

PAUSE: A COLLECTION OF POETRY

A Thesis

by

GLENN ALLEN PHILLIPS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2006

Major Subject: English

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,  
Committee Members,

Head of Department

Janet McCann  
Charles Taylor  
Sylvia Grider  
Michael Collins  
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## ABSTRACT

Pause: A Collection of Poetry. (May 2006)

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The following thesis contains a collection of original poetry, either written or revised during my tenure as a graduate student. This thesis also contains a critical introduction of the collection's forms, underlying themes, and writing processes.

The first priority of the introduction is to autobiographically trace the state of my poetry from its first rhymes to this collection. With a full understanding of my poetic history, the form and content of this current work will not only be understood in context, but become more interesting as an evolutionary study. I will discuss the different trends and themes I see working in my poetry. I will analyze performance poems as a unique style of formalist poetry, tailored to reinvent its oral tradition. I will show how melding the images of free verse and the patterning of meter creates a new poetic style designed to engage a larger potential audience than free verse or formalist poetry. Finally I will discuss what this collection hopes to do as a whole.

The poetry is separated into two sections. The first section, titled "The Page," is a collection of what I refer to as "page poetry"—poetry meant to be taken in visually, absorbed from a page. This section is divided into subsections of formalist, free verse, and prose poetry, mirroring my own poetic evolution. The second section, titled "The Stage," is a collection of performance pieces. While "The Page" represents the majority of my poetry, observations and evaluations, "The Stage" showcases my spoken-word poetry, discussing social and personal issues.

These poems represent my growth as a poet, and are, hopefully, only another step in a continual learning process.

## DEDICATION

To my grandfather, Curtis Allen Rogers

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Janet McCann, and my committee members, Dr. Charles Taylor, Dr. Sylvia Grider, and Dr. Michael Collins, for their patience, guidance, and inspiration during the creation of this thesis.

Thanks also to my friends and colleagues, whose listening ears served as the drawing board for many of these poems, to Curri Elliot, Jackson Hildebrand, and Sam Adams who came through in the clutch.

I would like to add a special thanks to my ever-supportive family for their faith that one day I would leave these hallowed halls.

Finally, I wish to thank God for these poems He gave me to share.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
INTRODUCTION: BETWEEN PAGE AND STAGE.....	1
THE PAGE.....	6
Upon Meditation of You.....	6
Strangling Pascal.....	7
Devil's Pantoum.....	8
The Bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.....	9
Children of the Sun.....	11
On Columbia.....	12
Bruised Ghazal.....	13
Waves.....	14
That Picture.....	15
Learning to Waltz.....	17
Quarter-life Crisis.....	18
Fibonacci and Nature.....	19
Poems Upon Reflection of Lucille Clifton.....	20
Galveston.....	22
August 25, 1979.....	24
Letter to Edgar Degas.....	25
Stood-up.....	27
Stargazing.....	28
An Evening with Judith Kroll.....	30
Seasonal Love Poem.....	32
Salem.....	33
Dream of Wordsworth.....	34
Light.....	35
Christmas.....	36
Aging.....	37
Sunset.....	38
Salome.....	39
Magritte's <i>Le Blanc Seing</i> .....	40

THE STAGE.....	41
The GAP.....	41
Ma'am, Put Those Jeans Down.....	43
The GAP Finale.....	46
New York Laws.....	48
New Orleans.....	49
Consumer Report.....	52
Jesi.....	54
My Father Never.....	57
Airport.....	59
Letter to Ms. K, My First Grade Teacher.....	65
My Soul Was Hungry.....	67
Voter Registration.....	69
CONCLUSION: WORD SPACE.....	70
WORKS CITED.....	72
VITA.....	73

## INTRODUCTION: BETWEEN PAGE AND STAGE

My first poem was in French. I don't speak French, and I certainly don't write it, but as a freshman in high school with far too much time on my hands, I wrote a poem in French for a girl named Jacqueline Rose. Though Jacqueline did not appreciate the poem as much as I had expected, I found exceptional power in that moment, when I first solidified my thoughts and emotions into an event others could participate in. I was fascinated.

When my poetry attempt ended with the painful silence of Jacqueline, I took to songwriting. Songwriting was comfortable. Trite and simple lyrics were completely redeemed with one above average melody. Songwriting was like poetry with a safety net. It wasn't until the end of high school that through teachers' prodding I wrote poems again—bad poems, but poems nonetheless. When I entered college there was no room for poetry. I bounced between chemistry and mathematics, not fully understanding either but fiercely committed to both. On a whim, I took a poetry elective my sophomore year. When asked to bring a poem to the next class, I brought a sonnet. I thought it was perfect. The content wasn't exactly earth-shaking, but the iambic pentameter and rhyme scheme were spectacular—no deviations, no mistakes.

My mathematical mind registered poetry as number problems, Rubik's cubes to be twisted and turned into order. Every poem I wrote was either rhyming or metrical, usually both. I was frustrated that I couldn't produce the same images and visuals as classmates, but I was content that images and pictures were of little importance to someone trying to balance out a seven line poem in perfect trochaic heptameter. I didn't have time for imagery with 98 syllables begging for proper placement. I, the only architect willing to give them shape, pressed on.

I entered my graduate program as a formalist. There are certainly good kinds of formalists, but I was not one of them. I was a pretentious and conceited. I read

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This thesis follows the style and format of the MLA Style Manual.

Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" every night before I went to sleep. When it wasn't Frost, it was Coleridge. When it wasn't Coleridge, it was my own work, trying my best to hammer stone into lace. The free verse poems I chose for my writing sample were chosen to prove that I could create images, the rest to prove I was an artist.

My first class in creative writing taught me one of my greatest faults as a writer. To be a great poet, you needed to know great poets—if not by their face and handshake, at least by their poems. To Frost and Coleridge I added ee cummings, Wallace Stevens, Maya Angelou, Adrienne Rich, and Ezra Pound. When I saw what their poetry could do, I was frustrated with what little mine accomplished. I saw poets moving freely between form and free verse, never forsaking the art of the poem. When I read about cummings's "the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls," I was amazed how something could be and not be a sonnet at once. Forced in the class to write prose, I could no longer dazzle an audience with a poem's shape and syllable count. I had to engage them with only words. I finally found full freedom to forget the fetters of formalism, and move, unbound, into free verse. Imagery became my greatest asset. I was able to say things without worrying how they would fit into an anapest. For some time, I refused to write in form. However, I saw the free verse poetry I was writing as rich but unstructured and weak. It was at this point that I first began to realize why form existed. For most of my poetic life I had been cramming poems like blocks into their poem-shaped holes. When I left formalism, I denied poems skeleton and spine. It wasn't until I tasted both extremes that I found a comfortable middle.

During this same time, I began performing poems in some local venues. The poems I chose to perform were either blank verse or free verse that had a special tempo. The more I performed, the more I became interested in writing poetry for the stage as opposed to the page. On the stage, white space was irrelevant. The only spaces that mattered were the places you created by breath, by movement, by holding out a fricative. On the stage I was forced to give stark images that people could hold, touch, put in their pockets, but at the same time entertain them with tempo, rhyme, and sounds. I found myself more interested in telling stories like those in "The Gap" and "New Orleans" or giving advice with "Ma'am, Put Those Jeans Down" and "Letter to Ms. K, My First

Grade Teacher.” Performance poetry became a middle ground where the necessities of metered and un-metered, rhymed and unrhymed were equally important.

