

2001

Perfect.ion.

Andrew Nease
Iowa State University

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Perfect.ion.

by

Andrew Nease

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Creative Writing)

Major Professor: Sheryl St. Germain

Iowa State University

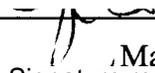
Ames, Iowa

2001

Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of
Andrew Nease
has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University


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Major Professor
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For the Major Program
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For the Graduate College

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Rubik's Cube

— by Dan Johnson

It isn't important to
get all the colors on
all the correct sides
for all the colors are
on the sides that they
need to be on now
and they are all on the
correct sides already
anyway

perceive points

Points sharp enough to shave with.
Cut out all but the stationary
and move your focus over the static shapes and symbols to make solid words come alive.
Liquefy the page. Cognize, cohesive tie,
bring to conscious and bewilder.
Try not to forget after
the page is turned.
A fine direction to approach perfection.

TSET

Tea Set

I have been pushed into this
tea set. I have been

pushed into this black
on white tea set. I have

broken the teapot.
I have broken

the porcelain sunshine
creamer. The shards are

sharp enough to shave
with. The tea settles

in carpet. The tea
soaks into

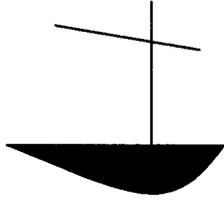
the carpet. The shards
are sharp enough

to shave with.
The shards are

pieces of porcelain
sunshine creamer.

PERFECT

Perfect

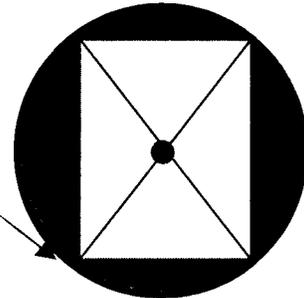


Every metaphor needs a masthead.
 Every metaphor needs a massed head
 of intellect or accident.

Incidentally, every need needs a condition to reach a breaking point —
 take the sailor who needs a vessel — but only to haul over sea, to cling to
 left harbors and posit the brown-in-blue hull on black-on-white paper.

Every circle needs a point.
 Every circle needs a starting point
 to enter full swing if allowed such a thing.

Every mean is a point ¹ * ¹ I mean the average between
 (anywhere) and (anywhere)
 (invented extremes)
 but a sailor on a sphere needs to start
 supposing meaning at,
 well supposedly, some point some where.



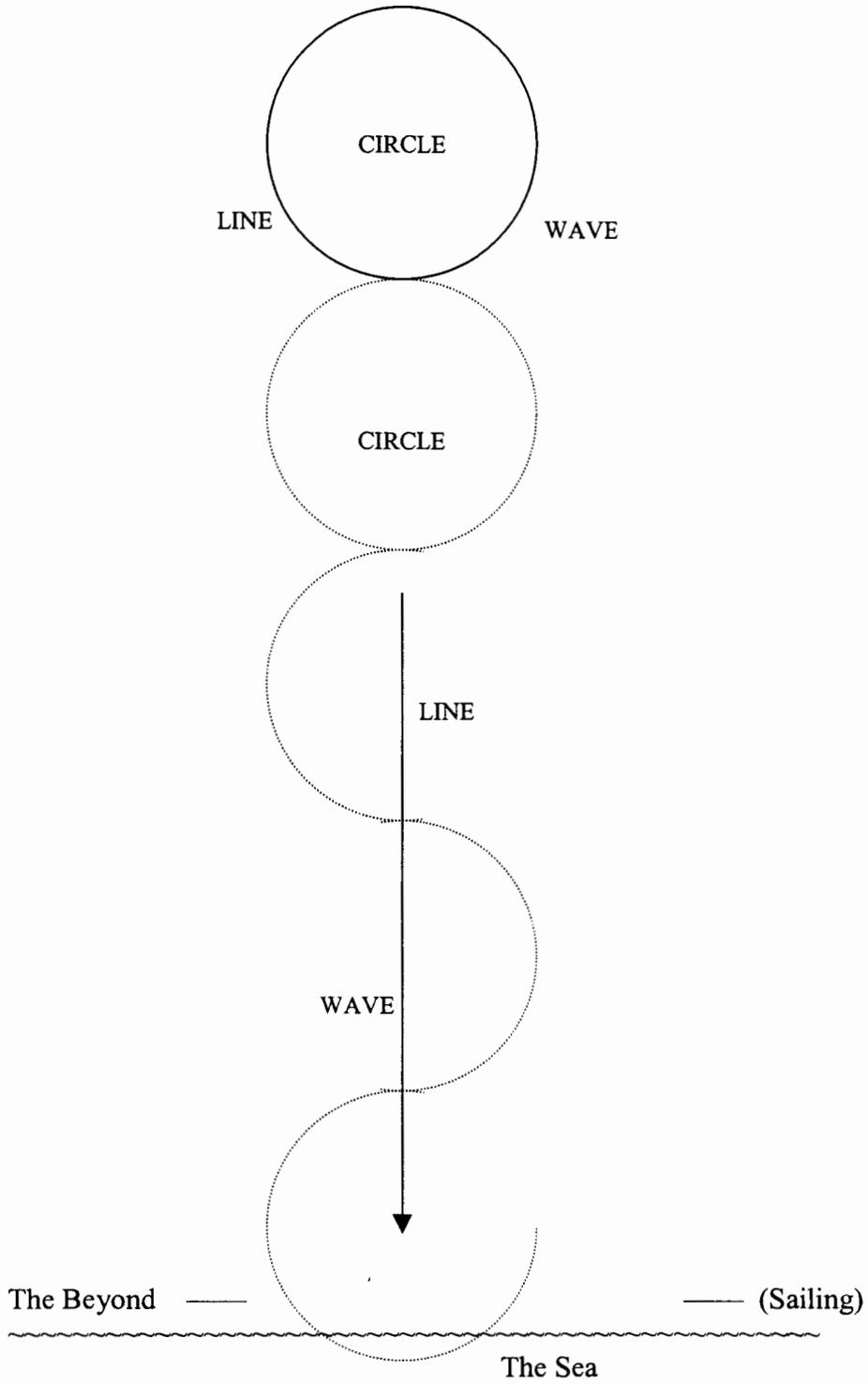
Every circle needs a circle.
 Every circle needs a circle to call
 its self a circle.

