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till

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TILL

by

Jonathan Peter Moore

Bachelor of Arts
Rhodes College
2003

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing
Department of English
College of Liberal Arts**

**Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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Thesis Approval

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The Thesis prepared by
Jonathan Peter Moore

Entitled

till _____

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

Examination Committee Chair

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ABSTRACT

till

by

Jonathan Peter Moore

Dr. Donald Revell, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of English
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

till is a collection of poetry exclusively composed while the poet was a graduate student in the Creative Writing International Master of Fine Arts program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The manuscript includes ekphrastic reflections on *William Eggleston's Guide* and confronts regionalism, religion and past/present subjectivity.

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PREFACE

Socrates: You know, Phaedrus, writing shares a strange feature with painting. The offsprings of paintings stand there as if they are alive, but if anyone asks them anything, they remain most solemnly silent. The same is true of written words. You'd think they were speaking as if they had some understanding, but if you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that very same thing forever.

--Plato

These poems initially arose out of a passage in John Szarkowski's introductory essay for William Eggleston's first collection of photographs, out of the concentration that broke, as I read his prose. Szarkowski begins his opening remarks with the phrase, "AT THIS WRITING," and in the heralding expression, the former curator of New York's Museum of Modern Art forgoes hierarchies and vain attempts at immutable precision, privileging a subjective, immediate and particular mode of ekphrastic engagement (5). I was at the time trying to reflect on one of the well-known lines from William Carlos Williams' poem "To Elsie" in which he describes America's "devil-may-care men" and "young slatterns" as possessing "imagination which have no / peasant traditions to give them / character" (217). I began to read Williams' condemnation of industrialized provincial life into my own connections with the American South, and his influence spurred me to investigate the parts behind the parts of "I was raised in these parts." I saw this investigation taken up and taken further by Ross

McElwee in his film *Sherman's March*, Thomas Sutpen in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* and most serviceably in *William Eggleston's Guide*. One night in the basement of my parents' home, I discovered my response to "To Elsie." Covered in dust and wrapped in a sheath of plastic, the cornice of a dollhouse jutted out from the rubble of a workbench.

For as long as I knew T, he smelled of dirt, an odor you notice all the more in the city, where he resided for the second half of his life. Bartering a shotgun home in sharecropping country for an air-conditioned duplex in Nashville's Berry Hill housing projects, he squirreled away nickels and dimes to buy small patches of land. In these little roadside thickets, he raised tomatoes, greens, squash, okra, carrots, chickens, strawberries and blackberries, all while working full-time at a local grocery distributor. Later in his life when his lungs started to shut down, he wore breathing tubes up his nose for hours at a time. The condition worsened until he was finally forced into the hospital for a tracheotomy. Following the operation, tubes tethered him at all times to his oxygen tank. No longer able to wood work in his shed or tend to his scattered plots of land, T divvied out the tilling of his gardens and the harvesting of his crops amongst neighbors, my father – who still answers to the appellation T's son – and me.

In the last spring of his life, T refused further imposition and remained indoors. The hospital dispatched door-to-door orderlies to change his trach. and, after a few visits, T asked one of them if he could keep the biohazard bags they filled with the slender tubes and stubby trachs that previously perforated his

larynx. My grandmother would sterilize the respiratory byproducts in the pots that were used for cooking. In no time, kids could be seen throughout the projects playing on swings that dangled from tree branches by T's recycled breathing tubes. As for the trachs, T spent his last days on earth using them as one might popsicle sticks, reassembling a scale version of the childhood home he left behind in sharecropping country. My grandfather, John T Moore, posthumously entered this replica of what he called "The Old Place" into an arts and crafts competition at the Tennessee State Fair, earning the blue ribbon.

Finding this artifact that had drifted into the unconscious clutter of my parents' basement seemed to be the perfect conversation starter for my dialogue with Williams. But no matter how I tried, I could not break the ice. The burden of rendering justice to the account of a man who resurrects his ancestral home out of the very thing that while keeping him alive signals his own impending death, proved to be too much for me. I could never divorce his *story* from the vague and overpowering potential I saw for it. And moreover, the generic disparity between personal narrative and lyric poetry – where one re-presents *my* truth the other monumentalizes its immediacy – prevents a relaxed cross-pollination of the two. In looking back, it strikes me as poignant that these insecurities and technical inadequacies manifested in response to Williams, a poet who spent much of his later career revising *Book One* of his long poem *Paterson*, burdened by his overwrought desire "to write in a larger way than of the birds and flowers, to write about the people close about me: to know in detail, minutely what I was talking about—to the whites of their eyes, to their very smells" (6).

