

Salem State University
The Graduate School
Department of English

Bones and Allegories

A Thesis in English

by

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Afterword

This poem has been a nuisance. At first, I noticed it crouching nearly out of sight beyond my windowsill at night, murmuring the Kaddish. For a long while, I dismissed it as the wind, but each night it got louder and clearer, until suddenly I woke up and there it was, perched on a chair to the left of the dresser. Soon, I couldn't sleep. I began to throw things at the poem: balled up dresses, hair brushes, necklaces, once I even threw my Vogue cd, but I missed and the jewel case was destroyed.

One morning, stumbling to the coffee maker, I saw it clearly and in full light across the room, elbows sunk in the soapy dish water. Every morning after it stood there, clacking plates around, getting suds everywhere and looking back over its shoulder with that wide, wide grin. It was difficult to keep the poem clean after that, I'd take it to the bathroom, rinse away the film and detritus, and it followed me around dripping all day, and the next day again and the next...

So as you can see I'm done with the poem. Good luck with it. I'm leaving it here, distracted. I'm making a break for it...

The DJ asks *How ya'll doin' tonight?*

Then he repeats, *I said, how ya'll doing tonight?*

And so I reply:

*I have felt a darkness / putting up roots through the arches /
of my feet, and moving / along the worn paths of my own veins /
and capillaries, and now, / each year, this heaviness blots out /
more of what I once / did not know to call light.*

The DJ has no more questions.

Plays Freebird.

CAPITALISM

My nephew's not even three yet
but already he can spell some words:
like S A L E and M A L L
and I'm glad he's picking up
the foundations of capitalism
along with his letters.

If I can't give him a better world
at least he can play with this one.
it's like when you buy toddlers
the best Christmas presents
and they spend the whole day
playing pretend with the box.

It's an ailing metaphor
but modern culture's like the box.
I think of Ke\$ha as a box.
I really like Ke\$ha
She's probably for sale,
not that it does *me* any good.

If I could buy Ke\$ha
I don't think we'd be happy
but we could both make-believe for a while
we wouldn't have to kiss
but after we could sit side-by-side
and watch even the sun depreciate.

Rich people spend their money
on other money
I spend my money
on string
colorful string
– looks good on the walls

I have to be poor
because
my mother was poor

I wear it
like a pretty toe ring
on my ugliest stubbiest toe
the one that loves banging
into bric-a-bracs
in rich-people houses

I like
to dent their things
so they'll appreciate them more
instead of focusing
on all that money

Philanthropist

It's great if you're a philanthropist.
That means you get to be generous
and greedy, and never reconcile
anything. I'm not a philanthropist
I'm a poet. Of all the many things,
this is not not the worst of them.
A poet is always trying to reconcile
everything, and sometimes will
go on in such an uninterrupted state
for hours. The rest of the day
the poet spends reading
other people's fruitless reconciliations.
This is because the poet likes to
be touched. Not just on the body
but also on the ephemerals. The poet
likes nothing else. Sometimes I confuse
people when I talk. They say wait, *I thought
the poet has no body* and I tell them
no, you are thinking of the po-EM.
The philanthropist doesn't have to
worry about the poem, the philanthropist
can be touched almost all the time
by almost everybody at the smallest
whim and not feel any confusion.
This is called giving it away
and it is both generous and greedy.
Keeping too much money is greedy
which is why the philanthropist
is always giving. But the philanthropist
might be confused about who to give
what and how much and when and
why. This can involve rhetorical
choices that are difficult to make
alone. There is no need for this.

Philanthropists, give me money!
I feel like giving it all away.

We've Been Playing Monopoly Wrong

Build all the houses and hotels with money from the bank.

Let all your friends and strangers stay for free.

Travel extensively, remember to enjoy it.

Take the Get Out of Jail Free card, photocopy, share.

Pay your taxes.

If you land on Free Parking, take that accumulated tax money, throw a party.

