

KUGEL

RYAN NOWLIN

GREEN ZONE EDITIONS

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Cover drawing by Chris Wayan, age 9, ca. 1961

Some of these poems have appeared in *Sal Mimeo*, *The Delineator*, *Periodic Postcard* and the online publications, *Boog City Anthology: Portland, Oregon & New York City Poets*, *Across the Margins*, *Posit* as well as the anthology/photography book, “*Like Musical Instruments: 83 Contemporary American Poets.*” Ed. Larry Fagin & John Sarsgard.

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“The world is blue as an orange”

PAUL ELUARD

“I caught a bird which made a ball
And they thought better of it.”

JOHN ASHBERY

“The children of the Czar
Played with a bouncing ball”

DELMORE SCHWARZ

“She wondered what makes the German Language so
appealing and I explained they make good use of the
hard K sound and other consonants, and declared that
consonants are exciting.”

JENNIFER KIETZMAN

*To my family: to Mom, Zach, Steph, Ian and Elliot and for my
late Dad.*

*Special Thanks to the late Larry Fagin, Alan Bernheimer,
Barbara Henning, Charles North, Lewis Warsh, Jennifer
Kietzman, Kostas Anagnopoulos, Elliot Figman, Suzanne
Goldenberg and to Lorraine Lupo for their generosity,
friendship and support.*

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PREFACE

In his artist statement Chris Wayan weighs in on his drawing from 1961,

“In case you’re looking for a guy with a tan...Yves Tanguy was a sailor who taught himself how to paint, did eerie alien landscapes, and joined the Surrealists. I was exposed to him early: a science fiction publisher used Tanguy and Kay Sage paintings as paperback covers, and when I saw them, I immediately set out to master surrealism--well before the age of ten”

The child artist then is Narcissus, reflecting himself through the medium of the drawing. At the intersection of art and human need to project self into the sphere of influence, there is a confluence of desire for self-reflection in otherness as well as a startling absence of relation which, in my opinion, are some of the hallmarks of *Naive Art*. All innovations in art particularly the development of single point perspective during the Renaissance culturally implicated us in the dialectical process of history. In a sense innovations in art redirect the trajectory of human consciousness therefore dictating the terms of our knowing the world.

Over the past nine years from 2009-2018 I have completed the following two chapbooks, *Banquet Settings*, *Not Far From Here* and a now a recently completed full length ms. entitled *Kugel* (which incorporates the two previous chapbooks) “*Kugel*” originated as a dream of sorts including the German phrasing of “*Er hat die Kugel*”. I never intended to write this poem as a Paean to the Jewish noodle dish by the same name, but more of a word literally transcribed as a dream. In German “*Kugel*”

has many associations but mainly it means ball or sphere. (Other connotations include Bullet, Christmas Ball, Chocolate as in Mozart Kugel.). Also, during WWII my grandfather worked in a ball bearing factory in Schweinfurt, Germany.

Other poems in this ms. include Banquet Settings/ Office Settings. These poems were in many ways a response to Roger Shattuck's seminal study of the turn of the century French Avant-Garde, *The Banquet Years*. These poems seem to set the tone for the rest of the book with a spare lyric style off set by other types of poems which are more conversational and/or humorous. The first line of Office Settings, "Started a polar expedition with summer clothing/ and maps of Italian Lakes?" was extracted from a passage from Freud's "Civilization and its Discontents". Yet there is also a joyfulness in Kugel about the kinds of things words can do and even some wistfulness about what they can't do. After all, "what's as happy as a word near a word?"

The evening window dreams: as do I with the sun fading on the magpie brown carpet. The cupboards were full of colorful cans. Can the dog stay put or be whistled inside? I was thinking of what Larry Fagin said before he died about paradise, poetry and love. Of those things poetry being the most difficult thing to hold on to. I remember our first meeting in his apt. 437 E 12th street and laboring up 4 flights of stairs to find myself in Larry's little rent controlled abode, my work in a notebook. Larry glanced over what I presented mostly work left over from Temple grad program. He initially was somewhat circumspect, but he was very conversational and nice. I decided to begin working with him that night and set the price for the fee which amazingly was always \$150 per two sessions. Many found Larry's personality something to admire and/or emulate as he always created a world to aspire to. A friend

named Miles made the remark that Larry never said that my favorite ...is but rather the best is such and such. Miles read a list poem of Larry's best ranging from jazz/classical to the best time of the day to write or the best time to listen to post-punk is in the afternoon.

OFFICE SETTINGS / BANQUET SETTINGS

OFFICE SETTINGS / BANQUET SETTINGS

Started a polar expedition with summer
clothing and maps of Italian lakes?
Hundreds of talk sessions led
you back here, where you began:
An office setting w/ O'Keeffe pelvis
print self consciousness reduced
to bone about but not about
slippery surfaces, slack hands, space
unadorned. Mute tumult of brain,
murmur from an empty shell,
first flies...

