sunday morning tambourine

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sunday morning tambourine

by

Juliana M Sartor

B.S., Central Michigan University, 2010

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
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Department of English

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This thesis entitled:
sunday morning tambourine
written by Juliana M Sartor
has been approved for the Department of English

Ruth Ellen Kocher

Noah Eli Gordon

Date__________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

IRB protocol #________________________
Like the chatter of its namesake, the poetry of sunday morning tambourine chimes between rhythm and ringing, between recall and recognition; an exploration of truth and record, language and retelling; building momentum and reason through repetition, a tinnitus of memory: the best i can do for whatever becomes my history.
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one recall poem

when i wake, i stumble to recount. grey
light pressed into pulled blinds. you at the kitchen table
your fingers through a mug handle.

dthis is how life moves. this is what recognition gives us.

for a minute i hear noises that my mind makes.
   woodwind, first. then, longing.
the CAVES of MAVES
we didn’t go there. we couldn’t. i mean, we wouldn’t. i mean, people have gone, i guess, and died there. like, skulls-rotting-on-poles type of died-there. i don’t know. that is just what she told me, what she guessed.

we lived in her bedroom. we filled everything with ink, with notes and noise. we found anything magnetic. some year we realized there was an entrance to the attic in her closet. for weeks, we planned going up there. we would need:

1. a flash light
2. masks (for dust)
3. rubber gloves
4. large plastic bags (garbage bags) in case we found something rotting
5. a shovel to move rotting things into the plastic bags, if we found them
6. knee pads
7. a pen and a pad to take notes
8. bug kit (tweezers, magnifying glass)

i suggested two flashlights, or she did, in case we wanted to separate, but we didn’t.
sometimes we would lay on her bed and pretend one of us was a boy but we didn’t know what boys did so we just laid there. she told me a story about her babysitter’s house and we listened to alanis morrissette and i imagined her babysitter naked in the living room, naked in the shower. she found tapes with naked women on them in her grandmother’s boyfriend’s attic. her grandmother tanned in a two piece in front of the glass front door. i asked what the women on the tapes were doing. she didn't want to say. she took stuffed animals—doodlebears, i think—and put one’s face between the other’s spread legs. this was what the girls on the tape box were doing. i didn’t get it. i didn't want to.
we went to church with either one’s family. her dad wouldn’t go. we would yell at him to go, that god wouldn’t love him if he didn’t. he didn’t care. he stayed somewhere in the basement, in dust. our church didn’t have pews. less dust. we stood in the rows of red seats, popping the rubber caps out of the top of the chair tubes. my mother told us to stop. we giggled. her mother gave us string to busy our hands. we played cat’s cradle. we tied the string around the rubber caps. the priest was like a vacuum cleaner. his face looked like a pissy cat’s. i saw it and laughed and she saw it and laughed and we didn’t even have to say what we were laughing at, and we laughed and laughed, and her mother told us to stop, and we laughed harder, and my mother told us to stop, and we laughed harder. we had a contest to see who could find the one photograph of a bird in the hymnal first. i think it was a sea-gull. a beach-rat.
we thought we would find a dead thing in the attic. maybe a rat, or raccoon. what would the smell be like? my father hated raccoons. they would get into the trash too much. they would hang down from the tree near the street and drop into the trash cans and rip apart the bags with their tiny nails. their sharp incisors.
we found a dead raccoon somewhere else: when my neighbor came to the door, my parents gone, saying that my dog killed something and was eating it in her yard and we had better get rid of it. we were ten. the neighbor said to get a plastic bag or something. i found a kroger bag and walked behind her house. the dog was sniffing at a rotting carcass. she hadn't killed it. i stared at it. i stared at the bag stuck to my fingers. we walked onto the driveway and stood there until my mom got home, the plastic bag in my hand. my mom got a shovel and moved the raccoon. she threw it into the creek behind our property. i put the bag back into the kitchen cabinet.
we wanted something from the creek behind our property. we thought it meant something, water. moving water. we thought it would bring us something. we hoped we’d find stone walls of an old house along it, a place no one else had been in for centuries. that we would see the handprints of small animals in the floor’s dust, bite marks in the doorframe from sharp incisors. what we wanted was to find something so old that it was new. we would need flashlights, and gloves. we would need a shovel or something.
at some point, we gave up on the attic. her father said we weren’t allowed. he said we wouldn’t find anything up there but maybe a dead raccoon. and dust. i guess what we really hoped for was something more human. for a real dead human. for some rotting skull. instead, we laid on her bed and wondered what boys did with girls. we laid on her bed and made things with paper and covered everything with ink.
we made ‘bibles.’ we cut sheets of computer paper into tiny rectangles and stapled them together and covered them in ink. we filled them with nonsense. we had contests to see who could come up with the most synonyms for ‘smallest’ and named our ‘bibles’ those series of synonyms. we made up recipes that included human flesh. we laughed about this. we made up quizzes to diagnose demonic possession and laughed. one of my back covers was something about a juice drink from concentrate. we laughed about this. one of hers was an advertisement for the CAVES of MAVES. she included an impaled skull on a stick. we laughed and we laughed. we laughed when we called them ‘bibles,’ like they contained instructions. they contained ink. years later, when she found them, she gave them to me. we laughed about them. we drove around in her car and laughed and i looked at dust, and she drove and her headlights branched. because this was in michigan, there was snow.
sunday morning tambourine
i shift a box of north american maps
you said you'd never be here again

