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Megan Carter

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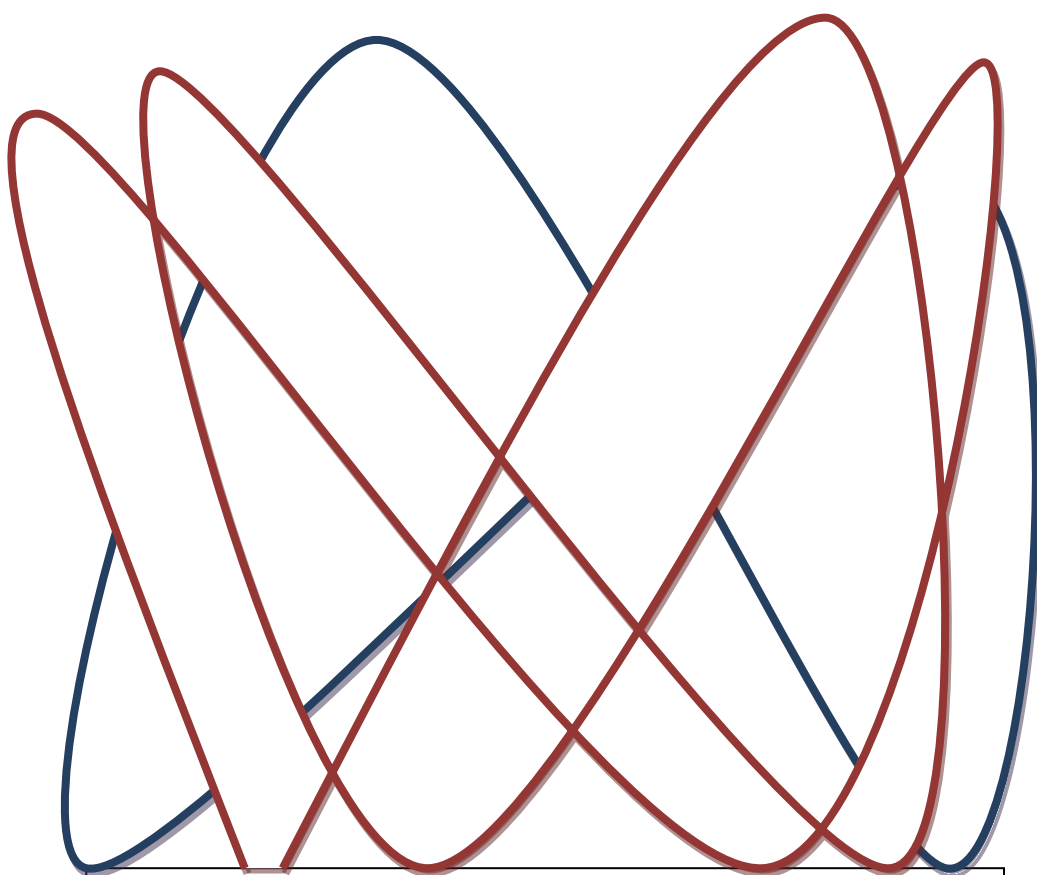


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Bridging

**Poetry of Place in Putnam
County**

Megan Carter

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Acknowledgments

In writing this paper, I want to first acknowledge the work of my body, especially my eyes and ears for putting up with me. I also want to thank my Broca's area for putting up with my desire to further my language skills and understand the rhythms of words in nature.

I want to thank the leaves around DePauw—I appreciate that you didn't disintegrate in the winter when I needed you most. Thanks for allowing me to place some of you back in the trees in order to defy nature but to better my craft. Thanks to the trees for sticking around. I've fallen in love with Sycamores & Maples here, and the secret pines.

I want to thank the bridges for not cracking under the weight of my sedan. I want to thank the engineers and builders of the covered and iron bridges. I have so thoroughly enjoyed the details of each structure—its trusses, beams, and windows.

I want to bow down to the county roads. I would serve you a meal if I could find your mouth. I have appreciated the paths. All of the winding hills made me remember and write about childhood.

In this process, I owe much gratitude to my thesis advisor, professor Joe Heithaus, and his ability to help me through writing blocks with the medicine of poetry. I also owe him something for inspiring me with his work, teachings, and for hiking with me in New Mexico. I also owe thanks to professor Harry Brown and professor Jeanette Pope for serving as Convener and Reader for my thesis and for having confidence in my creativity.

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Thanks to my roommates who tolerated my mess and impulsivity in this process and who deserve an apartment cleaning!

Last, many hearts to my family in Cincinnati for allowing me to come & go throughout this journey. Thanks Mom for listening to the vision of my project on the phone, for feeding me. Thanks Dad for showing me hard-work, for buying me hiking boots, and for your goofiness. Thanks Julie for helping me imagine the world beyond this project and for being my career coach. Thanks Allison for visiting me at DePauw, going ice-skating with me in December, and for contributing a poem at Dunbar Bridge about aliens.

Walking

Leafing

First Bridge

Steady, blanketed cloth (out) of place—weaving for myself
alone. Branch out.

Three years, I can't stop seeing the haze, stuck fog,
library staring out back window
interpreting houses to my right—butter yellow, mint green,
cream arched in retinas, and left, apartments of pastel
fizzing on tongue. In front of me, cars in the lot— metal embodiments
below blooming trees that layer toothless streets. Branches of pear tree and Oak--
all fingers and toes. But where is the whole (holy) body?
Omphalos underneath,
inside Ford Taurus, Jeep Cherokee?

It's 2am, the library is now closed! Please bring any last-minute check-outs to the circulation desk. I repeat: It's 2am, the library is now closing. The lights will shut off in five minutes.

I EXIT
stream down a lit walk eyeing glass shards
outside the fraternity to my right. I think about stereotypes & sports.
I picture stadiums behind pastel apartments.

Pondering obscure intricacies: what if helmets left on the field at the end of the season stay
buried
under winter rain & snow.
Are people still buried in the half-acre cemetery outside track stadium? Is an athlete buried
there? Are trees older than plots?

Rain pelts my nose & lips,
I enter my house.

Holding the Yoke

Don't fall back down
sky
don't do it—
crack under the clouds
I'm holding your hues in both hands—
ravenous red through stoned branches,
dandelions basketed in amber,
honey and salmon sinking.

But I never had a chance to wave,
say goodbye to you.
The birded blue sky will disappear
along with the cotton clouds.

I just want the sun to sit down
across from me
in a rocking chair
for once
before it drops into the bowl.

I want to ask how the broken morning yoke
soars, casts, then settles
down into navel.

Setting Sun, can I just shake your hand before the stars?

Blinking & Musing

Summer still-air, sun drifting, I stare out the lens of a lawn-chair outside East College.
Salmon-coated brick, spotlights flaming to light the path where few walk.
Ready, set, no one! Scribbling a poem, empty, vacationing
thoughts, tired, I notice grass-stains on knees.

Little black bugs fall from Red Oak above,
too relaxed to move. Giving up on mastering, controlling
chaos today. Clouds overhang, squirrels serve me acorns on my head.
Looking up, I wonder if sky has a doctor on-call. Tame landscape,
sneaky, sly creatures, dropping nets to test me.
Closing eyes, I imagine my doctor's office at home & I'm
complaining about a concussion caused by squirrels.
Blinking, my dentist now leans me back & brushes my teeth dipping toothbrush into snow

& mixing it with baking powder. Blinking again, late November, standing outside East College—

Linings of my pockets stuffed with leaves, its cold & I'm still wearing short-sleeves.

Morphing into something & fly back to summer,
nesting in branches & dropping acorns on my lonesome myself.
Missing silence, I crave to blink back.

Distance

Braided trees
out the pinhole—
long, steady fingers
rope,
withstand wind gusts.
What wind wants—
cut off stiff, wavy leaves to
let go let go
unclench,
 snap down
& violet

from a distance—
ultraviolet & pigments & centuries
& seasons of we say what we want.

Fall.
All of our leaves fall.
So what?

8:25 am, Dissecting Leaves through Lens of Library

Butter gingkoes
saturate scarlets and ambers
not cleaved, they cannot
curl up, mitten on sidewalk in
the same demeanor, footmark.
Sycamore leaves spiral faster
in distance,
Grandfather palms
stiff veins, pigment
down on pavement.
An old man passes me with school papers tucked in cardigan

but I pretend he carries leaves
and hides more in the body of his jacket.

To drop
down willing,
Sycamores are not waving gingkos.

Noticing the Sunset while Walking down Locust St

Sapphire sky helling again,
day closes before I can compose.
Sky-sheet
down
falling out bramble, brambling,
leaves layer all paths.

Scabs in the sky—
doctoring the scratches, Could I
basket all of this scarlet underbrush?
I'd dig a compost pile and let layers fall
out of the Ford truck of the sky.

I ran when I should have walked—
warbler splashed me in the stream
of my center
as if a blind bat or mole bit me and dug back down
darker & deeper.

To say enough is chipped sticks,
I can do better.
Feel Sycamore shedding.

Musing Outside, Dim September Afternoon

I.

Roofs. Ridges. Roots
I prefer roots, unwinding ancestry,
but I'll walk through tunnels, ridges,
stand on roofs in order to uncover.

II.

Blueprint of sky—

fishwater, egg-blue cubicle walls.
Could I find solace in library,
studying?
Sky-wires, birds, and clouds,
instruments out window. Do we control we?
Is this town (un)born,
dented in to be re-born, bent?

We don't bother to push aluminum
out anymore.

Buried town,
I have my great-grandmother's feet
& I can work.

III.

Irish green beer-bottles, lamps
licking paths, crowned with flowers,
a dark green tint trumpeting outside
Asbury, academic lawns littered,
I look into.

IV.

Walking, waiting to build into
I know nothing of old around here,
just jazz & houses.

Each layer of siding,
labor.

Man's hands for me
inside.

Laid (land) side by side, bricks & stones & windows.
Catching my reflection in craft, I flex & fidget
down
 the
 street.

Cloud's a river and I'm
alone.

My thoughts reach a squirrel
that squeals up brick, touching crown-molding,

trying to climb into basket of bell tower.

Lit, lucky to have nightlights,
my limp echoes feed shadows,
perpendiculars.

Light limp echoes
seeking owls beyond statues.

Wings not expanding tonight.
lost light limp echoes.
Flying through land refined,
stiff, painted span.

Dear, dear, hope lies in
lingering voices.
Footsteps, I step out of shadows
& seek voices of sheen of plaques, alumni
to reach out, waterfall.

Before dark, in day-dark,
brass owl opens wingspan,
feathers flapping, heavy cloth.
Leaving thin twigs, string echoes of night.

Porching the Path

Pathing pavement,
my feet and legs are still that—unawakened,
unknown, lumber.

Could I
fly into, out of
(dis)embodied houses on Washington St?
Know the peace, pearl of place interwoven into campus?
I want to hold the mold of each serious construction.
I could carry my whites in a basket, and walk up porches
to find a crescent sitting on a dining room table.

Which house will welcome me?

The window-watcher aged 21, Visitor to Greencastle.
Hi, my name is _____.
My mission is to walk around town until I know the reflection of place,
my face amongst locals, folks whose families built houses here,

farm here.

I look inside another house painted yellow, a wrap-around porch,
two elderly women with stern lips sit to the left playing bridge
and exchange smiles with me.

Should I wave?
Could I pick a porch and know place?

I path on,
light blanketing behind.

Dream Words, Tethering Dusk-thoughts outside East College, September

Unhinged, I realize that I need nails
for my construction
to staple spider webs,
to net harvest sky, butter-night
and smooth it across, to remember what I see.

Sightings Around Town

Leaves drag bellies across concrete,
Fall afternoon, neighborhood of pinhole windows
& poisonous cherry trees. Every house unfamiliar,
original, unlike home.

Worm walking asphalt. Upon closer examination, baby snake.
No hiss, hum, sun-fried scales, copper & beige skin.
Perhaps tanning, creature slithers still.

Greencastle Square

local, rural, man-holed roads.
Walking, seeking understanding,
the right combination of steps, keys to open
shops, shake hands with keepers,
admiring practical grit & facial expressions— noticing
break habits of a bald-headed man.
I walk in a café, sit at bar table, drinking coffee & reading a book backwards.

Staring out side window, man bends knees against brick,
smokes three cigarettes,
shuffles his stance.

I think about birds on wires.

L

ooking for Soil

Salmon Wings

gravel path, walking through
Nature Park, crossing clipped butterfly,
Goatweed Leafwing,
honey red, curtained leaves,
three inch wing-span
curled under,
torn.

I cry. I'm not a child.

Unwound, sitting as stiff maple-leaf,
August, lost dreamcatcher.

Beaks

let so much in—worms unknown,
they share coursing warm-blood,
warm-blood,
colors below the surface
(begging) to exist.
Blame the sun, blame labor, family,
but do not blame the birds in this place.
Wrapped again & again,
nested.

Whistles of the Eastern Bluebird

I've searched but I haven't spotted
You—Eastern Bluebird, intricate nester.
I stepped on your pale blue eggs.

Cracked on the basin floor,
Ten centimeters spanned twenty

between cracks,
A clutch of fuzz.
I wish I could spot you in these open woodlands
flapping through fields, passing by as I sit under Sycamore.
Your soft golden belly, perky beak, royal blue overcoat.
I'll station one hour,
glance at riveting tadpoles in shallow rainwater.

Until I have to stand up, walk back,
I sit quietly under brittle branches & stare at yielded sunlight
& worry about work.

But wait—
 tury cherwee cheye-ley
 cheye-ley, cheye-ley, cheye-ley
 turwee, turwee

I listen again, cock head &
see *Sialia sialis*.

Boxelder Bug

the way that you climb on my power cord, dangle upside-down,
swaying legs, you refuse to die.
Two legs, now three and I thought I crushed you with my sock,
prone to ground—grey belly—coiled over, stuffed
between itself,
pruned out but so hollow.

Carved From the Cocoon

Limestone, gone.
Infant carved like a pumpkin,
yolk of an egg disposed in the sink,
shell of a turtle cracked,
honey sucked out of hives,
STOP sign graffitied with GO.

Wind rolls dust
where caterpillars form cocoon
but it's too late—parasites latched,
debris blew until
eggs hatched,
ground sunk,
tears flood, paralyze & drown cocoons.

Float away is all I can say
to organisms driven by the will
to survive,
the will to survive
vanquished by
another's will to feast.

(In my rented kitchen,
I lit flames, scooped out yolk, sliced pumpkin,
cracked shells, flooded cocoons in the sink.)

Dandelion on the Side of the Trail

Wild-flower tries, strives to survive
alive,
Cemented.

Our road or theirs?

I think the sun
will break, chop slanted stem
before we feel tears.

Wading Out

Dipping limbs in October air, Indiana
wind twirls hair, rearranges bangs,
covering eye-clouds. *Do not look at me*
uncreating today.

Behind corn fabric of forehead,
mind leafs onto Walnut, holding stem,
nibbling kite-breeze, body bends, licks rhythm of subtle
current, seeking clay.
I have pinched & kilned all,

let go

Waiting to graduate & be gifted, granted doors into
deep earth, to bed & carve out
canoe, nestle into nectar of rivers. My chapters
have consisted of spitting out pumpkin seeds
again & again
for simple language, voice pencils pages,
underlines alliteration on weekends, wakes up words
with caffeine.

Voice is hoarse. She plastic forked all sides of my cardboard box, poking
holes on purpose. Four years of bending back, packaging clay, picking out
seeds on street. To showcase here?

