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A Bird Flies Into a Pane of Glass Again and Again and Again

Zachary Cosby
Portland State University

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Artist Statement

This project began as a burst of enthusiasm for the possibilities of the prose poem, and ended as a search for a means to move beyond the tired (and tiring) American tradition. Upon reading my first pieces within the genre, I recall a feeling of limitlessness, as though removing enjambment from the work had the effect of compressing experience itself into a stream of images. The more I wrote for the project, the more I felt an overwhelming awareness of sameness. As I began to research the history of the American prose poem, from Russel Edson and James Tate, to anthologies and journals of contemporary work, I began to sense a pattern. The further the genre developed, the more it appeared formulaic. It felt as if the truly successful prose poem operated as if someone took a handful of their most personal items (a letter to a dying mother, an ape, a piece of yellow string, the landscape of a dream), put them in a box together, and shook them like dice in a cup. A prose poem, then, was the resulting mess that spills across the page.

I want a kind of writing that brings back temporal linearity and a speaking subject to the forefront of the work, while still retaining a playfulness and willingness to experiment that (by my definition) characterizes the poetic genre. Rather than moving in the direction of flash fiction, I was interested in finding ways to make everything smaller than before. I wanted these poems to capture the kind of sparseness and lucidity that was historically invoked by haiku and haibun forms, but today might be best exemplified by the still emerging stylistic quirks seen on twitter.com. Twitter forces the writer into concision, rewarding those who can

create tiny worlds through the suggestibility of disparate words and ideas. Some living writers, such as Melissa Broder, have found immense success beyond their published poetic works in this medium, while other dead authors, such as Richard Brautigan, have found new life as their work is excerpted and presented in entirely new contexts.

For me, the challenge was in finding a middle ground between these two tendencies. Perhaps I am still very much indebted to the american prose poem, but the dream is to move beyond it. I try to embrace the minimalism, the temporality, and the speaking subject of contemporary internet writing and place it within the memory of what the prose poem once was.

**a bird flies into a pane of glass
again and again and
again**

by

Zachary Cosby

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in

University Honors

and

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Thesis Adviser

Zachary Schomburg

Portland State University

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The role of the kiss is to never swallow what it craves

— Michele Glazer

A kiss is the beginning of cannibalism

— Georges Bataille

cave

i wake up in
caverns with no one around

to excavate your
ghost and flood this poem with

tar a photograph or ten
thousand dots of

ink
that i call a name

is this poem a self-understanding or a truce

my arms are yellow paper folded

when my arms dip in water

they transform to something limp and disappointing

it rained through the funeral

everything felt incredible and large

a cup of coffee with the wreckage of lipstick

the smell from wet piles of clothes

so like swallowing a bird in flight

a feeling tunnels through my body

a quiet landscape

a stillness like the space between wings

a stillness like the flooded cave

in this dream, my mouth filled with sand

my teeth bleed we wait for night

i ask for some kind of fire

you touch me like sleeping birds

it feels like the shadows below clouds

below our skin hide lakes of blood

i am trying to remember how to escape

a place without sound or trees

i make a canoe from stone and sail it

i lay in the dark and cover my face with sheets

the lack of air hangs wet and crushing

why do memory pucker and bloom

i don't really know

don't really want to know

the front door is locked at night
i lay in the yard a dead pale moth
winter parachutes from the sky
in this dream even icicles feel
the snow an endless plain of bones
i wanted someone to be with
so i held a picture of some strange face
and nailed it to my chest
somewhere an alarm was ringing

our death friends are all hiding
i leave the house to look for them
they become statues partially hidden in fog
like a memory you told me
slipping in the rain while climbing the roof
to watch your dogs teeth the forest
our hands like wood grain in sun
we were not inside those bodies
we were those bodies

imagine a number
that's how many dead deer
a forest could hold
we could walk hand in hand
through the trees
dumping our memory
like a landfill between branches
we could dig new landfills
into everything we touch
there is a phantom limb
growing through my mouth