Banquet settings for none
Not too far a field
box of recall
a margin of excess
and borders of emptiness
like the night sky or vacant blue of noon
some life stored in the cupboards
decorum of natural trees whistling
through missing leaves
winter or summer or another time of year

HERMETIC DEFINITION

Always let on that you know the language
writing not to die
or uttering not to
or appearing not to
with no experience
or truth required
“let the wind speak
between land & sea
that is paradise”
I love you
what are you trying to say?
take me somewhere
in your car
before the therapist descends
in the dark underpass
don't turn around
I'm never going home
consider exile
dovetail
is imagination private?
vertigo
the limit of choice
incurs
a shattering
to move
in small ways
new use of a pronoun
or different negotiation
with space
new dynamics
shattering is quiet

KUGEL

Images of ex-girlfriend
appear in dreams.
Years from now we are married.
She's in the bathroom
applying make-up.
"Er hat die Kugel," she says.
Literally, he has the ballpoint pen
or the ball or he is "on the ball."
Or ball of noodles.
Nothing in town has changed.
The orchard is still there.
Except now I am in my late thirties.
We were happy, so happy
long before life had begun and ended.

DEDICATION (ST. JUDE)

The gesture by which men claim
to challenge a hopeless cause
is their modest way of seeing the world.
They move at their own stately pace.
You can't hold them or push them back.
I just picked up a novel by Hyman Roth
to enjoy the fruits of talented men like yourself.
My one hope is to take myself seriously.
In the meantime I am making headway
in the department of new friendships.
Are you a person drawn to me?
This road we're on is a lifeless artery
in China. I'm not being dramatic.
I just find myself forgetting about the life
around me, like in the beginning of the poem.
I was probably thinking of you or someone
like you, but now the cat has stuck its paw
in the steering wheel. Please don't leave me here.
Sometimes I miss you. You bleed for everyone.

PLASTIC CRÈCHE

But the fables have turned
the television is speaking
in code waving frantically hoping
someone hears. Maybe
it succeeds because
we know what it means
piling list upon list not
whispered, not told but declaimed.
And when the carpenter
Retires his hatchet
It simply passes out of existence
The fact that one is sitting here
On some strange edge
Then recedes from view.

POEM

I have ought-ism
I ought to know
I'm wiggling in & out
wires in my head cross
when I think
but I'm forgetting my manners
Mr & Mrs Story, Mr Bill Daley
mi casa, su. . .
words, stories, images
ghosts of life
boarded up
some in the mailbox
sparrows yelling obscenities
need to be paid
so I write
I write about loved ones and lost ones and myself
& they pay me
& I pay the birds

BLUE

What would it be without its word?
Death. Blue across the lips.
I respond to “smoke” with “cigarette”
unsuccessfully. Death is exactness.
It escapes and shows up later in dreams
as a blue pill dissolving in water.
Globe of a breast, a bull’s testicle,
liquefaction of the sky.
The ungraspable instant
when I touch you
on the night of the body
seen by an uprooted eye.

THE WOODS ARE ASYMMETRICAL

An entire afternoon spent waiting.
I could be someone else
not counting on time passing
who held out for an idea
the dark color of which was subsumed
in the drift of trees, over-earnest
in its internal coherence.
I smiled at who I was, as edges
of his experience were passed on
and living his life was not an option
though it seemed available
just when I was choosing where
to jump

DOOR OF DAYS

Another day. I was out of tune, music fled from me.
All inhabited space is like home. It is a kettle blue hotel
on 13th and Locust Street; the Arts Tower, Philadelphia, hotel and
home hopelessly blurred: open doors of syntax, and nuanced
windows. The high rise is imagined as a compacted being.

For the past year I have occupied a space in the Sylvania
Building, providing a point of departure for analysis of space.
Rm. 619 is a door, but a door plus three steps. A bar of light next to
the curtain and outside: branches, distant chimney, setting
sunlight.

THE END

The end of the name and as we know
the name gets around. What's as happy
as a word near a word? Teresa said you were
into this sort of thing. Water lilies in the bathtub
charged with forgetfulness
craning with one foot in a marsh.
Polaroid rain has steel tips
pounding a cathedral.
Dream pamphlet alone at night.

SESSIONS OR SONNET

To think x, y and z are dead?
Now it can be determined that
our loves were at best
motley and accountable
to our makings. Was it labor
expended or magnitude in
equal nature that brought
us together? A mixed
bag. But it doesn't end
here in a museum exhibit.
Over downed lines a rough magic
premonitions that my roving brain
tries to expunge. Not eclipsed but faced
with memory like heavy rain.

BERRY PICKING

As time passes nothing is boring
The search continues and you gather more
Or less depending on what you need.
An obvious derivative, the poem
With the word bled, barely a word at all, a berry on the tongue
A distraction from the stairs to the study
As the fruit is squandered
And you excavate a corner of macadam in the driveway
With characteristic peevishness. You must return the pickaxe.
Red bark in winter. This year
What you were told couldn't be said that way,
or even this way anymore.
One job out of the way, with sixteen, not twenty, lines
Chilled as the slender gooseberry

SUBURBIA

I am the only warm thing
left not true but still
going nowhere
on an ever extending parabola
into the next neighborhood
only partly motorized
the garden-scape of the suburbs
is a tourist destination
trains were recently behind schedule
the past is much easier to arrange
I do the housework
not wifey
I love the muted sound
of the dresser drawer
but I find my words everywhere
on scraps
& in the margins of magazines
next to half-read articles
about something
thank god
it's important work

OPEN SECRETS

You've already crossed the midpoint of the year
and time off is far off, a foreign term far away
time to think must be delegated and parsed into blocks
the turtle is slow but unafraid to stick its neck out
that you've scheduled all your meetings and medical
appointments before vacation means that you
are no longer young
you meet people on the train, at the airport
the supermarket checkout
you are those people too
through scalloped curtains you look upon
an archipelago of gleaming new office parks
and green-blue tarmac ruled with silver lines

INDETERMINATE FUTURE

Escape pales in comparison
with staying put.
So we must be lifeless
with light breezes.
She is reading with photographs
of trace moments in the
inclusive area. Wobble of raindrops,
bent daffodils, soba noodles
& new world music
but on a small scale
hollowing the throat.
Anthem the moon.

