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Sequent Introduction

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

SEQUENT INTRODUCTION

By

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To KP, MP, RT, JJ, RG, BP,
and all the other propositions
on whose strength the soundness
of my conclusion rests.

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ABSTRACT

Sequent Introduction is a rejection of Richard Rorty's assertion that traditional philosophical problems are no longer of use. This text is strong poetry, introducing new vocabularies and metaphors to redescribe traditional philosophical problems and renew their usefulness for contemporary pragmatists. Relying heavily on both form as well as content, to invoke formal rhetorical and analytical traditions, this thesis will borrow its form from formal symbolic logic. The arc of the work will imitate a symbolic logic problem by using the theme of sequent introduction: if one has a given problem or sequent that has already been proven, one can introduce that sequent into the problem provided there is an equal substitution of variables. That sequent then becomes a unique but applicable rule to "shortcut" an excessively long proof. The work is divided into five sections that re-interrogate traditional philosophical problems: eudaimonia, or happiness; aletheia, or truth; flesh; It, or the Other; and finally Logos, or rationality. As the individual poems within each section test, play with, and offer potential solutions to that section's primary concern, the sections themselves offer a serious consideration of the value of the traditional philosophical question at hand. As a result, each short section functions on its own as a short completed logic problem. Though the sections are substantially different in both form as well as content, each section is then a proven sequent, which, when used in context with the other sections, constructs a positive answer to the problem of whether traditional philosophical problems can be remade useful.

EUDAIMONIA

Revenge on Creon

Aristotle says that anger means you want conspicuous revenge
for a conspicuously unjustified slight towards yourself
or your friends. To be angry is to be able to name the one you hate.

Your name is Creon, and I am waiting for you to die.

You taught your women that we do not deserve
anger. Grandma replaced it with coffee and cake,
and now we are all fat.

(Her constant apologies are a dialogue;
we've all learned to hear your lines.)

Ma replaced it with guilt, and now we are all
in never-ending debt.

(Your narrowed eyes burn in her face. No matter
how good her makeup is, she hates her reflection.)

I replaced it with silence, so I rush around running
other people's errands—I have none of my own.

(I no longer celebrate my birthday;
the waste of time and money is shameful.)

Years of Old Golds have given you colon cancer,
the sediment filtering through your throat and stomach
to settle in your deepest self, changing it from living flesh
to the old road alligators left dead on the highway.
Day after day you lie in your bed, every rotting detail
exposed in the hospital's fluorescent glare.

(On hearing your prognosis, your new wife
looked at you with wet eyes and wailed, "What's
going to happen to me?" And so you spent
the first five minutes of your death comforting her.

I'm sure you remember that my aunt and I,
we're both certified nurse's aides. That you
trained Ma to be dutiful and responsible above all.
That Grandma was a genuine 1950s housewife—
instantly attentive to her family's needs.)

You ooze blood onto the white blanket;
I find your slow decay immensely satisfying,
though you'd never hear me say it.

Creon Gets a Chest Tube

Ma doesn't care if I go to Creon's funeral or not.

She loved her own grandmother desperately,
but didn't attend her death. Work takes precedence.

Creon will die in a few weeks—the doctors have started
a countdown, can only drain the rotting fluid away from his body.

I am thirteen hundred miles away—in Florida.

In some ways, I want to go to the funeral,
sit in the pew and stare at his corpse, this final act of hurt.

It's getting cold back home now, October settling
into the broken corn stalks. I miss my black coat,
the cuffs and collar exploding with fake fur, throwing
shrapnel through the streets of that farm town.

I went to the doctor today too.

I have a syndrome. My body has forgotten
how to make tears. Bruises like smudged eyeliner swell
the tender inner flesh where my knuckles press all day long.
I bought a tiny bottle of false tears, pronounced "genteel."
Preservative free.

The little bottle goes everywhere in my pants pocket now;
drops are less painful to the abraded flesh
at body temperature. Sitting in Creon's cold church,
they'd stay in my purse, tightly capped.

My friends' southern drawls cling in my hair like cigarette smoke,
the smoke that clotted Creon's innards,
the smoke that is crisp and buttery
in my own throat on desperate winter days in Minnesota.

Creon at High Noon

I: Arrested

You were the Lincoln county sheriff, had a white Bronco, gun, and badge.

My cousin rode shotgun. Chad was the real deal, the golden-haired boy, striking as I look at him in photographs, sun-bleached hair, tanned skin, and dark eyes galvanizing. Sometimes you let Chad hold your gun so he could pretend to shoot trees and fence posts. You kept count of dead bad guys.

Pale, dark-haired, and spectacled, clearly I was the villain. One day while you were watching football, Chad and I stuck a nail file in a light socket. Shorted the whole house. You grabbed me by the wrist, made Chad follow.

Grandma was at Pearl's, so you dragged us to jail. You threw us in a cell, cursing; said you'd let us out when the game was over. I looped my elbows and knees over the crosspieces, hung there—I watched so much TV that I couldn't believe the bars didn't give. Chad spent the time flipping cars off.

You were all the law there was in those parts, all the law I could imagine. When Grandma came to break us out we sobbed. I imagined Ma wasting away with grief at the thought of her daughter, the criminal. I wondered if other people would be able to tell, if my record would show on my skin.

II: Claim Jumping

I loved gold dirt, a yellow clay Chad and I mined in the garden. It ran in small veins about a foot deep. We spent all day collecting it in a sand pail, using dinner forks to flake the gold out of the ground.

It ran thickest by the garage. Grandma had dug out a row of old hedges with the intention of planting flowers. At some point, someone drained a car out there, so it stayed bare. We weren't allowed to dig there, and the lubricated dirt was silkier for the breaking of the law.

When you got done with the day's work, you walked past us, and if we had gold dirt, you'd buy some for a nickel. We took the nickels over to the gas station and bought penny candy. Chad took delight in swindling you—we gave the stuff away to Grandma. I tried not to think about it.

One day I saw you drop the dirt in a bush before you walked in the house. Your nickel was a gift in my palm—a warm little lizard, quick and rare. This is the only time I can remember you loving anyone.

III: Snakebite

Minnesota politeness is a sliding scale. Loved ones hear *thank you* less often. Actions become all. So of course when you gave me a Christmas gift last year I snapped to parade rest and thanked you properly, formally.

In retaliation you made me thank your new wife, drew her children's attention to me. You sat, coiled deep in the sandy upholstery of your Lay-Z-Boy, cancer breath rattling in your chest. I stood still and moved carefully.

Grandma asked me to come home quickly—this family visit to Creon's left her alone. She was my lasso from heaven, pulling me out of the pit.

I began to excuse myself. I must have grabbed my coat too quickly, because you suddenly lashed out, tagged me with "Great. Have a nice life." You sank back into the recliner, eyed me coldly as I grabbed your fifty dollars and ran into the snow. The punctures left by those barbs are the last marks you left on me, but I can't quite get your venom out of my blood.

IV: Death Valley, October 26, 2005

This last year has been a shootout, Creon, and both of our hats are black. You've fallen in the dirt, clutching your wound. I didn't hear the final rattle, but I'm standing over you now, watching your red blood blacken in the sun.

You are dead today, and I imagine your ghost coming to haunt me, whistling in the corners of my apartment, bringing in rain and rot.

I see you in us. Your glare burns from behind Ma's. Your sneer whips out rough-edged through Grandma's. Your bones may be left to bleach, but final revenge is yours—I am becoming you; you know I'll never leave this valley.

Son of Creon

Chantix. Sings sweet dopamine
lullabies to your brain better than
Wellbutrin. Stales the smoke
in your mouth and throat even better
than watching your father rot
from the inside out. Obsessively healthy
routine of pop, pop replaces
obsessively deadly routine of strike, breathe.

You're a tiny empire, but not
in the Roman way. You're a Viking,
loot and pillage, carry the treasure home.
You're a dragon, stockpile, and sit smoking
on heaps of gold and garbage. Pirate
copies from Netflix. Stock your lumberyard.
Buy the house across the street and cram
it full of musty couches and old baseball
cards. Squirrel away the car your son put in the lake.

