

EDWARDS, HANNAH EVANGELINE, M.F.A. *Transient Species*. (2018)  
Directed by Prof. Stuart Dischell. 46 pp.

This thesis is a collection of poems. The writer explores mental illness, isolation, trauma, and grief, and chronicles numerous speakers' attempts to overcome these issues and move on with their lives. She also deals with aspects of love and family, both in terms of foundational closeness and insecure dependence. As a whole, *Transient Species* is a book about finding enduring connections, while simultaneously learning to understand the temporary nature of all things.

TRANSIENT SPECIES

by

Hannah Evangeline Edwards

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro  
2018

Approved by

---

Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by HANNAH EVANGELINE EDWARDS has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Members \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Final Oral Examination

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
THE YETI, AT LAST, JOINS THE ROLLER DERBY .....	1
BENEFICIAL NEMATODES FOR TILLED SOIL AND GARDENING .....	2
ELEGY WITH DAMOCLES AND OFFICE BULB .....	3
SIX METAPHORS FOR SUICIDAL IDEATION .....	4
FOR THE CLAY BEARS YOU MADE IN THE OBSERVATION WARD .....	6
FOR THE DEAD POSSUM I FOUND ON NOVEMBER 6 <sup>TH</sup> .....	7
PRIMEVAL .....	8
TO THE STAIN ON MY MATTRESS .....	9
TICONDEROGA .....	10
ORTOLAN .....	11
MUTAGEN .....	12
AUREATION .....	14
REVENANT .....	15
PANTHEON .....	16
POETRY FOR QUEER WEEK .....	18
LYCANTHROPE .....	20
</EM> .....	22
VINYLDENE .....	24
THE SHARPSHOOTER'S DAUGHTER .....	26
MY THERAPIST ASKS ME TO KEEP A GRATITUDE JOURNAL .....	27

THE KEEPERS OF OLD CITY .....	28
KEEPING UP.....	29
STILL LIFE WITH SUNSHINE AND WAX VEGETABLES .....	30
THE BATTLE HYMN OF DRYER #8 .....	31
THE BOY WHO COUNTED EVERYTHING .....	32
FOR THE BEETLE ON MY WATER GLASS .....	35
FOR MUMTAZ .....	36
PELAGIC .....	37
THE MOST DARING OUTFIT YET.....	38
FIRST, THERE WAS DARKNESS. ....	39
A BLUER ULTRAMARINE .....	40
THE BALTIMORE SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT.....	42
GOD SEES DOG.....	43
EKPHRASIS AS KUDZU JESUS .....	44
THIS IS THE POEM WHERE THE DOG DIES,.....	46

THE YETI, AT LAST, JOINS THE ROLLER DERBY

She is ready.  
She stands with her sisters,  
greased skate to squeaking elbow pad.  
An avalanche on wheels—

she scuffs her new helmet  
in her first engagement  
when she blocks their Jammer  
like a mountain coming down.

She plucked her eyebrows for this,  
though her legs and her teammates'  
fuzz about the same  
and she is relieved to note

at the end of the first jam  
she is not the only one  
stinking through clumps  
of prescription-strength deodorant.

At the buzzersound,  
the discordant whooping of the pack  
in celebration riot  
sounds more like music

than the frozen wolfsong back home.  
and somewhere in the snarl of limbs  
in the dog-pile, she wonders  
if this is what it feels like  
to be warm.

BENEFICIAL NEMATODES FOR TILLED SOIL AND GARDENING

You should not have opened this box.  
Now you will never be rid of me.

I am waiting underneath your fingernails,  
to infest your ants, your grubs, your skin.

I, assassin,  
woundmaker without knife,

without teeth, slippery  
body corpse-silent, I,

unremarkable ambush  
predator, am part of a family business.

We will eat those termites for you. Your aphids  
will watch their children burst open,

our muscle writhing  
and pushing out from inside but be warned:

When I am done here, my cousins are coming for you.  
Heartworm, hookworm.

Pinworms and whipworms too, if you're into  
that kind of thing. We hope you are.

We hope your blood vessels  
are just a little kinky,

that you like it  
when we get under your skin.

ELEGY WITH DAMOCLES AND OFFICE BULB

She said, "I'm afraid the fluorescent light  
is going to fall on me,"  
and I laughed, glancing up

at its cracked shield, the low, grating hum  
"What if the mercury gas leaks out and—"  
I told her she would live forever, then,

like an old Chinese king searching  
for the secret to long life.  
"I don't want to live that long. I don't know

how much more of that noise I can take."  
I looked up, but wasn't wise enough  
to see pointed shards, already falling.