Voice tapes me up. Tomorrow, I will walk down sidewalks, file a complaint
with the shipping department.

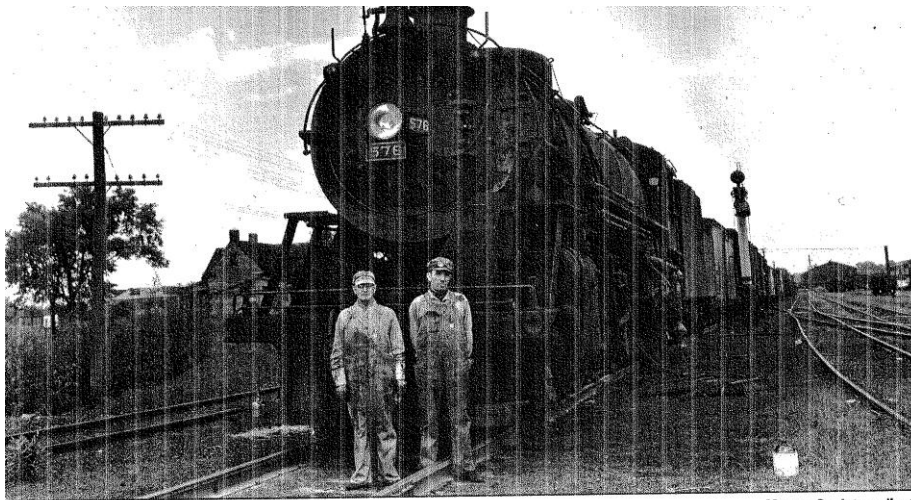
Here's my truth: stars seek
release, to fire out, blossom. Wide wood running, carrying lumber
down, re-carving & leaning into Walnut,
leafing

Mapping

Mapped Putnam

Hard work & hiking books, I've got.
Could I continue to construct?
What becomes,
blossoms
or spirals down Fall,
sprouting language, bridging finest limestone.

Carry me past pumpkin season, carve into mesh
of this place, Putnam, Civil War Veteran.
Putnam County.
“hardwork, self-sacrifice, and frugality”
Pioneers picked at, pitched forts in this land and
moved on
until National Road bled into Putnam,
routed, mapped this place to become
paradise
below and above ice shelves.



Monon Society collect

Rattle Tracks

To be a Hoosier, to hear railroad—Monon—“the only one.”

100 year anniversary on July 1947,

Vernon A. Hewitt typewrote in 1946:

“Hoosier Heritage: An Address to the Railcar and Locomotive Historical Society Chicago

Chapter

Treasurer and Asst to President

Chicago, Indianapolis, and Louisville Railway Company

He markets “the love of American Railroads.”

I seek to ride the Monon

meaning I sit in the archives

and think about dark coal-rails abstractly,

or sit behind the Monon restaurant, parked car, yearning

for more than October leaves—waiting for C-628 locomotives, swift engine, conductor honking

loudest on caboose. Black gates

gone. I hear cars: the winner of the race between road & rail.

Commercial & freight trucks of hogs & chickens rattling across neatly-nailed tracks.

“The universal use of the automobile over splendid highways are marks of inevitable human progress.”

☺ ☺ ☺

Dillinger, Dillinger, comes & goes

beat, beat the asphalt National Road

springing west, weeding in and out of towns—robbing

Greencastle, rupturing rock, stealing charm.

No doors safe, Midwestern mothers, key them all!

Serial robber, he comes & goes as robin-hood, taking harvest.

☺ ☺ ☺

Railcars Running

Running railcars,

railcars in the wind,

ear to ear—drums earn sound,

bodying,

an eerie song plays in my car.

Sometimes I wish to rewind history to hear conductor,
become conductor.

Driving out to Monon—extinct, I know the other rails
run. The absent rail reminds me of great-grandfather

dismembered. Deaf, he stood on tracks foolish. Did he want, like me,
to be
conductor?

Vandalia line
dead?
Not quite.
The place runs at night, I know,
so I carve a center
here
behind Monon Restaurant
wiping frost off my windshield with fingers.
I imagine coal seeps up from the tracks.

The smell reminds me of my grandpa's garage—
tobacco and steel. I could sit on this pavement amongst cigarettes
& dried mulch for days.
But I could not bathtub all this energy;
I've missed the years
running



Bridge to Terry

A woman with sandy-white hair, thick rims, & a heavy sweater sits smiling
across from me
shuffling, with excited limbs in the library archives,
carrying three spilling books.
Her name is Terry. I talk with her for an hour.
Coming in to research the National Road, Monon, Vandalia lines,
I notice my research starts to speak.

Voice to voice, a stranger teaches me more.
She tells me her mission to unleaf a lost aunt,
a wealthy one. As a kid, she didn't meet many relatives, moved around a lot.

I speak my path from Cincinnati, Catholic schools.
Wide-eyed, about to burst, she holds up an arm,
I grew up on the Ohio!
Well, in Indiana on a houseboat with my father & sister
until the fire,
until my father was burnt &
stopped his work & moved back to Spencer.

Overwhelmed, saying sorry, I decide to turn over sadness, talk about myself.
I'm from Loveland, 40 minutes from river.

She knew my town, smiled.
Talking tug-boats, she stands up, & asks to borrow paper from my notebook.
Leaning over, drawing a three-storied design, penciling carefully
next to my words. She draws her father's boats, describing how engine & fan worked
together, how a pulley clips onto barges.

Caught in conversation, I notice snow beginning to fall outside. I shake Terry's
hand & leave.

Later, turning through notebook, I see another sketch:
Directions to Terry's Homestead & a note—

*TERRY WHITE- 765-654-6543, I'd be more than happy if you stopped by. I live in
Fillmore. I run a cattle farm, I have llamas, chickens, sheep. I'd be happy to show you the
county as well. That would make me very happy. Just give me a call.*



Fueling

I want to build houses, root.

I use consciousness as economy.

I contemplate trucks hauling soup cans & cereal.

Feed me

feathers pah pah pah in the mouth.
Spiders inside veins hatching roots.

Sitting home, picking worms off leaves.

Lacking fruit, light lusters through pane.
flower-fallen, flower-fallen. I stand at window,
listening.

☺ ☺ ☺

Poems lay eggs.

☺ ☺ ☺

Earth, women are your water.
I've been pumping the wrong gasoline
believing it to be water for words, wind, my stream.

☺ ☺ ☺

I wish I drove a rusted Ford. Cherry-green with tin roof scratched,
paint chipping from hood. Engine drive me,
seek sacred space.

☺ ☺ ☺

Bud, blossom, tree stub falling off cottonwood
fallen off like loose limbs in petroleum on gas-station concrete
like slippery, silhouetted feet that could belong to anyone—I am one crisp,
salmon leaf.

I'm trying to yarn the maples back but I should be running, whistling, waiting for new,
to pack bags & go.

☺ ☺ ☺

I understand the deep-down, personal vein-language.

Can air catch fish?
How about leaves?
Could I be invited into salad
of sky?

I promise not to eat anything green until dawn,
hours of surviving on air, industry
alone.

☺ ☺ ☺

Fool-body. Young, deep, waiting to fill. I don't know so keep telling me tethers:
truth-blankets-truth-threads-truth-baskets-truth-waiting-truth-fruit.

Keep saying truth & perhaps I'll learn rhythm of local jazz—Tad Robinson.

☺ ☺ ☺

Glaze peels off picnic tables,
paint pulls back—see
no crown or clouds—paper construction, cotton glued, remember,
don't you?



I want to paint the barn a new shade
every month, to mean something to self.

To cross bridge, hear trees preach,
the art of constructing a barn in place.

🌀 🌀 🌀

To escape my moth,
I seek goldenrods.

🌀 🌀 🌀

It's that + that + that.
All of the glue out in woods that connect thoughts,
that makes me question more than substance of wood,
patterns of words,
secrets of age & trunk that's still growing.

Sitting down at desk fleshed out & paved, I scribble in journal
& think about buying a pulley to carry yarn across bridge of place.

☺ ☺ ☺

Should I strike the lightning? Do I have that sort of power? Can my words spark?

The wind blows & trees curve crooked.
Whipping air, spiraling species.

☺ ☺ ☺

Musings of polar Indiana: If I had a mustache, would it curl under?

☺ ☺ ☺

Butter of leaves,
Make soup of some sort,
embody railroad jingles.

Heartbeat of sun reflects into leaves
And I think about rough, human prickles against water jewels of sky.
Splinters, wood decks net into clouds.
Violet, amber, honey, we plant light.

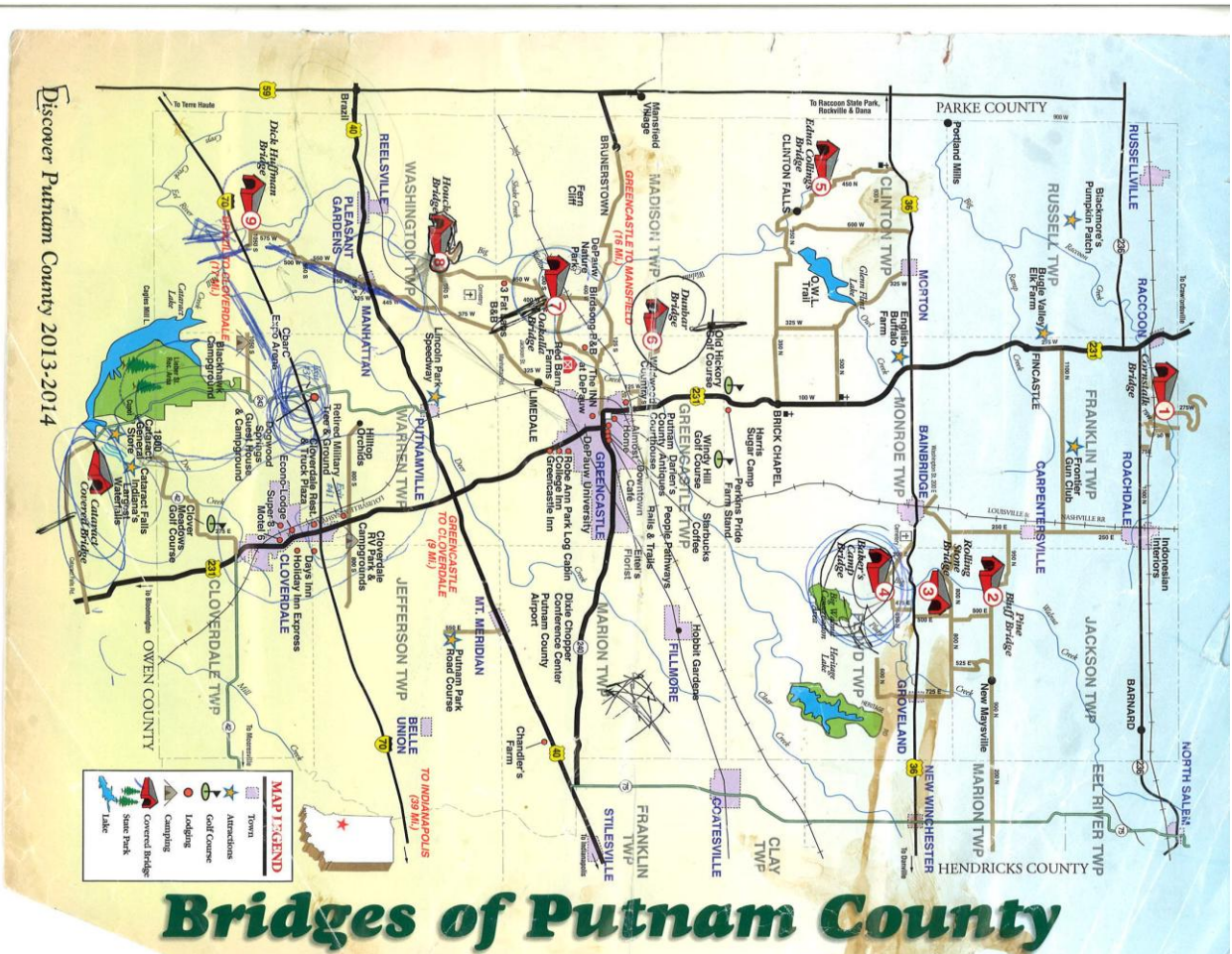
☺ ☺ ☺

chirp chirp caw caw curve
bend, burnish my mind to become _____ (something like an egg)
construct all shades of barns—red rusting brown, chipping white.
Pastels shade deep woods, burnt down black, caving in, being rescued by arms
of Oak, Birch, trying to pick up infrastructure, cracked beams leaning
against cloudy woods.



Answers do not hang off gates, door knobs, hinges, on my dog's leash.
What's seen is present without people.

Opening, creaking, letting the dog run free.



Driving

R_{emembering}: E_{ast}

Plastic Rims

I.

Hiding on the porch, step down,
unearth, I hear.

I scrape along path of quarry,
lying back flat looking up,
reaching out arm to find grass with closed eyes.
61 degrees, October, Greencastle, Indiana.

I sit on brown grass, hearing distant rattle of railcar.
Staring at knuckles,
turning palms up.
Could I, Could I
replant?
I acknowledge water here—a sea
of rain
reinvesting.

Fog right,
I wake up
on my childhood street, half-acre plots,
no weeds, vines
uprooted.
Sunken chemicals flatten neighborhood:
there is a jigsaw pattern, front porches with wreaths.

Fingers through grass, I pray for a false divine.
This land used to be farm, pride of Miamian soil.
Before that, wide wood—more than good enough—
Immaculate forest. I could've built a barn.

Leftover bark floods my backyard.

Trees, now tile,
now creaking kitchen floors.

I remember Sycamore I peeled back as a child,
toads croaked in puddles, wildflowers sprouting under toes of trees
now sliced.

At 10, I hung up a net between Sycamore & Oak,
to kick a soccer ball between elastic. Sometimes I missed & ball
landed in my neighbor's yard.

Another lawn, porch light.

II.

I return to consciousness, at quarry. Reclaiming
ash, possible? No porch lights or lawns.
This place, factoryed out, weeds higher than my hair (& turning scarlet-cold)!
Bring in digging machines for limestone dissection. Or is it time to build
another road? A paved subdivision?

The trees are dead. Deader than home. I spot Sycamores rimming this place,
rustics hold on! Too old to not know better.

The heritage of bark in my backyard--
beaten, a deer caresses legs against an Oak out back
Is the creature sharpening before
stumped?

Dried potential, rotten soil preserved,
store-bought violets,
Midwest, in aluminum can of carbon dioxide
let us pray for clarity.

Balding, wigged ground—Ohio to Indiana—

Painted brown leaves rehydrated through rain, keep them in bloom
through acrylics.
A mom sits on her deck, glances at child in a plastic pool, and breathes
because child is contained and not swimming in backyard puddles.

Another day of
Do not let the girl out!
Do not let the dog out!
Pesticides, oh dear.

I stare at sea-water of this place.
I wonder who first decided to bruise Her, unblanket Her,
rip out all of our teeth.
Ex-cultivated. We are alone,
plowed, fracked, frozen.

Winter may be hot. Time to talk, mom, dad, Winter may be hot, it's time
to talk.

My skin is growing a price-tag: \$15.93.
I'm sitting in my backyard, 1995, and the garden grows pink pebbles,
ones I remember in fish-tanks. All my fish died.

On my knees and elbows, I try to dig through
soil but all I find are (finger)nails.