Now at the culmination of my graduate experience, I realize that every poem has its own needs. Occasionally these needs are met by free verse, occasionally by form, and occasionally a careful twisting of the two. Often times I find that it is the theme that dictates what form must be used. The subjects of my poetry vary from working in retail to John the Baptist’s head on a platter. Being raised Roman Catholic, the ideas of Heaven and Hell always proved to be fertile breeding grounds for poetry. My earlier poems tended to focus on larger Judeo-Christian images of the Devil and God. As I progressed through college, the truths of Christ and the Bible became clearer to me, thus more relevant to my life, more evident in my work. I would read and then use poetry to respond to Biblical passages. Poetry became a comfortable place for me to examine my faith, especially performance poetry. Poems like “Jesi” and “Voter Registration” were written as opportunities to share my faith. In page poetry, following the footsteps of Edwin Muir and William Butler Yeats, I use both biblical and mythological references to deepen particular lines or give a sense of higher consciousness to certain poems. I see poetry as a way to both evaluate and express my faith in the same vein as Emily Dickinson. I greatly admire her ability to both question and revere God in her poetry, leading me to what Donald Miller in *Blue Like Jazz* calls the “rite of passage for any thinking man,” an intellectual “crush” on the maiden poet (155).

In contrast to religious imagery, I lean on simple images to set poetic moods. I desire to find the spectacular in the commonplace, echoing the works of my favorite poet, Billy Collins. As Sir Philip Sidney claims in his Defense of Poesy, poetry is “an art of imitation...that is to say a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth (to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture) with this end, to teach and delight” (11). Billy Collins’s poetry has been both praised and criticized for its simple subject matter. However, I think that it is his simplicity that allows him to both “teach and delight.” Discussing his adolescent thought process in “The Lanyard” allows room for any reader to enter the poem as a child and then subsequently take away the regret of not being able to fully repay a parent. Poetry must delight us so that we pay attention to what it can teach us. When you make a moment come alive, especially a moment containing little or

no action, your imagery reaches beyond the poem and into the life of the audience. In poems like “That Picture” and “Light,” I try using the everyday to explore something larger. However, I try not to limit myself to only common imagery. Much of the poetry in this thesis is intentionally dreamlike. I use strategies of magical realism in poems like “Learning to Waltz” and “Magritte’s *Le Blanc Seing*” to discover potential in objects beyond what we would normally perceive them to be. In Billy Collins’s “Walking Across the Atlantic” he writes “I feel the water holding up my shifting weight./ Tonight I will sleep on it’s rocking surface” (5). The idea of the extraordinary existing within the ordinary allows poets the opportunity to reach beyond what Sidney calls the “thorny arguments” of the philosopher and the “old mouse-eaten records” of the historian (15-16). Many of the page poems in this collection are left unresolved or questioning. The design is that the audience will find the answer.

In performance pieces, on the other hand, I feel the need to take the audience by the ear and direct them to a point instead of pointing them in a direction. I try to resolve an issue for the audience, because I have an immediate responsibility to them. The idea of performance poetry interests me on many levels. I see performance poetry as a throwback to an older oral tradition from which poetry has strayed. Dana Gioia praises performance of poetry because it creates the “sensual excitement of speaking and hearing the words of the poem” (23). I believe there is an excitement that exists within performance poetry that page poetry lacks. Poetry was originally intended to be heard. Long after *Beowulf* was written down, poets still had an oral responsibility to their audience. Not only is it important that the poet can visualize and engage the audience, but it’s equally important that the audience is able to respond directly to the poet. I have never experienced as much useful response to a written poem as I have to performed poems. There is something about a loud and elongated “boo” that you can’t fully articulate in a circle of workshop readers. At the same time, a cheering crowd speaks volumes that the same workshop could not. If poets desire to move poetry from the tower they have locked it in, we must be brave enough to stand in front of a mob and show our skin. I understand that there is poetry that is not meant to be performed. Performance poetry is a specialty, the way that Haiku is a specialty, the way that *pastiche* is a specialty. However, if poets do not perform, or at least support the performance of

other poetry, then poetry risks an implosion, folding itself into oblivion. A hope for my own poetry is that the desire to speak, contained within performance poetry, will spill into page poetry. It is necessary to create a continuum in voice similar to the continuum in genre created by prose poetry. Once that continuum is set, then people will be able to walk easily from the stage to the page without tripping over ideas of audience and presentation.

The overarching goal of this collection is to show my evolution as a writer and evaluate the kind of poet that I am. A secondary goal is to examine the extremes and middle ground of “The Page” and “The Stage.” It is of great comfort that I could fit some poems, namely “New York Laws” and “Airport” comfortably into both sections. It gives me hope that future collections won’t require a separation at all.

I believe that poetry exists to fill a need. This collection is an acknowledgement of specific poetic needs and the poems are an attempt to fill them. As my graduate career ebbs, I don’t consider myself any particular type of poet. It is only at moments that I am a poet. The rest of the time I am an observer with pen and paper trying hard to stop the world from spinning long enough to harvest moments, to find Sidney’s “speaking pictures” and pull them ripe from the vine.

## THE PAGE

**Upon Meditation of You**

The frigid granite waits against my back  
I stare glass-eyed at God's infinity  
And count the holes worn through this burlap sack  
In which He keeps a perfect you and me  
Whatever distance keeps this shore from sea  
It gives me hope to know the universe  
Is smaller than a leaking burlap purse

The weight of cold falls heavy on my skin  
December's silver paints the canvas night  
Then nested in seclusion I begin  
To whisper love-words colored cloudy white  
Perhaps you'll never hear me but you might  
And if you do our love has conquered space  
And every atom's corner is our place



**Devil's Pantoum**

These red days scrape us.  
The archangel Lucifer, mute,  
with split tongue tied  
and halo bending...

The archangel Lucifer mutes  
martyrs' mumblings.  
Halo bending,  
he bares his teeth.

Martyrs mumble,  
consumed with white.  
He bares his teeth  
in sinless grin

consumed with white.  
We say he's gone,  
in sin, less grin.  
We say we're clean.

We say he's gone  
with hell on his soles.  
We say we're clean,  
next to godliness.

With Hell on our souls,  
with split tongue tied,  
next to godliness...  
These red days scrape us.

## **The Bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church**

The streets of Birmingham were frozen hot  
Like angry coals un-smothered by a snow  
Of ashy white. September had a special  
Way of burning Alabama cold.  
The Klan made a minefield of our town that year,  
A deadly game of hopscotch that they never  
Asked us if we'd play. I think  
Some white girls wandered out to throw a stone,  
But never seemed to hit the square we drew.  
Then bruised and black and blue, we'd swallow hard  
And ask them if they'd come and hurt next week.  
I think deep down they knew we wouldn't be  
Around to play again. The winds that day  
Blew hard and whispered rhythms beat across  
An ocean. Rhythms heard where we were more  
Than just a circle painted red and white.  
Those rhythms heard when men came home more red  
Than brown, more lost than found, more dead than here.  
Those rhythms heard when baby girls forgot to breathe.  
Ba boom, ba boom, ba boom, ba boom, ba boom  
God made me pink that day. All frills and lace  
Passed down from slave to free then back to slave.  
My hair hurt just the way that beauty made  
It tight and smooth, a spheric checkerboard.  
A dozen perfect braids stuck out like rays  
Of sun eclipsed by moons of ebony.  
I young, I strong, I Nubian and fierce.  
I met that Sunday morning like I met  
My last day captive on this pulsing earth.