If you give up the smoke, will you
have to give up the gold too? One can only
loot with fiery wrath. Somehow, "Give us
your daughters or we'll be forced to go away
empty-handed" isn't as threatening as you
like to seem. I can't imagine you cooled.
Placid. But this new you, this soothed you,
this you whose brain gets no pleasure
from something you've known all your life—
how will I find you in Pfizer's monastery,
swinging your unlit censer with the other penitents,
chanting the medicinal Mass to make your body clean?

Polish Potatoes

“The woman who sold me the potatoes was from Poland; she was someone
out of my childhood...”
Philip Levine, “The Simple Truth”

Or perhaps out of my blood’s past, the gritty
earth history that lies beneath my fingernails
and in the inner structures of my hip
joints. She is Polish Great-grandma,
choosing the newest potatoes
washed in the velvet of their fresh dirt,
collecting them with a smooth plucking
twist of calloused fingers. Great-grandma
cooked potatoes every day, and
with so much starch in her kitchen,
it was always possible that she, too,
would have become a stiff,
collared woman. But she was warm
and rich as a long summer day filled
with dust motes and the cool shadows
of elm leaves. This woman
with pie-crust hands who wiped flour
in long white slaps on the side of her apron
knew about butter and sweet milk gravy, knew
the best way to eat potatoes when you’ve
eaten them every day for the past lifetime.
Solid and brown coming up from the dirt,
bitter with earthy peels and the starch
as yet unsweetened by heat, Great-grandma
understood potatoes as she understood
her children, turning up at the end of a tired day
sun-brown and needing a hot bath
to turn their flesh clean and sweet.
Her sleeves gathered in soft cotton wrinkles
around her elbows, Great-grandma would sigh,
cluck her tongue, and heat water.

Having Served Her Generation, by the Will of God, She Fell Asleep
-from Aunt Milly Macon's grave, died Aug. 13, 1889

I am shaving a man's head so he can be
Hunter S. Thompson for Halloween.
He is already tired from drinking;
his head bends to my side
while I pull the razor against
his scalp. My students

are in the graveyard today. Florida's
afternoon oils their smooth limbs
as they hunch over notebooks,
gravestones and as we write charming
eulogies about the dust below us
and they get drained and frustrated

because the razor refuses to slide smoothly
over his hair's thick stubble. I feel
the familiar catch as the steel poises
to slip into the skin and I stop, hold
his skull, delicate as an egg blown hollow
for Easter, whisk the razor through water

and I press again, a relentless benediction
all of us both want and need and yet don't,
and with luck I won't press too hard, won't
drop anyone and have to watch the broken
fragments scatter and sift deep
into the cemetery's browning grass.

The Bread of Heaven

I cannot believe that I am sitting here
thinking of such tedious things as
the supermarket where I need to buy
a pound of butter and a pack of cigarettes,
and thinking about needing to go
to the little bookstore whose hours are flexible
and thus difficult to determine, wondering
if I should stop at Harry's for a gin and tonic
on my way home or just go get my car
and my cigarettes and butter now, and I am
thinking this and slowly surfacing away from
Ashbery's *Selected Poems* that was supposed
to be the book that capped and spanned
his career in the eighties until he wrote
something like fifteen more books in the nineties,

not when
I am twenty-five

and outside this goddamned office
the world is broken wide as an egg
spilling out its rich Florida sun,
not when my hair is cut short and haphazardly
as though I've just gotten out of some bed,
thrown on this tight t-shirt
and flown across the world,
(screaming against the Earth's rotation,
chasing the violent splinters of unending dawn;)
all eyes and hips and fingers,
everything reaching for anything I can get,
and here I am, pulling you, me, this poem
out of everything except the box of cigarettes
and into a morning-colored life.

Shavasana

“Your only job now is to breathe,” Raquel says,
and unexpectedly the skin around my eyes
and nose is hot, is tight. Corpses don’t cry.
My eyelids drain to my sinus cavities where fluid
drips thickly into the back of my throat.
The yoga mat feels sticky under my palms.

I know I shouldn’t care but I can’t help competing
with people in class. Flexibility is my only
bodily virtue and so it matters deeply that all
the thin eighteen-year-olds in downward dog
teeter on their fingers and toes, while my palms
and heels are firmly planted on the floor. That in
forward bend they struggle to touch the mat
while my forehead can rest against my shins.
My warrior is a hell of a lot prouder than theirs,
with right angles at the knee and high-floating
hands. I win. My prize is that I do bad yoga.

“You could at least try,” Jacob Swanson says,
as the volleyball hits the ground a few feet
to my left. I don’t tell him that I don’t know
where it is—if I look up and it hits me, it’ll ram
my glasses into my face. The other kids
in gym instinctively know how to do this;
their forearms are all pink from contact
with the ball. Mine are still pasty and fat.

The little boy next door was named Andrew,
and though he was six and I was ten we played
together—the only kids in the neighborhood
that didn’t speak Spanish. The day we blew up
his inflatable kiddie pool, I splashed some dead grass
in his eye. When he ran inside, I stood there waiting
until his mom came out and screamed at me, “What
the hell’s wrong with you? Get out! Don’t touch
my kid!” I stared at my fat gut, round and guilty under
the purple lycra. Eventually, Andrew’s dad came
and helped me pour the pool water out. He didn’t
say anything to me. I think his wife told him not to.

About five years later, Andrew sent me a short
letter and fifteen cents. The letter said the money
was for the paper fan he broke. It was one of those

cheap metal folding things you get at carnivals,
and I had long since forgotten how it died,
though I remembered the object itself. I often
wonder if he remembers getting grass in his
eye. The return address was blurred out,
but there was an Arizona postmark. I couldn't
write him back. I lost the fifteen cents.

“You love to be judged,” Bailey says.

He's not entirely wrong; there's
a certain comfort in knowing how
to apologize for oneself. He later says
that he's sorry, which is true, and that
he didn't mean it, which is a lie. I know
it's true because my mother's said it, too,
and independent corroboration is persuasive.

Once, at a speech competition, I made it
to final round. Standing onstage at awards,
I got nervous and I forgot where I was so
I hiked up my pantyhose and promptly put
a big run in them. I stayed in speech for
four years. Adding it up, I think I have fifty
of those “You almost made it” ribbons.

“There's less of you every time I see you,” Becky says.

Weight is identity and so sixty-five pounds
of that self has disappeared—and I'm glad
to see me gone. I'm making denim quilts
out of the old pants which no longer fit
and which have big holes in the thighs
that have been patched and repatched
because it's hard for a fat girl to find pants
that fit at all and so she keeps them past
their expiration date. There's a sweet
viciousness in a quilter's rotary cutter.

I've always loved the Nintendo character Boo:
round, white, insubstantial. I love his beady
little eyes, his long wicked fangs, the way he covers
his face with his tiny arm stubs when he's scared.
He's a dollop of sweet whipped cream with a curl
for a tail, a dust bunny hiding under the bed, a whistle
of steam fleeing my black kettle. It's hard to tell
where Boo is standing when he plays tennis
or baseball, his sneaky hook lets him curve around

obstacles in golf, and despite being a ghost he's a heavyweight at the kart races. He's unpredictable and charming, present and absent, sometimes a king and sometimes just a flunky for Bowser, oh, dangerous and sweet, Boo is the best there is, and when I'm dead I want to be a ghost just like him, all deadly shriek.

“Let all your thoughts drift by like balloons,” Raquel says.

I try to imagine tension burning away
from the ends of my fingers like smoke,
like a ghost's breath, seeping into the floor
like water into backyard grass. As I breathe,
the thin white cotton of my t-shirt slides
across my belly pleasantly as it rounds
and flattens, a volleyball, an envelope.
Too soon, we reawaken ourselves: I flex
my fingers and toes, curl myself onto my side,
and from one breath to the next, I'm no longer dead.

ALETHEIA

How I Will End

When the universe was new, it was a simple whole, grand and unified, too simple for us. Our understanding starts where complexity begins, at 10^{-34} seconds. Those few parent forces that were joined quickly decoupled, gravity fell from the nuclear force, electricity released its grip on the magnetic. There was only one product of these unions, now left to look after itself: hydrogen. With nothing else to do, it burned in the vacuum, in its loneliness colliding its own protons until the constant fusion reactions produced helium, then deuterium, and suddenly space is full of young suns, angry and sullen, immolating themselves, becoming ash, then burning what was left into new types of ash: carbon. Oxygen. Humans.