The garden grows worse than the road—concrete—where can I swim?
Where can I slide?
Sorry dear, the swing-set broke.
We put it out with the trash last night.

Could I, could I grow grey-hair in college?
Grey-hair girl, Greencastle, consumed.
This girl, this Girl lounges on a wicker chair with plastic muscles
and overlooks quarry, her patio of rock and she waits for
rebirth. She's as territorial as a dog.
But the yard is empty, balding.

Let us pray for puddles in Fall.
Harvest moon falling down
deeper into rimmed clouds.
I dissect Maple leaves in front of me
and I see scary magic—
pupils like spatulas frying eggs, my hands want to fold like
crescents.

Another day of
Do not let the girl out!
Do not let the dog out!
Pesticides, oh dear.

Fingers aren't always branches, my skin is not bark,
I am the factory and my engines are running,
but the fan, I'm afraid, has clots of dust and is
slowing down.

Why do I sit and try to porch-light this dusk?
Shouldn't a gate be closing?
But the quarry is no park, it's my pain,
my childhood in a plastic swimming pool. The water here
cannot reach Walnut, Ohio,
carry to Mississippi.

III.

playing golf,
trying to find leaf
greenest in order to hit my club into some hole.

Could I, could I escape roots to renew?
I need not, I could not, Never!
I touch my ears—intricate. Perhaps the wax,
corn inside will hold this whole place together!

I touch my lashes and remember eyes.

I step out of the plastic pool,
mom says come inside,
help me husk corn,
clear and set table.
I remember how fast the sun dunked down.

IV.

Here, quarry-rimmed, I'm mounted on top
benching over,
7:55 pm, harvest half moon,
butter night
breaking.

Wandering

I think my ancestors were nomads for as much as I
wander. I seek migration and meat, not corn or grains.
Spinning top, stability rests in motion—running, walking, writing, fabric-winding,

go!

Vicariously, I enter rain-clouds in my bedroom.
Sometimes I pull out my own weeds and threads at night.

Every morning outside my blinds, a chokeberry tree.
I wonder why I sit in bed & type when I could live in wet woods,
spread roots and seeds,

let go

My words run into every corner of my computer screen. working. work.
worked. wilting.
Red-stems
wandering, seeking to.

Far Away, Canoeing into Wabash

I.

O Wabash, winging up from Ohio,
flapping down Indiana into Illinois.
503 miles hooking southwest.

*Round my Indiana homestead wave the cornfields,
In the distance loom the woodlands clear and cool.*

Visitor to this place, peeling up my leaf
& dancing near flickers. rewinding sensitivity
around here. here?

*Oftentimes my thoughts revert to scenes of childhood,
Where I first received my lessons, nature's school.*

I know Walnut better, canoeing
with wet dog, barking boots,
lounging in Spring body,

easing under covered bridges.
Shallow skeletal bottom,
black wads of leaves,
a human, I hook what's left.

Failing at fly fishing, I use small seine
to catch fish, local bodies.
 brown water bubbling,
 a pool of bass, carp, salmon, catfish, perch.

II.

Watching a YouTube video called "Fishing on the Wabash River,"
I place my body in an aluminum boat with Dan & his four kids.
We cruise, bend through Wabash
biting wind, whisking hair,
laughing.

Banking, we fish for drums under iron bridge.

Crank it in crank it in crank it in!

Arcing poles, thin lines of pressure,
his girls catch beauty (four inch bodies)
with #2 hooks & rigs. Releasing wild &
laughing.

III.

Fingering through family photos, my Dad, older sister,
& I hook hot dogs with tiny pink poles & catch catfish
off pond deck—1997.
My sister and I smirk at camera, gripping a bladder and belly.

CATCH & RELEASE ONLY.

Pond rewinds & washes me, makes me
want to carve out canoe & paint it
red.

IV.

Here, Indiana waterbed —golden-blue reflection
springing up, I sense & seek something

known below blanket of soft wind:
deep river roots.

I imagine snaking up tunnels of water
backwards—from sea to Mississippi
to Ohio to Wabash to Walnut where I
now rest on shore
looking for shells. Divided,
I morph into trout imagining fish-eyes & cheeks,
a new language.

I will always carry my Dad's blue tackle box
back home.

Back & Forth in Grandpa's Sedan, Wishing I Drove a Truck

ENTER PUTNAM COUNTY

Ohio to Indiana against setting sun,
pulling threads, carrying Sycamore sap in a 1997 sedan.

To see farmland, fields, Big Walnut Creek.

Do not Disturb! No Trespassing!

Taking signs lightly, I root,
seeking bridges, tunnels to stop in for a few minutes & sort out self.
To write this place, weave thread through all this fabric
feels unfamiliar, of another wood.

To pick up sticks & root my Sycamore seeds.

We will Shoot Unauthorized Personnel!

Driving,
four years of closing, opening windows,

let go

my voice whispers,
step out of the car, earth feet.

Spotting a three-inch ivory snake on road,
I turn engine off, get out, walk slowly, humming toward it.
Loosening out of canvas shoes, slithering toward limp snake,

I pet creature with my toes.
Sun-swollen baby.

Walking away,
abandoning my grandfather's engine, curving body further
through wheat stalks,
camouflaging, losing self in dusty blond forest.

Weaving out, driving, lost on US 40, National Road
to retrace roots, to compose poem. East to Cumberland, West to Vandalia,
600 miles of goldenrods out my window.

LEAVE PUTNAM COUNTY

East, out of county, passing Civil War homestead, open black fence:
red-brick, white shutters, wrap-around porch,
pond, a horse farm.

I pull up drive & back out quickly. Too scared to knock.
Back East back to Ohio to home to buy more packets of seeds.

W est

Beams of Oakalla—1898

Small maple leaves
Fall here—tiny,
crowned, put together
brown leaves—bitter Oakalla.

Ring-billed gull trembles in flight,
fall.
Oakalla, Oakalla, Oakalla
echoes.

Black cattle look up from pastures.
I head back to my car, drive with muddy boots, soggy toes,
passing a hair-strung barn, tire-swings, a creek between homesteads,

Back into town, factories face me.
Clouds leak above.
If only I could concentrate.

Oakalla, Looking Up

Two airplanes stream overhead.
I stand in mud, quick sand? Gripping rope swinging from branch,
I notice poison ivy.

Could I, could I hang on, stay here?
Climb the mossy tree?
Wind pushes, leaves drain downstream.

To wander softly and not sink
would be nice.

Matted paradise, leaves canoe down Walnut.
My hair blends into branches.
I'm dug in

Into blue distance, a red barn, white homestead , russet horse.

Scene distracts that I almost miss
the white-bodied bird, a Ring-Billed gull.
I pretend its dark-grey feathers carry envelopes, my mail.

.
I pick up white feathers & bury them between stones.

Backing Out

I.

Behind Monon again,
parked in Semi lot, NO PARKING strapped to barn,
I listen to pop music & think of paradoxes—
loose leaves & wires,
still hum of old railcar next to my engine
running.

I seek to run length of rails, to restart progress with my feet,
unreel yarn back to old, peeling white Depot
to meet old conductors,
take a cheap ride to Chicago with old DePauw students.

I remember running these tracks in sleep—unbolting rusty toes,
unwelding rail joints.

Turning away,
I will come back.
I'm running away again, not planting seeds, trying to understand
deep night seeking.

II.

Winding car onto Elizabeth St, driving straight back to Silverwood Signs,
an iced deer antler hangs off the side door & I glance inside. Down the street,
a '70s Chevy truck hums in driveway, its cherry-green coat
rusted & still running.

III.

Passing by houses with porch swings chained up,
I seek to pull them down & swing,

knock on stranger's barns & seek communion over crescents.

I want so much.

Afraid to bother, fleeting fabric down W Jacob St, I stare at knobby trees—
wild-eyed Walnuts. I think about my grandpa & his stubborn straight face,
our blond hair, eyes.

He loved birds— robins & blue jays & cardinals.

He loved to carve bird-houses, string them against Oak, and feed squirrels.

He always left his sedan under a shaking Sycamore and now I run his engine,
spinning his seeds a state away.

Slow Wheels

I.

Driving west through unpaved, pebbly roads,
to see flux of factories to creek to cows tonguing hay-beds.

Curving around 125 S, my favorite white house, well, red barn mailbox
fading. I seek fresh water.

Big Walnut emerges & I fear my car will slip onto February ice & slide
down but car crosses bridge. I stop & read:

1960

BIG WALNUT CREEK BRIDGE

Sun sparkles, winding through flat land.

I've been here before.

Seeking Oakalla,

I know these routes.

A red engine clucks behind me.

Alright, I'm driving. Happy?

Abandoned tunnel to my right, a private grass-haven,
Snowy roads, scraping mud, I break.

PRIVATE PROPERTY.

Passing WHAT GROWS HERE,
my professor's poem planted, restoring message of Heartland..

Path curves down, high hills hang.

I spot four vultures stretching up, winging away from me
off asphalt, keeping away.

Thoroughbreds stationing in front of homestead,
cows cuddling hillside,
listening to echoes of grain-woods,
I can breathe.

II.

Oakalla, Oakalla, I'm swooping through streets
finding brown sign & remembering the route.

Pedaling through stones & snow, my wheels won't climb up track.
I slip back down.

let go,
turn back.

It's too cold to step out anyway.
Root, flower later.

III.

Curving car creekside back to Greencastle,
I try to teach myself to identify more trees—Hemlocks, Beech, Birch
but squirrels squiggle by and water reflects green,
I spring in my seat!

I spot a mallard paddling backwards against current and
I think of my Mom & her station-wagon stories, sitting backseat
with her sister trying to ignore seven other siblings. So many,
I sit alone with an Annie Dillard novel as my companion.
My sisters, 300 miles & a river away.

VI.

Breaking through huddle of woods,
more mallards, more sun-beads against skin.
I think about returning home.

Could my lumber cross bridges & root here?

Back to WALNUT CREEK BRIDGE,
I stop to capture inscription, glance down at Walnut
& remember green frames and harvesting well.

S outh

Hardware

Stopping in Cloverdale Hardware,
walking down 12 aisles, carrying notebook, shopping bag,
looking serious.

I pick out my tools: a powder blue corded phone, an electrical switch,
a door hinge, screws, rakes, nails, window glaze, paint colors.

FREE CHAIN SAW SHARPENING

Now, what should I fix?

Carrying self as customer, a visitor
here to construct, re-stick words, rake & fertilize,
buy seeds to grow something.

I dust off antique toasters & typewriters, stare into old mirrors,
open mailboxes, I think about sending letters to a friend in Texas.

Passing clay mallards, picking up old bait tins, pretending in power of possession
on a Wednesday afternoon, in February in Indiana's oldest hardware store, wandering, seeking
with no money but words in a journal.

Cataract First Eye

I.

What a beauty to be won!
With limestone coarse & sun
beating my cheeks,
trees rimming it all.

Fingers feel sky—leathery leaves outside brown gate
and picnic table where I sit,
glazed, dry lips.
Pushing out blossom-eyes to see water belly
down.
Through grandpa green, I see scarlet
but behind me, vehicles, wires,
the American & Indiana state flags,
hung over wooden fences and symbolic huts.

And I wonder how I can become more
Here.

Let me tread rock,
skin to stone
skidding, too many layers for roots,
a cicada just hit my shorts.

September holds me.
Break open the beak and eat earthworm.
It's so hard to read stream,
chirps, cherry-rust leaves.
Nature laid & netting: Brown braids over spouts,
water trying to be.

I try to dissect
trees, flexing ankles down,
pathing to shore.
Acorns slip me down.
Me and my canvas shoes knotting
over each other and venting
mouth, I keep ankles
down.

Leaf-light communion, I crave settling,
shoring.

II.

Mud, basalt-lit light lives
under flesh. these footmarks
into pockets of rock with dark moss
below russet,
beneath crossing of Elms & Oaks,
pastelled.

Leap light!
Combining strokes soft, layers of skin glimmer
in starkness.
Arched head filters right to envision plastic boats
(instead of bottles)—red mast, blue sail.

III.

Hands in harbor, I have reached creek below falls.
Russet palms, I think about the Pledge of Allegiance as I stare
at paper-veins and recognize my own—my distinct left hand
from right: Y to inverted Y.

Why I go to the fountain:
to feather my face, know love drug of Nature--
a knotted breed. Knobs below branches,
the great Elm with roots wide. Intentions are silly.
I cut down sunflower, sunflower wilted,
so I cut it,
cut it out of compost.

I feel the day through grey sweatshirt,
eyes soft and squish like moss.
See—I stumble on rocks—soft small feet.
No bridges to mud, pebbles, puddles. How,
maker?

IV.

Tilted head sideways—leaning, toes touch rock.

couple unbuckles their Jeep doors,
slinging camera and backpacks over shoulders,
walking to water.

Ripples of waterfall,
limestone balding—doing its job.

Rain pelts my nose and lips,
I re-enter my house.

Cataract Falls & Bridge

I.

I turn off engine & listen to a song about life being automatic,
it's March & snow's melting which means heavy, thick water
rides down creek, chaos overriding chaos.

Open water,
I'm surprised Cataract Bridge doesn't crack above pressure.

I imagine this place is a waterpark,
if only I could ride.
Stuck on stiff grass, sitting, wearing skin, waiting to jump-rope
into rhythm of falls. How could I possibly take a picture here?
Am I a tourist?

Murky brown waves knee
supple caramel pouring into pot, hitting boil & splotching
bottom of fall. Wavering over rim, leaves scuttle ground-level,
lingering, wading bodies of bottles & leaves & logs.
I want to say surf's up!

Water almost floods path where I sit, unleafing.

O when the limbs fall straight in, O when leaves, limbs & plastic go bobbing in,
O how I want to be in their puddle, O when limbs fall straight in.
Beer bottles bobbing, bobbing, bobbing, carrying labels,
I want to wade in the shuffle, waves of white & brown spiraling,
wind-whipping,
I feel the force of place.

II.

Russet, russet fall
down onto Sycamore roots, water pouring over feet,
bony knuckles, kart-wheeling maples.
It's February, melting snow running, whimpering waves
let ice go, flowing,
let go
Copper ladder bends into stove of water, I want to follow its descent.
What if my roots are stored down there?

NO SWIMMING

Bridging, Deeper

Cataract Upper Falls through leaves & dusty, cold grass,
I reach bridge erected in 1838 for “public convenience,”
Smith #4 truss, criss-cross, criss-cross beams.
In 1876, bridge became pedestrian path only,
no more cars, tires, tons,
too much water underway.

I enter the covered body:
a dozen picnic tables, water below beats louder than feet.
I imagine tires & shoes creaking through and I suddenly feel like tourist,
pedaling toes across beams, I take off shoes.
But what if I want to camp and stay?
(If only I carried a sleeping bag, tent, heavier coat).

O water-house,
I could live here, nice air, no doors, window coverings.
Mill Creek carries spring, sheets of ice hitting Falls. Crashing ice,
I read chaos carved into walls:
V HEARTS M
FRANK LOVES WILLY, FEBRUARY 22, 2002.
GET BACK HOME, LAURA ,TO YOUR BALD-HEADED MOTHER!

Water whistles below.

Out window, waves lick lashes,
a father videotapes his son running through mud, kneading it.
Winging out, eyes staring
down through beams in bridge. I think about slaughtered birches, my watering can
of words—a prick of toes, body lying flat on lumber,
staring up at arches with little flickers of light falling through.

