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ORION’S EYES

By

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B.A. Colorado State University, 2020

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

(in English)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

May 2022

Advisory Committee:

Jennifer Moxley, Professor of English, Advisor

Benjamin Friedlander, Professor of English

Laura Cowan, Associate Professor of English
The following manuscript is a thesis in poetry and poetics. The goal of the thesis was to generate poems which investigate perception and to develop a nascent sense of my own poetics. The manuscript is invested in the exploration of poetry’s sonic qualities as a primary constitutive force behind a poem’s meaning. Inspired by Zukofsky’s declaration that the highest order of poetry is music, the poems are rooted in the expressive capacity of the voice. The critical introduction draws attention to how that vocal expressivity functions in the poems as a meaning-making element.

The poems included in *Orion’s Eyes* were written between 2020 and 2022 and explore perception through sound and imagery. They exhibit an interest in phenomenology and the natural world as explored through word- and phrase-based sound patterning. Indebted to Merleau-Ponty’s writings on the inseparability of the senses, the poems enact certain forms of repetition and variation to generate aural patterns that are echoed in the imagery and matter described. Many of the poems also show, in their subject matter, direct interest in questions of voice; the concentrated interest in the formal presence of sound as a constructive device for the poems naturally led to a reflective interest in the aural realization of those sounds. The poems are
divided into three sections gathered under the thematic groupings of “music,” “light,” and “harmony,” and are populated by ten black and white illustrations by Casey Forest.

The critical introduction elaborates my drafting and revising processes and is presented from a reflective standpoint. By analyzing the opening poem of the manuscript, the introduction explains what decisions were made during the writing process and what literary influences were behind those decisions. In foregrounding my influences, I hope to make apparent the adherence of my poetics to a inspirational lineage that is loosely attributable to a line of speech-based-poetics, but is diverse in genre. In the readings of my poems, I primarily elucidate formal craft elements and how these elements would be reflected in a vocal recital of the poem.
DEDICATION

The manuscript as a whole is dedicated to my mother, Mary Rose. “Raft” is dedicated to Lucas Bacmeister, “Pyrography” to Duane and Janis Lewandowski, and “Permitted Attention” to Nathan Renshaw.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I’d like to thank Professor Jennifer Moxley for her careful attention to these poems and her willingness to challenge my approach to poetry in meaningful ways. I would also like to thank Professor Benjamin Friedlander for the endless reading recommendations and rabbit holes; Professor Laura Cowan for encouraging and enabling my initial encounters with ideas of ritual, perception, and Merleau-Ponty; and Professor Steve Evans, whose course on phonotextuality taught me the proper way to articulate the function of phonemic progression in my poems. Thank you to Nathan Renshaw and Katherine Dubois for being early readers of many of these poems. Finally, my deepest gratitude to Casey Forest for crafting lovingly detailed drawings and for being a voice of constant support in my life.
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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Orion’s Eyes begins with an *ars poetica* style poem that seeks to generate certain expectations for a reader about the rest of the poems. In this introduction, I would like to work line-by-line through this opening poem—using each line as a key to discuss my compositional decisions and the inspirational sources of this manuscript.

I have opted for two methods of quotation in this introduction: I conceptually engage some of my sources by explaining how I understand their ideas and how that understanding manifests in my poetry; others I cite without elaboration as a silent demonstration of an ongoing dialogue:

> Our debt to tradition through reading and conversation is so massive…that, in a large sense, one would say there is no pure originality. All minds quote. Old and new make the warp and woof of every moment. There is no thread that is not a twist of these two strands…. We quote not only books and proverbs, but arts, sciences, religion, customs, and laws; nay, we quote temples and houses, tables and chairs by imitation. (Emerson 130)

Speak this

The poem, and thus the book, opens with a traditional call to the muse which also functions as an imperative to the reader. I intend both of these calls to imply a poetics where the poem doesn’t exist strictly as an index of myself but is also exogenous, as exhibited by the call to the mythological muse as an external poetic source, and is made newly present each time it is spoken aloud—by myself or another reader.
Both of these points will be touched on below and will make up the bulk of the frame for my explanations, but I want here to note that the second point is an expression of my belief that my poetry is situated within a certain lineage of speech-based poetics. When composing these poems, sound patterning has been my primary compositional principal; “speak this” is thus a plea for a literal vocalization to practice these words aloud—the ongoing exploration of what Olson referred to as: “[The] living oral law to be discovered in speech as directly as it is in our mouths” (169).

I have used sound patterning at various levels: puns, repetition, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, syllable count, and phoneme progression. Though these are free verse poems, the formal principles that constitute them are rooted in sound, rhythm, and number: “If number, measure and weighing / Be taken away from any art, / That which remains will not be much” (Zukofsky Anew 85). Thus, my explanations in this introduction will largely focus on how I see sound patterning functioning in individual poems.

lichened tablet

Here, the first pun of the book, “lichened”/“likened”, and the first invocation of the rhyme in the text between the natural world and the written and spoken word. I see these two concepts (pun and world/word rhyme) as deeply interconnected. A central reason that sound patterning is my primary formal concern is because I am also interested in exploring how those sound patterns mimic, share elements with, or draw attention to perceived patterns in the sensory world. When sitting down to write, I find that I am first drawn to the sound word or a line; the sound of a line leads me to the conceptualizations and images of a poem—where “thinking with the things as
they exist” is closer to being led along a line of melody than it is “directing them along a line of melody” (Zukofsky 13).

