

The University of Southern Mississippi

SPRUNG GERMANIC

by

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ABSTRACT

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Sprung Germanic is a collection of poems written at The University of Southern Mississippi. It is accompanied by a critical preface.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, the Agostas, Peter Hobbie, Nathan Baer, and my bride Iris.

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INTRODUCTION

Living amid terrorism during the Cold War has given my poetry its dominant themes of violence and kinship, and accounting for those themes requires a brief, prefatory description of my childhood circumstances. I was born into an Army family stationed in West Germany during the 1980s, when the East German Stasi, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Cells tried to repel U. S. armed forces from Eastern Bloc borders with urban guerilla warfare. To wither the military's morale more effectively, these groups included the children of GIs and officers among their targets.

I played marbles and baseball as many other children did, but I also stayed alert for anything that might kill me with shrapnel or chemical fire. Traps meant for me would be camouflaged as anything I would want to touch. The thin casing of a bootlegged Claymore proximity mine, for example, can be decorated to look like someone's lost schoolbook. An F-1 lemon grenade, like an Easter egg, can be well hidden beneath a few leaves in a raked autumn pile. Incendiary grenades can be disguised as unopened cans of Fanta. The possibility of painful death lay beneath everything fascinating. This perspective surfaces in many poems' portrayal of objects that are not typically dangerous, such as the description of a shortwave radio in "Kanji Poem I: Signal Point."

Though I never handled a concealed bomb, every successful explosion by anti-NATO radicals affirmed the need to stay prepared. My parents and I were at Oktoberfest in 1980 when a fire extinguisher, stuffed with TNT and mortar shells, erupted near the main entrance, killing thirteen civilians and wounding over 200 others. Bavaria, where we were stationed during the latter four years of our second tour, was regularly targeted with bombings, kidnappings, and assassinations. A demolition bomb was even found on

the roof of my elementary school. My early awareness of violence appears in poems such as "Letter from Derek."

Within this context, kinship grew beyond the normal bounds of a nuclear family. My parents, sister, brother, godparents, and I formed a self-aware community with the other soldiers on Post and their families. Kinship was a haven from violence while it simultaneously served as a reminder of violence. We children understood that we were potential targets for terrorists expressly because we were part of the Army community. Within that community, too, were officers who had lost limbs during their service, and they were tactile reminders of the harm rendered by explosives. The wide sense of kinship was made necessary (and, perhaps, possible at all) because of these facts.

Several of my poems take kinship as their subject matter and situate those relationships amid the atmosphere already described. I avoid treating violence as a divisive social force. Instead, my poems attempt to convey the heroism of kinship formed as a resistance to nihilism. Moral goodness can arise as a response to conflict, as exhibited in the meadhall Heorot from Beowulf. My poems often focus upon the drive to tighten and extend the bonds of community while enduring aggression intended to render all things meaningless.

These themes appear in my poems apart from contemporary political contexts (such as the Iraq War). My poems tend to build upon materials borrowed from mythology, folk-tales, historical episodes from earlier generations, and outright fantasy. "Blood Eagle" uses a possibly apocryphal story from England during the first millennium. The poem illustrates how the violence that underlies political organization prompts the scholar Bede to affirm religious and tribal kinship by writing England's first

history. In "Gunkanjima Pen Factory, May 1952," a former Japanese Imperial soldier struggles with the new social order borne from a new economic structure imposed upon Japan by the American Occupation. Finally, "The Jumping Spider Learns Faith from his Mother, the Claw Hammer" dramatizes a sentient spider's recognition of kinship with a maternal claw hammer while his birthplace is destroyed by a man unaware of those emotional bonds. These poems all share thematic concerns, and setting them outside present-day political contexts lets me treat these themes as factors that comprise personal identity rather than as opinions better offered on the Op-Ed page.

I have found my poetry's main themes treated most powerfully in American letters by Robert Penn Warren. Several of Warren's earlier poems (such as "History") portray violence as an objectified facet of human life, a "ragged ritual, but not of anger" (Warren 21). This understanding might suggest that resisting the nihilism of violence is useless, but Warren's work insists that violence must catalyze us toward a deeper intimacy with the world. "Masts at Dawn" ends its unsettling description of an early morning harbor with the conclusion that "We must try / To love so well the world that we may believe, in the end, in God" (Warren 126). Similarly, the narrator of "Boy Wandering in Simms' Valley" observes the house that remains years after its owner killed himself when his wife died. Rather than conclude by championing futility, the boy is led to "[wonder] what life is, and love, and what they may be" (Warren 195). Importantly, the narrator wonders *what*, not *if*, life and love mean – even when confronted with proof of their ultimate disintegration. Warren's poems seem to respond to violence with an effort to find meaning through thought and reflection, and my poems differ by seeking resolution in kin and community. However, my poems share Warren's earlier recognition

of violence as a fact that implicates us all, that demands acceptance as part of our identities, but that must be resisted by *creating* meaning.

Old English verse (as well as the Icelandic sagas) has been the most important guide in finding my poetic voice. The heroic ethos of the ancient Germanic tribes places great importance upon my main poetic themes, violence and kinship. The poets accept violent death as a moral certainty: in their world, we all die violently because we *must*, as prescribed by Wyrd. If accepting one's own violent death is the greatest moral good, fostering bonds of kinship and forging an extended sense of family through fealty is the second greatest good. Old English heroic poetry crystallizes my personal understanding of violence in the world more than Warren's poems, which turn to inward meditation. Old English poets turn to others who bear the same burden while regarding violence as an aspect of one's nature to claim when needed.

While Old English poetry appeals to my thematic interests, it has most markedly affected my understanding of poetic form. Its accentual, alliterative meter offers an alternative to accentual-syllabic form in modern English. I have needed such an alternative because I rarely succeed in writing accentual-syllabic verse. Accentual-syllabics require that the reader emphasize certain vowels within a metrical foot. I can imagine stress falling on any vowel, so I tend to feel excluded from accentual-syllabic poetry. An Old English poem, however, derives its form from alliterating consonants that occur at the start of nouns and adjectives in each line. Old English alliteration resonates better with my instinctive ways of choosing words when communicating, so the Old English form has served as a sound example of how to write a poem.

Learning to read Old English poetry has also led me to conclude that a poem's form is physical as well as grammatical. Old English emphasizes alliterating consonants with greater intensity than the normal lifts and drops of stress in daily speech. Because the form of each poem depends upon vocal performance, each resembles a musical score. The score is not the song, though it prompts a musician to perform the song, creating it as a tactile thing. As no concept of musical form is complete without accounting for the instrument played, so my notion of poetic form extends beyond the abstraction of language to include the reader's body: lungs, throat, tongue, nose, and breath.