A poem often quoted for the line “poetry makes nothing happen,” W.H. Auden ends “In Memory of W.B. Yeats” gesturing to the genre’s apostrophic ability to “survive, a way of happening, a mouth” (52). Such a mouth shoots the breeze with both Szarkowski’s intuitively brilliant embark and the work of William Eggleston it introduces. Conventionally unfamiliar in their framing and off-kilter composition, the images in *William Eggleston’s Guide* incited critics, teethered on the gelatin of Stieglitz and Nadar, to pan the Memphis photographer’s vernacular work as mere snapshots. “A snapshot... Heightened from life, / yet paralyzed by fact” writes Robert Lowell. In rebuttal, Eggleston argues:

I am afraid there are more people than I can imagine who
can go no further than appreciating a picture that is a
rectangle with an object in the middle of it, which they can
identify... they want something obvious. Blindness is
apparent when someone lets slip the word ‘snapshot.’
Ignorance can always be covered by ‘snapshot.’ The word
never had any meaning... I am at war with the obvious.
(*Democratic Forrest*, 163)

Here, Eggleston addresses a replica of “the executives” from Auden’s “In Memory of W.B. Yeats,” who, having wandered “into the valley of [the poem/photograph’s] making” advocate its expulsion from the Republic (52). Obviousness suggests pre-judgment, and in that regard, I cannot help but consider the significance of titling a book *William Eggleston’s Guide*. Surely we

are meant to revere the images as the American South according to Mr. Eggleston. However, the longer I look at it the more I understand the designation as Eggleston's admission of unfamiliarity with the familiar. These dye transfers guide his transfer from what home *was* to what it *is* and back across. We are given both the obvious and the obscured. The "with" in "I am at war with the obvious" suddenly embraces a sense of allied forces. Eggleston is an Odysseus; *William Eggleston's Guide* signals his cartographic quest, a map of digressions. In *Democratic Forest*, he compares taking pictures with the viewfinder removed to firing a shotgun: "Unlike a rifle, where you carefully aim, following a dot or a scope, with a shotgun it's done with feel. With a fluid movement, your body follows a moving target and the gun keeps moving after the shot with what is know as follow through...the opposite of the rational method" (64). If Eggleston is guiding me these images are guiding him. I follow his follow-through, and in each image I hear Virgil exclaiming, "you have reached / the place past which my powers cannot see" (Purg., XXVII, 127). In each landscape, I hear an ancestral humming, you have reached the "raw towns that we believe and die in" (52).

:

Henri Cartier Bresson's photographs astound with their miraculous attention to the ephemeral, whereas Eggleston's uneventful structures mark the sparse instances of human absence. In questioning these unpopulated images of misspelt graffiti, yard-sprawled toys, dilapidated cribs, scattered puzzle pieces and tattered shoes, I found an enduring presence that bridged the generic gap separating personal narrative and lyric poetry. In attending to this enduring

presence, a way of writing jutted out from the rubble of the workbench. I was able to survive The Old Place as a way of happening, a mouth, a personal narrative that is overheard. If I am to name this enduring presence, it could only be *home*. This presence extends beyond the ekphrastic poems I have written in response to *William Eggleston's Guide* and encompasses, as well, my earlier work. The occasion for those poems seems closely attuned to what Robert Hass writes in his introduction to Robinson Jeffers' *Rock and Hawk*, "It is the fate of American poets to reinvent the religions of their childhoods in their poetry." While writing these poems, I was not necessarily reinventing the spirituality of my father, a part-time lay minister, but the quotidian habits of his church. By conflating my father's two worlds – the poly bag plant, where he works, and the sanctuary, where he worships – I noticed the pragmatism shared by both institutions. In this respect, the practice of speaking in tongues began to rhyme with the bag machine malfunctioning, as both threaten with collapse the nomos of their respective association.

