

Future Barn

a poem

by Tyler Gobble

You might prefer to bow your head
& fling these words towards whatever
God orb or entity you worship
Be my guest
Which is a good reminder to say
Thank you for being my guest
Anyhow me personally
I prefer to keep these thoughts these feelings
Down here between us
Like an excited goat
Kicking up its own shit between fence posts
This my latest attempt to send a signal
A red light flashing high up a windmill
Hoping the planes & the birds soar elsewhere
Despite my rambling in spite of my babbling
I do not wish to keep you
I want to release you towards one another
To mingle forward together into the future
Barking in the present & fueled by the past
First let me share a minor explanation
If you stand in this yard right
Between the driveway & the leftover trees
The electric company threatens to unplug
You look past a trio of houses a random horse
If the corn does not stand still

& we can see it maybe

Future Barn

The affectionate name I grafted onto my grandfather's barn

Old white rickety thing he keeps threatening

To tear down to dig a hole & push it in

But I beg no & not just because

Future Barn

It is such a solid two-word combo

A duet between temporality & hickish leaning

But also because what its presence means

First an artifact of a past beyond mine own

The barn squats on the plot grandpa awoke on

The barn surrounded by field

The last patch of family farmland

Up & down the same road

A pile of memories held against myself to myself

Till now here they come flooding

Once my dad dragged me along to help

Uncle Ted

He was moving & I brought my dog

Sugar

& she ended up shitting in the house

After everything else had done been hauled away

& I did not tell this to anyone till right now

It is the night after my wife left

So I figure a pass might be granted
Okay but what about for killing that bird
Brice & I in the field with pellet guns
& I killed this bird
Which kind of bird
I did not yet have brain enough to know
I peeled back its chest & flickered there a neon heart
Or so says the little voice that narrates my memories
Also I confessed the envelopes never too till now
Grandpa & I turning dust down the driveway on his tractor
& I holding the mail freshly plucked from the mailbox
& a couple flopped from my tiny paws
& folded into the dust below the tires
I never told anyone about the pile of fear
My tiny melon mustered in worry
What little I knew of bills repos pen pals the lottery
The worries coagulating like soup
& despite its bubbling no I did not come clean
Why am I telling you now
Standing on this diving board waiting to jump
Into the chlorinated water of divorce
I am remembering how Grandpa collects
Obituaries of men the same name as him
Fred Tyner
A morbid notion I thought at first

But later realized what a way to keep going
To continue living to hit something solid
About one's position as a human being
Being flushed out this moment & (back) into the next
It thuds like finding a fossil
When you are out digging a well
This poem already reveals rather how I juggle
My high hopes for each & every
With a brain that flicks on & off
A broken porch light a bad chandelier
The person I feel myself becoming
The tingling hands & the blurred vision
The voices I am forced to wrangle each morning
John Ashbery
He said *It's getting out of hand*
& I must agree as my head throbs
Hungover not from booze
But these spells punctuated with memory loss
Tagging along these latest years
Leaving at times only the present to contend with
Well that & my habit of breaking to reveal
Multiple realities nested inside each other
Like in a poem two sentences
The first about water & the proceeding a frisbee
Chopped & spliced back together to reveal

[i]nto it. I've transferred

I hold no clear signposts

I spy no scorching spotlight

I offer no resonant red revelations

I call it instead accrual

The personal & the poetic

I look not at the height of the snow

The public & the private

I am watching the snow blow

The lost & the retrieved

As it drifts against the barn

As the barn releases itself from its foundations a millimeter

Grandmother in the picture window

A boy

He leaps & lands from the top of a dirt mound

Safely on bones of rubber a skull of milk

Hello my name is *Idiot Wisdom*

Hello my name is *I Might Enter The Field*

Hello my name is *Wild Error*

Trevor Borden

He sings *Where are we going*

When will we get there

& to that urgency I must add

Who the fuck am I

Stumbling into this sector of my life

It rings in my years
As time passes & memories molt
Effects separate shift & settle
My poems skip around amongst the blur
& seek to see both how it was created
& how it might end for the variety of us
This here league of selves

Nicole Walker

She says *A creation myth is pretty lonely*
If you only write it about yourself
Same probably true of the apocalyptic tale
So I must head back to where this began
To navigate dirt as the minutes fill me with dread
The tick keeps shuffling & dirt keeps time
Hello this artifact is called *Painting (All Blue)*
Hello this artifact is called *Wolves Inside A Fence*
Hello this artifact is called *Flags of Countries I've Never Visited*
I wonder what manners folks might find
To communicate if not for mouths
Some guy on some podcast
He says *The early words came out like coos of birds or barks of dogs*
Or (this is me)
The sound of a small rock sliding down
The face of a bigger rock
Till they bent & melded to become a word