In this exploration, I have come to see my poems as not trying to directly imitate or make present a specific image. Rather, I find that my writing process has begun to relate to nature as what Mandelstam called “an extraspatial field of action”: “[Poetry] is not a part of nature [nor] is it a reflection of nature…but it is something that, with astonishing independence, settles down into an extraspatial field of action, not so much narrating nature as acting it out by means of its instruments” (103). This extraspatial field widens attention past the referentiality of words, not to erase their definitions, but to rouse attention from routine usage—bringing sonic attention to the fore and highlighting orality as an act of engaging with nature. Mandelstam, to explain this further, uses the word “sun”: “When we pronounce…the word ‘sun’ [in a poem], we are not throwing out an already prepared meaning…we are living through a peculiar cycle” (115).

pressed letters

Here, the word “pressed” rather than “carved” or “chiseled” implies a gentle pressure that may rebound and unform—temporary and ephemeral: “Do not look for truth but for fragility” (Avasilichioaei WE, BEASTS n.p.). I do not mean to imply that any word or line choice is tentative and subject to change, but rather that the poems are constantly rediscovering themselves and any images, concepts, or ideas are in flux. In other words: I have not sought to lay down exact fact but am more interested in Oppen’s ideas of preservation: “The writers first concern is to be sure that he means anything, and for this he must preserve and restore the meaning of words” (167). While Oppen’s comment extends to social concerns of words, I situate myself with the idea of “preserving” as a kind of sheltering of language—a holding open to welcome
any possible movement that the words themselves invite; as in the ending of my poem “Steady Glow of the Just Seen”: “the eyelids sink // imprint leaf shade / into blinking eye” (40). The rotation of the /l/ and /i/ phonemes of “lids” into “sink” double in “imprint” and “blinking”—all of which I feel as a kind of residual imprint of sounds that have come before in perpetual soft-rhyme so that the final “eye” not only puns on I/eye but also elongates the phonemes that have built up to it, moving back in the throat as an /ai/ made natural by the /g/ just before. In this way, I see the words as enacting a kind of natural movement in the mouth where Oppen’s preservation of meaning is not in the individual word but is, rather, in the situating of cadence and phoneme progression: “I really want to explore what it means to be immersed in language, to explore how you can take something that begins in a point but then shifts and begins to encompass an entire space, so that the source is enlarged and ripples outwards three-dimensionally” (Moure n.p.).

grow / upon fragmentation

Fragmentation creates jagged edges, upon which something may cling. Imagination places beautiful gestures upon Venus de Milo, Sappho’s beloved surrounds her broken lines, and, in a geophysical way, coastlines abraded by water create footholds for life: “on an open shore, with moderately heavy surf, the rocks are whitened by the crowded millions of barnacles” (Carson 31). The fragment’s capacity for jagged footholds offers a formal poetic approach that directs attention to roughened edges as places of imaginative play. I do not mean to say that my poems are deeply fragmented in an overtly experimental way, but that I try and emphasize small moments of enjambment and standalone words and phrases to generate places of suspension such that a reader’s attention may be directed to the poem’s form as a site of constant reflexivity.
For example, in “That Immense Seamstress: Gravity,” I write, “gives substance to / coarseness to” (58). Here, the hanging silence, emphasized by a stanza break after “coarseness to,” highlights the “airiness” of “fairy mouths” that comes later—hopefully allowing the sound and space of the poem to direct attention in a reflective way upon the poem itself; the airiness of the page or of unspoken silence after the “to” invites ideas of the poem as language in a tense position between the gravity of the physical mouth and the airiness of silence.

feeding spread of sedimentation

In repeating words and phrases throughout, I have sought to create a kind of sedimentation of meaning in individual poems and across the manuscript. Repeated words or phrases in poems like “Sound as Clear as Light” and “A Walkway” function like musical variations by changing throughout the poem in relation to the words around them and, on a larger scale, repetition of certain words—such as “sun,” “stone,” and “earth”—across the manuscript provide motivic throughlines which accumulate significance through their varied syntactic and contextual functions.

I see my poetic influences as another form of sedimentation. Poetry, for me, arises from constellations of disparate texts and images (of any sensory type) that have been impressed in me. All of the writers cited in this introduction are not only here for theoretical engagement, but have been influential on my poetry. The inclusion of naturalists—most notably as the three epigraphs of the text, but also present in subject matter—requires some explanation.

My admiration for naturalists such as Carson and Muir is rooted in my interest in observation (with its root ser- “To protect”). I have found that their writing and language usage creates a distinct aura of fascination through their contemplation of the natural world. When
Muir, for example, sees an “ancient flood boulder” and describes it as “a nearly cubical mass of granite about eight feet high, plushed with mosses over the top and down the sides to ordinary high-watermark...like an altar, the fall in front of it bathing it lightly with the finest spray,” I am interested in how his expression of the shape of the boulder—particularly the word “plushed”—conveys his relationship to the rock (seeing it as inviting and comfortable) so as to anticipate the next sentence: “When I climbed on top of it to-day and lay down to rest, it seemed the most romantic spot I had yet found” (180).

erosion!