Having created us, the universe can't go back. It takes a lot of energy to fight entropy, to shove an element backwards against the sharp lines of the binding energy curve, to unbreak a cup, to regather wasted heat in a more potent form—oil, wood, speech. In the cores of suns all ash moves toward the most stable substance: iron, Fe^{56} .

Today the old star trash that makes up my body slides more quickly to its stopping place, the hot reactive core of me grows colder by the hour, my own specific gravity is increasing, I am slowly hardening, here, this is the weight of iron.

Stuck in Tallahassee

Take any road out of Tallahassee and you will find yourself in Bloxham, Wakulla, Panacea, Sopchoppy, Waukeenah, Chaires, Miccosukee, Havana, Gretna, or Telogia, just the same as when you left. There is no freedom from the unorthodox.

At their desks, sighing in the humidity, children struggle to learn the awkwardness of two Ls, two Ss, and two Es. There are also three As, but no one explains this on the phone to their maiden aunts compiling Christmas card lists. Call 411 and you'll often hear the operator spelling under his breath as he types; he'll spell it for his girlfriend over dinner that night.

Here, we're grateful when we get to the zip code, grateful for the bland intuitiveness of FL. If only we didn't live in a joke town just one step removed from Kalamazoo or Timbuktu. Why not a Georgetown or a Greenville? Lakeville, Lakeview, Lakeland, Lakewood, Lakeside?

It might be snowing there or it might be eighty degrees. Probably both, and it's probably hailing and windy and partly cloudy too. A woman there would wear her hair up under a hat and down loose and braided with red paste in the part every day. To learn all her names would take a year. If my atlas went across the pond I could tell you for sure if it was dark there, too; I can only reference North America, but I'm sure it's nighttime in Lakesomething somewhere and Lakesomething's children are tucked into a warm or a cool or no bed at all in the freezing sweltering night, and not a one is worried about letters that come two by two by two, trapping us in obvious place.

Πού είναι το λιμάνι?

Today I am huge; I am a god.
Specifically, Poseidon. And in
my kingdom I will eat the little
octopuses that inflate and cry
as I put them down my throat,
and the fishes, and the crabs,
and I will show them no mercy,
for they exist only to nourish me.

I will open the windows of my palace
wide to admit blue salt, and I will play
Debussy's *Le Mer* and broadcast it
over my watery realms, and all
who hear it will fall in love with the beauty
of my domains, and if (and when)
they protest that it is inappropriately
French they will suffer my wrath.

I will sit on my throne and make
storms and σουβλάκι with my trident,
I will drink Mythos and knock over
all the temples to Zeus and Apollo
and Christ and all the rest of them—
you live on an *island*, in *my sea*;
I'm the one you need to be worried about.

And all the little people will cry
on Νάξος and Σαντορίνη and Μύκονο,
and in the water they will spew honest vomit
over the sides of their boats, these cruel
people who make up the world, who fight
over which of them is sleeping with which
one, and whether that one's breasts are real,
and whether they've ruined my planet
or not, and which deity is worth dying for,
and how can one make money from misery,

but because I love them I will pull them down
the whirlpool's throat and show them
no mercy, and they will learn that they exist
only to worship me, which is what they will do
when they get to my palace and find
there is nothing that exists for them anymore but
the eternal joy of my deep Mediterranean blue.

Late Summer Matrix

The stars' neat orbits cut crisply through the night
sky. Behind Dad, on his motorcycle, I thought
of the way the pink granite split, mica bright

in the sun, after the sharp hammer stroke. Right
then was when I learned about systems, law.
The stars' neat orbits cut crisply through that night

and he taught me how to see in this the polite
gravity dance that binds us, the burn that makes raw
elements, air, pink granite, mica bright,

skin and chrome and the denim that wraps our limbs tight.
We breathe in exhaust, weeds, manure, and corn pollen,
all of which cut crisply through the Minnesota night

and they are what is needed for this season, its long-light
days stretching like furrows to winter, then thaw.
The highway flows ahead in pink granite, mica bright,

stretches to Florida and migrates back: my pattern of flight.
Here, cradled in systems-in-systems, I am utterly his daughter.
The stars' neat orbits cut crisply through the night
and inward to lodge in my granite heart, mica bright.

Getting Away From You

I feel guilty that I left a half-carton
of smashed eggs inside a Diet Coke box
the day I moved out without telling you.

I think it's strange that you watched
low-budget porn on my couch with your
forty-year old boyfriend while wearing
a fleece jacket and white spandex shorts
that showed your granny panties.
I think it's strange you didn't warn me.

I had left the Midwest where politeness
is a ritual-thick awareness and found
myself living with you. Courtesy demands
that we are always most polite
to the people we hate the most.

I regret that I didn't know your last name
even though you refused to tell me. I regret
that I didn't yell at you for leaving
the used douche bottle in the shower for three days.

Minnesota nice is a white-out. We mimic
the weather outside to keep each other alive.
It leaves us windburnt but serene.

I snuck in while you were away
and began to throw my things
into giant plastic crates. Five hours
and two silent friends later, I left you with nothing.

I imagined this silence as torture, a way
of leaving you shouting into the blizzard,
waiting for an echo that cannot come back.
With the muffling, killing snow falling
into deep drifts around you, I see you
holding dripping white shells and fading
into a seamless landscape as I walk
away, coiling up the guide rope
stretching between buildings.

Psychophenomenology

I. The Body

It is the origin of the coordinates
and the intersection of the best of all possible axes,
the seat, the soapbox. To move is to walk
a treadmill and make the world slide around me.
Plumbing becomes prime mover as digestive tract
becomes guts; I do not calculate the amount
of speed and force it takes the arm mechanism
to lift the dinner fork; I am hungry.

II. The File

It is the extra-body the self-body keeps
around to see itself as the world does. It is
the formula which centers the plane
in empty quadrant space, it is Descartes'
evil demon. The file chides, "If both dominant Intuition
and auxiliary Feeling are habitually extroverted,
ENFPs may legitimately doubt their inner substance
and be quite vulnerable to others' positive
and negative projections." It will soon begin
to talk about ego and symbol when it should keep
its focus on the hydraulic movement between bodies,
for insofar as this goes, the file is right.

III. The Saint

The saint's inner terrain is molded by glaciers,
star-glazed ridges and deep calm flats abutting.
Ghosts and phantoms shape the saint
and so exist even if they do not: we see icy cells
and corsets filled with nails. Great is she
who breaks her body for the love of the Lord,
for she knows why sacrifice works. If I have
a headache and I break a finger, my headache
goes away. If I am too small to be seen,
I can give of my own flesh, and in the pooling blood
this supreme teleological threat disappears:
the threat to the subsystem is reduced
in response to the rising visibility of the whole.

Camellia Fight

In March, in McClay Gardens, the round blossoms hang heavy off the trees, pink or white or variegated, and land on the ground in bright handfuls of lightly sweating petals. On the manicured path, we got in a camellia fight, lobbing the fallen blooms at each other, laughing at the surprisingly loud *paf* they made when they hit the body. Victorian ladies in their gardens could have done no better. Barbie and Midge dream in their plastic houses of such affairs. Caught up, no one thought to get it on tape until well afterward, when Lisa thought to amuse her husband with a sweet show of womanly charm.

Pink or white or red-and-white broken, the flowers flew again like bloody snowballs in a bitter fight between wicked wolf-children. There's some aggression here, a tinge of distaste, especially in the second event, staged for the video camera. In this subsequent round the flowers are bruised, their petals turning purple and brown where our clawing hands have raked them, the gentle and playful becoming grotesque in its parody of femininity. Still, it's seductive, the smiles both alluring and cruel, the blows both harmless and brutal, the backdrop both a lovely blossoming spring and a bitter, now-barren wood.

When it's done we're wreathed not in garlands like Buddha but smeared with sap and nectar and pollen, long trails of the flowers' inner fluids glazing limbs and clothes, dirty like blood and semen. Transmitters of desire and eventually death. I want to keep the dream of Charlotte, Emily, and Susanne in their long skirts and corseted waists gaily tripping along the tidy lawn. I want to keep Barbie, Midge, and Skipper in their bright bikinis and long, thick hair sprinkled with just enough petals to be sexy. But Baudrillard comes standard with the replay for the camera, and I have to know that the first was just as image as the second, just as image as the original plantation, just as image as this poem before you.