I raced down Sixteenth Street to beat the crowds,  
Admiring my dress in every store  
Window lucky enough to show me off.  
I stopped in fear when I heard clocks chime ten,  
Too young to know to call them ominous,  
Than ran with lightning speed to our church door  
With faster pace than intuition knew.  
Clip clop clip clop clip clop clip clop clip clop  
A flight of stairs in patent leather shoes  
Took just five steps if you were brave enough.  
The bathroom door swung wide after I knocked.  
My sisters stood like angels, smooth skin burnt.  
Each one a porcelain doll wrapped tight with lace.  
My Addie, Carole, Cynthia, Denise,  
My treasures locked behind a basement door.  
I remember looking one more time at me  
And hating how my ears always stuck out  
Like black doors on a fancy Cadillac.  
We laughed until our laughter turned to screams  
That haven't stopped for almost forty years.  
Eleven, fourteen, fourteen, fourteen gone.  
They stole us babies from the house of God.  
I'm fifty three and still think I wear pink,  
The only color I can still recall.  
The clock is stopped at eight till half past ten,  
The second that we lost our hopscotch game.  
I may be blind but Lord knows I'm not deaf.  
Those drums they're getting louder every day.

Note: In Birmingham, Alabama, on September 15, 1963 a bomb killed four girls at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. A fifth girl was blinded as a result of the blast.

**Children of the Sun**

they grow in wet marsh  
under rising circles red  
swamp water boiling

soft green bamboo shoots  
plucked early to thatch a roof  
thin skin pulled tightly

sharpened to a point  
blind boys draw white man's blood  
stabbing up a storm

silver birds screaming  
cut the heavens up to shreds  
burning soft bamboo

one silent cricket  
mourns a thousand heavy tombs  
full from the harvest

Note: In early World War II boys as young as 14 were snatched from their families and trained as fighter pilots. These Japanese soldiers were sent to die.

**On Columbia**

Be still and hear the silver eagle fall.  
Its fiery feathers singed by angry gods.  
Reluctant pyre seven stories tall,  
Dust shakes in Mother Nature's cruel applause.  
A thousand cloistered sinners white with prayer  
Sing heavy dirges, wingless angels slain.  
Impossibly bright shadows rip and tear  
An ominous blue sheet of perfect pain.  
Insomnia makes children wake and cry.  
Two lungs too full of empty steal their sleep.  
The whole world holds its breath when heroes die.  
A silent trumpet begs the sky to weep.  
Eternal struggle nature *versus* man,  
The battle's fought and nature wins again.

**Bruised Ghazal**

You barely purple in this empty bruise.  
I'll stand face to the wind until I bruise.

The air is tight with ropes of boy scout knots.  
With every windmill spin, I feel your bruise.

I almost found my way through maze of you.  
I wipe away the grin I had to bruise.

I painted all my skin fluorescent orange.  
The nuns said it's a sin to see the bruise.

I need to feel a color more than numb.  
I stabbed myself, a pin straight through the bruise.

Come bridge the me to you I cannot reach.  
I'm begging you again to push the bruise.

You told me home was touch and roof and food.  
The orange I bought begins to smell like bruise.

**Waves**

I stand on shifting waves that speak  
Forgotten dusty lines.  
They mumble Whitman, Carroll, Wilde  
Dickinson and Stein.

The curious crabs are scrambling,  
Etching Frost in sand.  
The wind through palms is whispering  
The end of Kubla Khan.

The waters hold their salt lips tight  
And let the shore believe  
Their every thought is novel,  
Originality achieved.

I stand on shifting waves that speak  
Forgotten dusty lines.  
They shift beneath our trembling feet  
To show us they're alive.

## **That Picture**

I think these hands are finally mad.  
Without consent they tried to box  
Those pictures taken late last fall,  
The day before the colors and you left.  
They act as if they have the right  
To disobey the blood in me.

As if to say when we made me  
It drove their owner slightly mad,  
And I'm not saying they're not right  
But I'll be damned if this brown box,  
Half empty with regret, is all that's left.  
These hands can push but I won't fall.

She said she loved me in the fall.  
That picture there shows her and me,  
She on the right and me the left.  
I never noticed she looks mad,  
But then again if you were boxed  
Without consent you'd have the right

To show a little temper, Right?  
I think that if a picture falls  
In bubble wrap and coffin box,  
It earns the right to look at me  
And look at me as though it's mad,  
That it was loved and now it's left.

That picture has a place, the left  
Side of my desk, the wood's just right  
To match the frame. Of course I'm mad!  
They tried to box that perfect fall.  
They tried to box that perfect me.  
I didn't frame that for a box.

I framed it so they wouldn't box  
the perfect leaves that autumn left  
A harvest full of you and me  
With reds and browns and orange so right  
That we could barely call it fall.  
It looked like summer finally mad.

Those hands are mad that tried to box  
That perfect fall where I was left  
And you were right. We, more than me.

**Learning to Waltz**

My left foot  
Is broken.  
My right one  
Is twisted.  
The swelling  
Is such that  
I can't feel  
The bottom  
Of either  
My left or  
My right foot.  
It's almost  
As if I  
Am walking  
On frozen  
Papayas.  
I'm clumsy,  
Fruit footed,  
Papaya-  
podacious,  
And yet still  
You believe  
I can dance.

**Quarter-life Crisis**

Impossibly separated  
from bald men  
with diapers,  
without teeth,  
placed unevenly on  
sharp edged  
today.

Foresight and hindsight  
tug at my hands.  
I balance the present  
on the tip  
of my tongue,  
taste twenty-five.

## Fibonacci and Nature

These petals thick with significance

Pinecones spiraling to infinity

Sequential seeds sun-roasted

[Ten feet above the pulsing earth]

Silk-filled seashells

Moaning deep-sea dirges

[Twisting arabs into oceanic ears]

Honeybee ancestry

Stretching back mathematically

[One queen

Prophetic

In her hexagonal hive]

In the pages of *Liber abaci*

Fibonacci found

The crumbs of Eden

And choked them

In chalk dusted hands

[Numeric nature

Lying prostrate

At the trembling hands of God]

Note: The Fibonacci sequence is an important mathematical sequence created by repetitious summations of simple integers that create the next member. i.e. 0,1,1,2,3,5,8

## Poems Upon Reflection of Lucille Clifton

I.

You've got me twisted  
Thinking it wasn't enough  
I bent my back for you  
Thinking it wasn't enough  
I tied my tongue for you  
Thinking it wasn't enough  
I curled my toes for you  
You've got me twisted  
Who knew I was so limber

II.

I hung my head low today  
Not of shame  
But because you threw your tentacles  
Around my neck and brought me down to you  
The plain woman with the short brown hair  
Said it looked like a hug  
Maybe she was right  
Maybe you were loving me  
Maybe you were humbling me  
Maybe I was bending down to get a better look  
At what's so obviously beneath me.

III.

My eyes are green

Chinese jade, angry dragons  
My blood is blue  
Pure warrior line, Dajome  
My tongue is red  
Like blood tastes, dripping  
My teeth are white  
Radioactive chiclets, glaring  
I got a rainbow in my soul  
This must be why they call me colored.

**Galveston**

I saw the ocean and thought of you.

Heavy waves rolled  
toward thinning death.

Sun shavings slithered  
on the water's surface,  
    flashing star back  
    to unsuspecting eye.

My breath poured out  
in empty sighs  
mixed with  
salty air.

I saw the ocean and thought of you.

I thought of the night  
your hair blew wildly,  
    frantically reaching  
    to the gods.

