

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Fogler Library

Spring 5-6-2022

Orion's Eyes

Adam Ray Wagner

University of Maine, adam.wagner@maine.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/etd>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wagner, Adam Ray, "Orion's Eyes" (2022). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 3617.
<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/etd/3617>

This Open-Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

ORION'S EYES

By

Adam Ray Wagner

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

ORION'S EYES

By Adam Ray Wagner

Illustrated by Casey Forest

Thesis Advisor: Jennifer Moxley

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
(in English)
May 2022

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| DEDICATION | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iii |
| LIST OF FIGURES | viii |
| CRITICAL INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Speak this | 1 |
| lichened tablet | 2 |
| pressed letters | 3 |
| grow / upon fragmentation..... | 4 |
| feeding spread of sedimentation | 5 |
| erosion! | 6 |
| a way in | 7 |
| to the fissures that moss-roots remember..... | 8 |
| rain follows | 9 |
| to source | 11 |
| and / to shape | 12 |
| the written rubbed antler | 13 |
| seek soaked speech / grown over stone..... | 14 |
| Coda | 14 |
| ORION’S EYES | 16 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Speak this lichened tablet..... | 17 |
| Section I..... | 18 |
| Sound as Clear as Light | 19 |
| Draft of a Day | 20 |
| A Walkway | 21 |
| The Underworld of Song | 23 |
| On the Heart Shape of Prothalli | 24 |
| Grand Canyon | 25 |
| To Build a House in Song..... | 26 |
| Campanology | 27 |
| Voice of Summer Storm | 29 |
| Of Melting..... | 31 |
| Raft..... | 32 |
| Ancient Diving Practice | 33 |
| The Gleaming Drum | 34 |
| Section II..... | 36 |
| Circulation..... | 37 |
| Near to Thirst | 38 |
| Ripeness and Sight..... | 39 |
| Quarry | 40 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Steady Glow of the Just Seen..... | 41 |
| Fading Fire, Vital Candle..... | 42 |
| The Edge of the Body at the Wildflower | 44 |
| River as an Axis | 46 |
| Abandoned Church | 47 |
| From Liver & Cold Stone, Hollering Down the Mountain..... | 48 |
| Section III..... | 50 |
| December 18, 2021 | 51 |
| At the Edge of Sight..... | 52 |
| Leaning into the Ice | 53 |
| Understory..... | 54 |
| River Grass..... | 55 |
| Balance..... | 56 |
| Valediction of Sand..... | 58 |
| That Immense Seamstress: Gravity | 59 |
| Cold, Morning Mountain Climb | 60 |
| Pyrography | 61 |
| Permitted Attention..... | 62 |
| Soldering Wind's Nest..... | 63 |
| Architecture of Water | 64 |

| | |
|------------------------------|----|
| De Lapidibus | 65 |
| The Ocean | 66 |
| Making Ritual | 67 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 70 |
| BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR..... | 72 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|----|
| Fig. 1: Draft of Poem..... | 8 |
| Fig. 2: Image from Paul Klee's <i>Pedagogical Sketchbook</i> | 9 |
| Fig. 3: Image from Paul Klee's <i>Pedagogical Sketchbook</i> | 10 |
| Fig. 4: Meadowlark..... | 19 |
| Fig. 5: Cow and Sparrow..... | 21 |
| Fig. 6: Walking Fern..... | 24 |
| Fig. 7: Goldenrod..... | 37 |
| Fig. 8: Candle..... | 43 |
| Fig. 9: Crocus..... | 47 |
| Fig. 10: Sun and Earth..... | 52 |
| Fig. 11: River Grass..... | 56 |
| Fig. 12: Duck..... | 57 |
| Fig. 13: Deer..... | 58 |

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 /I/ 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:

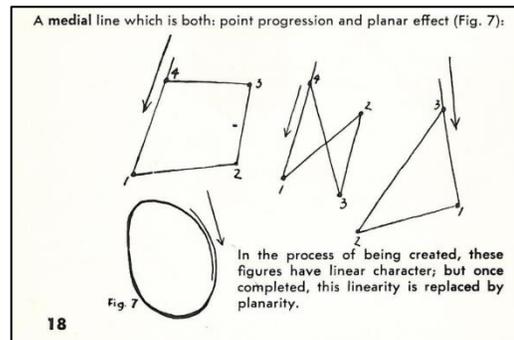


Figure 2: from Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook*

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-

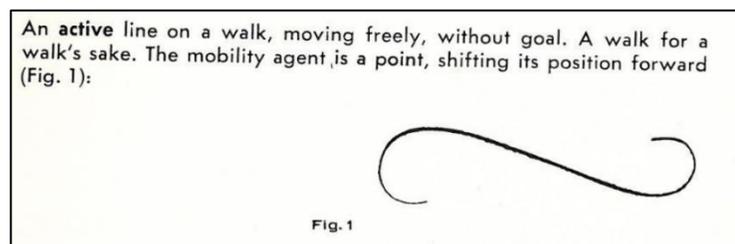


Figure 3: from Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook*

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.”

