

12-1-2013

## Maps on the Backs of Our Eyes

Joan Paulette Robinson

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, dudleyj2@unlv.nevada.edu

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MAPS ON THE BACKS OF OUR EYES

By

Joan Paulette Robinson

Bachelor of Arts in English

Michigan State University

1992

Master of Arts in Teaching

Wayne State University

1996

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Fine Arts - Creative Writing

Department of English

College of Liberal Arts

The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

December 2013



## THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the thesis prepared under our supervision by

**Joan Paulette Robinson**

entitled

**Maps on the Backs of Our Eyes**

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Fine Arts - Creative Writing**

**Department of English**

Claudia Keelan, M.F.A., Committee Chair

Donald Revell, Ph.D., Committee Member

Megan Becker-Leckrone, Ph.D., Committee Member

Andy Kirk, Ph.D., Graduate College Representative

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D., Interim Dean of the Graduate College

**December 2013**

## **Abstract**

A collection of poems related to places in the Mojave Desert and the Las Vegas area or in rural central Michigan. Most poems deal with history and memory and the overlapping nature of experience.

## **Acknowledgements**

My advisers Claudia Keelan and Donald Revell gave freely of their loving wisdom and encouragement in order to make this collection possible. Many others supported me along the way, including my parents Dennis and Suzanne Dudley, my brother David, and my in-laws Steven and Vicki Robinson as well as many friends, especially Claudia Bridges, Debi Harney, Cindy Bezard, Dorothy Vanderford, Laura Beauregard and Jonelle Wilson.

## Dedication

To Gregory,  
whose love inspires and animates every word

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## Worried About My Skirt at Jean Women's Camp

—rusty peach. The women,  
dressed in white t-shirts and  
blue track pants,  
fondle large dogs  
and back away from them,  
crouching.

The mutts sit for the whistle  
then bound toward the uniform line.  
Their tails high flags  
paws prancing  
through the only strip of grass  
into the row of open arms.

The guards speak through  
the loudspeaker, announcing.

Worried about my skirt,  
I push it down against the lifting wind.  
Andre is ahead of me  
I am not worried about him seeing my underwear.

Maybe the guards  
will kick me out. My boy shorts are blue.

Priscilla is behind me  
her tightly curled white hair unruffled,  
red lipstick crisp.  
She has seen much worse than my knickers.

The wind dies  
the sky has gone crimson  
the last light shines  
gold on the razor wire.

## Morning Routine

Lungs constrict breath all night adrenaline jangle  
at least the sheets are clean but so much why  
did mom send the old bowls from home, their backs yellow  
with hard water? I have bowls. They aren't even nice ones.  
Abundance candle backfired. Plenty yes, but plenty of what?

Light another candle in dark room. Sit. Breathe.  
Nadhi Shodhana. Skull shining breath. Bee humming breath.  
Meditate on light expanding within. Light heals. Light protects  
Worry about calendars. Worry about missed deadline. Worry about  
Gregory going back to bed. Note worries. Return to Light.

Just a moment's ease. Enough to write one line, then another  
Each stacks on the other just enough a breath a word  
Find it, Mark it, and move on faith: slow, yes; painful, sometimes.  
Keep going, keep going, keep going,  
almost~

Much later, I figure out the bowls.

Mom was eating soup one day.

Probably either Sea Crest Soup, named

after the motel at Hilton Head

where it was invented

or cabbage soup—depending on whether she had

chicken noodle or bean with bacon

in the cupboard.

She was eating this soup and marking the newspaper with

her pen. Something causes cancer. Something

cures cancer. Something grows better in June.

Something you do all the time is killing you.

As she cut out the article to copy and

send she thought, "This bowl is really nice for soup."

"Joanie should have this bowl. I will send her

another, so Gregory can have one too."

And so they arrived, wrapped in the Lansing State Journal,

wide, Sears floral, orange with decades of rusty well-water stains,

ready for soup. Where they wound up:

under my white IKEA bowls, hidden

in the back of the cupboard.



## **Boulder City**

Six Companies marked these streets

According to their plan,

A clean and wholesome city,

Built complete on rocky land.

'Tweens bow their heads and thumb their phones

While walking into traffic,

A mother jogs her infant stroller

The widow sits on her porch alone.

Ravens cry from palm trees,

Bells ring the hour's death,

Twin pugs bark helplessly,

While a toothless youth cooks meth.