Invite all your friends and all your strangers.

Pass Go.

Pass Go.

Pass Go.

Myth

When I was younger, I believed that
bumblebees can't sting, which
my mother taught me, but life
and time proved her a liar;
not only can they sting
they can sting
over and
over

.

Speaking of Fairy Tales, or, The Huntsman Denies Ever Cleaving Anything

That ax, he says, is good for finding spaces in things.

Come to the Lost Party

I'm watching *Lost* alone –
having a *Lost* party of one.
I told my old friends I was
busy tonight, and the new
ones just stood me up.
Munching sinful Sun Chips
I enjoy them less than I'd like.

America, the Beats gave
you too little credit.
I can teach you to touch
the truth of experience
in my living room as easily
as in the brothel, and later
we'll even be able to look
each other in the eye
without too much shame.

Female Poet on The Moon

Oh moon, you futile wax-waner
tiding through the vacuum

how long will they warble for you?
You dead lump rock, the cast off

glow of the sun, anti-matter
anti-magic, anti-madrigal

No love is unconditional.
Oh moon, look at the stars,

small, discrete, respectable,
but when I saw you, trying to

swallow the tops of skyscrapers,
choking, what is it that I felt

then? Anti-proud? Disgrace?
Schadenfreude's opposite?

Oh you earless, airless orb
with the empty crater-eye

sockets, you with the mean
.273 Earth's radius, the dark

volcanic maria of your crustal
highlands. There's silence enough

in your dust to muffle
an eternity of songs.

I waited here too long
for you, my hiccup heart's

arrhythmia tick tick tocking,
taking the wrong time.

Never again, you deceitful
synchronic orbiter, I'm giving

all my psalms to death, who is
reliable, who will come for me

however I howl, and whomever to.

Do Not Bow

Do not bow to a deer, and do not stare a monkey in the eyes.
These are useful things to know, and in this way I have made my poetry useful.
All this talk about meaning, but what we really want is to fuck around
And pretend we're not under obligation to somebody else's suffering.

What I want is to see Buddha statues made out of glittery ground-bones.
Please note that by dying you authorize your bones to be used in any way
This institution may deem fit, any part of this agreement may be changed
At any time. If you choose to terminate this agreement, you agree not to die.

Back before I was pushing around poems, I had to sleep without any miracles
Besides the singing of the rocks and the way blood goes from red to blue
Blue to red, red to blue, without expecting anything from anybody.
Now I've got googols of miracles, no more accountable than sand grains

And I got you, too, and what a deal!
I didn't sign anything, after all.

Dear W,

So, let's say we're all dying up.
Caught in some circle unfurling
drab tongues to press and rattle, faded
but full with the cold of the sea.

But then there's you, and you, you were for me.
We talked about you at the bar today
and I told them how you read me
the very cut of the earth, and that our arms
were the same as the shore.
Wide to the water lap, the ebb, the pull.
And I said that you taught me
to be still, and an open sort of grace, drawn
in the greatest tide we've known.

Failing to Dream, I Survive by Eating Words

I write the names of people
I love on scraps of paper
& bury them shallowly
at the feet of new graves.
Like all the college graduates

I'm far too busy listening
for music in car batteries.
It's not that it's not love

but I could do better.
Was it her or her poems
that I burned that day
crushing milkweed & clover
in our overgrown lot?
Orion's sword is sucking up
even dimmer monitor lights.

Oh! It's not just paper pages
they're printing these days
when I leave them alone
lying in my living room.

You Said Don't Wait Up, the World Will Go On Without You

You're a fool. Now the whole damn thing's quit spinning.

Formication

I run my fingers through your syntax and watch them blacken
and your spleen's still wearing that funny beret
I misheard miracles in your skin
and your sciatic nerve is all regret.

Your poetry's bad but you have a nice triangular shape
blessed of hips
there's a word for the tingling feeling amongst
and between ions of the macro scopes
but let's not repeat it here.