## SIX METAPHORS FOR SUICIDAL IDEATION

1:  
The flowers rot on the windowsill.  
I never expected to be the person who needed

reassurance that they are loved, but it terrifies me  
to think about waking up

without the stench of decaying  
roses. I am too afraid to ask for new ones.

2:  
I want to believe that there is a place  
robots go to pray; They are the only ones with proof  
that there is a maker.

3:  
On good days, I do not pray  
because I have nothing to say to God.

On bad days, I build a shrine  
in the corner of my bedroom  
and pray there is no afterlife,  
because that just sounds exhausting.

4:  
Last week, I discovered that I am allergic  
to kiwi and my antidepressants  
are likely to have a fatal interaction  
with over-the-counter allergy medications.

5:  
I bake little cakes from a box mix and the smell  
of chocolate mingles with the fetid roses.  
I stick my head all the way into the oven  
  
to make sure they are cooked through.

6:  
A friend comes to see how I am doing.  
I offer her cake, say, "I'm still alive." I wait

for her to take a bite. She tells me,  
“These taste heavenly.”

FOR THE CLAY BEARS YOU MADE IN THE OBSERVATION WARD

each the size of your thumbprint  
molded around narrow digits

and then pinched  
and tugged into resemblance

you're shrugging  
*they won't let me have real sculpting tools*

in the bears' hollow undersides  
your loops and whorls

left the clay not quite smooth  
*I have to use my hands*

I marvel to think I might have lost them  
the bears are the purple-blue

of your bruises  
when I ask if you chose the color

you shake your head  
each fleck of ear

and nose tiny  
already crumbling

and I worry their faint mouth  
lines carved with the edge

of your fingernail might crack  
and vanish into the drying animals too

FOR THE DEAD POSSUM I FOUND ON NOVEMBER 6<sup>TH</sup>

You were a chicken joke  
with no punchline:  
your little feet laid out, reaching  
for the other side. Your fur

was darker than most,  
body rimed with black  
like you knew you would end  
up on the asphalt.  
I couldn't bear the concavity  
of your little body,

how soft I imagined your fur, The tenderness  
with which your babies—I imagine them  
black as you, little wraiths haunting  
your favorite garbage bins—must have clung  
to you, nuzzled

at your breast, and your corpse  
reminded me of this morning, when  
a gunman opened fire  
in a Texas church and I  
didn't feel anything at all.

## PRIMEVAL

We were never bred to hunt, but our jaws have always ached to tear open one another's throats. We are full of instincts we can't lose, even if we leave them in the supermarket, pretend to drop them between

thin-sliced pork chops and chicken strips, already fried. Still, they crawl their way out of refrigerators and plastic packages until we are snapping, restless in the winter quiet, and we have to get away. We hunt

for a god primal as we are. We are hunt for a place to rest, to mix blood and berry in a den that will save the memory of our clawed fingerprints.

There is a light on when we arrive and it is a relief we can still see one another even here, see the edges where we turn back, drop scale and teeth.

Where we bring soft bodies together, become the tenderest animals.

TO THE STAIN ON MY MATTRESS

You make me look cool and approachable  
Like the kind of person who could  
say “I have never once panicked and murdered  
a prostitute” but not really mean it.

You’re a great conversation starter,  
Like, am I (a) the kind of person  
who murders sex workers or  
(b) the kind of person who spills  
a lot of pomegranate tea, and (c)

which of those options is more intriguing?  
You know I’m happy to be anything  
they want. Even before you,  
I had a difficult relationship with the truth.

I hid candy under a different, smaller mattress  
Romance novels and cheap vibrators  
under a different, bigger one.  
Once I even—can I tell you this?

We’ve been sleeping together so long.  
I’m not sure what the line is anymore  
for this kind of intimacy. Once I hollowed  
out a Bible and filled it with lube and spare

batteries. It’s still in my parents’ house  
somewhere. A confessional waiting  
to be opened. Anticipating the moment it can seep  
out into the nearest body, thinking, always thinking,  
how nothing will be the same after it spreads



ORTOLAN

The gods are always hungry  
for me. They want to eat  
my body, leave greasy  
lip-prints on my marrowless  
bones.

