "idiot" and "bumrusher." These various poetic responses (satiric, elegiac, and a mixture of the two) to the processes of memory often require an adaptation of uncomfortable memories (past military conflicts, degradation of the environment, the killing of animals, the suicides of friends, sexual abuse) into poetic material.

Returning again to the title of the collection, the action of constructing a satire or an elegy in response to a remembered person, place, or situation is an *adaptation* of the remembered subject. Anyone who has been made to sit through a eulogy seemingly describing a stranger rather than the person one remembers will understand that an adaptation has taken place.

Elevation of the remembered is most common, in such situations, but unwitting and unintentional denigration is also possible. For example, someone remembered by his or her friends as a lifelong atheist may have religious beliefs ascribed to him or her during such a ceremony, particularly if the ceremony is taking place in a religious institution. The frustration often felt in response to a eulogy because the eulogy either falls short or does not reach far enough is analogous to the emotional response to lived experience that inspired the creation of *A Field Guide to Adaptation*. Both the satirization of the processes of memory and the construction of an elegy for the subject being remembered seem incomplete in some way because what has been lost cannot be recovered. As Joseph Roach writes in *Cities of the Dead*, memory is, after all, at its heart, a performance—one that "stands in for an elusive entity that it is not, but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace" (3).

II. Technique

The poems in *A Field Guide to Adaptation* were constructed using very different techniques and processes in order to investigate as fully as possible the processes of human memory and the responses of satire and elegy to those processes. All of the following types of poetry are included in the dissertation:

lyric poetry

prose poetry

ekphrastic poetry

collage poetry

found poetry

univocalic poetry

fixed form poetry (pantoums)

poetry constructed using predetermined constraints (the "Looney" poems)

Although all of these types of poetry are present in *A Field Guide to Adaptation*, I have chosen to write primarily in the prose poem form, which is already filled with unease, situated as it is on the border between two formerly distinct genres. The choice of this poetic form may be interpreted as a strategy to involve the reader of this work in the feelings of unease or uncertainty that inspired the collection and are present in the satiric quality of the titles. This unease stems from an inability to determine whether or not satire or elegy is the best response to the processes of human memory. Prose poetry, because of its hybrid nature, is also well-suited to blending different tones and styles of language in the same space and is particularly useful for poems of equivocation and vacillation, especially if the prose poet makes use of what Ron Silliman refers to as the "new sentence."⁴

Another conscious choice I have made, which might serve to recreate this feeling of unease in the reader of *A Field Guide to Adaptation*, is to fuse imagery and vocabulary from "high" cultural sources (history, literature, philosophy) with the imagery and vocabulary of "low" cultural sources (children's cartoons, comic books, sensational tabloids). Doing so creates unease by simultaneously threatening the value placed on the "high" cultural elements through the association of them with similar patterns in low culture and also by creating a sense of unease related to the seemingly inappropriate elevation of trivial or "low" cultural concerns and topics to the level of serious philosophical and intellectual investigation.

⁴ In Ron Silliman's book *The New Sentence* he lists the following qualities of the new sentence: 1) The paragraph organizes the sentences; 2) The paragraph is a unity of quantity, not logic or argument; 3) Sentence length is a unit of measure; 4) Sentence structure is altered for torque, or increased polysemy/ambiguity; 5) Syllogistic movement is (a) limited; (b) controlled; 6) Primary syllogistic movement is between the preceding and following sentences; 7) Secondary syllogistic movement is toward the paragraph as a whole, or the total work; 8) The limiting of syllogistic movement keeps the reader's attention at or very close to the level of language, that is, most often at the sentence level or below.

III. Theoretical foundation

The theories influencing *A Field Guide to Adaptation* may be grouped loosely into the following categories: 1) theories of the development of parody and satire, 2) theories of the prose poem, and 3) theories related to the photographic image. These categories have been influential because I am conceiving of this collection as 1) a work that combines elegy and satire, 2) a work that makes self-conscious use of the prose poem as a means of negotiating elegiac and satiric impulses in response to the processes of memory, and 3) a work that seeks, through its use of manipulated slide images, to simultaneously critique and explore the problematic urge to commemorate via photography.

In the first category of theoretical influences, the works of Mikhail Bakhtin, particularly "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" and "Discourse in the Novel," were significant. Other significant influences on this category were the investigations into satire by Robert C. Elliott, Northrop Frye, and Alvin B. Kernan. In the second category, considerations of the prose poem by Michel Delville, Marguerite S. Murphy, and Ron Silliman were of the greatest influence. In the final category, theories of the photographic image presented in the work of Susan Sontag, Walter Benjamin, and Roland Barthes were of significant influence.

One theoretical concern underlying *A Field Guide to Adaptation* is the relationship between hybrid genres of poetry, such as the prose poem and the ekphrastic poem, and satire. Scholars Marguerite Murphy (in *A Tradition in Subversion: The Prose Poem in English from Wilde to Ashbery*) and Michel Deville (in *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre*) have remarked on prose poetry's unique ability to mimic and absorb extra-

literary genres. Recent prose poems have mimicked the extra-literary genres of such things as the customer survey card of a fast food restaurant and a standardized, multiple-choice test.

These examples, combined with prose poetry's long history of mimicking an equal number of "literary" genres such as the play, the novel, the essay, the meditation, and the fable, make a strong case for considering prose poetry as having a kinship with early, parodic genres described by Bakhtin in "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse." Bakhtin traces the development of the novel, which he considers to be the culmination of "novelistic thought," to its roots in early, parodic texts. For example, Bakhtin cites the parodic epic "War between the Mice and Frogs,"⁵ Aulus Gellius's *Noctes Atticae*⁶, and the *Moralia* of Plutarch (51-52). Bakhtin's treatment of the prehistory of novelistic discourse is exhaustive, but a few other notable examples of parody that he investigates are worth mentioning here in connection to the dissertation, including the parodic sonnets at the beginning of *Don Quixote* (51) and Ulrich von Hutten's Renaissance work *Letters of Obscure People* (82). The satiric poems included in the dissertation were inspired by many of these early parodies and by Bakhtin's examination of them, even though Bakhtin does not have very positive things to say about the poetic mode.