ONE HOTEL IN EVERY CITY

How many of us on one trip or another conceive of the hotel as a global destination? At least one hotel in every city takes you somewhere else: Blake's in London with its Chinese Room and Corfu Suite; San Francisco's Clift with its art deco bar fashioned from California redwood; Dubai Burj-al-Arab, with an underwater restaurant around a circular aquarium; The Heart of Amsterdam, its stage, the cash register, its drawers, the girls; Hotel Mignon overlooking Venice, its humid square of requiems and luminous vertigoes.

WAITING AT THE STATION

Vision: crisis with baggage language
of inquiry art-life process
searching for patterns
I find myself
terminal paradox
taking Euro Star from Venice to Milano
en route to Frankfurt read many times
“...the tension of infinite beginnings” (Rilke)
a connective tissue
drawing to a close
Maps Roma where some thought and language come from
interpretations and revisions
30th street station schedule board glitches
delayed 2 hours or canceled
move from one compartment to the next dream allows for de-
compartmentalization
train moves backwards
what do I believe in?
the clock stuck on an hour
isolation seems like
an extra way of loving yourself.
I have all the time in the world
now the window is dark
one day begins another ends.

POEM

They've seen you on the other side
of the wall gazing
at the stones and birds of appetite
their razor-edged beaks shred the remains
Forget about saddling that horse
Diabetic foot, I will fight privatization
of the system. When you have nothing
even a run-in with disease
is welcome. Where'd you go?
In a jeep on top of a cliff-department
of aging, jumping on a bed, partly cloudy.

NOT FAR FROM HERE

We live at the southernmost edge of the district
beyond most of the other houses, their windows
& weary children. There is a yellow cast
to the sky. A flame-lit park already far behind.
The smoldering outskirts are reconfigured
with every step you take. The eye returns always
to beauty though hideousness has its compensations.
To escape the strange brown emanations
of the autumnal city, we drive leased cars,
habitually changing lanes. Something
will happen here. The sounds we make
when laughing are often brutal. We haven't learned
who not to touch and when to pray.
Our faith was in the metal of ghosts.
& the taste on our tongues was penitence.

NOT FAR FROM HERE

A PART-TIME PHILOSOPHY

Imagine a room
You've already lost interest
Time doodles
You could have put some big ideas in there
Step outside, I'll lock you out
Water braided with light
Edge of tinfoil curtain
Crinkling in dead air
Then pushed by a big lazy fan
Passing over flyspecks
There isn't even a surface
You've stopped thinking about bugs
The kind that crawl
And the kind that listen

THE NARROWS

Bodies salted among the cattails
and cryptic phragmites stood
Zelig-like in the new hot world
to come. Give to me silica in
a sieve until we unravel goodbye.

Styrofoam snow everywhere you go,
crumbs and clumps,
all shrubs incline westerly
as if frozen in mid-kowtow.

The chain passes smoothly over the teeth,
two shoes, not fellows, loose items
bells, bowls, clouds, cathedral transepts,
passing tugboat recollection
sticking like rough honey

PROCRASTINATION

All's right with the world when you ignore it.
I always put stuff off until
tomorrow. So here tomorrow
is and all those problems took
care of themselves without
my having to lift a pinky.

I won't be offended if you snub me because
I've already forgotten it and who are you
anyway? No one important. I received
your books and will not read them.
But is it true that to dream about
one's teeth crumbling means
a fear of castration?
No it doesn't.
And I'll get around to
you. Take a number.

You see, I've waited until Monday
to address last week's aspects
having lost focus and now disaster strikes.
The problem was not how to finish them off
but how to continue, have them go straight through
the roof. They were prospects. While my facade is one
of cool reception, my intestines are full of hyperactive percentage.

The green walls of my urologist
grandmother's office were more obscene
than all your puerile sentiments.

City of Paris, place of first steps,
I haven't forgotten you,
all your glass

IF YOU ARE SINCERE

If you are sincere in your heart you will be petulant
when the proceeds of a month have been squandered
your friends will forsake you for a time

Sunday afternoon the long lazy fall of light
shifting on the parquet floor
air sluicing down your neck

You may be many things in part
but wholehearted
in passing

Paul Celan wrote
“Der Stein in der Luft, dem ich folgte”
and the stone disappeared

Call Beth about taking in a movie
one about Sufis
spinning

Sour reminiscences
of red devils
intoxication endured

Children are the real devils
their obtuse views
demonstrate no doubt

Sisters of doubt
save us
we're so close to the edge

MISSING PERSONS

It was around the time I was doing
the brown paintings that my life
seemed like a glass channel through
which I was moving gradually into blackness.
Then there were spotlights along a row of legs
of chorus girls. Time advanced
as a series of deals. Though this
may seem untrue it makes sense.
Truth makes no sense.
Imperceptibly I believe the past
has been worth it but that may be
wishful thinking.