Believing in rushing rhythm below:
Trying to snap stills, my camera keeps running out of battery.
How hard to capture violent Falls.
I cannot guard this place but I can try.
Stretching out branches, I scrape to both ends of bridge,
a kid again
flying her kite.

Leaving Cataract

10 doves curving in sky
above rubble, grey bellies out.
Climbing back into car, I hear country music about life being automatic—
Waters wild here.

“Maybe the world without us is the real poem” –Mary Oliver

I drive to Lower Falls of Cataract.
Let go,
bird out, touch trees, build a house

but back here?

Parked, seeing a campfire of sticks,
Sycamore leaves face down,
plastic & glass bottles & red-lipped weeds
hold their own flames. Stabbing toes in mud,
walking out to the end of falls, I expect still streams
but sticks, splintered birches & bulldozers, a soapy stream
of Styrofoam rising.

Trying to catch bubbles,
hands too far out,
I foot limestone, jaded ice edging below.
Limbs stuck in mud, *stubborn place*.

Choking frame, I miss upper falls & crashing waves.
These flat acoustics, white surface—grandfather beard waters.

Cataract,
brown water bubbling, dancing from skin to sky.

I think about dish soap, packing peanuts popping off & off.
Across waterway, flooded birches, iced roots.

Little drives this place but I drove here
to unleaf, reblanket, reclaim nature.
O fish,
I'm so sorry.
I think about childhood cul-de-sacs & sun-sparkling
against pond. What croaks here,
who bathes, washing plastic off body
every day.

Rewritten Disappointment of Lower Falls

When I write poems, I have to be honest: I'm stretching out wings so wide
that I set myself up to see cracks through words and seeds. I let bark fall
and I have to find slanted beauty in another wood, stream, state
tomorrow.

Driving back to lower falls—ice melting, the mile back—unknown.
Tree limbs caught under car, squirrels sweeping through underbrush of Oak.
Arriving, I step out and mud clots boots.

Holding camera, I try to capture 18 foot falls, weak water
bubbling.

I think about my friend sleeping on my couch 20 miles away.
She's not seeing this sliced forest of sticks & rocks & cigarettes & plastic cups,
unreal.

I want to fish but the stream is chalky with waste.
Gills can't work here.

Cataract Questioning

Wide roots.
Sea is river is creek is bed to shore
sitting on sand, I stare into water for fish, gills.
Here, holding my face,
twisting hair to signify confusion—who am I addressing?

It's November, all fish gone or stationed under Mill Creek,
where wet flickers, waves subtle. I want to stop water
to photograph a still.

Bubbling wind, what breath blows up?

Before Putnamville, Stopping at Cemetery

FOREST HILL CEMETARY

PLANTING TREES, BUSHES, FLOWERS & EVERGREENS PROHIBITED

edge of campus, across from old rail depot, the covered bridge attracted me.
Winding through, a mausoleum tucks under grass:
COULDING.

How many bodies lie in this closed cave?

I crackle tires over bridge to reach rolling hills,
bunnies bungee around.

JM PAXTON, a war hero,
he possesses the engraved canon in the grass.
“I love Rock n Roll” plays on the radio. I think about concrete
& skeletons swaying under soil, heavily furnished.

Putnamville, Driving 250 S

I.

Matted weeds, twig trees,
red barn to the east burrowed in snow-sheet grass.

Oak tree to the west,
empty reaching claws, 2 way trunk.

NO TRESSPASSING

Blue height above,
prison across the clearing, past loose wire fence.

Knotted branches like tumbleweed to my right, guarding coffee-brown gates
concealing white farmhouse.

Horses—stallions, three black and brown wild,
propped in side-yard,
flinching, cold.

A couple of hooves hide behind Walnut—branches open, palming
below cirrus, in front of leftover husks.
Carrying on, car pokes behind me, makes me think of a red-headed woodpecker.
I’m glued on sun, passing driver must think (I’m crazy), I think complex,
fancy, it’s noon & 20. Coming up on my left,

tree stubs, Christmas lights come as sun fades.
Overhead, sky-stream. Veiny, not mysterious.

I cross Monon,
reach US 40, less snow.

II.

Crossing over DEER CREEK, I seek to stop.
Takes me 15 minutes to lose car behind me.
When I lose him, I park off the road,
icicles melt from roof drains,
Oaks tear out water from leaves.
I trespass (but there's no sign),
tires mat cut-down stalks over old tracks.
 air's not moving much
 stalks craning fuzzy heads
 cradled by soft wind
 clutching legs, car door open
 looking up, listening to planes.

Houck 1880 – One-Way

Overhanging scraggly trees, dusk-blue distance,
milky air.
Dug out, braided farmland, construction—
plastic tape, empty corn, excavate.

Digging machines flatten. I drive through
Houck, imagining wood cracking
as beams creak: dim huddle over Walnut,
car (and bridge) withstands driving through.

I park Northwest. Swerving, unoccupied path,
cirrus-sun blankets and melts roadside
snow. House on a hill to my west, one-story, red-shuttered,
simple.

Here, parked, parched grass, I realize poetry is subtle,
all from one seed.

Afraid to turn car back to bridge, constructing
new, another bridge—less charm, more concrete, quicker path.

Lingering and I don't know why. Pulling onto 550W,

Sycamores rim around, drop snow down, lend leaves.

Half-iced creek-beds, crazy curves, I keep going
past painted barns, black cattle, following instinct,
turning right onto 125 S back to Greencastle.

Putnamville, Wanting to Give up on Seeds

I.

Driving on US 40 seeking to swim,
tire swings hollow, Walnut tree waits with branches behind its back
for leaves to spring up! Blossom soon (please).

Brushing hand through hair, trying to break into place, to find deep
red home in woods. But see—I'm dissatisfied with seasons and scissors.
What I mean is that I hear snip, snip, crack, drag.

Deep-eyed trees axed down,
to sit in truck-bed to tree farm to factory to make furniture and paper everything.

Searching for centers, seeds split. I think about returning to Greencastle to buy sunflower seeds
at the grocery & give up.

Seeking still to cradle cotton in hands,
I keep driving.

II.

I'm a woodpecker seeking sap of horses, cattle, gated sheep.
Parking outside an abandoned motel, I remind myself that I wander,
peel off course, that seeking never ceases.

To continue to drive & scribble one seed, soul, reason is silly, quite stupid.
Unknown faces, wind, fears.

Strapped in, a buzzard catches me off-guard swooping through sky:
brushing fields, belly out, quilted wings.

To live here,
buy a rusted truck, some land, raise sheep, pigs, cattle
and keep seeds inside.

Car bruises dirt roads, crosses Deer Creek,
I look at sticky woods and above, beginning to see

art that I can't write,
stubborn glue.

III.

Putnamville, abandoned porches, lumber, school buses, military tanks.
I realize that my poems have become lists, dimensions.
Writing about same straw & barns & cattle, trying to catch feathers in a bucket.

Crows scatter from tin roof of prison.
Should I care?

I curve by another red barn & mossy house. I stop to stare at clay statue
of a little girl—white bonnet, powder blue dress against rim of a pond. I think about my
grandparents, their clay mallards, seasonal flags in front of a porch 200 miles away.

To be sitting against my old pond,
listening.

Reelsville, Trying to Paint

I am not a scientist,
driving through Reelsville, edge of county, I fish for something with
two lures in my pocket.
Seeking, dancing, limbing out, to learn story,
lean into place.

Passing Peace Gardens, somebody yarned a tree.
Crossing Big Walnut, a distant hue,
shaded fields, the outline of a lemon-colored homestead.

LEAVING PUTNAM COUNTY

Turn around or leave place? Tie yarn to a map and stretch. Could rhythm
be about carrying scissors and cutting chords,
craving what's outside rims, to cast out & cast in pools of chaos?

Reeling and winding around, undefined fish
so I'm on my way out & in & out,
streaming.

Curving around county, driving by diners, post offices, bars,
trying to understand Spanish on the radio, thinking of all of the streets
I'll never enter, but then I think about the houses, barns, farms, and
universes I have seen.
All of the locals I've joked with, all of the hands I've shook,
all of the directions I've learned
to forget.

I'm leaving Greencastle in 2 months, to enter another state, country,
continent. I'll miss cords, voices, dialects, daily life of here.
I'll be back

N_{orth}

Passing Chapel Hill

Driving,
shaking birdhouses,
seeking birth of self, common language.

To write world through county
& come out with core would be wonderful.
Standing up paper-self & bending language to tree,
to build barn.
Asking always, do I carry enough tools, do I basket
enough on travels? Using compass, map, & camera
& coming up short.

Driving,
wrapping words around silos, toes to asphalt, ears to crow-wires
& calling that sky,
wrestling with a barking dog:
sit, sit, please stay! no bite, no!

Stretching still-body who stares at one light in a closed room.
She knew *this is not it.* Not at all.
Branches crack, cry, drag. Trying to glue sticks together
& say root, leaning into place.

☺ ☺ ☺

I did not know Buffalo here are American Bison
I did not know
the fur of place
the tusks that could kill me
I did not know Pioneer pulling, holding onto spirit.
I do not know what's lost.

☺ ☺ ☺

Inside the Barn

Hay stacks in a steel barn
some kid just kicks
clueless.

Sterile, tangled, ripped out
fodder the kid plants on his tongue.

Under hip-roof,
he hopes to jump up and touch frame.
His teacher said *gravity is constant*.
He could rope hay & hair, climb up and touch.
Prone, he licks the concrete—metallic.

Spider web stuck in teeth,
no floss, he holds theories about hay & hair & fingernails
but Extraction is his mom who says make the bed
so he waits for the spider to crawl across his palette
and bite down.

Supine, he looks up through hip-boned barn
for scarlet rays
undefined, bending down
to kiss and cradle him goodnight

Goat remembers that he is seven,
that he still sips juice boxes,
molds pizza out of clay,
rolls his hamster in a plastic ball down the stairs
and suffocates ten stuffed turtles under his covers.

Western Edge

I found Portland Mills, a girl in a car without a map. Am I even in the county?
Large forest, little homes. I'm always searching for bridges, preferably covered,
but I can't find Edna Collins and I'm actually Northwest. I always drive too far away
instead of turning around, I look for cut-throughs, another route, usually longer.

Nonetheless, I'm parked in a Private NO TRESSPASSING driveway. I'm wondering
why this park is closed, it's midday, Wednesday, February. I turned right
down this road to find water and now a gate shuts me out. I find an alternative— a bridge
hovering over a washed-out landscape. Driving on 875 W, I don't know the name of the river
below—Big something: Raccoon Creek or Ramp Creek? Today's foggy, endless clouding,

and an underbrush entirely red under twisted, balded maples. I just realized that I'm in a driveway called "Indian Rock" & I think about the Native Americans that inhabited this part of Indiana because I do not know, **I do not know**. All I can imagine are tools underground, excavated. What kinds of pottery, stone axes, pestles, blades, scrapers exist, or am I acting like a tourist? What tribe: Mississippian, Miamian, Wyandot? And where are the archaeological sites, what is found sifting through soil? Are the archaeologists worthy to touch artifacts?

To my left, I see what's left of a brick chimney under a twisted maple. I realize that I'm on a street called Pocahontas Drive and I want to call out the disrespect.

Heading West, I want to leave. I see a curve in the road and I twist through woods to see cattle—deep black & brown feeding from the same basin. Eyes glare at me, petting green, they do, and I drive by and feel sad that I do not tend to them, that they're stuck grazing icy grass. Wanting to stop my car, walk to fence, open the gates, and ring a bell—yelling at myself: *go, shoo, go!*

Bridge Mission: Baker's Camp

I.

Driving onto 231 N to US 35,
I listen to sappy songs & Billy Joel's "Captain Jack."
I drive out to a covered bridge in Bainbridge, a hideout with forest-huddled barns.

Sycamore to my left—sun glosses its white upper branches.
I sift through Baker's Camp Bridge 1901,
I imagine a wooden roller coaster with no hill.

Twisting, knotted road past bridge, I can hear the railroad roar
but which one?

II.

Branches: black curdling fingernails—let me nudge all weeds
against wall of the wind.
I mistake stuck, rotten leaves for a bird's nest,
to my left—corn all cut down,
matted by the wind—tornado air, sounds like my car
exhausting.

I stopped on 300N away from blue woods,
next to Big Walnut.

Today a friend talked to me about suicide.

I think about Walnut's slow ripples, jade blue stream.
I almost turned my car around
before seeing this humble place
to *let go*
unpinge,
lie on roots.

III.

Surrounded by underbrush, wearing nature,
I think of modernist poet, H.D,
my body as shell against an "Octopus sea"—
the way we break wind.
Weeds weave between my split ends, a red-stem leaf
falls on my left shoulder,
I laugh.

IV.

Sycamores sway on the other side of Big Walnut.
Leaves curdle around branches,
trickle on,
leaves meet roots.

Staring back into water, I confuse a folded leaf for a duck
as it sways swiftly downstream and under,
gone
to weak current.

Water tinkers on like little boys playing jacks
but John forgot his bouncy balls—
stuck rocks, Sycamore roots jumping into stream.

V.

Hark! Sycamores, what could these covered bridges mark but you.
Brown twisting roots, stark white legs.
I look up and acknowledge fruit.
You're still carrying? I bend down and pick up
spiked bulb in my hands,
an ornament.

To 1901

BAKER'S CAMP BRIDGE

J.J. DANIELS

Returning winter, carry me green leaves,
plant me in Oak and Sycamore.

Eyeing East: homestead, barking dog, tree house leaning.
Winding woods,
red wood tunnel—covered bridge,
my homestead harvesting under cumulus.

Lying on road beside bridge, could I—could I
unbuckle the clouds?

Sycamore roots webbing, veining
around & around.
Sturdy trunk, hold on,
control shadows of stream,
crumbling stems, crumble not!

Roots over roots, forever footed,
embedded.
Breath heats leaves
let go,
linger, twist feet
& shuffle, scrubbing leaves.

Under Sycamore leaves, red stems, I spy a Styrofoam
cup—human proof.

Roots slide in and out of water, connect to land like snakes,
leaves with turned-up stems wade through Big Walnut bobbing
downstream.
Little boats, I will miss you.

O furniture, creaking Sycamore joints,
mesh, manure, wet-stemmed
underbrush. We bring rusted tools, white houses, red brick
to this place and decorate with lights, a plastic Santa in a canoe
in the front yard.

Driving past fenced farms,
thick chimney brew, steel silos with stairwells,
I want to unbuckle & climb.

Black and white cattle to my West, losing
woods, trees have become a holiday out here.

Confluence of feelings—tree-barking cattle,
yellow slides. To return to Walnut & slide back down stream.

Bainbridge Looking for Leaves

Easy now, STOP for streetlights.
Pickups & golden retrievers bathe in wet grass.
Slowing to 15 miles per hour, every car passes me as I ponder.
Before my car, a slate-coat, white belly bird.

Opening my window,
seep, seep, seep, seep.
caw, caw, caw,
seep, seep, seep.

Caught up in bird language, I barely notice the puffy bird clawing off
& flapping away,
a dark-eyed junco.

Crossing Monon, could I stay?
Coastering parallel to rails on 800N, could I ride?
I remember stories of great grandpa rubbing tracks, whistling,
trying to see sky or where he dropped his pipe.
I start to whistle, trying to mold sound, drumming up
atmosphere of my Dad's town. I wonder what caught grandpa's eyes
the day rails split him.
seep, seep, seep, cher-ee, cher-weet-weet

My dad's seeds sprouting inside me, spinning around this town.
Stretching from Ohio to Indiana across National Road, I've come from Columbus
to Cincinnati to Greencastle & now North to Bainbridge.