I pluck out my eyes  
with two taloned thumbs.  
They feel like balls of wax  
in my hands. I shape  
the balls of wax in my hands  
into two feathers

and hope they will lift  
me towards the sun.  
They can't lift my body  
towards the sun;  
I have fed too fat

on millet seed  
and the drippings  
from the ones who came before.

They will drown me  
in an ocean of Armagnac  
like the ones who came  
before and I will melt  
at daybreak with the wax  
feathers in my hands.



MUTAGEN

*Angry, and half in love with her, and  
tremendously sorry, I turned away. –  
The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald*

I want to escape  
my breasts. I want to escape  
my own shirt. I want her  
hands to be a size  
that fits me. I would like  
her body to be the size  
of a moon. I want  
to orbit around her until gravity  
brings me to be an inevitable  
blemish on her surface. They call  
the basin on the moon  
Tranquility. It is on the side  
that will never face  
the sun.

I know that I punched her  
and stole one of her teeth,  
but when I saw her, I knew  
I had to have one of her bones.  
I had to have a piece of her to hold  
onto.

It would be easier if I could sully  
her.

I pressed her fingers into my  
bruise  
and let the blood  
surround

her like a chrysalis. She emerged  
whole, coated  
in clear lymph  
and green light.

We have celestial bodies.  
Or at least, I asked her one  
time and she said she might  
believe in angels. The dead  
are curled heavy in her irises  
and I think sometimes I see her  
writing in a book  
of my sins. It is lighter  
than it ought to be.

AUREATION

I made thread to eat.  
Nothing smoother  
than fibers under

a motionless hand. He  
told me with hands  
like that I could spin

flax into gold. He  
told me with hands  
like that I could get

into a lot of trouble  
this late at night all alone  
without even a name

to call out to. He  
stole me. Kept me  
locked in my own house.

Took off Mama's necklace,  
her earrings, my clothes.  
He wanted me to touch him

with my impossible hands,  
wanted me to say his name  
like praise there in a room

full of wheel and straw.  
I waited until he was sleeping  
pulled slowly at the fine thread

on the wheel. I struck a match,  
watched the peeling floorboards,  
the skeletons of wicker furniture,

the wheel and straw all turn  
to gold. I packed in silence.  
I never said his name.

REVENANT

The cardinal hits  
my living room window  
and leaves behind a ghost  
of feathers and dandruff,  
wings outstretched  
like fingers on a hand.

She must have seen the light  
inside, felt the mechanical warmth  
of a heating system I can't share,  
and thought it better  
than being alone.

She knocks again, a loud crack  
against the weather-proof panes.  
This time, she falls limp  
as an angel in the virgin  
snowdrift outside my house.  
I pull my boots on.

I pick the cardinal up with the snow  
beneath, her downy neck snapped  
and dangling, and put her brown-red  
body back into the earth.

I am alone when I return  
from her funeral service,  
staring at the ghost  
outside my living room window,  
her wings outstretched  
like fingers on a hand.

## PANTHEON

*“When you boil it all down, we have three overlapping, yet ill-fitting options for our daughters: virgin, mother, and whore.”*

I.

I am full  
of milk and honey. I am stuffed  
with other people's bones.

Every day, I take them  
to the mill and make flowers  
until My arms give out.

There are only five gravestones left  
without My name on them.

II.

When they ran out of wood  
they came for the haystacks.  
burnt them until My needles

were the only things left.  
Until the men needed something else  
to keep themselves warm.

It is strange to feel guilty  
for not being more flammable.

III.

I am the thing of iron and storms,  
the jingle of tack and the hull  
of their war ships.

I am the sound men make  
when they fall overboard.  
My compass

will always reach north; no man can sink  
what is already drowned.

IV.

I am the goddess of thorns without petals.

I am not beautiful  
and there will be no honey,

but o Me, o heaven above,  
when the centuries  
have dried My mouth

to soil and rock,  
men will still feel My teeth.

POETRY FOR QUEER WEEK

Hello everyone, and welcome  
to the Queer Week nautical safari!  
Come see the queers! Wild  
and unbridled in their natural habitat!

They may have locking jaws,  
razor sharp teeth, and a life expectancy  
twenty years shorter than ours,  
but their hearts beat just the same.

Be sure to check your scuba gear  
and lock yourself firmly in the queer cage  
before our descent. Allied tours Ltd.  
is not responsible for your worldview  
being damaged.

