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## Exploding Aliens and Other Offspring

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Exploding Aliens and Other Offspring

By

Jonathan Grant, B.F.A

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
Stephen F. Austin State University  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements

For the Degree of  
Master of Arts

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2018

Exploding Aliens and Other Offspring

By

Jonathan Patrick Grant, B.F.A

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## *ABSTRACT*

The goal of *Exploding Aliens and Other Offspring* is to capture my specific surrealist world point of view provided by the closed-knit crazy community I grew up in alongside my love for cartoonish melodrama. The collection progresses in order of images and the evolution of such themes as the venture from childhood to adulthood, societal obligations, religion, parenting, death and the hereafter.

## *ACKNOWLEDGMENTS*

My deepest appreciation goes out to the English and Creative Writing Department for not only introducing me to an art form but through a variety of courses help me hone it. My own personal world view and attention to detail has forever been altered, in a positive way, and I am glad that because of these courses I can see the poetry not only on paper but in the world we live in. I want to thank Dr. Marsden, Dr. Smith, and Dr. John McDermott for taking time out of their busy schedules to serve on my thesis committee.

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**I.**

## **The Midnight Movie**

We spent mornings cackling over a Canadian outfitted Elmer Fudd chasing Bugs Bunny through snow, Wile E. Coyote getting shot out of cannons and Daffy Ducky saying "it's rabbit season." It wasn't until that night when we watched from the crease of our seemingly closed bedroom door, Father's flesh and blood movie of shaved-head boot campers getting yelled at in words we'd never known but laughed at because that's what father did. It was TV the way we never seen it real. We were tantalized. And as that shaved head man raised the gun up to his head we told ourselves what to expect.

But no cloud of smoke came from the barrel like Elmer's gun. Instead a loud flash that caused our eyes to wince and ears deafen. The soldier wasn't left with a soot-covered face, a mouth wrapped around his head that needed realignment. There was nothing there, his head dissolved into a red mist of flesh, teeth and hair. We sat for what felt like hours waiting for a translucent outline of his self in a white gown to ascend from his body, playing the harp all the way up to a light opening in the sky. We looked at each other, realizing things are not the way they seem.

## **The Drive-in**

2018 becomes 1954 when I fly through my car windshield—  
a chorus of Queen's the vibration of shattered glass—  
screeching tires turn to cricket chirps, mute  
at the American Drive-In Theater. I hear

shuffling fingers dancing in popcorn buckets and lovers  
smacking lips on the floorboard of their convertibles while rows  
upon rows of Buicks turn off their headlights. A static of hisses,  
pops and fading credits followed by an orchestration  
of trumpets and violins, introducing The Red Nose Samurai,

the star of the film. He snuffles in the rice fields, circled by  
a pink tornado of cherry blossom petals and my father holds  
me up to say "Look son, look what they have done." I think  
of the director yelling "action!" The samurai is battle-worn.

His katana is chipped, the handle damaged. The moments he runs  
his arm across his runny nose is when he seems most human.  
My father's eyes never leave the screen. Towards the end, he places  
his hand on my head and whispers something to me which gets  
drowned away from audience members cheering at the gore.

We never get to see how the movie ends. The samurai is about  
to reveal his deepest darkest secret when an expanding circle  
of flame engulfs the screen.

I wait by the door every night waiting for him to come  
home. I imagine he left the house to scour the drive-ins  
to find out how the movie ends to come back to tell me.

But he never does. The days I run my arm across my  
runny nose are eventually replaced with shoulder shrugs  
and head shakes. On rainy days I see him  
drowned in a ditch and when the skies clear, I see him  
on a yacht raising drinks with a smile.

My skull bounces off of the pavement back to the present  
and I know I will die not ever knowing anything.

## **The Samurai of the Town East Mall**

Eyes closed, ankles submerged in the penny fountain,  
the Latex Flesh Man meditates on his surroundings

with his hand on the hilt of his katana, swiping at all  
the *Seventh Heaven Hot Dog* bun sleeves fluttering around

him on tiny twirling gusts of howling winds twisting  
into tunnel formation every time mall customers walk

through the automatic doors. He dances, the tips of his  
toes gently dipping in the water, barely leaving a ripple,

not disturbing the pennies below. He gives private lessons,  
fifteen dollars an hour. It used to be Primary Man

who taught the mall goers through uncoiled bushido  
scrolls how to write their name in calligraphy

on their divorce papers and how to write a haiku  
about your lonely estranged neighbor that takes

your empty Campbell's cans from your trash  
and how to properly permeate your tea

with the accurate amount of hallucinogens to warrant a  
second sip and how to incapacitate that man or woman

in your office who is also running for partner.  
But Primary Man has been replaced by a faultless

Automaton that requires no sleep, experiences no fatigue  
and asks for no money. That's why Primary Man sulks

in the food court with a man who used to set the pins  
at the local bowling alley, an accountant who got replaced

with a calculator app, and a man wiping hamburger grease  
off his mouth with a bunched up white lab coat who bears

a startling resemblance to Primary Man's old doctor.  
With the katana's hilt in hand, he rises to avenge their honor:

*He will get our jobs back!* Chest and shoulders broad, he  
lets the mall silence set the scene. The customers don't dare

gulp. Those at the food court slowly rise, eyes fixed, chewing  
their lower lips. Sweat skis down Primary Man's sloping

forehead and drips off the tip of his nose, splashing in the  
fountain. Then, the precise soundless swipe of Automaton's

blade cleaves his chest. Just like that he is submerged, head  
first, into the water, dispersing the pennies below. Those

at the food court drop their gaze. High pitch screeching  
of dragged chairs can be heard as they sit back down.

Primary Man awakes to see a flying chrome sphere. It says  
it is his doctor. "You sure are a lucky one," it tells him.

It doesn't take it long for it fix him up and send him off his way.  
So Primary Man leaves, his broken katana his cane.

He heads back to the mall with his last fifteen dollars in hand,  
scar across his chest.

## **Conscious of a Tin Can Man**

Tin Can Man, cousin of the seagulls,  
you looked fatigued holding up your catfood muscle  
and hollow tincan bone by your cracked coat hanger  
scoliosis spine. Yet, daily you polish  
the piles of dross you rest upon.

All of them smiling, surrounding you,  
giving you what you always wanted.

In time your audience will no longer just be the cawing  
gull circling. Paddle your landfill to the city  
shores and show them what you can do, you  
starving artist, show them who you are,  
find what you have been looking for

in vain. The world needs you to speak,  
Tin Can Man. But I warn you, soon-to-be  
bloated artist, when the answer to your S.O.S  
comes (in the form of you kissing the cheek  
of your wife who tickles and raspberries  
the bellies of your children), I will be  
ashamed to see you comfortable  
in your new found flesh and bone.

In that time,  
your figurines may be made of platinum  
but they frown and cry tears of grease  
and smell of old banana peels. I beg  
you, for my survival, to follow the seagulls  
back home and nose dive in the filth.  
Backstroke through broken glass, damaged  
water heaters, and rusted car bumpers  
and let their rigged corners unpeel that  
false skin and tissue you're hiding underneath  
and stare at yourself in the broken microwave  
windows. Stare at yourself and remember  
who you are or grab your onesie skin suit  
and leave all your trash behind.

## Leftovers

This rundown wooden building, covered under the shadow of a chrome city, roofs ending near floating satellites, has long since lost its name. It houses the last remaining skin men who every morning climb to the steeple and ring the bell. This is their mating call. They want to impregnate those above with the chimes of the old world, the part of ourselves we left behind.