& the word attached to a thought an object
The bruise on the side of a banana for instance
& now I listen to a forty-seven minute deep dive
Into the fragility of nature's most popular yellow fruit
Thank goodness

The human mouth is very distinctive
Against the dark cavern or an empty sky
Easy to spot & even easier to hear

There are even more important things than "he said" & "she said"

Mary Ruefle

She said this & I know a specific population would disagree
& elsewhere she nicknamed tulips

Urinals for the sun

A quote with no purpose in this poem

A dip to disrupt except to say

Here is something I get a kick out of

Everything is mighty complicated quite nuanced

Built of echoes & thuds of the moment

Like the poem I once wrote

“I Am Not Potato”

It goes a little something like this

America I am not your potato

A potato has 48 chromosomes

& I have forgotten how many I have

A potato can be cooked more ways

Than I have chromosomes probably
My ancestors domesticated the potato
& I am mostly not domesticated
I leave my peels everywhere sorry
Sweet potatoes are well-loved around the world
& folks in Switzerland don't know who the fuck I am
I am not a potato
A shaman
He said *you put a raw potato on that*
Meaning on a broken bone meaning to promote healing
& the only thing I promote is the contents of this poem
My grandfather
He said *Rub potato juice on your face to cure acne*
It got worse
& what's the deal with potatoes having juice anyway
I am not a potato
I am an American
Thomas Jefferson
He introduced the French Fry to the U.S. in 1801
But where I come from
We call them by their Christian name
Freedom Fries
Buck fifty a plate at Friendly's Restaurant
Agriculturalists in Europe
They found potatoes easy to handle

Except when hot of course
Something I guess potatoes & I have in common
Potatoes & I
We are both not mentioned in the Bible
& true I always believe my mother
She said *Son you are what you eat*
& the average American eats 137.9 pounds of potatoes each year
But gracious I am not convinced
No I am not a potato
Potatoes first became popular once
Marie Antoinette
She wore a crown of potato blossoms in a parade
& I have been popular since
A German shepherd
He bit a chunk of my elbow off
& I did not cry one bit
People somewhere else fought a war over potatoes
& as far as I know no one has ever fought a war over me
Potatoes are grown in all 50 states
& I have only grown as a human in Texas & Indiana
Also I taste awful
A physician in Ireland
He said *Potatoes are powerful aphrodisiacs*
& that is the last thing I need
End of poem

& yet this hee-hawing
It continues on clamors on as much yapping happens
To categorize box-in define people & their types
The collection of what tingles throughout the chain
Across geographies ancestries communities coalitions
I see my reflection in a link
In the chain of names tossed around
To describe or often I guess to demean folks like me
Small town camo-clad twangy types
Redneck hillbilly bick white trash
Goodness gracious
Let us leave that last one here to turn over in the dust
But otherwise my eyes my ears even my hands are open wide
To consider what the hell each label means
My uncle
Let us start with his umbrella
It is hard to deny he was a hillbilly
His patch of dirt backdropped by a line of trees
The sun shining a halo of clouds over his trailer
The plywood shed adorned like hillbilly heaven
Johnny Paycheck the bleats of a goat
The continual crush of cans the crooked horseshoe stakes
The chickens roosting in the bushes
Beneath the satellite dish dangling from the gutter
This is the choir witnessing through sound

The chickens laid eggs in the front seat
If one forgot to roll the window up right
& then here is the baptismal pool
Someone loaned a backhoe & he set out to dig a pond
But it ended a puddle a hole filled with hose water
A few bluegill he caught tossed in
& me eight years old I dove right in
That mud pit that slop of red clay staining my white underwear
That murk & that muck caking my pale skin
My uncle
Done for the day asleep in the black seat
Both the man & the machine out of gas out of purpose
I am categorizing by intent & by concern for
Or is it against aesthetics
Unconcerned with context & accrual
Gripping time as this mechanism
To tie your rope around & sling forward
As here I speak of a type of person particular to survival
My uncle
He figured up the small stack to dish out monthly
To keep four light bulbs flickering
To keep his gut pumped with beer
The Beast
That is what he calls it
Though one might know it by its Christian name