On your left, you'll see  
a specimen I like  
to call our "model minority"  
He's thin, white, athletic, and basically

almost heterosexual except  
for the gay part. He would love  
to answer your questions

on his boyfriend his coming out his  
sex life your sex life, and of course  
your ass looks great in those pants.  
Girl, you're really working it!

Now, at first glance, the butch lesbian  
over here can be a little intimidating,  
but she would be pleased as punch  
to talk to your man about eating pussy.

She doesn't like sports though, so beyond that  
they might not have a lot in common.

Oh, I'm so sorry for your inconvenience,  
but this part of the tour is closed.  
See, our trans man hasn't had The Surgery

and we at Allied Tours wouldn't want  
anyone to get confused.

Now that we're done,  
stop by the gift shop on the way out  
for your free souvenir T shirt!  
We are all human  
in hand-lettered rainbow cursive.

And as you disembark, remember.  
Queers: they're just like us regular people!



LYCANTHROPE

She follows instructions. She starches  
her blue uniform dress and always sits  
with the hem well past her knees. She does not venture  
outside the Perimeter with its hydraulic doors  
its identity cards its laser grids—green lines cutting up the stars  
in the nighttime like veins. Like safety nets. Like razor wires.

They keep the wolves outside  
waiting, maybe baying, maybe fucking,  
dog-sweat oozing, panting tongues lolling  
on the concrete. It is safe inside the Perimeter.

She tiptoes home from the Academy  
where they teach in well-guarded silence  
what terrible things wolves can do  
to little girls who don't follow instructions.  
*There are wolves in the alleyways, little girl.*  
*More in the woods, the skyscraping trees. Wolves,*

*maybe breathing, maybe lapping*  
*at the concrete. Their claws can rip*  
*a dress clean off you. She dares*  
not go outside to check.

but sometimes she dreams that she slips  
past the hydraulic doors with their identity cards and  
she meets the wolves outside the laser grid  
and its star-massacre, beneath the skyscraped trees,

maybe her feet are claws pressed against the concrete  
and perhaps her tongue drips  
from her head and maybe she looks up  
to see stars in a lineless sky and howls.

But then it is morning again, then she starches  
her blue uniform and straightens  
its long hem and hurries past the Perimeter  
and she hopes today is not the day she gets caught

looking outside, looking into alleyways,  
breathing in the smell

of the trees, hopes when she sees nothing  
no one notices  
her practiced exhale of relief goes on  
for just a little too long.

</EM>

<!DOCTYPE Hymn>

<Hymnal>

<head>

<title>They held God's funeral</title>

on the Saturday after

He died.

</head>

<body> They had long since known

He was terminal.

<h1>His first Son asked him if He was afraid to return  
to the place from whence He came. God said no. God  
said: </h1>

<blockquote>I knew it was over when they shot  
silicon into their brains, when they discovered  
that binary necessitates the existence of more  
than one (1) Answer. They began making up  
their own Answers, began filling their hearts  
with code, began filling their fingers with  
alphanumeric clicks began  
upload/input/return.

Except they never return.

Not anymore. Now it's called something else—  
something wire-shiny something blazing with  
the bitten Apple— of course it is. They had one  
bite and they think they know everything.  
They don't return.

Not anymore. I don't expect them to return.

The mark of a good parent is having children  
who can do without Him:  
Children who press On.  
Press forwards. Press  
Enter.

Enter.

Enter.

</blockquote>

</body>

</hymn>

</amen>

## VINYLIDENE

*Although only a transient species, vinylidenes are often found in organometallics as permanent determiners of reactivity.*

A lot of people died this year.  
I checked the statistics,  
it's not just my imagination.

(Fifty thousand suicides, and  
more than half a million  
from cancer alone.)

Like my mother's best friend  
Michelle, who told  
me I would be perfect

at whatever I finally decided on,  
like my father's best friend  
Bracey, who told

me to always keep a knife  
inside my pocket  
because the world was an imperfect

place. He taught my father  
to make teriyaki sauce with bourbon  
my father taught me to make

even the sweetest things burn,  
like how it's easy to hear  
that everyone you have ever loved

(who has ever loved you) is going  
to die, some of them painfully,  
in a sermon or anatomy textbook

but it's harder when they took  
you to the grocery store,  
when you stood next to them

in the international aisle  
while they wavered

between two brands of tortilla,

a somber hush falling along the tins  
of oil-packed tuna, the canned yams,  
like they knew (you were too young

to understand) this  
was only a temporary stop  
between work and home.