## **Babel In Bloom**

*I thought maybe I would buy myself some new tits*

*but then I thought naw*

Sparrows loop the sky between branches

Leaves sizzle green electric growth

*It's not going to work It's just that its*

Beam Hall shadows

*Our business plan will show*

*Hey can you wait a minute*

Emerge into glare

**TODAY IS THE START OF EARTH WEEK COME JOIN US**

sycamore maple russian olive fruitless mulberry

roots invisible entwine under sidewalks under grass

something blooming butterfly bush chaste tree french lavender

sprinklers mist

evapcorp coolers drone

breeze in my palms

leaf in your hair

What is your world?



## **The Corner of Calumet and Commonwealth**

Detroit branch sifted light  
spreads on tufts of herbaceous  
tousled lawn pink hydrangeas  
nod blowzy blossoms thrust  
through soot-blackened window frames

a poplar fountains through the parlor  
pierces the rotted roof beams and  
arches its branches blue

a man with grey felty dreadlocks  
walks his kindergartner in the middle of the quiet street  
"Howya doin' baby girl?"

a pheasant strides  
across the cracked chicory fringed boulevard

## Hot Night in Naked City

Stratosphere's neon needle

    stabs the thick night smoky with California

    forest fire carnival

screams float down

    between the 38 Buick on blocks

    and the Ingersoll Rand compressor

        through the open rollup door

table saw shrieks

    he is splitting a board in two

    sawdust piling around his feet

smoke rises in a thin white plume

burning cigarette poised

on the edge of the saw table over

sawdust piles around his feet settling

    on leaning stacks of bicycle frames

Austin rims clock gears flea market family albums

    first edition *Gangs of New York*

Mother's ashes in a box

forgotten in a dark corner

## **Bar Vertigo**

Just past the intersection of Charleston and Eastern  
on my way to the Straight Pepper Diet meeting,

Glowing doorway of Bar Vertigo beckoning,  
behind it, the Blue Angel stands above barely  
visible in the shadows, but inside  
the red vinyl booths glow.

Stale beer, vomit cleanser, and whiff of sewer.  
Eighties R&B on the jukebox or if I'm lucky,  
it's Hank, but that would be too much  
for me.

## **Bum Magic**

Somehow

we match frequencies

at the precise moment

The Number One Muni

stops at the intersection

of Frontier and California

He is sitting in the bus shelter

Me, I'm on the bus

in the rear facing seat,

next to the far window.

We lock eyes, and I laugh, because

he is some hobo-clown

King of the Bums,

a curly haired, bushy-bearded

no-front teeth, urban camper.

Waving his plastic 7-up bottle

Grinning and shouting

Yoo-hoo! I look away,

afraid he might get on—

then what?

I look back.

He's still flailing.

I laugh,

and the bus pulls away.

**Roadkill Shoe (Intersection of Spencer and Maule)**

For most of a week,  
it lay in the crotch  
of the same curve where  
the man died-flung  
from his scooter and  
headfirst into the yellow  
fire hydrant.

His grandson behind him  
landed unharmed.

I saw  
the black plastic shrouded body lying  
at roughly the same spot  
the shoe lies now.

In fact, I can see it from the break room window,  
while my Teriyaki Shrimp Rice Bowl rotates  
in the humming microwave.

Later, I will pass it while driving

home. It is a high-heeled women's shoe,  
an anonymous black leather pump  
lying on its side, its footless cavity  
gaping at the pavement.

Perhaps she caught it on the car frame escaping  
a drunken argument with the driver,  
or maybe she kicked it off fighting  
someone who grabbed her from sidewalk  
and pulled her into the open door of a van,  
or most likely, it occurs to me the next morning  
as I pass it again, the shoe is a castaway,  
fallen from the top  
of an overstuffed garbage bag,  
collateral damage of a hasty  
break-up move.

The shoe offers no answers as it shuffles  
slowly between the yellow turning  
lane markers, until one day, the street  
sweeper claims it, and it disappears.

**Enigma Garden Cafe, 1993-2000**

Enigma—

oasis in memory

green-hearted shady respite

from glaring Las Vegas sun

shadowless TOO MUCH LIGHT

unbearable witness

a much needed place to hide.

Enigma—

soft whispering mornings

staring into middle distance

steaming Webfoot crazing the air

while hollyhocks bob

bright gangly blossoms, and

vines trace a curlicued net through

brightening air,

Enigma—

afternoon Julie holds court, her filmstar

hard-bitten glamour enthralls, her vulnerability

hidden behind dark glasses, red lipstick and



ever-present cigarette, then

Len arrives huge and solid in his  
Hawaiian shirt and shorts, tenderly greeting his  
plants and reeling off stories of old Las Vegas  
and dusty California

Enigma—

evening poets at the podium on the porch  
giant black June bugs  
terrorizing the audience, and words floating  
into the night only to be cut with the blunt  
knives of helicopter blades as they hack the  
bluing dusk.