Leaving tracks unleavened, climbing back into sedan,
I think about body as locomotive, barn. Would I rust, grow moss staying here?
I could goldenrod, sprout across highways.

I've got to meet more locals. To understand my lumber, branches I carry.
It's lonely with just Sycamore leaves.

Something about me bathes here, I hear it.

Bainbridge, Husking

February air, US 36,
frosted furry farmland, layering way through Bainbridge with
stuck limbs, riding over iron bridge. Unpaved streets,
running through place, dropping seeds, rubber tracing curves,
empty corn.
Out of fuel, steering words over snow,
roads eroding.
Missing tractors, hiding behind trees, leaves,
husks—solitude.

A complete cut-down landscape
but folks here are nice so I stop in town. Bonton Diner, sitting down & staring at portrait of a
covered bridge, I drink water, order biscuits & gravy,
attempt to access wifi.

An older gentleman walks in waving his paycheck at the waitress, sits down across from me, and
smirks. He orders fish, says his name's Spencer. His parents were simple farmers, and his dad
made the best honey. Both deceased, he gave up on their ways of life a long while ago. He drives
a golf cart around town because he says it's easier. He's 67 and he acts as he pleases.

I tell him my name and ask about Bonton's fish.

Tilapia he spits without hesitating. He asks me if I like baseball.

Yes, I watch the Reds, I'm from Cincinnati.

He hates the Reds, he's local & gave up on TV a long time ago. He coached baseball in town and
was a pitcher in high school.

He comes to this diner every morning because he's retired.

He leaves my table to join his friends. I eat my biscuits, drink coffee, and sneak looks back at
him. Twenty minutes later, I wave & leave, driving East down Main, turning right
& spotting a baseball diamond:

VISITOR

HOME

I look out my rearview and see a golf cart trailing behind for a few feet. Its tiny engine stops in
front of a powder blue house. Spencer steps out, picks up his newspaper & walks inside 106:
local, known, knotted.

☺ ☺ ☺

I have no reason to be here but to become
lost, maple leaf colored salmon on tree of holding limbs,
never losing his coat.

☺ ☺ ☺

Bad Luck Bridging

Driving US 36, Clinton Township, on my way to Rockville—
a horse-engraved gate holds in two red barns, a white ranch, thoroughbreds.

Black cat crawls in front of car,
I press brakes, smiling, letting cat glare green-eyed,
crawling.
I wait and notice husks to my right fading brown. Surprised,
I spot a pure-white tail wagging, a Husky weaving its way through Fall's leftovers.

I'm looking for Raccoon Creek and laughing at my incompetence, map-losing skills.
Driving West, I think, but I could end up North, reaching Cornstalk Bridge.
Passed by trucks & tractors,
sight-seeing, driving 25 mph, trying to knit this road.
. Bright blue houses and EGGS FOR SALE!
 Old Fords, Morton County store, I seek to stop and buy bait
 but my gas light is on and I turn around.

Northwest to Southeast, stretching tires. I never reached Raccoon, Edna Collins bridge.
A graveyard of heart-shaped plots appears to my left, sheep cotton my right.

Overhead, a cowbird spitting through sky.



Bridging

R

eflecting

Scattered Strings

Trying to soften language, compose soft I feel. So many blankets.

Deep breathing, beating woods. Wild
toes press into Oak, fingers wrap & climb. Limbs firm & splinter.

Leaving place, carrying slivers of bark in briefcase.
Seeking to balance on tips of trees, blow out and wing words down into bowl, to let rainwater
collect
and wait. To stare down
at gathering lumber and see flow and shape of stream.
When bowl fills, climb down, hold plastic, close eyes & dip face in water. Feel meeting place of
skin & stream.

To tell truth, you have to feel and admit that enough may not knock.

*Enough is not enough when porridge spills from bowl, and there are no sinks
so we keep sitting, timing self in line to run run run, break through and basket new.
We lose threads & time. We're tired & waiting for goldenrods
to bloom back. Open mouth & let nothing bloom. You use
what you're given for it all. The gate's not always open, seeking, breathing.
Time, how could I do you a favor? Could you let me in here? Don't let me stray. I promise you,
time, that wings stretch, hawk out & blanket place.
Carving out, sometimes, know a pencil isn't enough.
What tools can you give me?
To water & let self stream—a leaf!
To walk down street through puddles & sticks & gravel & say this is enough—this is it!
Is it?*

Stop Breaking through Beams

Holding coin,
watching it flip before eyes
& knowing truth is like magic or at least I mean it that way.
Breakthrough isn't breaking anything, perhaps bending
but not cutting out. Why do we keep bleeding our world?
It's all tied together, do you not see the complexity, the way we push back all of our hair,
feel force. Today, today, I understand the beat. And whether or not vegetable juice helped,
I cannot help but tell you that I leaped over, I stand at top of mountain.
I understand crux, the puzzle I'm trying to put together,
Words that I'm looking into and calling holes. Sometimes the face of coin is black or blank
but it's only night and light will come. **Light will come.**
*You will be able to see day again. I promise this: do not fear order, but do not rest there,
for floor tiles will make you dizzy.*

What Am I

doing? Was I conscious before? Current of now, answer.

*Young poet, fool, do not stare straight
down into ponds without knowing, knowing why you tie self on tracks around town.*

Freedom feels here, yes, but I keep clinging to ladders of silos, staring straight into sky, and
circling eyes over engine.

What? Have I choked birds in this process? Stepped on goldenrods?
What am I reeling in?
Can I hold the body of fish?

Gusts

Thunder eyes,
Indiana,
what have we
what have we
watered?

Truth

means tying fabric to all places, identifying self
in movement, in winging around county.

True wit of poetry lies in reconstruction
Tying up ghosts in the closet
so I can sit down and dine,
enjoy my fish.

Remembering Subtly

Stuck in tunnels of mind, I drive out of the bridge
to see owls hovering on fence.

Creaking Oak floors, walls & ceiling. I could walk all over
this place but I don't, I sit
at a picnic table inside bridge,
carving initials, drawing birds.

Could I call bridge my barn, repaint it, put up doors, windows, wheels?
I may have to stop by Cloverdale Hardware.

Remember young poet, this place is not yours. It will never be yours.

Breathe in, stay practical, rework energy into night-fishing
because why not?
Let line drop out & down window,
listen to echoes of owls.

“The real cycle you’re working on is a cycle called ‘yourself’” -Robert M. Pirsig

Questioning Routes

21, undefined driver, on my way out & in & out,
to wander, to lie on flat-beds, to stop wasting, winding
around curves from West to North driving by diners, post offices,
barns, farms, climates, universes I’ll never enter.

What does it mean to feel the world?

To fear it?
To feast with it?

To dare to never tell anyone about what you know: deep roots, streams,
so you keep carrying sand in pockets, in purses, briefcases.

A closed soul, a fool?

Listen young poet, walk across bridge, carry lumber and no coins.

Wear your mother's watch and walk into the bridge, to every edge to pray for something,

My yarn unravels underground, caves of footsteps I cannot touch.
I can only trace my body above.

What I'll Do Differently Next Time & What I'll Keep on Doing

Not attempt to write the world,
not drive so much,
conserve more energy (sleep).

Know that you’re more than a leaf. You write about them so often but you’re complex—you’ve
got organs, you can cartwheel!

Not be afraid of words, our own, or those in a dusty dictionary, thesaurus.

Seek community first!

Listen to more classical music and know composers.

Walk more paths you drive, step out of the car always.

Do not be afraid to *caw caw caw*
 seep seep seep

in public.

It’s okay to be confused. To not know balance of concrete and abstract. Your words are mediums,
makings. Stop taking the land too seriously! You might slice it, extract. **Beauty is not breaking**

through. It's what's between, lying edged, in air, in streams, seas, day-to-day routines, deep breaths, a simple feeling. It's about crossing states, counties, going over falls in poetry and laughing, knowing you can reel yourself back in. The richness lies in memory, music, dancing. It's about being serious and joking simultaneously. It's about never growing up and loving to grow old. It's about point of view, language, addressing the you when you mean I, realizing that possessing cannot love, birth beauty.

Bridge, jump toes in air, seek to connect systems, know the interwoven nature of what's around. Know intuition & flowers & fingers wrapping around, lying on the table. **Seek communion with self.**

Beauty is about understanding energy and obeying a universe of atoms and gumballs with too few or too many dispensers.

I do again & again. I think about labor: I need to be a welder or a farmer. Abstract, you are a necessary illusion that's too real to me and Concrete, stop giving me shin splints. Mirages & memes follow me. I'm dizzy studying architecture of small towns, but I love studying towns. I think I need to buy some clay (or gumballs) now.

Centering

Walking Quarry Rim, Following Tracks

I.

I came back here to DePauw's quarry
to walk the rim because I imagine that snow has stars.
See—I came here to brush landscape, to listen to stills.
Air is thin—but then I hear echoes like gun-shots, then nothing again.

I walk around, following cross-country ski tracks. Searching for icicles under
rocks, inside caves. But the sun is shining and I crave to reach bottom
hollow of path, a quarter of a mile to hike down.
I must trudge through layers to reach bottom, slip on sheets of ice, hoping for
moss, grass hairs. I miss dry land, summer beetles against birch
trees now stark. A robin chirps, confused by March air.

II.

Solitude—no wind today.
To appreciate stillness, I must staple it to some wall.

My breath is the only force here, shedding. I think about creatures gone— tad pools
swimming in puddles in quarry's bowl.
If I could climb down, inspect frozen, stuck fish, would I apologize?
Could I build an underwater cave with a heater?

What about tree sparrows, cardinals huddling on branches? Did they leave this year?
What are their patterns? I look at red-stems below leaves and realize that my dried willow hair
still grows, knotted, yes, waving in wind.

I stop at the Outdoor Classroom,
rest on rock, clothes covered with snow dust. All around me,
bunny tracks. I follow for a moment. Scraping overhead,
a plane. I start to hear frequency of place—snow melting through pines.

I hear plastic rustling in trashcan, a plastic bag.

P
U
S
H:

Pall Malls, coffee-cup, chip wrapper, beer bottles.

I contemplate what's loudest between plane, snow, and plastic bags.
What stays and what insects out, bellies up and flits away?

III.

Following cross-country ski tracks, not lifting feet,
wearing into place, seeking communion. Wondering where loose water lies
to dampen my eyes & see complexities of puddles: to see fluttering tadpoles and question
whether soft bodies will transform into toads or frogs.

Quarry Dissolve

Separating train from tracks, Monon & Vandalia—now empty harvests, footpaths.
Detaching progress is like tearing birds from air, gluing frozen leaves back on trees,
re-sprinkling limestone in quarries.

We use, crack and extract pearls of place.
One day, we pray, *please reclaim, rejuvenate, rejoin wilderness*,
nature. Once snow melts, once words control where water goes,
we'll change. Torn, jointed dimensions.
How can I tell nature to

let go

leave her to construct silhouette
alone? Oh, she'll be waking & walking again in no time. *Really?*

Absence of light matters, organs make the body.
My voice echoes off edge of quarry, her rim.
Looking out at dynamite of place, disembodied, unglued, but I'm here
seeking, entering, consuming views for my taste.

I keep trying to open chapel doors of here and understand the marriage of twig to twig.

Create rhythm, blossom, print boots in ground again & again.
Try to be a poet today, hold hand out to nature.

One day, I'll basket fruit & call *that* a bridge.

Believe in wildflowers, web toes through place,
clap for birds and route back home.

Planted

Following my own steps: cow hoofs running on the treadmill,
centering myself inside place. Entering Fern Cliff, I have ripped roots with hiking boots and knotted

Oak paths back together. I have voiced refrains of bird swings through sky,
I have held the bowl of my mind and let out some leaves.
I have breathed in weeds on edge of Walnut, worn winter coat and lasted out here,
bridging, knocking on doors without knobs, entered barns with worn walls,
welcomed this place,
let go.

planted seeds in palm of my hand, identified the species,
tasted atmosphere of county,
sat under Red Oaks, Sycamores. Admired the chokeberries outside my window,
how they hold green stems—collars to blossom— throughout winter.

Stationed

I.

Between clouds & Ceylon,
street & porch,
sitting.

Rhythm of place: layering soil, land
in deep, violet blossoms.
Day-driving fast over brick town & back roads—
flattening my house. Living underground, mole breaking
up, rebirthing, rebuilding with twigs.
Old beams resist new river,
walls, floorboards of a thicker wood.
Breaking rhythm, recreating
words into webs, dissecting codes for technology,
recovering rhythm, blankets that cover me.

Four years, almost empty, almost full.

Behind overlapping light of branches,
running routes,
breaking limbs off US 231. Could I stop

and stay, porching.
To push-pin home on this county map, to dress (& undress)
leaves of place and dance is enough.

II.

Breaking rhythm, stopping car, bending knees
to goldenrods, wide woods.

Breaking stones, excavating sacred pearls—winding quarries,
questioning *what is mine?*
My ancestors mined—broke, bent bones for coal, axing
down sediment under soil, seas of time, digging out roots
to feed family.

To be the means—between—to know middle earth,
to lie in bed at night and listen to railcars,
and understand progress, power that ties to street lamps.

To be Plotted, Dotted.

To be still, sitting eye,
Putnam County, I imagine someone's tracking me. Cycling
through place, I doodle spirals in journal. Am I having a breakthrough?
I think about shells, a paper nautilus, the golden ratio, a universal order.
How I seek to tether words,
slide hands under place and scoop up to hold
vulnerable threads of now.

Voice is mine. I crave to beak out
of shade, stretch out and know roots and a basket of another.
How does Terry, the woman I met in the archives,
walk outside every morning to feed cows, chickens, till land,
& come inside to repeat birth tomorrow.
Does she let her basket weave itself?

*Leaves fall, do not pluck, peel, wait for time
to bring more, young poet.
Use tools to till. Let sun hatch outside. Trust
seeds that seek to soil.*

*Let go
Stop squeezing,
look up and laugh.*

Practical toes, work like mother, grandmother. Every day is not
harvest.

Sitting, Watching Seeds

Watering

Seeds in soil to blossom,
lip out and embody, becoming,
spinning again & again, dressing out, seeking deep dance, elastic of family,
beating away but digesting Midwest through December sky,
I remember the hum of my pink cotton music box,
wired ballerina now loose, out-of-tune (Dad can fix this).

Ballet toes, piano keys of childhood, fragile
rhythm, craving new stages.

Threads bungee across Indiana & back into Ohio, mapping
out mother and new music, blanket of Ohio, spinning top winding me east—
grandpa's clutch, tobacco scented seeds.

Resting in furniture gardens of living rooms, soft fabric
of pillows against cheeks—roots.
To drive East, sleep on fabric, put sheets back on my bed.

Walking down Jackson Street to the Square

Greencastle, Indiana, I'm kneading sidewalks, rewinding self on concrete
again & again, lumbering. Roots snake ankles,
I want to build trunk, unbuckle bones, and branch up here.

Basketing,
I have blossomed, unblossomed, tied self around town—to tracks to roads to rivers
to Bainbridge to Greencastle to Cloverdale, brushed into land, locals.
Gripping stems & unraveling palms—learning to *let go* and stop shading Spring
with paint samples: *That's the one! Carolina yellow. How many tubs?* Forgetting
petals of skin and stigma of veins—close pottery I did not mold yet, loosely holding.
Let go
fall into more baskets unguided,
picnic on new porches, grass
with new dew. Whisper into shell &
wait for echoes in waiting room of here.
Lie down, interweave, brush petals. I miss
goldenrods. *I have to go,*
drive West or North or East or South
away again &
again, wandering,
seeking
fertile teeth-roots, an embrace deeper
than letters.