Old English meter's hard, alliterative form emphasizes each dominant syllable as a muscular act, as in lines 99-106 of "The Wanderer."

Eorlas for-námon	æscas þryðe,
wæpen wæl-gífru,	wyrd séo mære,
ond þás stánhliðu	stormas cnyssaþ,
hríþ hréosende	hrúsan bindeð,
wintres wóma,	þonne won cymeð,
nípeþ niht-scua,	norþan on-sendeð
hréo hæglfare	hælepum on andan (Diamond 156)

Four of these seven lines emphasize the consonants w or h, each of which requires the exhaled breath to clash with speech organs. A strong w forces the lips to round, blocking most of the breath needed for hard emphasis; oppositely, a strong h obstructs the exhalation at the bottom of the throat, weakening the consonant's volume. The consonants must take emphasis, pitting the reader's body against itself. The poem

struggles with the body and becomes a muscular action, manifesting an aesthetic sense of violence with every important consonant.

Further, each line's caesura contributes to the manifestation of violence. The alliterative stresses receive special emphasis, while the syllables between the strong consonants are spoken within a more common range of lifting and falling stresses. Each on-verse forces the reader to exhale more air with greater intensity than most accentual-syllabic meters, and a line's caesura offers her the chance to inhale in preparation for the off-verse. The caesura is not a "silent rest" in the sense that commas, periods, and semicolons are; rather, as elements of the poem's physical form, they compare with the pauses between a weight-lifter's dumb-bell repetitions, preparing him for the next flex. No physical act can continue indefinitely, and Old English's formal allowance of the reader's recuperative space emphasizes the muscular acts that preceded and will follow the break.

Old English also offers a chance to enjoy the mysteriousness of what words *mean*. Literal definition of many Old English words remains uncertain for modern readers, and even literal translation of a word within a poem might neglect a wealth of interpretive possibilities. The words themselves render the poems navigable but ultimately unknowable.

I strive for a similar effect of expressive opacity in my poems. I want to kindle the reader's imagination without over-determining what the reader imagines. Such a poem resists being understood on the literal, semantic level. The ideal reader for these poems would be one who accepts semantic blindness and uses his imagination to feel (rather than see) his way through the sounds and suggestions.

The poem's expectation of a tactile (rather than comprehending) imagination grants the poem form without completing its identity. Once the reader has configured the poem rhythmically and cognitively, he enters it with an intimacy owed to his *completion* of the poem. Active engagement with the words engenders a closeness similar to that of two fist fighters drawn into intimacy through intense physical contact. Each poem in this collection apprehends its subject with opacity in order to deny the reader clear sight of the poem's literal content, in favor of a non-analytic, associative understanding.

"The Sea Ettin Speaks" is likely my most opaque poem drawn from the Anglo-Saxon heroic ethos. The ettin Wlvine's speech owes much to the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition of the heroic *beot*, or boast, and the wandering thane's elegy for dead kinsmen. Her grammar is a simplified form of Old English. Rather than inflect each definite article according to the noun's gender and case, I have used *tha* exclusively. Likewise, I have simplified the endings of conjugated weak verbs, using *-ed* for past singular forms and *-eth* for past plural forms. I opted to keep past forms of strong verbs, however, in order to portray the alienness of a sea troll's speech while giving the reader enough clues to the passage's semantic meaning via cognates between Old and modern English. The poem has not yet achieved this balance. I have included it within this collection to illustrate my experiments with ancient and modern Englishes in the interest of creating an expressive opacity that renders the ettin somewhat comprehensible (through cognates) but ultimately unknowable. In this instance, opacity stands to spark the reader's imagination by forcing gaps into the story's overall texture.

My poems about Japan use opacity for a different purpose. Japan fascinates me because its contemporary culture appears simultaneously cosmopolitan and backward. Its

labor force and research scientists work so efficiently that Japan stands out among first-world countries for its technological innovation. Despite their clear knack for material progress, though, most Japanese corporations still have patriarchal structures that institutionalize sexism against women. I was personally subjected to institutionalized racism on behalf of Tokyo's police force: officers were instructed to demand the passport of anyone who did not look Japanese. I am struck by the apparent inconsistency of first-world technology and traditional values, yet I hesitate to pass judgment on Japan because I know that I am too far outside the Japanese cultural perspective to truly assess their circumstances. Within my poems about Japan, then, poetic opacity reflects cultural strangeness.

Opacity works oppositely in my poems written after videogames. Rather than striving to balance poetic expression with the impossibility of understanding another culture fully, poetic opacity rebuffs the superficial aspects of the videogame medium. My videogame poems attempt to disassemble all but the most general aspects of a videogame's graphic representation on a screen. After I have stripped a videogame of its most concrete, literal qualities, I use the abstract patterns of interaction with the game as a foundation for the poem's images.

"Generation," for example, is based upon the videogame Tron. Tron requires that the player guide a constantly extending line and cut off the opposing player's line. The lines can only be redirected at ninety-degree angles, and a small explosion occurs if a player collides with either line. For the poem's purpose, the forward motion of each line made me think of a river, so the poem begins with running water. Because the lines can only be adjusted at ninety-degree angles, the gridded shower tiles appeared. The element

of expansion became mildew traversing the caulk between the shower tiles. The game's limited patterns of interactivity bore these images, from which the whole poem emerged.

Defined literally, videogames are digital algorithms encoded onto hardware that a computer can read. The entire setup relies upon a television's screen to represent the interactive elements. Visual media project images that are turgid and fixed. The body perceives screen images as direct sense impressions, and the brain encodes these perceptions as experiential memory. A person must *generate* a poetic image, however, which enlists regions of the brain other than those needed for literal memory. Visual projections imprint themselves, but those images do not intimately *belong* to viewers as poetic images do. I am burdened by the flat, concrete, and literal nature of a videogame's image. I believe that literal thinking tends to foster disaster, and I write poems about videogames opaquely in order to force a videogame's core attributes into a form that resists any attempt at concrete interaction. Through opacity, these poems alter videogames from concrete, on-screen representations into associative dreams whose contents reflect the game's rule structure.

My aesthetic is that of a sacred riddle, which Johan Huizinga described as "a ritual element of the highest importance and yet essentially a game" (Huizinga 110, 111). My best readers are those willing to play and, through language, discover seriousness and pleasure blended into joy.

POEMS

CLAYTON, GEORGIA

Lapsing spring helms the ground, ice black in flecks
on mountain cabin planks. We doze.
Swallows taste the first fat insects.

Dawn stencils dun leaves veins. Oak necks
contract, crack bark. Slum sap outflows
lapsing spring, helms the ground. Black ice inflects

Georgia back to winter conjugation, wrecks
the season's speech. Spade-tongued
swallows taste the first fat insects.