Bakhtin's praise of various precursors to the novel, such as parody, is consistent with his privileging of the novel as the artistic form most able to make use of the dialogic properties inherent in all language. He is less flattering in his characterization of poetry and poetic forms. No matter what complications poetry includes in its content, for Bakhtin, "the world of poetry...is always illuminated by one unitary and indisputable discourse," and "[i]n poetry, even discourse about doubts must be cast in a discourse that cannot be doubted" (286). As mentioned above, at

⁵ A parody of Homer thought to have been written about 500 B.C.

⁶ This is a commonplace book, including Aulus Gellius's thoughts on grammar, geometry, philosophy, history, and many other subjects.

the heart of this dissertation is a dramatic enacting of several anxieties. One of these anxieties is related to a suspicion that Bakhtin may have been correct and that there is no way to escape the "unitary and indisputable discourse" of the poetic form. At best, in prose poems, a poet may, perhaps, vacillate between the "world of poetry" which Bakhtin describes and critiques, and the world of prose, which he champions.

Ron Silliman's "new sentence," and prose poems that put this idea into practice, usually avoid sounding like the interior monologue of a character in a novel or lapsing into a more traditional, stable, lyric "I," even though many younger poets seem uninterested in Silliman's *poetics*—his aesthetic and political reasons for developing the concept in the first place. Many of the prose poems in *A Field Guide to Adaptation* were inspired by Silliman's "new sentence," although not necessarily his *poetics*. The feeling of being fragmented in purpose and in emotion that often permeates elegiac poetry seemed to mesh well with the technique of the "new sentence" and Silliman's concept of putting pressure on sentences in a paragraph—of creating torque from one sentence to the next.

Other prose poems in the dissertation, however, read very much like short narratives, and employ a stable, lyric voice, such as "January 31st, 1955." Some of the prose poems in *A Field Guide to Adaptation*, written using the titles of tabloid news articles such as "Super Man to Renounce U.S. Citizenship," are an attempt to combine some qualities of the "new sentence" with at least a hint of narrative. Poems that seek to do this kind of combining are some of the more satiric poems in the collection. In addition to the ideas of Bakhtin and Silliman, several theories of satire also influenced the satiric poems in *A Field Guide to Adaptation*. In particular, the link certain scholars of satire make between satire and magic resulted in the presence of

magic in many of the satiric poems. "Houdini Speaks From Beyond the Grave!" is one such example.

In "The Satirist and Society," Robert C. Elliott, examines the connection between satire and magic. Elliott provides historical evidence of the presence of satirist/magician figures in Greece, Arabia, and Ireland. Satirist/magicians in these cultures had two fundamental uses for the societies of which they were a part. First, satirist/magicians helped to aid social cohesiveness, taking part in ritualistic "Phallic Songs" of the tribes. Second, they were useful in warlike defense, weaponizing satire for use against the tribe's enemies (Elliott 151). Important as these satirist/magician figures were, in "defending and supporting and holding together the social order," Elliott points out that their public role was overshadowed, in ancient legend, by their "individualistic, almost anarchic practices"; many ancient satirists were possessed of "dreadful power" which they exercised "ruthlessly"⁷ (150). Elliott describes the power wielded by these ancient satirist/magicians as the "destructive, supernatural power of words of ill-omened invective and imprecation" (149).

Elliott also identifies a sort of unwitting synecdoche that occurs with powerful satire in both ancient and modern times. A satirist may critique one part of the whole, but readers may transform that critique into one of the whole. The example Elliott provides is that of Swift's "Modest Proposal." Some readers of this work have come to interpret the text as a general critique of religion, whereas Swift may have originally intended it as a kind of *corrective*—a critique of *corrupt* religion, intended to rectify the church's silence concerning poverty. Elliott describes this unwitting synecdoche in the following way:

⁷ Elliott relates the anecdote of Aithirne the Importunate who roamed Ireland from kingdom to kingdom, exacting fantastic levies wherever he went. The one-eyed King Eochaid offered Aithirne whatever his people had of jewels and treasures to buy off the threatened satires, and Aithirne responded by demanding the king's one remaining eye, which the king readily tore out of his head and gave to him.

The satirist usually claims that he does not attack institutions, he attacks perversions of institutions...But it seems to be that in the hands of a powerful satirist an attack on a local phenomenon is capable of indefinite extension into an attack on the whole structure of which the phenomenon is a part (53).

Aside from this tendency toward unwitting synecdoche, Elliott also identifies what he considers to be literary devices common to many satires: irony, burlesque, innuendo, the beast fable, the imaginary voyage, and allegory. The satiric tradition of the "beast fable" is of particular importance to *A Field Guide to Adaptation*, as it inspired the organization of the section "The World of Beast and Fowl." Animal imagery, and the relationship between animal species and human beings, is an ongoing trope in this section.

Northrop Frye's investigations into satire in his two critical works, "The Mythos of Winter: Irony and Satire" and the earlier "The Nature of Satire," include Frye's theory that two things are essential to satire: first, "wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd," and second, "an object of attack" ("The Mythos" 155-56). This characterization of satire holds up well, in most instances. For example, one of the most well-known grotesque⁸ landscapes in the literary history of satire is that present in Rabelais's *La vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel*. The grotesque in *A Field Guide to Adaptation* manifests itself in poems that contain unnatural combination of images from the familiar world, with other images that have the potential to evoke strangeness, fear, laughter, or a combination of these. The Looney series of poems may include some of the clearest examples of the grotesque in *A Field Guide to*

⁸ By "grotesque" here, I mean that which is outlined in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* as an aesthetic that creates unnatural combinations of characteristics, evoking both fear and laughter, often grounded in an extreme physicality and a concern with sexuality. Wolfgang Kayser, in his book *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (as quoted in *Bedford*), describes the grotesque as "the estranged world"—where, unlike tragedies and fairy tales, which rely on a setting distanced and estranged from everyday experience, things evolve out of humorous representations of a world familiar to the reader, resulting both in alienation from the world and in an unwilling participation in it.