Communications

These days, my phone is asking me constantly *are you dreaming?*

Are you dreaming?

In this way I am learning to untie myself from the earth.

My phone and I speak silently, via arcane hand gestures. *They're watching us now, all the time.*

Are you dreaming?

Are you dreaming?

They offered Nikola Tesla once he sorted wireless transmission, but not quickly.

Pork is tenderer if you bleed the pig slowly.

It was a lot like this, except that, like most of us, Tesla bled money.

Are you dreaming?

In the end he died in a DC hotel, the electric spirit flat, dull.

My friends tell me I'm full of shit, but let the tethered fuckers talk. Tesla's still dead.

Are you dreaming? Are you dreaming? Are you dreaming?

Are you dreaming? Are you dreaming? Are you dreaming?

I'm working my way loose.

Language Sells

The Rosetta Stone girl
hasn't sold anything today.
Watch her utilize tools
to maximize presence.

She demands a certain type
of legitimacy and reads
in a certain assertive voice.
But she worries constantly
about positive and negative
indicators for eye contact.
Storytelling is an effective way
to appeal to someone's emotions,
why just the other day...
she's been told.

She no longer resembles
the things she represents.
She gave up on universal
language out of a hatred
for grammar drills.

I am -- you are -- she is
told to speak motherese
defined as simplified speech
with exaggerated intonation
and rhythm. But nothing
with her mother has ever been
simple. This is why
nobody buys a box.

She thinks of companies
as those groupings
of people united against her.
Mother Mother Mother

*why must we spend
all our time tasting money?*

What a complicated pronominal
structure, but it may reinforce
the purchasing decision.
If you cared as attentively
as you listen you'd
buy it, she gets commission.

Employment

Carefully, I line up the six
bird spines, side by side
each vertebra balanced
on its left transverse
process, as close as I
can get them to a life
like arch, just lying there
on the conference table.

Ever wonder where
the time goes?

Roommate Love Song

-For Sarah, Pete & Cheryl

We're watching a movie
where this bro has cancer
and his 3 bro roomies intercept
the letter from the doctor
and they're all like: *dude*
how do we tell him? and
his birthday's comin' up and
it's totally gonna be a downer.

So they figure they'll wait
and tell him after
so he can have *like*
a totally killer night bro
before like chemo & shit.

We then watch 5 movie days
of bad repression, which works
out to like 45 real minutes
and these bros
are not taking it well.

Cancerous bro will say something
like: we should totally get a keg
on Saturday. I think like every b-day
for the rest of my life
I'm gonna throw a keg party
And in-denial bro 1 will say yeah man,
yeah man, yeah man, whatever you want
dude, we can have whatever you want
and his voice cracks, and I've-got-a-secret
bros 2 & 3 look stricken, and bro 3

drives them to the liquor store
with tight white knuckles
and when they get there
bro 2 won't let cancer bro pay
and he's crying handing over
his card and cancer bro
and the clerk shuffle awkwardly
and bros 1 & 3 look away
and no one's saying anything.

So they go on like that
until Saturday morning
when the doctor (who couldn't
be bothered to deliver the news
in person, but apparently cares
enough to think about cancer
bro on the weekend) calls
to make sure everything's
alright *yo doctor Mankins*
you callin' to wish me a happy
birthday? Well it all
comes out then, and cancer
bro is sitting staring silently
at the wall, world all demented
in understanding, and his bro
roomies are out in the living
room bracing themselves for
a killer party, and everyone
puts on a brave face and starts
drinking and before long they're all
choking on sobs, and it's all: *dude*
duuuude duuuuuuude, dude
dude we're like bros to the end
right? Like dude dude of course.