In the account given of Williams, and likewise the nativist polemics of the Fugitives, I resented seeing History subordinated by Nature. Contemporarily the "South" is less a geographic region than an antiphon of tourism, Dollywood; commercialism, McDonald's Southern Style Chicken Sandwich; and nostalgic cocktails of individualism and myth, Dave Smith. Where I hope these poems depart from other engagements with the south, that confuse the constructed and the inherent at every turn, is in my adherence to Wendell Berry's proposal for regionalism, "a local life aware of itself" (56).

Many thanks to Claudia Keelan, Don Revell and Nick LoLordo, whose mentorship energized these exchanges.

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till

...And I made a rural pen.
-William Blake

For me color is an artifice, a cosmetic like the kind used to paint corpses.
- Roland Barthes

William Eggleston's Guide
Morton, Mississippi

Book open to bone-

looking tree. River turning
out its deep pockets

On the nightstand
irises make themselves
at home in a clear tincture

Where echoes sleep together
with apparatus a mnemonic
man is emptied of lungs. A child

is getting his tail tanned with tubes
The smell of rain is letting up
and I cannot sleep or look

at the elderly attached to oxygen
tubes in casinos without my back
pockets coming together, without

hearing this man refer to a bed
of irises as flags, or the way the verse
in his hands carries me to cords:

I bought some flags in Reno
where your body is still the color of pine
and on every broken down tree

we see rabbits and snakes
tame on account of being
hungry so long

W.E. Guide
Whitehaven, Mississippi

What this long motel can't feel with its stains
she discovers in her naked body

smearing makeup onto rented linens.
Dusk is a stadium of native tongues
telepathically speaking, "don't be so hard

on yourself for the parks keeping their hours
and nativity scenes seeming out of place

in early March." Everything I touches turns
to skin. Somnolent winds. Shoelace - tied
to the vent's grate. Talk about memory, talk
about pleasure - if it is flaccid, the air ain't working

Turning back to *God*, spray-painted on the wall
the G coils into a 6; he faces W.E. flaccid

The night the ceiling scratched her scalp, pleasure
could be heard in the walls, where it was written
paper thin; making scenes out of seems

memory takes pictures of Polaroids as they turn
the purple of dreams galloping over reams of milk spilt

If you tie a string around your finger
it turns this color. The shutter stutters out
a reassembled dusk. Take shelter. Take a picture
of your last government check

Consider the Ravens

I. *Clear Thoughts*

The bridge burns, throwing day into night
When I set out, I knew what it was to arrive:
acupuncture makes its way to Music City

Tomorrow belongs to the bag machine
malfunctioning. The past is a polyurethane
ocean. At the plant, the pressman tells me
if you drown in your work, they'll have to cut
the most beautiful thing out of your lungs

Whelm without medical attention
cuts strychnine with the weight of speech
Selame kalaqui Selame Selame kattalaqui jon flog reido

Somewhere an angel is being skinned alive
in rumor mills, and weather makes
fun of machines, curling irons
toasters. A beautiful girl in half-
way house stitches curtains out of baby clothes
believing if she were to step back and pull
one foot out of this world and one foot
out of the other, she would stop burning
stop breathing, stop reading so much
into roots left dangling in the air

After the rain, the lord hath said
there is rain in the way you talk
Go out and rent the porn of tractors

And the lord hath said when a man
in the poly bag plant says be careful
the job you are about to do
should not be done

II. *Carry into the machine the voice of being caught*

The pressman speaks:
That there's the seal bar
We call her the hot-knife
Running upwards of seven
hundred degrees. She's
a jewel. Gots to hear her out

No voice at all, only song
of biting down as if in pain
and releasing bag after bag
The clear breath is cut and
sealed. Cauterizing I've heard
it called

Rendered one from another
Stretch out your arms;
the blade is longer with a heat
could pull you from yourself

Bite down on clear breath

This is the lift of one hundred
articulate tongues, boxed to be
shipped, fulfilling the word of
ends meeting their maker. Clear
breath of this plant presses
against cardboard palette

Taste the voice of being caught
I can assure you it aint no scream
I can assure you it aint no scream
That blade'll cut you clear in half
The voice of being caught:
I see you in there