A flat moon grinds through my blood. Bone perfects
its long still stretch. I curl grub toes,
lapsing. Spring helms the ground in ice. Black fleck

carpenter ants fly copper at dawn. Hex
eyes fract the dark blur bird whose beak snaps closed,
swallows, tastes the first fat: insects,

winter moths. Unlocked dirt collects
spermball sap. Rocks rise wet through the hard snow's
lap, spring's black helms in ground ice. The swallows
sing, taste the first fat insects.

PONG

We twist to slide
bones on black water.

Our contraceptive net lets the nonce pearl
past, the problem neither of us wants.

It's all we have—

our cathode ray congress all foreplay,
the increase in score our end.

SCRAWLING DENMARK

The old map's border lines and lands
had ghosted under too much sun.

I flush the sea sky blue with colored pencils,
ink the counties clear.

Wax water helms the pen's nib.
Specks of damp pulp stick
to the skull tip, make
the tracework tool a mop.

The North Sea's teeth once thinned
crust away from cliffs, carved skerries.
My mending blends islets back together,
plumps beaches black, darkly
ices over farms.

Children gouge first bites
from fresh bread, sup fist to mouth,
where long ago pike staves broke skin
off shoulders, undid the field owners
to thump plows in land wrested theirs—
all those outskirts buried now
beneath the state that I,
half aware,
draw again.

A SHORT LAY

The dragon Adilegian tackled
the sky clod, scraped cirrus
fleece off cumulus frame. He mauled
no cloud, though it hung high and white.
The mimic's thrum nerves whipped, stilled
within the rake. Sinew glistened as
creekbed quartz.

Adilegian let go. The flayed heap
lolloped sideward. Its underflat
panned dark to the sun,
hardened, crashed down:
bones a coral scrawl.

The dragon buried himself,
nape garlanded with the torn strap,
and slept.

THE EYDERSNAK

When Perseus slew medusa,
 he bobbed his bounty's
 head on pole. Blood dropped,
 and clump sand begat the Eydersnak.

From wart soil bulbed a snake's skull, then
 scaly tube. Dead blood
 forgot God's order,
 bore another head.
 A mouth cracked and eyes popped on the backside clot.

Their sizes vary. Some grow stunt
 as earthworms while others
 unroll long as a
 leg. Pregnant
 women should watch for small ones.

Mothers miscarry if they glaze
 the Eydersnak with
 their shadows, and the
 beasts travel fast. They
 stuff head in head, roll, a plague of chance meetings.

SIGNAL TO NOISE

He exits the bookstore and shuffles
the book from its bag, a Japanese
copy of *Histoire de la Gravure en France*
that he bought for the pictures.

The sun's bright ink drenches Shinjuku traffic
and the cars shine ceramic.

His eye reflects kanji painted on pavement
yet he cannot imagine its sound,
just as *tomare* makes no shape in thought.

Script still claims an accidental name.

止まれ is the shush
of round rubber over 止まれ.

MUTUAL ASSURED DESTRUCTION

Cecil's infantry brigade fell back from the front lines and camped in a snow clearing within a ring of trees. He awoke and found the sleeping bag beside him ripped from lips to pouch.

Every third man leaned against the trees like pissing, only the heads tilted up, chins to bark, necks slit to yawns. *Did it with a good knife, too.* He checked the wounds. *Nothing rugged where the blade doubled back at the spine, clipped the breath.* They hugged the trunks, wrists bound in DeWoolfson silk, each knot pinned with a Schutzstaffel rune.

Proof of contract, Cecil thought. *And the signature holds even in retreat:* dark cherry hash where blood froze, stained oak.

LAST TIME CRABBING

I, bosun, shoved the boom starboard
sailing east into early Atlantic dark.
The hull hopped its new tack
over each clip wave.

On the Carolina coast
fiddler crabs bore their bulk claws
down into wet grain strand.

The navigator called *Yaw back!*
and when wind dug our wake deeper
dolphins swole from cold sea,
backs smooth as piglets'.

We nosed into a coastal pool
flanked by beachstraw.
I hooked the anchor larboard:
a Volkswagen engine gone to lump
after hot fuse.

We staked slick blood chicken
necks, bound the barbs fast to lines,
hucked bait down where fat blue crabs
and their stunt kindle clamped the bauble meat,
trapjaws sucking—
shimmered them from shallow
into bucket.

They boiled climbing,
hinges rustling as dry grass.

CURIOSITIES FROM GIBSONTON, FLORIDA

Dodburn's Oil and Lube:

Clown painted on plywood
cutout holding posterboard:
"Trespassers will be followed."
Sign holding a sign.

Argyle Acres:

Ferris wheel buried to axle
in backyard grass, bucketseats
stuffed with sod,
bottle palms and wishbone blooms.

Argyle Acres, three blocks later:

Double-wide ripped longways,
furnished for manikins,
a jotun's dollhouse.

Road from Argyle Acres to Giant Burger:

Body facedown in rain ditch,
legs sunk in mud, flannel trunk,
newsprint steepled over head.

Giant Burger:

Scowls notched with oil.
Giant's widow in corner booth,
dress and mourning bonnet black.

Our question on local things then
widow, chair, center of room,
burgers rumpled on paper plates—

Our answer: home is what fills the space
between secrets and their keepers.

for Charlie Coddington

DOMESTICATION

I slip through the vet lobby swinging
 doors, scrub suit dark marine from rinsing
 blood and froth slopped by Parvo
 gold retrievers.

Two pets wait to board:
 Tinkles Schentel, streaked rank Chow down
 for grooming—Ham Dobson, black cat, white
 bullet on throat.

I sling Tinkles' leash past
 gravel teeth onto stub neck. "She's just
 talking," says Mrs. Schentel.

Old Dobson sets Ham's cardboard
 box on the counter. "Sure the dog
 talks." Fishes cash from wallet. "Takes
 a strong dose of stupid not to
 listen what she says."

Mrs. Schentel flushes, drops names
 and tip jar change, rolls
 into her Royce for Omaha.

Dobson typhoons red
 marker over black
 ink "Parts" on the box,
 underneath draws "Ham."

Midnight I park at the porch.
 My cat Taxes trills around the
 yard. I needle pinky into corner
 gums and check.

Blood on teeth.
 Chef's Blend breath.

A FUNERAL

From his seat in the white
garden chair freckled with mildew, he sees
a squirrel twitch in sand and scant
grass sketched by bulblight,
the sky between moonset and dawn
plum.

 The rodent's gutworks
 have busted. Cogs and clackers
 knead round the cracked core.

He walks to the sloperooft
tool shed half as tall as the house
and, in the dark, clangs log
splitter and shovel free
from stacked monitors and consoles.