Milwaukee's Best

To keep that wood stove of his heart siphoning cigarette smoke

For the final twenty-five to forty years

See also those ones hit television fortune

& thus hooted & hollered their way to Beverly Hills

& see that relative of yours

He quit receiving invites because

He quit answering invites & because

Everyone else

Quite honestly they were a bit nervous around him anyhow

Let us remain focused on folks cordoned off by rural propensity

Till the itch might overtake them

Which reminds me of my father

A man scratched by birth alongside six siblings

Tucked in their shack at the end of the dirt road

A single street lamp illuminating the outline

His daddy cursing his beautiful cabinets Monday through Friday

His daddy cursing his beautiful children all weekend

His momma chain-smoking in the kitchen

Nibbling away on her ketchup sandwich

But here let me get on to my second batch

My father as I have known him these thirty-one years of my existence

He is a redneck

A certain spell of success alchemizes the hillbilly from the holler

& into a pattern of houses circling a small town a rural suburb

The concern changed as aesthetic once burrowed finally blossoms
So then perhaps the cigarettes go away
The drunken rubbernecking it simmers down
The spirit to holler reenergizes into babble in backyards
More manicured more landscaped
My father mows his four-acre plot once a week
& yes he is shirtless
& yes Hank blares from the barn
& yes a Bud Light a rocking chair await his ass
Like his wallet his scope his belly
The redneck's shifted concern
Or is it expanded
Beyond survival towards contentment & the presentation of that contentment
See also Jeff Foxworthy & his persona-clad clan of ramblers
Or see also your "rough-around-the-edges" buddy
He of the good factory job
He likes his booze & his crude senses
He is happy his wife & his kids sleep in nice beds
The redneck has not shed his roots
Now tucked inside Wal-Mart jeans a Carhartt jacket
Lifts a finger towards a particular case of the other
My dad points at the moments & he nods
He says *You can't hide it*
The woman at Wal-Mart
An unlit cigarette in her mouth & a cartful of Cheetos

He says *You can't hide it*

Joe trash-talking through a game of cornhole

He says *You can't hide it*

Parking lot teens in camo hats a cheekful of chew

Lying about the buck that got away the length of the fish

He says *You can't hide it*

& I can't hide from mine either

I am a hick

This here third definition born of the same pond water

& raised on the same beef jerky

But the hick is extended through education & exposure

Okay we can call it what it is

It is privilege

Survival has hedged its bet on analysis

See also Abraham Smith & Shelly Taylor

Editors of the anthology *Hick Poetics*

Accounts & ditties as they say *fast-tied to the countryside*

The hick extended beyond presentation to the production

Cropping a field of hope mining a mountain of making

To move beyond the isolated scrutiny & insecurities of our ancestors

To recloak ourselves in the virtues of nature of collaboration of orality

Shivering with a need to nurture this pang in our hearts

Future Barn

I cling to this title to tighten a worldview within

To expand towards the very difficulty containing us

Our hand-me-down hats & whiskey mustaches
Hear how it rings it thuds perhaps it pings
Hail on the tin top dead bird against the window
Abraham Smith & Shelly Taylor
They said *It is our responsibility to speak the language of the holler*
& in that last word yet another h-word
We find cropping up again & again
Both that expanded divot where some heavy-ass iceberg halted
Often where stuck are hillbillies
Where birthed are rednecks & hicks
& also holler as a bawling
A reclamation of that word through its usage
Within the wilds & within what grows out of those respective spaces
From those of us who know the great American countryside from our country-knowing mouths
The hick with space tied to the eyes & the hands & too the mouth
One prone to squawk among the branches & backwoods barks
One with a sideways song to sing as the wrench pings loose the oil pan
See also the pages within
It shuffles & deals a bunch of noisy hick poets
Out of their valleys & mountainsides & through time to us when we listen
I was a nineteen-year-old nutjob
With half a scholarship & a free Tuesday night
So I followed whatever kind human would lead me
To a place to not be alone & guess what
I ended up at my first poetry reading