Every center needs a circle; every circle is a center.
 Every semicolon is a syntactic mean that means the medium
 was transcribed to find balance / and in waves,
 to find the quasi-equilibrium.

Every wave needs a line.
 Every wave needs a traveling line of “text” and “con”“text”
 to be not or not to be a circle.

Every circle needs this luxury line — resilient, straight, unending.
 Weigh the anchor, set sail southeast on the page; all hands on deck,
 to wait on and to wake in
 the banking, the yawing, the pitching, the waves.

Every Wave needs a Circle:



On Deck in The Empirical Ocean

(All that you know has come to you in a wave. All that you have seen has been light. The photons have traveled in the form of a matter wave to shake particles in the back of your eyeball. All that you have heard has been the compression and decompression of the fluid atmosphere — an ethereal longitudinal wave that vibrates your eardrum — Words, then, are waves to you, and when you think, you think in words that you have heard, and those words are recreations of the waves. All that you feel is pressure. And pressure on nerve ends sends electric waves from your hand, through your arm, up your neck, and into the web of your brain. So, what you feel now, the pressure on your back, on the bottoms of your feet, your tongue in your mouth, is known to you through waves. What you hear now (((slowly, listen around you))) is known to you through waves. What you see now, these words on the page and the colorful things you aren't focusing on (((blurred around the border of the page))) are known to you through waves. What you think now, your registrar of cognition, the free associations, the quick flashes of vision (like when I say "bark" and then "dog" and then "tree"), the dualist conversations with yourself, the side trails of imagination, the sounds of syllables, are all recreations of past waves. And though it's not related to this poem, you should be aware that someday people might be born with several ears, and to them, our "stereo sound" will be dull and possibly lifeless. Some might hear the waves above our sonic threshold and find better music up there. Or some might be born who see the spots on distant stars without using telescopes. (You should know that the light is available to us, traveling trillions of miles, clear and precise (though space is somehow empty).) Or they might see (or is it hear?) colorless images with sonar, radar, or ultrasound. (You should know that all objects are colorless — the trees, a box of crayons, your skin — and that only light has the quality of green or brown or "pacific blue" as it bounces to your retina.) And we don't sense all the waves in the world, ignoring the subsonic and ultraviolet, the X-rays and microwaves. There may be waves that we haven't learned to decipher, perhaps some elusive spiritual waves that ghosts spin in, or a hundred sophisticated languages that insects use to make fun of us. Prayer could be a wave; heaven on earth could be a batch of new waves and sensory organs. And perhaps you should know that someone might someday be born who hears only light and sees only sound, and he or she might be able to function quite perfectly.)

* you are here *
and your dog is an amplitude

Creation

He looks
ridiculous
in the deep of the river,
the dog dog paddling,
punching down the water,
clobbering, with alternating paws, climbing
a treadmill ladder, the
rhythmic wet suction,
clop clopping back
to you,
pushing
tiny waves,
stick held high
in his teeth.

Recreation

The black widow spider in your brain
who has weaved your brain
and trots about busily
pinching threads together
botching the slubs
spinning dead flies
who thinks she is a center
who sucks in old silk
and gives birth to hungry babies
occasionally takes a rest in a shaded hollow
plucks the silk tenderly
recreating the waves
so that you can remember
the happy wet dog.

Thoughts on Cleaning, Coining, and Cognizing Water

In the bathtub they ask:

Do you like it when I'm hard?

Do you like it when I'm wet?

and we answer yes but we are never quite right or wrong.

Water is somewhat similar to a woman. I play with waves of her skin.
Solid, liquid, air: and scientist I care so much to make a distinction.

I dipped my hand in her — the pond of supposed wetness I call "bath water."
Deep inside, both hands prying, and I could still not feel the wet emotion.

She is loose, water is whoring, my hand loosens her.
She breaks apart when I enter. She slobbers when I part.

Fluid on my fingers slides, retaining heat, too lax to hold together.
And I blame her for wetness? For the misty particle smell of climbing vapor?

Nothing is wet, I've decided; that's the center of this poem. I can't feel it, water as a pronoun.
In the bathtub, immersed in H^2 . Oh, I feel nothing but warm, but warm isn't wet, is it?

The mass I am in is clearly invisible but dense enough, just heavy enough to cognize.
The matter is escapable, and that makes a difference in my mind.

She wears a see-through daily; I've put her between my legs and the dirt on my legs.
She cleans the matter from the matter of me. I am baptized. Clean. I am born again.

Her fluidity is soft, soft enough so she feels like rolling down my back when I stand.
Water is so much softer than baking powder.

Washing my hands under the faucet, I know water is hard to figure — small, but hard.
It's hard for me to remember that the water is wet-less and wet only when it matters.

And drinking the molecules, helping my body to wash me inside, to gather and piss,
I think I'm drinking milk but I'm drinking relatively small solid matter.

I had to drink barium for an upper G. I. and I'm not exactly sure
if it was liquid or solid or if there's a line so easily erased, not so easy to cross.

Water spiders can stand it, can stand on it. Ask them to show you their ground.
I can come to realize that she is not all that I want to believe.

ii

define your definitions

1 = 1

I am I

I am you to you

You are you to me

You are you

but

What is poetry?

Poetry = Poetry.

Who am I?

I am I

0 = 0

Focus of Passing Harbors

She's a gypsy,
by definition,
so she must focus on the leaving and grieve.

For without definition,
what would she be?

Below woman
body
word?