He takes a few practice swings while the light
picks up. He hasn't broken wood in years.

First honest shot landed one foot
wide. Second plucked spine from neck
under the splitter's pug sledge.
Third fragged the skull.
Fourth confirmed the lump.

He buried the rag beside an old pine.
Carrion flies jangled on his shoulder.

 He dreamed carcass bones
 thrust through red dirt as shoots
 to hoist the dry white trunk.
 Leaves gleamed black,
 powerline eyes.

FEBRUARY OUTBREAK: THE HISTORIAN'S TALE

*Despite their education, technical savvy, and professed
disinterest in the spiritual world, urban Americans run,
screaming to their gods, at the first sight of zombies.*

— The Zombie Survival Guide:
Complete Protection from the Undead, Max Brooks

Rumor has it even Mardi Gras vets
couldn't tell a jazz funeral apart
from undead feet shambling through the French Quarter.
They brought back to Charleston the wet
growl, twitchy grip, lazy milkball glance—
fat toad heart in clawbone chest—snakeskin brain
fluttering low voltage—veins a silt drained—
gumclot blood. Tourniquets from torn pants
won't prevent infection, memory's rut.
From crowds zombies come, and crowds zombies make,
like ants, if ants didn't queue when they raked back
food, but hauled the whole mound after lunch.

Penned for five days makes you itch to take charge
of things, grab control of history from
the grabbers. Hunting tempted our party sometimes
but who went solo got locked in the surge.
We succumbed to sty-craze and tried to run
through the city, the long concrete stretch, to
Edisto, armed with blades filched from toolsheds,
target practice Glocks and Remingtons.
Guns dominoed them at a distance, though
the toppled corpses still crawled. Machetes
and chainsaws cleared paths nearby. Firelog pokers
pierced their eyes and stirred blunt brains to stew.

Then night fell, drew the evitable
in. I dallied with the dead, resigned.
A few bites warmed aorta I dropped
the adze grandfather gave seventeen
blade sacred family hymn
line gone

rhythm din

KANJI POEM I: SIGNAL POINT

Slant broadcast antenna tops the box:

spike and hung bone
pry one tongue ten-thousand
mouths—fishhook jams in
wave, faces handhauled
through pall static sequins.

GENERATION

A Carolina spiderlily sprouts
 from a rock crack's lips split barely
 above shale-hue current.
 Midmorning light on a river
 becomes life's unraveller. That bulb
 shards apart to bloomcup whose shreds
 go suncrazy, turn to seraph feathers
 perched upon a sword all green fire.

Love can only lose in this place:
 the angel's blade stiffens, chips,
 hinges back, dunks its frayed
 headlump upstream
 to click against stonestead.

Melba's arms fix against her breast
 nine black roses and the stream's last spike.
 Cecil tows her on her back
 where rock dims deepest – unholds
 the dress hem.

He never mends back the bank,
 leases land to summer floods.

His head loses the line
 stitching day to calendar day
 until he crumples in the shower stall,
 skull full with water.

Caulk locks glazed tiles into grid,
 a mail once hard against spray
 peeling down the farmwork dirt.

Mildew's dark drops drive
 the white seams, turn corners
 black until spores crash, blow
 over baked clay plates –
 wet scrim new skin on old bones.

after Bally Midway's Tron (1982)

DÔGEN'S CATS

One climbs furniture then cries
for help off the *kung-an* desk
he's mounted for ten-thousand unknown reasons,
none of which suggest the best descent.

Another dozes after breakfast, gets whalloped
from behind. He turns to see his brother's paw
perched upon an invisible *keisaku*.

They stample over Dôgen's papers
chasing reverbs of a ghost.

Suddenly the nap succeeds.
Forepaws fold under breadloaf body,
crosshatch into full lotus meditation.
Muscles hush upon a page
where Dôgen has written:

Water plumps ramen—
so becomes ramen.

Whiskers stiffen
in the wind.
Ears lie flat
as flipped back cowls.

At one with whatever,
Dôgen's cats rise.

BEARINGS

When Mom was pregnant I whispered
through her navel what you'd need to know.

Get the MP if there's Communists.
They kidnap kids off Post and other times
strap packs of cowchips, soap, and mortar
into park trash cans or glue them
to the school roof.

Figure out who cares about what.

If you win Mickey Jordan's allowance
gambling over marbles,
don't tell Dad in front of Mom
He'll have to make you
give it back.

Don't tell Mom in front of Dad
where you hid the butter, and *never*
put the butter back.
She'll have to ground you.

Don't get your arms blown off.

for my brother

BEECH ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA

Dawn lumps through far clouds
like cob-nub out of parted silk and husk.

The blue frisbee skips over Peter's fingertips,
topples through grass to stick
between the farm's coffin gas pumps.

He gets it back, hurls the frisbee tilted
at Roy. Slanted, liling,
the disc capsizes, chops
red dirt hedging the sweetcorn acre.

"You throw like a hatchet swing.
That's how it junks on you. Slip it off
like an accident."

Roy lets fly and gold foil letters
blur into white bandanna.

NINEVEH

The chrome on Miss Donna's sedan had thinned to patches like a pelt rug with the mange of years of footsteps. All that kept that car from rolling down the drive and into the road were two heads cracked from the shoulderblade wings of lawn angels piled like lumber on the grass.

Her second child's ghost had gone into the walls and built machines. She'd rigged microrecorders connected to nothing in each hall to thwart the gearbaby's spies.

Through my front window she saw me control the camera in a videogame. After reaching logical conclusions she marched across the street with a broomstick and broke my front porch bulb.

One month later, she stood in the eggshell glass holding her sedan's gas cap. "If you had just forgive me." She gripped it as Grendel's claw, trophy of a holy yank. "I might not needed put this back. But now I must and God He hates me what I done."

She cried and sang: "Ride with me in case I die. Rise with me when I must die."

I have always assumed something divine within lunatics that can abate if only they bear it witness somehow.

I crossed the street and held her hand. She snapped open the tank cover, punched the cap down and turned. It sank like a slow tooth.

Inside smelled like Pall-Malls and something rotted gone. The whale's motor turned and she chunked it in reverse, lumped over the angel heads and into the road. Then stopped. "Christ you hate so goddamn cold!" The vent control nub clattered to brimstone and the heat closed my eyes. The sedan wretched forward and jolted home. She cut the thing's guts, ran inside, locked the house behind with the driver's door rocking like a cherub's first unlocked wing.

Next week I found a new bulb
on a folded bathtowel in the center of my porch,
leviathan's pearl.

BLOOD EAGLE

Ælla lays on his gut,
cottonmouth lips picking copper
and sand off the Northumbrian earth.