once still in a stall shower
there were symphonies worth having.

at the end of the night
i say let's do something
drastic.

a quick stone in the meat of my hand
after so many years, shuffling
we talk about wreckage
like nightfall

i hear a mailbox shut and then
open

it was the day we promised to do dishes.
i ripped your t shirt in half

my skin something less wild
like the workings of neon

and timbre of voice
i think of you in terms of eggshells.
our bookshelves crumbling with color

you say  opalescent, formative

when i reach out and say  foxlike
i ignore you
at the flea market with your parents.

if i lose this,
i lose it all

someone shuffling a pack of post cards
a noise just above the wind

you bought almond milk this morning
the mouth of isolated downpour
somewhere north of here in a month
or a day
it won't matter.

a wing seat, a door latch
no processions or pipe organs
shook or wilted
there's an advantage to following snow through fields
the bridges
as things to be plucked.
each pore on my body worth having.
i think to point out the branches
but remember disease.

i can't help the vine winding.

i don't have a problem with these mathematics.

it's just
rejection  but when i turn my head to one side
i hear more than a barking dog.
i know nothing about house fires

just echolocation.
i couldn't quite remember a basement anymore.

a rush of twig buds against the roof rack
we greet the bridges like strings

i get home from work late
to a stranger in our kitchen holding four polypropylene water bottles.

you are white knuckled around a spaghetti fork

we've seen single clouds exhaust downpours somewhere north of here.
i want to remember you for your scars
counting out paper cranes
the back of the buick
spring, 1997
pulled a watch from your father's desk drawer
a course of antibiotics, the glass of portraits

sidestepped a list of grocery aisles
periscope crosshair, RADAR, SONAR
some
mythical beast or, your wife
all the beige ice clumped up in wheel wells
i took a length of orange
tape as a tombstone.

you knew more about the shovel
ears turned toward the mark of a barking dog

we will breathe about this
in the back of the bean field

you say it's becoming a habit.

the straightness on the bookshelf,
the crown of your head.

i'd give almost anything
to remember the lighthouse
it's not right for the moment
so i ask about symphonies, stalled and still
crumbling with color.

