

**Pastoral**

A peach tree in the snow.  
A black cloud in a peach tree in the snow.

I am talking, now, to a consultant  
from the online tax firm  
about a form that needs fixing  
and this flimsy piece of former wood  
wavers in the hand.

In the wind, in the hand.  
It could have made peaches, or framed a house's bones.

Instead it serves as background  
for columns of numbers  
that signify financial decline.  
A real and imminent catastrophe.

It is Greek, catastrophe, meaning "downturn,"  
and derives primarily from theater.

A peach tree in the snow.  
Paper leaves in a peach tree in the snow.

Across the street, some men fell a tree,  
a rigid pine whose torqued enormity reminds me  
of the clustered redwoods lining the campus creek  
or logged to build Victorian structures  
hulking Telegraph's curb.

They put the wood in a machine  
that makes wood chips.  
The smell of burning gas precipitates  
a real and imminent catastrophe.

A peach tree in the snow.  
Wood chips in a peach tree in the snow.

Sheep, deer, wild elk. With their antlers  
they terrorize the bark. Anthers.  
The purple flowers throw their seed  
and other flowers catch it.

Spent stamen, little rusted pistol.  
A bullet lodged in the trunk.

My daughter  
decapitates dandelions, cradles  
the heads in her hand, watches  
as the old ones scatter  
in the real and imminent wind.

They float on unimpeded  
in the hand, in the wind.

A peach tree in the snow.  
Shell casings in a peach tree in the snow.

My species is industrious,  
dapper and intelligent,  
formed in the lucid substance between  
the sublime and the belligerent.

Ice caps retire and slip into  
a warming, gorgeous sea.

We place granite on our counters,  
white stones in the garden.  
We watch the turbines turn.

A black cloud in the snow.

A peach tree in a black cloud in the snow.

## **What Hallows**

Consider once again impressions  
stamped in the soil of the chest, the shaped  
absence of a lung, its hollowed out trunk.  
First swollen, wet. Then slack, like a limp  
balloon. A heavy-headed helianthus  
leans to eat the ground. All week I've watched  
foxgloves hasten and wither, their leaves  
go fabulous yellow. The apples bend  
their tree. A dead bee bedded in the crease  
of a leaf looks alive in the morning dew.  
This earth is loosely tethered. Liquid,  
uncertain. These nights, unbearably cold.  
The clouds, pink things, float miles away.  
My thoughts revolve here, swimming.

## **Everything Must Happen But to Whom It Doesn't Matter**

Trout break the surface of the lake.  
Water eats the cliff's lip, hog fat  
roaring in a stolid pan

warmed by guttering flame.  
Smoke floats. The blue limbs  
of tattered conifers frame a sky

barred with ribbons of light,  
needles on the forest floor  
tenebrous as leopard spots

strung through a thicket of leaves.  
One boat's slow slur  
chops another's foamy wake.

If the road ends, it ends  
in the lucid motion of dragonflies  
cutting the air, cattails heavy

in a layered bed of shale.  
Already I'm staring at my feet,  
counting out the time it takes

the flies to find the center  
of the meat, mycelium to gather  
on the substrate of a log.

There never was a road.  
In the pan, the sulfur shelf's  
bright orange darkens

to cinnamon glaze, its tossed caps  
strewn along the oak's base  
big with morning rain.

A stone smell drifts off the water.  
I hear a motor hum.  
The atmosphere is brimming

with the putrid scent of life:  
its petrichor, its iron,  
its camphor and its loam.

## Circles

*“Cause and effect are two sides of one fact.”  
—Ralph Waldo Emerson*

The new begins in fragments, babbled  
automatically through the mouth  
of an open wound. We drove the flood banks,

searching for a place to watch  
the jetsam flow, or collect driftwood  
from the river, or scraps of rusted metal.

I found an iron hinge, grafted it  
onto a canvas. All art begins  
in fuckery. So it is with blotted varnish,

the spots of gouache that out of loathing  
spring themselves  
on a surface flat with color, red paint flaking  
flecks of fire

into chips of actual rust. The shapes result  
from an idea, turned over in the ether  
like so many weathered stones. Ground to powder,

stripped to filament, the mind is foreign  
even to itself.



We drew a ring around the hinge to give  
the painting structure, some intention,  
or semblance of it, to make the matter flow.

We turned object into artifact, artifact

into sound. We made it pretty. We made  
it sing...

All night I traced the canvas,  
assessing its receptivity to color. I put

a brush against it, let the fibers  
fan the empty space. These movements—  
thrashing, metonymic—fix  
the shifting

measure of a thought. Where it founders,  
how it goes. What its limit is. Above me,

rafters line the basement ceiling, hold it  
as the fettered edges of the painting  
hold a sinking image. Erect an architecture,

keep it straight. Strew the viewer's eye.  
Edges let us know where not to look.



We live within the circle, replete  
with its occlusions. Goshawks  
loop and dive. Loaded barges push

a string of goods along a river  
thick with oil. To me, it's all one  
stream of thought, stripping names

from things: sourceless, sustaining,  
at any point completing itself,  
beginning then again. The water

moves from mountains, moves  
the hills in turn. It rises, heavy

with history. Condenses into clouds.

Still there is

no logic to this.

The water rises, fragmented  
matter floats through it, identifiable only

through its participation in a stark  
but larger whole, an object,  
or the river, either one evincing

a purpose

surpassed by an ideal:

Thomas Jefferson, 1782: "The Ohio

is the most beautiful river on earth."

1856: Margaret Garner. 2010: The Ohio  
is ranked America's dirtiest river.



There is a through line, through which  
thought turns in on itself, resolves,  
hastens inward to the ends of what we think

we've made. Extricates the pull  
of iconicity. I flick the brush and paint  
spatters the canvas. Light ebbs

and the pattern dissolves, hauls brightness  
to a region far beyond perceptibility.  
Even here, one feels the infinite regress

of run-off from Pittsburgh Steel, dribbled oil  
of the pleasure cruisers, the coal-fired stacks  
of steamers with their drunken loads.

The wheel revolves. Soot sheathes  
the limestone floor. Catfish, big as a fist,  
bubble up on the heated bank.



Sifting fragmented matter carried up  
from the river's bed—bicycle parts,  
shredded plastic—a doll's

missing eye—

we drag

sticks through retreating water,  
pilfer anything of use.

We draw circles round the circles  
of the image of our thought.

I dip the brush in water, watch beads  
dapple the canvas surface—  
forge the picture's larger structure.

Plumes diffuse

a darkening medium

I pour down the sink. In the distance,  
water eats the face of the ridge

cradling a new-paved road. Black clouds  
feed the tributaries feeding into  
my design. The lightbulb flickers. Its coiled

wire burns. Pipes push downward  
toward the river's open mouth.