Bede dreams the man untimed.

"Behold the Yorkish Hall," says
Ivar to his men, spanning the prone
king with the flat of his axe.
"The sparrows fly in."
Head breaks Ælla's teeth.
"And they squirm back out."
Helve thumps his arse hole raw.

As a raven, the Lord
gathers riven Ælla, packs
the bones back, scores
the slit shut with beak.

Ivar's axe unseams the back, neck
to hips, then saws each rib at root.
Hands fish the hot cleft mess,
crack the man his wings, pluck
out lungs mid-flop.

It looks to Bede like
bad carpentry.

Ælla hefts his lungs,
offers one to Bede, says:
Here is law without history.

Government changes hands.

ABANDONED GREENHOUSE

Around a gray-stem flower
in glass cloche hull,
the last one here laid
crystal pepper shakers,
a polished brass watch,
quartz knobs, silver cigarette cases,
mirrors sharded loose
from junk makeup compacts.

Twilight slops through the skull's long sag,
raises a scuttled garden of light.

GUNKANJIMA PEN FACTORY, MAY 1952

A conveyor belt stitched from kimonos
of those who died in the war clatters
ballpoints down the line.

He draws one from the flow
to snap on a cap then put it back
but stops, stunned by the pen's
black vein.

In his hidden ear
three words clap—

suishô shô ebi

水晶 Between the wars his mother's father shows him how
to dive for quartz clumped under reefs atop hot currents.
His first time down he gropes three glints within a coral rift
and holds a wolf eel's teeth—
slamstrokes to the flat blur sky
and passes through a cloud of shrimp. Rostra stab his chest
礁 to welts. Air bloats from his lungs.

His old man rises from the waves, quartz and eel in hand.
The boy blinks vomit and salt.

By firelight he wrings heads

海老 from shrimp, flicks limp sandveins into embers.

Pen husks, clear as silicate,
clog the assembly line.
He snaps down black plastic
light as discharged rifle cartridges.

ELEGY FOR THE HIDDEN FANTASTIC

Science ripens citron beasts from
 ancient misperceptions, and names chaff
 vernacular. The illuminator's pen slumps field guide
 script into page margins, unhasps the clean hoot owl from
 taxonomic facts. Images make the pen
 turn scalpel to
 peel rind plumes
 and find the first
 pulp parts.

Stone-horned *bubo*,
 pestilent wingspan
 clogged with holy wrens—
 now *booboo* scabs
 from hide-and-seek.

Ulula, lazarized
 from coffin verb to
 ululate Hell's gears.

With these unhusked by ink dissection,
 the owl's hallux limps,
 drops the branch it held when
 watching Cain illuminate with rock
 and human ink
 the margins
 of the earth.

LOGOI AMAUROS

Aliases affix interminably: a cache
of spent Legos shuffled to restructure
how to call things.

The Latinated fish hasn't kin
with brim or bream.
Each hangnail appendant
recurs
invariant as ticks on a retard's rebus,
replicate as idiot enjambments
margining the lines
of an endless villanelle.

Nomenclature forced binomial
claps together old Greek bones,
but resurrection fails. Tinkered up
names pop into dust when the tongue
slides wet and hot to word the world.

Index *Trombicula alfreddugesi*,
a name to locate facts—
but when your asshole fattens
after sitting wide legged on the wrong log,
beautifully you will
goddamn
chiggers.

PERPETUA DISCORDIA IN LITHIA, FLORIDA

My boys stack palmetto
bones on our fire, summer's last hairlick.
I tell them that dragons drink elephant
blood to cool their bellyfires.

Rashad doubts all of this.

Donovan grabs an elephant ant
tumbling out of the white stone pit
to fight with Ian's dragonfly.
The wingless wasp stings.

We douse the fire, go to cabin.

Rashad motions me bedside and
whispers, "What you say about
dragons really true?"

"Yes, and also, dragons won't fly
five miles near a burning stack
of elephant bones."

He stares at top bunk
undersprings. "Okay."

I lie on my cot, listening for
whispers, last night plans.
Rashad's flashlight makes his blanket
a shadowbox.

Fingers shape his fight.

À UNE PASSANTE GRAVURE

I first notice her as tonal distortion.

"Kitekurenaika? Midotaon, hai. Shee yuu!"
 She clacks the clam phone shut,
 gums it on the hem of her blouse
 whose deep cut looks like the *kan* of *kankei*.

I know her from the videogame studio.
 She's different on the street, moves
 without motion-capture wires sprawling
 from her joints. Her legs, more deliberate now,
 do not bend at the knees.

A silver chain runs from her ring
 to the collar of a trembling chihuahua
 bound in a sweater whose back reads:

LOVE is a four-letter word.

關係
 kan kei

A VISION OF FUTURE WATER

Instruments like traps
and wickets for a shabby game mark
the chem lab work stations.

A white glove snaps
thumb and forefinger printless, as though
only ghosts could pump
the dropper bladder.
A plump globe fumbles
off, blots the microscope plank.

A slide cover pins down depth,
flays the rain piece
into Mercator map pelt—
water's skull displaced.

An eye searches through its own
grease for paramecial fruit to gar
apart with blackpoint needle.

New bits swivel from the gouge,
float to the tile's left bound,
flip to the stain's backside.
After lateral drift, the manifolding blisters
swing recto from the right edge.

Chalkstick fingers prod
the burstings, take the water's
wafer shape as fact.

The ocean is
a postcard.

LETTER FROM DARL TO JURGEN

Herein lies our problem. In a woman's suitcase somewhere sits my electric razor (replaceable), muslin tie (refugee from an ill-conceived undergraduate wardrobe), and the lone Tromsø codex (you and I are *i knibe – fængslet* – best glossed *fucked*.)

I had the text in hand when Anna found my sleeper on the Danish train to Hamburg. We haggled intransitives and pluperfects well before departure, but the real exchange of tongues came that night.

You were right about her: she *is* younger than she looks. The dam marked the apex of my eight years bent over fading particles. Professors and students were both *verboten* to us as doctoral candidates, a binding that Messrs. Ringbom and Flynn kept fixed and from which Anna freed my hands: Helen glossed with Clytemnestra's years. That woman bore our Janus taboos with *license* – a true colleague.

Bourbon worked on her, and so did I. Morphemes distilled into phonemes.

The punchline: she's married and has trouble with this sort of thing. She barely let our sweat chill on the sheets before she roasted me for compromising her lazarized integrity. You know that I stand with the old guard on women, *acadames* and otherwise. I recommended that she find new accommodations if she liked not to accommodate.

Goodbye Anna! Goodbye codex.