Maurice Manning

He was rattling something from *Bucolics*

do you make nothing Boss but questions

did you set that fox inside my head

did you lay that field behind my eyes

& down I fell into hick poetry

This particular region of babble mine own holler

A helicopter leading me back into the woods

A lineage of things & the sounds they make

Trucks birds guitars mouths the realness of the snare trap

It is not defined by what it is after

Bear rabbit coyote human being

But ultimately what it hitches

Bear rabbit coyote human being

It whips through the world regardless of intent

Anyway I am not here to tell you a story

I do not unfurl epiphanies

I grind my gears & crank these levers oiled slick out in the open

Find here contained some literal yawp & sprawl

A physicality untapped in certain less desperate heads

It is a convulsion of sorts you see in the body of the hick

Reciting these lyrics or playing some checkers

The hick groans moans snaps back the head

The hick breaks lines skips to a king

A splatter across rural impressions

I flit to & bounce right off every jukebox

Meth lab overgrown lawn polka-dotted with washing machines & treetop
Here to Texas & back with scraps stuck to the verse
I am some limping oracle flung half-crooked & half-dead
Like the fowl on the Chicken Express sign
Flapping the wings of my mouth to stay alive & off the ground
In times like this we are wearied yet wide-eyed
A continuousness explodes a catalog of just what makes these days
Both so excruciating so contagious
So now I say may we all get out of this damn place
& let out our long cries
Like look like I am begging you
Step outside something is glowing
A forgotten snap of wood a styrofoam cup
With a gap-toothed boy drawn on it
The ass-print in the mud is mine
A cigarette in its final moment of burn
Its last roiling to transfer its hope to me
This afterthought twig of oak this brunette grass
It is a known fact I will be dead one day
Who knows maybe in your lifetime
So I fling a stone & it skips across the county road
It is a sign of my futurity
To say *I mean business*
My beady eyes pointed beyond this stone
If the stone skips only twice it is hard not to agonize

Over the two hops to compare to contrast
Yes three is the charm
Like any good clap relationship or plate of pizza
Just enough to be heard clearly loved wholly to eat till full
Any more & the performer doubts your sincerity
The couch becomes crowded
The belly's burgeoning rebuttals
Look a faint halo of smoke
& I am reminded of my first real friend
A pyromaniac & amazing on a trick bike
Jason
Tiny fissures in the flesh of wood
Spots of time on my shirt
Mustard from the hot dog last Tuesday
Three years ago I began bleeding
My nose or my knuckle I do not remember
Look the fire is really starting to fire
In my teens catty-cornered to the concession stand
Burgers for a buck a fistful of gum for a quarter
I willingly spread flat on the pavement
My place in the middle three of us
Five of us & once there were nine
Jason
He jumped us all well except that try of nine
When he clipped the end person's arm

I think it was Becky
Though I might misremember
Distracted by a ribbon of ash through the barbed-wire fence
Bouncing like his tire off the concrete
The flame is up here now
The flame is opening towards the field
I hear the slightest sounds from afar
& I am reminded of the party

Jason

He threw it in a barn some years later
You cannot torch the sincerity out of me
Written in blood in the morning on the side of the barn
We all knew I was a weirdo anyhow

Hankering gross mystical nude

Walt Whitman

He said that & I say it is night now
I have wandered to the creek
The fire has tired itself out with a little help from the cold air
The air so wild it holds me upright
The ripple effects of open burning
Spark vein a single droplet of tear into the creek below
The fish so rarely fished so they wait instead
& I admit I hate buildings undue handshakes styrofoam
The authority in a glass of water
How the city clogged my senses

The particles like snow fleeing
The condo's tectonic plates of drywall
The particles clogged my nose
& the pitiful engine patter clogged my ears
The neon OPEN signs clogged my blue eyes
My skin rubbed raw
My dry mouth bombarded as the enemy's gate
I want to eat this mud where the water meets the grass
Once as a child I ate dirt but no longer
As an adult I devour what once belonged to the dirt
But now amends its color several valleys away
Like my uncle in his tanning bed in North Carolina
I carve this space to fracture
Like my old friend the stick
I crave this space to holler
Like my old friend the flame
I press my face deep in the mud
Where something snaps something settles
The light the vapor the wind this sound
Not abstraction but reflection to consider
Only certain parts of the manual
I am told poetry too had to be discovered
As will the next planet to house us after this one smolders
& then a faint sound riding the wind
Otherwise if close startling & overwhelming

But from here: a tea kettle's wail
The swift momentum of buffalo
& then there is a filthy pause
Months perhaps
Years in fact interrupted finally by again
Mary Ruefle
She said *I hated childhood*
& I would agree
If I remembered much more of it
I only remember that I did not want to go inside
Because I knew if I went inside
I would have to go home
& that would be me
The kid who went home
Also I had to shit
I had to shit so bad
It stuck as my first memory
I could not go inside
Because my mom sipped a Diet Coke on the couch
& she would realize it was time to go home
If only to save her a trip outside to fetch me
I shuffled through the woods
In & out of rusted cars behind fat bushes
I held it till I could hold it no longer
Let it slip in my underwear