I thought of how  
your lips parted slowly.

Then tight-chested  
I turned my head  
to the water  
    waiting salt-eyed for

your lips to close

I saw the ocean and thought of you

A wind surfer

in the distance

hung fearfully to a

mushroomed sail,

    skipping him

    across the waves

A blinking Jesus

I saw the ocean and thought of you.

How far the shore was

from our salt eyes

**August 25, 1979**

Butter pecan napalm

Melts like honey

Down the little boy's arm

As he statue of liberties a double dipped cone

Braided garden hoses

Swell up to spill out

Neriad blood

That colors creation clear

Half witted day struggles

To pierce raisin clouds

Scraping all the while

Hell scratches the soles of children

Sprinting from shade to shade

Two scorpion tongued lovers

Burn their name on each other

As Saharah arches her back against

The belly of Beelzebub

Grasping for scratching wool

To sand her skin

Back to rough.

**Letter to Edgar Degas**

Who are these dead women smeared in paint  
Drowned in oil crucified on canvas  
Did they live before you fed them immortality  
These chipped porcelain dolls in permanent fourth position  
Do they cry  
Do you hear them  
Grumbling at the vastness of eternity  
Are they as tired of you as you are of them.  
Fettered in demi plie  
They have lost womanhood  
The natural evocation of feminine  
Shattered in a thousand pieces of un-sewn youth  
She could have been a mother  
Why didn't you paint her children  
She could have been a mind  
Why didn't you paint her thoughts  
She could have been a whore  
Why didn't you paint her lust  
Instead you clothe her in sunlight and waste  
Dangling for an eternity inches below the belly of life  
She should have been the lady Absinthe  
Miserable and perfect  
Infinite shades of depression  
Her absence is her only presence  
Her void her only existence  
Her nothing is everything  
She is ten leagues below the surface of the water  
Screaming  
What echoed silence

What enlightened despair

How heavy are the nooses of forty-seven melancholy women and their flexible daughters

Do they even remember dying before they lived

**Stood-up**

I waited for you to come.

Apple-mouth, I waited.

On a broken bench,

In heavy shoes, I waited.

Scratching at my arm

With closed eyes, I waited.

And you,

You sat on the other side of the world

Balancing grapes on your tongue,

Stirring apple martinis

Without concern.

## Stargazing

He plays Mozart on an oak piano,  
Spilling notes across the hardwood floors  
They stained a month after buying the house.  
She busies herself cutting peppers and chicken  
With the precision of a surgeon  
In a black and white kitchen.  
The smell and the sound wrestle for attention,  
The old Victorian home caught somewhere between  
An oven and a four story music box.  
The sonata fades, the chicken sizzles...  
He enters her corner of the earth  
In faultless synchronization.  
They move around each other like satellites,  
Perfectly countering each move.  
He Mars, She Venus, They Cosmic.  
All other distractions,  
Twinkling constellations  
Galaxies away.  
They love elliptically,  
Moving as two,  
Existing as one.  
He catches her off guard with a kiss.  
Her laugh is an extension of him now.  
His brother calls with heavy news.  
His weight is an extension of her now.  
For a moment they eclipse one another.  
He and she, a brilliant they  
Stretching to Eden,  
Tasting like apples and figs...

The timer sounds,  
The planets depart,  
Ethereal cytokinesis.

She opens the oven.  
His fingers warm cold ivory.  
They separate  
Still connected by a cosmos  
They rule simultaneously,  
Sharing samespace.  
One four armed god  
In infinite repose.

### **A Evening with Judith Kroll**

A desk lamp warms the room.  
Where she speaks softly, slowly  
Pushing eras between syllables,  
Filling white noise with  
Electric thought. I hear  
Synapses popping in her mind,  
Bouncing across the room,  
Out the door, over the ocean,  
Off snow-capped statues to land  
Vibrating at the feet of Vishnu.  
In her whispers, I hear  
Bangles banging,  
Silk colored wives, bejeweled,  
Bereft, standing in silent repose,  
Staring beyond me.

In a black box theatre,  
She lays down poetry like blankets,  
Invites me to sit and gaze  
Across India watching the monsoon  
Take its breath. She pulls English  
Words and stretches them around  
Her Hindu tongue, chewing them  
Like bubblegum, letting syllables  
Dribble down her chin, Himalya.  
She wipes them away with  
The back of her sleeve, keeps chewing.  
The fat boy behind me asks who her influences are,  
Hoping she'll say Whitman and Pound.

She says, "I am my own influence."

She wears sunglasses in the dimmest of lights

Claiming her eyes are photosensitive.

I think, instead, she's protecting us, knowing

If we could see, like Semele,

We'd burst into flames.

**Seasonal Love Poem**

she shook me  
like October winds  
limb from limb  
reminding me  
of the fall  
that was me

she froze me  
like December snow  
white and cold  
shivering me  
to the skeleton  
that was me

she drenched me  
like April rain  
pain on pane  
drowning me  
to the ocean floor  
that was me

she burned me  
like August heat  
charcoaled meat  
scorching me  
to the scattered ashes  
that are her

**Salem**

Bodies

Hang

Like

Rotten

Figs

Out

Side

**Dream of Wordsworth**

In sylvan copse,  
I see you  
Eating naked  
With your devils.  
Your rough teeth  
Bear into angel skin,  
Ichor dripping  
From your beard.

As you lift your head  
I hear you whisper  
“Sublime.”  
Then, in wide-eyed ecstasy,  
Resume the feast.

## Light

Last night there was a piece of light on my bed. Staring through my broken blinds, streetlamps poured October orange on my window and pushed a shard of light through, letting it hover just above my black sheets. I tried to cover it with my hand, and it slipped through my palm, tissue and space, crawling to the skin. I gazed at the star-paint, flipping my left hand so the light settled in my palm.

## **Christmas**

A plastic Jesus balances on a branch. Buried in a balsa wood bassinet, cloistered in cotton balls, he either sleeps or lies awake, eye-less. A star hangs a foot above the Christ-child, pulling the top of the tree a little to the left. Still clinging gold sequins reflect the light from a passing car. For brief seconds it burns like a beacon.

We sit in silence, hoping the Magi are near.

**Aging**

I am not yet so blind that I cannot see the sun by its warmth upon my face.

I am not yet so deaf that I cannot hear the wind by the way it moves the trees.

I am not yet so mute that I cannot sing hymns by the folding of my hands

I am not yet so cold that I cannot feel the day by its trembling horizon.

I am not yet so dead that I cannot feel the pulse of this world as it spins upon brilliant  
intention.

## Sunset

The sky falls up, exposing the underbelly of day, pink and fleshy. Color stretches, taffy across the heavens, dripping sugar into horizons sinking. Neon paint spills across a caesious canvas. Red and orange screaming like martyrs. Space bleeds into atmosphere, boiling.

A little girl scratches her eyes as Armageddon awakes

## Salome

She dances like waves, twisting. Small gold coins attached around her waist shiver as she shakes and spins her way across the tessellating floor. Silk vales tied to her hands and elbows stretch out in centrifugal celebration. As the drums fade she lays her smooth skin on the cold tile at Herod's feet.

The crowd explodes in adoration and worship. She makes herself a spectacle, a proper gift for her king. So elated, he offers the young girl anything she desires. When she closes her eyes she finds they are filled with diamonds and rubies. Unsure how much she is allowed to request, she runs to her waiting mother's scarlet lips. The whisper fills her ear like blood, then deaf to its repercussions, like a child asking for horses, she sings her mother's words.