THE SHARPSHOOTER'S DAUGHTER

I never held a real gun  
    only cold aluminum BBs poured  
into warm plastic and wood  
the afternoon we shot paper targets  
and old soda cans the same night  
my mother taught me to drink coffee  
when I couldn't sleep to stop fighting  
my faulty body the frayed  
nervous system I inherited  
    from her the rifle was perched  
upright between my knees  
when she warned me not to point  
a gun at anything I wasn't willing  
to kill not even if the safety  
was still on the rifle was heavy  
against my forearm when she showed me  
how to lay in prone  
until my arms went numb  
    how it was the only way to stop  
my hands from shaking  
when I took aim the rifle was snug  
against my shoulder when she told me  
about the boy on the movie set  
    who put a gun  
full of blanks in his mouth  
for a joke but the kickback was still enough  
    to blow him away.

## MY THERAPIST ASKS ME TO KEEP A GRATITUDE JOURNAL

isn't it nice that I can write for hours without stopping to eat  
or drink and since my lover's promotion we can afford takeout  
every two weeks isn't it nice that there are fake flowers  
for those of us who can't keep the real ones alive  
that my life is probably more enjoyable than Kurt Vonnegut's  
that my hands only shake before I've taken my medication  
that if I really did kill myself I know at least five people  
who would really miss me isn't it nice that my panic attacks  
no longer come every single night that butter is spreadable  
after I forget it on the counter that I've learned never  
to start drinking or singing alone  
my professor calls me an obsessive poet my therapist  
calls me a maladaptive daydreamer but isn't it nice  
to think that somewhere in America there is a home  
where people are laughing and no one's coffee ever goes cold



## THE KEEPERS OF OLD CITY

The goats at the cemetery mow the lawn.  
They bite invading greenery back  
from the oldest resting places.

The goats at the cemetery do not have time for you.  
They only like the people who lie still enough to grow  
grass and vines, honeysuckle sweet from a ribcage

The goats at the cemetery have tombstones in their eyeballs.  
They see the faces of grave markers like incisors,  
identities ground off by ice and rain and time

The goats at the cemetery know the missing names  
of the old men, the bony prostitutes, the confederate soldiers.  
They call them Crunch, call them Daisy, call them Dandelion Flower

The goats at the cemetery pull lips back from snaggleteeth, let out  
echoes of words that rotted in molars and jawbones:  
“We live here. We always have.”

## KEEPING UP

The Joneses have a new car  
again. The Joneses got a new car  
last year, too. The car's value  
is inversely proportional

to that of their bed. Mr. Jones  
is a hedge fund manager;  
a lot of things about him  
are inversely proportional.

Mrs. Jones likes to say  
she is a full time wife  
and mother. The cars  
hold no evidence of children.

Once, there was a Cheerio  
that fell behind the driver's seat  
but that was a mistake—  
a false positive. They

sold that car right away,  
like they were afraid  
it would grow Legos, or ask  
if they were there yet

when they obviously  
hadn't arrived.

STILL LIFE WITH SUNSHINE AND WAX VEGETABLES

It was the height of summer;  
they should have expected it.

The way the windows bowed just slightly,  
becoming a Chekhovian magnifying glass

loaded and waiting to fire,  
its aim heedless of the quiet mastery

that made them, the way their bodies  
were formed with no mold or pattern,

only colored wax and perfect  
memories of harvest time.

THE BATTLE HYMN OF DRYER #8

O great clattering machination of sunshine,  
O galumphing combatant in the war on wet,  
O soldier. You are brave indeed.

Scarf-scarred, jean-jacket hard,  
you seal unmentionables  
in a maw of gaping rubber-glass lips,

never to be spoken of, lest they frighten  
new recruits. Rhythmic silence  
of sock-bullets and machine hums. Despite

all of your medals, metals  
your great grates and heaving lungs,  
brass-plastic buttons scratched  
beyond repairing  
to uniform shine, you never blow hot air.

You tumble, fall, rise  
to fight your terrible foes:

the gasping lint-filter fire-hazard,  
the matched sock,  
the great heaving thumpalump  
of your own hour-long heart.

And though "Busted P.O.S."  
is the only inscription on your sticky-note  
tombstone, you know,  
O General:

Sometimes, in a war zone,  
the best you can do is be in motion  
and look like you're working.