Despite everything, I do not judge her cruelly and so cannot regard her as a thief. A girl's mind goes absent when shaken by guilt. This is not to be held against her.

Yet that is neither my problem nor yours. Don't expect much chance for tenure when you've co-signed a loan for a rare text now made even rarer.

For your idle hours, find enclosed my remnant notes – all in shorthand, yes, so please oblige me to interpret as I oblige you to find her any way you can. Try the Polizei first, then Hamburg's department chair, then – and only then – her husband.

Keep my name unclear. Misspell it on the phone and blame line static. Smudge it on reports and blame the post. Secrets are our schooled calling – and this one, if kept, will be our return on those that we have filched from broken scripts.

THE JUMPING SPIDER LEARNS FAITH
FROM HIS MOTHER, THE CLAW HAMMER

Moonlight hits the hammer
mislaid between the basement window
and pale mustard blinds.

The jumping spider's hammock
tenses her last tethers
holding eggs white as apple flesh.

Red Kinsler yanks the junk drawer's
loose brass knob and uncorks
a wash of twisted paperclips,
batteries blotched with acid rot,
unwound springs saved from plastic
click pencils. Widgets sprawl on cement
like the cogs of a busted galaxy.

"No goddamn hammer. Paid twenty
for a ten-dollar tool and now
no goddamn hammer."

He bends to stir the clutter.

Mandibles rip a backhand freckle,
slop down venom, hold.

Then unlock.

Dragline thread reels the spider
up to the formica.

Red shakes his stung hand
like a wet rag, grabs
a crusted nine-volt to throw
against a wall.

Corrosion nips his palm,
skews his shot which hits
the blinds' cracked ballast.
The whole job clatters free.

And there, before Red and the spider,
 leans a ten-dollar hammer
 sold for twenty.

Spider—

Tarsus Mother!
I fell through your
claw's cleft into life,
ate white grub manna
from your bone while
others hatched bad,
flipped dead with legs
in cramped air.

The handle crackles when Red pulls
 it from the sill. A welt of sawdust marks
 months of termites' nesting in the grain.

He locks a fist around the stainless steel head,
 punches the claw through the sill and wall —
 hacks until red clay
 chunks onto the floor.

Spider—

Did I drive my Tarsus Mother off
by piercing what was not prey?
Her absence is the question's
only answer.

On that split flesh endite that I bit
she drew her claw high, shattered
where she'd bore me.

I must rise as she has risen.

The fly's body crushes sunlight
into dark oil hues, its drone
fatter in humidity.

The spider snaps into jump,
zip silk strung from sheetrock to tail.

Chelicerae crush the fly's armor,
sting, clutch as silk
pitches them back to wall.

NEATH

A ditch deep to my hips flanked
the mountain road.
Each November,
knots of dawn snow drawn
along the walls
unpacked dirt and sharp
trash from bent roots.

I ran barefoot through that muck
one weekend on a dare.
Water clamped my skin numb
so toes and soles touched unfelt
pop tops and ragged tin,
like slogging through the water phase
of teeth: a spill of unfast enamel.

That night as I lay in bed burning
the house took its other shape.

The cobalt carpet
turned to wickerwork earth,
grass flattened under stone dew.

The bedroom's edges unlatched at corners,
paint's tan bristled grain,
and the walls slumped like young
oaks sick with snow.

Furrows in the floor collapsed to ditches,
their dark banks lit by a ribbon of blonde water.

I ripped as the ditchwater,
room, and plant had ripped.
Something right began to break.

Only the blood's summer held back my flesh
from blooming into dull silver, yet my feet
sleeked hard, scented with ash, iron, pine.

after Konami's Silent Hill (1998)

FROM DERRICK TO UNCLE JON,
FORT JACKSON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Boot camp's decent, though half these guys look near dead. One loused up the arrowhead formation, so drill sergeant commandeered his stationary. Another farted during reveille so had to eat kidney beans all day.

Started breaking down M16s today. A lot different from that old Nagant you and Dad took to the Pee Dee range. I was ten one time we went, back when the Nagant's kick would have cracked the muscle off my shoulder. I kept busy with my soccer ball and Dad's camera, the complicated kind with a fat nose.

You asked if I heard of bicycle kicks. I thought you were on that junk they jailed you for, talking snipe hunts and skyhooks, so left you alone with the ball while Dad aimed that old Soviet barrel.

You threw up the ball, arched back without the guts to swing your feet off the grass. I fooled with the camera, took a picture the second after you got it right – focused mostly on your moccasin flicking off the heel. That shoe looked cut from the belly of a month-old calf, and the ball hung fuzzed in the corner, like one of Mabel's cloves.

Ever had a thing happen that you didn't know happened, but you were there and got the right to remember even if you really don't? I can't get away from it—that goddamn kick—I guess like you can't get away from what you did.

Hope you're okay in there. Don't tell Mom I wrote.

WANDERLING

The shade crept grip on grip up the strand skerry
until hands clapped ground and black breath rose
over grind lip.

New snow held nowhere on the elderfrost,
all bleach down and babyfat skimming winter's gristle.

The clamberghost spilled forward what became
a foot with walking, each cold heelfall welding
flurries down:

crop crop crop crop

The thringer's frame
thickened into makeshift flesh.
The mound gathered unto him,
gave him ice for body.

He became, at last, what killed him.

THE SEA-ETTIN SPEAKS

We left port with new nets
 at dawn and Ken Stortessen's boy
 cursed us on the water, asking for
 them by their land-names.

From dark water spumed a thing
 with limbs and mouth, but barnacled.
 It thumped on deck, spoke and clicked,
 fixing us all.

Way! Hwaswa yow ert mid wrightles uttring,
 witt thu eower bark twikkt ovr-thwart
 un mičel riče shaft fram wlonk welkenis.
 Ryvel-loht up-hile vallowong uhte,
 unruffle writeling ond witwalles wrablis,
 flam wengis ond tutelis.

Icham Wvline, unseondes hlafes wro,
 Sae-hlides flaunk-roo, flan on wathe,
 tynd on flor. Me sammtale brotheren
 twisted eall ur kin-twysten for untholmodnes,
 unshadweth uns unwrenchis, ut-sondreth
 ur kytes soke-shawles, swa ich rast for to flatten
 ond fnesne ham ut loghe swa ugsom fowlen ye-wend.

Me veder kennt silc felawen, threo hele eiris,
 whilom ich, wif-flot, lufed eall him – hranes, hondes, brand.

He kembyt ham kine-wurthe, that combe his kevel.
 Hie woweth him, ac ut-sale hoker-loweth.

Ne wasele umbe horlege-lokers wha slomereth
 in horde-hows whiles ye cofres slokynest.
 Hele eires goth helethes. Godes freke
 ne hehengel, hehne-engel.