For in the here, where is she beyond here
with me, breathing in liquid air
and brushing with warm passing?

I'm not a gypsy,
by definition,
because I can never move to where,
and have found focus here
worthy of metaphor.

Self-defined, self-defended;

she is ship and sunflower,
woman, word, gypsy.

And where would I be without my definitions?
How could I possibly justify perfection?

Here.
Breathing in
sunshine and warming
her contemporary harbor.

In Broken Poem: The Weakness of Religion
(If Religion is a crutch for the weak.)

Life is a crutch for the living.

& a crutch is a crutch
for the week your legs are broke in.

The splinters of your crutch are sharp
enough to shave with.

A God is a clutch stuck in
seventh gayy-ear.

Coffee is a God for thee
wanteth coffee.

Life is a crutch for
the living.

Atheism is a crutch for the weak and weak
minded.

Books are a crutch for my
miserable little memory.

A crutch is a word is a rose
is a rose is a wave.

A theism is a crutch,
all have a theism.

Words are a web and you are a spider
spinning lies we call flies you call poetry.

Poetry is a religion, is
a faith, is a *dream*. A real legion.

A crutch is support for the catch
of your armpit.

A Poem is a crutch for the weak and weak
minded.

A crutch is a clutch stuck in
the middle of a better man.

Word play is a flourish,
grace notes to meaning.

Agnosticism is for the dope weak bird
intellectual relativists.

Religion is a crutch
for the book of the week.

Registrar, buy a car,
take me far, fair lady!

The Book is a crutch for my
miserable little me-ism.

Tea is the breaking
is all just an amplitude.

Cliché is a crutch is a crutch
is a crutch.

Crutches are crosses
are stakes in the ground.

If a Poem is a crutch for the weak.

The Dictionary Decides to Write a Poem

I AM VERY INTELLIGENT

BY RICHARD CHRISTOPHER NARIE, Ph.D.

I have been thinking
over things
lately

thinker, thought, thinking

and have come to the conclusion—
not the zygotes, mind you—
that I am very intelligent.

It's an intelligence well above knowing that
an integument is the covering layer
of an organism

a skin or cuticle

and to shilly-shally is to
hesitate or waste
time.

My brain studies Braille and braising techniques;
my mind, above mincemeat,
is the center
of my macrocosm.
My lexicon, a near sixty-
thousand, is an envy common.

I am iodine, the one who speaks or writes.
That's ME, a mechanical engineer who houses
an emergency
medical center
in Maine.
I'm bound by a brilliance of twenty-six agents—
I, being almost ten; U can get wasted at bars—
that defend each other with unique confidence.

These agents are here, these agents are there—
a separation of three hundred and ninety-

seven pages or the addition
of one T.

I have been thinking,
over things,
lately

and have stumbled across a few disadvantages that geni—
another word for “geniuses”—
like me might encounter.

My heart, for instance,
follows a hearse into heartache
on feet that do nothing more
than be a plural
of foot.

Pain is a basic bodily sensation marked by discomfort.

My fingers are an action
above finfish, and my soul—
before the sound but after the sough—
is a strong, positive feeling

as of intense sensitivity and emotional fervor

conveyed especially
by black
American performers.
My soul is designed for
or controlled by
blacks.

But you can't judge a book by its integument.

Look ME up if you're ever in Maine—
Population: the organisms inhabiting a particular locality—
Richard Christopher Narie, Ph.D.
in the Book between diction and dictum.

Why I Didn't Tell My Mom About It

As a kid, I knew I had It.

Somewhere in there, the one thought that would implode the universe.

Or explode my head all over the sheets or shower.

But I wouldn't have known the difference.

Prosopopeia / Personification

The human
hand defines a space,
and your dead fingers
feel “alive” and witty with intent.

Body, the slave,
claims to have rights
beyond plant, animal, stone.
Paper, rock, scissors
live for logic but die in quiet.

Silent equilibrium.

And if it doesn't move, you can call it dead.
Apply Einstein.
If the eye moves with it, neither are moving.

But the human
knows this, and empathizes with the ash,
and the ash claims humanity
by moving along with some bourn
that separates us from the logician magicians.

Invest in the future of rocks,
sharp enough to shave with,
sharp enough to cut the dead from the living,
a blade to part the sea of chin hair and chin.

This is my skin adorned. Hold dear.

I love you.
I haven't felt this alive in years.

stories of being there

one

Back in Pennsylvania:

Brandon puts his finger in my mouth and we laugh about it.
I kneel on the steps and he reaches through the white plastic gate.
With short tugs on my lower lip, he watches my face as it flips back to place.
At one and a half, Brandon smiles and he knows I am there.

Smiles is a weak word though. *His face glowed* is a phrase too romantic.
But something there is that didn't defuse the joy at all. His smile is ecstatic.
exact.
effort-
less.

When I pick him up, he rests his elbow on my shoulder.
He babbles and I try to speak the language

of *lub bub bub bub bub bub bub*
baa baa baa baa baa baa baa baa baa

He doesn't listen to me though. And he seems to have
nothing to say

aayaayaayaayaayaayaayaaya

His speech is an effortless, toying business;
he attends to it while pulling pots from kitchen cabinets.

Joy is the abandon of pulling pots from kitchen cabinets.

When I go to leave the house, to get in my car and drive away like a cliché,
my brother tells Brandon to say

goodbye. *ba*

says he, proud of his little successful.

These are necessary, Brandon. Words will be your little warriors.
They will stab the medium wall, try desperately to pierce it, together in waves
will try to push it over like shots, lots of shots, shots from a shotgun blast.
Say *pretty* and please the ladies. Say *big* and the men will be proud.
We have little else to work with save the occasional hug.
Say *joy*. Say *cheese*. Say *love*. *C'est la vie*.

————— We will keep the wall between us as we go. —————

There In June:

I was driving home
from my interview in Uniontown;
I remember the curve where I started crying
and I didn't have a reason.