The rest of the weekend is a montage
of all this bro shit they've always

loved to do together with a very
un-bro-ly sense of urgency *yeah dude,*
you killed it, you own the gym dude, and still
no one's told cancer bro, and cancer
bro hasn't let on that he knows either
and then on Monday morning
hung over in the kitchen, reeling
from the sharp teeth of the ringing
phone and thinking, *dude, maybe*
a little hair of the dog they all get
the voicemail together: *a mistake...*
so sorry....mix-up with the blood-
*work...*and they're all up
in the kitchen, whooping and hugging
and crying, and they're thumping backs
and bumping chests, and giving like
full-body hugs with no concern
whatsoever for bro-code
crotch distance stipulations.

And I think the bros must live
happily ever after, doing b-day
keg stands under the bored eyes
of the nursing home CNAs.

And I'm thinking of *my* roommates
and what I'd do. I'd start by not
opening their mail
since that's a felony. But I think
if one of them did have cancer
and somehow only I knew
I wouldn't tell them, but I'd
write a poem about it: *like*
here's this totes random
poem about cancer I wrote
for you in an act of
sublimation, but don't think

*too hard about it, it's nothing
like, really, it's nothing
and what you wanna do
for your birthday? Dude
duuuude duuuuuuude, dude
dude we can do whatever
dude we can do anything
you want.*

Dana,
Dana Ward

There's this guy
who made a video
about you, on YouTube,
our loving cup
I wonder if you know it?
The video has a strong sense
of parody with an underlying
admiration that really makes me think
of the questions you raise
about the possibility
of true connection, or the
failure of the same. One
of the nice things
about YouTube is that
in its own way it transcends
language. The power of the
body going beyond conventional
modes of understanding to
that human whatever that we
can't quite name. I've been thinking
a lot about life, about youth. My Uncle
is old. 84, Alzheimer's, nursing home.
Same tired story. I visit him every day
but Sunday. As his mind
deteriorates his speech
becomes at once both
more flat in theme but also
more interesting in composition.
*We went through the whole war
just me, the cat, and a wild pig
that got loose.* I think about poetic
tools like repetition, the disjointed
voice, the unreliable

narrator, shifts in perspective
manipulation of cliché, all
of these are things
my uncle is teaching me about
in one way or another. Mary Ruefle
has said, either in lecture or poetry
hard to tell which is which
that all living poets are
writing all the time
about death, but this
has no value until they're dead
because then every morbid word
is suddenly and unavoidably
about living. A shift in a point
of reference. As a child, everyone
thinks about life as moving
toward some future point.
As we grow old we realize
we've gone right past
zero into the negatives
but we can't turn around
I just watched Gravity with Sandra
Bullock and George Clooney.
The basic idea is that
Sandra's character
has to overcome the terror
of her probable death alone
in the void of space
and her general ambivalence
about living in a universe
where her child is not, in order
to make her way back
to the world. Sandra was OK
but I've never liked her.
I think it's because no matter
how empowered her
roles, something about her

screams *save me*
save me I want somebody
to save me
it might be the eyes.
It's not a female thing
a rejection of a woman
representing weakness even under
a skilled facade of strength,
it's that we all want the same thing,
to be saved, but
most of us hide it better.
The other day my uncle
saw his cat, Clover, on the bed and
thought she was his dead son
curled up and crying.
Who would do that?
Who would just leave
that baby there?
Some laboratory somewhere
is working on a device
that can access our memory
system as we get old, and prompt
us when we need,
say, the name of our daughter
or cat, instructions
on tying our shoes, reading
our watch, turning
up the t.v, turning down
the heat, the faces of the people
we find we can actually pay
to care for us. This device
that is not perhaps human –
unless humanity is found
to be a function of memory –
will speak in the world
through and for us,
will hold together more

of human life than we
could have ever imagined,
would have ever retained alone.
This technology though
is still in its infancy.
Dana, this poem wasn't
supposed to be so depressing.
I only wanted you to know
that there is such a thing
as connection.
Every day we cast it further
even when we lose direction
even as the body shimmers
as the mind slips past.
Don't lose heart, in the end
we'll always have some language,
some semblance of art, gone
between us.