Inhinen tuteleth, a-dileyedeth ure kwiknar
 mid pykis on brac-pyt. Thoy reich hie fethmedeth,
 ne on-wald for theod-orf feffedeth, unter-freke
 eall un-tild. Folc wolt swa last wolx.

Ich whiles wandrend fand me dongen fader
 nest fail-dyke. He liy wardlass, kist atweamt,
 garth-rys tumblende. Me dream umlapt

tha for-dynnad wappende on dike,
 ond ich him fan to nestlen him for-bathde and derne.
 Ich nakned ond ye-graven him.

On wankel greet ich gret: for brotherenes un-way,
 for fader-ruke, for un-wemmed grim-runkylles,
 for whyrlende sae-gumen, ac mast for mech –
 Wlvine ut-hine, herte-bloodes hired, sal-less helmer.

Scholde Wlvine, nook-shotten, fleck ond flawe,
 erfe efre ye-flayed, yet harwe this sybbeless fowel-dom
 fram athel-chiteringes after-clap?

Me sprang neopened liche-wakes othis. Ich seth
 tha scheappend of al-kin mute, of arn ond muse,
 lawerc ond krake, sperhawke ond sparwe.
 Honde wreoned luft-kindleres neb, wryed, up-welt.
 Ich et me feondes flake watel. Scheld-snorkils
 ransacked ragmones hed, fnaest nefand,
 swark undrehlich.

Ich kuste tha lave, brides drihten samgrof,
 ond wende me leof-monnes kyth choppen.

Clawlesslic ich bi-tid in swaked halle, telenid
 tha wlatsume alder-whelp. He, Rascall-tasker,
 taried for tarne. Ich takked armes-stokis on his honde,
 wraskled him to snaperende, grop swere, ond dawned
 kist-rys, walmes, sprangis-lic tangle. Hed yet tetweamt,
 grist-bating gyede open-heaved, lich to brotheren
 wha fettletth wood ruke, rideth flesch-wig,
 flayeth ond flyteth.

Ich asked tha hedes brotherenes nom. Cwaeth he:
 "Wurse ond Wurste! Thu niker! Me lymes ond lithes
 waffeth after hedes shaftend, swa ich wille efer snap
 for-wandred." Ich sowsed him mid stanes. Grist bated.

Ich unspurned al-kin hem beddes, belyed mid ryvel-loht.
 Hrim tha glam-flaukr be-whaet, sebare skalle,
 Hem on dampned tinsel up-ye-warpt.

Witt thu, thoy sakless, newandren in hie thrall.

She snatched Ken Stortessen's boy, dragged him
 down into sea, and left us to our fishing.

THE SEA-ETTIN'S SPEECH, TRANSLATED

Hail! Whoever you are, listlessly spinning your prow, know that your bark twitches thwart over a great kingdom shut away from skies. The undersea's ravel-light seals the yellowing dawn above, silences the blustering of nightingale trills and the witwall's warbling, banishes wings and beaks to flight.

I am Wlvine, a slant limb from the unseen half, roe of the sea-lid's fire, arrow on wave, tine on floor. My banded brothers, acting in haste, twisted our kith apart as branches off a stock, kept their plans in shadows, mangled our laws and made them little more than scarecrows, so I fought, cast them down, and sneezed them from the sea as ugly birds fly.

My father kinned those fellows, three hale heirs, even while I, woman-waste, loved all of him—brains, hands, sword. He groomed the children he deemed worthy, but that comb was the bit in his mouth. They wooed him in the hall but mocked him outside.

If anyone sleeps in your hoarding-house and watches how well you slake your coffers, never take him as a guide through fens. Hale heirs wreck homes, and God's archangels turn vicious.

The three who lived in his hall whispered—slew the one who gave them life with pikes in a brackish pit. They gathered their inherited riches but had no handle on their inherited thanes, undermen all untitled. Folk wilt as blame and burden grow.

In my wandering, I found my beaten father by a sod dike. He lay wardless, chest split open, ribs tumbling. My cry of joy joined the waves' din, and I took him for nestling in the deep bath and darkness. I stripped and laid him in a grave.

I wept on that grit for my brothers' treachery, for my heaped father, for fierce wrinkles of light, for thanes flung off, but mostly for myself: Wlvine, the one who lives outside—the one devoted to the heart's blood—the one who gave her dead father a roof though homeless herself.

Should Wlvine—shot to life in a nook, blot and flak, heifer beaten into flight—yet harry this faithless eyrie for what befell from noble chattering?

No wake-oath of revenge unlatched in me. In front of me, instead, I saw him as the Maker of birdshit: from eagle and titmouse, lark and crow, sparrow-hawk and sparrow. Over the face of him who kindled everything weak, my hand clutched, wrenched, ripped up. I ate my fiend's flake wattle. Light from wrinkles on the sea above ransacked that devil's open head, found no life, darted away.

I kissed what remained—the lord of small birds half engraved—and went to chop my beloved's kith.

I entered the failed hall silently and scoffed the wretched elder-whelp. He, Rascal-tasker, tarried in combat because I was a woman. My hands, traps on arms, closed on him, wrestled until he snapped down, groped his neck—from his chest made a dawn of bones, walms, seaweed tangles in many hues. Though head had been split from trunk, its grinding teeth guided the open-topped body to his brothers who fettered the heap and rode it as a steed, fighting each other while fleeing.

I asked the head for his brothers' names. He said: "Worse and Worst! You nicor! My limbs wave lithe even after my head's sundering, so I will stumble forever, exhausted from wandering." I beat him with stones. The teeth ground still.

I, strengthened by the undersea's ravel-light, spurred over everywhere they made a bed. Ice whetted the water's under-flicker, scabbed over the side of the sea bare to men—vomited them onto land.

Be warned that, though guiltless now, you are never to travel in their thrall.

THE SQUARE

We stayed long by the fence after cutting.

Dick's gun packed loud from the pighouse
and Dad, Cecil, Cousin Ronnie stilled to chat
sleeved in soft plaid against late November
with Cristy and I clamping our knees in the appletree
on either side of a caterpillar tent.

Back at Cecil's, Dad and Ronnie
hucked the net and spread it on the kitchen table.
We clutched for mistletoe
tipping from its grip on twine,
snowshoe leaves and grub berries
waxy.

Mom and Mabel set the ham at table's center,
steaming mid mistletoe on cloth
tracing sides of equal length.

Two dimensions, height and width,
given only forward movement
make a wrapping ouroboros.

Four sides blend into scale
and bent bone.

Twang rope and trestle,
thread and steel rail—

Rope wraps on rope into net.
Beam pierces post into fence.
Thread doubles back into knit.
Ballasted parallel rails pin
crosshatch creosote ties.