i think of you in terms of eggshells.
there is a sudden comfort in shifting.
it's not a stillness. in a month or a day you say you can hear my bones, a sudden shifting

i thought myself loyal, like a spouse with each pore on my body worth having

i hadn't seen a basement in months a modest nod to rifle ringing

our hands in the shape of tin tables
our bones become the currency
of some pretty, white
moment
miscellaneous swans

one
in fall, my parents walk our dog into a copse of beech trees near the lot they've bought for our new house. they keep the dog on the leash because she looks more frightening than we remember. on a pile of leaves at the center of the small clearing in the wood they see something alive and large, and stop. my father comes back with an almost wild eye. “an owl,” he says, “just standing there, with its wings held out.” he spreads out his arms to show me, not blinking. “just standing there.”
silver gate, montana, 2008

dthis summer, i need more than anything to leave. angie and bridget pull themselves up on top of the car, crushing the top-carrier to make the latches meet. we leave the things melissa stole out of honest lack of packing space. the cats paige and i had found near a taco bell drive-thru in cody, wyoming, perch on the back of the back seat. we have to stop to empty a litter box somewhere in minnesota and just dump it all over the rest-stop parking lot. in another life, we sing backstreet boys in a public bathroom and hiss at miscellaneous swans.
chicago, illinois, 1999

me and angie and our moms go to medieval times with a school trip. there is a boy standing up two rows in front of us, blocking the view of the final joust. my mom tries to get his attention, eventually throwing crumpled papers toward him, none of it working. finally, she dips my grease-covered napkin in water for some weight, balls it up, and chucks it toward him. the horses in the arena whinny, stamping straw. he turns around right as the wet lump hits his cheek. we all sit simultaneously, looking around for the source of the assault.
the desks in angie's basement were pulled off a curb before trash day by her father. they are old-timey: wooden, with the chairs attached. we play school a lot, usually “high school,” in which one of us is a mischievous teen wearing too much makeup who is sent to the principal's office for kissing boys in the hallway. her dad comes down to pester us, somehow fitting himself into one of the desk chairs, calling out and wailing, filling the role of the special needs student. his name in this game is “charlie.” we hate “charlie.” not long after, i find a porcelain statue of a bear with engraving on the bottom: “charlie: the spirit of friendship
warms the heart.” I know this means I should learn something.
first:

no lighthouse please no seizure
grown into an ocean of me

   gripping ground down southerly.

to weave to spin shear and shuck. movement by the window

   throws off the smoke.

some days all we do is nod.
miscellaneous swans

two
plymouth, michigan, 1996

angie and i have a game we call 'tracks.' or 'making tracks.' we aren't 'normal' on the playground. mostly, we want to talk. when snow comes, we wander far out into the fields at the back of school property, one behind the other, discussing nightmares, or projects, or glossolalia. we turn at calculated intervals, bending the paths stomped beneath us into something calligraphic, at least for an aerial view.
in a summer when high contrast photography of abandoned buildings was how to prove social worth, becki and i drive out west of town on gravel roads till we see a groaned-down barn. overrun with sprouting maples, we park and approach it cautiously, still 50 yards away. i realize i am standing on some kind of insect pile while i wind my film, then shriek and run back toward the road. a salem township pickup truck approaches and slows. we tell the fire chief we are shooting film for class. he tells us to get the hell out.
key west, florida, 2009

i drive down for new years with paige. we stay at her grandfather's fourth house. in his first house, he has a bowling alley, a movie theatre, and a bedroom still made up for his youngest daughter, who ended her life off the edge of a cruise ship. when the ball drops, i meet a boy named nick who kisses me later at some landmark for the southern most point in the united states. i think i am too ugly for it and choose to care most about the buoys in the night and naval waters. the glare of the lighthouse. later, melissa bites her nose with a chip clip in paige's grandfather's fourth kitchen. my favorite part about that kitchen is a sign above the sink that reads,
“simplify, simplify, simplify.”
i dream that dooley and i are in his mother's basement. earlier in that day, we had discussed the importance of a kitchen in the basement. we worry that we will never ourselves afford such luxuries. his mother has stuffed rubbermaid containers with unhanging framed art, the kind that runs up credit card debt. in my dream, he keeps coming down the stairs without ever going back up. we are surrounded by all sorts of impossible bicycles. it has something to do with the wallpaper.
Mount Pleasant, Michigan, 2008