Sometimes stragglers exiled from the chrome buildings walk by in their loosened magnetic ties and attempt to talk to one another about their day and go to the bar to watch the fights and dig gardens and sing songs and hold hands and feel pain and make love.

As pieces of moon crash through roofs. We ask ourselves *How much higher can we make our cities? What is up there that we aim to reach?* It is a vacuum. Utter silence. Robbed of color. No birds to wake us up in the morning or cicadas to caw us back to sleep at night. *Can we even remember the feeling of a wind's breeze passing over our skin?* Our eyes have been replaced with sixteen Watt light bulbs and our torsos with fifty-five gallon oil drums. We keep plugged in to stay alive and when we want a son or daughter we fashion one together from broken appliances found in dumpsters. We aren't what we were born to be anymore.

But that's okay. It's not too late to find a silent corner and let the vibration of the bell chimes cause the ghost of us to remember who we were and pretend who we were meant to be.

## King Ramses in Neo Egypt 2077

The pharaoh gasps for air in his sarcophagus and claws from his tomb, an undiscovered pyramid lost in the sand, to a titanium fogcity of strobing neon lights and auto flying cars. Multicolored-mohawked, sand-freckled, pierced face teens change their sex on the fly with the press of a button. Speeding by, they mock the red robot eye and circuit exposed chrome cybernetic appendages of a survival-stricken ex-marine, who only has a cheek of flesh left. He siphons electricity from exposed wires of a street corner vending machine,

where wannabe parents amalgamate a collection of their favorite genetics on a drag and drop touch screen to make the baby of their dreams. Upon pressing the blinking *Complete Your Purchase* tag, the baby rolls out of the bottom along with their pocket change.

Fumbling over cracked sidewalks, the pharaoh wonders where he is, not knowing he rests against where his father first taught him how to draw and shoot a bow and arrow, now the herbal cookie bakery, tagged with C'thulhu graffiti.

Or that the foundation of the illuminated stadium in the distance—where the greatest brains of 2077 (soaking in a green glass jars of preservatives) wrestle in a battle of wits—was the steamrolled mud-and-straw home of his best friend, a comedian, who owned a blind camel he claimed could see better than the rest.

And oblivious, the pharaoh sees his own great great great great great great grandson playing pretend in the last lot of grass, shaded by the world's last tree, a place where the boy will grow to be a man, see change, and die and grow unrecognizable again.



## **The New Land**

In the Buc-ee's my nephew's heart sinks to the soles of his feet. It is unrecognizable. This is not the same place the corner store once stood. Where his father worked the counter and he, after school, played on the arcade machine, in the back, by the ATM's and slot machines. It's all gone; no fossil records preserved in the soil underneath, just nothing. He says we have to go and I tell him to stay, to learn. When I was a kid this was all trees, a small creek ran through that my father used to fish. Big fish, could swallow your hand in one bite. Tough fish, could easily snap your line if you weren't careful. Orphaned fish, dropped by birds, whose parents talked of swimming in ponds, whose parents talked of lakes, whose parents talked of oceans, whose parents talked of change and how they needed it to appreciate what they had.

## Obsolete

The neighbor boy in diapers  
is juggling his father's lawn  
mower and his dog and my car  
and while he practices speaking  
French, his third language, I realize  
I'm late for work, again. Back in  
my day we could hardly bend  
a spoon over our knee and now  
teens in diners bend them with  
their minds to impress the waitresses.  
Out of the womb, my nephew shot  
electricity from his little infant finger  
tips and my boss's sister is in the E.R  
for third degree burns from flying  
too close to the sun. I'm am the old  
model of the new world and I am  
happy to see them pass me by. Grow  
till your head wears the clouds like  
a crown and live to be buried by  
your grandson's grandsons. Become  
the last model and go back in time  
to run circles around Christ, suffering  
on the cross and watch yourself  
become obsolete.

## Lazarus

The Old Lady in 4b with glassy cloud eyes and carpal tunnel raptor wrists is playing piano again in the room right above my recliner and I can't hear John McClane say "Yippee-ki-ya, Motherfucker" over her cringe-worthy performance and wrongly timed whole and half notes which leak through my damped ceiling.

My loft is showered and umbrella weighed down by refrains that pop on impact like bubbles in a horrendous squeal which causes my cat to put her head in the oven as the television screen jumps off the fire escape into the alley dumpster. The piano finally stops and I curse with my fist up, "Goddamn piano sounds like bagpipes!"

It won't always be like this, one day the old lady's eight and sixteenth notes will fall gently down like snowflakes. I will close my umbrella to catch one on the tip of my tongue and when the note pops on impact I will hear the younger, fetal, me sing Ave Maria inside my mother's womb as if possessed by Alessandro Moreschi as well as the carving of sestinas etched onto my umbilical cord where I used to strum Jimmy Page guitar solos to pass the time. I was a prodigy. The next goddamn man to walk on water. But I kept telling myself I'll start tomorrow and before I knew it fourteen thousand five hundred and sixty tomorrows passed.

But that one day I taste her sound I will get up to go change the world like I was always meant to. The ceiling will cave in and I will taste mahogany and dust bunnies from the old lady's piano leg driven down my throat. She will try to call for an ambulance but in a gurgle I will tell her to play that last song again. From each key stroke I will feel the vibration of fourteen thousand five hundred and sixty days pulse through my body and I will cry tears that pop on the floor and say "Wow, I got it now."

## Slug Boy

Don't waste your salt on me like everyone else, it doesn't burn as much as they say. And no my father isn't a giant omnivorous slug man terrorizing Tokyo and my mother didn't find me under a rock in her garden. Look at me, I'm not even part slug, I was just born without any arms or legs. You don't have to be nervous for me I know the big race is tomorrow and don't call me brave. Call me a competitor, like all the others who oil the automobile engines growing out of their calves every night. It's my birthday but you don't need permission to dive in. I'm just going to sit here on this inflatable donut pool floaty and rest for tomorrow.

Should I be training for the race?  
Can't you see my phantom limbs suffer from atrophy?  
I never needed them. How come the waves you made from your rooftop cannonball feel condescending to me as I teeter totter in place? I can swim without arms and legs you know.

Ouch! You know you don't have to screw those pool noodles on my stumps so tight. I don't need them to paddle to the side. And why would I want to walk on land like you? I didn't wish for arms and legs when I blew out my birthday candles. My face isn't turning red because I am hoping to give birth through my stumps. I am just pissed you haven't noticed my calloused skin.

Keep a close eye on me tomorrow because when I cross the finish line first I will give birth, not to ten fingered or toed limbs, but to a pair of translucent wings which will splash color with every flap. I will use them to break from the earth's stratosphere and saddle naked on the back of stardust, my glistening sweat twinkling like tiny stars creating a trail of constellations taking form of John Merrick crucified on a cross of hydrogen and helium. Can't you tell I was never a slug, but a caterpillar, and that was always enough.

## **Master of Simulacrum**

The Master of Simulacrum can grow breasts,  
and sing windmills in my mind with a lisp.  
It reminds me how my dead wife used to hum  
in the shower after sex.

And his sweat glands sweat her sweat  
which compliments the morning breath she used to breathe  
to intoxicate me before her brush. He is a perfect version  
of her. A better version, one without her seizures and fatigue  
due to an enlarged tumor hanging off her frontal lobe.