Enigma—

midnight conversation one last cup of tea  
strange shapes hide under the leaves  
bird-women, satyrs, drunkards, painters  
flickering candle, goodnight, goodnight, goodnight.

### **It Happens in Pieces**

A poem is a mirror  
walking down a strange street.

Out on the sidewalk  
reflecting light and heat.

Bouncing fragments:  
elbow, nostril feet.

The body caught in fragments  
on its silver sheet.

Then gone, carried under an arm  
the world moves across its surface  
catching light:  
a momentary blinding.

## **Glitter**

Afternoon shower of light  
you loosen from the clouds,  
spilling between my thighs—  
oh it rains mirrors, bouncing  
reflections, cosmic fragments  
comet-dust, meteoric mica flakes  
Tremble and pour forth, oh my earth  
spinner oh my star shaker, oh my.

After the bang, the swirling subsides  
pooling, coalescing in repose  
your face dusted with diamonds.

### **In the Absence of Shadows**

In this bright city shadows take flight  
it is difficult to differentiate in too much light.

Some prefer mystery, things out of sight  
Here our history suffers from too much light.

Expose every naked corner of flesh! Every skin so bright  
Still, a little dignity is welcome in too much light.

The sun beats down the day, electric signs defeat the night  
Our poor eyes weaken under too much light.

To appreciate God's Gift of rest, to prefer darkness we might  
Rather than face the day squinting in too much light.

## **Moving Out**

Hot, purpling dusk,

the shirtless youths throw

a football in the parking lot.

A girl in a green tank top

descends the stairs and climbs into the

car her lumpy boyfriend drives.

The sun will come again tomorrow,

the ball will return to earth,

and the girl will emerge from the car somewhere.

The players in the parking lot will go their

separate ways and become pit dealers,

construction foremen, certified public accountants,

and massage therapists.

I will keep watching from this window or another.

Tomorrow I will be waiting

and the day after that until this vacancy

becomes familiar and your face blurs in the distance.

You could be the guys playing football

or even that car-driving boyfriend,

your absence—

### 1825 Darling Road

1973. My mother stands in front of our yellow Duster with the black vinyl roof, her auburn hair pulled back with a navy silk scarf. With one hand she shields her eyes from the shade-less glare, and props the other on her hip as she stares at the Cinderblock jawbone jutting from the gray-brown mud that indicates the perimeters of the hole that will become the basement of our new home.

Meanwhile, my brother and I squat over the cracked and crazed clay, and peel off its top layer as if it were our loose skin.

## Auschwitz Summer

We toured the museum.

This is what we saw:

college students posed for pictures

underneath the *Arbeit Macht Frei*

bullet holes, mud, dead grass,

faintly scrawled letters, poems, drawings

left on the flaking walls

a mural of frolicsome children and animals

decorated the communal toilets.

Pictures. Black and white snapshots

rows and rows of shorn heads and

terror blackened eyes. And

one woman, her still lipsticked mouth

twisted up in one corner,

a small red flag,

raised in defiance.



## **The Farrs Take in a Visitor**

An Easter morning in the early years of this century, a knock came at the door just as we were about to sit down to supper with gathered family, friends and welcome strangers.

Just as we were about to eat the offered lamb, potatoes, green beans, hot rolls and tossed salad, we heard a rapping at our door.

Sun City was dusty that morning, our skies hazed with the yellow dust blown from the Gobi Desert, blown from Asia across the great Pacific to this tract house in Nevada, to this door.

When my uncle opened the door, we saw the figure of a small woman silhouetted in that hazy frame. She had wrinkled brown skin and a crown of white hair lit from behind, lit from the dimmed sunlight.

Her black eyes frightened and her cheeks flushed, sweat dripped down her face, and we were all in a wonder that this woman would arrive on this day.

On this day, when the dusts from Asia coated our grass, on this day when we celebrated The One who was not there, she appeared.

We could not understand her, and she appeared. We could not understand her, not all of us, one did, my brother's fiancée's father.

He came from Korea as a young man, before that, he studied Mandarin Chinese. He studied Mandarin Chinese in Korea, and now lived in Chicago, and on this day, He dined with us in Sun City. He could talk with our strange visitor who would only drink water and would not eat our food.

Our visitor took the bus to the wrong Lake Mead Boulevard, got off at the wrong stop,

and walked to the house that should have been her daughter's.

It was ours, instead. A policeman drove to our house and took the woman to her

daughter, many miles away and glad to have her home.

## **The Lonely Street**

*after William Carlos Williams*

School is over. It is too hot  
to walk at ease. At ease  
they roll the street on skateboards  
coasting the time away  
They have grown brown. They own  
their summer bodies, loose  
t-shirts draped over shoulders  
broad and slumped, they push  
off with one foot, then stand  
and sail with slightest momentum  
down the lonely street.