& I was still not found by those brothers
It
Whatever the forgotten names of these hosts friends opposition
I laid facedown flat between a stack of leftover lumber
& an aluminum canoe spray-painted gold
West edge of the property
Why do I remember that detail
& why do I include that detail
Till I stunk so bad I could not live with the smell
Or maybe it was the feel
I was nine-years old still wearing tighty-whities
I pulled my waistband with my left hand
I snared leaves with the right
I layered the insides of my underwear
With what fell from the tallest oak tree in the yard
I could hear them coming through the thicket
The brothers
My mother with her last sips of Coke
What she saved for the half-mile walk home
I did not wish to head home
So under the gold(ish) canoe I scooted
I was strong enough to lift & roll under before it dropped
But once below I had to face the fact
This is where someone would find me
Too weak to lift from below

Banging my first rhythm of filthy panic

Mary Ruefle

She continued *I hate adulthood*

Which is likely how my mother exhaled

Peeling the leaf-&-shit soaked underwear off my shivering ass

I remember often shivering even when warm

Mary Ruefle

She concluded *I love being alive*

Which I feel compelled to agree with

A feeling first felt the night I made out with

Becky

Who would later become my cousin

The same night I saw my uncle's asshole

A picture of it & no scenery

Tacked to the end of that slideshow from their first trip together

A cruise to the Caribbean

She & her mom & her sister with my uncle

The sister

Now run off with a boy named Clyde

All we know he is twenty-seven years old

My parents & my uncle & Becky's mom

They done ran off to find her

Supposedly holed up a few miles around the bend in a trailer

The chubby sheriff who might be distant kin

He said *the trailer is green*

The wrinkly lady at the gas station
She said *it is surely brown*
Or maybe her name was Shirley Brown
Both sources compared the color to bodily waste
My parents & my uncle & her mom
They left us alone in the woods
In a house built on the side of a mountain
We spent a half hour channel surfing
Two minutes trading terrible massages
That gave way to another half hour of channel surfing
Till finally buoyant we were on my uncle's bed
The only bed in the house big enough for two bodies
Hovering on the surface till we melted
Like letting our limbs loose & ceasing floating
Joining the fish in the bowl of the body of a lake
My uncle
He had built the house for himself & his ex-wife
The one with the voice gone scratchy
Because her previous husband shot her in the neck
As he left her for himself to be alone in the woods
We found ourselves in my uncle's bed dry humping & then
Becky
She slid her hand down my pants like a steak knife through butter
I came in my boxer shorts immediately
It was the year I switched from those white ones

My friend Dan

He was on the wrestling team

He said *Those are the ones perverts wear*

So boxer-briefs became my thing

I threw those soggy boxer shorts off the porch

Rolling hem over hem on the air

Till snagged on a branch & appeared to wave back

How my wife would wave goodbye many years later

Saying she was staying with Amber for a few days

But she never did come back

Becky joined me on the porch

Margarita mix in a coffee mug

Emblazoned with my stupid body in my stupid football uniform

My mom sent it to my uncle after his divorce

After his ex-wife took every coffee cup ever accumulated

I wore no underwear & felt self-conscious

But she could not tell or she knew not to show it

Becky

She said *You wanna see it dude*

Wanna see a picture of your uncle's asshole

What I should have said was *No*

But I said *Yeab* hoping she was mistaken

The tip of a hot dog or a chain email gag never sent

Hoping she was being sly to get me once again

In a room with no view of my underwear mid-air

But she was not kidding
She was bored
& to pass the next sixteen seconds
She pointed at the screen
Sure enough an asshole & sure enough I looked
I too was bored & like people do when bored
I did something I did anything
I did whatever was in front
Like stare at the asshole of my uncle
Though I never did verify it belonged to my uncle
It might have been anyone's uncle's asshole
This casualness worked for my uncle
He never had a plan never a notion of consequence
He did not guess a computer could display such a moment
He built a windmill on the property without acquiring a building permit
As for me I find it is amazing I make decisions at all
My attention span spun soon in diversion
I continue to mourn what I believe
To be the loss of what I believe
The kindest most personable most rational president
Should the first requirement to lead this country not be this short list
Kind personable & rational
I could sketch the terrible core of the character
Now tweeting from the Oval Office
Instead I softly stroll through eight years of photos

I often talk too much
Expand to fill the void long ago left when nature left
Or rather we banished it like an adulterer
We pressed our stamp onto its forehead
I feel the best thing in life
Being one of the only creatures as far as the eye can peep
Me & a bunch of tumbleweeds between here & the mountain
Where exotic animals are stored
The Budweiser folks
They fly up there & shoot em dead
Somewhere slept my wife who hates that lore
& my dog whenever we could find her
Chasing swirls of dust around cacti
The beer cans fill with dust
Streaked with the stuff
I remember it was my turn to find the dog
So I tramped off in one random direction in my long johns
Singing my song she likes called "35 Chickens"
Careful not to step on a snake
& she was there with her head down some hole
I prayed she comes up with her nose
& then she chased some quail
I transformed the chickens in my song to quails
& I headed back to my dreams
Flames transformed into solar panels