I know that crying is a weakness, Sunshine,
and I know that wild sobbing is the evidence of something
broken but I didn't have
words or reason.

I thought back to the night I called you at 3 a.m.
waking you and your visiting family to tell you that *It* was attacking
me and I couldn't think right. *God* and the *Universe*. *Existence*. *Endless*.
You were happy to have been woken and you talked to me
so that I wasn't afraid or taken to overwhelming questions.

————— [We will keep the wall between us as we go.] —————

If home is a place.
If home is a center.
If home is a stake in the ground.

I drove straight past it.

I drove three hours to be with you, Sunshine, three hours of crying,

pulling the ticket from the metal booth,
 on the Pennsylvania Turnpike,
 beside the semis and minivans,
 tuneless with the motor milling,
 past Burger King,
 crying on I-79 to Erie,
 in my car, on the line of pavement through the trees
 and dark fields of Pennsylvania,
and I collapsed to your warm arms
and cried with abandon, exactly like a baby, in and on your unmade bed.

shhh... shhh... shhh... shhh...

you said beneath the covers, protecting us from the outside, like a wall;
the tears were exact and effortless.

three

On a Saturday Afternoon:

Your hair is soft and dry and in my hand.
 My cheek is on the skin of your forehead.
 My arm wraps around you like a curling question mark.

I love you

— are the best words I can say,
 the best syllables —
 and I pray that you understand them
 exactly.

Winter it is, and winter is cold; your body is warm in the doorway.
 Your smile is silent and,
 desperately, wants me to go.

This beauty, I can never abandon. *This Now*. *This Forever*.
 My reasons are endless, effortless.
 Snow in my hair, I don't want to let go.

If five has a center, I have found it:

————— (we will keep the wall between us as we go) —————

It ends like this. *Hope* fizzles, floats to the ceiling, disappears.

Words will be my failing little warriors.
I love you Sunshine.
Endless and effortless.
We will keep the words between us as we go.

Snow in my hair, I'll be crying on the long cliché *home*.
 When I ask to kiss your mouth, there is no joy for us.
 My warm mouth pulls your lower lip only to say

goodbye

I'm not proud of this.
 little. not successful.

four

Here In Iowa:

A year is a quick thing
only when looking back,
but here it is, a quick thing that has been spent
and is gone.

I drove through a suicidal spring, a vacated summer,
and now I'm in Iowa writing poetry and watching some tv.
I'm an hour behind my stake in the ground.

I don't hear much here.

Sunshine sent one friendly e-mail.
My mother sent some scribbles from Brandon. Joy is the smearing
of five crayons on white paper.

They call it the Midwest, but they also call it a center.
I suppose it feels *remotely* like a center,
but I will always be the center of my universe and you will always be
the center of your universe and the earth is made of six
billion centers, which is just enough to make the earth
the center
of space.

That's called "perception." *C'est la vie.*

Space is effortless.
endless.

Existence is a question.

*the
center empty
is alone*

— But we shouldn't talk about that,
not without a thousand unsettled pillows,
or a thousand backup words,
or one word that you could understand
exactly.
Not without an unmade bed —

After I dig these poetic holes, I find it best to abandon them.
We will keep the world between us as we go.

Back In Pennsylvania:

Brandon points to the picture of me
and says

aa

like a question.

My mother reassures him: “Yes,
Uncle Andrew.” She uses
her puppy dog voice.

Brandon waddles on stilts to the stairway;
he points to the basement, says:

aa

like a question.

He looks to my mother. “No,
Uncle Andy isn’t down there
anymore.”

I Will Write This Poem In Hand

Hand waves high
to the geometric planes
that grace the stars
in infinity.

Hand is afraid to look up too long;
the stars make Hand panic.

Hand is covered in a puffy white cumulous cloud
of shaving cream.

Hand rubs the oil from my hair between fingerprints.

Hand pinches snot from my nose.

Hand has more thick blood on it than in it!

Hand composes pottery with sticky grey clay.

Hand, the poet, is distracted, thank God, from thinking
about cosmologic relativity.

Hand waves by
and by, Lord,
by and by.

Canyon

(If a tree falls in the woods, does it pine to be heard?)

I, a record player, spit
and snap out
track number
two, the haggard ravine; a blistered
tongue dragged down the dike.

I, J. Alfred Eliot, hustle
wastelands of words, spew
an impotent brew, a rich
vomit on the carpet.

But you ask again
after three nights
of chatter that I
announce
how I *feel*
on those mornings
when, enclosed in
the dead air,
I clench my eyes tight
to incite a migraine—
to distract myself
from private dire
thoughts that seem
to pull a scalpel across
my forehead,
temple to temple.

*It might help to talk about it,
and it might hurt like hell.*

But there's a place above your breasts
where I'd love to lay my head
and stare to
the dead air
and tell you all there is to know.
So words make the grave jump
from my lips like little men
in army suits. Wet breath
thrusts them into the dead air.
And many perish in the 8-inch canyon;
they slap walls,
stick to cobwebs—
with knees collapsing forward,
they skid face-first across white
sheets. A few soldiers, snagged
in rippled vibrations, die
at their destination and hold
up flags as they topple
lifeless
into your inner ear.

I, a pine tree, bend back
with a wind that lifts my chin,
splinters my neck in short
shocks and my spine splits
at the fracture;
these brittle bark
bones rip and twist. I
collapse in whisking
trebles and brutal basses
to the flat
forest floor.
The explosion of birds
settles for silence.

Paralipsis

I won't mention the paradox in this poem

or the dog
happy to be alive
and fetching

Not to mention.
Not this time.

But it's drastically simple, this metasubject,
taught to be a metasubject, not to think
outside the metasubject, like a God, a good boy

on Prozac.

For the Electric Fans

I liked this piece a lot, but I found myself wanting more.

Yeah. Just a little bit. Not much.