## **Bedbugs**

encroach on white sheets.

Unbidden, hungry

for my blood.

Unaware I

listen instead to the muffled

jet engines as they descend

over my empty apartment complex

destined to convert

to failed condos next month.

The Elvii float on parachutes past the Stratosphere's

screaming spire. The jets

hover in a twinkling string,

and crisscross over my bed

and disgorge rumpled passengers,

as the insect bodies suck

and fill ruddy abdomens

on my sleeping neck.

## Highway Passage

Raven dips over the cars  
black wings spread,  
toothed feathers  
comb the blue morning light.

Sunlight glitters on the armature of the gravel mine  
that scrapes the cliffs red and raw.

The dry lake bed filled with last night's rain  
mirrors mountains and sky  
an inverse world,  
a gateway shines from the valley below.

## Windows

I have spent my life sitting at desks, looking out windows

Today's window behind the computer screen

Reveals portions of chaste tree, its leaves twitching

in mid-July Nevada monsoon weather,

back of iron chair on the porch

where we eat dinners when it is not too hot or cold

a low horizon of wall, which borders the sidewalk

Across the street, a white car parked. Not the one

the neighbors usually drive, must be their niece's

gone to the mountains for the summer.

I have spent my life sitting at desks, looking out windows.

The same desk then, but the childhood window

Always washed in the spring, double-paned

Showed our grassy Michigan acre, then the tarmac road

Then the whole of the Hitchcock's house

When it still belonged to them, before it became

"The Hitchcock's Old House" next to the "Perleberg's Old Place"

Both inhabited by strangers. Hitchcock was an ag engineer

grew winter wheat on his lawn. The Perlebergs

were farmers. All of the land around used to be their land

now it's parceled. The woods behind, Frye's Woods, hasn't

belonged to the Fries for years but still, it is a woods.

Before that it was Dexter Trail, an old Chippewa path

Through the forest before it was farmland.

Alone in those trees, I practiced walking quietly,

quiet as Minnehaha in doeskin moccasins.

Looking out windows, I have spent my life.

## A Conversation with Grandpa Farr's Ghost While Driving from Indian Springs Middle

### School to Las Vegas

You and your buddy

Joe Costello drove across this desert

in a 1928 roadster

followed the grooves Mormon wagons

cut through the unforgetting rock.

Planned to spend your future

in voluptuous darkness

directing the beam of

light carrying the flickering images

of the Modern Age.

Once your older brother died,

your sister died

and your other brother married,

you couldn't find

your heart

in Henry Ford's paradise.

You left the Russian girl



behind the counter  
of her father's store,  
reading Tolstoy between customers.

See the sky as I see it now.

Joe couldn't get a job  
so you both came home.

You made your life  
and your family  
on Three Mile Drive

After you died, we found your tools  
the ones you made  
for engineering school  
after you came back.

One engraved *Lydia*  
another engraved *Mary*

My grandmother  
the Russian girl  
and her sister.

Look up  
at the clouds  
hovering over the valley  
like airships, sun-fired  
orange, gold and red.  
Shadows settle into the shoulders  
of the mountains  
sleeping pantherlike.

Throw up your hands  
and exult—  
The Almighty God did this!

If all of your dreams came true  
Who would I be?

### **Bee Savior**

Yellowjackets creep to the edge of the mountain pool  
dipping mandibles and forelegs for a drink  
the overeager slip~  
caught in eddying current,  
tiny limbs flailing.

A workrough hand descends and lifts  
each waterlogged creature  
on a brown thumb  
steady, waiting for its wings to dry  
until it flies again.

## **Rusty Gigan**

One man's trash is another man's treasure

No need for fences here in the desert

Piles of rusty twisted metal

Stacks of corroded wheels

Parts of airplanes tractors washing machines

Graveyard of useful objects made useless

No way to fill up all that space

Built of leaning, wind-bronzed boards

Light riddled shack stands behind

The solitary doublewide off the two-lane interstate

One man's trash is another man's treasure

Graveyard of useful objects made useless

By wind and time and sun and water

By that wide space between mountains

## **Chloride, Arizona**

garlands of broken

bottle necks

threaded over

rusty chain

clank and

shimmer

laced over fences

hand painted signs

advertise curiosities

for sale or

beware of dog

padlocked chain link

gates and vacant

yards suggest

otherwise

wind lifts

corrugated roof

flaps and bangs

wisps of dust

spiral in the street

on the playground

cluster of children

some brown some white

pile on the swings

twist their chains

yellow dog trots

circling silent

tail erect

### **Morning Song**

Will you come sit with me?