Hunks of potatoes revealed to be nuggets of gold
I remember in the morning my wife orated a lesson
On the Sabbath in the tradition of the Jews
& then I yammered something I remembered
A time I choked a rabid dog to death
Maybe why I am so spooked by flutters in bushes
The rise of moths in the outhouse through the space
Between my ass & the hole jigsawed above the bucket
I leave the door open
I am hasty to undust the ignitor of my earliest nightmares
The desert gives room for such reflection
A safe place to get stoned & cry alone on the porch
When my wife sleeps in the cabin with the dog coiled around her thigh
The shower curtain around the rod in the outside stall
The latch snapped off the sack of water useless now
I am now truly the only creature here to the mountains
Where is that moan coming from
I look inside myself
A god done broke open a rock
To see what she hid there long ago
It is a scorpion crying to get back outside
Which brings me to my next point in this lecture
Advice for my friend
James
I am in no way qualified to give

On making contemporary art

Contemplating the depiction of the decapitation

John the Baptist

A look on his face like waiting for wool to dry

My memory is an eighth-full dispenser of orange juice

I puff on a cheap cigar & begin this list of advice

Or some would say rules

For being an artist in this kaleidoscopic garden

Potatoes

If you insist to enter one in your contemporary art

It must move across the wall out of reach of the child

What child whose child

I do not know but his name was Conner

Most art will be out of reach but do not intend to do this

Nor should you intend not to do this

Be more like the heron I witnessed today

Both passing along majestically & shitting

How impressive something so large & so seamless

Critics

They will lecture on one thing

A true artist must never have a backup plan

This latter is a ladder nowhere near right but recognizably crooked

An ladder

I fell off mine & hit my head

HARD

I see the sound of a tiny door made of water opening

Then I walked through it & I felt a shoulder

It said *Look anyone can be a lifeguard*

You just need the right tank top

James

Never worry about what you make will do eventually

Because in 1830 a steam locomotive traveled thirty-six miles per hour

& by 1969 The Apollo 10 space ship affirmed

Twenty-four thousand seven hundred ninety-one miles per hour

So at this rate that wobbly stool you whittled

It will hold the biggest wow you can imagine

Art heads straight from one head to another

Some artists spend all their time on Twitter

Sad boring sack of pancake powder painting flowers terribly realistic

What the hell am I talking about

Let me begin again perhaps

It is hard to imagine

Anne Carson

David Blaine

Barack Obama

As children what they wore & how they behaved

What signs of early miracle revealed

But I bet I would be disappointed

To witness David Blaine picking his nose

Just as I did & not slyly vanishing it

Aggressively wiping it to the underside of the lunchroom table

Where he like I squatted everyday with his boring friends

We one day forgot

Or more honestly they left us

& moved to Utah to become doctors

To save lives & perhaps time will tell cure

Alzheimer's disease

That terrible disease which wipes the mind

The king of all

That disease which gripped the shoulders of your grandmother

& shook her mind clean minute-to-minute

Each turn around the house bringing to mind

As if for the first time

The pie there on the counter sliced to sixths

Till finally the pan was empty

& she was so very full

It is as the mind yearns to do

To leave only crumbs

& the sadness to think a mind

Anne Carson's for example

Once so empty & then briefly so simple

Look a bee

I can count to twelve

The admired truly knows how I feel

Till piled snowflakes become the simples

Her whole life became an avalanche of reason & Greek
Hard to imagine Anne Carson flipping through her books
Not recognizing the handwriting in the margins
Not conjuring the definition of "cinerem" in the dictionary of her mind
The residue from a fire's ashes
Which calls forth Barack Obama next to a non-smoking sign
With a cigar in his mouth on the White House lawn
An image
I admit it I made it up but also likely I did not
Grey flecks in his hair
A television channel struggling with its signal
Hard to imagine
Barack Obama
Out of sorts befuddled confused
But I did see clearly in a photo no imagination required
A look never before seen on anyone's face
As he shook Donald Trump's hand
& prophesied the beginning of a fire
Last night I dreamed a fire with these three surrounding
David Blaine
He rips up a card & throws the pieces into the fire
Anne Carson
She stares deeply into the seams where the orange meets the blue
David Blaine
He pulls the King of Hearts from the pit fully intact