I want to kiss him on the belly, coating little feet  
kicking from beneath, but that costs extra.

When I leave him and walk past the mile-long line  
of customers waiting to see him, a fatherless boy  
walks in with two baseball mitts followed by a dog  
who mimes the Master of Simulacrum to let him bark  
like he used to before his owner's pesky neighbors  
made the State remove his voice box.

The Master can be anything you need him to be.

When that long line dissipates the Master  
of Simulacrum will close down the shop  
for the day and return to his home in the multi-colored  
neon maze of funhouse mirrors in an abandoned carnival  
where he spends every waking minute searching  
for himself, ever-changing in the glass,  
hoping to remember who he once was.

## **Fishing Line**

I awake to a vibration, a Morse code shivering the marrow of my bones to a mush, telling me that, "Old man, today is the day." The three corpses of my brothers, breathless, mummified by the dry winds and salty air of the ocean, surround me. Their button eyes still scouring the water's surface for signs of an exposed fin and a dusty thumb and pointing finger clenching their fishing line.

We were born on this boat. Pinched the radio room's shag carpet between our infant toes. With our adolescent fingers fished out framed photographs, taken from people's homes by hurricanes and tsunamis, of beautiful young women. Lowered mother and then father into the calm sea. Grew old on this boat. Our home, *The Lonely Island*. And for what? To prove to the world that my father truly saw what he saw. A giant catfish known to swallow cruise ships whole and cause tsunamis by submerging, whose mucus-coated whiskers could turn anything gold.

The fishing line tightens as the gannets dive. Rain falls and dark thunderstorms expand across the sky. The sea tosses and turns as the silhouette of our father's passion jumps and suspends above us. It is half the size I imagined it to be and as it belly flops and drags the ship below to the sea floor by its whiskers, nothing I see it touches turns to gold.

I awake to a vibration, a Morse code shivering the marrow of my bones to a mush, telling me that, "Old man, you're on land." A miasma seasons the air. Hundreds surround the beached monstrosity of our father's day dreams. The crowd tells me it had destroyed my home and swallowed me whole, that a young man from a foreign land came in the night, caught it, eviscerated it, freeing me and smashed its head in before saying, "These things are pond scum. Not good to eat."

## Crab Man

The Crab Man charts the ocean waters,  
raised by fishermen he is both a brother  
and a cataclysm to all the critters and  
behemoths of undersea life. Today, he has regrettably  
given up his decapod sea legs. Sometimes  
he stares off into the distance  
with his compound eyes and wonders if he  
can just fall in. Be a crab like any other crab.

But the world depends on Crab Man. Who else  
would ride the high tide to the beach shores  
with enough fish for everyone to have their fill?  
Who would spit little bubbles for the children  
to pop with sticks and write parables in the sand  
learned from the old albino sperm whale?  
Who, at the day's end, would torpedo back into the ocean  
on his father's boat? He tells himself that he must  
get more fish before their bloated stomachs grumble  
again. It is with these responsibilities which drive  
the Crab Man.

Most of the time he dances on deck the way his  
ancestors did. At night, he wonders if any fish swim  
amongst the planets and the stars. In the mornings  
he polishes his priest tool at the sight of his catch  
and wonders why does it have to be this way, why  
does everything need to consume something in order  
to survive. He lands one blow, and then another. It's  
systematic at this point. He prays for the days when  
it took him hours to drop the mallet. Finally he sets sail  
for the beach shores, tired and looking for a way out.  
He feels the ocean's sinking. There isn't as much in it  
as there used to be. The seagulls on the rocks look starved.  
The wind whistles an old tune through their ribcage.  
Fishermen become extinct and boats reside beached on the shores.

People don't remember how to sail anymore. Children grow  
never having tasted the sea. The people ask the Crab Man  
what to do. If he cannot feed the people, then what good is he?

What is his purpose? Does he repopulate the oceans or burrow himself into the seafloor escaping expectation and gradually let the people forget about him. He knew there would come a time when the oceans dried and the only sign of sea life were depictions found in canvasses of the painter in the lighthouse. When that time comes

he will lower himself into a boiling pot.  
"Feast," he will say, buttered and broiled. He will be their messiah even though he knows that they will tell tales of his deeds but act no different as if Crab Man never existed at all.



## **The Squids**

Father lived his life by the instruction of his Magic Eight Ball. Anytime he was lost, he would get down on both knees and shake, whispering his prayers to it. It's how he met mother. Landed his six figure job. And why he died getting struck by lightning as he covered the sprout of a newly planted tree the Eight Ball chose him to guard at all costs. The entirety of my youth was watching him bash rabid dogs with full bladders in the head with a shovel, create cardboard box blockades for the off road elementary kids leaving school on their bikes, and keep a tight eye on our Vietnamese neighbor who was always jealous of the length and cleanliness of his hedges. Just to make sure the tree sprouted. At Father's funeral I told mother that he died for a dumb reason. She slapped me and said that he died for his reason for living. I live in the house now, the tree has grown tall and strong. The plumber tells me that its roots punctured the sewage line years ago and gradual deterioration is the reason my basement is flooded with piss and shit water. It will cost an arm and a leg to fix it and I lost my left arm in a mowing accident years ago avoiding the tree. I shake the dust off my father's Magic Eight Ball and whisper a prayer exactly how he used to. Emerging from the dark liquid below, the words "Do Nothing." I go to my basement to find the last remaining squid man and his squid wife with nowhere else to go. They smile and say "We'll take it!" Little squid kids coiled in their tentacles, who will grow to change the world.

## **The Plumber's Wife**

My plumber fell in love with my toilet.

He said he could hear his estranged deceased wife singing through it from the bumbling bubbles of toilet water popping at the surface.

I saw and heard nothing.

But I did see and hear him sneak through my tiny bathroom window at night to smash my toilet with a wrench just so I could call him in the morning to fix it.

"Just take it with you," I said. "She was your wife after all."

"Ex," he corrected me, gluing the porcelain of my toilet back together for the fifth time.

He did something and until her death was putting the pieces of themselves back together.

The last night he snuck in I hid in the shower and spoke into a handful of water saying "I forgive you."

I felt it was the right thing to do, advice given to me from my toaster which pops up burnt toast in the silhouette of my sister, who I miss dearly.

## **II.**

## **Shovel Knight**

### **I.**

The divorced husband digs the in-ground pool  
with shovel in hand. He never sleeps and only stops  
digging when he thinks he hears the backdoor squeak.

This pool is a welcome home present to an ex-wife who will  
never return. He hopes to surprise her with the one thing  
she always wanted. As he digs he imagines

she can hear the clunk of his shovel breach the earth  
and the shifting loose dirt thrown over his shoulder but she  
is tucked away in the arms of another man.

### **II.**

He has recently gone missing. When people ask his whereabouts  
they point to the endless hole in his backyard and say  
that he dug too far and ended up in the center of the earth

in a realm surrounded by flying dragons and a star headed princess  
who adored him above all else. He vanquished evil with the clunk  
of his shovel and was dubbed a knight, under the hand of a Rottweiler  
in shining armor.

### **III.**

At night, when the town is asleep, put your ear in the hole and don't  
breathe. If you're still you can hear a man clawing his way back up,  
burying all the possibilities behind. Still stuck on the idea of cementing  
this hole and filling it with water.