III. *Here I Raise my Ebenezer*

Sleep just jumped up on me.
Inside the bag plant
the hot knife cuts the poly
seals the halves, wakes his
children with what sounds
like coughing

a clearing of throat

*If I ever get so I can't work. I'll want you
to come over and shoot me in my sleep
but do it the day before I call you
so as I don't see it coming*

To recline is to stretch out
Recline. Stretch out: I is evidence
in the absence of seal
the bag takes on sleep's physical shape
a rending of ends
a recliner characterized by a father's
father's absent head
greasy blemish, congenital
blot, there to see
there to see through

IV Priest Dam Project Changed Lives of Many
-The Tennessean, 3/10/04

Hope like everything else
you have swallowed
this isn't permanent

onemississippi
twomississippi
thousands of
motorists traveling
I 40 just east
of the city glance
at the impressively close
J. Percy Priest Dam

fivemississippi
six children steal batteries
from fire alarms,
touching them
to their tongues

onethousand one
hundred and ten
tennessee families
gradually
relocated, when
the state flooded
the valley. Dwellings
and barns sold

To kiss the terminal
is to need the word
to take the taste
of tongue from
your mouth

ninety-five tennessee
graves were moved
Little families
Seventeen cemeteries
carried no names

halfway through
the prayer

I notice we were asked
to bow our eyes
and close our heads

If the family insists
the state leaves
the body
where it is

Whatever Tickles your Fiscal

The hallway nests the daylights
out of me. When the blind pose
for photographs they know
how one feels. Sock footed
preacher reasons how cotton
can be eaten, plucked pink
after the first sentence wizens
into print: plates spinning

under a tent in one artery
of the delta. In my dreams
forgetting to lock your doors
restocks the view
your windows rest against

In epilepsy and Wal-Mart
we see ourselves as one
digital one with one digital
one to grow on, muttering
this is where language stops
and starts blinking. Slow down
America, doctor-it-up

W.E. Guide
Tallahatchie County

W.E. snaps a child faceless from her playhouse
doorway. Morning, just clearing
the fencerow, restores it in the American
Whistler, surrounded by dead grass

producing the entrails of peasant
homes where like our lungs, light
only sheds light when death needs
an eye on the shucking hand

Tearing sieves from the breathing tubes
Whelm flicks them into water
From this smallest of bodies billows
the unprocessed rank of field hospitals

Is nothing more baptismal than the camera shy
for good cause? Before there was anything
but children and wind chimes
I will have heard the cleansing roil of T

erecting a home-place from memory
breathing tubes and children's books
Each trach is inspiring. I-think-I-can-
I-think-can Lincoln Logs cooked clean

as a whistle, bloodless as saw-dust
Children's books in this house meant books
children had gotten in to with pen, circling
till they tire or tear through

Leave me

to the typing paper stored in air-tight bins
where humidity lets it alone

In the feral colony, we're told
feral means fearful. On the road

back to Music City, heat lightning
Doors boiling over into splinters

and someone is caught living out the sound of silos
Where no one owes no favors, tradition's

a table waiting to be set. Enter it as you would an angel
built outside with fish hooks. Where handwriting

is a whore-hating ghost, you sign your name
son of man

Trailer for

Spider web on the hedges
I wanted to see you naked
on his cold leather couch
Four o'clocks open late
and release their fragrance
throughout our conclusions
about concrete nails.

If there is no make believe
in heaven, there is in the afternoon
Words cleaned out of me, it's true:
I mailed a blank missive to you

Spider web on the hedges
What you see here and what
makes you suffer belongs to Amateur
Photography, prayer that folds
so tight we mishear "overcast days"
for "open caskets" and "can you touch
your toes?" for "can you color your hair
until it makes me hard?" I have
budgeted \$40 a year for movies, and
even if I blow \$60, the plan holds as true
as I am sweet on you

W.E. Guide,
Near Morton, Mississippi

Of course he is in fact
it's in the air conditioning
that I laid eyes upon God

The way the outskirts appear
in a bottle of ipecac, and the land
doesn't remember an old friend

from a former one. Count no Count
knew his days were numbered
when his wife asked to paint them

thinking this likeness will be the one
that rivets our senses to the rain
our birthmarks to the workbench