Anne Carson

She recites a single sentence so crisp even the coals cringe

Anne Carson

She says *I am curious about the season of coldness you have there*

Barack Obama

His fingers dance in & out of his pockets

To clarify he too feels what I feel if only for this brief moment

& yes I did hear my wife's last demand

No more of these poems blabbering hickish beathen joy

But I failed I am back with more

The same brackish syntactic yawps

For instance this essay about

Jared Leto

Acclaimed musician occasional face on my mother's television

A man committed to the reinstitution of the American buffalo

Into the continued consciousness of the American person

Did you know this

Once dwindled down to less than five-hundred

American buffalo

Now they graze a couple of tens of thousands

I watch them glide across my mother's television

Murmuring with a mouthful of spineless grass

The buffalo

They say *Thanks Jared Leto*

My mother

She told myths as I worried in childhood
She said *Don't worry God combs the buffalos each night in Heaven*
She said *God straight banded those strong legs to the buffalo*
To push those giant heads like torches through mounds of snow
I clutched my beloved chicken bone
As other baffling things fell out of her
Or out of her television
I cannot remember
I say *Inside a pasture one often finds gold*
My mother often rammed her crimped hands
Through the yearly gourds like a buffalo head through a snow mound
& when her whispers could not woo my worries
She drove me a town over
Where a farmer had given up on cattle
& had given up pigs
& had given up on ostriches
She drove me a town over
To watch his herd of twenty or thirty buffalo
Keep pace with our vehicle till forced to turn east
Following the fence which weds them to one another
& my grip loosened on the chicken bone
She drove me one more town over
Where a man with one eye
He lost it in a war
What war

He served ice cream

She said *This is a very good price*

He said *You can have whatever size you want*

I said *Large*

To him her God the chicken bone Jared Leto you here now

Though to be honest I only meant to tell you about when I found out

Tristan Tzara

He called for *the universal installation of the idiot*

& I felt for the rare time in this life

Ahead of the curve out in front of something a smidge ancient

Tripping myself into the dirt of mistake chance unintentional intersection

The universe does its own number on this mess

Some lost to a vortex of wind

Some changed due to illegible handwriting

Some scribblings clear as a puddle of water

My writing "my uncle" punctuated with the loss of an actual dear uncle

This spring bisected by a disappearance back to my Hoosier Homeland

Literally why I am on this plane right now

The idiot as connoisseur of chance messy imperfect maker

The idiot tosses the ski rope to the sky coasting for a bit

Finally losing balance & letting the lake do what it wishes

& in that what it wishes

A possibility for a lot of other mis-es

Mistranslation misunderstanding misremembering

Mistakes by your original standards

Emily Dickinson

She said *If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off*

I know that is poetry

& the process of knowing the self

It is a similar slice of desired uncapping

The best utterances & kisses know this

The enlightening trudge at sun-up knows this

& the strums on the porch at sun-down know this

So what do you see when I take off my hat

Heredity hickishness the dull clippers in the closet

But of course us being these tumbling selves

It is a temporary peek

An uncertain scratch in the marble

A split-second sniff of what really is cooking in the kitchen

& then POOF back into the world / the whirl

Filthy in unknowing

How third-grade students write poems

That do not realize they are being written

Too enthused with the act to worry what makes it a poem

A human being scribbling

We live nine years twenty-eight years sixty-one years eighty-nine years

& we collect these experiences translated into memory

Then what

Joe Brainard

Unable to slather enough through painting

He discovered the easiest model for the maximum memory withdrawal

The "I Remember"

But stacked / written out it does not nod fully at how remembering works

Of what his simplicity hides behind its curtains

I dismember I misremember I remainder what is left

A quick scrape against the overwhelming

A burst bubble in a flood of suds

Like what do I really know of my fucking childhood

I misremember my first funeral

I fell asleep in a buttoned-up shirt

Ugly with mauve pinstripes

I ate meat lovers pizza

I remainder the color of the bra I glimpsed

The number of ice cubes I sucked down whole

I was nine or post-first cavity filling feeling

Yes I dismember the flavor of popsicle I sucked

Grape or green

What is the peach

The sound of a hand on my hair

Or the door handle of the green camper

It was on fire or the sun was coming up

I awoke

I said *I know somebody is dying*

I awoke

I said *Somebody I know is dying*

Jeep Wrangler exiting my gullet
I misremember which night gown my mother wore
The teddy bears or the hearts
& the wallpaper it was green
Though I remainder the number of deer heads displayed at the funeral
Each certainly shone on the wall
Surely remember the end of October
A hotel with a pool indoors
I misremember the size of my penis in the pool
Who was there who was laughing
My dad literally fishing my trunks from the deep end
Which uncle chomping tobacco the color of his horses
I dismember my uncle literally fishing my trunks from the deep end
Which father chomping tobacco the color of which horse
I misremember the first chicken I killed
I remember the smell of weed in the parking lot
I remainder I ate chicken legs & puked on Halloween
Which year & which chicken
I misremember how I misremember
What reason my uncle gave for never shaving
This guy I knew Sean
He turned mad at me for lying after I told folks at a reading
This next poem I wrote it in the car on the way here
He was in that car too
Eating a lemon kolache or a sausage biscuit