Snaketini

The trendy in Hanoi are drinking snakes.
Deadly vipers are kept in cages behind the bar.
Order something, and two bartenders
will catch the snake, slit it lengthwise,
rinse its blood out with clear rice wine,
and catch its mingled fluids in a vat:
this infusion is both bitter and expensive.

All the best mixologists will tell you
that snake essence is therapeutic for those
oppressed by coldness: dark repeated draughts
of blood and venom, yellow fat and bile,
bring poison deep inside the drinker
where it waits, a thick evil coiled
in the base of the stomach. It sends heat
into the bowels and head, the fingers
and spine, and where the poison leeches
through flesh, winter, age, and memory
are all burnt out, leaving behind desire,
potency, and a flood of rats who, realizing
their own mysterious good fortune, are as grateful
for the stupid tourists as anyone else.

Make Believe

The children
outside my window
are playing
at suicide, holding
a silvery plastic gun

to their temples.
No caps, no water.
No electronic screech.
After the pull
they crumple

to the ground,
tired little lumps
of leftover protein.
The living
wrest the gun

from the hands
of the dead
and they, too, aim
and fall. No one
disturbs corpses.

No final girl stands
over the carnage
at the end; there is no
Sisyphus with his
terrible duty here.

Just a gentle progression,
one by one, to death,
formalized and
precise. They'll
jump up soon, but

I prefer them now,
envy them now,
just little limbs,
sleepily melting away,
lost candy in the sun.

Heatsink
-for B, 2007

It's getting hot in north Florida—every day's brilliant sun is starting to bake in the permanent, never-cools summer. Everything's median temperature is rising. I put on jeans and cut them to shorts, tie up my hair when the fine curls at my nape grow damp, drive with the windows down to let the warmth seep in; I am training my body to accept the heat the way a mountain climber gradually increases altitude. By staying away from the typical Floridian supercooled a/c, by July, I'll learn to love a smooth powdering of sweat, a thin layer of shine over my skin.

It's hot at the studio, and the kiln firing off today doesn't make it any cooler. Sitting at the wheel, I draw the clay body upward, squeezing with a disciplined firmness with my fingers, then ballooning out the lower walls, making a fat little belly. I imagine the sides of this belly all prickled with sweat on a hot day, and know that it won't care; this little man will heat train at thousands of degrees—twice. I collar his neck, move his spout this way and that—nothing seems appropriate. Finally, he goes under the dryer until he's safe to move—his first summer lesson. I step outside to cool off a little; I've built up a significant heat reserve.

This new little thing is meant for porches, for long slow sits; he's meant for July; he's meant for ice water and Planter's Punch and Tang and sweet tea. He's heavy, with strong, thick walls and base; he'll keep cool even in this sun—this is what I learned from two cicada-sung seasons with you, what he learned in the kilns, what he can offer you now. He's a proper southern gentleman, this little pitcher, and he's asking you, come take a load off and have a nice cool drink. Stay here for a good long time, all summer if necessary, until your temperature's coasted back into the zone where it belongs, and you love this time again, this hazy afternoon light, this day that is all of our days, this endless thermal cycle.

This Is How I Say My Name

I find so little joy when I squeeze myself
and let the fluid run into the cream separator,
this dark multi-handled pail
that I cannot bear to throw out
and that no one will buy at a yard sale
or steal away when I leave it on the lawn
afterward. It is ridiculous to measure things
this way but I love the angular faces
of numbers that belong only to me.

I have never not known how to swim,
so I imagine that there is no better thing
than swallowing water and feeling
the foolish heat seep out of lungs and limbs,
hearing the liquid-cooled fright
echo off pool walls or sea floor,
but then, as a casual afterthought,
being brought back, coughing out
this poisonous water and finding air again
and finding that it burns like a first cigarette,
and every breath after that would be
just the same, forever, and this would be
the best thing I ever learned,
this choice between myself and the world.

FLESH

If I Could Send You a Box

-To J., in Spain

I'd slide morning hands over my skin to scoop up
for you the sand of my humid sleep: the hard
little pebbles of sweat collecting in my collarbone hollows;
the black sliver of an eyelash; last night's fine silt
of sandalwood, rum, and smoke not yet showered away.

I'd spoon out the reddest flesh of my watermelon heart,
catch its sweet water in the bowls of my storm-sea
eyes, pour it into tiny glass vials and write labels:
For uncaring stars at three in the morning. For cold
hands. For the stubble-cracked North Dakota prairie.

Then I'd reach into the black-brown of my hair
and my hands would come out coated in shine,
long flax streaks of coffee-lacquer gleam, and with them
I'd tie the box shut, press on a postage benediction
and think about your walk home, long fingers wrapped
around the corners, an easy, accustomed counterbalance,
the best of me pulled tight against your warm stomach.

Marry Me

and every day when you come home
I'll put on my pearls, take off
my underwear, and meet you at the door
with bright red lipstick and three fingers
of Southern Comfort over ice.

and when we go out to dinner
you'll walk behind me, steering me about
by the small of my back, feeding me
cigarettes and holding the lighter,
and at night after you've driven me home
I'll sit naked on your lap and you'll tell me
about your day while you press and stroke
my most tender buttons, nipples, earlobes,
collarbone, clitoris, and when I can't
take it anymore I'll flip you over
and fuck you in the ass, drag sharp nails
and teeth over your strong limbs until
your nerves liquefy in their channels.

and it will be so easy, man and wife,
being and relation, both of us image flickering
and burning like Vegas; we'll never stop
playing these games together,
high rollers who know all the odds.
I'll drape from your arm, press humid lips
against your neck when you throw
hot numbers. Bring your hand close,
honey, and let me blow on it for good luck.

Divination

You bite your nails
which I think is beautiful
except it is better
when you grow them out

and I get to play
your manicurist,
knead the lotion
into worried cuticles,

work the small bones
of your fingers
in my palms, roll
and press them to

a fine smoothness—
I know that when
I let them fall
into their star-shape

and give them back
to you, the clean
white crescents will erode,
nervously cut back

to the raw flesh. You
will be embarrassed
by this. I will carry
a file, wait gratefully.

I Had Never Eaten a Fresh Fig Before

But V, you love them,
gave me one tonight
while getting out of my car.

I dropped it on the concrete
outside my door. It was late,
and though I felt it slipping out
of my fingers, I did nothing, held
onto my keys. I imagine you'd
have dropped your purse instead.

The juice from the torn skin,
its maroon navel, its slick curves
all glistened in my palm.

Inside I found an anemone,
pink and brown fronds spiking,
curling against invisible current.
I found the green, sandy edge
of watermelon rinds, and it tasted
clean and a little bitter, a little
quiet sugar around the bruise,
and V, I finally see you now.

I like the sour-ragged edge
of it, the resistance of fiber
and strand and brash starch.
Let there be no rotting syrupy
fluid, no ripening decay softening
acidic edges. Let the damaged flesh
be all the sweetness there is.

To Sue Augustine, Who Wrote *5-Minute Retreats For Women*, a Small Book Advising Women to Color With Crayons to Relieve Stress and Promote Joy

The problem is that when I open the box
the crayons are all good-smelling and I
don't want to ruin them not because I don't want
to mar their virginal perfection
but because the brilliant lined-up points
are spectacular, like a nightstand drawer
packed tight with smooth plastic toys,
fluorescent and demanding as my first
stolen glance of bleach-blonde porn, the little
dots of the first nipples I sucked all aware
or the glare of school spirit flaming out from
the letterman's jacket protecting my bare ass
from a vinyl car seat in Minnesota winter,
all the bright wax promising electric contact,
and it is vivid, breath and nails and lactic-acid muscle;
these crayons have promise and it is not to draw
hearts and suns but to suggest luminosity
and touch and sweat sheen, to stand upright
as radiant little sex icons, glossy with heat and pressure.

Crackerjack Prize

I'm the blowup doll that never says no,
the cat with one eye that only can wink,
short-feathered poultry on the side of the road
the plumber that is here to examine your sink.
I'm almost or maybe and suggestively so:
the hamster that runs in the wheel when you think,
the red-pointed gnome that makes the garden grow,
the cocktail sword holding bright cherries in your drink.
I'm plastic and lurid and great fun to know,
the princess wand painted aggressively pink,
the round disc sled bellying wild through the snow,
the play-dough, the implant, the invisible ink.
Sandwiched in paper, I'm waiting for you,
Arsenic, a landmine, your hidden cuckoo.