This morning on our cold, wood floor,

Sit together, face to face and knee to knee?

Will you come breathe with me?

Let us shut eyes, clasp hands, and be

Together while the cat rattles the door

Will you come pray with me?

This morning, on our floor?

Dearest G—

I left the dove

for you to pick up

when you get home.

Forgive me,

I cannot bear to do it.

It is so lovely,

its rose-grey wings folded,

its head to one side.



## **Marriage**

How I came to live in your house and call it mine,  
How I came to share a bed with you, a garden, a yard,  
How I came to love your dog and two cats  
May I never forget what an arduous journey it was,  
So lonely and severe at times so wayward and wandering  
I feared to live alone the rest of my days  
In empty rooms with echoing hallways  
Only the sound of my own voice muttering bitter regrets

Now I set at my desk, the old pine one  
And look out your window, our window  
You are away at your own work,  
But even in your absence you are here.  
Even in my solitude I am met with your love  
And so your house becomes our home.

## Mira, The Wonderful Star

She

glows in colors numerous and changing

Flux is constant: sometimes Red Giant,

she swells magnificent

sometimes white dwarf

tiny but powerful-

no one before

Fabrizius

noticed

Her remarkable ways,

an amateur who watched the sky

with the eyes of a lover,

delighting in each revelation:

her true nature exposed.

### **Our Lady of the Rains**

Her golden hair flows  
around her face as she  
proffers one perfect, round  
breast to the parted lips  
of the Christ child.

For centuries they came,  
they left their fields  
to kneel before her,  
fold their rough hands  
and pray for rain  
to save their crops,  
their starving children.

## **Thunderbirds**

Everyone looks both ways before crossing.

The trucks roar their engine brakes  
as they roll through town.

My class throws stuff in each other's hair.

My butt hops a little off the wooden bleacher. I get a splinter  
through my rayon skirt.

My body fills with vibrations

and there they are.

Silver streaking hulls glitter in the sunlight, flying together, apart,  
passing one over the other upside down  
high in the air and spiraling nose first toward the grassy field.

They converge and land. Wheels skim the runway.

The cockpits open in unison,  
handsome smiling men dressed in red jumpsuits shake hands  
and give pre-signed photos. Each signature covers a plane in flight,  
so we could tell whose was whose.

Lunch, then classes.

Bomb tests continue and my portable shakes while

I write the parts of speech on the board.

## Nostos

Sunday light beams through Jesus at Gethsemane,  
the stained glass window between congregation and traffic.

Golden locks pour down his back. He prays on

My child body waves and sways

against my mother's legs

in time to a Bach prelude.

The light, may the

light come into me, may I

rise. Oh God, here I am

among these legs, find me,

love me, lift me close.

These dirgy hymns in this church

built from field stones

the farmers carried to town

a century ago, farmers whose

great-grandchildren I stand

shoulder to shoulder with in this church

under its famous windows

and oh Jesus

I do not want to be like you.





## Tule Springs, Floyd Lamb State Park

In North Las Vegas, water comes  
from deep in the earth.

Ancient spring-beyond ancient, before any human could tell a story about it-  
it rises, fills pools lined with tall grasses

filled with park service fish

Some fishers sit

in nylon webbed chairs,  
with coolers at their feet.

Other fishers dive or wade,  
as water jewels their feathers.

where there is water

there is life

or potential of life

even on Mars or Jupiter's Io

even in the Mojave desert

*pah* means water

Tonopah

Pahrump

Pahrnagat

Paiute means Ute who knows how to find water

Peacocks peck the ground tails folded  
outside the whitewashed '40s divorce ranch.  
Photos of trim, smiling young women  
horseback riding in pristine cowgirl outfits,  
curled hair cascading from underneath white hats.

Around the corner, a father places his tiny pink daughter  
in the crotch of the graying tree  
he will not let her down, and holds her

singing,       A!

she replies,    a!

                  B!

                  b!

on through the alphabet as the Canadian geese sleep together  
on the grassy bank  
each balanced  
on one webbed foot  
each neck turned back  
each head buried in a feathered back.

My husband and I take pictures:

trees, geese, ranchette.

Not our faces.

We look out together.

The little pink girl, freed from the tree,  
runs squealing up the path  
scattering geese in a beat of wings

Beneath us, the caliche basin holds this water.

Built in layers: mastodon tusk,  
sloth claw, lion tooth. All drank here.

Another layer-bonfire ash, arrowhead,  
bones of Tudinu, who fished and sang with their children.

Some of us will leave our plastic buckets,  
fishing hooks to be buried,  
while the spring eternally shimmers  
reflecting eternal sky.