Riven, the bordersnake dies.

for my mother

PROJECTS FOR FATHERS AND SONS

The boy trolled a shovel through the junkyard's
 box fan rows then slowed, cracked
 plastic husks to uncask wire—
 great yards of inner amber hair.

The heel of his Keds chopped
 off the top chips of trampled deer shit that hid
 further needed things—oil lamp that still
 could slit flame—jagged ceramic cone—
 plate magnet off a toaster Mac—scraps
 of electric tape—shim to pry
 old solder daubed on split motherboards.

He dug loose warped Louisville Sluggers
 and handles from axes, hammers, brooms—
 sifted pine straw for a shard
 of pot-stone holstered in earth.

Then hustled the parts home on a slat
 tied to the back of his bike and
 dumped them on the bedroom floor, tripping over
 books about filaments and dry cells
 propped atop his father's 1979 National Geographics.

The man had gone to train
 the Bundeswehr how to tilt antennas
 so to cast field chatter past Eastern
 Bloc receivers.

His son iced wires with solder,
 shawled the vine gaps in tape, bound salvaged wood
 with nails and old splints—then hauled the mess
 to the roof. Straddling backbone
 shingles, he braided wire around
 the cobbled pole, gave the circuit ground
 on windowsill. The glazed cone, propped
 over lamp, sipped
 the flame's top bangs to cook the magnet.
 The glossrock hummed.

He listened.

And he waited.

for my father

HARMAN KINSLER AND AYN RAND FISH ALONG LITTLE RIVER
IN RICHLAND DISTRICT, SOUTH CAROLINA (CIRCA 1825),
DESPITE DISCREPANCIES OF TIME AND PLACE AND AGAINST
EITHER PERSON'S DESIRE FOR COMPANY

Rand. What do you do?

Kinsler. Sell fish in Chester.

Harman sloops a worm down the nail bent
into hook, doubles the extra fat back on point
and ties a knot.

Rand. What good is that technique?

Kinsler. Fixes bait so fish don't suck it off. Dangles
here to give something to suck.

Ayn's hook draws slime from her
worm's clitellum, a bandage
scraped with scalpel.

Kinsler. Your hold's too hard. Grip less so the
worm fights less.

Harman casts.

Rand. I'll hook my worm as I decide.

Her bourgeois will falls
apart between slick fingertips.
Intention fails to turn one fact.
Iron scrabbles on white plate fingernails.

She casts and her worm
saults free behind her,
a slab of uncooked bacon.

Kinsler. Ever threshed?

Rand. Why?

Kinsler. You swing that pole like a syth.

She remembers without meaning to:
goddamn Soviets stole her family

treasure.

Sunlight clicks across ripples
drawn in water by their lines.

Ayn decides the subject must change.

Rand. That public bridge upriver kills the ferry business.

Kinsler. Amen.

Rand. My map shows four ferries running thirty miles south. You own the bank where the public bridge lands. Burn the bridge and start a ferry.

Kinsler. Three Kinslers back were English lording over Irish. Trouble lies in that... dealing over others and themselves besides. No, I'll upkeep why they bore me here.

Rand. You'd turn *profit*.

Kinsler. Profit run against my debt of time.

Rand. Time doled out to fishing? Quaint *labor*?

Kinsler considers this.

Kinsler. Here's the way here works. Folks cross Little River to get to kin in Fairfield. No one's care how or why. A public bridge saves trouble.

Rand. Trouble saved is profit spurned. *Listen.* Man's true object, his *fact*, is excellence – a happiness claimed against others' claims on his self. Greatness awaits the commanding mind.

Silence.

Rand. Burn the public bridge.

Harman poles out two
notchlip redhorses, strings
them by their lips
in the Little River's flow.

Rand. *Listen.* Why do ferries run where bridges aren't?

He sighs.

Kinsler. A difference in the body. Men aren't fish.

Rand. Exactly. True men arise when their title and deed over nature – the power of things – solves weakness in other men. The land awaits your hand while they garden and grovel in dirt.

Kinsler. Who now?

Rand. The farmers who you fish for! Keep all you catch for yourself and make them need to fish, then sell them what they *need* if they're to fish – hooks bent for those without spare nails – worms dug for those who don't know where to dig – poles rigged – twine strung. Rent your banks into a market.

Kinsler. Something in that comes up short.

Rand. Only your *vision* is short. I map empire on your lot, yet you would stay a wretch while others cross your land and fish your rocks.

He unstrings both catches,
slits shivering bellies,
snaps guts into grass like pennies
from a coinpurse
flipped inside out,
and lays fillets in cast iron
flat over kindling.

Kinsler. That strength you'd brand on my rocks makes none strong. A turned profit unbones all, makes everyone in Carolina goddamn Irish. My forebears couldn't be but English, nanny to the world, yet you aim to make me back English instead of what I am – free from lording over them that can't care for themselves.

Fire
blacks bones in

the pan.

Kinsler. You'd turn yourself Irish in the same gallop. New foals dance better than you bait.

Rand. It's getting dark.

Kinsler. Good.

Harman
lays a straw cot.

A bitter little girl,
denied nobility by someone else's dream,
takes control of Ayn Rand's tongue.

Rand. Where can I stay?

Kinsler. I don't like you, so don't stay here. Stark
Tavern's past the current into Fairfield.

She swallows and
the child dunks
into ribcage slum.

Rand. How do I get there?

Kinsler. Hit left when you cross the public bridge.

Ayn kicks her pole, draws
dress over her glorious brain,
and swims cold, free.

Kinsler watches her escape,
decides to tell anyone who asks:
She's my sister. No relation.

RIDDLE FOR HAIL

My teeth cockle iron,
chap cliffs to chalk,
let streamlets loose,

herd snake and sparrow home,
split the snail's hearth.

Bark slumps.
Limbs clap.
Leaves fat with light
fall in locks.

Cloud and bone
bale cram rush.

I fill a spoon
while shovels break.

FIELD RATIONS

My sister Cristy and I rummaged Dad's rucksack
whenever he came home from State-side training
or missions to Norway teaching farmers to make
cannons out of plastic pipes, aerosol, potatoes.

From the clink of backup bolt assemblies
and copper shells shinning in his field kettle
we wrestled loose his leftover rations: superdry fruit
sealed in olive-drab foil, food in uniform.

Cristy slumped out of that canvas pantry and
sneered a package open with baby teeth.
I unfolded the vacuum-packed wrapping
at corners first, like turning down a perfect bed.

Mummy peaches and bananas sponged fast
from dust around our tongues. In a bright room
across the house, mother-father stuff crackled free—
baby brother an apple secretly plumped.

for my sister

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