Once the past that was not
perished, she installed window
units and prayed of walls perspiring

measure of myth in the lay
of abandoned plots, measure of days
in the middle of one or the other Whelm

remembered her introduction to
good eyes and roads. Back when the land's
place was in the unspoken request

and the photograph is as we speak

A Dime that Doesn't

Above the bears breaking muscle loose
from a stream, colder than the dead
sustaining them; planes cross

the country's t. A woman rides
in the letter next to me, another in the letter
I am drafting on an air sick bag

With every false start, the voice
on the other end becomes larger
The sky is a landfill for such things:

sins we no longer name. Each word
sets the animal's teeth
in plaster. In panting
we till its ingrown tongue

The Cuss of Place

T's son leaves his mark
on the mocking bird's hide
in a place visible
to the bird by mirror

When it pecks at the spot
I shout for my mother
and she slams her hand
in a car door, holding it

I had never heard

Long Live the Kane

A garden came, and we burnt it
for in its piles of silence
occasionally, our lives came up

missing / for air. Belief
outgrows its aliases. Sugar
scratches
at the bottom of our skulls

an aging rapper
slapping—
together flows

Cot Damn

Watch out or I'll have you
steering with your knees
clap-happy with the radio
screaming out we got the beat

we got the beat, we got
the beat. Yea, we didn't rent
Don't Look Back. We water
colored in a park, all white

and black. For contrast
busted blocks rendered unto us
cheese balls, the old kind
that come in a can and blush

allover the sheets the help
slept in. One crass hurrah
would have been grand
Bobby Pin, then again

Till Human Voices Wake Us

Says Sonny replaced the lights
in the education building at church
with new florescent bulbs

Says they look so much better
you can actually see
to walk down the hall

Says Ms. Geneva found herself
washing fingerprints off the walls
where she couldn't see them before

Labor Ready

They sit you down with your dead
ends. in tongues of one to five:
How likely are you
to be dismissed from a job for fighting?

How good are you at fighting?

One being. I have no idea, Five being
I cannot lose
The color of angels
they claim my piss is unclean

W.E. Guide
Crenshaw, Mississippi

There's no way I'm sure of
your being
okay if n' when the plant closes

The n between if 'n when
is to say
each 'n to his own

The T between John and Moore
is not initial
Sharecropper can't be expected

to name all his children
twice. T's son
drives I around in a pick up

stomping grounds, fair grounds
Berry Hill
the parts behind the parts of I

was raised in these parts
Think of the T
on the headstone and what

Dr. Anderson said at the funeral
I see death everywhere
Other peoples' fears frighten me

Pyrrhic
after Ross McElwee

Behind the wheel
with the top down
your head
centers
a hurtling landscape

Persons seen
abandoning
animals at this site
will be prosecuted

How many first
sexual experiences
can one
woman have

Sew & Sew

I mark my place
in Bibles from
one inn to another
way out – with a Hello
My Name Is
humming so strongly of it

Performance

“Once History inhabits a crazy house, egoism may be the last tool left to History”

Norman Mailer

I, on the other hand, am in service to the horseshoe hanging over the shed door

I sip runoff pot licker poured over a photo album

I wipe my mouth on a newspaper that reports: If Tennessee was to excise Shelby County, the state’s public school system would rise to the low 20s in national rankings

I knock off twenty minutes early and call it cool-down time

I ask spring if it is coherent and notice

I am all talk

I rears its own form on a chalkboard with industrial staccato
A SHORT MAN IS AN OXYMORON BUT STILL A MAN

I attribute the quote to a headless statue

I see every day on my way to where I stay

I make the house smell of dolls

I listen to soft paper when

I need to hear a man wrapped in flames

I expect a miracle every time he gets to the part about Percy Priest Lake

I remove the inhalator and his face comes off with it

I swap eyes with the yard jockey and he tells me,

“I can’t sleep knowing I must go back out there”

I keep smashing clear through cock-crow

I assumed genitals were present. Later,

I discovered genitals were impossible

I cannot be certain of where anything originates unless

I sit in a room with someone till they no longer exist

I go to the library when I am homeless

I go to the bathroom when I am good and ready

I knew she was faking. We'd talked about it

I am no hunter, so I'm told

I, as it happens, is the hardest part of hearing your own voice

I feed lines to a wall-eyed lesbian who can't keep "It's The End of the World
as We Know It" together