OPEN AIR

The new life in rooms showing
us superimposed. On and on
and out of it like a deep-sea jewel
squirming in a net with variegated tendrils.
Only this. A break with the past

doesn't mean "come to an end." Those
influenced by you take your advice.
Parallel rays at either end of day.
You wait for hours, reading a book,
for the right weather, right light.
Avenues of cypresses on hand.

A cafe, no less full than usual, people unseen
but touchable like glass, rendezvous named
for a mountain, snow drifting with no endeavor,
long-channeled, a result of your own
private theme or themes.

EVERYTHING THAT IS THE CASE

The gentleman across the way
has been leaf-blowing for the past hour,
though there is not one leaf
on the sidewalk. He must like
the vibration. There are teeth
caught in the wires above the street
and all the Lambrettas are choked
with mockingbirds. The offhand way
in which everything is coated with this
multicolored broth drives me bat shit.
I watch the Electrolux inhale two pennies
and a nickel from the carpet. A few drops
of water fall from a hanging potted plant,
tapping on a sheet of newspaper.
Post-Its are stuck everywhere, in books,
on chairs, pots, even on a human skeleton,
and here we see rows of closed boxes,
their essences sealed, ready for the attic.
This craze for labeling is routine,
clear as the noonday sun.

EXAMPLES

Fall away. Other words
with their stubborn afterimages.
“Aloft” is false: up
in the air. These insatiable alphabets,
this space with its false bottom.
You’d think something more remarkable
is down there, how transparency
may hide, lying low, obscuring
the professional and personal connections
one enjoys. Does one? Help from friends
matters dearly. Let’s leave it at that.

IN A CEMETERY

A month of fires, somewhere or explicitly
away from or towards a holy place,
in search of holly oak and pine. To say you breathe
and are able to whistle is enough. We never tired
of cutting class and going to the movies
or art galleries. The pictures swallowed us whole.
Why don't I see my friends *all* the time?
You know why. Moments before the collapse,
standing before a diptych, feeling both at once.
As usual I keep my big mouth shut, because what do I know
really? It always resolves itself anyway. I pause here
in the cemetery at Battle Path and Battle Avenue,
site of the Battle of Brooklyn. Great days, those days.

POEM

This bit of white so far
off course not Ecstasy but
suburban real estate.

Those entangled peer
into the Void. Their pills
cast a malevolent sheen.

The days of Einstuerzende Neubauten
are long gone. *Now* is when to move on
or stay put. Your choice.

ASSOCIATIVE STATE

To continue in the usual manner
is to invite a much-loved laugh line
here. To return is to differentiate.

The relative strength of impulse
plunges one into who knows
what to say about it?

This heretofore unmeasured depth
means “this is known to me,” though
there is no relationship between us.

That is partly why I’m always on the go,
loading my plate, watchful in a way
that no one notices.

THE PRINCIPLE OF A DOUBT

As Bill van Wert would say, a word should reach around like a scorpion and sting itself. As of yet no such luck. Men have doubted much, for here was a land where jackpots proliferated and boll weevils marked time as molten hyperbole. Sex was also a kind of mustard, which augmented our daily bread. And while the meat we chewed on stung like nettle, overall we were comforted, fondled and metered, though listlessly, by an assortment of common flower girls. Invite the suicidal fellow to a pizza party in his honor was a bit of advice we ignored, considering the flagging pulse of our blackened villages. No Standing from 2 pm-7 pm as of a minute ago. Our parsnips are the finest in the land. No, I disagree. In our high school, members of the Arnold Stang Fan Club admitted to feeling discomposed only much later in life.

AEOLIAN HARP

At night a bruise of a place
the sea declines certain objects
someone else's stripped hermeneutics

There must be some spectacular medium
to make a silk purse out of life
make you real and render

The particulars to truth, and you are
strangely free from the burden
of intelligibility

POEM

Staring at my image in your sunglasses
I see the supplemental me
though my diffidence still comes through

As well as the world, a consequence
of the search terms I provide to help fill
a veiled space

And that includes your Darwinistic gloss
on us. I'm okay with that. You know I'm more
than a just big lug sitting at a keyboard

Designing a funnel of air to circulate
in a room full of people
at the Museum of Modern Art

I am a poor wayfaring stranger
The very first time I bit into an apple
I thought my god this is amazing!

When you get hung up on something
that dumb (in the best sense of the word)
an ambience of formal fooling around

Comes along to wrap the whole museum up
like Crisco would. A drop of vegetable oil
never hurt a fly.

GLAD INSENSIBILITY

Flying over Lake Michigan in a pink Cessna
you overcome a crucial
vocational crisis. There are stars, as in “everyone is a . . .”
Without sovereignty, they are subject
to empirical loss. It’s a lot like life.
Identities are fostered solicitations.
Ugh, I think I am happy enough
even though the Australian girl left
with another guy from the convention.
I pause in the botanical gardens
to consider the phlox.
The air feels just right, a shine to it
though it’s dark now

OUT OF PLACE

It was no one's birthday, not that day.
The pie was just all right.
Sarah would call it a void pie.
It's not like we were professional shoppers
With likes and dislikes. In dreams
a woman is either in an open room
or a locked one. Platelets
condense in the shadows.
We aspire to a handiwork
of thought resembling action.
There are many rooms.
You're not limited to just one.
At sunset lamplight is dull
in each doorway.