“Give me here on a platter, the head of John the Baptist.”

The sword they use is sparkling and sharp. His neck splits like a ripe gourd spilling seeds and color to the prison floor. Upon the platter where normally they would serve grapes they bring the severed head to the little girl. With innocence she sinks her delicate hand into his matted hair and lifts him from the smooth silver. She runs to her mother grinning and unaware. Her heartbeat slows as she sees her mother's mouth stretch wide into a shallow crescent.

The weight begins to press upon her shoulders as they both wait cold, in silence, four eyes unblinking.

**Magritte's *Le Blanc Seing***

I wish that you would turn your horse, ever so slightly to the left. I wish that you would pull rein and spin him away from the forest. That way, in the vacancy of underbrush, where he is empty, I can look into his broad chest, see the heart shudder, the lungs mushroom, the liver cripple. That way, I can see the loss of your hand and what you were (not) holding.

## THE STAGE

**The GAP**

I work at the GAP.

Please, allow me to repeat this as its understanding is crucial to the following catharsis.

I work at the GAP.

I sell things like toggle jackets, like performance pants, like dry tech rec vests.

It's not because I want to.

It's because after getting degrees in Mathematics, English, and History,

I felt that I could best serve humanity by helping them find a blouse that'll match their materialism.

This season my prison comes in a variety of sun-washed colors.

My demons are the sporty but spunky hues of bubblegum, pistachio, lemon custard.

My name is Glenn Allen Phillips, for you slow kids this means my initials are G A P

For you non liberal arts majors, that spells GAP

In some way this little spark of coincidence gives me some personal freedom.

I see the gap as more of a big cosmic joke than an occupation,

More like a carefully planned punishment than a real source of employment.

I really shouldn't complain that much. I'm only working there for another couple weeks.

What's that like 14 days?

Like 296 hours?

Like 1,847 minutes?

Like 12,660 seconds?

59, 58, 57?

Last month I got the signature service award.

That means that out of all the employees, I'm more polite about hating people.

Hi, welcome to GAP what can I help you find?

Oh, just looking, ok thanks for being specific. If you need me I'll be at the cashwrap just plotting.

Hi welcome to GAP.

Are you looking for something special?

A bridal party, and you're not the bride, how obvious.

Hi welcome to GAP. What can I do you for?

Sales, you want sales. Well, we've got about as many markdowns as I have creative ways to kill myself with this pants hanger.

You see, I can tell the difference between char truce and Alaska,

Tangerine and coral,

Earth and acorn.

I can offer you denim in cropped, cargo, carpenter, classic boot cut, relaxed boot cut, low rise boot cut, my daddy buys my affection boot cut, easy fit, slim fit, flare fit, pencil cut, kill me now, long and leans, worker jeans.

I actually see people on the streets and know what season they're wearing,

What mini-purse they're carrying,

What cammies they're layering, and I weep.

I know that gray has become the new black.

I know that pink is now the new gray.

I know that as we idly sit here tonight, black is poised and ready on the threshold of fashion to become the new pink

Reclaiming his throne thus making it full circle

Fulfilling the prophecies etched out in Revelations 2:20.

I hear the hoof of the apocalypse.

I see the blood moon shine.

I know that black is, indeed, about to become the new black.

This is the weight I bear.

But take heart, I will survive,

Selling my pride for \$6.25,

Being perpetually patronized by high school kids half my size,

Because in my depression I still realize, it's not Abercrombie and Fitch.

**Aside to Women Who Purchase Their Jeans at Anonymous Three Letter Clothing Stores Who Feature Sarah Jessica Parker in Their Television and Magazine Advertisements: Ma'am, Put Those Jeans Down**

Ma'am, put those jeans down.

I'm not trying to start a fight.

I don't mean to be impolite.

I just need to do what's right.

Please, put those jeans down.

Now, you can call this an intervention.

I know its something we don't like to mention,

But if I could have three minutes of your attention,

I think we could work this out.

I see that you've grabbed a pair of eights, and if you wore eights, I'd celebrate

Because your body would have found its denim mate, and these jeans would've been made for you.

But as it stands, all I know that's true is your body's wearing like a 22,

And I don't think an 8 is really right for you.

I'm just here because I care.

Ma'am now I see you've grabbed some long and leans, at this point I have to assume that you're either functionally illiterate or buying for a friend.

It doesn't make sense for you to buy long and lean

When you are clearly neither long nor lean.

This morning when I woke up I didn't try to squeeze into a pair of encouraging and happy to be here.

There's no way that I would be able to fit them over my contempt for you.

Maybe you could wait a season.

Pretty soon we'll be getting some low rise boot cut.

You may have also heard them called delusional denim.  
 They have some holes in the side, and they're frayed on the hems  
 So it really gives that classy, woman on top of her game, feel.  
 You could even accent it with a pair of broken heels and a 40.  
 I'm sorry there's a coat hanger over there trying to get my attention and if I don't act fast  
 I fear she may pivot and then we'll never find her.

Hi, can I help you find something, a cammi, a cardigan, a corndog?

No I'm sorry we don't go below a zero  
 But maybe you could grab some hohos and oreos  
 instead of sucking down diet pills and no doze  
 Then you wouldn't have to find Barbie doll clothes  
 Because you could dress like a big girl.

I know, I know, you're just not hungry.  
 You had like half a cheese cube last week on Wednesday.  
 I'm just a sales associate trying to be friendly.  
 So, how's Ken, still asexual.  
 You know you can still get into that dream house without fitting through the door.

Yes ma'am, we have boot cut which has a lower waist.  
 If that's too high, we have some low rise boot cut.  
 If that's too high, we have some ultra low rise boot cut.  
 And if that still isn't sending the message you want,  
 We've got some ankle socks 3 for ten that you could match with a nice "v" neck.

Ladies, forgive me. I'm not trying to be rude.  
 Some of you come through, and you look so good  
 Because you're wearing the shape and the size that you should,  
 Not trying to wear what you wish you could.

The denim you buy is not an expression of your attitude.  
It's functional fashion based on longitude and latitude.

The men who come through here are of course just as guilty,  
Hiked up high waters forging through the Mississippi,  
But I forgive them because we're guys. We don't know how to dress.  
We're color-blind, lazy. We're awkward at best,

But I work in the fitting room. I see you walk through the doors  
With 25 sizes, not one of them yours,  
And I'm sad because I've got to pick them up off the floor,  
But more so because you don't see how pretty you are.

If you're curvy or slender, voluptuous, trim.  
If you think you're too thick, if you think you're too thin,  
I just needed to tell you, and I promise I'll end,  
But you won't fit in those jeans till you fit in your skin.

Ma'am, could you put those jeans down.

## The GAP Finale

You know, every time it turns November

I like to take a second and remember

All the things that I'm thankful for.

I think about my family. I think about my friends.

Where I am, and where I've been.

I think about where I'm going, and what my life has in store.

I'm thankful for the roof over my head, thankful that this tummy's fed.

I'm thankful for the blessings that have fallen in my lap.

I'm thankful you're all here today, thankful you're here to hear me say

That what I'm most thankful for is probably the GAP.

I'm thankful that just last week my manager, he snapped at me

Because he felt that was the best way to get my attention.

I'm thankful that I'm so low in this sadistic corporate totem pole

That there's really not even room for condescension.

I'm thankful I know good and well, Dante's 3<sup>rd</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> circles of Hell,

Because I've worked there now for just under a year.

I'm thankful every time I walk out a door, a manager frisks me just to be sure

I'm not stealing what they know I'd never wear.