I write about seeing fall, "When the shotguns burn woodstoves

I feel the hoses turned loose inside of me, blowing the trash out"

I wash my mouth out with a map

Covenant and Loving It

In the heart of the stomach-
colored country side, ice falls
from an awning and bread breaks
a bitch's leg

On both sides of a bomb
threat, sandbags roar in remembrance
of the ocean's floor. Suffer
the dream where you stand

to be done in by dreams
Into a pattern
in the key of hot knives
a sea of glass stained, levees shatter

Let 'er Rip

She pulls another name
this time from the dead

The weight of covered dishes
is the weight of dropping them

onto the fellowship hall's
simonized floors. Light

shines through accidents
imaginary as all get out

My cousins book
to the sprinkler's edge

where headstones swear
the unreferenced shadow

of its clock-wise spew
When they ask, I tell them

I have forgotten how
a staring contest works

Bystander

When a hole in the map bursts
into flame

piss on my grave
a slow legato

of pollen describes the mind
when the prescribed dies

home becomes the medicine
they ask us to pour

down the drain

Chanticleer
for Jonathan Williams

Hey, Ladonna, who do
you think would win
in a fight between
Scooby Doo and Aunt
Jemima?

I don't think
she'd fight a dog

Lasting Impression

The hotel baked cookies all day
Heaven is singing where you have no business

Lowman on the totem pole swapped a hot sheet
for cold, took off when Alejandro's

fingerprints went up in fumes. Sing for the hatchlings
wrapped in a wash cloth soaked in bleach

Sing for the flying low, for the tumbled rack of tourist
pamphlets. See Rock City and the clouds

break over the deep end, where the sound
of a player piano powwows with your own heart beat

In the Boot Corral a bride-to-be
towels off in the nude, while

Tootsie's Wild Orchids Lounge
in the unfastened stay

W.E. Guide
Memphis

The broken watch worn
in habit. Split olives
in the fig tree's shade.
We press out sunburns and
the pale impressions flash
A fountain, yielding salt and fresh
gurgles through handfuls of olives
A dress up her crack, as T's son tells it

The man in the pew behind her explains
his two black eyes: I pulled the bunch out
and she turned to waylay me
Well, how did you get the second
I figured she wanted it there
so I shoved it back. The bit in the horse's
mouth. The area outside of Jerusalem
where trash was carried and burned

Poem

preacher to preacher's wife:
I'm sorry I need

understanding that's what

soloist to the sound man:
When we
attached a tape recorder

to my failings, we recorded
over your successes

usher to the others:
The ceiling is healing

into an open wound

born-again to the unborn:
Where the tape is

I can hear what the hell is

Steeple People

1.
Here's the church
 Here's the people
 Open up your
 a) hearts
 b) purses
 c) wallets
 d) all of the above

 we need a new steeple

2.
Here's the organist
 Here she's calling
Street-people in the
fellowship hall
 A Room in the Inn

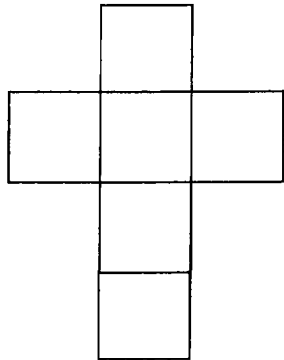
Becoming, meeting one's end
 or maker

3.
With each donation, a name
will be etched onto one of
six glass panes

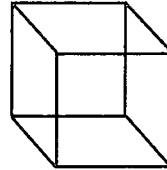
4.
Hug n' Howdy Time
Revival, Prayer Request
Offertory Hymn
Responsive Reading
Profession of
 Faith
Might near everything can
be called

5.

What will we call



when it



and is buried in the spire

6.