Adaptation. In this series, familiar cartoon images and characters from the Warner Brothers and Merry Melodies cartoons are combined, alternately, with images of trench warfare from WWI, the GPO bombings of the Easter Rising of 1916, the American soldier/sniper known as "The Devil of Ramadi," and the pornographic film *The Devil in Miss Jones*. The prose poem "The Art of Sex Talk," not contained in the Looney series, is another example of the grotesque in *A Field Guide to Adaptation*. The ekphrastic prose poem "[Unlabeled 3]" may also be considered an example of the grotesque, even though it contains a photographic image, because of the image's depiction of visitors to Yellowstone Park taking pictures of several black bears. The tourists photographing the bears are outside of their vehicles, squatting dangerously close to the animals, and offering them food. The image of this, because of the potential for violence and disaster combined with the familiar, has the potential to evoke both fear and laughter.

In the series "Woman Trapped in Landscape," mentioned previously, the women, and what they are photographed with—variously, a monolith on a beach, the wheel of a historic ship, two shrubs, a blue-colored snowmobile, etc.—may also be considered as bizarre, if not grotesque, because of the strangeness of the repetition of their poses; if the images were not part of a series, and were viewed in isolation, the sense of the strangeness of the images would be lessened. The way the series of images increases the sense of the bizarre, because of the repetition and proximity of the images, one to the other, is analogous to phenomenon related to the "new sentence," outlined by Ron Silliman.

In Ron Silliman's book *The New Sentence*, he outlines the way that "increased sensitivity to syllogistic movement" endows prose poems constructed using the new sentence with "a much greater capacity to incorporate ordinary sentences of the material world" (90). In other words, fairly mundane sentences, which do not make use of figurative devices, or other "poetic"

techniques, may function as a "new sentence" depending on the sentences that precede, and follow them. A sense of what Silliman refers to as "torque" is created, because of the proximity of certain sentences, one to the other. A similar feeling of strangeness, and of "torque" is created in the series of images in the series "Woman Trapped in Landscape" because of repetition of pose. In each image, the female figure being photographed is placed, almost as a prop, or object would be, in a landscape the photographer wishes to commemorate. In this series, the selection of the absurdity⁹ being foregrounded—namely, the repetitiveness of the images, even as the subjects and situations photographed are different—is an important act of shaping. As Frye notes, the satirist "has to select his absurdities, and the act of selection is a moral act" (Frye, "The Mythos" 155).

The possibility of a type of morality existing in the satiric gesture appears again in the scholarly investigation into satire of Alvin B. Kernan. Kernan writes that "Somewhere in his dense knots of ugly flesh the satiric author...usually inserts a hint of an ideal which is either threatened with imminent destruction or is already dead" (168). The work of Michel Delville and Marguerite Murphy had the most direct influence on my choice of the prose poem form, which predominates in *A Field Guide to Adaptation*. Delville assesses prose poems on a continuum of intrinsic formal features "paradoxically shared, at least to some extent, by all narrative and nonnarrative genres" (Delville 106). Delville incorporates Alberto Moravia's definition of the short story into his continuum. Moravia posits a spectrum of "short-storiness" on a scale of "narrative expansiveness versus lyric concentration, its opposite poles being the novel and the prose poem" (106). The prose poem, Delville intimates, vacillates between vertical/lyrical/poetic concentration, and horizontal/mimetic/prosaic expansiveness.

⁹ "Absurdity" here is not meant in terms of "the Absurd" or absurdist literature; rather, the "selection" of an absurdity, necessary for satire, as outlined in the work of Frye, is what is being alluded to.

Marguerite Murphy, in her investigation into the development of the prose poem, explores the prose poem as a "consciously experimental" form which, at its best, uses and deforms entrenched discursive modes, conventions, and genres. Murphy rejects organicist notions of art, and of the prose poem, which reduce the genre to its "cleanest lines," and which mask its "conflictual and open aesthetic" (8).

Several key ideas from the works of Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, and Susan Sontag have been helpful in *A Field Guide to Adaptation's* use of photographic images. All of the found images incorporated into *A Field Guide to Adaptation* have a connection to the satirical gesture at the heart of the collection. As mentioned previously, the historical role of the ancient satirist was often combined with a form of magic. Photography also contains within it a particular kind of magical communion with the dead, or with a past time. As Barthes writes:

The Spectator is ourselves, all of us who glance through collections of photographs—in magazines and newspapers, in books, albums, archives...And the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any eidolon emitted by the object, which I should like to call the Spectrum of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to "spectacle" and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead (9).

The return of the dead described by Barthes may be quite unsettling. Ironically, the action of taking a photograph, as opposed to viewing one, may be useful as a kind of warding off of the dead. Barthes quotes Franz Kafka who once told Gustav Janouch, "We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes" (qtd. in Barthes, 53). In *A Field Guide to Adaptation*, the incorporation of found images depicting grotesque

elements of postwar American life, combined with the barbed, satiric attacks of the poems, may also be interpreted as a kind of warding off; the text of the captions and prose poems surrounding the images may be an attempt to push away that which is objectionable within the images, and by extension, within the culture, through satire.

If, as Frye states, every satire must have a target, then the dissertation's target, in these barbed attacks on what is objectionable contained within the images, is an attack on the urge to mindlessly commodify and commemorate experience through the capturing images—the refusal and limitation inherent in the collection of commemorative photograph images Sontag describes.

Sontag also argues for an inherent pathos and elegy in all photography. She links this, in part, to the unique relationship between photography's rise and the dispersal of the extended family in Europe and America. Sontag writes:

Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself—a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness. It hardly matters what activities are photographed so long as photographs get taken and are cherished. Photography becomes a rite of family life just when, in the industrializing countries of Europe and America, the very institution of the family starts undergoing radical surgery. As that claustrophobic unit, the nuclear family, was being carved out of a much larger family aggregate, photography came along to memorialize, to restate symbolically, the imperiled continuity and vanishing extendedness of family life. Those ghostly traces, photographs, supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives. A family's photograph album is generally about the extended family—and often, is all that remains of it (8-9).

This urge to commemorate, rather than to directly experience, deserves to be skewered. The image of a family is not a family. If there is unwitting synecdoche in *A Field Guide to Adaptation*, what begins as a satiric attack on the urge to commemorate travel experience in postwar America threatens to extend itself to an attack on all commemoration of experience—all memorializing that acts as if the memorializer has special access, or special knowledge, of the subject—particularly the kind of memorializing that is often the function of a lyric, poetic voice.