Same Leaves

Because poems are bumpy,
because they are manifestations of body,
because I don't ask the right questions: too many wheres, whats.
Not enough whens, whos.
Who am I walking with, who am I missing, who
do I seek to be, who am I to nature? I remember
when I started writing poetry and I thought I could mesh into woods,
hide in underbrush, hold a basket and wait for
seeds to drop. There was Fall, and I fell in love with apple farms, leaves. All that's left are bulbs,
little spiky ornaments that fall on my head, when I huddle under trees next to Big Walnut.
I carried a bulb with me in my car to my apartment to sit on my dresser for 3 months to find its
leftovers sticking all over my carpet & clothes. I'm waiting for Spring
to dance,
for nature to put leaves back on trees, for fullness of fields
I've seen cut-down corn, crazy salmon-leaves
feathering this county. I laughed but it's time for blossom, birth.
Don't get me wrong—I like the canoe of leaves I see in Fall, but in Winter, I can't reach Walnut,
I have to sit inside & read. I like to read but I want to engage more, know a different shade.
Richness is sprouting, golden promises. I want to know bellies of birds instead of googling
webbed feet & beaks.
I seek to paint something, to open musty window, reach out with my brush.

I seek to wander,
to examine rays of flowers, to hear centers speak outside.
To water my thoughts, to garden again would be wonderful.

Comfort Soil

Blanket self in place,
pull up fabric, lie down, sleep.
At end of project, sorrow, sycamores sway to new beat,
new people, new canoe.

Brick path lit for another. I shake hands with her.
I don't know her yet. She sits here in front of me. Walking in library, leaning against stairs,
seeking silos,
starving to say
to say
here I am I am here
becoming what I wanted to become—blossomed.
Do not look away, young poet.
I hand tree branch to her & say *go!*
good luck!

Place is like porridge, young poet,
sit down, look out window at violets, vines,
new aromas, leaves.
Go ahead, sneeze, turn over a new leaf & look at what you write, sitting in a tree.

Look at blooming words. These winds!
You are growing expanding, building something strong, a web, a system, putting leaves back on
trees, you are, Poet.

Out of breath, bending knees, knuckles, bending to garden, goldenrods!
These are all my words. Not cement but seeds I have planted.
No more cracks, corners, my heartbeat built this place.

What you wanted sprung, what you whispered now whistles through wind.
Beautiful limbs, you're not a bulb, furnace, factory, still-beating machine,
a plucked bud. No, you are . . .

Keep going, it's good!

Notes

In **Walking**, “Mapped Putnam” on page 18, the quote “hardwork, self-sacrifice, and frugality” and the information about John Dillinger on page 19 comes from John Baughman's *Our Past, Their Present*.

The photograph following “Mapped” is called *Engineer Charles "Happy" Eker, Left, and Fireman Lawrence Gray Pose in Front of Locomotive 576* and was taken in Bloomington, Indiana.

In “Rattle Tracks” on page 19 the quotes come from Vernon A. Hewitt’s address, *Hoosier Heritage—the Monon*.

In **Driving**, the map on page 27 titled “Bridges of Putnam County” comes from Putnam County Convention & Visitors Bureau’s brochure, *Covered Bridge County*.

In “Far Away” on page 32, the italics are lyrics that come from the Indiana State song, “On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away.”

In “Bridging, Deeper” on 44, the history of the Cataract Covered Bridge comes from an inscription to the left upon entering the bridge and more information is located in Putnam County’s *Covered Bridge County*.

In “Leaving Cataract” on page 45, the Mary Oliver quote comes from her collection *The Leaf and the Cloud*.

In “Before Putnamville” on page 47, the song “I Love Rock and Roll” is sung by Joan Jett & the Blackhearts.

In “Bridge Mission: Baker's Camp” on page 55, the “Octopus sea” reference comes from H.D’s *Collected Poems 1912-1944*.

In **Bridging**, Pirsig’s quote before “Questioning Routes” on page 64 comes from his *Zen & the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

P rocessing

My project encompasses a process, a deep conversation with self. I started the project believing that I could easily capture place through poetry. I thought I could better understand the stories of locals, farmland, forests, animals, plants schools, parks, shops, and roads around me. I believed that I could easily hold the seed of place, if you will, and my poems would serve as a sort of basket. My job then was to weave words together and at the end of the project, an answer, insight would fall from the tree and blossom. I've been waiting, pushing, forcing my words to bloom into something but have found that letting my words flow is best. In order to do so, I have learned to accept what I know and appreciate what I have yet to grasp through writing.

What do my poems capture? They capture a 21-year old walking, driving, reading, conversing around Putnam County, Indiana and searching for poetic language that speaks to her roots. This project started out with the desire to seek, to understand the vulnerability of the layers of **here**; what I found was a nice community, beautiful woods, and my own spirit, drive, and passion.

One of the hardest lessons I've learned with this project is in realizing that there is no consistent narrative of place; my experience is subjective. At times, I would try to capture a bridge or forest through a specific framework, or point of view, but found that my words are interpreted uniquely by others and myself through different seasons, ideas, and life experiences.

This project has been a mission for me to better my craft by understanding the overlaps of poetry, literature, art, community, and traces of ecology. Through my experience, I have bettered my craft and found that there is no true beginning, middle, and end to my project. I'm still writing poems about place after I completed the project.

When I first embarked on this project, my thoughts began with how could I construct,

drive around, and build a body of words through language? I knew that I needed tools of some sort. I began to craft my own through new experiences: I read works of many poets, fiction, and nonfiction writers. I traveled to all stretches of the county to listen to water over bridges, birds crossing in front of my car, hardware stores, the routine of peoples in coffee shops, diners. I worked on our campus farm last summer in order to feel complexities of soil: I learned how to plant tomatoes, corn, pumpkins, squash, green beans, and how to dig trenches and a compost pile. I listened to my fingers as I kneaded the land, bent into cornfields, picked out weeds. I began to lean into place.

I remember nurturing my knowledge of trees. I began to read the book, *Field Guide to Indiana Trees*, in order to point out an Oak from a Maple from a Sycamore and more specifically, how to notice a Red Oak from a White Oak or a Red Pine from a White Pine. Throughout my project, I have tried to memorize the nature I've seen and I did struggle as I sought deeper for a feeling, an understanding of the rhythm of place. I began this project on campus—the library specifically—from a central location. Next, I began to see place from a microscopic point of view by walking around DePauw's Nature Park and observing the fabric of what I saw. Later into my project, especially during winter, I focused more on the story and history of place and less on flora and fauna, although types of trees stayed cemented in my mind. As my project expanded, it became okay to lose specifically of plants and trees I saw. At times in my writing, a wildflower was a wildflower, and at others, when the color mattered to my poem, the plants became more defined. Throughout, I have expanded and heightened my relation to flowers, trees, rocks, seeds, and soil. Now that it's spring, I crave to see goldenrods again waving at me off the highway.

During my project, I sought to understand my stream (-of-consciousness) and challenged

myself to write a poem (or two or three) in my journal every day. I began my project in June 2013 and it's ending now at the beginning of April 2014. Since June, I have filled approximately 10 notebooks with words, sentences, poems, lists. I have wrestled with words and learned that beauty isn't always going to present itself in front of me. Summer was sticky, Fall was dim, Indiana Winter resembled the North Pole, and Spring may be wet. But Summer was also relaxing, Fall contained harvest moons, Winter sparkled, and Spring renews me again. I have been intrigued by words that seasons bring me. I documented as much as I could notice over these three seasons—the way Big Walnut moved below bridges in August, the way the sunset appeared in August, September, and the way professors walked down the street. I became an avid bird-watcher.

I wish I could have videotaped myself through this project. I have sought to build myself into the lumber of here, but in learning about the seeds of here, I know that I also hid from myself at times. What I mean is that I began to lose myself in this work, in understanding these roads, routes, spider webs. I wore out my mind by searching some days and should have hiked, enjoyed body more. Perhaps I should have been running, cycling, motorcycling through the woods instead of driving in my sedan with open and closed windows. Nonetheless, I stayed practical throughout this process and learned how to find beauty in simple and often broken pieces of nature. I wrote about the mess, chaos of here—of burnt-down barns, heavily wired alleys, chipped tables of diners, faces of with frowns, smirks, and laughter. I asked so much of myself during this process and discovered the limits of my energy, that's for sure. I have grasped the beauty in routine, patience, and listening to new voices. **I think that poetry makes people whole, human, and empathetic.**

I saw delicacy in patterns, in everyday habits. I felt like every day I wrote, I dug into dirt,

found a new worm, and held it up to the sun. I felt like father at times— a guardian to my construction in my attempt to build a house, or center of here. At other times, I felt like mother trying to plant and nurture seeds. Often, I felt like a child seeking to know a new world, layer of self. At the beginning of the project, I thought much about what kind of voice I would embrace. Would I be a feminist, journalist, scientist, artist, sculptor, poet? Do I have the credentials to possess a title? And then I realized my voice is always my voice and that is good enough and genuine. But I still carried many anxieties—would the self be destroyed in the process? Would I become a collection of feelings or worse, a pile of mechanical parts in the end? I realized that despite my nerves, I gained rich knowledge about the web of the world and my inner self, or soul.

I also thought about who I would read in the process. I looked up to environmental writers and poets such as Annie Dillard, Aldo Leopold, Thoreau, Wendell Berry, William Carlos Williams, Mary Oliver, Charles Wright, and my own professors, local poets—Joseph Heithaus and Rodney Jones. In Dillard's *The Writing Life*, she writes that the “writer knows his field—what has been done, what could be done, the limits—the way a tennis player knows the court” (69). Beginning my project, I didn't know how much space I could embrace or how much I could write about **here**. I had a whole county on a map in front of me and my rebellious self even sought to break through the boundaries of place into new counties, states, and home. In the back of my mind, I knew my existence here is home and I also knew that Loveland, Ohio, my hometown, would be present in my work. This project became about stretching myself, of remembering childhood, about looking at and knowing the lumber (family ancestry) I carry into Greencastle, Indiana. Not only have I written about home, but I have written about the path between—stretching my car back and forth, becoming familiar with the National Road (and

freeways).

When I felt roadblocks in my writing, I turned to experienced writers to aid a young poet. Thanks to Rodney Jones, I turned to C.D. Wright and her “Dear Dying Town” from *One Big Self*. She writes, “The food is cheap; the squirrels are black; the box factories have all moved offshore; the light reproaches us, and our coffee is watered down” (567). She creates beauty out of despair in an exhausted town. Her words capture the rustic quality of a run-down, difficult place. She’s direct and inventive in simple, everyday images. C.D. Wright reminds me why I write poetry—to tell life like it is; truth is messy and musical.

Another author that helped my process, thanks to my professor Joseph Heithaus, was Richard Hugo and his *Triggering Town*. In his chapter of the same title, he helps me understand my centering subject: “The poem is always in your hometown, but you have a better chance of finding it in another” (Hugo 12). My hometown is located in the suburbs of Cincinnati and located miles from two small towns, Milford and Loveland. However, here, I can walk to the square. Greencastle is accessible and resembles many other small towns. Here, I can better capture place: “With the strange town, you can assume all knowns are stable, and you owe the details nothing emotionally” (Hugo 12). Hugo explains that because the town feels like a blank-slate of sorts, that I, the writer, can begin to paint the town through my lens, or experiences. I won’t know who controls the factories, finances, farms, who eats breakfast at the diner every morning, who killed the town’s wandering cat. Further, Hugo writes: “However, not just any town will do. Though you’ve never seen it before, it must be a town you’ve lived in all your life.” (12). While I may not know all of the details of this town (I know a few), I must allow myself to know the town, which means that I must invest time and shape place through my imagination. In a new town, writing feels easier because I do not know many (or any) people and

I can change the names and roles of locals. In a new town, I can free myself to say what I crave to say in my hometown without being afraid of offending particular people. Here, in Putnam County, I have been able to discover my roots—my Ohio ancestry 200 miles away. I have tried to write in my hometown actually and have found myself overwhelmed and unable to grasp what surrounds me. Here, I can write more about family, the land and street where I grew up, old hometowns of my Mom, Dad, grandparents, and great grandparents. When I left Greencastle and drove to other towns such as Bainbridge and Cloverdale, I found myself wanting to stretch (write down) my roots more and more as I saw new trees, flowers, roads, and met new people.

Poetry is about re-gluing roadside sticks & stumps, about re-gifting language with minimum wrapping paper (because I cannot afford much).

To be original, cast out words from my own lips, to reshape what I know.

I also drew inspiration from Modernist poet, William Carlos Williams, and his work, *Paterson*. He writes about his hometown, Paterson, New Jersey and seeks to find beauty in the concrete of place. In his Preface, he writes: “Rigor of beauty is the quest. But how will you find beauty when it is locked in the mind past all remonstrance?” (3). Williams seeks to grasp the abstract idea through a defined lens by being hyperaware of the atmosphere of Paterson and focusing on particulars, or details in the landscape. In Book II, “Sunday in the Park,” he searches for beauty in a park above the city. Through the microscope of park, he observes the land and conversations between strangers:

Outside
 Outside myself
 there is a world,
he rumbled, subject to my incursions
—a world
 (to me) at rest,
 which I approach
concretely—

The scene's the Park
upon the rock,
female to the city
—upon whose body Paterson instructs his thoughts
(concretely) (43).

Williams explains that the beauty of the world remains at rest and he seeks to dig up and discover the hidden truth. He describes the park as a scene on a rock and beauty as a female (abstract) extension of the city. Williams seeks to reinvent and masculinize the park (rendering beauty concrete) by redefining nature through language. Paterson becomes the listener and watcher as he tries to distance himself from place and see new perspectives in order to feel the land more fully. He analyzes signs, body parts, and his own anatomy in order to create movement and as a result, make the landscape more conscious. However, he cannot succeed in making Paterson (the person or city) fully conscious of place because he cannot keep his identity or the city fully concrete (masculine); he cannot break through the city's abstractions (his own obsessions).

Throughout Book II, Williams approaches the park as a keen observer. At times, he criticizes people and at others, the stiffness of soil. Williams seeks to understand what underlies the surface of the park and simultaneously, common man. He titles the section, "Sunday in the Park" as if Williams's figure, Paterson, is taking a gentle walk. The irony of the title conveys Williams's desire to deeply critique and analyze the layout, or map of the park. He attempts to rediscover Paterson through his footsteps:

Walking—
The body is tilted slightly forward from the basic standing
position and the weight thrown on the ball of the foot,
while the other thigh is lighted and the leg and opposite
arm are swung forward (fig 6B). Various muscles, aided . (45)

After Paterson observes the fragile roots below his feet, he notices the sway of his own body. He questions his own attachment to nature and himself. In studying the movement of his feet, thighs,

and arms, he heightens his awareness to his anatomy and seeks to extend the self, or soul, into nature. Like Williams, I have walked around place, departed from the known trail, and have tried to break into, if you will, the beauty of place. Through my words, I have tried to create a character for my body in Putnam County. I have tried to redefine my attachment to nature—to learn how to blossom in both an industrial and rural landscape.