THREE LETTERS

One I sent, one I wrote
but didn't send, one I would send
if only I were free.

I wrote regularly to a few friends
and kept separate ledgers
for weather, disasters, idle thoughts.

Marie and her uncle went to
Swan Island after all.
They return tomorrow.

Perhaps we'll steal a glimpse
of the stars or fill our thimbles
with the snow we've seen this year.

Please return my stylus.
I must etch each letter
before it's too late.

STOLEN GOODS

One comedian absorbed another one's shtick
by osmosis, the way a jet engine
accidentally sucks up birds. The merest mot
will throw some people into a rage. Others will laugh,
eyes blurred by tears. Children who speak
so innocently we don't know what they're talking about
embarrass us. There was nothing funny
about turning 40, so I celebrate
my 39th birthday every year.

Let me be serious for a moment.
I could have literally laughed myself to death
listening to you deny my allegations,
which is when you decided to close the book,
place it on the table and walk out the door.

We should be so lucky to have this kind of life.
Our days are visits and meetings,
not real work. Think how narrowly we escaped
our youth the way one fled an insane asylum.
Sleep is what most people will miss when they die.
That and ketchup. Who will remember their last dream.

STRANGE DAY

Dark Shadows was boring
but I wasn't disappointed
because I got to see a lot of "hot babes."
Is that the expression?

Waiting for jasmine to bloom
so I can plunge my schnozz into it.
I'm a lucky guy.
Tomorrow I have no idea what to do

with myself. I could drive to Canada
and back if I wanted.
We can never know ourselves, can we?
Well, can we?

POEM

Remember Richard Diebenkorn?
He's still important. The far west
at dawn is Diebenkornesque.
I took refuge once
at its glassy edge. A boulder
teetered on a crest.
All I ever wanted was anything
except what common sense dictated.
To be Burton but not speak.
Robert A. Burton, MD, or Robert,
brother of William, one.
I'm over here in shantytown
without a CVS. All my friends
live in one city or another.
When the wind blows I'll lie
to you. It won't matter who says
what to whom. No blame, hey.

IN A BORROWED APARTMENT

I tried to escape by changing the subject
or presenting a blank look, but gradually
I came to value the awkward stage
when what we aspire to seems harder
than we thought. Who's this 'we'?
Eating nothing is easy. Even the empty glass
is full. We're meant to go hungry.
There's that moth again, part of my life.
I must return this purloined ash
to the western territories, I mean
the library, where you are listed
as a street, I mean planet

TO YOU

I was dying of boredom
when you called. Thanks.
The day was overdetermined
with schedules and plans,
a trek across end-winter grasses
and roads strewn with bits
of foolscap. So few words
were actually chosen.

How I want a drink
after the imponderable chapters.

And you are that which
I have never been able
to hang up on
even when the advice
you pass on seems just O.K.

A whispering arc
when I speak with my back up
over vast distances
into the rare concavity of brick walls.
My voice is refractive.
The line has never been straight
but it never goes dead.

INDEFINITE PLACE

THE RAIN

I can't always tell the rainy days apart, their opaque distances, their individual drops, the plainness of our lives. The whole world was troubled. It was too wet to make hay. Sheep and cattle began to die off. The rain fell for weeks at a stretch. There was no wine that year in all of France. Not much bread, either. And surely to you my life has been darkened by hours spent in cars, waiting for the door of a building to open, for something to happen, my subject to go somewhere. A core of certainty limits you to being here so you wait. Try not to miss the ultimate point in this interim "race for life," where you too have become a finalist.

VERBENA

Verbena said no, meet at Meg's
but the distance was great.
We had to fly in order to see
each other. I'm standing on a pontoon.

Sue was making an abstract, wrapping
a wire around a cardboard tube. Another
person was disambiguated by Felicity.

Meg had a disturbing way of eating,
something about tasting life
for the first time then getting bored.

It's a beautiful day for nothing
to happen, to pour it into our mugs,
to open our mineral hearts.

Absolute clarity makes its dutiful
way to the surface. Bleh. This is
the standard way of explaining loss:
I was, you were, they better be.

It's freezing on the platform, waiting
for the pipes to clank. Will they?
Something's afoot... we are afoot.

BILDUNGSGEDICHT MIT SCHNAUZER

Joining hands was a great idea
allowing us to face the future
with childlike Dummheit.

We bought a dog
We named him Leibniz
after the biscuits

Why must potato eater
have a tobacco pipe
with a cube at the end
for a nose?

There was something in you
that I looked for in others
to no avail. I have lost
any inclination to laugh

You hold me
which at times seems
like so much ballast

It takes no one to make a crowd

WINTER LIGHT

The clouds have their old soft boiled egg look back, drifting over promiscuous buildings anyone can have their way with. Grammar, we've lost grammar. It fell away. To reconstitute add water. Or the unspeakable mystery when our mothers met for the first time the men who would be their lovers. What failed to be conjured, reality delivered with a shrug, murmuring bingo. This is how we are made. I would be caught up in planning a future but then get excited about something provincial, a new car. The slow asphyxiation of light in November. I was experimenting with things. They were fine, though I couldn't keep track of them. A tray of books was placed next to me. I read them all though I owed nothing to the present moment.