but you can't see it

we found a cave
no one had explored

you shined a light
but the cave swallowed light

you put your head in
but the cave swallowed you

i look to the sky
and try to find an outside

but there is no outside
and we are very small

when i think about it

thick black fog

flows out of my mouth

thirty two teeth

looking for a way out

each of their cavities filled

with familiar sounds

my lower half

a stomach cramp

a roadside bomb

spraying flesh confetti

maybe my body speaks

in strange languages

it's scared

to reproduce

maybe gloom sunflowers

swallowed us whole

after three days

we woke in the belly

with hands and face smeared

in seed and pollen

please don't look away

o' book of walt whitman's

infinite teeming womb

o' ebook of robert duncan gray's

abattoir of dreams

the webcam model

we spent weeks watching

touch himself

on my computer screen

he was a giant beetle

i thought mothheads

were my head

chewing through

your head

i thought your teeth
were soft white linen

paper wings on fire
a slowly bleeding lamp

tiny parasites

riot in my stomach

they gather in kerosene crowds

and hunger

they want to burn their home

just as their home wants to burn them

how do you make a person

stop living inside you

it's hard to talk about

without losing a face

youth

i am outside looking in

the spinning particles

shaped like people

does everyone think about lips

pressing against skin

find me

behind the human

i dream of the mole
just below your belly button

when i wake up
my lips are dry

the window is open
and a voice flows through

it is humming a song
in a minor key

there are patterns everywhere
that exist

you can draw faces
from memory

it must be nice
to never feel alone

what does a phone call mean

magnolia trees

and the sunfucked dream

cemeteries are forests

radiating white noise

we stand like tall grass

in june

make dead deer of us

when photograph collections

are broken time machines

the wind is not peaceful

when you blow on my arm

when do spinning particles

turn to chemicals

of people

i wanted to drown

in waves of light

i planted flowers

in my skin

a tiny boy

became a tiny garden

and a tiny garden

became a tiny mouth

swallowing

when you lose that body

a never fake death

take your time

and tweet something beautiful

i try to swallow
every beautiful thing

but beauty disappears
inside a cave

bodies eat themselves
when starving

is cannibalism
beautiful too

everything i touch
feels like oil black hair.

everything i write
sweats that first time we met.

all things
are made of skin.

the carpets

a toothbrush

red candy

skin.

chat rooms

an erection

guilt smell

skin.

grocery stores

your best friends

the ocean

skin.

windows

despite their transparency

are a different kind of skin.

that immense feeling
of you on top

one hand on my hip
the other in my mouth.

that feeling
was always skin.

we will evaporate
in the air as clouds

heavy with cum
and bile

and blood

i can see
my neighbor

he's raking
brown leaves

horse

i write your name

in ink

and hope it never becomes

like the wallpaper

in the kitchen

of grandmother evelyn

that would fade

every summer heat

into pale ghosts

nobody could recognize

it was a beautiful name

for a grandmother

i watch a sailboat erase the horizon
and finally understand enormity

the sun has stopped in the sky
my phone a face in glass

my wrists in vases

of plastic flowers

they don't feel small

or beautiful

they feel like copies

of some dying thing

i wash my face

in the sink

i fall asleep

like wet ham

i use google to find you

give a new name

to something on the left

give a new name

to this book of poems

sometimes i call my mother
and say *everything will not be okay*

i always hang up before she responds
but one time i said something different

i said *death is the final horse*
and laughed

it sounded like a swarm of bees
as thick as fog

i have a nightmare about a horse
and all my friends as beautiful marble statues

one of my friends is on her phone
one of my friends is eating grapes
one of my friends is laughing and laughing
and all are beautiful marble statues

thirty seven beautiful marble statues
frozen in thirty seven beautiful marble ways