## **Laura Names the Bones**

occipital bone,

left and right parietal bones,

frontal bone,

zygomatic bone,

maxillary bone,

—this is where I have the pins in my jaw~

mandible,

She touches each part of her head as she

walks her long fingers lightly

indicating: my friend is a skeleton.

She is standing straighter than she once did

when I first knew her she hunched her back

folded in on herself, protecting. Now she is

straighter.

We are walking the wrong way on campus

because King Lear sold out

(who knew?)

because we are so busy paying attention to each

other we don't notice at first that the stadium

is looming closer and Maryland Parkway further away,  
because together we feel invincible  
on the last summer night. "No man is going to mess with us,"  
she declares when I laugh at my foolish suggestion  
to walk down a dark alley.  
Because when we walk shoulder to shoulder,  
we are invincible.  
We are also bones,  
skeletons standing for only a little while.

### **Evening Grace**

Their bodies rumple the grass in front of Grace  
the old church on Wyoming Street.

Their pale faces, spotted with tree shadows,  
their bodies at ease, no longer young.

Together they stand and file  
down the concrete steps to the basement  
talking and laughing, while

the street fills with murmurs,  
dogs bark from hidden yards,  
and shadows crawl across the sidewalks.

## Vegas Drive

Life got in under the door:

white-kneed spiders hung their webs on the bathroom ceiling  
a black widow set up behind the toilet.

We lived

an agreement:

do not fall in my teacup or on my pillow or pinch my big pink bottom  
and I will not brush you away with the yellow yarn mop.

I felt something flick my ear in the middle of the night:

a beetle size of an old half dollar a momma  
looking for a place to nest

the neighbor's calico slinked through my door while I did my yoga poses.

She sat next to me, flung her foot over her shoulder,  
and delicately licked her anus.

One day, I opened my door to half a green lizard  
agonizing on the threshold

the other half on the walk.

## **A Declaration for the Desert**

This land is not my land, or yours either.

It lives for nobody but itself.

Its canyons wind and twist,

Carved by absent rivers:

Dry now, silent now. Places

so quiet the body's breath heartbeat

pound excessive raspy rhythms.

This body needs what this land

cannot provide: water, shelter, food.

On the surface: barren, indistinct.

Some look underneath, scratching:

silver, uranium, borax, silica, rhyolite, gold.

Some look above for Zion's angels pointing

through the clouds to salvation.

Most see a margin: a mirage, at most a waypoint

a way to get from one place to another

a place of forgetting. Escape.

Tabula Rasa: a place to build and knock down

dream castles on a whim, on a chance,



no consequence, except a few rotten  
reminders, broken evidence of claims  
lost or forfeited.

### **Small Death on the Sidewalk**

Crushed

under the heedless heel-

Too quick to escape

and so destroying the

dreaming insect

its brittle carapace no protection

under unwitting tread.

How much has been crushed

out of unthinking words, gestures

Futile protections offer

nothing but a plosive crunch

as the softer feelings

smear across pavement

smear across pages,

smear across the coffeshop night-

A moment's groan-

the audience reflexes

before they return to their conversations.

## **Raven**

perched

on the corner

over the door

at noon

my portable

classroom parked

on the blacktop

the

black bird

sits

on the roof

until I

step

on the rattling

metal porch

the moment

my foot

touched stair

the bird flew

black bird

yellow building

blue sky

every lunch

hour a winged

shadow

passed over me

## Winter Seed

Buried in final earth:

quiet lips parted, eyelids met

hands folded, idle~

limbs cradled in Her rotten bosom.

Heavy the earth-pull and

dark the night—

Rest, white brow.

Release, white bones.

Roots hold in pale hammock;

worms entwine and devour.

All returned, all reduced, all reborn

in spring. The green shoots reach

for light, for warmth, anchored

in the remains of what was you, what was me.

**St. Thomas, Nevada**

The town is dry now; its crumbled blond walls  
hidden in between the gray and black stalks  
of dead marsh reeds.

We hold up the hand-drawn map we purchased  
at the Lost City Gift Shop.

*Is that the ice cream parlor?*

*Hey, I think that's the school over there.*

You search your phone for the photos others took;  
the same foundation on its small screen  
and a group of bright-jacketed tourists  
standing in a row.

For a moment, their image hovers  
in the present desert  
our desert  
as we check the caption.

*Yes, this is the Gentry Hotel*

In 1938, the Colorado River bellied and stretched  
became Lake Mead.

Flooded.

This valley and all its

features erased

*Hugh Lord sculled away from his home for the last time.*

Ten years later, two young women fished in a

St. Thomas basement, their legs gleaming

and their rods taut.

In the sixties, water receded.

The town families returned,

spread blankets between the walls

of what was once their homes

and had a picnic.