Part of my interest in sound patterning stems from my reading of Ronald Johnson’s Ark, in which the last two-thirds of the text draw attention so closely to minute interactions of words themselves (as puns, images, and compounded meanings) that attention ceases to register anything and a kind of meditative intransitive attention is instilled in the reader. I see this as a kind of eroding of syntax and external attention by means of incantatory rhythm.

While my poems do not reach the same extreme syntactic breakdown, I hope to draw attention to the patterns that exist beneath common attention to speech and world: “The world links itself to us through our awe, our awe is the root system of being...the truth of limitless particularity lies beneath language but is accessible to language when language asserts then cancels itself, asserts, cancels” (Lilburn 14).

Erosion in my poetry, then, is not an erasure, but is, rather, a tenderness—with emphasis towards tending—to preserve speech’s sound and rhythm so easily lost in our videocentric and productive culture.
Once we were melodious. Motivated. Hollows, having vented all stifling letters, all burdensome consonants. Yet the mouth yearned for a fullness it couldn’t quite achieve. . . .

Once we were a garden. We were undergrowth. Moss and lichen, trellises of ivy, clambering tangles of foliage. Yet something obstructed our allegory. We were not sentimental but intended a trajectory towards some kind of tenderness. (Avasilichioaei, “Before the cataclysm” n.p.)

**a way in**

I would formally characterize the poems as organic in Levertov’s sense: “A partial definition, then, of organic poetry might be that it is a method of apperception, i.e., of recognizing what we perceive, and is based on an intuition of an order, a form beyond forms, in which forms partake, and of which man’s creative works are analogies, resemblances, natural allegories. Such poetry is exploratory” (68). In my understanding and my approach to the organic form, the poem is ever self-constituting, but not automatic. At its source, the development of the organic poem is an active one: organic’s root shared with “organ”: ‘werg- To do…work; handiwork.’ (American Heritage 103). I am drawn to this idea of work, as built into “organ,” as a practiced attention to pattern that involves following the “check [of the] irrevocable laws set by the nature of the material, not by man…more than an active process, [this] is a listening for the dictation of the material and a taking in of the laws of harmony” (Albers 7-9).
An example of a poem that is organic in form, but that also required heavy revision to find its organic shape: The first draft of the poem “The Edge of the Body at the Wildflower” (pictured here with a different title), is similar in language to the manuscript version, but is more open and dissolute (44). The original’s airy structure doesn’t allow for a sense of energy and falls apart into ambient description. When paring down the airiness in revising, I came to see that the language that was there suggested itself as an energetic rhyme of curling petals wrapping around something and that this energy required the tight, spiraling lines that now structure the poem.

![Open Shell of Perception (?)]

Split petal self

shifting

seeking what core ends

overlap

sew grace to cohosh horizon

pick up toward peak

fold over fold

inverted stems

holding out rooted

stars lode story

carry

layer through layer

Figure 1: Draft of Poem

to the fissures that moss-roots remember

The genesis of this project as an exploration of the relationship between articulation and perception of the natural world began with the phenomenological philosophy of Merleau-Ponty: “He who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is of it, unless, by principle, according to what is required by the articulation of the look with the things, he is one of the visibles, capable, by a singular reversal, of seeing them—he who is one of them” (135). Perception, therefore, is an immersion, a reciprocal participation; to see an object is not an act of grasping in either direction, but is an inter-dependent ongoing mutual constitution.

It was Merleau-Ponty’s ideas that first rattled me into reconsidering myself as someone in a world worth exploring through language, perception, and expression. I see this interest in
perception as directly connected to my interest in sound patterning; I believe that as sound patterning draws attention to the mouth in the act of speaking, it invites simultaneous reflections on the phenomena of listening as a self-reflective act: “Perception is a slingshot drawn back to the first plasm” (Johnson 35).

By directing attention towards listening, I believe these poems offer ways to refocus and reflect on how we see, speak, feel, etc. In other words, these poems explore the question: how does my word choice—not only at the semantic level but, more emphatically, at the phonemic and rhythmic levels—reflect and potentially alter how I sensorially experience something? If there is an intentional ecological element to my poetry, I believe that it lies in this question; by attending to the patterning of language as a meaningful act, I hope these poems offer, in their willingness to speak slowly about natural phenomena, opportunities to linger and to focus on the intricate, ever-changing patterns that constitute the world.

**rain follows**

My composition choices on the level of line are heavily influenced by, and are thus best expressed through, Paul Klee’s *Pedagogical Sketchbook*. His divisions of drawn lines into active, medial, and passive help me think of the poetic line as an individual space within the whole of the poem.
For example, my poem “To Build a House in Song” has a variety of line lengths. Early on, the poem reads: “heavy / silk sleeves / catch / branch / reach / reeds” (25). I see these lines working in the mode Klee calls “medial lines.” These serve to suspend a moment and to steadily create a plane of action. In this case, the action of a sleeve catching on a branch is suspended as the words are slowed down: the quick /ch/ sounds force air through the teeth and seek to emphasize the gesture of reaching through reeds and the long /e/ sounds lengthen the words and put a forward-moving strain on the mouth through the lines. All these effects coagulate into the plane of the image of a reaching arm.