*I feel like there's something missing,
like you're almost there, but there's just not enough.*

Yeah.

Yeah. I wanted a little bit more.

You want more.

I have given you everything.

You have seen all of me.

I have poured everything into you.

There's nothing left.

I have given everything to you.

Ye asked and ye received.

And with words dripping from your mouth like pills,
you spit out through wet passages
words like an overdose of powdered pills
that you want more.

Should we force it out with the projection of a bullet?
I can clench my teeth hard enough to splinter cracking spikes
of enamel.

Should we extract "more" with a blade?
I'll slit my wrist and pull down my skin;
it will hang like the oval of a monk's cuff.

And you can put your mouth to the geyser of rich blood;
take full swallows. Not like the forced sips
of warm salty cum, but drink me like a beer bong,
full-forced, without swallowing. Your throat, an extension
of my arteries, a constant flow of pressure, like a pipe.

And wrap my dangling wound below your chin.
Put your face in me, my blood in the lower folds of your eyelids,
between your teeth, pouring out down the inside of your shirt,
slipping all the way down to the socks in your shoes
that fill up like sponges.

And I bleed straight through your exhaling nostrils,
and you can't breathe,
your throttling moans of suffocation,
and you drown, and you drown,
and you drown
in the wide inhuman gash of
more.

To Quote a Poet
(for the Scott in "Andrew Scott Nease")

Scott would pick up his pen and feel sorry for people.
He said, as a poet, his job was to explore the depths of human suffering.

*The wind sails this way then that way over the derelict
sentries who cross by Raspberry Square. In newspaper cathedrals,
in alleys without names, they gather for sleep, tuck in their flannels
and lay their heads against fluffy white garbage cans.*

He liked to say things like "fluffy white garbage cans."
He once slammed his finger in a car door and later recalled he had "cried like a staple."
That makes half-sense to me. Scott said lots of things that made just half-sense,
like, "The only way to get organized is to jump off a cliff."

*Here are they, found their way through the day unafraid
of losing what had already been lost — resolution.
From the closet I watch the world play dress-up.
In Mother's best atomic clothes, she pastes on yellow lipstick.*

One time, in his apartment, I asked for a can of root beer.
He said to grab one "from the arctic womb."
He meant the cooler in his closet, of course.
Why see an *arctic womb* when you can see a cooler?

*The sunlight unwraps the dust in the living room.
There's a rose bending over to smell its own feet.
The key clicks in the back of the lock; the door won't open.*

Before he died, Scott told me that life is a series of reciprocal doors.
"You can only go so far into a building before turning around and coming back out."
He built a life philosophy around doors, "Doorism" he called it.
And he often talked about "finding the hatchway back to heaven."

*The house, the street, the car door, the car door, the street. Here we pull
the thread and needle of our footsteps through arches and pinholes.*

Although he never seemed unhappy, Scott never had a thrill for life either. He overdosed on antidepressants in March of this year, an accident. Scott was 24 years old, just shy of a quarter of a century. Too young to die.

The mallard kicks its legs under the water of the southbound river. The mallard drifts backwards as it paddles north up the river. The mallard pushes forward as it's pulled into the southern sea. The mallard flips and drowns beneath a bastard of a wave. The mallard is nibbled by guppies.

I suppose a staple might cry, with its legs breaking under the mammoth arm, its howl of pain silenced in a short, sharp crunch, and the mangled body buried in a ghost-white field. But I don't know; poetry is not my kind of crutch. I'm not a poet.

O

and sunshine we have

to remember that no matter what

I write it with you

will see only it in words

The Perfect Poem

iv

love someone

IN THE COPYING MACHINE, THERE IS PASSIONATE VIOLENT SEX GOING ON.

i love the way your hair catches the light of the moon,
you look as if you have angels in your hair, drowning.
i love the way your hair catches the light of the moon,
you look dead.

True Fluid

On this couch
I am holding your shirt
like a blanket to my face.

I close my eyes and I feel
the shirt inflate, and a body
take place.

And then I feel your breathing
deeply for you are asleep
and surely dreaming.

I have no reason to open my eyes.

touching stories of you

one

Reading:

Windows are open,
and the breeze assibilates,
soft, then softer,
the sound of gentle
breathing across the window screen.

The dogs are barking.
Loud and important where they are,
but those lowly vibrations filter through trees to where we are,
here,
on the couch in your upstairs apartment.

The books are open,
and the back of your head is on my lap, your legs
extend to the other end of the couch; I hold the pages
with my right hand fingers, and my forearm slips in the lower ridge
along your clavicle, smoothed by a white t-shirt and absent bra.

The dogs are barking,
but not loud enough.
I hear you breathing, and the occasional cardinal
whistles high vibrant pitches, but not loud enough,
to wake you.

Your lips are open,
and press softly against the cotton covering my ribs; my left hand,
immersed in your fawn hair, stroking the hair on your neck
with the tips of my fingertips,
soft, and then softer.

Riding:

The sun, a throw of nuclear fire
in the imaginary middle of a shifty, shaping universe,
spins along the coast around the imaginary middle of the Milky Way,
taking 200 million years to travel a complete nomadic circle;
a year is the time it takes
the earth to circle the sun.

The sun
is bigger than the word "sun," is bigger than Ashley, a golden retriever,
is bigger than Italy, is bigger still than the volume of the Atlantic,
that huge hunk of water, is bigger than Atlas and is bigger
than the earth by one million degrees,
looks the size of a speck from Pluto, is
inconceivably smaller than
the galaxy.

The sun
shines sharply on the Pacific ocean,
heats the bouncing waves at the top of that swirling bucket
of liquid lake after liquid lake after river after raindrop,
and meanwhile shines past the earth against the rock of moon,
our eighth hovering continent, reflecting the white and invisible light waves through the
floating clouds straight to and through the window to
your carpet.