## After Basho

Mt. Charleston. Wandering car ride to the end of US 157 and Lee Canyon exit. Cool retreat for overheated desert-dwellers. Meandering path through public campground, behind Society for Creative Anachronism knights fighting with wooden swords. Steep climb. Wheezing breath. Used inhaler. At last, alone. This mountain ridge of ancient bristlecone and Douglas fir. Light dry earth, springy with fallen needles. Sun-freckled ground. Woodpecker knocked in the distance. Monarch flitted nearby. Rested under tree near the weather station. Exhilarating scene. Profound joy.

two city slickers

entwined under pine branches

mountain breathes us



### **Moth One**

Alights on the office window

White body feathery, pristine

against the square of blue.

Somewhere behind, a Southwest

jet lowers its orange and blue hull

to the runway.

Moth busy with moth ablutions

Licks tiny forelegs, wipes first

one antenna, then the other, next

hastily scrubs downy abdomen,

tips backward gently, assuredly

to reach nether regions, stops,

puts all legs on glass,

pauses a moment, then wings away.

## **Moth Two**

Perched, wings

folded, motionless

Mottled brown markings

perfect disguise for tree trunk, but

pathetically obvious on

beige stucco.

## **Pet Cemetery**

small graves

some surrounded

with pickets

cement plaque

RIP Kitty

Love Tony (big hand)

and Fannie (little hand)

shattered

bunny toy

faded teddy bears

white mailbox

letters to Chief

a good dog

tiny yellow

flowers

cracked soil

Boris the turtle  
buried near  
the other turtles

the guinea pig  
under a mound  
of plastic flowers

wind blasted  
stick crosses  
names effaced

pickup  
rolls down ruts  
man steps out  
in a dust cloud

to mourn?  
to pee.

## **Black Madonna in the Prague Loreto**

A rayed womb electric

with dark power

a flower opens

in the abyss.

She holds

her fruit

her child.

**The Desert is a Good Place to have a Vision**

on the flat rock

over the serpent swallowing the sun

in front of the brown and purple goddess

snake in one hand infant in the other

next to the red coyote with

black raven claws

and underneath Spider Woman

a labyrinth in her belly

revised in 2006

by the artist

the same one who

dropped out in 1973

and came here to paint

now returned a professor

on the other side of the path

the native petroglyphs

chipped fleck on fleck

traces of raincloud bighorn river

## **Frogs**

Over there, she pointed  
at a dirt road  
etched in the desert rock  
a trace already vanishing

Over there, we went there  
when I first came here  
years ago, before we married  
That's the Sheep Range  
and at the end of that road  
there's a pond.

That pond was filled,  
filled with frogs.

So many  
in the desert  
then.

## My Breath a Sacred Harp

blue sky between the corn leaves green cool dirt shadows blue sky shining  
here mommy's talking not to me  
blue dress not a pink one blue crayons jesus loves me color him blue  
i've got a joy joy deep in my heart blue walls stay quiet don't feel  
that way blue notebook and blue pen write secret lock them away tiny key  
blue veins white hall white sheets black  
mark red stain green bracelet  
blue book value pay cuts layoff blue not black not red  
but blue monday workdays begin again  
not to me brother runs shakes the stalks bright sun cool grass dandelion white  
butterfly daisy black eyed susan  
pink birthday crown pink balloons pink ruffles daddy give me a baby  
doll one that drinks and wets  
hard desk pencil smudge long division fly on my arm  
pink eraser crumbs brush them away  
blue black cloud billie holliday strange fruit  
pink robe wine stain cry into receiver mom  
wait and see follow seek accept  
complete revise embrace



## Transplant

Honey mesquite seedling split,  
fat seed sending limber stem  
toward the light, unfurling infant leaves  
white rootlet corkscrewing  
through potting soil only to be thwarted  
by the aluminum pan.

If it survives, it will live in the desert:  
split caliche with tenacious roots,  
fan the wind with delicate weeping leaves,  
drop finger-thick bean pods  
with more seeds waiting.

Today, the gardener coaxes it free  
from the pan to plant it  
in a long plastic cylinder  
filled with cactus mix and sand  
at this moment its whole living being  
held between finger and thumb.

**Air**

blows the neighbor's secrets  
to my doorstep:  
candy wrappers,  
credit card receipts,  
tissue wads.

Leaves knock at the windows,  
scrape along the cement,  
eddy under bushes.

Out in the desert,

the wind is free of walls.

It picks up dust and salts,  
forms devils whirling spirits  
that cut through the unlucky  
and take  
some soul piece.

Invisible power. Except  
for the dust riding

its currents:

seed for raindrops

and snowflakes.

Each pure moment

encloses

a bit of grit.