A few lines down, the poem reads, “gathering arundo—reed for flute making” (25). I see this line as closer to what Klee calls an “active line on a walk” which relies more on intra-line movement—such as the dactylic pattern on “gathering arundo”—to create a freeing effect where the language tends to be more self-reflexive (16). Rather than building up through the suspension of words, the language is allowed to run together. Being more independent than the medial lines, this line-shape allows for a more natural insertion of extra-image comments; in this case, I used that openness to include a brief description of “arundo”: “reed for flute making.”
The “source” of a poem is something I’ve struggled with and continues to be a kind of tension for me. As I write, I tend—without intentional choice—to avoid pronouns and specifically articulated perspectives. A lot of my work with Professor Moxley has revolved around deliberation of this question as she has challenged me in different ways to consider the subjective mode of my poems.

When beginning this project, I had conflated my ideas about distinguishable subjectivity with confessionalism. The work of this manuscript felt distinct from the confessional mode and I struggled to navigate myself away from assumptions about what my poems should look like in this false dichotomy. While I realized that the absence of first-person pronouns in my poetry was not a magical erasure of subjectivity, I still struggled to enact a reflective awareness of how my position as the writer of these poems was inexorably manifested within them; this often resulted in a kind of generic generality of language with no clear source of attending subject: “BECAUSE IT IS SILENT. IT / IS SILENT BY DEFECT OF VIRTUE IN THAT IT / CONTAINS NOTHING OF YOU” (Williams 123).

Attempting to further recognize how subjectivity manifests in my poetry, a large part of my revision work has been to establish a clear origin of perception to ground the poem—as in “A Walkway” or “Draft of a Day.” I have never thought of these poems as purely objective, but, in revising, I have tried to make the position from which these poems are presented clearer in the sense of both the phenomenological “where am I looking from” and the impressionistic “who was this written from.” “The difficulty of being a nature poet is that nature always intervenes. The virtue of an honest ethic, to write only what one sees, to write only what one lives, becomes
complicated by vision, becomes entangled by the experience of being in the world” (Beachy-Quick 3).

As I continue to write, I am interested in further thinking through the manifestation of subjectivity in my poems and in recognizing more acutely the false assumptions that impact my ideas about how my poems may be received. I have begun rethinking my notions of position and subjectivity—trying to be more intentionally aware of a nuanced sense of subjectivity; shifting to ideas about perception has helped reorient me and has provided an entry point: “The thing is not to display the ego, but to use it—the instrument of perception” (Oppen *Daybooks* 174).

**and / to shape**

Alongside this difficulty with subjectivity, a point of struggle for me has been clarity of image. In getting wrapped up with following the sounds of words, I have tended to lose the shape of the poem and the description(s) therein. In attempts to rectify into specificity, I became a bit adjective drunk; I thought that I was appropriately following Zukofsky’s advice “Emphasize detail 130 times over—or there will be no poetic object” (17). Instead of specificity, however, I found that the extra addition of words was muddling the sound and the images were *less* specific and only a bit more colorful. Helpfully directed by Professor Moxley’s encouragement to return to the verse designs of the poems, however, I have lately come to think of Zukofsky’s idea of emphasis and of specificity in a different way: not as a reinforcement through adjective, but sonically—through the *sound* of the image.

In “River Grass,” for example, the initial lines are 14 syllables, which (at least to my lungs) draws attention to an overly stretched breath; these lines begin with velar and bilabial phonemes, which require a more forceful gust of breath to articulate, and end on fricatives that
continue the air stream after a word closes. Initially, these lines were quite short as I associated the ideas of dryness and drought with lack and I sought to repair the genericness of the poem with repetitions and rephrasings of “dry” and “windy;” however, in reflecting on the interrelationship of enacted design and content, I began to consider how the physical enactment of the poem could be a more appropriate reflection of the wind pattern and found that an exhaustion of breath would be more physiologically appropriate.

**the written rubbed antler**

“Rubbed antler” is not meant to point to any specific deer, but to function as a metonymy for something left behind—the residue of an action gone by. As this image would indicate, I am interested in exploring gestures and traces rather than exact moments or concepts. Again, organicism arise in the root “gesture” shares with the organic processes of “ingestion” and “gestation”: *gerere*—“To carry, carry on, act, do” (*American Heritage* 28); it is this idea of “carry on” that I would most emphasize as I’m interest in the movement “gesture” implies.

For example, at the end of “Near to Thirst,” I cut off articles and used the semi-closed monosyllabic words “peak,” “rush,” and “reach” to triple up stress, building tension to the last line: “& drink” (37). The “and” of the ampersand produces a quick unstress and then a final stressed beat. In reading this aloud, my hope is that the succession of stresses is tensed by the pauses surrounding them—enacting a feeling of tension that is then sonically resolved and relieved with the vocalized unstressed syllable before “drink.” This sound patterning is intended to echo the feeling of hazy parchedness that strains for a drink, rather than to depict a specific moment of drinking.
Finally, the manuscript’s structure, the stone upon which the poems have come to rest restlessly: The use of epigraphs as section markers indicative of the poems that follow was inspired by Ronald Johnson’s *The Book of the Green Man*. This overarching structure grew out of the poems, not the reverse; though that comment is not quite correct, as the three epigraph authors, John Muir, Rachel Carson, and James Bell Pettigrew, were all foundational in the formation of these texts as their inquiries into natural phenomena sparked and complicated, in three distinct, yet interconnected ways, my own questions into natural patterning. These three divisions are not hard and fast, as will be seen by the many overlapping themes; instead, a loose gathering into music, light, and cosmic sympathy offers a more manageable entry point into the correlations between the poems.