I'm thankful prepubescent teens

Are sharing daily shifts with me.

I mean, just the other day one of them quoted an entire episode of "South Park."

They really are our most precious resource.

I mean who needs to discuss gender theory

When they're quoting Dave Chapelle and movies that were never funny.

I'm thankful every day I start

I ponder stabbing that badge directly through my heart.

But as if this wasn't enough, I've got customers to be thankful for.

I'm thankful people are comfortable enough  
To throw 7 loads of still folded stuff  
That was never going to fit them anyway at my feet.  
I'm thankful they know that I won't care  
When they walk right by pretending I'm not there  
Because the rigors of folding clothes is enough to occupy me.

I'm thankful that they take the time  
To remind me it's November 9<sup>th</sup>  
And we've got Christmas music a month and half too soon.  
As if I needed someone to explain  
The merry music that pierces my brain  
That they've heard for 8 minutes and I've heard since early June.  
I'm thankful that the women in line  
Find it necessary to take the time  
To tell me the change from their 7 dollar sales.  
I'm thankful that my degree in Mathematics  
And three years spent in theoretical calculus  
Is no match for a woman counting on her press on nails.

But beyond the customers, and beyond the store,  
I think I know what I'm most thankful for.  
I'm going to tell you, and I promise that I'll close this.  
I'm thankful the last 453 words  
Are the last of the Gap that'll ever be heard  
Because this poem is my official two weeks notice.

**New York Laws**

New York laws say you can't touch dead people.

You can't hold their hand.

You can't tickle them.

You can't give them a high five  
or a low five.

You can't put your hand on the small of their back;  
lead them into a room.

You can't put your arm around them;  
your leg around them.

You can't step on their feet while dancing.

You can't trip them while walking.

There is no leapfrog  
or freeze tag  
or duck, duck, anything,

Not in New York,

Not with dead people.

New York laws say you can't touch dead people,

But people in New York haven't been alive since the 20's.

No wonder that place is so lonely.

## New Orleans

*Where does a saxophone sound more sweet  
Than on the Cajun tainted corners of Bourbon St.  
Where is the rhythm quite as strong  
As in the sounds of the night wind's lonesome sounds*

I went to Wal-Mart last night, midnight.  
There were lines 12 deep with families,  
Shopping carts full.  
I snuck through express, 20 items or less,  
But my roommate was caught in line.  
So I took a seat, placed my bag beside my feet  
And grabbed the cell to waste a little time.  
There was a Hispanic family in front of me.  
The adults were passing around this infant like a conch, giving each other voice.  
A seven-year old was putting bag after bag into the cart,  
And as I watched the children, my only thought  
Was, "shouldn't those kids be in bed."  
Then I saw a gift card and a student volunteer.  
I saw the two five gallon jugs of water they were buying.  
I guess there's no bedtime without a bed.

*Crawfish casserole and a glass of sweet red wine  
Mixed with a music that can drown away time  
Papa's got a penny, momma's got a dime  
Devil's got my dollar but I feel fine*

My eyes moved quickly to another evacuee,  
A beautiful young black woman with highlighted hair.  
She played her gift card, spoke with the manager,

Then started to pick apart her shopping cart,  
Pen in one hand, receipt in the other.  
She must have triple checked the register  
Making sure she had what was hers,  
And I thought, wow, how meticulous,  
How organized, with what focus she did scrutinize  
The contents of her twenty plastic bags,  
And when the triple check was through, I realized I'd be thorough too  
If 20 bags held everything I had.

*Sweet sunrise and a plate of beignets,  
We dance all night so we can sleep all day  
Rap tap tap on that hardwood floor,  
We're drowning in rhythm but we're still thirsty for more.*

Now I couldn't help but feel guilty  
As I watched the people in front of me  
Buying pillows, buying clothes, buying life.  
And then I looked in my bag saw two Pringles cans,  
Some junk food and snacks for the night.  
I thought 7.57, would I pay 7 dollars and 57 cents  
For a family of four to have clean water?  
7.57, would I pay 7 dollars and 57 cents  
For a little girl to have clean socks?  
7.57, would I pay 7 dollars and 57 cents  
To help a stranger who has nothing buy something  
So at least they don't have nothing anymore?

And then my roommate came through the line  
And looked at my bag as if to remind me,

Whether I would or wouldn't I didn't that time.

*Where does a saxophone sound more sweet  
Than on the Cajun tainted corners of Bourbon St.  
Where is the rhythm quite as strong  
As in the sounds of the night wind's lonesome sounds*

I don't know how you move New Orleans.  
I don't know how you move jazz or Mardi Gras,  
How you move history or tradition.  
I don't know how you move half a million people,  
But I know how you move one.

Open his eyes

## Consumer Report

Did you know that HEB sells 15 different premium quality deli cheeses?

We're not even talking plastic wrapped or handi-snacks.

We're talking top of the line, aged with time, deli select.

This made me wonder, as dairy products often do.

Why, pray tell, is there necessity or need for 15 different types of well aged cheese.

Could we function without them?

And could we even, dare I say it, function better ?

Now I don't want to focus on dairy per say,

But while we're at it, what the hay,

Let's talk a little bit about fat free milk.

Here's the thing.

If you want water, drink water.

If you want milk, drink milk.

But let's not mix the two in some unholy blend that Borden sends fooling us with a  
yellow cap.

Fat free milk is like lettuce free salad.

It's like tomato free gazpacho.

It's like bullshit-free literary theory.

It's what you don't like without the one thing that makes it interesting.

It's like modernism with.....

No, I'm gonna leave it right there, it's like modernism.

The next item on my list is seemingly innocent,

A small baked refreshment which I assure you was put here to kill you.

You know those cookies,

Those over floured hockey pucks with the festive icing,

The ones that come ten to a box because if they were an even dozen

The laws of our state would clearly mandate they be placed next to the pounds of sugar?

You know those cookies?

Don't sell those.

Time, Newsweek, and The Washington Post have all had articles on the coast to coast  
plague of childhood obesity because of these cookies.

Little girls can't fit into their prom dresses because of these cookies.

Little boys can barely run a mile because of these cookies.

I am in the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of hypertension because of these cookies.

Don't sell them.

If you want to stop kids' hearts by ninth grade fine but make it something gummy,  
Something they have to consciously chew.

Give us a chance.

Electric toothbrushes,

Another "basic need" you basically don't need,

That stores nation wide are selling out of.

People, do I really even have to say anything.

Shame on you.

Left and right, up and down.

If it's too strenuous, stretch before hand,

And don't say something ridiculous about fighting gingivitis.

Everyone knows that's the Santa Claus of mouth diseases.

I swear, before the decade's up, you'll need two AA batteries to cough.

Now these aren't the only worthless products.

Just the ones that came to mind.

And I'm sure next time I'll have plenty more

As long as Wal-Mart doesn't close the door.

I just want all of you to be on your guard.

Be aware what you put in your shopping cart.

But the choice is yours. The ball's in your court.

After all, this was just a consumer report.

## Jesi

I love plurals:

Geese, mice, turtles, syllabi.

I just really enjoy the way they sound.

However, I've found some words that don't necessarily have defined plurals.

Maybe they were overlooked. Maybe they were underestimated.

Maybe plural got confused with genitive or dative.

But regardless, what I want to discuss right now

Requires me to define, somehow,

The plural name of Jesus.

I submit we shall call them Jesi.

Using the precedent of octopus,

I think that it would behoove us to name them this.