to source

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.

seek soaked speech / grown over stone

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 lichen 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

where air is

distance throat

the matter

of syrinx

sinking grass song

across horizon

sing morning air

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



Draft of a Day

*the yellow leaf a thought—
is yellow bird*

Louis Zukofsky, "The Judge and the Bird"

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

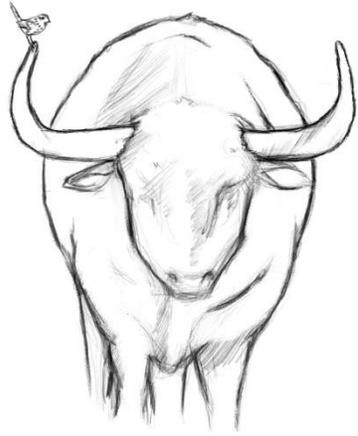
falling into shape

of a steady

familiar tale

the note sinks

fingers in cheeks whistle *crrrrrrr* 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

speaking 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

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

speaking

& 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 lilt 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

From Liver & Cold Stone, Hollering Down the Mountain

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

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, complementary, 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

lingers

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

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

wrung-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 unfixeness 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.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albers, Anni. "Work with Material." *Anni Albers: Selected Writings on Design*, edited by Brenda Danilowitz, Wesleyan UP, 2000, pp. 6-9.
- American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, edited by Calvert Watkins, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011.
- Avasilichioaei, Oana. *WE, BEASTS*. Wolsak & Wynn, 2012.
- , "Before the cataclysm." *Jacket2*, 2018. <https://jacket2.org/poems/cataclysm>. Accessed 11 March 2022.
- Beachy-Quick, Dan. *Wonderful Investigations*. Milkweed, 2012.
- Blanchot, Maurice. "Literature and the Right to Death." *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, edited by George Quasha, translated by Lydia Davis, Paul Auster, and Robert Lamberton, Station Hill, 1999, pp. 359-400.
- Carson, Rachel. *The Edge of the Sea*. Mariner Books, 1998.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Quotation and Originality." *Letters and Social Aims*, Macmillan, 1883, pp. 129-150.
- Johnson, Ronald. *Ark*. Flood Editions, 2013.
- , *The Book of the Green Man*. W. W. Norton, 1967.
- Klee, Paul. *Pedagogical Sketchbook*. Translated by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Praeger, 1953.
- Levertov, Denise. "Some Notes on Organic Form." *New & Selected Essays*. New Directions, 1992, pp. 67-77.
- Lilburn, Tim. *Living in the World as if it were Home*. Xylem Books, 2019.
- Mandelstam, Osip. "Conversation about Dante," translated by Clarence Brown and Robert Hughes. *The Selected Poems of Osip Mandelstam*, translated by Clarence Brown and W. S. Merwin, New York Review of Books, 1973, pp. 103-153.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "The Intertwining—The Chiasm." *The Visible and the Invisible*, edited by Claude Lefort and translated by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern UP, 1968, pp. 130-155.
- Moure, Erin. "Liminal and Its Performances: An Interview with Oana Avasilichioaei." *The Puritan*. <http://puritan-magazine.com/liminal-and-its-performances-interview-with-oana-avasilichioaei-erin-moure/>. Accessed 11 March 2022.

Muir, John. "North Fork of the Merced." *Muir: Nature Writings*, edited by William Cronon, Library of America, 1997, pp. 171-195.

Olson, Charles. "The Gate and the Center." *Collected Prose*, edited by Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander, University of California P, 1997, pp. 168-173.

Oppen, George. *Selected Prose, Daybooks, and Papers*, edited by Stephen Cope. University of California P, 2007.

Pettigrew, James Bell. *Design in Nature: Illustrated by Spiral and Other Arrangements in the Inorganic and Organic Kingdoms as Exemplified in Matter, Force, Life, Growth, Rhythms, &c., Especially in Crystals, Plants, and Animals*. Longman, Green, and Company, 1908.

Williams, William Carlos. *Paterson*. New Directions, 1992.

Zukofsky, Louis. *Anew: Complete Shorter Poetry*. New Directions, 2011.

----- . *Propositions: The Collected Critical Essays*. University of California P, 1981.

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.