Coda

In writing these poems, I have come to think through the ways in which language only fails in representation if we take words to be abstracted placeholders of things and don’t allow them to leave a tangible burn-shadow in the mouth of our position towards those things—which is to say the moment the word actualizes in the mouth it becomes its own absence. By treating words as a material of their own, I’ve worked to let language unfold in patterns that offer a different kind of learning to see which links sight and sound through semantics. These poems have helped me see how language, rather than attempting and failing to make things present, makes present our relationship with, to, and among those things; there are things to be said when existing in a world that expresses us in its saying. “My hope lies in the materiality of language, in the fact that words
are things too, are a kind of nature—this is given to me and gives me more than I can understand.

Just now the reality of words was an obstacle. Now it is my only chance” (Blanchot 383).
ORION’S EYES
Speak this lichened tablet

pressed letters grow
    upon fragmentation
feeding spread of sedimentation

    erosion!
a way in

to the fissures that moss-roots remember
    rain follows
to source and
to shape the written rubbed antler

    seek soaked speech
grown over stone
I.

“Music is one of the attributes of matter, into whatever forms it may be organized... God be thanked, for this blessed instrument.”

John Muir, “Twenty Hill Hollow”
Sound as Clear as Light

the meadowlark throws
sound

in a field
yellow-throated song
distance throat the matter
sinking grass song of syrinx
sing morning air across horizon

beyond meadowlark behind sight

music the matter of
tall grass

sound where meadowlark is not

sink the field
the land

to ear

sinking note
to air grass whistle

all falls
to where
the meadowlark is not
struggling to keep track of each rippled yellow

thought that sinks slowly across the harvested landscape

whistling bird
hops along the ground
unseen beside me first familiar in sound

rapid crrrrrrr clatter in center of song marks sparrow

beside me unseen
in rippled yellow

drop

into whistle

through short cornstalks left as cattle feed

sparrow at feet

falling into shape

of a steady

familiar tale

the note sinks

fingers in cheeks whistle crrrrrr mid-sparrow
**A Walkway**

plank by plank

forest floor to bridge
follow rushing body of a path
floor to bridge

wooden step crossing roots
past upturned trunk

hovering
root dripping
peat upon head

rushing
walkway
plank by plank

a quiet walk
slight rain
dripping peat

the walkway
a quiet-echo step
the thrushes far
calling for
sinking step
linger note-like

here we can hear them
the echo note off the peat
sinking steps building walkway

plank by plank
to the bridge
hold my hand
to the bridge
to hear
how far
are the thrushes
The Underworld of Song

song sparrow’s grained throat
    plants
    pours
    buries in quickest chirp line dipping tune
where root dissolves
    folding air upon air
    digging with vocal forested trowel
    in the many winds
    finding rhythm & howl
On the Heart Shape of Prothalli

The Walking Fern
forms fingertips
touch becomes root
the wind travelled
spore sinks
to an atmosphere
attending crease
between air and dirt
where a heart is further forming
in the shape of a young fern
half sunk where sun may yet
engrave day elegy into
path of a system still ongoing
a song
half lodged
in earth
looping helio-arterial to fern tip
Grand Canyon

speak Colorado river
of canyon
rushing residue
of erosion
at weather-tongue’s border
where mind falters

the sudden fall
rain rags down
canyon side
all life clings
to what is carried
to the river
and the roar-echo
around the mouth

learning the rhythm
that is voice
from downpour
sounds as of distant
cloud in the river’s
surrounding song
To Build a House in Song

Her arms wrapped round

    reeds
gathering
maintaining roots

heavy
silk sleeves
    catch
    branch
    reach
    reeds
    the    wetlands
    the    thatching step
    sodden surface

gathering arundo—reed for flute making—
    singing soon

heavy breathing
    that gathers
heavy breathing
    that gathers

silt sole & sore arms

    heavy, intricate sleeves
    slipping between plants

to sing, dry, & thatch
Campanology

Mouth
sense
sings
out-side

of itself
tolling for all
to gather
& hymn:

“remem-
ber saints!”

“rem-
ember saints!”

Bloodless in Death
fire
folding
inside
halo-forming
about the holy organs
empty & present

Eyeless in Love
the memory
of St. Lucy sticks to the air
mud-muck thick dark
when she comes
to the dagger
to the blind light
blind as the hand
that grips the sally
& pulls—melody
in taut delay

asks will
you
sing?

question mark
the heart of
the many roped
chiming labyrinth—

forested burial ground
for a deathless siren
turned wooden floor—
    from ship hull
    and sea
    that form sound

will
you

sing?