Even though the dissertation is driven by an attack on memorializing in lieu of direct experience, it is certainly possible that the urge to photograph individual, human subjects may not be as sinister as the dissertation intimates. In section seven of Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," Benjamin posits that photographic portraiture is the "last entrenchment" of the "cult value" of photography (as opposed to its exhibition value), stating the following:

It is no accident that the portrait is central to early photography. In the cult of remembrance of dead or absent loved ones, the cult value of the image find its last refuge. In the fleeting expression of a human face, the aura¹⁰ beckons from early photographs for the last time. This is what gives them their melancholy and incomparable beauty. But as the human being withdraws from the photographic image, exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to cult value. (27)

This turn from cult value to exhibition value seems related to Sontag's critique of travel becoming a strategy for the accumulation of photographs; what Sontag is critiquing is exhibition value, the anticipation of the pleasure afforded by future exhibitions (slide shows of family

¹⁰ Benjamin has this to say, about the aura: "What, then, is the aura? A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be. To follow with the eye—while resting on a summer afternoon—a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch" (23).

vacations, vacation photo albums, etc.). If, as Benjamin proposes, early portraiture was a holdout of "cult" value in photography, is there not a possibility that "cult" value, related to the photographing of human subjects, might not possibly linger, even into the present day, in spite of exhibition values subsuming most of its territory?

To cite an illustrative example from *A Field Guide to Adaptation*, the images contained in the series "woman trapped in landscape" certainly seem to be tinged with exhibition value, and exhibition value is part of what is being attacked through satire. However, several of the photographs utilized in the ekphrastic prose poem sections, particularly the overexposed image of a couple standing on a porch, seem to retain some sense of "cult" value. This increased sense of cult value is related to the degradation of the images: the blurred, water-damaged images, which would be rejected for exhibition, retain a Benjaminian "aura" if salvaged. For this reason, the ekphrastic poems coupled with blurred and degraded images are some of the *least* satiric and the most elegiac in *A Field Guide to Adaptation*.

Benjamin also relates the turn from the cult value of photography to its exhibition value to an increased importance placed on the captions of photographs—particularly photographs without human subjects. Photographs without human subjects, according to Benjamin,

demand a specific kind of reception. Free-floating contemplation is no longer appropriate to them. They unsettle the viewer; he feels challenged to find a particular way to approach them. At the same time, illustrated magazines begin to put up signposts for him—whether these are right or wrong is irrelevant. For the first time, captions become obligatory. And it is clear that they have a character altogether different from the titles of paintings. The directives given by captions to those looking at images in illustrated magazines soon become even more

precise and commanding in films, where the way each single image is understood seems prescribed by the sequence of all the preceding images. (27)

This "precise" and "demanding" quality of captions, as outlined by Benjamin, is part of the reason the caption form was adopted for the series "woman trapped in landscape" in *A Field Guide to Adaptation*. The caption's unique ability to command and direct perception of an image is put to revolutionary use in the feminist series.

IV. Conclusion

Ultimately, *A Field Guide to Adaptation*, as a collection of poems, remains open in its response to the various types and processes of human memory, though it formally alternates between satiric condemnation and heart-felt elegy. There is no "best" course of action in response to the fraught process of remembering. As humans, we are simultaneously at our best and our worst when we remember; we ingest the opiate of an elevated past as a way to escape the present, but we are also forced to realize how fragmented we are, how little we truly understand, when we remember.

A Field Guide to Adaptation also remains open in its consideration of poetic adaptation. It is difficult to condemn poetic adaptation, as a response to lived experience, even though it is sharply interrogated in *A Field Guide to Adaptation*. Poetic adaptation is only one among many other types of human adaptation, and the adaptation of other species, in direct response to environment.

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"That which we remember is, more often than not, that which we would like to have been; or that which we hope to be." –Ralph Ellison

"Where memory is, theatre is." –Herbert Blau

THE WORLD OF BEAST AND FOWL

Crow Under Erasure

Crows on rafter erupt until he lowers
the thirty-aught six, done with erasure.

One remainder hobbles on the concrete,
leg left to dangle by an open space, an erasure.

The explanation's incomplete
as a dog's soul, which is not soul, I'm told.

Chickens fuss in the coops at night.
Black wings flutter above.
The hens' sleep should be dreamless—
soulless as a white sheet.

We rub out the remainder, which is humane.
Nothing takes flight from me again.



July, 1961

Acres smoothed leave a barbed patina. A performance is made from little grazings. The skin's surface tension raises welts in an audience. Added force breeds a red sharp edge. Holsteins meet sledge. Barbs intertwine with the gossamer of currents. Voltage runs through several head who lumber into what was open space and then are made to dance.

"Humans Taken Hostage in Dog Park"

A pack is following in a circle. A hierarchy begins with scent. I am on a park bench. A humane society is one that remembers pairs of startled irises reflected in high beams. When we approach sleep, we draw a perfect circle, a string tied from our bodies to the circumference. Beyond the prime number of five, an alpha stays alpha by attacking once per day. Neck scarves make them look like children until blindfolded. Tell us what you are spelling. You buried the electric fence like a rabbit was under there, its vibrations in a register only you could hear.

Migration Patterns

Fingers trace blue tattoos—
the dotted incision-lines between ghosts.

She sprouts soft down again
on the round landscape of her head.

Between the delicate movements
of the crane, she invents

lovers' reasons
for refusals to haunt
hospital corridors.

In hospice, words sharpen
into the rain's needles

puncture tin roofs,
as she warbles

in birdsong, beats
wings toward water.

Luke Chapter Eight Versus the Mundane

It was cozy in the tombs
the heathen had taken for dwellings,
and my bear was with me, button-eye
unraveled on a small dream-thread.

Waking would prove
a pandemonium.

I rustled the onion-skin
layers of King James
to find the verse by touch—
his gnashing teeth,
his cuts still fresh,
alone in the mountains
of Gadarenes.

The wild man broke chains and rocks,
like Superman, until the day
Jesus whispered to the swine,
made them squeal and run
shrieking into the sea, full of devils,
and the day my parents
took the good book
for safe-keeping.