O life, o tiny beloved failure

If your memory didn't collapse
You'd grow more and more God
each day expanding into you
an infinity of touch
those tastes you had you have forever
And all the names go on and on
If you didn't need the word for memory
And the past shrunk away
on a proportional, almost comical scale

I never text and drive
but this morning I drove to work
reading Philip Levine.

A hand on the wheel about
one, the other dangling down
near my thigh, thumb
forcing open the spine.

I keep it low, hoping
to avoid cops, and especially
the judgment of the tall
black escalade crawling along
beside me in the morning traffic.

I think that there must be
worse things than poetry
that is, if you're looking at reasons
to die. For example

did you hear about Oscar
Pistorius' girlfriend?

She died for Valentine's Day.

I'm sure that's worse than a pileup
in the middle of *On the Meeting
of Garcia Lorca and Hart Crane*.

Oscar, shot his girlfriend
that night right through the bathroom
door, then carried her to bleed out
in the living room, where the police
later paused the investigation
to get pics of all his medals.

The incident occurred in the small
hours, early enough that if he'd
remembered to get her chocolate
or roses, she probably never got them.

Four shots. Well under a dozen.

Now the media's been going crazy
trying to decide if he *meant* to kill
her, or if it just happened, like
my poems sometimes. Either way
I guess it doesn't matter.
Someone's still got to find all
the bullets they didn't carry
away with her body and fill
the holes in. That is, if anyone
ever wants to be able to use
that bathroom door again.

Waterskiing Across the Surface of the Poem

I am the victim
of a horrible
boating accident.
I nearly drown.
For years, I wake
from nightmares where again and again
I'm submerged in the depths of the poem,
my blood diffusing into its cold wet dark.
Rest assured, Billy Collins
is as generous to a young poet
as you'd imagine:
he pays my medical bills
without a thought
and we settle easily
out of court.

From A Dictionary of Intermediate Japanese Grammar

ano 母親 wa kodomo o 愛してる to iu yori wa, mushiro, amayakashiteiru。
oya dearu ijyou, 子供 no kyouiku ni kanshin ga aru no wa 当然 deshou。
isshoukenmei 仕事 o shita noni, gyaku ni nakama ni kirawareteshimattta。

that mother is pampering her child rather than loving him.

if you are any sort of parent, you should be interested in your child's education.

he worked very hard, but, contrary to expectations, his peers hated him.

kono daigaku wa 教育内容 wa iu made mo naku, setsubi mo batsugun ni sugureteiru。
kare wa 平日 wa iu made mo naku, 週末 ya 祭日も shigoto o shiteiru。
karoushi to iu no wa hatarakisugi ga moto de 死ぬ to iu koto da。

this university excels in facilities, to say nothing of educational programs.

he is working hard even on weekends and holidays, not to speak of weekdays.

過労死 means to die from overwork.

彼 wa sonoban koufun no amari 寝られなかった。
tokoroga, だめ dattan da。
彼 wa 結婚何か surubeki jyanakattan da。

he was so excited that he couldn't sleep that night.

however, it didn't work out (lit. it was no good).

he shouldn't have married.

ningen wa douse shinun だから, akuseku katairaite mo 仕方がな。
ano hito wa 酒 o 飲む to 言う yori wa mushiro 酒 ni 飲まれている to 言ったほう ga 良い。
その koushou wa kiwamete 困難 dearu。

since we humans are bound to die, it is no use working hard.

one should say that sake drinks him, rather than he drinks sake.

that negotiation will probably be very difficult.

kare wa 小さいtoki 病気がち deshita。
彼は出金だらけ no 生活 o shiteimashita。
kare ni wa sake o igai ni 何も楽しみがなかった。

he was often ill when he was young.
he was living a life with many debts.
he had nothing to enjoy other than drinking.