## **Trapped Knight**

A stretchable dime-sized wormhole of blue and white light ripples like the surface of a wind abused agitated pond under the desk in a yuppie's cubicle on Wall Street. Beyond this spiraling puddle, an unordinary world occupied by Spanish moss bearded trees who speak the wisdom of how everything came to be and heroes clad in steel who face feral creatures for glory and self-absorbed Gods who act more human than humans high above in the comfort of their clouds. The yuppie retrieves a blazing sword from the lady of the lake and rallies a band of rebels to overthrow the malice King, he has found his purpose. But he stays awake at night mesmerized by the doodles he made on sticky notes stuck to his computer screen of cat headed jazz musicians playing saxophones in a bar of mice headed audience members. And the morning discussions in the break room about whether Dora's silicone breast could float in water or watching the game at the bar with old high school friends who are enjoying the few hours away from a home of screaming children by spending it in a place of screaming drunken men. And his apartment filled with comfortable furniture and surround sound hooked up to a sixty-five inch television which plays movies that glamorize the life of being transported to another world filled with magic and turmoil. When he returns to his cubicle, a chrome rusted armored knight with two glinting fairies orbiting the crown of his head, he marvels at his world's mundanity hoping for a client to call his phone. The yuppie stays in his cubicle until he dreams of decapitating fire breathing dragons. The dime-sized door will never close behind him. He will never know who he is and never become who he was meant to be.

## **King Arthur**

Believe me! I am a born hero  
the man in the oak has told  
me so as he passed me brochures  
through the tree knot with prophecies  
written on the inside. Can't you see the  
sword engulfed in flames in my  
hand? The red haired lady  
in my guest toilet handed it to me.  
Mother don't listen to what they  
say about me and I know I look crazy  
in the middle of Manhattan fighting  
an invisible demon goat with a  
sword only I can see but stand  
behind me and feel the wind  
of each sword swipe brush your face.  
May my soul stand behind those  
who pick up my sword after I am gone.  
Let's believe in this nonsense together.

## The Queen of the Croaks

We're in love with the ghost  
of the Woods of Whiskey Bay,  
a seven-year-old child with Dandy  
Walker Malformation who bobs  
her enlarged head sac weighing  
down from her forehead. The  
opening whistling of *Patience* rises  
from her radio tucked in the front  
pocket of her denim overalls which  
masks the shine and optimism of her  
psychedelic colored coated angel-cat  
shirt. Every day we follow her  
as she blows hubba bubba bubbles  
down a railroad track tunneled by  
curved trees. She is queen of the  
croaks. We're a gang of dying kids  
who trade collectible comics and baseball  
cards for prescription drugs in a tree  
house behind the Spanish moss of  
a dead tree. It is here we cough our  
life away. It is here we wait.

We once found a shrunken shriveled  
God at the bottom of a pharmaceutical  
bottle. He told us he took a personal  
sabbatical to find himself. When we asked  
how heaven was doing he shrugged and said  
"I'll tell you if I ever run into such a place."

There used to be twelve of us, but now there are  
only four. All that's left of them is their signature  
and artwork carved into our tree. The locals  
tell us to grow up and go get a job, to make  
a living for ourselves. The world seems blind  
to what's going on.

We're asked the queen to marry us today.  
She said yes and joked that she will  
give birth to zombie children. We tell her

if you do, let them loose on  
the world to remind them that they will  
rot someday and even now we are nothing  
but walking corpses.



## Parenting

The Honeycombed King has become  
a kingdom to pacifist insects  
which burrow deep in the hexagonal  
hollow cell-formed skin pockets  
of his chest, back and forehead.

They grow sheltered  
from the realities of the world  
and await their daily feast of red sap  
bled from the trunk  
of the dragon's blood tree

which fills the Honeycombed King's  
honeycombed openings  
which makes him a piñata  
to the venomous babadoosh  
whose snapping jaw he must counter

with sword, its toxins spiraling  
from its nostrils with shield.  
The Honeycombed King fights day in  
and day out yet the critters  
never know and are shielded

from his fatigue and the fear  
of his face saying he cannot go on,  
though he does his job  
and does it well, it is a sticky,  
sappy, hell.

## **Raising Kids**

On top of the Black Stone of Mecca, Mother Teresa stares at the crowd with dozens of atom-sized human fetii floating in the cornea of each eye. They look like pocket-sized Jesuses or Muhammads with their little beards.

The crowd assumes those soon-to-be men and women floating in her head are to be the saviors of the world. What child that is birthed through the eyes isn't special and what child whose mother is Mother Teresa and father the Church gives us reason to doubt their prominence?

But how was the crowd to know that the children who hatched from the eyes and crawled out of skull would amount to a chain smoking gang of Nihilists and that their true savior would hail from a small country town in Texas, birthed in a trailer home from an infected bunion of a foot attached to trailer trash that was told wouldn't amount to anything.

## **Golf Story**

I, with my bent subpar driver, have never not made a hole in one. I am told I will become the best golfer anyone had ever seen. As I set to drive in, the best man wins the tournament those in green jackets shake to a puddle in their Spikeless Balboa Vents. Afraid of what I can do. My caddy hugs me and the cheering spectators lose their heads in the man-made water hazard at the sight of my 9th hole in one today, this one on a par five. As the noise dies down and I approach the swaying red flag a small cry echoes from inside the hole. A termite sized baby boy with my blue eyes and black hair has hatched from my golf ball. I place him in my hand and let him suck at the tips of my fingers. They all tell me I have three holes left. I tell them I no longer exist and we head home.

## Monster Birth

I ask the doctor what's wrong with my wife  
and he tells me that she is pregnant and the  
amorphous black goo of tendrils worming  
it's way around my wife's belly is my child.  
I tell him he can't be right. I tell him it isn't  
human. Can't be good for us. He tells me a  
single woman came in a few years ago not knowing  
the father and gave birth to an illuminating egg  
that he cracked open on the edge of his mobile  
stainless steel tray, his very own sterile anvil.  
Sparks flew in each direction like shooting  
stars. The egg cracked and liquid light spilled  
out, a baby boy hidden underneath with tiny  
dove wings appeared. He cried ballads that  
healed all in hospice and eyes were the twin  
sisters of the north star that had the doctors  
and nurses blinking away their flash blindness.  
He was the most beautiful child the hospital  
had ever seen. And his mother cuddled him  
with affection.

That same child, the doctor tells me, died  
of lethal injection two months ago.

The Doctor pats me on the shoulder and tells  
me to feel lucky about my amorphous dough  
child, he has no form, he can be molded  
into anything.

## **Twinkling Little Star**

I plucked a star from the buckle  
of Orion's belt and brought it to you.

That is why I have melted away  
and this is my ectoplasm stuck

to the soles of your shoes. I did  
not mean for my gift to char your

hands. How was I supposed to know,  
it doesn't look hazardous twinkling

so far away.

## **Humpty Dumpty**

In the dirt Humpty Dumpty sat all day,  
boiling in the hot sun and hardening  
through the chill of the night playing  
his violin for flicked shimmering coins  
from guilt stricken passersby. Those  
who paid high penny wanted to hear  
him stop. For his blistered round fingers  
worming through the threaded yarn  
encasement of his worn down gloves  
did not produce pleasantness but  
indigestion. The citizens labeled him  
a disturbance to the standard of living.  
But Humpty played on, happy with his  
results, getting better day by day,  
little by little.

Years and years passed.