i wonder what it's like to be invisible
as i make a picnic for one

over there
a horse eating a field of grass

there is a horse wandering through my home

i place my hands on the horse's face

and place my hands on the horse's neck

when the mouth opens

wood vibrates like ten thousand bees

or clouds

a man walks to the horse
with a revolver in his hand

he presses the revolver
to the head of the horse

and whispers *run*

my own fingers fold
in the shape of a gun

the air is punctured
by the screaming of horses

deer

nothing exists outside of experience

which is to say this poem

is the space outside of masks

a gun fired into open sky

reading missed connections

i tell myself to write poems but I don't even like poems

there is nothing in the act of poem

why cannibalize memory for the sake of nothing

to eat a clementine alone in the dark

i put on a shirt

something necessary

i think this face is not my own

i think this face is not my own

i think this face is not my own

i think this face is not my own

a bird flies into a pane of glass

again and again and

again

my neighbor

is holding a rake

like a mannequin

a dead deer crumpled

through the hood

of my car

the sun is black

in a sky of black

over a crayon

also black

something is moving

behind the cans

in the pantry

if you want

to know something

it helps to name it

helps to touch it

i am amazed

how antlers don't bleed

my neighbor is

raking a field of rakes

i ask what he is doing

he points to the stars and the satellites

the night is for sleeping

and the day is for staying alive

it goes back and forth like this

for a very long time

i make a mountain of meat
that takes a lifetime to climb
i can see my neighbor
between two little houses
that little house is mine
that little house
is not

i make friends with a child
at the peak of the mountain
we share a common enemy
whose name we do not speak
our story is a ghost story
the kind a child
tells another child

a child wears a deer head

like its own head

i wear my head

like my own head

my neighbor

is raking the rakes

a child asks

about my face

a face

is a face

is a face

is a face

except

dead deer fall from the sky
and smack against our homes
a body falls apart
like a handful of flowers
pushed against a face
until it undoes

i see my neighbor
with black shirt
soaked in black fog
i want to save him
want to know
his name

i walk down meat mountain

below a black cloud that spreads

from this horizon

to that horizon

and that horizon

and that horizon

i clutch an umbrella to my chest

wow says a child

dead deer follow you everywhere

and we laugh

it was true

there is a portal to hell

in the corner of my bedroom

everything smells

a man that looks nothing like my father

puts a hand on my shoulder

it was a very funny joke

you had a dream of hostile billboards
we ran through new york in abstract fear
the faces on magazine covers glaring
we caught eyes like late spring pneumonia
we were 900 channels of television and worshipping the sound
of white noise breaking beyond our frame

i'm going to vancouver this afternoon

i wash deer blood off the hood of my car

i take a picture of me and my world

i like the thought of losing five, maybe ten pounds

consider replacing friends with plants

a change of surroundings would be nice

like opening a new tab

a tiny piece of glass cuts my right foot

it was shaped

almost nothing like the rays of the sun

passing through the window

i remember your name

i pour and pour away

the blood

feeling more like ghost

than the death that births it

slow

and incredibly far away

you would like it here

like how

alone it can feel

my body

no longer inside

this mannequin

hex

citrus

the
name
of
this
poem
is
citrus

i retire my lips
in a gesture of goodwill
towards those i fucked over

they live
their final days

inside a cave
with the memory

of red grapefruit
tongues

the ghosts they birthed
live on

as friction burns
on the skin of horses

a name
is a terrible thing

i hope a name
never becomes true

this is a forest fire of
paper cigarette ebooks dog
feces coffee street litter cables
reducing my head
to charred neurons stumps
and ash habitats.

once i found a moth
in the glow of your cellycell's
flashlight app

it flew inside my mouth
and recited a poem

moth poem

blue screens of death

flash inside your eyes

digital flowers bloom

black between our thighs

even these things
that i want
i don't really want

i think
i'm trying to say
that i want
to stop wanting

avoid
like a void
trying to swallow
another void

he says

i want to leave you with a virus

that doesn't scrape off

he does

it won't