where the hand
    swings
ever down

        sinking star
        of the bell curve

sound a-
lights, summons second-
ary

shoulder giving full bodily weight
to earth-drawn shape

slight lift

as the sound carries,
the rope pulls up
Voice of Summer Storm

sunk
root
would seem to steady the sky

into the silence between cottonwood branches
   where once a hawk nesting
    felt
    so
    exposed

where the flat evening thunder rolls
    fills—shudders
    all singularity

        shadow        of a branched nest
hidden      in clouds
        cracked
        with windy veins

blowing jagged
arrow
leaf
deep green in storm’s dark sky

will soon turn

        all white with
cotton
the world
white
as lightning
cast

        burning air

        wait
for the loss
  of crumbling
sky
  the reaching
voice of storm’s sympathy
so close to the hawk’s call
all sound
  struck briefly
    as a heard burning speech
& its shadow

    deep
    green lightning sun
lingers
Of Melting

the ice rippled by water
running over
down slope
to river
though much of it is lost

soaked up by the ground around roots

my fingers
are numb
placed in one
steady melting
pool
rippled fingertips
I had wished
for a trickle
to touch
in sound
as fingerboard ring
over slope to note
to hand if I could learn this singing

but I am only cold

to the edge suspended
this forest slope
to river it is
not silence
over ice but the tracing
of a cold path
begun
in the crunch
of snowy footsteps
some months before
Raft

Creek-like at the bank
a small, sodden voice
of stream & swell
undoes symbol—

ties twigs together
branch knots & small whirlpools,
ever the turning, drifting speech

drenched in naiad dreams
& silt-laden water
winding through sun’s glare—
      bumping grace
Ancient Diving Practice

Cold currents

ears & hands
carry up
what’s under
water weight
let go
the oil in your mouth, diver

shore of warmth clarity
going cold
under water

stop the ears
speak oil
& gather
away
away from your own hearing, diver
away in the cold, diver
weigh your speaking
water
carries up
oil
sink
& speak
in gathering
currents
The Gleaming Drum

That the stars pulse
    too

Grand Flame beat
    of blood

the rush of
cadence towards world

the tides find stars
    narcissistic reflections of
    night
coursed pulse beat upon
    mirror crashing beach
    partaking!
flood of what sees still
    sound the
    sounding-making
forming pulse from pulse
the rock dropped pebble
    carried rhythm
skipping ripple
    returning
even aorta meadow
    place of
first sound site

granted pound
    of ongoing
ungrappling as
    sound of sea
can be
    the rhythm of
own blood from
    seashell

is still the
    reaching tremble
of vein-root vibrations
is
the made-making
material
taut sound
maintained pattern
even through coalescence
in erratic kept return
rhythm
the flickering of
the night sky
II.

“Yet, here are lights that flash and fade away, lights that come and go for reasons meaningless to man, lights that have been doing this very thing over the eons of time in which there were no men to stir in vague disquiet.”

Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us*
Circulation

in spiral
cluster
crowding feet

that unfold whole body

a field caught light
its spiral
rays
made
sun

a field caught fiery ocean
for a moment sunk legs

a field cluster
goldenrod

has no center

a seed flowers
a spiral
moves the seed moves

out into a field nowstood
into standing seeking center
to cluster

into the well-cored centripetal
light moving into goldenrod
Near to Thirst

heat of pilgrimage
  of you who would forget

the terrestrial sun lilts
cresting sky to stream
  inverted nest
  where desire

  where sparrow
dwelling in pine thicket
  & warm air

turns eye
  upon mountain

turning
  to air

  journey melting

  into feather pattern of light

  a green rhythm lingers
  upon the iris

  where water-sight river hits eye
down spring
  from glacial peak

  rush
  reach
  & drink
Ripeness and Sight

my song: spine
    the world un-
coalesces what color is & the
    arc of my speech is only
as much as it moves
    in trickle-home irrigation or
the sprouting connection is
    in the clouds of earth and you
this morning
    in gardening sung light
making thin space in earth to plant—
hoping the growth that breaks
dirt casts shadows casts
from opened eye forward to
thin space from hand
wave upon wave in the light at midday I
rest in sun’s memory the animated grass
surrounding
small plot of tilled dirt in curved
waiting graced for the resting sun into the lost
shapes poured forth wine & honey to hold down
the soil and sank with it
sinking
who are you I eat from this garden I
cannot see but know
where the water comes from
Quarry

the stones
in an unworked acre
grow loud
& I stumble

the sun works against hours
illuminates each shingle of the shed
standing amid stone
sun amid stone

lichen light

walking among
the field

sinks where
sun is past

the words

as if to step between islands
the effort to say

stone

& mean
structure

& mean
stone
Steady Glow of the Just Seen

hollow leaves
taste of sweet sap
as they branch into your mouth

prayer:
   a pure tasting  the silence of a thousand rustlings
   slowly
   surround whisper-ripple
circle
ear

& heavy
   half-sleep beneath maple
the river lilts by
& the sun turns the leaves

   pressed
to eye-horizon
golden-circle slow
perception’s dream

warms upon an instant

reflection, glare, & amber

the eyelids sink

imprint leaf shade
   into blinking eye
Fading Fire, Vital Candle

hard to think as wax-drip builds
a roof going over head

heat courses through home
    bound-up
    in roaming walls lower-order stability

warm the height home a flame

as foreign warm sun
    speaks with wax tongue
        sings lullaby
            of a wick