In honor of his progress the villagers  
all took bricks from their homes and  
built a little wall for him to sit upon.  
Three feet and then one of twelve feet,  
then fifteen, and twenty-seven, and sixty- two.  
He was presented gloves spun of golden  
fibers made by the miller's daughter. They  
waxed his outer shelling so its glistening  
outline made him stand out to the kingdom  
like an animated constellation. He was  
gifted a new violin bow carved from  
juniper into the talons of a beautiful blue jay.

Local children grabbed stick and stone  
and pranced through meadows pretending  
to play hypnotic symphonies that caused  
others to follow in a straight line. At the base  
of his brick wall, a valiant tailor opened up  
shop giving out eccentric lessons  
to aspiring musicians stating that he was the one  
who taught Humpty how to play the violin.

Soon none could see Humpty. They could only hear his music fall upon all the king's horses and all the kings' men. The wall had become too tall. It waved back and forth and tipped. Humpty crashed into the town square and his scrambled-self covered the villagers.

Sad at his ultimate departure the villagers could not help but lick the yolk, shoveling egg into the corners of their mouths, reveling in its taste as they turned their heads to a stranger entering town: a young woman carrying a lark that was struggling to sing.

### **Little Old Man Who Lives in My Shoe**

A little old man, with a bandage covered bag, camps in the sole of my size thirteen shoe wondering where his little daughter went. He looks high in my dresser and low under my bed but she is nowhere to be found. At night I can smell cooked beans and see smoke escaping my shoe and see flames swaying back and forth to the fading sound of a little harmonica being played. One night after looking through the fur on the crown of my dachshund he tells me that the little daughter used to have a pet tick that she taught to shake hands. "She was so smart," he tells me. "She just went to sleep and never woke up," he also tells me. In a world so big to him, he ventured out on a rumor, from a wise man just a little bigger than him, that the missing piece which made her operate and flare her nostrils in laughter like only she can could be found in my bedroom. I don't stop him but instead look at all those around me and begin building a little homemade rocket from a milk carton in my backyard just in case I ever have to send the little man home with his even littler daughter.



### **III.**

## **Charlie**

Charlie was born with bent legs and a broken mind. My father couldn't find use for him so he tossed him off of the top of the barn to land on a pile of past broken calf bones like how Spartans in movies did with their newborn broken offspring. But Charlie did not break. He simply swam to the surface of the bone and mooed and swiped with his tail at kamikaze horse flies diving in for a bite. My mother saw it as a sign from God. My father saw it as a sign of himself getting older. So my father tied the calf to an old oak tree twenty acres deep in the woods surrounded our house. He figured young, hungry coyotes wouldn't make the same mistake he did. By morning Charlie was at our doorstep covered in coyote blood and clothed in the skin of a mountain lion. As my mother bathed Charlie my father could hear us laugh at all the quirks of him. The way he splashed in the tub with his bent limbs or sucked on the faucet like it was his mother's teat. My father one day had passed out mowing. He awoke at the shore of his pond, head elevated, and Charlie damping his forehead with a wet rag. My father went into the house and told mother that his name was Charlie. Excited to get to know him, father walked outside with a glass of milk devastated to find Charlie lying dead at the edge of the pond. Then the back door opened and my younger brother ran out, stumbling over his bent legs, slowing down so not to cause his weak heart to race, running to a father he always wanted to know, a father who couldn't decide if he should turn to embrace him or leave his back turned.

## **Baby Armed Spartan**

A Bullied Boy stumbled onto the grave of the Baby Armed Spartan and yelled him back to life.

—Boy, was it you? Was it you who called me back? asked the Baby Armed Spartan.

The Bullied Boy said, With your right arm so small, what can you do to help me?

—Nothing, I died in my first battle, the thrust of my spear just out of arm's reach, said the Baby Armed Spartan.

—As I thought. Crawl back on your shield in the dirt. You don't want to fail a second time, do you? said the Bullied Boy.

—Fail? I suppose I will not lean so heavily on unrealities and ignorance this time, said the Baby Armed Spartan.

—It's hard to find the inspiration in you, so don't fabricate it. If you were standing in my shoes the feeling would be mutual. Point me into the direction of the hero they say who rests here, the Phantom Armed Spartan whose reach extended his spear over oceans, who stood fast, alone in front of an army of thousands, who rallied the Spartans to victory!

—Are those the stories they told of me? asked the Baby Armed Spartan as he lowered himself back into his grave.

## Way to Fall

When I was born the doctor bolted  
my left hand to my father's and right  
to my mother's, like any other child.  
When my mother died, father and I  
dragged her everywhere until the bone  
of her hand broke down around the bolt  
and she fell behind. She is a phantom  
weight to us and father, like mother,  
is sick. Mother would always smile  
and tell me to keep my head out of the  
clouds and watch my footing. Without her  
here, stuck to my hand, watching my  
every step, I fell into a hole. I hung,  
suspended in air, by father's wrist. He  
coughed a smile and tore his arm off  
letting me go. He coughed another smile  
and said, "Boy, now that's a way to fall."  
I begged for him to pull me out but he just  
walked away. By the time I crawled out I  
was already a man. Father's bones could be  
seen a few yards from the hole. His skull smiling  
at me, comfortably knowing that I would hate  
him for the rest of my life. But all better for it.

## Teach

As a child, my most prized possession was a six-inch action figure rendering of Blackbeard the pirate, from a Burger King Happy Meal,

complete with his iconic black scallywag hat associated with red colored tips under its rim to signify struck matches.

On my bean bag he stayed during school hours scaring off my mother's devilish cat with sling of three peach colored plastic pistols slung over his shoulder.

In the bathtub I placed bubbles in the breech of his miniature Queen Anne's Revenge as I pretended, in a galley tactic, to sink and zigzag through a militia of British ships

helmed by Lieutenants Donald Duck and He-Man. I bragged how he was my hero, the man I wanted to grow up to be. But the truth is I never knew Teach.

It wasn't until I was an adult that I was told not gold doubloons, but a pile of rusted syphilis syringes were found in his sunken ship. Or when he docked

to see his beloved, he forced his crew on her as he mulled over which of them to shoot in the back as a reminder that he was in charge. In bars he preached "Heaven

isn't a golden trimmed cloud city but, escorted by Mephistopheles, a dark locus of thunder storms that encompass a drowsy squid who dreamt me into being.

I outgrew every childhood notion. And as I buried it along the sand the birds above sang their dirge."

## Goat Hermit

I left behind the coterie of Ferragamo shoe and tie wearing Wall Street VPs who dust the shoulders of their Zegna suits and the consistent car honking and rising steam of the city which crowded little Chinatown for a cabin isolated in rolling green hills like a cactus in the desert shadowed by a bent tree. I am a hermit who lives off goat milk. It is here I meditate my days away to the force of a virgin two-fisted wind untouched by anything but the overgrown hair covering my face. It is peaceful here, detached from the animated world of corporate take-overs, hypocritical religions, texts and the cultural trends set by social media. I understand now where the Buddhist monks are coming from. So why is it that when I meditate I see no glimpse of a Nirvana inhabited by palm raised and stuffed gut Buddha but instead a dire wolf thirsting for my goats locked up in the pen. I want a reason to dust off the antique blunderbuss hung over the fireplace. Come back to life wolf and don't worry, I won't aim for your heart but right above your head. I don't want to kill you just scare you off for the night so I may await your return, to pose again, man with gun.