It's important that we give them a name as their truth and identity have repercussions  
after tonight.

I submit that I have encountered over 457 Jesi.

I'd like to take a second to review a few.

There's a Jesus Pez dispenser.

People pop his head back once a Sunday, to kill the shame they've felt since Monday,

A little prism of religion. I think it's cherry.

There's a soap box Jesus .

They never really talk to the guy. They just like to climb up high.

So it's easier to look down on others.

There's a Britney Spears Jesus.

They're just cashing in on a trend, found themselves a new circle of friends,

Christian Cool Kids Club.

There's a rainy day Jesus.

He's never really invited in till somebody sees a storm blow in

Then He's allowed to stand watch at the door.

I've seen a Martha Stewart Jesus

That can make this cranberry salvation with a lemon twist, decorate their world with it

So no one tastes the insider trading.

There's a tough guy Jesus.

He's always called by his full name. Sure it's usually said in vain

But at least he's getting some attention.

There's a childhood Jesus.

He was there when you were little, before you were too old to fiddle

With Santa Claus and the Easter bunny.

There's an atheist Jesus.

Nietzsche killed him a few years ago. Now they're not knowing what they already know

Trying harder than believers to unbelieve.

There's a textbook Jesus.

He's been stripped of all his glory, turned into a children's story

So Dan Brown can call fiction a biography.

There's a universal Jesus.

He's a path that may or may not lead us to a place where Ghandi and Elvis meet us.

So heaven has a sewer line.

There's a conservative Jesus, and a liberal Jesus.

There's a concrete Jesus and an ephemeral Jesus.

There's a Quixote Jesus, a Sancho Panza Jesus.

There's the Ron Howard Jesus and the Fonz Jesus.  
There's a Snoop Dogg Jesus and a George Strait Jesus.  
There's a Planned Parenthood and a "love waits" Jesus.  
There's so many Jesi that it's easy to get confused  
But I know of another one that might interest you.

All He wants to do is talk,  
Have a little conversation.  
He wants to spend a little time  
With his father's sweet Creation.  
He's a medic and a teacher.  
He's a carpenter and preacher.  
He's a brother and a lover  
And a creator and a creature.  
And I nailed Him to a cross to wash away my sin.

See, all those Jesi are gonna die  
But only one can rise again.

## **My Father Never**

My father never told me that it would be alright to be him.  
Dipped deep in the stench of other people's pipes,  
He laid belly to the dirt and sucked up his lunch from someone else's hands.  
My father never told me that he was happy for me,  
That his happy could transcend that tree and be,  
Sucked up by gravity,  
Dripping up the branches of his xylem  
To be pushed into the ripe fruit of me.  
His happy wasn't for me.  
He needs more.  
These seeds couldn't drop where apples tend to fall.  
He was counting on me to be picked up by some wandering Americana  
Full of dreams and ambition,  
Who could pump me full of artificial flavor and neon food coloring,  
Speaking in yellow dye number 5 jive, running circles around the status quo,  
Going where my father feared to go, or couldn't go, or wouldn't go.

My father never allowed me to be the boy that he so effortlessly was,  
The man that he so effortlessly became,  
The father that he didn't give me room to be at age 23.  
Now I'm two years late and trying my hardest not to bend down for lunch,  
Gritty with someone else's gravel.  
I'll pretend to not be hungry.  
I'll become anorexic before I allow myself to eat the meat he warned me about.  
I'll shrink into oblivion before I live,  
Salt of the earth, bread of the common man,  
Some uncolored vase full of dead flowers and angry water.

Suck me up

Dry high into your lofty clouds.  
I'll rain down dust before I quietly subside,  
The rotten fruit of some homegrown orchard,  
Waiting for my greatest moment to be asexual repopulation  
I will not die hoping my seed outlives my wormed care.

My father never gave up on himself. He knew that me, that we, that we would be,  
Would be enough to validate the loss of one good apple.  
He knew from the beginning his organic colored fruit couldn't reach beyond  
What he sought for me.

And I, I will therefore be an apex of what he was not,  
Thereby making his immortality my sole ambition.

My father never made me to be a he that naturally evolved from him.  
He counts on numbered nails, scratching for leftover pieces of another man's meat,  
Laughing because he knows his progeny will crush him.  
Laughing because he knows his progeny will crush him.  
Laughing because he knows his progeny will crush him.

My father never planned for me to fall, but instead, to be sucked up into the sky  
Explode mid-air.

## Airport

I'm sitting in a Cleveland airport  
waiting for wings to float me  
from snowfall to sun.

The plane's delayed.  
The blue of the carpet's delayed.  
I postulate that the whole of Ohio is somewhat  
delayed.

There is a man in Concourse C  
with a tight black t-shirt and Gucci glasses.  
His wife, dripping in Armani  
offers a well-manicured nail  
to pacify their well-medicated child.

Black headphone wires  
snake up the man's neck  
biting him on the ears.

His eyes, venom filled,  
drown in vacancy,  
their mediocre holes  
barely visible through  
fashionable frames.

He is staring at  
an invisible girl  
asleep on the seat

in front of him,  
her legs slightly parted.

I wonder,  
    what kind of music helps you forget you are?

There is a couple in Concourse C  
sitting against a wall  
both dressed in burgundy.  
They match like altar boys,  
uncomfortable and frozen.

The man has a long  
white beard and  
graying hair.  
His perfectly groomed mane  
crowns the head  
and falls to his shoulders,  
reminiscent of Washington  
or my sixth grade teacher—  
both dead.

His plump wife  
talks anxiously  
on a cell phone.  
Her hair is fixed functionally,  
beautifully if  
she were some  
pioneering mother  
skinning a hog.

Their carry-on  
is a flat white box  
just the size for  
purple shrouds  
and poisoned Kool-aid.

They get up and move to the line,  
awkward Cleveland Gothic.  
They work into the crowd  
like sad clowns at the circus  
just before the top comes down.

I wonder,  
    how many of them are filling airports today, counting comets?

There is a little girl in Concourse C.  
She is playing cards with  
homeopathic parents  
who coddle and cuddle  
her inferiority.

They are playing  
“Egyptian Rat Screw.”  
The mother attempts to call it “War”  
but being politically aware,  
word sensitive,  
she prefers the idea of rodents  
engaged in sex.

After slapping two Jacks  
insuring her victory

she told her parents  
about an article  
she read in Newsweek.

“Just the other day”

she says

“I read that kids

who spend

at least 10

minutes a day meditating

are smarter.”

“I”

she continued

“have found

just enough time

in my math class.”

Her parents applaud

her literacy

her forethought

her now superior meditative mind,

they wait patiently

to slap her Jacks

Her brother is sitting

not four feet

from them,

rebellious two seats away

with a 450 page hardback

not reading

just looking for words

to tie in knots  
with tongue.

The father  
probably an accountant  
looks at him  
with concern.

The mother  
probably an aerobics instructor  
looks at him  
with concern.

The girl  
slaps him on the leg and yells  
“Oh you, You’re just awful.”

The accountant  
and aerobicizer  
laugh in unison  
then go back to coddling  
unaware  
their daughter is dead.

I wonder,  
    reading leafs of broken sonnets  
should I have meditated,  
would I be smarter,  
would I be healthier  
would I be rotting  
in Concourse C

contemplating the metaphysical  
all the while  
not knowing how to find the area of a rhombus?

It's almost time for me to board  
take my place in economy  
now that that man  
    that couple  
    that little girl are all reclining with extra leg room.