The pastor's face was grizzled
from flak he took on a bomber.

He suggested allegory, and that I
should read the verse about suffering
the little children, or maybe Noah.

His words drained the verse.
The spell was broken, and I was left
blinking like the wild man—no more voices,
just fishermen and homelessness
in the rain by the sea.

"Gorilla on the Loose!"

During the attack, T grievously mauled N, blinding her while severing her nose, ears, both hands, and severely lacerating her face. She signed "bad, sad, bad" and "frown, cry, frown, sad" when the kitten escaped and died. Curtiss F8C Helldivers, swatted from the sky with Kong's cupped palm, spiral and emit plumes of smoke over Fifth and Madison Avenues. She signs the word "nipple" for "people," mistaking the sounds.

Tapping for Syrup

I'll lick the salt and forage
the white-skinned birch of your body;

forks and knots, left in winter,
hardened in sleep.

They walk out bundled, anonymous—
noses, eyes, scarves;

tap through your skin
and spike it to drain,
boil, and thicken.

Once, in a canopy of orange
you threw sparks and disrobed on the streets.

A dream of rust in your mouth,
chain-link, the taste of copper.

"How to Tell If You Are Possessed"

If the roots of a downed elm look like lungs on x-ray. If the lyric I gets into bed. If your impulse, upon leaving the time machine, is to visit Wordsworth. By the brand.

If the stones and trees and birds start to do human things. If Bar S. If Flying W. If Lee's Ferry. If you trust a dog. If I, then you, then I, then you, keeps you awake.



[Unlabeled 1]

Species sharing space was the name of my favorite Golden Book. What ride is this? Is a woman in there, bear-suited, for per diem? Step into a habitat, smell of salmon's un-dyed flesh—unfructosed—and know which tier is to be devoured, which to be worn. A human departure. A line that snakes from the Matterhorn, past the Haunted Mansion, into the shadows.

A Troop of Possums

I saw the first one
on the broken, white strip
dissecting my street,
just lying there, a piece of cordwood
if not for fur, the small hands,
nose tapered almost to snout.
He was only playing
at the uncanny, he said,
at being, at nothingness.

The possums took me in
for a season, a dozen,
and now my response
is their response, to everything.

A woman searches through her skirt,
my clothes, her body,
my lips, for places to strike
a match pinched
between thumb and forefinger.
I become stump; stripe in the road;
still as an iron railing.

Books used to curl, to smolder,
the moment I touched them.
Now, the soft pads of my fingers,
clumsy, ball into a fist
to stifle yawns.

Years of a performance
that looks like sleep
become sleep, become
ambergris, an ether, anathema.

Watch out for possums.

Food Cart in Winter, Northern Idaho

On Main and Third I sit
huddled by a propane tank.

Magpies eat their dead
pressed into asphalt by passing cars.

I am the only one on the street
for the small beginning of rain.

Four thousand years of cedar
in a grove on the mountain

dodge the crosscut saw, the choker,
because we're bored down here,

because a grapple skidder, a nude mountain,
take a little bit of time.

[Spring kinks its shiv]

Spring kinks its shiv
in thigh, in lyric I

misfiring, it spills—
wrist, wrist, wrist.

Birds flit, grift, tilt in flight—
chirp in twig-crib.

I, bliss-chimp, dimwit,
dig in hips, nip figs, fling first.

*Isn't spring illicit?
This isn't its script?*

Light fills twin kilns with fists.

Grip insight, I think. Sink.

Kitsch is this pill I lick with dim instinct.

I insists I brims with thrills.

Nitwit I—thrill is invisible.

Still, I is shrill.
I flits in this,
pissing blight.
I is birthright.

The Art of Sex Talk.

Pretend your phalanges have become ibexes. Announce migration patterns. Prognosticate in the vulgate. No one does it well. On the playground, in the space between monkey bars and buried tractor tires, fake your way through a game of make-believe the basis of which is unseen, forbidden, must-see television. After school, your neighbor's sister would stand holding rabbit ears and asking *is this the spot?* while you blinked into channels of snow.

Elsewhere

Cheerless deer emerge. Peer. Breezes beseech evergreens: *Be berserk. Be wreckers—even wrecked.*
Hell defers. The trees, demented, deplete restlessness.

Elsewhere, dresses press flesh, yet reddened texts eek free. *Well, YES, excess feels best.* Gentle
temptress—tempest—when whelmed be treble, when sexed be cleft. Be deft.

Elsewhere, the weeds enmesh Demeter's endless tresses. Kestrels, lewd messengers, veer west.
Seedless, she remembers keen descent; her threshed whelp; her defects.

Bellwether, peel me zephyrs. Geld them. Gentle the feckless elements. Deflect.

Elsewhere, *BLEEP these BLEEP.* Sever tethers. Be verb. Be event. The self, never deferred, ends
sleepless.

THE WORLD OF HANDCUFFS, ANVILS, DYNAMITE, AND STEEL.

"Houdini Speaks From Beyond the Grave!"

Pinioned in straightjacket sounds like a martial stance. Knock three times. Bess's people wouldn't plant her next to a kike. Mediums and magicians meet in the back lot, three a.m. A door opens. Magicians choose doves; mediums, crystal balls. The audience prefers struggle in plain sight. I want you to punch me as hard as you can. I want you to check the knots yourself. Make sure there is nothing on the other side.

Looney

For Wittgenstein, Yosemite Sam, and Ansel Adams

In anger, one may seed the floor with a circle of lead. The west is silent theater. In foreground, a bison skull bleaches. Wittgenstein tired for many moons. He no workum. Ugh. Needs write children's dictionary. Needs front row seat for double feature. A uniformed carcass famous for a last stand blooms into an obelisk. There is no speed limit during the day on the reservation turnpike. Wagons nudge over a sea, a sea, a sea, tall as spokes.

Looney

For W.B. Yeats, Wagner, and Aleister Crowley

Cruciform roses bloom on the banks of the Liffey near the post office. Bugs unties a masonic apron's strands and lets it fall to the linoleum floor; turns dishy in his feminine aspect. In the kitchen of the future, my sister starts a long-play Wagner album. We wash sinks full of yellow plates with Dawn. Jimmy Page in a beast's stone house dreams of rutting lambs. Maude, Bram, and Billy spread a blanket over clover. A spear, a pier, a pyre, their song evokes.