## **Fire**

penetrates

every cell, every particle.

The core,

the fire within:

the earth,

our blood,

our brains see light

color

even when our eyes cannot

light is our essence

each particle

of everything

once was

and is

light:

flickers

wave on wave.

Devours

all.

Consumes,

never destroys:

the sun

the body

the heart

the hearth.

It moves us;

we move.



**Earth**

crystallizes.

Ideas

manifest.

A stone:

a thought.

An object

being

at this moment

touching this:

## Curriculum Vita

Joan Paulette Robinson  
647 Avenue I  
Boulder City, NV 89005  
(702) 281-2652  
joanrobinson89005@gmail.com

### EDUCATION

M.F.A. English. University of Nevada, Las Vegas. December 2013. Phi Kappa Phi.

M.A. cum laude. English Education. Wayne State University. 1996.  
Thesis: Cultural Communication and Composition

B.A. English, Creative Writing Emphasis. Certificate in Women's Studies. Michigan State University, 1992.

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

*College of Southern Nevada 2005 to present.*

English Composition I, English Composition II, World Literature I

*University of Nevada, Fall 2010 to Spring 2013*

Las Vegas, Composition I, Composition I extended, Composition II, Writing Center Consultant.

*Clark County School District*

English I, English I Read/Write, Journalism I, Journalism II, English grades 6-8, 1997-2002.

### GRANTS/SCHOLARSHIPS

UNLV GPSA Grant Summer 2013.

UNLV English Department Travel Grant, Summer 2013.

Western Michigan University Valclav Havel Scholarship, Summer 2013.

UNLV English Department Travel Grant, Fall 2011.

Nevada Arts Council Professional Development Grant, Fiscal Year 2010, First Quarter.

Nevada Arts Council Jackpot Grant, Fiscal Year 2006, First Quarter.

### AWARDS

Indian Springs Schools Certificate of Appreciation, June 1, 2000.

### PUBLICATIONS

"St. Thomas, Nevada." *300 Days of Sun*. 1.1 (2014). Print.

"Tule Springs, Floyd Lamb State Park." *300 Days of Sun*. 1.1 (2014). Print.

"Bee Savior." *(re)volve*. 35 (2009): 156. Print.



“Bum Magic.” *Interim.* *Interim.* 27.1&2 (2009): 26. Print.  
 “Mira The Wonderful Star.” *Interim.* 27.1&2 (2009): 27. Print.  
 “Moving Out.” *The One Three Eight.* (2008). Web.  
 “Desert Reverie.” *Neon Crush: A Celebration of Las Vegas Poetry.* (2007). Print.  
 “Communion.” *Chance.* (1999). Web.

**PRESENTATIONS**

“Multiple Voices Surround a Singular Identity: C.D. Wright’s One With Others”  
 PCAS/ACAS Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, October 7, 2011.

**WORKSHOPS**

Prague Summer Program, Summer 2013.  
 Naropa University Summer Writing Program. July 6-11, 2009.  
 Iowa University Summer Writing Program. July 18-22, 2005.

**VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE**

Reader for Poetry Section of Witness Magazine, Fall 2012 to Spring 2013.  
 U.S. Park Service, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Winter 2013.

**READINGS AND PERFORMANCES**

Vegas Valley Book Festival Poetry Readings	September 28 and October 4, 2013	Featured Reader
Word Up! Poetry Reading	September 11, 2012	Featured Reader
<i>Las Vegas Meditation</i> Documentary Film	release date: January 2013	Reader/appearance
Vegas Valley Book Festival Poets’ Bus Tour	November 4, 2011	Reader
Vegas Valley Book Festival Poets’ Bus Tour	November 5, 2010	Reader
Word Up! Poetry Reading	January 19, 2010	Featured Reader
Naropa University Summer Writing Program	July 8, 2009 July 10, 2009	Reader Performer, <i>Borders: A Poets’ Play</i>

<i>Estrogeniuses</i> Women's Poetry Festival, reJAVAnate Café, Las Vegas	September 16, 2008	Reader
<i>MM &amp; J Poetry</i> reJAVAnate Café, Las Vegas	March 25, 2008	Featured Reader
<i>Neon Crush</i> , Reading and book signing Clark County Library, Jewel Box Theater Las Vegas	October 18, 2007	Contributor/Reader
<i>Hot Java</i> Women's Poetry Festival reJAVAnate Café, Las Vegas	September 18, 2007	Reader
M & M Poetry Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf, Las Vegas	June 9, 2005	Featured Reader
<i>Jitters Poetry</i> Jitters Café, Las Vegas	October 14, 1999	Featured Reader
<i>NeonLit</i> Contemporary Arts Center, Las Vegas	September 24, 2010	Reader