話すべきことは全部話しました。
自分のことは自分ですべきだ。
この作文は間違いだらけです。

I told you everything I should tell you.
you should look after yourself (lit. you should do your own business by yourself).
this composition is full of mistakes.

***I try to resist the bird as
soul metaphor***

but watching them there, soaring
scuffling over trash
chasing each other off
lampposts, in the grey
dawn off the all-night
Dunkin' Donuts parking lot

I'm moved despite myself.

And
hell is

by far

an older
house

than
heaven

the soul

a weeping
bird

under
the rotten
boards

of the
veranda

Daoism: Nutshells only when Empty

Once, I tried flowing like water, and everything was so simple, blue stone, blue fire, blue grass, blue hope, entropy. It didn't last, but I'm not confusing clams and sparrows, so there's that.

Oh Cook Ding, I'm always thinking about your sharp knife finding the eternity between nue- and elec- trons. Wǒ yào dāng nǐ de wu wei. I want to be your non-action.

And oh, Emperor Wu, Liu An loved you, you shouldn't have burned his court. They were lying to you. It was barely a tremor. We only lost maybe 20 pots, and what does a Confucian understand about value and space set free?

It Turns Out

It turns out the brain was actually a bad little sun headed for supernova time-out. Finally, it exploded inward and I didn't see it coming and I stood there gaping. I thought it would be bigger. Turn out like a Michael Bay movie. I should have thought of my mother's black hole. I should have thought of tiny ripples in pond mirrors. I should have thought my life is a never-ending obliteration measurable only in terms of disappointments. I should have thought of basic science or the laws of physics.

It turns out the comet had been hurtling around some 40,000 generations. Finally, I gravitational pulled it into a quickly decaying orbit around the frontal lobe. I called it the soul. Turns out this is not politically correct. I should have called it my cranial visitation. I should have called it delusion in the void of night. I should have called it decomposition in the bright sky-bowl trailing the tears of lifetimes. I should have called it more often.

It turns out the thing was made mostly of ice, dust and ion tail tripping up light. Finally, it'd bled out everything and left a sick dull lump of asteroid. I regretted ever catching it. Turns out the thing broke apart under thermal stress. I should have regretted the bits of molten debris I slung around. I should have regretted being judged by other burning balls of gas. I should have regretted that the whole thing didn't end in spectacular collision with my respiratory center. I should have regretted a lot.

Maybe It Was the Processed Sugar

Or maybe God
that made the rat so stupid
he drowned in his plastic tub
in full view
of the three women
with their white lab coats.

If you take a woman
anywhere from, say, 13 to 50
well, she's bleeding
1/10 to 1/4 of the time.

I'm told this
is not among the miraculous
works of God, but
somehow I bleed
for six days, and wake up on the seventh
no less alive.

I'm also told, everything is a part of God.

What part of God
is my blood?
The dead rat?
The sugar? Or the scientists
who killed the rat?

I've been wondering 3/4 to 9/10 of the time.

Political Poem

I wouldn't suck his dick if you paid me.

That's when I knew for sure she was red, a pinko

commie. She's not the only one, a lot of people aren't really thinking straight about democracy.

This isn't some joke reality t.v. bullshit like Kanye's fake marriage to Kim

or an unfortunate bid on Storage Wars. Some soldier somewhere died

for something and you've got to appreciate that otherwise you'd be a slave, I dunno to what.

I also don't know how slaves buy stuff. Fuckin' life without money must really be hell!

Wandering around starved, naked, disconnected – that's why her attitude's so sickening. *Of course*

I was always going to turn her in but – truthfully – I thought her poems were so beautiful it was hard

for me. At heart, America's all full of shit anyways. I know there's no such thing as *Russia*.

Lies I've Told Over Dinner #082

I like how your cheeks puff out when you're angry. It helps me remember you're an animal, and so am I.

I thought you said *bullet hole* but really you said *poem*. Which was refreshing, because the bullet hole thing was getting old. Whenever you found one you'd thrust the appropriate (or inappropriate, as the case may be) body part at me and say *See?! Look what you did! Look what you did!* fingering the hole a little wider.