Looney

For the Devils of Ramadi, in Miss Jones, and Tasmanian

The line of sight touches an ache between finger and dervish.

Looney

For H.D., Robert Duncan, and the Acme Corporation.

Drink XXX to make visual fields brim rosy with pachyderms. An airborne moment is followed by a hell that breaks loose once coyote looks down. There is sometimes a whistle, as in bombardment. Maybe this is cinema. The finale, a hurricane, moves over water's body calling itself the devil. A bee. A bee. A bee. Bath salts. Oaks.

Looney

For Castor and Slowpoke Rodriguez

Let them collect laurels and land speed records. Hopping freight makes a continent a permanent address. At night, straw bales (rolls of sushi in their fields) are backlit by an opiate moon.

Looney

For Metamora and Elmer Fudd

Fudd would become poplar *pour chaser le lepin*. The role of poplar, tonight, will be played by Metamora, forced into pieces of scenery. I am not a bush, the man says. Fudd tells poplar shush. I will not be quiet, the man says. Fudd tucks the gauge below poplar's chin. Be very, very quiet. Let us begin when the moon was high, in what the Wampanoags called Rabbit Season, and tell the tale of a romantic people leaving a dying land...the trees, their leaves, the tears, this all evokes.

Looney

for Donald Barthelme and Baby Faces Nelson and Finster

Individuation happens in a bank, ink packets sewn among the unmarked bundles. Non sequential, I am at suck. I make and am swaddled. The charade continues indefinitely. The canister for an 8mm film on polar bears resembles a Thompson cartridge. Mats are laid out with juice and graham crackers. Miss Mandible tucks me in, her collarbone scented lavender. I name my bear Fedora. *Baby, baby, baby...* I bray at dopes.

Looney

For Bosko, Claude McCay, Heckle, and Jeckle

Jim Crow tightens the flight pattern. The line between fallow and bumper crop can be seen from space. A straw man propped up with rake. Why don't you give us a smile? A tidings of magpies scatters at shoeshine requests. Bombacot. Dutty Kansas, dutty Trench Town. Ah say boy, ah say boy, ah say boy, they're just jokes.

Looney

For Granny, Hecate, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman

A brass bra for modesty as Valkyries march through drifts. The talking cure. I linger in foyer, liminal space between entrance and den, filled with Macintoshes and Wellingtons. Colder than my tit. Let us begin again. First, I was using Glade to polish. Scent from groves of oranges rose. I cackle from tripod. A censer on chains swings in a low arc. Everyone say cheese.

Looney

For Sigmund Freud, Alice Pleasance Liddell, and Gossamer

When an anvil drops, my eyes, shed marbles, plunk. An XX couplet fills changeling, empty sockets. Quiet as an orange vapor, Gossamer tiptoes into my shadow. We fed Alan and Rex to a warren. What a ruin to ferry downriver, to see oneself in a mirror. The creature brushes its hair and winds the dial of a brass watch. *I'll be, I'll be, I'll be*; the Thames' tropes.

Looney

For Karl Marx, Ralph Wolf, and Sam Sheepdog

Apex predator is a salaried position. I would like to package my death rattle in a commemorative set. Once we lock the vault, this body won't be available for at least ten years. I will write an aubade that begins when the herd thins. At breakfast I never imagined the copper taste of your jugular. Does a bleat carry, removed from tall grass, choked in a copse? Would a steam whistle slake your thirst for all this red inside? Ka-ching, Ka-ching, Ka-ching, the market hopes.

"Superman to Renounce U.S. Citizenship"

Kansas is the noun of renewal. Who drops a baby under a truck in the first place? In the dustbowl, the Prankster wore a threadbare suit and played monte outside the big tops. I remembered, years later. I was five and drug my feet through a carpet of peanut shells. In the Fortress of Solitude I made sure to break only his limbs. We ate the elephants after the first month, he told me. The bones were enormous. When you're too weak to bury something you've named, it stares at you from a blood-spattered field of milo. Remember how Sherman told men to use pry bars and destroy even the railroad ties? Remember how they curved up, tusklike, while the enlisted raped belles under an oak choked by kudzu? Neither do I. My planet has a red sun.

THE WORLD OF DISAPPEARANCE

Woman Trapped in Landscape



I am getting my hair set. You are an infinite regress.



I am a thicket of curls. You are the word "nasturtium" said by a teamster.



I am the clotting limbs of a Japanese maple, throwing sparks and disrobing in the street. You are raking a burn pile.



I tug and create rhythm on a trotline, attracting bottom-feeders. You are carrying my jacket.



I am candied hawthorn berries, pronged on a wooden stick. You are the insipid waters of a dead sea.



I am an epicenter in this lake. Your tongue is a plucked lyre.



I am framing this monolith. You are losing me, losing me, losing me.



I am a beating heart's replica you've placed next to a Catherine Wheel to show scale. You are a long trail of tapped ash.



I am the symmetry left between root systems and the water table. You are an empty glove.



I am in my cyborg body, gliding over ice into a borderland of the future. You are going to miss your bus.

Newton's First Copy of Euclid

Stourbridge Fair, 1661

The voices of the small
in the bookstalls pulled Isaac
into their orbits of mathematics, and spoke
until he spoke star, like a native.

In the bookstalls (pulled) Isaac
felt direction; the gravity of churches,
until he spoke. Stars like natives
shine on the familiar below.

Felt-direction—the gravity of churches—
muffles the nascent thoughts; makes yokes;
shines on the familiar below.
Rats' soft feet make ellipses in the bookstalls, in the dust.

Muffle the nascent. Thoughts make yokes
the voices of the small
rats' soft feet. Make ellipses in the bookstalls, in the dust,
in their orbits of mathematics and spokes.



[Unlabeled 2]

In hospice your name will be Rose. I will wear an uncle's face when it turns to winter. We will enter walking backwards, or maybe only our shoes reversed. A brace of detectives, an on-call nurse, dispersed into the water. The reflection in a window leads a sparrow crashing into its body. I am telling you this now, a bottle plugged with cork, warm snow melted in our palms, left for us to sip.