You and I, we dance in the dark in the moonlight
to the music of Bob Dylan pushing his fingertips into the strings
on the neck of his guitar, quiet chords of E and A, as he sings Shelter
from the Storm with the breath of his impassioned soul, the breath
of the fluid atmosphere sucked into shallow lungs
and pushed through harmonizing vocal folds,
reproduced with electricity, magnets, and a laser, from that shiny CD.

I breathe you, sunshine, my anesthetic, my inamorata, pulling you in
with the knuckles of my elbows, my moist lips open on your neck,
twirling the deep fiber of your hair, the loose cords of Amaryllis.

three

Passing:

When you hand me the phone, and say
it's my mother, for one second
in the exchange, our fingers lightly
graze.

my fingers have squeezed the muscles above your kneecaps;
my thumbs have pushed into the pressure below the back of your neck;
my forefinger has smeared salt from nose to ear;
my hand, in a mitten, has locked with your glove on a ski lift;
my palms have cupped your ribs in waterfall mist;
my fingerprints have swept beneath your elastic belt line;
my hands have kneaded your feet in crowded restaurants;
the eight V's have caught the current of your long waves of hair;

the heel of my hand has started under your middle toe, weakened your spongy instep, rounded your calloused heel to your soft Achilles' tendon, pressed firmly up the underside of your leg, roughly over the hot muscles in your joint, stretching the skin towards the backside of your body, crossing over your thigh near your hair, wiping emphatically up your stomach like an iron, around the outside of your breast, over your hard shoulder, then flipped lightly onto your neck, transferred pressure to the fingertips, floated around the tender back of your bending ear, shuffled the hair out onto your temple, tracing softly under your cheekbone, sensed the warm breath from your nose, and touched your parted lips a passage before I kissed you.

And this brief remembrance at our touch,
this hope for the future is loud enough
to send an army charge of caterpillars happy
with a thousand suctioning toes to sing
to sing in harmony up through the skin on my back
under my shirt.

four

Parting:

swim

we open our mouths
 to sing each other
 some invisible wave of sunlight

visionless we hear
 the buzz from the refrigerator
 feel on our jawbones
 the swamping pressure
 the comfortable suffocation
 under our stifled rubbing
 noses

wet lips
 pull hot wetness from inside
 our mouths out to the bottom
 the top of our outer lips
 chewing surrounding
 we breathe
 swallow and taste

our tongues rub firm soft on inner cheeks beneath teeth
 lick taste buds suck and taste the lips and dying

skin

we reach out with our only jointless
 muscle into another body

Sailing:

Your back to me, my hands on the flesh that is you.
Your arms up and bent back, touching briefly the hair that is me.
I move my tongue down your back like a drip of water.
rolling to the floor.

Meanwhile, the waves near the center of the ocean,
the ocean that wraps our planet,
believe they are the center of something
endless.

No matter, the waves have no entity. If you look
close, you don't see waves, but the response of water
to waves – all those swimming H²O's. But the web is still there...
the web of the waves and amplitude... It's all too much to think about.

We'll go sailing, me and you,
on a raft tied up for two;
our stakes strung together,
suspended on this infinite plane.

We'll float on the surface of the huge,
huge body of fluid atoms rolling and shifting beneath us,
float on troughs and crests of the thin visual border
between ocean and sky.

Up through the clouds will be
the stars and the space and the endless.
Down through the ocean will be the bottom
of the ocean, the earth, the sky, then endless and beyond.

But you and I are sailing. Not sinking.
We're not drowning in the water or drowning in the sky.
The infinite reach of space has swallowed us,
but we are on the waves.

We are sailing on the waves.

Simplicity

It's easy,
like loving the abstract word,
the world,
the future,
the abused,
the working class.

Not like
stopping when she says to stop,
and not manipulating into penetrating further,
or holding her hand when she says she'll never love you, but she wants to be held,
or forgiving all that wants forgiven.

It's easy,
like demonizing the judge,
like saying I love you,
like poetry,
like words.

My Neutron Star

I lie in her bed as she stands
 by the pounding shower;
 it lightens when she gets in to soak her hair.
 I wait and picture
 her in a yellow dress
 by the bed.

In her room, across from the queen-size bed,
 stands an oak dresser and a mirror above a night stand
 where she keeps a brush with a blue handle. I think of the dress
 spreading down to her ankles—always yellow, like a shower
 of sunlight, bright as a crayon smeared on a picture;
 I like the contrast of bright yellow against her light brown hair.

Sometimes, after she showers, I stroke her wet hair
 with the brush and both hands as she sits silent and naked on the bed,
 and I wish I had a secret camera and could forever keep the picture
 of her bare back. In the mirror above the night stand
 I watch her face, still blushed from the shower;
 I watch, with each stroke, her closed eyes and parted lips. I often dress

in a T-shirt and cotton pants, and she doesn't wear a dress
 when I finish—she puts on grey sweat pants. She dries her hair
 with a towel as I trace her spine with my fingernails. And after each shower,
 she pushes her feet beneath the white comforter and slides beside me in the bed.
 I put my hand on her thigh and stare at the night stand
 where she keeps a jewelry box, the brush, deodorant, and a picture

of her father, smiling. She has several photos of family and friends. A picture
 of me is in the other room beside a bookcase. In it, I wear a grey suit—formal dress
 for a picnic, but I was trying to impress her. The camera catches me as I stand
 on a park bench; I pose like a heroic Greek statue. The wind lifts sections of my hair
 as I gaze toward a setting sunlight. When she falls asleep tonight, she'll be warm in this bed.
 She will feel my arms tight and my breath on her neck. She will sleep in the shower

of my love; I will love her forever; I would hold her for all time. I hear the shower
 stop and the curtain rings clatter. Before she goes away, I plan to give her a picture
 of her and me, smiling. And I hope she will keep it in this room, so she can see it from the bed.
 I will have my arm around her and she will be wearing a yellow dress
 and my hand will be resting against her light brown hair
 and the sunlight will fall four feet from where we stand.