I've decided I'm going to write the poem about the time Emily Dickinson discovers masturbation, and suddenly she doesn't have to leave the house, or publish any poems. She can just stay in all day and...

Then, when you find Emily, spread out there on the kitchen table, you thrust her toward me. *Look what you did!* you say *Look what you did!* your long fingers crinkling her name.

In Loco Parentis

When I was eight I killed my father.

I did it with a child's detached curiosity
but I remember it with an old bitter rage.

I always know where in our apartment
my mother has hidden the Polaroids
by a localized heaviness in my skin
a slight obstruction of the breath
when facing a certain direction.

I snarl, skitter around their edges.

I will not look at his round face, his white suit
the blood rose blush in his cheeks.

Now that he is dead, this is the only life
I have the power to take from him, and

this is why I've never asked his name.

*

In the closet, I keep only plastic coat hangers
but all of them are red.

On my birthday I spread them
around the apartment.

They tumble off the blades of the ceiling fan
melt in the oven, and become
cheerful baubles accenting the black
handles of the knife block.

This ornamentation is my only joy, and

this is why I will never marry.

*

When my mother taught me our language
she left out all the proper nouns.

Thus our conversations have always
been full of complex gestures.

To say *I want a Big Mac* we stick our fingers
down our throats, and undulate the shoulders.

For *fly new Asics*, we must hunch
down to the height of child, grab our hair
suddenly, and plunge to the left.

If there is a good sale at Wal-Mart, we might
first point to an empty spot in the cupboard
second, find a middle-class family dining
at home, third, tie them up, fourth
bleed them slowly until death, and

this is why my language is difficult to teach.

*

When my father died, he squealed
like a stuck pig. I had never

heard a pig stuck anywhere, but
somehow the sound could not be
mistaken. My mother keeps on

basic cable all day, because
she says that a house without
sound is a house bereft of both

Price is Right and wings, and

this is what I remember him by.

*

When my debt came due with Sallie Mae
I tore out my own wings to come even.

As you know, the roots of wings extend
into the marrow of the bone, so this
was no small task. I had to involve

the coping saw and the audiobook version
of *The Secret*. I've since learned

I could have just given them some

amount of money equivalent to
the original debt plus maybe half
a lifetime's interest, and

this is the regret I'm living with.

*

Shortly after I killed my father, my mother
moved us to a new shiny city, developed

the odd habit of sitting quietly, long
fingernails drawing back just the corner
of the living room curtain. If she noticed

me nearby, she might edge toward
the door, as if we were expecting a visitor.

No one ever came to visit, and

this is still how it is at our house.

*

My first day of third grade:

*Hi, I am nine, I just moved
here and my father is dead.*

In that silence, my wings wilted
for the very first time. After this
I learned quickly that there are
better methods of communication.

Such as L.L. Bean, Lisa Frank
and Tamagotchi. And that
the only thing worse than being judged

by friends, is being judged by strangers, and

this is why I introduce myself to everybody.

**

My mother likes Jerry Springer and Pandora bracelets.

Her hair is so large, sometimes I imagine I've seen
her wings. She taught me our word for wings,
to hold the hands out from the body, palms
forward, thumbs hooked, fingers splayed,

rotate the wrists inward, slowly arc until
the pinkies brush, then return, repeat, and

this, for us, is unusually gentle.

*

My father wore only white suits.

A white suit means many things:
Salesman, Satan, Jackass, Pimp.

To keep it clean at dinner, he'd wear
his cloth napkin like a bib. Honest
to God. At the Bank of America, he always
demanded the unsullied money.

I remember his words in his own ugly
language, *A certain absurd cleanliness*

*attracts even before it registers. In this way
you can take anything from anybody.* and

this is why I care meticulously for my teeth.