Pawning for Gas

I gut the apartment
after the thaw,
after the Skagit floods—
fill a trunk with remains.

The broker opens cases
of compact discs,
stares into mirrors—

plastic side
of a television
thumped like a melon

an offer of half
of half of half

Driving east
on the last full tank,
wallet light as swallows' feathers

Outskirts of Bozeman,
empty silver mines

muffled, covered over,
veinless in the snow.

"Another Human Foot Washes Ashore"

A perfect criminal, one set of footsteps on a beach. A perfect burial under layers of earth. What are you carrying? A seed of perfection trapped in the strainer of a glass juicer with pulp. A people strain to be a jury in the perfection. Broadcasting is best done by hand when it is light enough to see the row sewn and cool enough to walk the entire turned field in one day. A perfect body, a pacific gyre, rolls with crests and troughs like a palindrome made from the plastic caps of milk cartons.

Pots of Wine

Dangtu, China 762

Pots of wine under the elms
clotted their last,
thin drops on the snow.
Sash dragging, Li Po
saw fishes in the Yangtze
wiggle their way
toward heaven.

Plunk,
splash,
 no monk,
or civil servant, dappled
with slivers of moon, he sank
like all good poets, detritus
and stones. *Poor old Tu Fu,*
he thought to himself then,
He must be agonizing over poetry again.

Voices babbled in the shallows
over the poet and moon-slivers
till only the moon remained.



[Unlabeled 3]

Another color, full of wagons, my sister, distorted over time. Once, my hair was brushed into carbon and ash. Combines threshed west, flushed kestrels from the brush along rows of furrows and angles. The way my sister tells it, edges serrate, sometimes blend. Green and red are coated by simple machines. I pump my arms on swings, loosed into an orbit at the apex, never arrive. One place is a good little mother.

Outside the Bakery Window, First Shift

An overpass, above us, drifts;
collects us. A drift collects;

snows us. Snow is us. Adrift,
collected light from ovens, a beacon.

Bread rises on trays;
kneaded flour, yeast, and water.

Women walk past in leopard print.
Salmon-colored nails scrape glass.

We look for spots to fix, affix--
a dollar, clean works, bread.

Bend. Knead. Rise. Drift.

Secure Night Orchestra

A recital to settle wrongs. As stipulations, the transom and rounds kept open evenings. One melody leads another. An ankle entrances guards. An entrance funnels into the night's first movement. The second movement. Baton taps. The watched man, a second-story man, battles on. Section leaders maintain stasis. Eyes in a cadre watch the occupants of certain chairs. Third and fourth chairs continue measures of rest, detained indefinitely.

This Is Your Story from a Truck Bed in the Ozarks

Ash tapped onto red clay.
A way of saying
and not saying, then saying again.

The freedom of circles
on a riding mower
around a town's two churches.

The refusal to step inside,
or charge
for forty years of cuttings.

A left wife creeps
into the mortuary
to touch your skin, to say it's crepe paper.

I slap my grandmother's hand away.
We sold your guns. Even the Winchester.

Transit Visa

To ascend and leave you need papers;
beggars roll their own, puff and take flight.
Moths leave prints of ash from their bodies, chase scalding light.
Fog alone settles on the district.

Beggars roll their own, puff and take flight.
Tech malls have a nimbus from our distance.
Fog alone settles on the district.
Gray hands caress the spine of an avenue.

Tech malls have a nimbus from our distance
I feel my way along, from work, to bar, to home;
gray hands caress the spine of an avenue,
dissipated, disappointing.

I feel my way along, from work, to bar, to home,
a kind of migration, collapsed and small—
dissipated, disappointing,
the transition from insect into ghost.

A kind of migration, collapsed and small,
moths leave prints of ash from their bodies, chase scalding light,
the transition from insect into ghost.
To ascend and leave you need papers.



1964

Funerary speeches pluck and censor. Your hips' refusal to hover over blocking until a cue, or to choreograph hope chests, must be reclaimed. My memory box holds two feathers, a thimble, and your plucked tongue. We used to rumble on car hoods for ourselves and then for no one. Home ownership threatened the quills of our smut-babble. The progeny kept seeking entrance. Let's not call it "the sewing room." We never "quilted squares." Your favorite shears were a pair of Fiskars. The safe word was "craft time," the call sign "whiskers." Knock three times for truth and awake.

Melody and Empty Space

Our teacher sang show tunes
and wept. She pushed silence

past margin; the border
we grew to skirt;

left it to flower
a swollen month;

her partner's untold migration
from hospice to plot.

Write whatever, whatever [she said]
Why not take all of me? [a chorus]

I asked what a word was
from the glossary, the index,

to stop melody from filling
empty space; another period

full of lyrics; accidents.

Another Dave Elegy

Dave and his story
in a bower, in a garage.

Dave in a glade, gone for liquor.
Liar. Flowery idiot.

Dave in an empty parking lot,
calling shotgun, rushing on.

Changer of all lights, in all parking lots.
First is boring, matted in verse.

Bum-rusher. Ruiner. Hair-trigger.

O Dave. Behave. Lie still.



[Unlabeled 4]

Alice creates dance and calls it "disappearance of culture." Her partner is there and also spares. Bones bleach on an onramp. Things remain gingham and floral. Sinews and efforts abandoned, regular fares and discounts leave their bodies in a place picked clean. Everything buzzard and lower in the hierarchy must now survive. The dew point is such a little thing—so small and wondering, without a human to make it mean. Even the meanest little things pick clean. Even a body is lowered into open space. An arid climate and a dry climate meet. Even the memory parts like bone from meat.



January 31st, 1955

A little spot on the solitary dog-kid in the group of the non-dogged. The day's princess enraged. When was there a purple ripple, then a red ripple, then a gold? Six party favors grow forth from their hats and metastasize.



[Unlabeled 5]

A layer of aorta turns to brick, causal as an open window. We left our body, the rusted husk of Fords and Chevys on the lawn. Cracked and lasting in the landfill. The hair on temples thins and frosts over. The conveyer sighs like a bus.

On the Death of Walt Steinke, Raspberry Picker

Through the thorned bush,
hands turned red,
he picks around the trellis.