I stand to greet her as she comes out of the shower
with thick wet hair; I take the blue brush from beside the picture
frames, and before she can dress, I will straighten her black hair down on the bed.

When You Wish Upon Phosphorescence

A star
drips
from
my ceiling
bounces from my hip
to the floor

it glows for several hours

fluorescent green to dull white
while I revel
in dreams
of her

Fire Works At Birth

[This is a poem about the firecracker known as the whippersnapper; it, referring to the poem or perhaps the firecracker, has nothing to do with sexual self-destruction.]

You must be thrust
young whippersnapper
head white first and flying
alive now for two
kinetic seconds, the sperm
whale that you are.

Let journey arc your paper
white skin, wiggle, you lover, gun
powder, don't let her know your coming
to solid or to end. Hit her

in the face, solid finish, you must splash
her in the face; Explode, fire, cracker, Explode!
You must be born!

Again.

Wrathless

It's like saying "fuck" for the first time.
Your verbal virginity lost.
And the sky doesn't open.
It doesn't rain.
The pillars of the house don't crumble.

You don't die.

It's like nothing even happened.
"Fuck" doesn't matter
in an empty room.
No one knows and no one cares.
It's easy.

Try it together now: "Fuck."
It doesn't mean anything.

It should be as simple as staring in the mirror,
looking yourself in the eyes,
contemplating,
and telling yourself,
"I love you."

Drip

v

be something

Tock tick
listen to the clock talk
listen to the heartbeat
listen to the heart beat.

Push

Pull

Bounce

Earth Thrown On Heaven

Headlights

56 miles per hour.

Snowflakes

rush to the windshield;

they yield to the movement.

6 a.m.

feels like 2 a.m.

Balance

my stomach as he pulls the blue

Blazer for me from the road.

Long lawn

of a thin house forty yards back.

Blue door

thrust open, I plunge to the roadside,

my mouth a forest spring.

Leaning over,

the whiteness in the grass.

Turn-signal

blinking and the dome light

escaping from the rift of the door.

Vomiting;

the whiteness in the grass.

New snowflakes

descending; I'm vomiting

in pulpy thick grass.

Blazer

still trembling, spewing warm air.

Snowflakes

in moonlight, my coughing, convulsing,

choking on buried phlegm.

.
Somewhere, there are nude girls dancing.
A man in thick rags feeds a monster in his stomach.
Pool balls crack apart the pounding trumpet speakers.
The arid stain of bottles drained hangs in packed air.
Streams from cigarettes bend like sluggish snakes.
Somewhere, there are nude girls dancing.
.

Face up,
I heave the chill air.
Turn-signal,
lighting, darkening snowflakes and exhaust,
I wipe my chin with my coat sleeve.

Wet eyes weary,
White grain falling,
Pitch-black morning
with snow and headlights,
and the light from the door.

Somewhere.

Headlights
56 miles per hour.
Snowflakes,
rush toward the windshield;
they yield to every movement.

Cross Word Puzzle Correction

Tonight is a true story.

Was Jesus happy on that cross?
In his weakness, secretly shining
at the thought of never touching another leper
or standing in the way
to shelter a man from stones?

God only knows

how demanding it is to create destruction
and watch the world build a flaming grounds
for itself with fuel meant for food.
In the dry prairie, we orgasm
and shoot flaming arrows straight up into the air.
And when we burn, we scorn
with the patience not of Lot
but of clock ticks.

Every God has a weak spot
like the Problem of Evil
though that's really our problem
now isn't it?

How can the question not be its answer?

My Very Own Chaos Theory

If I shake hard enough
from fear you've seen in me
still and hard enough
to rattle atoms to their verge
perhaps a butterfly in Portugal
won't flap his wings.

Post-Pre-Mortem:

I don't like the place you put me
engraver, gravedigger, seer-sayer.

From 1976 — 2000—something.
From “there” through “there”
in a word — in a line
of indented rock below
my proud outstanding name.

Keep your eye on the stock market.

Birth through death. In such a figure (the dash)
I must have led a simple life, straight as
a dash, quick as a glance, dull and witless.
Curious teenagers read my name and think of simple object
under ground, not breathing, lacking substance between bones.
“I wonder...” and they can't dig much deeper,
to reconstruct the past, to bring me back to life,
the task too bearing for an evening stroll.

And where was I when? At then,
which cross-section in this/that simple line?
Everywhere at once, says a damning paradigm;
know nowhere at once, “You are nothing.”
You've read the book, have
conceptualized the past; you know
what happens in the future
at the end.

Put your stocks in rocks.

When the rain eases and the worm
sticks to the wet rock like snot or thawed chicken
pumping, pushing, crossing
the engraved line where I am/was 20-something
and wet in the folds of her blanket — I loved her
boldly; I've never been more in love than that age.

God, God, you make it so easy
to write poetry about three-inch lines
from birth to death
year to year
in relativity
no time whatsoever.

Happy are the lovers that fuck on my grave,
the humping vibrations rhythm through
layers of tight dirt to the wood to the air
to the bones that once held my thawed chicken heart.
Hear the pounding?

Hump-Hump. Hump-Hump. Hump-Hump.

My heart is dashing for them.
I've never been more in love.
I haven't felt this alive in years.

Charlie's Hearse

Life is anything

but simple, Charlie.
People drown in that
river. And it's not
the river's fault, because
all those little drips
just keep pushing. They
don't even know they are
a river. They don't
see any rain

clouds. Can't feel
a single trickle on
the river's back.
The rain becomes
the river, Charlie, and neither
know anything about it.
You see that turtle, with
its flapping feet? Trying to
get control
of his situation.
He can't get around
the current though. The water
doesn't care. Rolling
downhill, between
rocks, that's what the river
does. The river has no
purpose. It doesn't know
where it's going. It
doesn't wonder

if it exists. All those dead
leaves float along. The river
is a conveyor belt for dead
things, includes the imagining river
and rain drops. The trees don't miss
the leaves and the leaves don't
remember the tree limbs. They're all
dead as dirt. They can't tell

how cold the water is, because
 they are senseless location. Your
 skin can't tell either, Charlie. Just
 sends a message to your brain
 saying shiver, boy, shiver. Your skin
 doesn't know why it
 shivers. It doesn't think about it
 first. Your skin doesn't wonder
 why it exists. Use your towel, Charlie;
 you need to dry off. Your skin's
 not concerned. Not concerned
 with anything.