On a morning after an ice storm and a birthday party where a poet I know turns down my advances, Dooley and I wander into some woods we are surprised to discover. We see ice in shapes we've never known. We feel okay breathing here. In the same place in the summer, I see a tree overcome with vines. At first I think it is beautiful, but then remember something parasitic. There is beauty in force and seizure.
we love to hear stories about love from angie's mom. she tells us one of a boy named bruce who gave her a ring and then broke her heart. she threw the ring into a clump of bushes near her house. i imagine them to be the same piney bushes in front of my parents'. we used to take the needles and poke each other, pretending we were doctors. at some point, she had to search through these bushes for this ring again. i imagine she was poked a lot. i might have most of this story wrong.
two recall poem

when a girl says she likes my shoes i say “thanks
i bought them after i took the GRE?” like it matters or like
i don't remember. and then i tell her my GRE scores which, as
i tell her,
   like all of my standardized test scores suggest
i might be a genius mathematician but nothing else.

i’m thinking and i know
i also bought something else that day and what
i really bought was a case for my new computer
but i can’t remember this detail so
i tell her i bought an entire computer.
i tell her i was so traumatized by the GRE that

afterward, i went out and bought a computer.
this isn’t true

and i realize that later or i realized just now
   and i can’t even remember who i was talking to but
i want to remember and call her and tell her i lied.
i want to explain that what really happened
after i took the GRE
was that i drove three hours in my rusting ford taurus
   to ohio to party with julie who suggested i buy the shoes
   but actually just missed my new boyfriend

   because i’d made plans to go to ohio
   before i got the boyfriend and really all i wanted
   was to be with the boyfriend.

   but also i was worried because my GRE scores
   meant that i might not even get into graduate school and so
   what if i was stuck living in michigan my entire life and what
   if i married the boyfriend who was hot and nice but not much
   else or what if i did get in and then what if by the time

   i had to leave michigan for whichever
   mountainous state i’d move to i really did want to marry
   the boyfriend and what if i resented my own
   education or what if i denied it for the sake of something
stable in the name of love, what if i ruined everything
because i just wanted to be around any boyfriend what if i

settled and accepted it what if i stopped
getting better what if i turned off

even my faint desire
for ambition what if eventually i found the most pleasure in
something as simple as a new pair of shoes or what
if i lost myself so severely that my only desire was to buy
a new computer what if i thought a new computer solved
everything
and it turns out that i guess i did i guess
in my memory i made up
that fact after failing
half of the GRE.

i want to find the girl i told this to, find her
on facebook or go to her workplace
and wait there tapping my toes together to tell her that
what i said before was wrong.

maybe she would ask me what is the difference. maybe
i would stare at my shoes.
the bell/noise use
there is a certain exhaustion in discovery, in figuring. even just mental energy. staring over a plane's wing, the latch of emergency door just a grip and push. the figuring, though, the patchwork. sometimes i think i know enough about geography, about satellite maps, to piece everything together. but i don't. when landing in some city or another, i notice a collection of bridges stretched across a river like frets on a violin neck. something strung, or to be plucked. i can't remember which city. i can't even guess.

in some past life, i kept close track of memory. i labeled it. i boxed it. i interrupted incorrect recollections. my best friend was the first person i remember resenting for making things up. for her talent. people believed her. early on, i
believed her. we were loyal, then, like spouses, or like people who needn't make a big deal of their unions. there is something to be said for an inherent union.

with age, we begin naming. we label and flee. we search for new unions. i have never found them like i’d like. in snow, i move toward solitude. perhaps the insulation of snowpack provides a denser sense of quiet. a mark on my palm from tripping down a dirt path glows red with the heat of hands balled against the wind. i tell myself that when it fades completely, i will be done with a man. but a line on my calf from a fallen fir. but the gash under my knee from a rock
wall. i measure time with my body. i deem my own cells responsible.