## **Guns and Myths**

The local wildlife limps to boiling streams with blisters and singed fur coats. My heart rate picks up as I wince at the salty sweat swimming down my forehead. A brazen gleam bounces off my corneas. I rub my brow with my forearm back and forth to find relief. It is hot. But I have water and I am far enough hidden behind a pop up stand, dressed in fire-retardant materials to not feel the full effects of the heat emanating from the last remaining Crimson Lion.

He licks his paws and shakes embers free from his mane of spiraling blue flames. He chars the weeds and isolated trees of the Asiatic Gir Forest to a rolling hills of ash. This majestic blackguard stands twenty feet tall and roars like an erupting volcano. It is a survivor from a time of bastard heroes' kin to Gods who faced the club swinging Cyclops snoring cyclones in his sleep. Or the three headed Cerberus who salivated acid from the tips of his snarled tree-trunk-sized canines.

My ancestors used to hunt such beasts with a bow and a sword which had been passed down to them from father to father. It took skill, cunning, and the gods' favor to slay such monsters and even then the hunters failed. Like my ancestor engulfed in flames of the first Crimson Lion. I am not like them. My brawn and brain does not match their own nor do I possess the physique to drag a man-eating hog into the dirt by its tusks. And I don't have a flying Pegasus to navigate through a barrage of snapping Hydra jaws. But I have a gun. And where I am hidden in the distance all it takes is for my scrawny arm to pull back the bolt, point and shoot, like Zeus throwing his lightning down, from the safety in the clouds.

## Monster

The delectable eight-eyed Thing From Beyond the snow peaked mountain ranges and behind the crystal clear lakes had carried the child for fifty miles. Chased by a cohort of law enforcement officers, local worried husbands and wives and able-bodied vagrants they passed along the way. The Things are known for being kind, soft-spoken in their own way. They treat one another with respect. Never hurt their own. They have families where they raise their young to hold the old. The young, through bedtime stories and exaggerated stage plays, are told of peasant Things becoming king Things as they snuggle in their webbed nests of twigs and branches and baby foxes.

Knowing this we grab them, skin them for their tasteful back straps, and their thick fur to shield us from winter and tie their elephant sized tusks, dipped into the acid winked from their eyes, to the end of a stick.

This is why we are not angry when we find the child the way he is. We just shake their tendril hands and promise ourselves will get one of them next time.



## **Alien Hominid**

I have an alien in my basement; a bug-eyed little green man who flies around in a chrome saucer, which he crashed in my silo. I pulled him from the grain and dusted him off, put a wet rag on his forehead and slowly gave him water. My wife asks why nurse the thing back to health especially since he skeletonized the president with a zap from his death ray. I tell her because the world is at peace now. So don't die now our intergalactic marauder. If you should pillage and plunder and deliver us to the Promised Land, my double barrel is in my pick up, the keys are here. Keep the butt of the gun tucked tightly to your shoulder and rest your cheek on it easy. Be careful now, it kicks.

## **Dream Catcher**

In a world next to our world, the armless gunslinger spends all day and all night in a cave shooting whiskey bottles lined in a row on the edge of a mine cart wrecked on its side off a railroad track. The gun's trigger is tightly squeezed between his big and long toe. Before long the bottles are shattered and he takes aim at the fleeing mice. Then he walks outside to take aim at the flying birds. Then the salivating wolves and screeching mountain lions. He is training to be the world's best gunslinger and to do that he needs to outdraw the Four Armed man who spits sunflower seeds on top of the mountain who is said to never have taken a practice shot. But that's what the armless gunslinger is counting on. He has experienced it all and as he goes through town on horseback the locals stop what they are doing and flood the streets to possibly witness a living legend pass by. And he makes it to the top of the mountain and as his big toe rubs against the handle of his revolver the Four Armed Mountain Man guns him down. The armless gunslinger's spurs echo down the mountain for all to hear. The truth in the rattle that no man is created equal.

## Headless Dreamer

Don't stare at my neck hole  
And wonder where my head is.  
It went to go live in the clouds  
where everyone is rebirthed as  
children who chase dandelions  
twirling on a wind current through  
a field of strawberry colored  
chrysanthemums. When they get  
tuckered out, flying ants will interlock legs  
to create insectoid mothers who cradle  
them to sleep with whispered shhhs  
and gentle sway of a dying wind.

Lady bugs crawl across such mouths,  
pacifiers for them to suck dry  
all of the morning dew bubbled on their backs.

We will be well taken care of here.

I try to imagine if the worms burrowing  
under my feet live the same way. Through  
the tree roots and dirt can you see the vibrations  
of the restless dead constantly rolling over  
in their coffins? I suspect they died with their  
heads intact. I hear when that happens your  
corneas collapse in on themselves and suck in  
everything in sight. They say it's like a static  
television being unplugged.

But none of this worries me. Stay in the clouds  
head of mine. Never age. Keep existing. Believe  
in your fantasy. Preach to me if we don't get baptized  
in the River Jordan that the world will end with you.  
I don't need a bearded body builder who rides upon  
a nimbus cloud to free me from the darkness when  
I die. And I don't need you to come back down so  
we can self-detonate like a dying star. It doesn't matter,  
kill me whenever. You have given me what many  
men dream of and when the lights go out, leave me

behind so I can do what I do best in the dark,  
dream everything back to life. Like anyone else  
who has ever died before me.

## **Bloodhound Blues**

Your face is familiar like the starving bloodhound  
who used to do circles around the Tire, Oil, and  
Lube. Your droopy eyes, so red, cried blood  
to the sound of your starved stomach growling.  
The wind wisped Red River Valley through your visible  
ribcage. I passed you every day and meant to grab you so  
many times, but the congregation of ticks and fleas  
and baby mice chewing on the tip of your tail warded  
me away. You were a goner until he found you, nursed  
you back to health and surrounded you with concrete  
walls in front of one Pit Bull terrier after  
another until cataracts took your sight, and he put you  
down the only way he knew how, a shot from the double  
barrel you licked. You didn't see it coming. After all this  
time, I have found you again rolled in a rain soaked rug  
and wrapped in clear plastic on the side of the road. I  
won't leave you like this, but give you the funeral you  
deserve. I'll set you afire like the heroes of old and watch  
your smoke form a constellation in the skies. You will  
be a mad dog who barks the cosmos clear of asteroids  
and I will be there to lift your roadside vagabond  
kin into my truck. But my truck can only hold so much  
and when I pick up one, I will pass by six.

## IV.

### **Let's Get Married Under Picasso's *Girl Before A Mirror***

I ate my twin brother in the womb.  
That's his tiny fingers reaching under  
the skin of my stomach, tip toeing  
between your flexed shoulder blades,  
reading your mind from your goosebumps  
like Braille. He flicks my ribcage in Morse  
Code telling me you haven't looked away  
from the door all night. Let him stroke  
your hair and listen to me whisper  
"you can leave if you want." The front  
door will remain unlocked when you go.  
Because I know no one out there would risk  
taking you home to meet their mom or dad  
or even hold their dinner down as long as  
you have that fucking ballooned vocal sac holding  
your chin up. Just like no one could do the  
same for someone impregnated with his  
twin brother. All I ask is that you promise  
me when you crawl back in bed not to wake  
him and if you do, hold his hand tight  
and sing him back to sleep.

## **Radioactive Man and Sunflower Girl**

I am stuck here, encased in a mingling  
of tumors, my skin a prison; my swelled  
thighs root into the earth, only my left eye  
is free to scour my surroundings. Dark smog,  
toppled buildings and human silhouette shadows  
etched in the concrete, a few embracing me  
with a hand on my back, some touching their  
hearts. Others embrace me in a hug.  
They call me Tumor tree.