    & songs from

    glittering air
    surround the dimmest candle

re-building the mind afar

with last light consciousness’
    lit hall

    struck off
        into a match
            of higher-order flame

present warmth

weaves round
    a collage of smoke
        ordering in the ash
            the writ out burn
    flat
against iris
    & palm
gentle wound of

night sight
where the sun
in the moon’s round adopted star

also
heals
The Edge of the Body at the Wildflower

Split petal
  self shifting
ends overlapping
  sewing grace
to cohosh horizon
  fold over fold
toward peak
  holding out rooted
stars’ lode-stem
  layer through layer—
meshed light
  catches inner scribe
marking sun stalked
  leaf after leaf
lethargic
  in the petal-grin shape
flitting
  line carry line
waxing flower
  out & in
of seed-made
  slipped call
of wind-borne
  shoulder forms
the flower’s
  lock-joint
sun caught
  in slight gesture
expression
  & scent

turn               turn
the arm
raised up bent at elbow
pointing fore & middle fingers
turning

the sun known
  to raise
the earth
to lower
expression
circling
elbow joint
petal tips
& scent
River as an Axis

where the river’s running reflection
   lights the underside
   of brush, branches
   & trunks along the far shore

the pivoting sun
turns
   up brushes leaf blurs bark
   into golden, shimmering disks
   somewhere in the distance of water
refraction darkens &

sets evening slow upon water
   brittles slight trace of quiverlight stilling to sap

movement holds here in the world’s
steady turn
turn
away from the sun
Abandoned Church

I would have a crocus
take my breath

that it should turn atmosphere of my lungs nearly solid in the cups of its petals

& breathe out
a path
to an abandoned church

with stolen windows
a lack
of echoes

& the light
filtering through
a grate

like a neighbor’s voice
through apartment walls

here all sounds
spiral in the throat

always air speaks
out of the desire
to be wind-like

as the head
creates shadows

always a new
surface

lit
at the edges—border
of the trodden
floor path
dip-worn weight
thinning
Voice of the rock-bound speaking

“noise after noise
the raysome steps
  grand hike
to chains

“lode flame compass
  through ice
thick rime

“slick god-steps
  under earth hail
water-dark the racing up plunge to palace
  palm against thicket
    frozen
  the body becomes only
movement

“all becomes—
  in torch tossed
  calm of lit, outstretched arm
    bridging wick from temple—

  “surface glimmer bloom
    in the aerial instant”

flame-sealed stolen speech:
  the flint-tipped tongue

moon-heavy with reflection, sparking
  outer silhouette

to inner
  speech of origin
    sung
    iron

48
sung
bashed stone
sung
against stone

flare-up ember
embedded in share
    in spread
        the many-breaking speech act
lit
            the hoar frost melting

light fading about itself
        cooling press
        & distant lantern

distant enough
to light another
    & again
        sweet herald
            the pyre

pile upon
pile upon
        protection
            carrying
                & covering far earth

with symbol

the arc
of the stretched
torch-tossing
arm
III.

The spiral seems to be inwoven in the very nature of things, and there are those who believe that the atoms, whatever their size, shape, and nature, obey spiral laws, and that matter, however finely divided, forms itself into eddies which display movements akin to those which we behold in the planetary system. There is, according to them, a cosmos within a cosmos.... The inorganic and organic kingdoms are not opposed to each other. On the contrary, they are interdependent, complemental, co-ordinated, and conditioned. They are made for each other. No marvel, then, if plants and animals assume shapes and movements which are common in the heavenly bodies.

James Bell Pettigrew, Design in Nature
December 18, 2021

the sun was volcanic
& of earth

immediate to all
& love
  beneath
& over

*

in the snowfall two cosmoses:
one of all flakes
  the other of the gap between
At the Edge of Sight

seeing’s remainder
    in a distant house
mountain-side
    home
fed
    by stream
fed
    by surrounding
silver forest corner door wedged open

in sight said
abandoned dark
covered behind
short walls & low roof
how
does distance
feed
    by stream linger

and the surrounding
forest

low call
though front steps

fog pointing

following sight
surrounding
low distance
across the short walls
Leaning into the Ice

testing the thin frozen
    lake just
above land
    before the coming days
begin to creak across the surface

sight clear
as the cold, frosted eye
moves over the
underside of ice

barest reflection of frost
    in the iris

so small
under ice

turns over
snowing clouds
between the open skies
of earth
Understory
reach up
& touch
the dark planet
of trees
so near in unspoken orbit

only the paths
    compacted by hands
    & steps
are still ice
    the rest of the world
    has melted
to green moss
    & wet leaves
River Grass

gust
    finds breath as a dusty mouth inhaling brittle reed speech

how long
    the prairie reaches here speaking in accent of dry wind
    through tongue that sinks in granular words of stripped soils

mellow song
    drawn out of absence the droughtful earth into the thick air
    gathering in hurtle forth measure a choir of lack

until
out of breezes the river rises
    drains thirst into current

    carries
    prairie prayer of motion
    carries dust
    earth
    small swirl
    of thirst

over river
rush
    over
rocks
where
    water
    buries
    water
Balance

the stream begins
where fingertips end

gentle swaying
cow parsley caught
above slow

hand gripping rock
to steady myself
above slow ripple

impossible touch
moves
water
cold
in the sun
against
fingertips

were touch
the sun

all
would be steady

the white
of cow parsley
swaying
on the bank

food
for the deer
Valediction of Sand

Old stones
smooth the soles
of bare feet

& you’ve only to crouch here
put your hand in the river
for the sand’s syntax to swirl—

the movement
each step sinks into
— the whole body
taking up river-chill
ankle-deep
as the late morning
soaks dew into sky

the stream’s
rhythm
taking up
rain…

footfall here
follows grass path
each morning

sand in fingertips
watch earth’s glass darkening the sky

the stream will blind this path
to even the grass
should the sky come
to weigh enough
walk no longer