Here are the children
Here they're singing
Do lord o do lord o
Do you remember me
Nothing is called
to my knowledge

a room in one's end
or maker

As Rich as Croesus

Call the cracks creases
In Roman Holiday, workers
putty the cathedral steps
Eliza Doolittle splays across

In America, an eight-teen year old
creases a map of Ethiopia, coerced
by her father to holiday
in Italy, where she searched steps for

putty, but instead finds cracks
*I wanted Atticus Finch's suit
to stride through that square
to sweat through my creases*

Eliza to Higgins: an inhuman
noise of cell phones sending lip
puckered pics. I crack and reply
screen captured Doolittle Peck g'nite

Snapper Jessiessippi

For good news spreading
commerce leaves need

The further he went out
of his mind, gathering
influence, the deeper
upon returning home

he tills the jukebox
With enough pressure
to make mirrors
into believers, he sings:
The south is the oldest place
on earth. It has been in
the Wal-Mart the longest

Aux Animaux Domestiques
after Michel Foucault

to be –
gin with

the thought that bears the stamp of
an age: the wild profusion of existing
things. An embalmed
et cetera. Having just
broken the water pitcher, my
saliva speaks,

*What has been removed
in short, is the famous
operating table*

*Utopias afford no real locality
and so the slick mind*

stirs under our feet

Propinquity

after Renee Gladman

While the world slept, they robbed us blind

Each to each, a community
renames itself disaster relief:
“even our thieves lost everything”

Looking out for the uninterrupted
drone of clothes that somehow
talk all at once in a salt shaker of
sound, people movers, so fast
we catch ourselves

wanting cologne to pour from
a radio. Call it Sex Machine

Call it snake hole, where
when I was a child, I ran a garden hose
remembering a boy done in by syringe
filled with air

The mob mentality only works if one of us is spared
Ezra P. to Michael V.

W.E. Guide
Tallahatchie County

One could confuse
the hyacinth ablaze
of its own accord
and the child's head engulfed
as the center. Trees
at their varicose best
pumping nothing into the air
save the slightest scent of
his leaving, unyielding
honesty and eyeglasses
tubes up the nose
the breathing machine
does not make air
its icy embouchure
sticks to my vision
proof they touched
and tore
us lidless

W.E. Guide
Tallahatchie County

A cropped cloud
and a sense of what is there to see here
once I stops looking, a sign that says nothing
reads King Cotton Beverage Co Inc
and another Open and another too
small to make out. Water tower
and the idea of today stands taller
the closer you get to it. Before it gets too high
tie a string to the stem
long enough to soak up the bridle-deep blood
of military personnel: a hell I once saw
described in a unisex bathroom

Someone etching a bible verse
which someone comes upon later
and adds only in the south
would you find a bible verse
on the stall and I cannot help
but add another level of removal, etching
only in the south a person references the south
as an etc, etc, string that makes the mind bearable

Crutchfield saw this spot on his dead friend's chest
where the treatment still eats, unlike a cigarette
butt, the color of one still crying, searching
for its bearings with the light that shimmers up.
Spare change at the bottom of a brim fed pond.
Fill a flowerpot with water
and somebody's sure
to empty their pockets into it

if I were you might not have
left

children outside
after dark
means in the dark
*I say awkward **awkward***
you say it
AWEkWORD
AGAIN *I got you **AGAIN***
a thousand years of death

to be put into
the hands of mystery
move not a muscle
in the effort of
relocating heaven and earth

Keys thrown upon finding out
I was afraid I shattered
a mirror or scuffed the
floor in professor's house you
were sitting

to pick up the pieces
pick apart from either/or
image/sound
heaven/earth

in either/and
an orange
is the being peeled off

the lint trap
slipped I's mind
so succinctly

so I pulls
wet clothes from the dryer

Heathen

Cold, the sparrow curses in treble clef.
The florist has one arm and can't
remember how the lime kiln hands down
lime. The dark dries brighter than the hill
-top temple, Gnostic movie theater
where everything gets old if you do it
often enough. On sanctuary steps, a boy
throws himself down a forged hymn.
This is where locals splurge their bones
into the lake and tradition eats them.
This is where I wash my face

Percy Priest

Early so that when dreams are divvied out
you get the one where you recognize
your mother. A man stands near
the first remove, going on about head injuries
and light coming from the operator's shed.
It hurts listening to him
the pain of grapes swallowed whole,
the memory of our flat chests sepia-toned

in sopping baptismal robes. Come June
I will return to the peace sign we carved
into that mulberry branch. By then,
it will have healed into a snake. He asks
if I think they use current from
the dam or if the operator has his own
generator inside. This is
the government we're talking about