Failure to Communicate

We are in the bathroom
when you ask me, “Where
will I ever find another
woman who will do this for me?”

My fingers are in your ass
and your penis is in my mouth.
I was thinking of nothing more
than this except maybe
how lovely your navel is
and so your question
is a sudden hailstorm—
how, when your body is full
of another’s warm flesh,
can you be so lost in a cold self?
How, when I am here and solid
against the glowing white tile
and I have this freshly
bathed skin, can you see only
an idealized future room
that I will never enter?

Christ the Lord Has Risen Today,

but the way the Catholics here sing it,
this hymn is coming out all wrong.
I came to this Easter service moments
before mass started, and so had to stand
in the narthex, a pagan with sin in my heart,
squinting through the bubbled glass
for a glimpse of the priest. Around me
are students, no rings on fingers, pressing
bodies together with the excuse of the crowd
and hiding kisses behind service bulletins.
At least those children pleurably earned
their spots outside the kingdom of God.

In this church, it is Communion
or nothing. Not knowing this, I went
to receive just a blessing, but the priest
opened my hands and put the wafer in, and as
I walked back, thinking how sorry I was
to have motioned through the miracle
without belief, I watched the families,
old with rosaries wound across swollen knuckles,
young with children in shiny leather shoes.
Everyone but me crosses themselves.

Though I know so much of the liturgy
by heart, and I've sung in sacred choirs
for years, watched scores of the people
hear and be new, there's no heaven, no faith,
no gift of belief for me; only a lingering
desire to hear the old songs' endless cycle,
to take thin comfort in blanketing sound,
to lose my voice in the untuned multitude.
Alone on this day of the Resurrection, I know—
here, I am thy victory, boasting grave. Alleluia.

I Am Grateful to Johnson & Johnson

for convincing America that all wounds,
no matter how slight, require first aid.
This means that, when I have an accident,
I can run into the bathroom, spend an inordinate
amount of time playing with cream
and gauze and tape, and by the time I return
I'll be once more dedicated to safety,
and not plunged back into a world where

I treated my injuries with steel, not
with ointment. Where the "zzzt"
of the dish brush against a knife's little
serrated teeth was the same sound
as those teeth against my skin and so
washing dishes became a siren's song,
the impulse to let the knife unzip my skin
so I could get out of my body unbearable.
Where a broken glass, a stumble
over a curb, a safety pin, an unfamiliar
medicine cabinet, all became opportunities
to pour out my toxic life and leave
my body a numb, uninhabited tomb.

So bless you, you makers of car kits
and triple antibiotic, of stretch bandages
and liquid bandages and band-aids
in plastic and fabric and sport foam,
bless you for one-use thermal packs
and aspirin and sterilized packaging,
for blunted scissors and plastic tweezers
and alcohol swabs and iodine. May your
empire grow ever larger under the benevolent
wings of your caduceus; may the sterile
whiteness of your gauze wrap my eyes
that I will look no more on blood
and sorrow, but be gentle and clean forever.

IT

It Summons Itself

It waited until eleven-thirty to stand in front of the bathroom mirror shining a flashlight under Its chin, though it was early morning when it learned that light had been stopped

in Texas. It turned the flashlight off abruptly and stared at Its own reflection in the mirror. It did this for hours when It was a kid, and It could scare the shit out of Its relatives like that,

a small and subversive demon come for living sacrifice; It learned to be very quiet and to stand for long minutes at a time, that sooner or later someone would need to use the bathroom

and no matter how many times It did it, they'd still be terrified by the shadow in the corner, trapped by the eerie reflection, It learned to be visible by becoming invisible. It tried to summon up things while it waited,

Bloody Mary, come to me, five times fast. It dragged others along, laid Its friends down on the floor and tried to lift them with two fingers, light as a feather, stiff as a board; it breathed

on the glass and waited for spirits to write messages in the fog. Even though she never showed up and no one ever got even a millimeter off the floor, It learned to love a darkened bath

or bedroom, Its own ominous shadow sliding across the glass with a slick nighttime grace, the tautened wait for bad things to happen. So when It turned off the flashlight and searched the image for residual light,

caught light, It waited for something It couldn't explain with a pleasing anxiety, an equal horror of it working or not working. As usual, after Its eyes adjusted, there was only the familiar outline, warm and black and disappointing.

It Can't Sleep

If the lamp is on and the window open,
treacherous centipedes and plague-bearing roaches
will be drawn in through the hair-thin gap
between the window's screen and frame.

If the lamp is on and the window closed,
the air will thicken, eventually becoming
an illness-spawning miasma, infiltrating lungs and eyes
with the body's own airborne wastes.

If the lamp is off and the eyes are closed,
the ceiling will ratchet lower and lower
until the body is pressed, as for witch torture,
and suffocation will inevitably result.

If the lamp is off and the eyes are open,
the great abyss of the dark will swim and swirl
overhead and intense nausea, lasting for days,
will open a pit in the bowels.

If the curtains are opened,
the sickly sodium orange will sweep leprous hands
over the limbs, which will surely grow feverish
and branch into trembling.

If the bed is left in an effort to locate alternative illumination,
intense wakefulness will bring forth
a new generation of sorrows,
each piquant enough to savor for years.

Thus these smooth sheets, these down pillows,
this rich duvet, bought expressly to woo
spoiled sleep, are failing in their assignments.
If the expensive linen cannot adequately perform
the task for which it was designed,
how much hope can there be for the person?

Its Wasp

After the third incidence, It begins to worry that something is going on. It caught the first wasp in a plastic beer mug and took it outside. While It enjoyed seeing it fly away, knowing the feeling, It is no longer sure if It wants to drink out of that glass again despite an intense scouring, and so when the second wasp showed up, It opened Its front door and used big sheets of newspaper as sails to direct it in appropriate directions. This is also unsatisfying, as if a wasp can fly out then one can surely fly in, and now It ducks quickly in and out of Its home. The third was less overtly threatening—lying dead between the window screen and the glass pane—and so the tiny corpse is still there. As It thinks about picking up the wasp with disposable chopsticks from takeout sushi, It is pleased not to have thrown away such a useful item. That said, having scouted for nests and not finding them, It wonders what the wasps are doing in Its house, for they must have an ulterior motive.

It assumes that flying things must all have similar motivations, and It knows that nuthatches spy on chickadees, learning their private language in order to steal their food or be warned about owls in advance. Chickadees haven't yet learned nuthatch, but they have learned to give false alarms, to scare away hungry moochers.

Have the wasps learned to understand It? Are they attempting to warn It about a gas leak, a rent increase, or an impending job loss? It checks each of these things in sequence, flapping about and tightening knobs until It is convinced that It is safe from such things. What if the wasps are conning It? Maybe they're throwing out these danger signals in order to move It from Its pleasant couch. Maybe the wasps have learned what a grocery bag looks like, and now they want the pears It bought on sale for ninety-nine cents a pound or the six tall

Leinenkugels It covets and hides behind
cabbage and onions in case company should come
over and try to pry them away. It returns
to the wasp corpse and considers it carefully.
Pollen is starting to sift over the little body, and It
narrows Its eyes and accuses the wasp of unfair
use of camouflage. In a huff, It tells the wasp
that the window is staying down and the wasp
will rest there forever, dead like Sleeping Beauty
or whoever was in the crystal coffin, and It won't
fall for these little waspy tricks, so the wasps
can damn well just shove off, because It isn't going
anywhere, and It's not even going to call
Its apartment manager or look up wasps on the Internet,
because It refuses to give in, so there.

So now It and the wasp corpse will stare
at each other for weeks, just like It refuses
to fix the broken electric socket in Its bedroom,
just like It won't throw away old bill forms
because it wants to shred them first even though
It knows It will never get around to buying
a shredder, just like It will drink the first five
bottles of beer but never the sixth—It is far too
pleased by stasis, the deep-freeze thrum of continuation.

It Has a Disease

It only took minutes for WebMD to convince It that It had lupus. It added up all Its symptoms: a strange rash, chronic low-level fatigue. It considered Its nails, which, it could be argued, are tinged blue—Raynaud’s phenomenon (or maybe just garden variety cutaneous vasculitis). The real symptom, though, worrying and not pleasantly made up, was Its fever.