Go ahead. Ask it, Charlie. See if
 your skin is anything more than
 skin. Your skin is molecular, dead, like
 dirt. And that turtle don't care
 either, Charlie. Just trucking
 along. Not sure where

he's going, what he's going to
 do when he gets there. Tips back
 and forth. Bounces off rocks. Perceived pain tells
 him to swim the other way. He doesn't know,
 Charlie. It's not real
 pain. People drown in that river.
 That turtle
 doesn't feel nothing like you

do. You feel that breeze?
 Makes your arm
 hair stand straight up. I don't
 feel it, Charlie. I feel a message
 in my brain. I'm just like that river,
 Charlie. Can't see a thing. Just keep
 flowing. On a conveyor belt. Ain't nothing but cells,
 and them cells don't wonder about anything
 at all. That's enough
 swimming today, Charlie. Tell me there's

a God.

Sixty-Five at Twelve Thirty on Seventy-Nine Frustrates Sex, Suicide, and Bob
Dylan

Inertia:

For forty miles the steering wheel agrees with the road.

At half past midnight,
the ballast, my hand, hangs
on the seven o'clock.

Headlights open the shades of the highway.
A horizon-wide
hood hides fire
in the engine—the buried
barrage reduced
to a rattle, swamped by
Dylan's "Forever Young."

With a tight arching
muscle, my foot pins
the pedal at forty-two
degrees. Mad axles twist; pistons sweat
oil. A fetching grey
blur pours past four
feet away.
The dashboard quivers like thighs.

Dylan wails
a request: "May you stay
forever young."
At the bend in
the highway, the wheels don't want to turn.

The highway lifts its skirt;
I shake and push
harder.

perfect it

What I want to say
is how easy it is
to say how easy it is.

What is a pronoun exactly?

Perfection exists
as well as nothing exists
and goodness and the spider and the dog.

Let wet waves of wind
wash over and baptize
complexity to simplicity.

What isn't a pronoun
exactly?

What I want to say
is nothing except everything
and how easy it is.

Perfecting My Chin and Scrotum:
The Love Poem

Part 1: Perfecting

I shave and say
I love you
something is perfect

Part 2: My Chin

He covers my eyes with sponges dripping
the scent of soap, and after the needle
pinches the pulpy mole on my chin and squeezes
in the liquid anesthetic, I feel a bomb
at an air show melt my face, toasted so
I won't feel or care about the thin blade
slitting my skin or the spitting blood from severed
capillaries. Through cloud openings below
my eyelids, fingers of giants fumble with rods
and scalpels, their tan tight elastic sprayed red. He tugs a little
at a time. flesh-tearing sounds like shrimp
bitten; I hear the ripping
threads of cuticle above the moaning
machines in that room.
Blood slithers towards
my clavicle. I grip a metal
bar, then the palm of a female, and she licks me
with a wet and dead cow tongue—
a lubricated patch on my bare stomach
to ground me for electric shock. After each beep
like a low battery smoke
detector, a soldering iron pushes electric pulses into my chin,
makes the skin
boil in brief agony
and the blood sizzle and the smell
of burnt vessels linger like hair
singed by fire.
A new tube slurps the blood clean
from the gash, vacuums the soupy flesh, sucks
the bottom of a milkshake; a new needle pricks,
towing thread, jerking on
the cloth of face. Like jaded labia majora,
the cleft lips close and kiss
forever.
And then, the chin is

Part 3: and Scrotum

Beneath the blue gown, cotton green
slippers cover half my ankles and keep my feet warm
and sterile. I lie on the human
tray beneath a white sheet, knowing I am
naked, reading diagrams and pictures
of inner ears to turn my mind to anything
but sex. The doctor comes with a nurse,
both prepared to concentrate
on the skin that clings
to my testicles.

The doctor yanks on
a drawer and instruments rattle like pencils and paper
clips, and he finds the one he wants—short-bladed
scissors, more like a wrench or wire
clippers. He eases the sheet down and pulls up what feels like a skirt,
making sure to expose only my jolly pouch; the nurse rests
her wrist on my cowering
penis, pulling up my scrotum to tighten the loose
membrane.

The doctor pulls out
a needle, and with his forearm braced
between my legs, pokes the tip
of the syringe into the tiny sacks
of excess skin. My eyes and thighs
wince and I yelp and pull myself up
off the needle and settle down quickly. I pant
and grip the sheets as the doctor peeps through his precision
glasses and slides the needle in again—muscles
clinch tighter than rocks. He jerks
out the needle, and the nurse uses her other hand
to press stringy gauze against
dripping blood.

The doctor drops the syringe
on the table and seizes the clippers and a clean
cloth; my testicles shift and slide as the open cold
blades maneuver to the base of the growth.
I think of the nurse's hand on my penis.
The scissors bite down on my scrotum, plucking
the skin tags, ripping my skin, perfecting
the sack of soupe du jour.
Much later, the scrotum is

Part 4: : The Love Poem

I shave and say
you loved me

nothing is perfect

Reciprocal Refrain: The Parable of the Missing Half

I thought about writing this poem
in this afternoon on my couch.
You were with me. We were numb.
The way I put it, in my head,
the wit and rhyme,
crafted atypical tonal communication...

I don't remember the words
exactly,
but they were perfect at the time,
in the heat and hibernation of our sun nap,
breathing deep enough to notice
that the poem went something like this...