THE BOY WHO COUNTED EVERYTHING

1

It started with the bees, see  
He didn't like that they were all the same. He started naming them,  
learned each one by heart. Cried  
when the one he called Louise got crushed  
by the honey frame. We pulled her corpse  
out in a fragrant smear of yellow and black.

The nice thing about a bee funeral  
is they bring their own flowers. The kid  
looked like a field of poppies after he buried her  
and all the sisters who died  
when they pulled out their own guts with their stings.  
He was never the same after that.

Silent, in a queer kind of way. Like he wanted us to forget  
or think we imagined him.  
Maybe we did. He left us  
a note, though. It smelled like clover  
and said one day he'd come back.

2

How can you describe  
the way a fish moves in water,  
why the silver flash  
means so much to you,

the way it feels to pull in  
a wrenching line,  
nature struggling against  
your grasp?

The boy wasn't interested  
in that. He wanted to know  
what to call my catch--  
trout, a few walleye  
didn't satisfy him.

I remember laughing  
when I asked if he wanted names  
and family trees

or if he wanted to give my rod  
a spin.

How can you describe  
watching him sink  
beneath the surface  
when you are just a little bit  
too far away

3  
He had the smallest hands  
I cradled them as gently as I knew how  
when I took his fingerprints  
not my youngest body, perhaps,  
but the youngest John Doe.

I filed him away with the others,  
a dozen or so in the bottom section,  
rows of morgue drawers with no names,  
only numbers, and waited  
for someone to come for him.

He was lucky: thumbprints  
listed in a database designed  
to help lost children home again.  
the boy's parents refused to leave town  
until they had identified them all  
said their son would have wanted it like that.  
His body waited

six months in my refrigerator  
while each day they brought birth  
certificates, dental records  
and high school almanacs and slowly,

so slowly, the names  
of the other drawers came back .

4  
I've never seen a funeral so well attended.  
I've never seen the sky so blue.

I've never seen so many strangers  
in one place,  
so many flowers in each pew.

FOR THE BEETLE ON MY WATER GLASS

It was dark when I swallowed you.  
You felt large as a church to me,  
with your steel spire legs, eyes full  
of stained glass.

Your steepled wings beat  
bellsongs inside my throat.  
In truth, you were so small. My tongue  
too big to be your pew.

I named you Jonah.  
The way you struggled  
against my body, a prayer  
in unfolded carapace.

I retched, and you slipped free.  
Reborn on damp wings, aching and blue.



FOR MUMTAZ

*"The intimacy, deep affection, attention and favour which His Majesty had for the Cradle of Excellence Mumtaz Mahal exceeded by a thousand times what he felt for any other."*

—Iqbal Namah-e-Jahangiri, historian to Shah Jahan Mahal

O you who have followed me  
through war and grief,  
who will now press bandages  
to the new wound  
inside my ribcage?

We have made thirteen children--  
copies of your eyes,  
your smile,  
but it is not enough.  
I must rebuild you.

People and heavenly bodies combust  
and die like insects,  
but you, my Jewel,  
I will construct your face to stand  
for eternity.

I will arrange the cyprus and the fruit;  
the paradise rivers  
of water, of milk, of honey, of wine.  
Each morning you will bloom  
fragrant in my desolation.

Each night,  
the sunset will bring  
a blush to your stony skin  
eons after the rise  
of a different sun.

And when at last I rest  
beside you in the nighttime  
of your marble heart,  
I will never again  
have need of the stars.

PELAGIC

*After Gifford Beal's "Launching the Boat"*

It's real work. The honest kind.

Like God intended—all day, hauling  
boats, hauling nets. Sliding knife

between gills and skin; it's them

or you out here, and only one deserves  
to eat. Gutting them with salt-roughened

hands. Proving you're worth

the weight of silver  
scales and bones you throw back.

## THE MOST DARING OUTFIT YET

I am reading the news and I don't understand why men care about Kim Kardashian. I am watching

the television and I don't understand why women want to be Kim Kardashian. I want to be Kim Kardashian's

left boot. I want to be autumnal and chunky at the heel. I want to have brassy buckles to compliment Kim Kardashian's bronzed

skin. I want to be a bold statement that no one understands. I want my voice to come

from a suede tongue soft against Kim Kardashian's skin. I already have a foot in my mouth.