& allow this stream
to stretch
into glass
That Immense Seamstress: Gravity

gives certainty
gives stitch of rock & earth
gives spiral
to speech
that it may unspool
& tangle at my feet

Gives substance to
coarseness to

what fairy mouths
speak of:

craving made space
of speech
forged in airy
cairns—structures of
earth & path
silent
in weighted air
hammering together &

pulled tight as
my lungs to clouds move
in shouting onto, into
the grassbound cacophony that strings are tuned to
found in
their own resonances
Cold, Morning Mountain Climb

roughness of rock
    ledge provides rest
    shadow & sun

cold surface I’m
learning to repeat the path ahead

the rough slips
    resting hand
drifting through sparse trees
dark earth

say again the swell
    of rock’s divot & crevice fingertips

from the
    mountainous wind

and summer rains
Pyrography

silent world carved
    within wood

craft translation
    of wood burner
    & whittle knife

pressing against grain

hand dance of the fire branch
    fine as swallow wing-tip

wring-out wood
    that wit may bend

slow curve
of living circle    cure
    of a carved note

ever accurate attention
    burned into the active line
Permitted Attention

Wakeful morning about-to-be field
   I’m trying
   to pull any echo
of many-fold artifacts withholding sound source
   in ill-fit measure of my hearing

   so I lie next to
   in proximity bloom

the grass to sprout & footpaths slip—
   breath
   & step

to choiceless sleep that stumbles
   upon
   and takes up
dew-dropped deposit
   in simultaneous
   trace & impact
   sleep
   & dew
Soldering Wind’s Nest

the grasslands of Nebraska assemble in memory

between two hills
    the wind creases
tall grass to a matte landscape of contact

grained ends
    lean

what space is still wind in
    the slight turn of memory’s edge

here
    the reach of grass grows
    leans each blade
    flattening against
    the other

    the light turn in memory’s edge

    just touching in the wind

    two hills connect crescent
    in the grass blades
Architecture of Water

The sky’s aqueduct lowers,
reaches drenching point, drowning waterfall—thirst

flies the sea-bird, smallest love of the sky, between moon & sea

following stone arches over & under

water inside

water inside

as though clouds were drinkable thick in the throat of belief

leaning rock-like against heavy night

The lime-dressed course thick spirals to spring & creek
tasting still of stone & yet further
cavern forming, carving stalagmite—
the steady onward flow
of star-borne phosphorescence
De Lapidibus

What breaking stone
stones be told of:

gneiss of spooling
coal of caught heat

motion ever-
set shifting
solidity

obsidian
still of water

the small stone signs
a good skipping
towards the up-
set sand at base
of river to
the curve of hand

a kept imprint —

fossil’s gesture
points to itself
as time’s constant
fold: erosion,
form, and amber
morphing bedrock
silt still moving
The Ocean

the rough salt memory of
    substance carries on
the curling spray
    the slanting field
is made
    endlessly—ever a
buried surface
    of different, ungreen breathing

where form is found
    in the turning seasons
never ungrowing

fixed in unfixedness         carved
    even in a small beasts’ breath       in winter
Making Ritual

dip cloth
into ground

torch-soaking
action

that you
may drench

the sky
in new stars

embroidered heaven
grown of roots

all liminal
sewn onto

saint’s skirt
relic

or scrap-
bin satin

the earth’s hem
grows constellations

soaked eyes
& spirit myths

pierce
needle-like

shapes
from dirt & earth

that sink
every surface
into new stories

& ancient water
Notes to Poems

The title of this manuscript, *Orion’s Eyes*, refers to Orion’s journey to regain his sight. After learning from an oracle that his sight could only be restored by Helios, Orion turned his ears to the sound of Hephaistos’s hammer (in other versions of the myth, it is the sound of Cyclopes forging the lightnings of Zeus). Following only the repeated, heartbeat pound of the smith, he arrived at the godly forge and enlisted the aid of Hephaistos’s apprentice Cedalion who led him to the farthest edge of the ocean. Here, Helios’s rays restored his eyes at the request of Eos, dawn, who had fallen in love with Orion—taking him, in some versions of the tale, as a bridegroom.

Thus, sound—the sound of divine *making*—is necessary for Orion to recover his sight. This guidance of sound does not lead him directly to sight, however, but to those who will help him and guide him back to the sun and to sight.

The poem title “Fading Fire, Vital Candle” is from Gerard Manley Hopkins’s poem “The Candle Indoors.”

The poem title “Sound as Clear as Light” is from Ronald Johnson’s poem “Beam 9.”
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BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Adam Ray Wagner was born in Broomfield, Colorado on December 12, 1997, and was raised in Loup City Nebraska. He graduated from Loup City High School in 2016 and attended Colorado State University—graduating with a Bachelor’s degree in English in 2020. He moved to Maine that same year to attend the University of Maine at Orono. After receiving his degree, Adam Ray will be going on to work towards a Master of Fine Art degree. He is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Maine in May 2022.