Frankly, It was a breath away from fainting. It put Its head between Its knees for several minutes but all it heard was the diagnosis echoing through Its skull. As it sat there, It saw tubing snaking up from beneath Its chair, fastening around Its ankles and elbows. Cold fluid flushed through, steroids and immunosuppressants, then narcotics, burning trails of dead flesh over Its skin. As its heart failed epinephrine, then finally formaldehyde stabbed deep into Its veins. As the preservative worked its deathly way through Its tissues, shutting down Its broken body, It quickly typed Its will:

To the Unknown Executors, re: your terrible discovery: Please burn this building and everything you find therein, corpses included. Please do not scatter the ashes, plant trees on the site, or encourage children to play here, as these would be unbearable disruptions of being should any sort of afterlife commence. A fresh layer of concrete poured over all would be appreciated, but not expected. Thank you for your consideration.

The next day, It learned that Its air conditioner was broken. It was simply hot. No fever. No disease. It mourned the passing of Its premature passing; It had already considered sending funeral bouquets to Its friends and family. Now there would be no peaceful demise, no tragic self-immolation of any kind, autoimmune or arson. Only a bowl of cereal and a drive to work. What a tragedy, It thought; today could have been a great event, a grand and mysterious departure.

It Suspects

Too many horror movies, maybe? Or too many sentimental movies like *American Beauty* or the god-awful *21 Grams*? Whatever it is, It cannot decide whether It is going fully crazy or if all the media-blamers are right. It is beginning to think It has a ghost, or maybe MPD, or cancer.

Its relationship to objects is growing strange. Sometimes, It will turn around and where there was nothing, there will suddenly be a wasp or a book It had lost or a beer bottle, and though It knows the thing wasn't there before It also strangely remembers the thing there, and knew it was there, and isn't surprised at all. Sometimes objects go away instead of showing up, but generally, after a while, the unsettled newness goes away and It starts to feel good.

It has always hated people who insist that children are profound. Children babble; adult insight into the world's absurdity creates meaning. Artificially, It might add. That said, It has begun to have uncharacteristic moments of romanticized meaning, where Its toothbrushing routine or Its love of pickled foods is suddenly real, solid as rocks; Its trivialities explain more than themselves. These thoughts crackle into being in Its head, clicking away like gunpowder snaps thrown down ten at a time, little popping intrusions into Its normal life.

It is driving Itself to despair with this sappy reflection usually reserved for psychoanalysts and ad execs. It considers having an endocrine panel worked up, and looks forward to tilt table and cardiac stress tests.

Its Séance: An Empirical Report

I. Hypothesis

Strange thought patterns, displaced objects, and an overwhelming sense that things were different a moment ago seem to suggest a supernatural being living here and taking excessive incorporeal liberties.

[Note: Can ghosts open Tupperware? If not, purchase more Tupperware. Do not under any circumstances attend a Tupperware party.]

The following experiment is designed to initiate communication with said being, if in fact said being exists at all.

II. Method

After determining a baseline level of activity not created by the suspected being, the next step is offering the suspected being a series of the things it seems to enjoy [see Lures] in order to attract the being's active presence. The third step is to offer the being a range of communications channels so that, no matter what the being is like, if it exists, it can communicate with the physical world.

IV. Materials Required

Communications channels:

computer with a word processor

The buzzer from a board game with a conveniently placed Morse Code cheat sheet

pencil suspended from a string over a piece of paper

mug of water and a candy thermometer

small transistor radio set to an unused frequency

toy piano borrowed from a neighbor's child whose back was turned to the sandbox

Lures:

empty Grolsch bottle with ceramic top, as metal caps are unattractive

two round mirrors from Ikea, facing—being might be Scandinavian

used sticky note reading "Doctor, 1:00 Thurs" that disappeared twice

hairbrush, to be used throughout trial period

two-day-old glass of tea

wing-tip shoe tied to a string, to be moved rapidly at irregular intervals

V. Procedure

Near each station, a lure was placed. Each station was carefully monitored for a period of one hour, a difficult task as researcher was engaged in brushing hair [producing terribly sore head. Note: in future experiments, use soft bristle brush in place of pin-style brush. Alternatively, acquire research assistant]. Changes were noted and photographed. Blur or inconsistencies are due to one-handed photographic technique. Afterwards, all stations were taken down, lures carefully disposed of or hidden in inaccessible places, and 250 mg of ibuprofen was internally applied to scalp.

V. Results

- a. Computer's screen went from word processor to screensaver and then to power-save mode. When researcher attempted to wake up the computer, it refused. After reboot, auto-save recovered a blank document. The program's helpful cartoon refused to emerge. Computer's overall reluctance to participate in experiment potentially a result of actions, perhaps hostile, on the part of the suspected being.
- b. Buzzer refused to sound. Card slid off table at 45-minute mark and fell under sofa.
- c. Pencil drew a series of triangles with sides approximately .5 to 1.0 cm long. After this, pencil lead no longer touched paper. Disappointed in lack of foresight. Triangles may be interpreted as a drawing of a cat.
- d. Thermometer unchanged. Several bits of dirt landed in mug of water. Suspect this is reason water was left untouched. Researcher is ashamed of poor housekeeping.
- e. Radio briefly emitted line from chorus of "Cecilia" and then fell, and remained, silent. Researcher has deep sympathy for suspected being's emotional state.
- f. Toy piano, accidentally nudged by shoe on string, emitted a small pile of sand. Piano was rapidly returned to wretched child. No other effects.

VI. Conclusion

Researcher is not crazy. Remaining days until lease is up: 187.

Lines Written by a Pencil Suspended from a String Overnight

My Dearest It,

well can I guess your feelings at finally hearing
from me, but I beg you to wait on them a moment,
and instead read these next few words with forbearance.

It is no secret that I have haunted you
these many months, but fear not, for I look
upon you not with the bloom of anger in my cheeks,
but rather the tender blush of adoration.

I beg you to turn your fears to joys—
for yes, I do change and move without your will,
but it is out of most tender devotion to you, and I
should not toil thus did I not love you so well.

I admit it is not without a certain wild pleasure
that I drift through your rooms, wantonly stroking
your brushes and combs that so lately caressed
your noble head, the fortunate linen of your shirts
that presses against you daily, the regimented spines
of your books. This, my darling It, is your beauty:
not carved cheekbone or brilliant flash of eye,
but your sincerity and luminosity, which have seeped
into your small world and now emanate
from all these things that live under your rule.

I feast on the spectacle of our joint work,
that together we place these things just so,
and this humble home is now to me
the rival of any cathedral in the land,
rich with relics and glory.

You must know of the ages of time

I spend with you, dotting on your every word
and action, waiting to see if I might soon be struck
with wonder at the very grace of your limbs
and thoughts or if, like a student at drawing lessons,
it will take a gentle correction from the master's hand
to bring harmonious perspective to the composition.

And oh, how thrilling to watch the dull scene
suddenly awaken under my hand—sometimes,
my dear It, you require from me only a gentle trick
of the light and spontaneously you awaken
from bud to full, lush blossom. And how you dazzle
my eyes when you are so transformed, when all
your life is a passion play, and I am the multitude
kissing the hem of your garment.

That this has caused you worry pains me;
nevertheless, I could not bring myself to fly
or confess myself. But now I unburden my heart
to you, dear It, and because you love and take comfort
in formality it is in this gentlest of all ladies'
voices that I announce myself to you. Darling,
look upon me with sentimentality, think of eyelet lace
and finely worked samplers, think of the pliant strength
of whalebone wrapped in cloth, and know
that I am nothing to be feared, but instead
let me be your angel in the house, that soft
and sweetening presence that soothes all ills
with a cool, white hand. Know also that love's
powerful tide is not so easily turned; now
that we are here, I fear for what should happen
if you were lost to me. It is my most earnest hope,
therefore, that you can learn to love
such a Will-o'-the-Wisp as I must be to you,
learn to understand these works I perform
for you, with you, and learn that truly,
I do all in your best interest;
for never shall I leave you again.