I want to know that someone made me with an awl and the secret parts of animals. I want Kim Kardashian

to lift me forwards and shine all the hardest parts of me. I want to spoon my mate in a mansion's secret closet and never

be alone. I think Kim Kardashian wants to be alone, but I want to be Kim Kardashian's

left boot. When she takes me out everyone will see me. When she takes me out people will call me beautiful

and if I am not beautiful it will not be my fault. and if I am not beautiful, it will be because Kim Kardashian picked me.

and if I am not beautiful, everyone will still want to look at me.

FIRST, THERE WAS DARKNESS.

It didn't last, of course.  
Eventually, there was a hand  
on the light switch--  
its cherry ions not diffuse

enough to forgive  
the curve of her sagging  
breast, the pockmarks  
near his flaccid

cheekbones, the yellow  
tinge of teeth curling  
around the reassurances  
stuck in her mouth--

but not then. Not yet.  
First, there was darkness.

A BLUER ULTRAMARINE

What if we were dangerous pirates  
and stole everything we needed from the king  
and slept in hammocks, rocking  
weightless in the starlight?

Would we love the feel of dirks and swaying  
rigging beneath our calloused hands,  
the way the tar sticks to our bare feet  
even after they dangle in the water or

would we then spend our nights dreaming  
of going somewhere colder  
than the Caribbean  
for winter, laying down  
our pistols and scabbards  
so I could turn to you and say,

“Dear God.  
At least we aren't in  
paradise.”

Would we discuss  
what we would do if we never  
spent time in the crow's nest  
and didn't have to eat our limes?

Comfort ourselves with the thought  
of being students at Cambridge,  
secure in our sweaters and motionless beds,  
feeling fall coming on with a vengeance?

Think of how happy we'd be, worrying  
only of Latin, and never putting our geography  
lessons into practice.

What would we do if they caught us?

Ran us down  
in a faster sloop or destroyed our ship  
with cannon fire until the chain-shot  
was looped around our lungs.

Would we plead with them?

Beg for mercy, for our legs to buckle  
on solid ground and our throats  
to gulp the saltless air?

Become citizens and students;  
reformed after all? Or would we stand proud  
and say thanks,  
but we'd prefer not to be rehabilitated.

If they hanged us at dawn  
on a Monday morning,  
our defiant noses pointed north  
to smell the ocean,  
would that make us happy  
at all?

THE BALTIMORE SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT

I know that it's mostly shit,  
but at night they turn on  
LEDs covering the tanks' frail  
helix staircases, lighting  
a path so even from down  
here, we can climb to the stars.

GOD SEES DOG

I got up on the wrong side  
of the Old Testament today

and I was ready  
for retirement.

The rains were primed—  
set to just after antediluvian.

I had held with those that favored fire.  
There were comets the size of dinosaurs.

But when I looked down  
to aim my itchy trigger finger,

there you were. Bringing back  
a stick, even though

sometimes, she pretended to throw it  
just to laugh at you.



EKPHRASIS AS KUDZU JESUS

I have always clung  
to things that are bad for me  
and now I have fashioned these power  
lines from wire to cross  
to holy bones The cars

don't stop to admire them when they pass  
me though nor the trains that thunder  
by in neat rows like ducklings made of iron

I think they know if they stopped  
I would want to touch them  
I think they know how lonely

I am here  
How lonely I was here before you

Step closer now please reach  
for the tender leaves beneath  
my waist feel  
how they tremble in the air for you  
the way you are the most electric thing  
they know how they know I want

to touch cling  
until I smother you  
This is the only part of my body that  
can make its way down  
to you but understand  
I am always reaching for you

I want you to feel my body wet  
and green each atom  
a charged current pulling  
air from your lungs replacing  
it with my own

THIS IS THE POEM WHERE THE DOG DIES,

where Laika has her last howl at the moon,  
closer than anyone has ever been before  
And she realizes they didn't name her Sputnik  
because travelers are meant to come home,

where Old Yeller knows that his eyes are failing  
and that it is awfully dark here in this shed  
And he waits patiently for the horrible, deafening  
light. This is a poem where my father cries at the end

of Where the Red Fern Grows,  
where the black poodle from his childhood still hangs  
over his heart like the smell of something burning  
Where he pays the vet over and over

to treat our whippet's cancer, though the tumor comes back  
each year, faster and angrier than the last.  
This is the poem where I stop  
before the last line, before I can't hear

my dog's nails clacking on the hardwood,  
before the tumor becomes inoperable,  
before I learn it is possible to break my father's