As I close my book  
I wonder,  
    when this plane goes down,  
    will the thin blue curtain  
    between first and second class  
    be enough to separate the bodies?

## Letter to Ms. K, My First Grade Teacher

I just found out that I'm 25 years old.  
It kind of snuck up on me,  
I wasn't expecting it.  
I looked at my driver's license, did some addition.  
It was all very innocent, but nonetheless, I'm 25.  
Now I'm not exactly in a quarter life crisis, yet.  
But in this threshold between birth and 50  
Where my luck at getting a Senior's  
Discount outweighs that of getting a child's plate,  
I feel a certain sense of obligation  
To look back at my construction  
And, you know, see what went wrong.

Now please don't mistake me.  
I'm thrilled with how God shaped me,  
A little plump and hairless like an under-watered Chi-a pet  
But in my infinite wisdom, I've come to the conclusion  
Most of my problems started with Ms. K.  
So these are just some notes  
I wrote down to share with folks  
Of things I wish that I had known back then.  
Maybe some of you got miseducated too.  
So, I'm just here to tie up some loose ends.

First of all, I wish I could have colored outside of the lines  
Because the black borders she gave that made it easier to grade  
Made me feel like I was easier to define.

Secondly, I wish she wouldn't have lied about the cursive thing

Saying nobody prints after second grade,  
That ancient calligraphy is the only way  
Adults can effectively communicate.  
For like 5 years I was terrified that I would never be able to write about things  
That contained the letters "Q" or "Z."

I wish she would have told me that girls and math don't make sense.  
I wish she would have told me that a degree in either won't get you a job.

I wish she would have told me that Easter has nothing to do with bunnies,  
That Christmas has nothing to do with apple-shaped ornaments  
Drowning in glitter glue,  
That hearts don't mean love, they're just hearts.

I wish she would have told me that nobody drinks beer because they like the taste,  
That nobody works out because they want to be able to lift heavier things.

That people who freak on the dance floor are covering for an inability to dance,  
That people who lie are covering for an inability to trust  
That people who hate are just unable.

I wish she would have told me that Ashlee Simpson was a liar,  
That Milli Vanilli was a liar, liar.

That I don't need to be double platinum to call myself a singer,  
That I don't need a trophy to call myself an athlete,  
That I don't have to write a poem to call myself a poet,  
That I don't need big black lines to tell me how to hold my color.

## **My Soul Was Hungry**

*Well now...*

*Everybody, everybody's got a heavy load to carry*

*Everybody, everybody's got a burden to bear*

*But when you travel with the Lord you're an angel in His mercy*

*If you want to go to Heaven, you're already there.*

My soul was hungry...

Her voice was slow and sweet

Like molasses that passes over a stack of flapjacks

It was thick and buttery, a darker shade of warmth

A methodic drip of honey that gathered and lathered

Down the fluffy golden cakes

Her notes seeped into every crevice, every hole

Every slightly browned soul

Stacked, high upon her plate

*When the cry of the poor is knocking at your door*

*When the wretched and the weak, begin to speak*

*When the sorry and the lame cry out your name*

*Well then shed the grace of God*

My soul was hungry...

Her voice poured like hot milk chocolate with just a touch of amaretto

Molten emotion in a lavish saucy cream

Her words cloaked and soaked my heart

In a hypothetical, theoretical, yet highly edible ecstasy

You could swallow it, feel it smooth down your throat

Those fudge rippled, double dipper, caramel covered

Lip smacking melodies of the mind.

*And when you sing to God Almighty  
I want to hear you singing Loud  
You're the thunder in His holy cloud  
Sing strong like the mighty river  
Sing long like the angels' song  
Sing strong, sing long, sing proud.*

My soul was hungry...  
Who knew religion could taste so good?

## Voter Registration

Excuse me sir, I have a question.  
I'm trying to fill out this voter registration.  
I'm sure this is a pretty common problem  
But I'm not from around here.

Oh, no, I was born in the USA  
But by the time I was 20 I gave my citizenship away,  
So now I'm just working on a temporary stay.  
You see I'm a Christian so my home is in Heaven  
I think the zip code ends in a seven  
Oh wait, you don't believe me. Is that what just happened?  
You're rolling your eyes. This is funny. You're laughing.

Yeah I've got a passport. I can show it to you.  
It's got 66 books. Some are old some are new.  
It doesn't have stamps but it comes with the truth.  
Stick around for a second, I can read it to you.  
Better yet, find me later, and I'll bring one to you  
So when it's November you won't check red or blue  
But instead what the words in your heart prompt you to.

I'm not here to offend. I'm just telling you friend.  
Don't be so open minded that you're closed up again.  
People talk about sex. People talk about race.  
People talk about greed. People talk about hate.  
But I talk about Jesus and someone yells wait,  
We're in mixed company; you better watch what you say.

I don't judge you, I can't, I don't come with a gavel.

Every time I get wound up you just see me unravel  
Then I'm broken in pieces like a tower of Babel  
Cause I been filled up with sin since Eve ate the apple.

Now Paul already said he's the worst of all sinners,  
But I promise what you've got, what I've got's much bigger.  
And if we had a medal, I'd be a first place winner.  
If we had a crown, I'd be king of all sinners.  
The only credit I've got is that one day I chose  
To believe Jesus died Thursday then Sunday he rose,  
And he threw off the shackles that death had imposed.  
He took all my sins and in his blood they flowed.

And in my passport it says that once he's in my heart  
My citizenship automatically starts.  
This isn't my skin. This isn't my face.  
Glenn ain't even my name. I've got a new one by grace.  
See my home's got gold poured out over the streets  
I've got constellations pushing up at my feet.  
So I can check USA to make this form complete,  
But I'm really absentee because you can't hold me.

I'm just here on a mission to tell my sisters and brothers  
That my house is in this place but my home's in another,  
And if you just say there's a God but you're not loving each other,  
James says even demons believe that and shudder.

But like I said, I'm just confused a bit.  
I want to make sure that I get all of this correct.  
It's important I'm truthful in what I select.  
Maybe you could tell me, what box did you check?

## CONCLUSION: WORD SPACE

After evaluating my evolution as a writer, I keep returning to the idea of the page and the stage, not as a dichotomy, but two ends of a continuum. The questions of literacy the page, and orality, the stage, have a unique place within my poetry. Considering the stark contrast between the first and last poems in this collection it is clear that I have stood on both ends of the spectrum. What I ask myself now, is what fills the space in between?

Performance poetry allows a certain ideological resolve that page poetry does not. After a stage performance, the audience is there, waiting. The poet cannot hide from the speculation or at its best the adoration of an audience that demands explication. The audience's physical presence creates a unique demand for clarification from the author and understanding for the audience.

Page poetry, while just as powerful as performance poetry, digs an un-crossable chasm between the poet and the reader. A detached audience requires immediate answers to the poem that an author is unavailable to produce. Page poetry must be confined to what is written, an unresolved question or situation, leaving an empty space for ambiguity and interpretation.

The bridge between these two seemingly diametric forms of poetry is the "word space" they both create. Word space can be defined as the unsaid words that could resolve both page and stage poetry. When I write page poetry there are things I leave unsaid. This space allows the reader to enter the poem. When I perform poetry, my words actually enter the audience's physical space, thus anything unsaid or unresolved is where I, as the performer, can retreat.

I believe that the understanding of the word spaces will form a clearer link between the page and the stage. My hope is that one day, all poetry will be able to coexist in both, reestablishing the orality of page poetry, while at the same time buttressing the literacy of stage poetry.

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