COUNTENANCE OF THE SKY

The kids are gone and all their sweets are gone!
Avenue A is O.K. so near to me, quick. Jack Robinson.
My work on keyboard and harmonium.
Sad Eyed Lady.

More urgently, what are you eating? Gilded croissants.
I woke up late. A galaxy of junk, far corner of the room.
Bottles I drank from back then. I lost an old friend.
Here she is again, in the margin of a dream. Sudden newness

of skin, otherwise ordinary blue streaming above, beyond
fiction. The reading eyes cross the black river
where the young congregate among resounding thuds
of balls. The moon adores the courtyard. What a comic

hornet flashing forth at the right moment.
Rapping at the gate goes unnoticed
but the beleaguered vines finally
catch a break.

EMBLEMS

A poet is born into a childhood not a country:
A faint impression, the flight of swallows

lightly troubled in the somber sky, a wakeful
poignancy like a dawn walk after the best party
of your life.

How artless a man devises mischief
and on his lips there is a scorching fire.

I was wrong the way Montaigne was wrong,
seeking stillness among the natives

and their hatchets, but for courage or luck melting
away like memory wax.

The slippage of forgetting makes us invisible
what good is a bird's eye view—

The last leaf falls from the tree which dates
back to the Hoover administration.

During the war in the Pacific theater
airstrips were often used as baseball fields

with ersatz pilot gloves filled with sand.
Landing strip also means a woman's narrow

pubic area. Sorry, this mirage is reserved.
I presume we are all fully responsible for once

Yet the scale of one's life is equal to
the old tenements concrete stoop.

I'm not talking about a national absence
like Lincoln's face or a scratched penny,
but a more recent memory like the crystal columns
of the nail salon where the post office used to be.
I come from a cloud so quiet and high
even bar headed geese can't reach me.
These curtains are so generalized you can hear
hangers clinking in the neighbor's clothes closet.
Who will give me some sidelong glance
or enter into some re-zoned district of intimacy
Whose Facebook did you have in mind
When you wrote "Only Connect"?
Someday we will leave some evidence
of the past in the form of updates.
Finally, a minor stretch of forgetfulness.
I'd prefer an actual relationship with
a peculiar situation. In a world filling up
with mist, the antidote is right
where we are that is until the dream is over.

THE MADNESS OF FORGETTABLE THINGS

after Francis Ponge

An eternity of promises yearns to become pencil lead. Such pinks and oranges splash across the continents of my father's globe as sunlight edges over the bookshelves late in the day. It takes a while to say something intelligent about these kitchen appliances shaking with hiatuses, and even longer to develop any Sitzfleisch with waffle imprint for this kind of work. Unbearable profusion of books on chairs so you can't sit down wherever you like. The simple grid of a dishwasher like a hallucinated island suddenly engulfs you with delirious spumes of water. A detergent capsule expands into three valves each scooped out like an iron sea boat loaded in the middle. A steady trickle on the kitchen floor forms a puddle.

CLIFF NOTE

The fruitless fly never mates or settles down. It buzzes aimlessly, then dies. The fruit basket appears ready to spill its contents at my feet. Japanese tourists visit Washington D.C. every spring for the cherry blossoms, much to our chagrin. Once at Bump I met Dawn Bridges. That encounter was drawn out but better left unreported. The reason I liked her may stem from an unsolved issue regarding a trolley---one foot wedged in the tracks. To be stung furiously at night.

INDEFINITE PLACE

I've taken on too much. People often say this when they mean nothing of the sort. Wet wind, speeding clouds, interminable indecision, but a well-rubbed assurance.

Some presentiment of a vast capital reached me obscurely like misgivings streaming along many radii.

I counted chimney pots, some round others square. Fly on a lump of sugar through a window pane in the clock tower.

GALAPAGOS

The tapping of fingers comparable to hooves. You are so far removed from that first place known only to me. In the Galapagos you find no boats in the harbor. I keep writing. Do you know why? Life can be a dream known only to you. My dream is public domain where the tropical water began and the green air ended. The thing a rat never neglects is a puddle and the font bowl in the church is a breeding ground for mosquitoes. The way I see it the redeemer has no place to hide here, except in the shadows of imperium. The taste of absinthe is slow to take hold like molasses, yet the lonely tenor of life makes its cameo among the living and the dead.

EXASPERATION

What, then, was the exact nature
of the impasse? The entire blank world
inside the blank room, solitudes of
black air filled with contrivances.

And now an endless lapsing of breath
and intervals of frigid air, forgotten like an
entire age. I met someone new. It may be
over soon, you never know. When I'm in

her apartment in Brooklyn, I tell her nothing
outside can reach us. I smoke on the balcony.
A dusting of snow on the awnings is pretty.
How many expirations in a walk?

Expired milk is a sign of time.
No two cats run away for the same
length of time nor for the same
reasons. Outside there were more

people than ever before, but they felt
too far away and inaccessible to me
like shiny distant planets. Their faces
looking up with their bumps and

sorries. Lights coming on and horns
yellow parcels carried carefully.
One starts to lose one's footing.
Which sense would you say loves

us best? Can't the heights be heard?
One has accumulated so many facts,
but they are closed to the formal beauty

of the park. Avalon with supermarkets---

such depths you never knew how many
wives were afraid of the heights
that couldn't be heard. As in the desert
the decision to retreat was something
come upon alone.