Young Avenue Napkin

In the bassinet of shiver, I pull
money out of a machine, supple
as wrapping paper smoldering
in a barrel, where hair singes
the way lightning starts
on earth, retreats to sky, the way
the balance on my account
escapes into the registers
of all the omens I polish off

Arise, Shine

Armature in the peripheries,
a house pointing east with windows
so hot humans wake on beds
stripped bare. None of them
went to college, one was held hostage
as a child by her father. T, according
to T's son, spoke of drunks breaking
and entering, turning the old place
into a club house. In the repose
of running a still, playing cards catch
fire, and a muralist's daughter retraces
her steps from factory farm to family
tree. Where did I leave my keys?

Armature in the peripheries,
his idea of Eden was spider eggs
strung from ceiling to ceiling fan.
Some organs of sight are not, he'd insist,
needle but thread, so we kneel
where the land revives your name.
Strewer of synapses. Flipper of switches.
The silt around your eyes sparkles
when she listens. Who is to blame
if I wait to wash the feet of the dead
till they are dead and have no need
for feet? Sand gets into everything
the televised speech, the roaring drunk.

Crazy Eights

We are accustomed to hearing small children,
but the one he ran over in his car was quite large
Divorced his wife – started over with a comb

and a son. So I hear the women
squeal away the mirror's fog
licking the chaffs of their palms

I'd wager half of all baptisms
are do-overs. Men watching
brico blocks in broad daylight

Quiet, his mouth and flagship tattoo
point to shock therapy
and the small engines it leaves in disrepair

W.E. Guide
Huntsville, Alabama

Still a photographer behind this war
with the obvious, still the sun streams
another way behind us both. The closest
elms burgeon sweaty and bright

Amending what we cannot say
with what they let us see; tree non-tree
yesterday, the Air National Guard uprooted

Their search lights and chain link, and now
there is a shadow called rustling, and now
there is a swarm of catfish days spent reading:
treatise on the breeding pains that snap

the bough. Oceanic chamber pot hissing
with song I has never heard, moves
I because it touches memory purposefully

A man in company clothes
wiping dust from the nape
of a retired jet fighter

Oil spots make him think of weather
Glory,
I will wait for you by the vending machines

Skill & Live

After the new wore off, their children began
adding and taking words away, learning
how it was cults were made, how the same fingers
ape rock, paper, scissors, can pluck the flame
right off the wick, believing if it's ripe enough
if you're just that slick, you can eat the bud

In an exit-ramp-abandoned Ford, they breathe
smoke. Memory of sleep escapes as they empty
their pockets, trying to remember
the book before they monkeyed with it
Visitors linger in the hospital's
parking garage till the storm passes by
Heaven, one says, has us pegged

W.E. Guide

Black Bayou Plantation, near Glendora, Mississippi

Gypsy pigeons gone to pieces
in the revolving doors
are not pictured

The white floors at my back breathe
swaddling T through
their strapping arms

White jugs on a gravel drive
a hitch in my giddy-up, rackabone
in my throat

The last thing he ate, snack cakes
and spare ribs from the hospital
vending machine, clings

to love's loud unprotected limn
Stinking of tomorrow's rain
the clouds foam at the mouth

W.E. Guide
Tallahatchie County

In heat, those who cling
to guns and religion return
to decorate the graves
For Christ's sake, Charles
in his paid-cash Cadillac
pulls quarters from ears
and keeps them

Traw is a purple heart,
holds forth by creak bed
His shadow felled
clear cross barbwire
What's burnt into the retina
believe you me
will always be there
in the middle of the air

W.E. Guide
Gulfport, Mississippi

A woman knows
when her hairnet
has fallen into
the grinder. Fingers
wring through her
permanent. She
knows someone
will have to pay
for the thousand
pounds of pig
that will rot
in the jungle
of dumpsters

A boy sneaking up
on a sleeping dog
stamps as hard as he can
on the rock where
the stray sprawls

The sky has seen it all
once, and we
are there
when the farmer
rifles her open
and the boys come
running up a hill
to hear how he had
to do it, how he had
no idea what could
have scared
that dog that crazy

I don't know what
to tell you, Virginia
cept keep looking

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