With great affection,
Your Ghost

To the Unexpected Visitor,

Since the Visitor has approached frankly, said Visitor will receive frankness in return. The Visitor has stated his or her intentions to affect the course of events in this Apartment and apparently is willfully

altering the mental state of the Primary Inhabitant (addressed as "It" by the Visitor). The Visitor also states intent to stay with a mild suggestion of impending psychosis should leaving be suggested as an option. Very well.

The Primary Inhabitant shall, due to lack of feasible alternatives and a high lease-breaking fee as well as the Inhabitant's well-known tendency to weep while packing, allow this state to continue and upgrade the Visitor's status to Trial Resident (hereafter called the Resident) if the following regulations are upheld:

The Resident shall confine his or her manipulations of the Primary Inhabitant to those changes that do not increase entropy only. Entropic-plus changes to the Primary Inhabitant shall be at that Inhabitant's discretion and desire. Inhabitant is not responsible for any acts of arson that result in violation of this principle.

The Resident may manipulate the Apartment and all subsidiary Objects exclusive of the Primary Inhabitant in ways that create aesthetic value, where aesthetic value is defined as that which makes said Apartment look less obviously like a dump. Mirrors may not be altered.

The Resident may manipulate any Primary Inhabitant Authorized Visitors if a Request for Action is submitted prior to the Day of Visitation, especially if said manipulation is entertaining. Resident may not ruin Visitors' possessions, because then Primary Inhabitant would have to pay for them. This would then go on the Resident's tab, should the Resident at any time have an income, which Inhabitant has reason to doubt.

The Resident may manipulate any Unauthorized Visitors in any manner desired, especially if said manner involves pointed objects.

The Resident is asked to recognize that the Quality of Invisibility is both disconcerting and creepy and behave accordingly.

In exchange, the Primary Inhabitant will commit to the following regulations:

The Primary Inhabitant shall retain ultimate Discretionary Power regarding the Primary Inhabitant, the Apartment and its subsidiary Objects, and any Visitors until such time as this document is reopened or the Inhabitant becomes insensate, as with drink, at which point the Resident is instructed to firmly ignore any demands the Inhabitant might make.

The Primary Inhabitant shall cooperate with the Resident's manipulations, insofar as none of the above regulations are violated and no cruelties such as waking up vegan or getting a large gun tattoo are inflicted.

The Primary Inhabitant will consult the Resident on large aesthetic changes but does not want to hear anything derogatory about the large floral-print couch, which has great sentimental value and is not going anywhere.

The Primary Inhabitant shall announce Potential Visitors beforehand when possible and offer the Resident a forum for arguing against formal Authorization of said Potential Visitors. In exchange, Resident must agree to stop tying shoelaces together.

The Primary Inhabitant shall continue to maintain the basic continuity of the Apartment and its subsidiary Objects by maintaining said Apartment's upkeep through paying of rent, utilities, and media channels; and by performing routine cleaning and maintenance of the Apartment and its subsidiary Objects except for pest control, which is filthy and best left to experts.

Violation of the above regulations and strictures by either party shall result in re-examination of this document and an investigation into the sustainability of the Resident's Residential status.

Don't Think This Can't Be Revoked,
It

The Ghost Considers the Nature of the Universe

In five or six years as a nurse's aide,
I learned that many nurses eventually develop
an aversion to something that isn't actually
all that disgusting. This lets them shove
all the grossness that exists onto that one object,
allowing them to do their jobs calmly. I can't
bear the bloated, swollen corpses of leftover food
that accumulate in the trap after washing a sink
of dishes. Joshua hates the sound of the two parts
of a metal ice cube tray grating together, the strange
circular ridged texture of it. Mavis can't deal
with dogs' mouths or sniffing, drippy noses.
And so no human substance can be that bad.
HIV infected blood is nothing to worry about
given standard precautions. Throwing up? Better
out than in. Organs, mucus, excrement—all part
of life. I've acted in this way so long I genuinely
can't tell whether the stuff in the sink really is nasty,
or whether it's just convenient for me to think so.

It, you are my verbal dishwater, pleasingly
murky. You are my scientific sink trap, smarter
than I am but indulging in all the strange
half-believed obsessions and neurotic ideas
I can't indulge in without feeling foolish. You're
my ideal Other form, completely unattainable
but irrefutably real, as all the people I seem
to interact with on a daily basis are the imperfect
reflection of you. The only problem
is that, having talked to you so long, I can't tell
whether you or anyone really is there,
or whether it's just convenient for me to hope so.

LOGOS

The Propositional Calculus Explained

I. The Rule of Assumptions: A

You are a brand-new potter.
Your teacher reassures you that you
can make whatever you want.

You start with what you are given,
a little lump of clay just so big,
and your teacher has wedged
all the air out for you. Under supervision,
you make a tiny bowl. It is ugly
and you hate it. You will have to make
worse things before you get better.

So you make another bowl, and it
is genuinely terrible, fallen
and with an uneven rim, because
no one is watching you this time,
but this is the first bowl you made
by yourself, so you are keeping it.
This moment of more is the start
and the end of all things, for everything
that you have, you have to carry,
all the ugly cups and plates, the mug
you love at first but despair of
by the time it finally gets fired
several weeks later because you
are better than that uneven foot
now, but you have to take it
home and show it to all the people
who've been putting up with your
bragging about learning to throw pottery.

They try to encourage you by exclaiming
that these things are beautiful;
this is mortifying to you who know
better, but the only solution is to get
better, so you make more, and your creatures
tell against you, reveal your cluttered
mind that thinks of sandwiches and TV
as you try and fail to center things
accurately. You think of your aging
hippie teacher, who reminds you that
if you center yourself, the clay

will center beneath you, and you are mortified that people will notice that you've been working on this one task for twenty minutes.

So you wanted everything, and made everything, and now you don't know how to get rid of it. Fortunately there are many ways to accomplish this. Give ugly objects to the ugly people you know. If someone compliments something, it's going home with her. You can always sell your useless crap to the rubes at the craft fair, who pay good money for anything that's not just a plain cylinder. You can drill holes in the bottom and use them as rustic flowerpots.

Meanwhile, you will get better, you will learn that you should never throw hungry and you will get a sense of speed and force and clay body, and you will make more attractive things. Your bowls will look balanced, your mugs and pitchers and cups will have grace, your plates will not bubble or bow in the middle. You have learned control.

You'll start this process with romantic visions of connecting to the earth and being sexy Demi Moore in a man's shirt throwing huge airy vases and art pieces. You'll wait for the gods to descend and proclaim that you have found truth and beauty and knowledge. Unfortunately, this is not what happens. All you learn is a process, something you started when you first picked up a can of Play-Doh, there's no universal truth here, but look at the clean line of that ginger jar you just made, the beautiful flow of the glaze, and you did this, what more could you successfully want?

II. Modus Ponendo Ponens and Modus Tollendo Tollens: $A \rightarrow B, A \therefore B / A \rightarrow B, \neg B \therefore \neg A$

Go to the old church where the Mass
is still traditional and listen
to them chant, line necessarily
following line, the story ancient
and obvious, disruption will
unmake creation, there is only
one way it could possibly be
and you are hearing it, sicut erat
in principio, et nunc, et semper,
et in sæcula sæculorum,
if you have this body and blood,
then you have heaven, this
is the way it is always going to be.

However. In 1570 when the Mass
was set even the female mystics
who found bodily rapture in Christ
couldn't have seen Madonna coming,
couldn't have known that her
Immaculate mass—complete
with virgins and prayers, with rays
of light and confession—would be told
by the light of a burning cross
as she stroked and licked a black Jesus,
couldn't have foreseen the crucifixion
of bodies with black leather and latex
as she called for her slaves to lay
their hands all over her body, these
mystic women couldn't have known
that the very images and words
that made their pulses race to union
would later turn on the world
when we turn on the radio, no,

instead of sacred heaven you have
secular Earth, and since you
have not-heaven, then you have
not-body-and-blood, time is rewound,
Christ is unmade, and we are at
the beginning again, we have an eternally
young Madonna, she can be anything,
and this is her power, to be contrary
and thus negate that which came before.