*

In my mother's closet is the only book
in the house made with letters, so

during *Dancing with the Stars*, I often
sneak in to study. I'm learning lots
of things, like: at the base the rachis

expands to form a hollow tubular shaft
which inserts into follicles of the skin, and

this is a true fact about most feathers.

*

There are many words in your language
for what I've done to my father:

annihilate, dispatch, deep-six, do in
assassinate, eradicate, rub out

slaughter, put to death, waste
destroy, neutralize, finish, butcher, but

of course this is misleading. This is
not a work that ends. Even now

I'm gnawing off the traces of my father
from my back, with my own thirty-two teeth, and

this is how I'm going on.

*

My father's blood was like asphalt
in that it poured hot, thick

on the kitchen floor, required heavy
machinery to spread evenly, and
could be shaped into a sort of path.

In the summer with all the curtains
removed, the windows closed,
sometimes I can still smell it, and

this is why I never Swiffer.

*

When I was ten I foolishly sold off
the licensing rights to most

of the things, I'm telling you, to Sony
Corporation and included a right
of first refusal on renewals. Now

I'm broke, and everyday Visa is bothering me
ING Direct is bothering me
even Citibank Group is bothering me, and

this is the reason I don't answer the red phone.

*

When my mother watches *Law & Order*, her eyes go big as saucers.

She's learning about facial recognition software, and different ways to identify semen on dirty mattresses. When she

washes the mugs now, she scrubs the rims with the soapy rough part of the sponge, and

this is what you might translate to *progress*.

*

Once my father was gone, my mother

spent 100 years washing dishes, give or take, for 25 years' wages at Applebee's. They got her on sale. I remember watching

the cracks in her hands as they flowed through the air, and the strange shapes

they made, like tiny red letters, and

this is why I'm ambivalent about labor laws.

*

As soon as I could make a fist I was into mashing and throwing

mashing and throwing. So I remember the feeling of Gorton's fish sticks, Ore-Ida

french fries, Green Giant canned peas
my father's white suit in the corner
wary of SpaghettiO's sauce, and

that is where I think that stain came from.

*

Since I began interpreting for you
I've almost come to resent our idioms:

His palms are surely parched
She's just polishing coat-hangers
A sunny wrist blossoms roses etc.

I can't quite get the meaning across, and

this is trite like a plucked chicken.

*

When I was six, I used to like to try
on my mother's wants. I tried on
Swatch, Hummers, IBMs, but

now that I'm older what I really want
is a more expressive, universal language
one I might hold on my back, or, as you

might say, *in my heart*. As I understand it
if I can say and mean your words seriously

such as *askance*, *fecund*, or *zenith*, then
life *can't* be all that bad, and

this is the theory I'm going on with.

[Radio]

There is only one
way to say goodbye/
it is the only thing you
don't have to pay for/
you want it more/ than
what you have paid for/
you haven't paid for anything
in years/ except miracles/
and car radio/ there has been
a heavy price for car radio/
the stars were pleasant distraction/
a nice way to imagine the soul/
folded into light/ bleeding/ into
darkness/

i got a miracle/
i got it cheap/
it was years ago and I paid for it/
I paid for it with money/
I paid for it with other
things/ I paid for it
with other ink with other
friends and other think/
with otherwise ephemeral
bits of my body/ with lies
and with moonlight/ stolen
moonlight/ nothing that can
be paid for can be owned/
I own my own/ only owe/
only lowly one/ lonely one/
I heard about it/ I heard
about it on the car radio/
good/
goodbye
goodbye/
goodbye radio
goodbye/ goodbye
lies & ephemera/ good
bye moonlight/ good/ goodbye
other satellites/ goodbye/ bye goodbye
what is paid for/ goodbye years/ goodbye pop
& the soul/ goodbye stars you are pinpricks/ goodbye miracles
goodbye poetry/ good/ bye/ goodbye friends/ goodbye to you/ and buhbye again/car
radio