He said later *you did not write that poem in the car on the way over*
I said *I did* & *I did not*
A response he hated more than my original fudging
You see I wrote that poem on a porch
& I wrote that poem again in the car
Needing it to exist in the blurry narrative of my uncle's death
Which uncle & which death
Which came first the uncle or the poem
The poem feeling like it has been blabbing for some eons
Humming & conjugating orally like sparks
& eventually it sticks to stick to poof a fire
A comet melts into the side of the space station
& neither would ever be the same
In letters this can sound marvelous
The first striations into mud & a variety of others since
I am jealous of how visual artists do studies
Meaning deliberate workings reworkings reimaginings of subjects
Francis Bacon
He paints the head of an important person
& then smears the face with a cloth
His notion of the nervous system
Irrationality & something like chance fucking
It is always fun to make light of consciousness
The constant power struggle the insistent landscape
Grotesque in the knowing

One poem

It creeps into the world & reverses my understanding of coconuts

Of coconuts I am no expert

& neither is the poem or the poet

As the poem merely reenacts sincerity

Pathos breezy & imbalanced

Like how the autumn forever treats the leaves

A bit of dust in my brain

Something I had confirmed four years ago

& when I open my mouth

It is because I need more space

To breathe than these lungs originally applied

Yes I am amped up & yes I have committed myself

Locusts ate the field

It was golden & then it was bare

Tombstones rising accompanied by an orchestra of snails

The tiniest fiddles of their throats shouting at one another

These language acts are experiences

Solidified into that gelatinous thing you might label

A poem

I am misremembering again

The mold for my aunt's jello infested with chunks of fruit dessert

Which aunt & which fruit

Tristan Tzara

He said *no more masterpieces*

William Carlos Williams

He said *a poem is a machine*

Imagine how bewildered first & stoked second

The Swiss army

They felt the first time holding their knife

I am digging for the kind of thing a thrift shop receives as a donation

& then continues to mark down in price week after week

Because no one can figure out what it “does”

It turns on it revolves it appears to hold whatever will fit

I am not interested in poems that go boldly into the dirt

I am more concerned with the dirt itself

How it clumps it mudds it fractures into the smallest particle

No longer dirt but dust yet so reintegrated with the rest

The layer where we stand where we walk around

Existence often is reason enough

When I was a child my uncle dug a hole in the yard

The dug dirt lived as a mound off to the side

& the pond never became more than a puddle

My cousins & I

We accepted our aggressions & curiosities climbing instead of plunged

We fought each other for the peak of the mound

We chased each other down

We imagined it a slide when the rain or snow wet it slick

& in our less loving times we made clods of the mound

& threw them against each other's developing heads

Poems do vibrate into discovery & this is different

Than the organized beauty I am prescribed

No intentions but hopes

These hopes for segments of my interiority

Bright bulbs to impart the sensation of things

My uncle

He said *a knife is when you cut with it*

An onion is when you dismantle it & cry

A feeling is when you strain & blink goes the edges

My ideal poem is a field littered with dandelions

A struggle between two cousins to sing

Loudest from atop the mound

My uncle

He would often dismember the chore chart in lieu of napping

He would misremember how many cookies he swallowed that day

As connective tissue a poem is dubious

As a puzzle piece a poem rises partially

A cookie thrown into the creek

A mountain of the place where we once grew potatoes

There was more of the field to my uncle than one might first assume

I turn from this particular poem to do some people watching

The inexact chance-based art of sitting & observing folks

Blistering atoms around the self

A child screams his first curse word

Straight into the mouth of another child a tad smaller

Several security guards chase a single shoplifter through the mall

A man covered in pigeons shakes the pigeons away

Only to reveal himself to be yet another pigeon

Kenneth Koch

He tells the tale of a student miswriting a swarm of bees

A swan of bees

& I discover it on every lake I do not dive into

The lingering bird

It suggests *more trills equal more inclusion*

Another chance to hear the notes bounce off a relative's hair

& become whisked fresh by poetry's own obscurity

& in this particular period of grieving

Of course I am drawn towards this idea

An archive of feelings

Ann Cvetkovich

She declared it somewhere

But as I look out the window of this plane I must not

Future Barn

It glows erupts persists from below