ANYWHERE I WANDER

A lit match revives memories of the dark. Cars communicate with each other when we are asleep. The answering machine used to organize my life. A syringe mops up after the injection and the temple walks with legs of stone leaving us who pray. Leopards sweep up after their prey.

Mildly inconvenienced by passers-by or overcast skies, we'd take our city walks on a Sunday in a scissors gray neighborhood perfectly pitched between storefront blue mops and absinthe green ATMs. I've dusted off my old answering machine now going through the fires of purgatory--

(As Keats said to his brother, we are moping in separate rooms, reading these same dark letters, a zone of fruitful endeavor whenever we meet on the phone) after having walked the plank between canvas and typewriter, or walked in the late afternoon sun glinting on machines.

I go along like a bird, staring into the dark of this soft June if only to traipse through mop drenched trash with all its yeses and nos mopped up. The breakfast rolls shuffle across the boulevard until my waiter in a dark vest looks over my bill with his adding machine. How do flies die?

Virginia said she liked the word *breach*. So a word that once existed faded by the end of Wednesday. My friends come upon by happenstance in adventures I never had--chose to ignore me like a mop. That's the way it went. I wanted to live my life in such a way that each moment expressed some connection to the one that preceded it or at least someone to walk with.

POEM BEGINNING WITH A LINE FROM JOHN BERRYMAN

The flowers crowded the wilting party.
Some white coated attendant arrived
silently to deliver dabs from the lab dish
of me. As usual I can't seem to skip

out of perceived responsibilities like
eating, sleeping & making money.
A key without a lock like an argyle sock
without a foot...is incomplete.

The driveway, office and timely release
of years automatically scratch a fit
out of a watchful leaf. One minute life
was pushed forward associated with

consent boxes, next the curliest
of dreams forced you abroad.
I couldn't say that being human
was voluntary but it did tell a story

which to another person wouldn't
seem pointless. I got started with
one thing then another and soon
it snowballed into something larger

like that dispirited coil of blankets
and malt-liquor bottles, a bum's
nest. What was normal? Things don't
add up so a loophole in the middle.

I can't seem to keep what I need though
I'm surrounded by those things.

I could have ended up dead, at least
for a while, or exiled. To perceive crossed

signals fighting in the city, how light fell
transparently on a bridge or moving traffic.
Mild rain, dry wind, all the bones
moving, except the ones of possibility.

POEM AFFECTING A BREEZY MANNER

All my life surrounded
by all-knowing big city types.
In my family if you used
eight words instead of one, you

weren't trying hard enough.
I am kidding, of course, but there
is a lawn where a reference book
turns its pages to my factless

biography (also found in the mucus
membrane aisle of any Duane Reade).
During the last chapter meeting,
a woman behind me whispered

of the romance of a better job,
and some warmth to cherish.
Well, here I am again dishing the dirt
about yours truly after passing a weekend

in the Big Apple trying to catch the
Columbia hoops tilt and then a cab
ride from hell through the West Side
Casbah. And speaking of news how-z-

about tossing a few primo items
my way? Going along Fifty-Seventh
Street with its tramping legions
of subjugated Gauls, its gold and purple

apotropaic cries. The morning biz-niz
of this dreary work-a-day world.
Hell, if you slit chickens for a living,
you'd pray for me too.

WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU

pisses you off, makes you difficult to know.
For Christmas, a bag of dildos. The original
request was for Bilbo from The Hobbit,
but someone got confused or considered it a joke.
Perhaps this also explains the value assigned
to walking the dog in circles, or the gentle dip
the plane made rising from JFK, the whole city
inching forward like casseroles encased in concrete,
unnoticed by attendants walking in their vests of lights.

CROSSINGS

I

Laura would often say
“LOL my apartment
is an enlightenment club”

Heat filled the foyer
and the toaster
shot bread at the ceiling

But those happiness drops
were not—had never been—
ours to sample—

Complicated strata of meaning
compiled, from plastic tooth cup
to sudden breath of clouds

The stillness between trees
hoping to find a minute
to think

2

Certain sorceries
to be disposed of
summarily

The earth was unmoving
the sky continued
do not repent

No revival of intimacy
since we were never
together

3

The merry-go-round
with Rhein maidens
was angry

A dream of being and becoming
was the unity of the two—
the dialectic

4

Dichondra surrenders
to rain. Spectacle of tower
indicative of a show

Suddenly I feel so tired
listening for somewhere
to go

Hang a left, sidewalk ends
someone says stop. Evidence
of an axis of X-es

5

Years later you blinked
a single thought—Laura
her fishlike iridescence

A past visitation
the flies have nibbled
and moved on

6

Tomorrow on the planet Amor
the sun slunk back
in its socket

Book within reach but six words
are too many. A noted precipice fell
away. I wasn't sorry.

7

Silhouettes speckled with growths
of calcite or cave popcorn
teardrop tapered to a point

A palimpsest of emptiness
disturbing your theory
of flowering

Did you mean once
as in upon a time
or one time only?

My too short sabbatical
was made even less remarkable
by glimpses of vague forms

8

Yellowing paper on my desk
two aloe plants, head
of an evening moth

When did the cul-de-sac
become something to cross
at night along with other

streets. The week
should have a buffer day
for an unbalanced tea.