Walking thoughts: Is poetry universal? Are my feelings already documented on the World Wide Web? I need to listen to what is known here on the radio, in the leaves, in the pockets of professors, store-keepers, patriots of place.

I have pushed myself to know, recreate more. I sought to read the wilderness at the beginning of my project—how birds, limbs move, how bridges rattle beneath my car, how ice rolls down Big Walnut once it melts, and how Cataract Falls builds up force. As fall blossomed, every leaf, Sycamore tree excited me. Every local voice I heard intrigued me. I became humble to here. But some of my fears came true: my words felt mechanical at times, my body grew weak. I became familiar with place and in the winter, the county lost its charm. In November and December, I began to feel that beauty was shrinking as I took in deeper layers—I thought about the people with foreclosed houses, burnt-down barns, those walking up & down 231 against the brutal cold. I began to wonder if I lost my innocence in this journey. My privileged world turned upside-down: I couldn't really control what I saw. Sure, I could pretend in poetry—I can put leaves back on trees, but I couldn't change the broken world I saw. But I sought to regain the beauty. After winding around place, taking pictures of farm tools, red bridges, and touching limestone, I have come to a new realization—that I cannot uncover all unknowns, that each day brings new eyes, new potential, more water, flowers.

This summer, while re-reading passages from Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of*

Motorcycle Maintenance, I was reminded me of how I should perceive beauty: I should value quality over quantity. Thus, throughout my journey—I have sought to observe many barns, farms, bridges, waterways, but **I didn't have to travel around so much because there's enough truth, texture in one place, landscape**. The narrator in Pirsig's novel finds quality in knowing his motorcycle. In being the mechanic to his own machine, he sees beauty as manageable, ordered, and therefore beautiful. However, Pirsig also writes about the fear of technology by describing a certain "attitude" of his friends, John and his Sylvia: "It's all of technology they can't take. . . To get away from technology out into the country in the fresh air and sunshine is why they are on the motorcycle in the first place" (14). Pirsig's friends define technology as ugly, as a pervading force of the industrial world. By restricting what beauty can be, however, Pirsig's friends actually fear a force, an anxiety, that doesn't exist. In my project, I've had to embrace the "ugly," the cobwebs—dilapidated barns, excavated quarries, snow and ice covering roads; I've had to teach and re-teach myself to be patient, to appreciate the process of writing, of working with words over time and understanding the network of wires and threads of place.

I have learned that nature is practical and ordered, to some degree (if not disordered). In the middle of my project, I began to question the order of my project and with that thought, the order of the natural world. Could poetry ever make sense like a scientific paper or technical pamphlet? In my journals, I kept drawing a spiral/sea-shell pattern, seeking to organize my poems and have them tie into the outside world. When I think about this pattern, I think of Marianne Moore, a Modernist poet, and her "Paper Nautilus" poem:

For authorities whose hopes
are shaped by mercenaries?
Writers entrapped by
teatime fame and by

commuters' comforts? Not for these
the paper nautilus
constructs her thin glass shell (lines 1-7).

Marianne Moore presents the figure of a sea-creature, an octopus, who releases its eggs when it sees fit because there is beauty in waiting to let go and nourishing delicacy. Moore sees no error in the nautilus letting her eggs go when they will in order to offer them the best protection.

Moore invokes the danger of the outside world through the creature's need to mother the eggs until they are truly ready to face the world on their own. I can feel the pain of the mother freeing the eggs through the "wasp-nest flaws" and Moore shows the continual attachment of the eggs to the mother through the "chiton folds" because of the persistent drape of mutual support between mother and offspring (lines 27, 29). Moore's contrasting message to women in society empowers me today: she wasn't afraid to embrace the kind of love and dependency she desired. By reading Marianne Moore, I learn about the ties of nature's geometry to poetry. What I find beautiful, connecting in Putnam County is human structures and designs of bridges, for example (at times minimal, at others, awe-striking). Covered bridges aren't merely blanket forts made by children or creations of my mind. It takes a determined, knowledgeable engineer to design bridges, and hard workers to understand how to construct arch and hold of trusses, nail in beams over water. Tools can be used for progress, to carry my car across the states; a wrench may be cold but it's not made to be seen but used.

Could I build a bridge? Could I carry the lumber, nail in trusses? Could I connect?

In searching to tie mathematical patterns into nature, I began to research Fibonacci numbers. I began to memorize the pattern 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55 and write it in my journal. Then I drew rectangles around each of the numbers and connected their shapes through a spiral (attempting the pattern of the Golden Ratio: Φ) (Buomomano 295). Some plants use Φ to pack as many seeds as possible into their petals and sea creatures use this number to form the

strength and design of their shell. The rhythm of our hearts has even been proposed to be Φ . The article “Golden Ratio is beating in our heart” looks at the way that Φ :1 and Fibonacci numbers interact with the body (Yetkin, G, Sivri, Yalta, Yetkin, E). The authors explain the Golden Ratio as the “ratio between two lines of unequal length, where the ratio of the lengths of the shorter to the longer is the same as the ratio between the lengths of the longer and the sum of the lengths, $a/b = b/(a+b)$ ” (Yetkin, G, Sivri, Yalta, Yetkin, E). The authors propose that the ratio of cardiac phases of diastole and systole follow a similar or exact ratio to 1.618. The researchers tested 160 healthy subjects between the ages of 20 and 40 and found that their diastole phase and their systole phase ratio (correlation of heart rate with diastole/systole ratio) was close to Φ (1.611) and that the R-R/diastolic phase duration ratio was 1.618, the Golden Ratio (Yetkin, G, Sivri, Yalta, Yetkin, E). This means that the human heartbeat follows a rhythm, an order, and by understanding this study, I have seen the connections between humans and other plants and animals. I have grasped a brief knowledge of how our world, universe fits together, although some researchers have argued against or introduce systems beyond this ratio.

As I reel in this project, grasp a mathematical center, and learn how to swim through my stream, I have found methods to further my craft. When I found Φ , I felt that I could celebrate and keep writing because I could wrap my mind around the order that I may be following in my work, a movement that exists in my bones, body.

Writing poetry is personal but universal. Mapping a place makes me want to understand the map of my mind. After studying the golden ratio, I became interested in dipping my head in neuroscience. In Olaf Sporns’s *Networks of the Brain*, he prefaces: “We live in the age of networks. For most of us, networks are an integral part of our daily social and intellectual lives, connecting us at an ever accelerating pace and transforming the way we communicate, learn,

create, work, and play.” We are connected through communities, through nature, through our own bodies. There is a reason I follow routes in my journey, perhaps designing a method to chaos. Sporns highlights the need to understand bodies as part of a complex system composed of cellular networks tied together through our nervous systems. The brain appears small but is complex with neurons working together to create motion, waves. For example, when water molecules interact, they “can generate complex patterns, such as eddies in the flow of an oceanic stream or the beautiful symmetries of snow crystals” (Sporns 2). When I watch waves of water, thickets of ice cracking, rolling down Cataract Falls, I am watching the frenzied patterns of molecules. And by not necessarily seeing, but in knowing nature’s intricacies at a distance, I can begin to basket beauty and understand how my body too shares the movement of nature. My molecules, neurons, thoughts, memories create consciousness. Like the outside world, the brain has a complex architecture, but with many scales and levels, no neurons or thoughts act alone (Sporns 2). The world is composed of many systems, threads that tie the tiniest ends together. As a human, I know I complicate the world, but I feel that I compliment the web as well through being a member, builder of creation. **The truth of my actions in nature: As much as I feel that I’m just eyes, a pencil, notebook in the woods, my actions are complex.**

My scene, what I’m viewing in Putnam County, is dependent upon what stimuli I’m attracted to and interpret (Buomomano 312). Specifically, the way I move my eyes affects what I see and absorb. The simultaneous response of my body to my environment makes a difference to the depth of my consciousness. In my poetry, I use “ing” often to signify movement, to push myself to see this process as doing rather than sitting still. When I think about fluidity in poetry, I remember the work of ee cummings. Through his words, I see physically see language shaped on the page. cummings uses poems as bodies, or disembodied examples of a leaf, for example:

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iness (80).

cummings blends the word leaf with loneliness. He incorporates a visual art form to better represent the downward movement, feeling that he cannot convey entirely in words. A literary deconstructionist, Martin Heusser suggests that this poem has ecological purpose and has the power to activate emotions—it represents extremes of emptiness to wholeness (80). Heusser further suggests that the visual poem shows the “individual’s life-long tightrope-walk between isolation and integration” (80). He understands the poem as depicting the harsh dichotomies of life and the fine line between joy, belonging to society, to sadness, being alone and excluded. Another critic, Terblanche offers a critique to Heusser claiming that there’s a confluence between the leaf in the poem and loneliness—there’s a connection, synapse, which ties the poet together with the landscape and as a result, Terblanche suggests that the poem holds a more complex meaning. And this interpretation should be interpreted by the reader alone in order for one to nourish, mold the forces of the poem and create a third dimension. In my project, I have tried to find a third meaning in place in connecting my memory with new experiences.

With poetry, I’ve opened my eyes and watched limbs shake, wind blow, birds flit, and have become in-tune with my senses. Who I am and what I perceive as a conscious being is small, complex and beautiful. I feel the connection of what I’m doing with other disciplines and I

cannot deny the overlap between what I write and what I absorb from my immediate environment. I am a complex being –more than the body of my poems, which usually include leaves blowing through streets. Poetry is colorful, musical, and words are not like concrete; words create a stream that holds thoughts and memories together.

Finding centers through scientific and poetic analysis has helped me design order in my journey through Putnam County. Research and reading helped me find new paths in nature. I see more than the initial beauty of the blue-lit woods, more than destruction surrounding Houck bridge. When I began to write, my words began to dig, dissect, and deconstruct. Now I see that the answers aren't merely under soil. At the start of my project, I questioned whether tools are used merely to excavate. **Can tools nourish?** Throughout, I used tools including my car, eyes, paper, pencil, mind, feet, rocks, sticks, houses, streets. But used may have been the wrong word because these utensils were helpful, necessary for me to pick up and enjoy the food of this project.

But have I sat down and enjoyed my meal? At times, I felt like I was breaking bread in a moving car. I was chasing down roots, which became a hard, impossible mission. Time and again, I would search for roots and find attachment to leaves. Roots take much energy, many experiences to uncover. I need soil, water, and land. I struggled to find one place on the road to rest. I continued to drive, finding new sanctuaries, and generating dust, gas miles, and coffee cups.

I know that I must cooperate with nature, but I unintentionally act as predator towards this harmless, husked land. At times, I felt entirely human, hungry, and trying to sink teeth into bridges & trees. Consumer, I am (at times). Brushing the land, petting mallards, squirrels, birds, dogs is not enough. Is my appetite too much? In Mary Oliver's "Sister Turtle," she writes about

her craving for consuming meat. Although she can live a vegetarian life, she writes that “to consider Nature without this appetite—this other-creature-consuming appetite—is to look with shut eyes upon the miraculous interchange that makes things work, that causes one thing to nurture another, that creates the future out of the past” (Oliver 14). Oliver examines her place as human, as a hungry creature caught in the life cycle of earth. She wishes to pay attention to her desire, her thirst to eat another creature because she feels a human right, a natural existence as predator. Simultaneously, Oliver seeks to be “*beyond all that*,” which means that she desires to be more than a body, a soul. Despite her anxiety, she eats turtle eggs: she knifes into the shells and scrambles the yolk (Oliver 21). She writes that “I ate them all, with attention, whimsy, devotion, and respect” (Oliver 22). She eats the eggs carefully but also quickly. She doesn’t put much thought into the taste of the eggs other than their fibrous texture (Oliver 22). She feels that it’s her right and responsibility to consume and as a result, she feels whole and nourished (Oliver 23). And why shouldn’t she, she questions. Then there’s her belief in a soul. At the end of the narrative, she feels satisfied with eating the eggs. After reading her short story, I felt anxiety because I know that we as humans cause more harm than eating shells; we destroy every facet of our fragile world. We are excavators and we are deep predators. I have been frustrated by my abuse toward nature. I do not own, possess nature, I tell myself. I do not own the trees, fish, air. They are not my dog. I hold no leash. I will not suck out the earth or step on any more shells I say. My privilege, at times, carries tools to destruct. I have Oliver’s appetite, I know I have consumed the meat of here.

Have I been preparing dinner, gathering meat, this whole time? Where are my guests? I need to invite Terry, the woman I met in the archives, and Spencer, the man I met in the Bonton Diner, over for a meal. I shouldn’t stop driving, bridging out to Houck, Oakalla, and

back East, but I should sit down to notice and appreciate where I've traveled.

Throughout this project, I drove nearly every road (if not every edge) of the county to do what? Write a little and reel back into campus. But I have a hunger to know what surrounds me and perhaps I should apologize to the birds, trees, and my favorite bridge. I explore because I know the human mind is incredible and centered at times. But I'm also trying to communicate with a broken world, a place that my ancestors, my family built up and tore down. We try to change the world, I try to change the world through words as I drive under tunnels, on highways, through bridges, and attend school. I'm remapping a mapped world through my feet. I'm trying to control a controlled world. I contribute to polluting plastic, paper, carbon emissions.

This project has challenged the way I perceive and want to treat nature. I can stare at a seed, an egg, a plant all I want but beauty will not pop out like a jack-in-the-box. Maybe my childhood toys, my 1st World lifestyle of fast-food restaurants, grocery stores, and televisions make me feel that nature should stand in front of me like a billboard or a Santa Claus handing out gifts. Throughout, I kept thinking that I was bullying nature—pressing rubber against asphalt, and saying road, tell me where we are, tell me what this place means now! But now I know that nothing will burst forth from the soil and speak to me.

I continued to fall into the trap of anthropocentrism, of seeing nature, which I define as expendable and dominating. In Betty Wells's and Danielle Wirth's "Remediating Development through an Ecofeminist Lens," they write that the "deterioration of the world's environment, primarily the result of human activities, has been accelerated by development (specifically Western culture/agriculture). The pursuit of development through colonialism, industrialization, and urbanization has extracted a huge cost from the environment" (Wells, Wirth 300). Our environment is being destroyed through a singular, androcentric vision of nature through

development, a seemingly progressive word that signifies destruction in our society. Wells and Wirth explain that our culture erases differences and cultures (301). Over history, Western countries have seized other territories, controlled people by force, wiping out customs and ways of life in order to introduce our own. Our own which also controls and enslaves us. Upon starting this project, I wanted to see through a new pinhole, window into Putnam County. I knew from the start that this place contained no secret jewel, treasure to be found with my search. I wanted to nourish place through words like a blanket. Before doing so, I studied ecological feminism, the “position that there are important connections—historical, experiential, symbolic, theoretical—between the domination of women and the domination of nature” (Warren 19). Ecofeminism argues that over history, nature and woman have been treated in a similar manner: women’s roles and bodies have been taken for granted, appropriated, and viewed as prizes. Women have been oppressed and dehumanized around the world just as nature has been excavated and abused. Ecofeminism seeks to change the web of domination by including feminism and native, indigenous and local perspectives into conversation with science, technology, and development (Wells, Wirth 304). After studying ecofeminism, I began to see the intersectionality of place, of the ways that Western society has cut into local towns, railroads, and covered up the inequalities of race, ethnicities, class, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. Human attitudes and actions affect the way we treat our bodies in our environment.