I don't know why and I don't know when. All  
I know is that I glow bright and flash  
everything away.

The freckled flower girl who plants sunflowers  
wherever she frolics has come across me. She  
places one where my ear is supposed to be and tells  
me that I have, "Such a beautiful eye. Is it caramel  
colored? Never seen such an eye color."  
I murmur for her to go.

She visits from time to time, placing a sunflower  
here and there.

She said she comes to see my caramel eye. I murmur  
for her to go, that there is nothing to see and that  
she is killing herself. She talks, pretending not to  
listen to me while she plants.

As her hair falls out, mine grows,  
As her skin cracks black, my tumors subside.  
She smiles at the sight of me wiggling my fingers  
and grasping sunflowers between my toes.  
I frown at her deep breaths getting deeper.

I tell her she shouldn't have and she tells me it's "Okay,"  
and that she wanted to see what two caramel eyes looked  
like, she doesn't see a difference. We laugh and embrace  
one another as I glow bright and like always, flash everything away.



## **Forgot How To...**

A man kissing the nape of his wife's neck had frozen in place once they got naked.

*What's wrong?* asked his wife.

*I forgot what to do next.*

*Does that mean we can't make love?*

*I apologize, I'm rather embarrassed.* When he turned to walk away he noticed his legs stopped working. *I have forgotten how to walk,* he said

*Do you mean you aren't going to be able to run in the big race tomorrow?* she said.

*Yes, but not because I can't run, it is because I have also forgotten how to see,* he said.

*Maybe you just need rest,* she said.

*I wish I knew what it was you were saying, I've forgotten how to hear,* he said.

*@%#\$&%\*#,* she said.

*In this short time I have forgotten your face and lost the sound of your voice, my memories have tricked me into giving you a butch sound and a starving frame, or is that not right?*

She was silent. He spoke again.

*Before I am no able longer to think, before my inner monologue sparks out I wonder if I have fallen into a deep sleep...or am waking from one.*

## “Quiet!”

Against everyone's expectations the mime  
in central square spoke. Yelled, more like it.  
In this new found world where mimes talk,  
God flies down from Orion in a UFO with flame  
decals to feed the Loch Ness monster and to  
announce his retirement as he adjusts Jesus Christ,  
cradled in his arms, to his left side. The nations'  
leaders make love near a comforting bonfire of  
guns and talk of a happy future afterwards as they  
all look up to the stars to see the last nukes detonate  
in space—the entire universe sees the last toxic  
mushroom cloud form and slowly die out.

And honest men and women will be praised again,  
not just those who can kick a ball through a goal  
or shoot one through a hoop. We will see what this  
world can become.

But the old world always revives itself. When it's  
too quiet after the war ends, the televised preacher  
will take millions from unsuspecting followers  
whose heads are in their knees in a bunker surrounded  
by tin canned meats waiting for the end of the world.  
Sometimes the old world can be seen on mugshots  
on Channel Four. If you look closely in those eyes  
you can see the same face found on hunters in cave  
paintings. I can feel it in the coins and paper reminders  
of dead presidents.

Tomorrow the president of the United States will break  
up with Putin and stop taunting Jong-Un to tell  
the world from his podium that the mime never  
talked. It was a supervillain ventriloquist  
who tricked us all and the world will sigh in relief  
at the statement, knowing it not to be true.

## **Cat Got Her Tongue**

A woman with emerald eyes and ruby red hair sparkles in a diamond dress under the light of a bar and like a siren, calls to me from the aura of cigarette smoke cocooning her. I tell her I need her, that I want her, that she is a woman who has survived the dreams I've woken up from. She stares silently and after a murmur the bartender, cleaning a mug, says that a cat got her tongue. So I walk down every alley and bully every cat until I find the one who has her tongue. They all screech and hiss the same name which leads me to a gated house where the cat rests behind closed doors, a companion to a sick boy, a boy with not much time left, a boy who spends that time cuddling and loving the cat. I do the only thing which makes sense. I kick down the door and put my hand down the cat's throat until I come up with her wiggling tongue in my grasp, a tongue the boy expected to be a white rabbit.

When I give it back to the woman with emerald eyes, I ask her to speak and she tells me "Thank you." A thank you like hers is visible, carried on the saddles of doves. I tell her everything I said to her before. She puts her hand gently on my cheek and says, "That's all so very sweet. But I am married to the bartender." The beer he hands me is dark and I taste it on my tongue before I swallow.

### **Who Stole the Canaries Voice?**

The housewife cleaned out her ears with their pinky finger, which meant "Did I just hear that wrong? There is no way I just heard my canary in the shower sing in grunts and coughs. My canary is the best songstress in the world, just as long as she is in the and shower out of plain sight. It must be the tub's acoustics misrepresenting her majestic vocals."

The Shareholder had come to the canary in her sleep and reached down her throat, stealing her voice. No one was going to ever hear her sing, she could only sing in the shower. That's why he stole from the canary and traveled the world using her voice to bring tears and joy to the masses. I heard a similar story about harmonica player in queens who could spit a harmony majestic enough to raise the dead lost his lips and the sweet old lady on her death bed who kept herself young with her piano playing was buried yesterday without any fingers. It all makes sense seeing how zombies are blocking all the parking at the mall and that grandmothers are now younger than their granddaughters. Yesterday, a poet told me he was the best poet never to finish his work. That's why when he goes to bed tonight he will awake to the Shareholder, at the foot of his bed, sewing on his new right hand.

## **Silent Tiger**

Awake at night I yearn for the Friday  
nights when my floors and walls vibrated  
and danced to Survivor's "Eye of the Tiger"  
blasting from your high powered fifteen  
inch speakers and the groans and moans  
coming from you and your lover's simultaneous  
orgasms. At midnight my-two-year old  
would shadow box in his crib like Rocky  
punching frozen meat while me and my  
wife talked to our daughter about the birds  
and the bees. We would invite friends over  
to place their ears on empty glasses propped  
on the wall. I remember laughing all night  
with my wife,

ex-wife.

Then you went and hanged yourself by the  
extension cord of your Pacman machine and  
it went all quiet. I play the song but it's not the  
same, I have forgot the sound of your moan. Now  
alone in my bed I dream of eyeless tigers and  
dying Pacmen folding into themselves. I  
lie awake, wanting, waiting for the  
sound played through my silent walls.

## Casino

In the Casino, the machine is found where the high rollers meet, past the complimentary soda fountain and beyond the grey cigarette smoke clouds of emphysema. It is here that this particular machine takes and rewards years not dollars. Here the line is long. An elderly women with lipstick on her teeth ages herself to dust and gets blown away by the next in line. There's an Asian man in a medical mask who looks to become a boy. Here he settles into the swiveling leather chair, convinced the machine is due to hit.

If you listen, spontaneous screams signify winners. I've gambled here often. But I cannot tell you the last time I've rubbed a flashing red screen and left with less years than which I came with. Once I saw a man win five years and remind his girlfriend why she cheats on her husband. Sometimes sons leave older than their fathers. If I ever hit the jackpot, I could only tell you what I would do with all those years.

I wish I could put a ribbon on everything I'm about to win so you could go back to when you listened to Led Zeppelin and walked around your parents' house balancing school textbooks on your head. In this way, I would cease to exist. And you could finally be who you were meant to be.