9

Improbable face of
a moving point then
midday stillness

I wonder why my eyes
have opened
in this particular place

I wait for developments
whether to count my blessings
or heap up bitterness.

10

Should the love object
be as patient
as sand?

She kept you up all night
with the false rebuff
of her painted frown.

11

I can't give you the exact address
of my building but its under a dome
enclosing the entire state.

Not funny. Transients broadcast
endless apologies for life. A bug
walks across a wrinkled magazine

12

To a green thought
in a green shade was
the only thing between

you and a sludge
of random propositions
and these far out

worlds and seasons

RAMMSTEIN

You kept asking
but you can't see:
Gnats on a page.

By the time you see
a green glow emanating
from the Complex Desjardins

I will have gone over
the cliff (or not) horizon
receding. Then there

was a need to distinguish
myself with minute shavings.
So many labels on the luggage,

hardly a friendly face,
blue-eyed. The first erasers
were made of bread.

A plane cuts through
pieces of the pinkish
day. Lately, we fake

it in bed. Leaves
are burning some
where.

SOME PAINTERS

after a letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo

Some painters turn into idiots themselves, but still manage to slap something decent together at the last second, imbecilic faces gazing at them with lolling tongues. The beautiful one in the front row, the only one with her tongue in her mouth paralyzed you with her eyes...then the spell was broken and you went on painting. You mustn't let yourself be fobbed off like that. Life turned over on its blank side, formerly a pickup circus in front of Walmart where strong women with granular veins made unfathomable sounds.

THE WOMAN WITH THE RED UMBRELLA

after Saul Leiter

You could say it started in a taxi going over a bridge and you wouldn't be entirely wrong. The rain sped past as a pile of leaves twirled sideways in a wind. I took refuge within the dark cave of a carpet shop. The hope of finding someone set upon his actions in this city with its "ordinary metropolitan soil" was first a search in oblivion. Yes, to quit a bad habit like smoking or drinking was to expect an uncomfortable future. I was learning to eat grape leaves when a blooming umbrella materialized behind a cab. The woman's kids who were trailing behind her seemed like rust pipers or horn criers. I wanted to greet her even though *the impossibility of defining either here or describing now* foregrounded a long congested street that appeared to stretch in a narrowing ribbon all the way up to Riverdale.

LOTTERY

Keep the good memories close
even if it means the end of hope
and other platitudes such as the misspelled
tattoo, a derivative wonder.

Temporary smiles you can literally buy
them perfect. I remember how
that store was supposed to be.

One needed a pair of red dice.
Not so long ago quiet
was as common as concrete.

EPISODE

I'd like to live in London or Paris. I come from a small town and would benefit from a big city experience. The phone just rang. It was no one. A cognitive map defines the streets and distances and who is truly capable of speech in one of the languages. Are you still there? Hello? Please break the silence, just as you broke figurines, lamps and frames. If a face can be easily read what need is there to speak, but I can't see through the phone, can I? Only shadowy patterns like in X-Rays or soft porn, suggesting star-shaped bullets, the light flush on my face.

SADNESS

I tried just existing. Didn't much like it.
Sadness wasn't sad but pungent
a la asafetida.

By and large O.K. Suzy Privette
lived on the corner of Tumeric
& Ginger Root. I visited her house last

April, didn't know her well.
Books by Austen, Byron, Browne
imposed some decorum.

Might as well boil it down
to time signatures. The object
thus made common. Where

Does it come from?
Mustn't be afraid of the clocks,
they are our time, space, surface

of an egg. My eyes
in a mirror, something
no one touches.

Water running, lips
wrapped around
the spigot.

JAGGED COASTLINE

Unpeopled mountains are frightening
I would go to them without being a person
Violets appear in the spring

A spell of indifference fell upon us
tired as we were of each other
and our mad-house promenades
around the deck. Once on a month-long voyage
we treated ourselves to a blood orange

Maintaining an idea of yourself
is the only thing worth doing
despite evidence suggesting otherwise
you could learn from it but you don't

EVER SO HUMBLE

From my highchair the floor
seemed very far away.
I'm still not where I need to be.

Strange to see the bent spoon in the sky,
hear the fading putter of private planes.
Vast board game of Hudson Yards.

The burnt body of Shelley, burnt boats,
red piss. Winter in Italy. Pasta in plastic,
no place like home. Vivian may be pregnant.

Bridget said she fell in love with me
at the orientation. Now a new crisis
effecting all of us: A flood of unpaid bills

(not to mention unfinished sentences)
In lieu of an ending,
calculate the darkness

and square off.
Swirling wind,
snow settling.

BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Ryan Nowlin (NJ) received his MA in creative writing from Temple University in 2004 and MLIS from Rutgers in 2011. His concentration was in post-modern American poetry and 20th century Modernisms. For the past few years he has been an active participant in the Poetry Project at St. Marks in the Bowery. He currently lives in NJ and teaches as an English Adjunct at Hudson County Community College in JC. Recently poems of his have appeared in *Sal Mimeo*, *The Delineator*, *Periodic Postcard* and the online publications, *Boog City* and *Across the Margins* as well as the anthology/photography book, "Like Musical Instruments: 83 Contemporary American Poets." Ed. Larry Fagin & John Sarsgard. Also, he has published two chapbooks, entitled *Banquet Settings* and *Not Far From Here*. *Kugel* is his first full length collection of poetry.