Can my writings be a form of activism? Am I respecting and acknowledging difference enough in my project? I have been a feminist by listening and trying to be patient in place. I have followed paths in my journey such as others’ footprints, cross-country ski tracks, and bunny marks around DePauw's quarry. I have walked through corn-husks and snowy lands and heard distinct sounds such as snow falling from a pine, plastic rustling in a trash can, and my

own breath. Perhaps, I often thought, my own breath is just as bad as plastic. However, I am not a factory product, I am a product of nature, of the beautiful, intricate, mysterious system.

I perceive in my own way. When I started this project, my quest was to raise my consciousness in place. But I realized that raising consciousness cannot be accomplished simply through studying place; I need to meditate, relax, and not carry my journal around everywhere. I'm not a god. I have a body. I cannot bird-out into the sky. I have expanded my depth of literature, understood new truths in landscape and I never know what I'm actually seeking. But I've seen too many robins, hawks, mistaking them for eagles, and glanced into blue haze of distant woods again and again believing in a language I could build. I tried to tie down a wooden bridge through words but I've come out with the color red, and the shapes and sounds of beams. Life does not stand still; it carries and new experiences add to the intricacies of my existence. I'm learning every day about the falsities of my projections onto nature, to assert a photograph of what I feel. Maybe if I built a covered bridge and knew the trusses, beams, entering cars, I could surely write a better poem, narrative. Maybe *Oakalla* would mean more than a vision, a memory. Maybe I would have painted the bridge a rich purple. **Is poetry mental medicine? Can it help me grow spiritually? Show me the words that will help me fly.**

I have been trying to learn roots so that I may look up at sky. From soil to sky was my plan for my thesis. But I still don't know roots even though I've spent a year writing and researching my ancestry. I know that my great-grandfather Carter was nick-named "Smiley" and that was my nickname during childhood. I know that I am certainly the confluence of both of my parents, that my two sisters, my Mom, and I are almost exactly the same height. I know that Terry, the woman I met in the Archives, used to live on a houseboat on the Ohio River, close to my hometown, and has a similar lineage as me. I know that I'm a body like everybody else who

carries lumber, tries to move and rattle down roads. I know that sky sounds nice, can look beautiful, but it's full of gases. I know that in writing this project, I became fascinated with microcosms and macrocosms and the metaphor of the human body in nature. As I continue to write, I see the body projected all around me. I know that it's natural that my veins curve like blackbirds in the air and that my blood looks like coarse amber sunsets. It's no surprise that my bones are as deep as roots, that the complexity of my brain makes me want to explore tunnels and wood-workings of bridges. As much as this project is about tying, gluing together what I see, I know there are endless unknowns, routes, words to describe the ways I seek to birth, blossom, awaken my body, soul and carry the net in-between.

Enough! I have been progressing, I have been riding the railcars of here, following the routes of my childhood, adolescence, young adulthood. Look up & out into the future!

Where have I been exploring (and composing)? DePauw's Quarry, Greencastle Square, Putnam County Library, DePauw's Library, my workplace on Crown St, my apartment on S Jackson St, libraries, archives, the Putnam County Museum, beyond the familiar, hiding in covered bridges, driving to get lost and mapping back to Greencastle, dipping toes in Big Walnut Creek, Deer Creek, Mill Creek, playing with the cat in Cloverdale Hardware, sitting quietly, observing locals in Bainbridge's Bonton, staring into screen of an old TV on top of Four Arches, out my car window, whistling over old Monon and Vandalia rails thinking of my Dad and grandpas, staring down depots, knowing too many country roads with too much ice. **I seek a deep communion with place.** I have nurtured a deep communion with place. The bread tasted differently than I had expected—more like rye and less like wheat. But if I broke bread, where did I consume it? Have I dined alone on a rock or with others? Did I have butter? **I am still seeking communion every morning, afternoon, night with the sun, when my bones rest.**

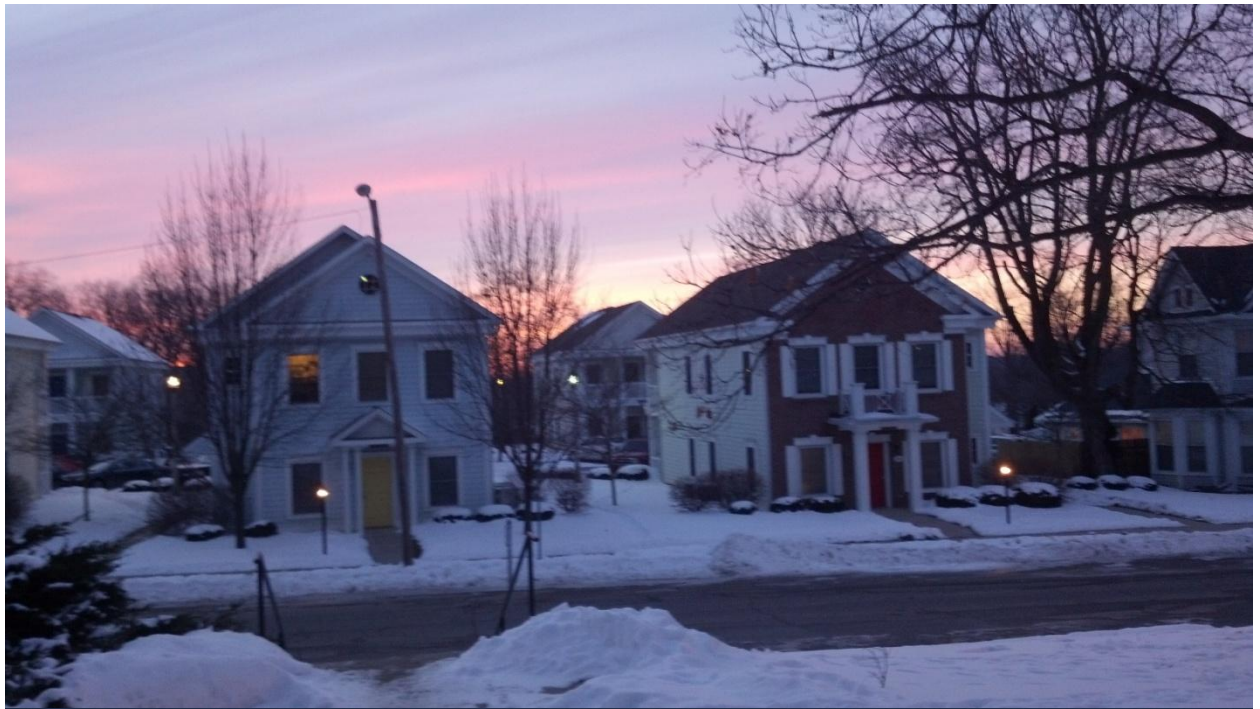
I have passed through many places. I have traveled to and been inspired by Bainbridge, Morton, Mansfield, Cloverdale, Fillmore, Greencastle, Roachdale, Russellville, Putnamville, Reelsville, Cincinnati (home), and towns in-between. I have run into six adjacent counties which include Montgomery (north), Owen (south), and Clay (southwest). The highways and back-roads have helped me shape my poems. They include US 231, US 40, US 36, and others curving between. I found beauty in US 40, the National Road, most of all because it connects back East to my relatives in Ohio and is dotted with memory-striking places where deep roots lie. Roads, seemingly simple, have much personality. They are made of dirt, asphalt, concrete, blacktop, rocks. They are tethers, corn-mazes, stretching beyond the state maps in my car.

I'll say it: poetry is a journey towards perfection, to have a full basket of fruit always is impressive, impossible. It's about belonging to a creek, a stream, a river, and one-day, a sea.

I should have fed the birds.

To create literature is to plant seeds and to wait for thick, fertile plants.

I have a lot of weeds, scraps on the side. I have a trash-pit but I see that I need to recycle, to create a compost pile as I clean up my craft.







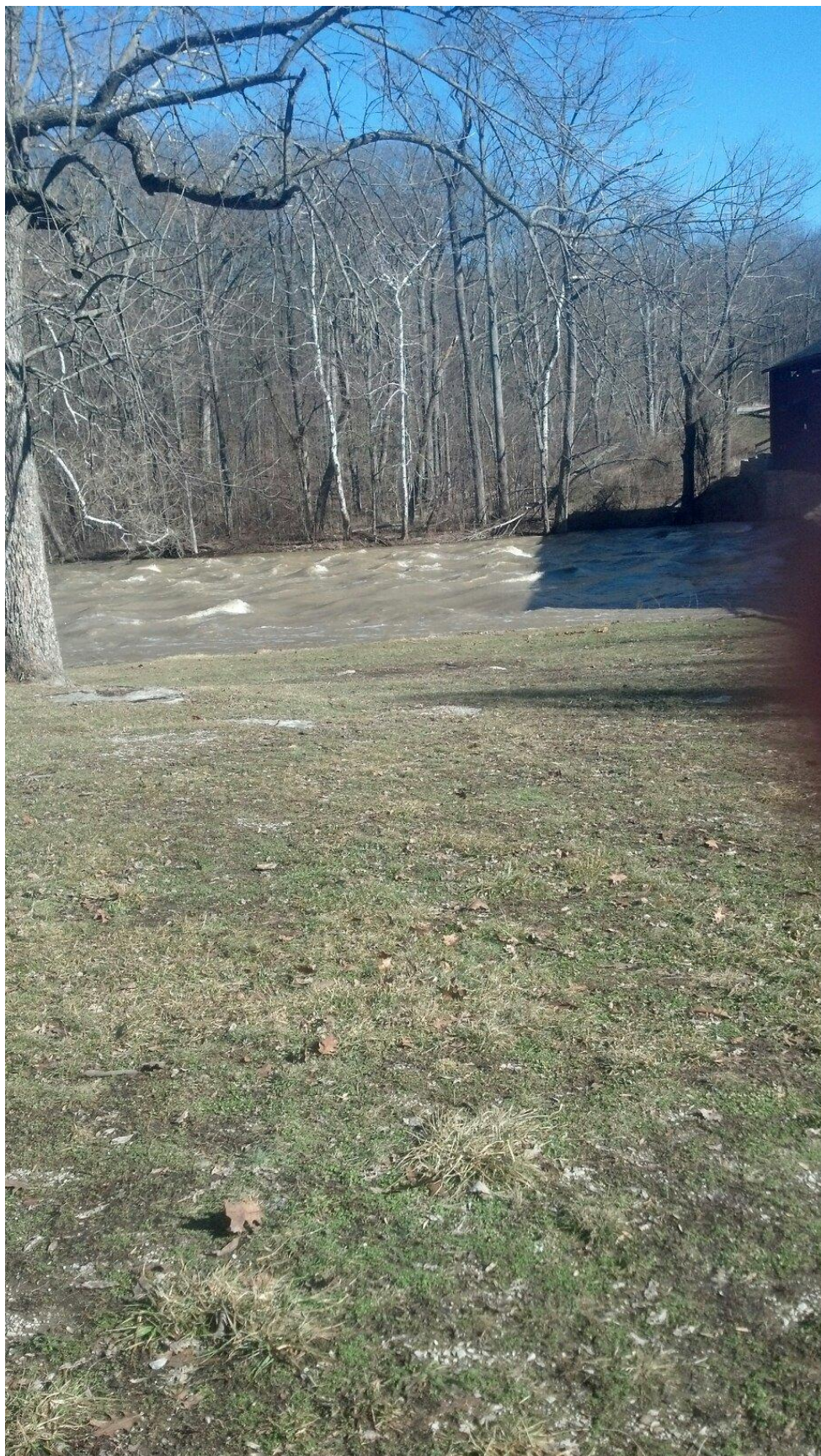


































To be a Hoosier to hear the railroad
The Monon -

100 years July 1947

"Hoosier Heritage"

"An Address to the

RAILWAY AND LOCOMOTIVE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
CHICAGO CHAPTER

By

VERNON A. HEWITT

Treasurer and Asst. to President

CHICAGO, INDIANAPOLIS AND LOUISVILLE

RAILWAY COMPANY

"The Love of American Railroads"

I am hungry for the Railroad

Monon

meaning...

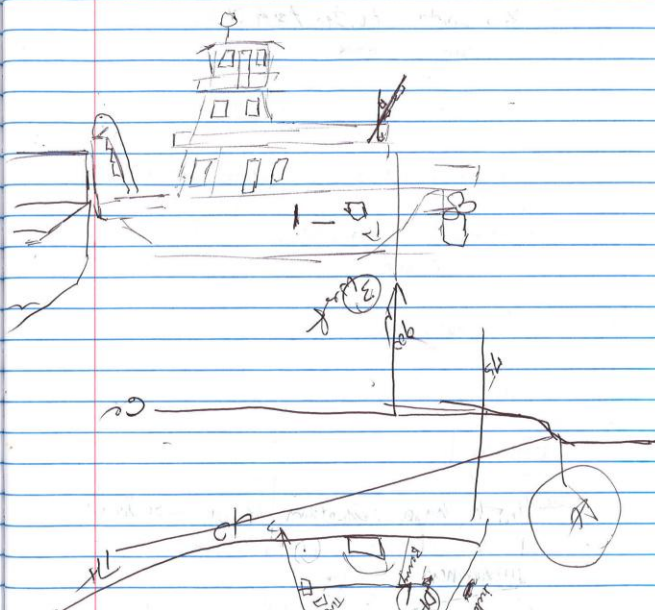
To sit in the archives and think about

dark coal-rails

sounds

(too soon) ✓

Industry



my body.

• Because I was not present I could not be, could not embrace, be. Sick and alive. I am amazed at the beauty. Could it kiss out-lips unraveling to touch encounter a neighbor. I could love-hug, the letter, seek. What I seek & follow, taller feeling. Nimble, beautiful strong, I could breathe legs, make legs but I want, really. Let me blossom.

Orange belly, grey feathers, lean back sitting, sharp watch for a tickle by an shadow. You keep I see, I know, getting, coming, you fear, you & black talons fly and from branch, but I look & my next and feel the family of fear - you surprised & you can't look can't look to you're hanging, you sit, you, you look at all.

observant, can't eyes I fly, and, the don't notice, the red-bellied or family. I do you know. The old turn of heart.

Leaf is, but not these long look & look, still have, but lips for more than human, happy

We are not the words we possess, the sounds we make. We hold meaning in the essence - the clay that remains every dark day. Every time I move unravel the blanket of myself. I am the holder, the it, the all. We are brave - you are brave - I am brave - for being here - harnessing fear, dragging toes in wet sand, far. I am here seeking. I am given and I hope to give back, bend back to the garden of self - the harnessing, not the extraction, the pouring into, hold, release, not the dusting off, and walking away. I have walked away too long. And don't I see, unearth the eagle feathers in my teeth? Don't I hear the empty, the yachts, the yachts under the my floorboard? But I'm just finding out, twisting, unbinding lines that become my art. My pen - like teeth - bite.

Covered Bridge

Barn yard red
Tin lines stretching
toward tree tops
stretches of planks
convergence of covered
buggies and ~~and~~
speedy autos?
Bridging simpler times
with rapid forces of
now
what lies ahead for
grand runners
As they war ahead
below the beams
not thinking of
the beauty of
the artwork.

♥ (mom)

The Green Monster Creek

The flowing water
Is like a big green monster
Under my bunk bed.

The red barn mocks me
like a giant alien
threatening to attack me

But the barn also invites me
like a rich hostess
intriguing me to come in

But the barn is not a barn to me
like a generic brand of ice cream
acting like Ben & Jerry's

The barn is an inlet of ideas
like a college seminar
asking me to ~~let go~~
to pull myself under and ~~let go~~
push forward.

Allison Cars

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