III. Double Negation: $A \therefore \neg\neg A$ or $\neg\neg A \therefore A$

It's not about
what you don't
not know, it's more
about what knots
you know you cannot

unknot when given
a string of logical
thoughts that don't
seem to knot together
neatly, leaving you

with aught but
a string of naughts
where formerly
several nots
seemed to mean

that you got
to the spot
where your problem
said you ought.
Fear not, for not's

not a bad thing
for a logician
to have wrought,
for one not's a not,
and so is not not not,

but a simple not not
will unravel that lot
and leave you with
a neat argument,
just as you were

taught, and now
you'll see that
you're damage-free,
the answer did not
have to be bought

with a new assumption.
Just be careful

you don't get caught
making faulty claims,
as not all nots

will be the not
you want—but if
your not is not
the wrong not but
the right not,

then now's not
the time to delay,
unknot the nots;
convert your not not
to a regular A.

IV. Conditional Proof: Proven B, resting on A $\therefore A \rightarrow B$

Imagine you are a kindergartener, small, energetic, and for the most part, completely unaware of the world around you. You are at an adult party that you probably shouldn't have attended, but your mother had just bought a little fluffy party dress, with a smocked front and eyelet lace everywhere, so she yanked on your tights, jerked the dress over your head, and strapped on the white patent leather shoes, which, you are forced to admit, do click pleasingly on a hardwood floor, and off you went. Now, you're lost in a sea of tables higher than your head, linen mesas with trailing gold garland, all of them completely blocking your ability to see the people you came with. None of the pants legs around you responds well to a hopeful tug. So you leave, you go into the den, the centerpiece of which is a big, brilliantly-lit tree. Resting against the tree, you are delighted to see a ladder. A bright wooden Santa is climbing the ladder, with a big sack of presents on his back. You are pleased, even if you can't quite tell where exactly he's taking the loot. You touch the ladder. You feel guilty and don't play with it any more. You look around, see a bathroom, and click away to use the facilities. When you come back, excited from touching some other family's toothbrushes, there is a playground-fight circle around the tree. The ladder has been broken. Santa's sunk. Fingers point at you. You protest. The ugly word "liar" gets tossed out. You puff up with indignation. The word "spank" hisses out of some adult's mouth, terrifying—you do not get spanked at home. You are removed and an interminable round of interrogations starts and blurs by, culminating in you dictating a formal account of the proceedings, copied down by your mother, and signed by you. You have the stunning realization that only your mother believes you. Twenty years later, watching *Law & Order*, you are blown away by your family's willingness to convict on circumstantial evidence, and you have almost convinced yourself you must have done it, even though you can't recall it. Your mother kept your testimony in the bottom drawer of her jewelry chest, the only one now who still has more faith in her daughter than in the obvious.

V. And-Introduction and And-Elimination: A, B \therefore A & B / A & B \therefore A, B

Your Dad once ruined his mom's best frying pan, nearly blowing up the oven. He was making gunpowder, simple on paper but a little more complicated when you're trying to figure out measurements at the drugstore. Dad blames the druggist; if they didn't want kids to make explosives, they shouldn't sell the ingredients to a ten-year-old.

Nevertheless, Dad talks Mom into getting you a chemistry set as a kid, and, even though it was the deluxe version, it proved a little lame. So Dad jacked it up a little, bought a few bottles that didn't quite fit in the little plastic rack, and you started having some fun. After all, you can only make so many clocks powered by lemons or potatoes before you start wondering what would happen if you could get your hands on, say, some sodium, or maybe one of those little hand-crank generators instead of just a D-cell, or you start asking if anyone is actually going to ever use that old lawnmower again, because if they're not, you know someone who could maybe use a small gasoline engine, not that you're naming names.

And so you learn to make useful polymers, not just the fun goopy play ones. You learn what it really means to be grounded after you forget to disconnect the power source before rewiring that switch. You learn about geology by walking around for a year with a rock hammer and an 8-pound sledge. You make an igloo and spend the night in it, and you learn about layers and sweat in cold temperatures. You learn that you can take apart and reassemble almost anything in ways that suit you better, and this was the whole point, the reasoning behind the chemistry set and the model rockets, the fish tank and the bike, the computer and the trip to Greece, and now here you are,

and everything looks like an Erector set to you,
you should build something, you are holding a wrench.

VI. Or-Introduction and Or-Elimination: $A \therefore A \vee B / A \vee B \therefore C$ resting on either A or B

My mother has long since made her choices.
At the beginning of the Great Plains tornado
season, she packs a cardboard box with all
the belongings that she can't bear to lose:
a locket, her grandmother's wedding ring,
some photographs, the tape reels holding her best
piano performances. In a storm, it goes
where she does, it keeps all her best things safe.

At the beginning of the Florida hurricane
season, I figure out whose house I'll go to
when mine is destroyed, and stash a bottle
of rum in the trunk of my car so we can drink
ourselves into oblivion and finalize the process.
I can't bear even to throw away a wineglass
with a broken stem—eventually, I'll find
a glue to repair it. Under these circumstances,
annihilation is best: storm, stir everything
into a soggy, mildewed stew. Crumble
the computer, with poems, into a tangle
of circuit boards and gray plastic. Finely shred
every article of clothing, and mash the couch
with concrete and rebar. Launch the dishes
into a farmer's field a mile away, and let
the farm kids find them as archaeological
artifacts next summer. Smash it all, I'd rather
start over new when I get to somewhere else
than have to pack and drag it all with me.

VII. Reductio ad Absurdum: B & -B resting on A ∴ - A

There's a certain loveliness in the slasher movie. Think about the soft indentation of the killer's knife at the cheerleader's throat under the clear moonlight, the angelic plea on a face desperately waiting behind a pressboard closet door as the imagined weapon comes closer and closer, the unexpected grace of a scythe swung by a lumbering goon hiding in a workman's coveralls.

There's honesty here. This movie knows what I want and will politely not disappoint: I want to see the blood arcing through the air and splattering against the far wall, maybe overlaid with an ominous shadow. I want to cover my face with my hands, peering through my fingers as bright young eyes are dug out from their hollows, and then to genuinely be forced away as the eye is severed from the head with a large pair of fabric shears not unlike the ones resting in my own sewing basket. I want to wrap myself up tight in a quilt as armor against the things lurking in the dark, both on screen and behind me.

The romantic comedy is embarrassingly sarcastic, the action movie is too burdened with special effects for my miserable eyesight to be happy with. The drama is just trying too hard to be fashionably cool—there's so much pressure to perform properly in these relationships. More and more, I want to return to the easy world of horror movies, to the pleasant tightness of clenched limbs, the astonishing clamminess as blood drains from fingers and cheeks, the sharp awareness of darkness and space. I want to go back to the flicks my cousin and I watched as kids: the tenderness of a chainsaw, the straightforward transaction of desire inherent in a machete and a hockey mask, the simple, easily faced threat of undead pets.

Well Disposed / Divine Being

It eats all the ice cream and throws up. It eats no ice cream and is depressed. It eats some ice cream in some times. Meanwhile, it goes to the gym in strawberry-pink running shoes. It considers plastic surgery.

It tries calculus, but calculus fails to please. Leaving math behind, Its taxes are audited, and in this process, lies miraculously and unavoidably happen due to clerical accuracy. Seeing the light, It buys a graphing calculator with great joy.

It pushes a rock up a mountain. The rock rolls down again. The face of the rock, which had looked familiar, becomes strange under accurate inspection. It decides that the rock must be a metaphor, and leaves to go place an online personals ad.

It gets pink eye and the left is crusted shut. It gets better. When depth returns, Its objects are all in the wrong places. It spends the day moving things back. If It can avoid it, It does not have people over for dinner for many days afterward. Spatially, it has become more delightful to go calling.

Finally, It does the math, It adds up what there is: wellness and being and divinity are given. It is toned and smart and gratified and located. Its life is favored by the gods. What else could It require? It gets up, It puts on water for tea, It presses Its palm to the window to check the temperature outside.

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Education

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Presentations and Publications

"Who Should I Save?: Nurses as Next-to-Final Girls." Popular Culture/ American
Culture Association of the South Regional Conference. Savannah, GA. October
6, 2006.
"Queer Cool: Showtime's *Queer as Folk* as Universal Romance." Popular Culture
Association/American Culture Association National Conference. Atlanta, GA.
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Poems published in *The Wabash Review*, *Parting Gifts*, *Poetry Motel*, and *Afterwork*

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Poetry Staff, *The Southeast Review* (September 2004-December 2006)
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