But you're gone. And I've come here to hear those bells chime and the sound of change crashing the ground you've loved so much. As well as the sound of old people's spines straightening and the youth's bending.

When I hit that jackpot and shrink back into a fetus.

Pass me along back to the end of the line. Before I am old enough to walk I will put these years back. And in all the chaos of handing me to the next in line my umbilical cord will rub against the ash in the red carpet and recognize you. I am home. I will one day return to you.

## **Devil's Advocate**

Among the Lascaux Cave Paintings between the buffalo and horses are depictions of a wing stripped Lucifer falling from the buckle of Orion's belt, crashing on the backs of dinosaurs. He is seen dusting himself off and attempting to pole vault back to the stars with the trunks of a palm tree. He fashions together gliders from pterodactyl parts and lifts from the rims of the volcanoes using their rising steam to surf the clouds. But the stratosphere freezes him and he crashes into a school of fish swimming in the reef. Day after day he falls, but comes closer. Soon the wooden Wright flyer he used to fly over the star struck citizens of Kitty Hawk is surpassed by his televised launch of the Apollo 13. When he returns from the moon he is the only person in America with a displeased expression on his face. When the reporters asks him why the long look after making history he answers, "It didn't go far enough. I'm tired and dying. Can't you see I am trying to take us home? We don't belong here. We are not in Eden anymore. We are convicts in a prison, and I am just trying to break out."



## **Praise the Sun**

In our hour of need the Sun God  
hears our prayers, ankle deep in  
the swirling hot plasma of his throne.  
He leaps on the back of a moth-shaped  
solar flare, to come to us, to answer  
our prayers.

In his presence everything turns  
into ember and ash. In prayer, on  
city streets, the Earth's citizen's knees  
sizzle on cracked sidewalks as their  
dried pursed lips funnel the little oxygen  
in the air left and sunken eyes stare  
at their God's bubbling magma moustache  
atop his gallant smile. Their sweat  
dripping hands rise as their clothes  
melt in a psychedelic puddle around  
their ankles. He gives us what we ask  
for and in a gentlemen's bow, returns  
home.

On his journey home He passes a small  
girl on the moon climbing out of a crater  
on the dark side sucking on a frozen cube  
of lunar water with a tiny ember dancing  
and popping in her palm, guiding her out  
of the indissoluble darkness. Torn rags  
covering burns not inflicted by her warm  
memento.

At home his wife sings nursery rhymes  
as she sews skin grafts over their son's  
burnt face, placing a tiny moon rock  
in his hand to give him strength. The Sun  
God enters, smiles at his son, gently put  
his hands on his wife's shoulders and  
whispers "Now if those dishes in the  
sink aren't done by the time I get back,  
there will be hell to pay." And he leaves

to drink himself into a frenzy and bury himself in other woman. That is until we pray for him to saddle upon his flare moth and descend back to us to answer our prayers in our hour of need, like any good God does.

## Mississippi Messiah

Mississippi is the new home of the new Lord.  
Their messiah chews his fingernails to the cuticles  
at the sight of gurgled syrup bubbles boiling  
from the mouth of a dead Paul Bunyan impersonator.  
He choked to death attempting to eat fifty pancakes  
in under a minute.

Most of the people in the crowd assumed he would  
resurrect him with a snap of his fingers or fish his soul  
from the heavens. The crowd roared as he walked  
to the deceased corpse with his arms out wide, praying  
for a way out under his breath. Preachers sang  
hymns out of sight. Young children wanting to see sat  
upon their father's shoulders with gleeful eyes. Everyone  
stood motionless in anticipation. The new minted Messiah  
compressed his palms against the deceased man's chest  
and every so often placed his lips on his and breathed  
his own breath into him. The new world Messiah kissing  
the sugary taste of Paul Bunyan's lips reminded me of my  
childhood.

In the evenings afterschool on the streets of Vegas  
I sat next to an elderly oriental lady popping stripper cards  
before handing them out to passersby near the MGM Grand.  
Across from her a man clad in black would pull rabbits  
out of hats and ask "Is this your card?" He'd levitate over oranges,  
and pull change from behind the ears of poor men. If one  
would ask how it was done, he would say "with the right  
incantation, of course!" On his death bed, he mumbled the  
words "abracadabra" and poofed into smoke.

I knew he was a fraud. A man with flowers stuffed into  
The tips of his wand and rabbits up his sleeves. But I convinced  
myself of this fantasy, this lie over and over again, so I could  
believe in a world of miracles and magic. So that's why I  
understand why the crowd of believers did as they were told  
when Christ arose from Bunyan (with syrup dripping from  
his cheeks), and gathered his thoughts before saying "Make  
a coffin from timber and set it down the current of the Mississippi

River."

When they finished they told themselves that their messiah was testing their loyalty. But I knew better. I could see this Christ behind them, ankle deep in water. He couldn't walk out any further for fear he would drown.

## **Preacher in the Mississippi**

I go over and under and skim the Mississippi River on an airboat looking for air bubbles fogged with my brother and father's last breath. I want to carefully scoop them up to take them home to mother so she can let their last exhale pop near her ear and brush the side of her face. But all I have found in my travels are graffitied and abandoned churches underwater and the ponytail preacher who lives waist deep in the Mississippi River who baptizes anyone within his reach. When he dunks you under the waters, he doesn't let up until the fear in your eyes turns to conviction. He drowns many. I've seen unconvinced bodies drift down stream. The preacher grabbed me once but I kicked him in the groin. As I escaped to shore, I could see a translucent figure of a starved man with stigmata on his hands and feet stemming from the preacher's back. Like an injured animal he was dying and dangerous. But when the preacher gets too tired to tread water he will join the bodies downstream and will have to face what we all face at the end. Voice the story in an air bubble and I will pop it near a microphone on the world's tallest building in the clouds to let all his children know his last will and testament.

### **Obituary For An Old God**

Too old to be given a name outside of the first and oldest, age unknown, passed away at the turn of the century, died in his sleep in a retirement home in the clouds above Olympus. Like any senile old coot, he was an unreliable narrator who told counterfeit realities of how things came to be. A great, yet misconstrued, storyteller, he was the last of his kind. That said, if you wanted to hear a story that revitalized your imagination you could sit down and listen to him speak. I guarantee you never heard stories like his. Just remember, don't believe a word he said.

## **Valhalla**

I was never going to go to that place like you wanted me to. Not the Pearl City rooted in the clouds where peace and pacifism are plenty. Such prosperity would drive me mad. I would grow horns and bat wings and lash out just to see if making such a choice was still possible. I would hurt you and you would hurt me, caging me in a place I don't belong. I want to go where the warriors go, where they fight in a grass plain to the last man standing, only to be reborn from the blood soaked in soil and start again. I want to fight in my afterlife like I did during my days and die the same, never resting, always pushing, it all building up to something, even if it's just a lie.

## *Vita*

After completing his work at Ford High School, Quinlan, Texas, in 2012, Jonathan Patrick Grant entered Texas A&M University at Commerce, Texas, for one year before transferring to Stephen F. Austin State University at Nacogdoches, Texas. He received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Stephen F. Austin State University in May of 2016. In the following fall, he entered the Graduate School of Stephen F. Austin State University as a Graduate Assistant, and then continued as a Graduate Teaching Fellow, receiving the degree of Master of Art in English (with an emphasis on creative writing) in December 2018.

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