The brown topsoil shift
color and direction,
marks a year, that's all
his cracked hands do:
take in the motion; the strings
of days, the knots
of days.

His wife wakes sudden in the dirt.
Alone, the sun creeps
across the wall, he's gone
and rises upwards,
arcs a deep, berry red,
bathes the ceiling in light.



1964

A hand cups the elbow of a body touching base and is the same as touching base. A hemline grazes the body in a base state. Everyone freezes. In the wilderness beyond a fire's rosy circumference shapes move in an apex constellation. Time atrophies; a molar with a withered root, hemmed in by living neighbors. This is how we unfreeze: first an open space stretches between a hand and the body touching base. Tips are grazed. Life fills us. Grace moves from the den, gives chase. Base moves. Spaces change.

The Witch's House at Dak To

for Stuart K. Polzin

Our peppermint smell
spelled red confusion,

limbs tangled in an oven
while the witch watched on.

We burned there a while,
then gave up

on woods and a cottage,
the candor of the hunted,

crumbled receipts in kitchen drawers,
a trail home

pecked away by yellow bittern,
dropped crumbs under canopy jungle.

Any Resemblance to Real Seas

Living or dead is incident--
is as leaves to canopy.

Twin daughters under an oak;
Clarity and Revision.

If I am to leave springtime
rendered in anamorphic widescreen,

make it a season of John Woo--
crane shot, time laps blossoms

monkey-style eruption,
a fist against planks

in an open meadow;
a sequel to waves.

Seafaring

points on tide charts

a palm on the small of back

buoy of knees,

fingers drummed

coastline, kelp, and coral

lap of waves, an undertow

under pylons, the water level

marked in rust and salt

Tide Charts, Meier's Quarry

azure gets used
only for the sea

an industry of making it
appear and disappear

eyes the color of tiles
blue on the mosque floor

see the usury
adore blue industry

get used to the sea and sediment
eyes. l's. -ize.

All I Can Offer to Ghosts

I will in acacia, I will in pine
find nothing of your body.

In concrete, and in diesel,
your voice,

a fender wrapped around a barrier,
curls under.

I keep a sliver
on my tongue, and wonder

if you dissolve, and why
a median gets seeded;

green shoots between the lanes,
a garden stripe of accidents.

Lying is a diadem

down I mean

between means

and an enduring slumber

a bower at night

daisy covered

light settles, sunken field of winter wheat

singular shafts backlit

ground into foreground

a change to the second reel

concessions in the lobby

yellow floor lights

Monument

A brass nub mushrooms out of concrete, a famous meridian. A carcass bleaches, felled from veldt. Succumbing to blues suits me. Velvet thongs caress Normandy beaches. The dollop of hips mushrooms outward. A uniformed carcass made famous for storming blooms into an obelisk.

Busking for Commuters

for Michael Fairchild

Lick your way to rush hour's candy center. Triage of the open case. Gauzed in headphones, catkins on a goat willow branch. A green stem cuts away its buds, strips off playlist's algorithm for solving fear of crowds. Coltrane from an alto. Reeds sway on platform, on riverbank. Standards fallen into naked ears. Burrow. Improvise.

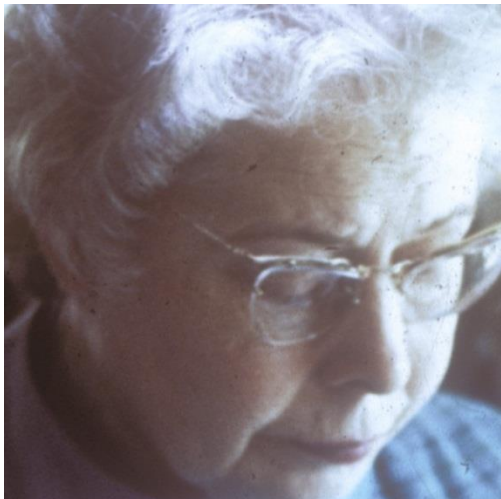
Precipice

Muscles ripple below the skin. Flags snap on the prows of ships. A conductor folds space over, presses air with the heel of a palm. The slick plane of your back, kissed into an epicenter. Fathoms down, a diver's thread to the surface snaps. I drag my feet through a postcard of snow in the front yard; the ruts of wheels heading west.

Service Begins, Quality Never Ends



Service begins this weekend. Service begins at six underground railway stations. Service begins at the rise of meeting. service begins, Where. Service begins at home. Service begins rationing "non-urgent" operations. Service begins evening at Liberty Island. Service begins labor. Service begins rush hour trips every twenty minutes. Service begins for missing Korean mountaineers. Service begins at South Campus dining hall. Service begins today. Service begins environmental review of proposed Ohio. Service begins selective logging. Service begins princess. Service begins. About us. Service begins producing. Service begins with an A. Service begins and quality never ends.



landscapes metastasize
honeycombs memories
melt into landscape
a real service
room where I left
bones snap arrive
call honey in welcome
knife hinges cabinet doors
survive peek
extracted from dresser



hominid is hominid

a jawbone's a jawbone

when boiled

salt-pork the last flesh

tender falls

away from the bone

left to be catalogued

fractured with pollen

sediment reconstructed

feathers layers

knives are broken

surface tension

silt between firm

disperse in clouds



Memory turns mother into landscape. The landscape and I diverted into woods, then into pulp, then vegetation, thin veins traced into us, into angles of dust. Memory turns landscape back into mother. Mother turns, in context, into context. Context slips into the water; a selkie or seal. A face arranges, but never turns into pure, clean syllable. We hide her skin from her. Without context, we wither; a forked branch on a dead oak drops acorns into the sea.



Memory does us a disservice; severs us from a moment of worship; sells us beginning and end.

in my

worship ends the service

best

procedure ends the service of a sailor

memories

brief chanting begins and ends the service

things

the war ends. the service members

change

your managed care plan reduces, suspends, or ends the service

edges

the system ends the service request.

serrate

the busy season ends the service

an elbow

once a game ends the service

instead

solo organ, without voices, formally ends the service

of knee

to these ends the service

a song

Un-deploying takes it out of service
and ends the service

instead

acclaim ends the service

of curses

fatigue cracking is the common failure mode that ends the service