i drive every way across this country to try to convince myself. but dreams. but a pair of basketball shorts. but a plane ticket, a rental car, the elk rut. my body on a cliff in utah. the breath of wind. i feel myself moved, like i could give it all up. but a shaving scar on my shin. but a photograph of nothing. a corner of my pillowcase. i guess i just want something to hurt me. to discover the threat of another. to wake into exhaustion, finding a mouth-shaped bruise beneath my ear. grey light when i draw back the blinds.
miscellaneous swans

three
the house we live in in montana is hooked up to the best well in the state. angie and i learn this one night when a shirtless man with handfuls of nalgenes comes to our door and asks to fill them all. his name is steve. angie had been home alone, high and reheating spaghetti. when our housemate lukas and i return home, steve is in the kitchen. lukas disappears then emerges with a can of bear spray. angie's hand is tight around her fork. eventually we learned that steve is friends with henry, our boss, who used to be the one living in the house. after filling his water bottles, he spends two hours telling angie that unless she works
on a squid boat in alaska, she will never reach her enlightenment. the love of his life is also named angie.
cadillac, michigan, 2009

rob and i drive north along the lake coast to the century-old house where he grew up, the dining room table awash with pre-christmas shopping, or still littered from last year's. something's antlers on every wall. we drive into town in his mother's old saturn, and spend three hours wandering among booths of antique irons and handmade dreamcatchers at the annual flea market. i joke about wanting a wool blanket with a wolf's head stitched into it, only to find the same throw on the creaking bed where rob and i sleep. we can't go a night together without getting off, so i lay on the rug with my knee up and his hands in quiet
places. It is here where I fire a gun for the first and last time.
plymouth, michigan, 2007

some spring or fall, a newness of weather, sitting on a playground in a neighborhood with dooley. we smoke the last of some weed we'd gotten from his little sister, another bridget, blonde too and beautiful. at first, we swing, in love as we could be, but quickly grow sea-sick. we plant ourselves at a tin picnic table, pressing our hands and heads toward it, wondrous of what paths we'd step out with our lives. it is helpful to know a person of less faith than myself, to reassure the unassurable with a “we'll all be okay,” or some similar phrase i myself will cling to.
somehow, richard convinces angie and i to join him on a 12 mile hike through yellowstone. we don't even have proper shoes, but end up along a mountain. we see a wolf print in the mud, as large as my small hand. a creek winds its way over our path, first just a few stones to step over, but eventually a river, nearly raging, up to our waists. its bed of sharp shale into our feet. in the center of the rush, i pinch to angie's arm, refusing to move. "you have to let go of me!" she screams. if i don't, she is sure, she will die. but if i do, i know, so will i.
sunday morning tambourine
hemming your pants before a wedding
the window open enough
i touch water

and remember something mild

i look for open eyes at the airport,
for teeth. felt a greasefire from
the balcony

the ink stain raw and nearly permanent
getting home from work late with my shoe toe
against a small spine, stuck
to spring ground

i used to know about wrenches and electric cars.
i once thought myself loyal, like a spouse.

i confuse your toothbrush for my toothbrush
the shadow of a branch from the window

i pretend i don't hear it
when you ask about the lighthouse.
–

we close the restaurant early
taking my hair in your hand.

smoke up a brick chimney
a dead bird on march ground.

–

remembering your wife
you pull up scored bone
from winter dirt

i swallow hard
rings of muscle down my throat, one by one.
   i remember gripping your arm in the middle of a river
i sift a pack of post cards
through wind. hemming your pants
before the wedding, coming downstairs
a million times
without having gone back up

i ball up a napkin with one hand
wet toes into straw stacks

we see a horse, impotent and bridled

and what causes this strangeness of force
i make priority
of a brass ring.

it's like i can hide behind a sapling
with your shirt ripped off
in my hand.

–

downtown, walking game trails
through snow
i hear a mailbox shut and then open
trying to take your advice as antiques
around us, wheeled things
down stairs
       into wooden basements
a movement toward the window.
your hand upright
with its wingspan.
when i lose this, i will lose it all:
the old tripod in the car trunk
a novel you wrote about florida.
i will never care about florida, except
the hand i let slip past my skirt.

9.14 for clear garment bags
against your boned shoulder
a slowing township fire truck before we crossed
to risk denial: the arms of wind and turbines

a grown man packed into a school desk
an accessory fetched from a road side

we track thick soles
through snow fields for months.

we will remember 1997
as the scar across your forearm

or your voice echo to find me.
i mark a burial with orange tape around a tree limb
another man's brass ring at the bottom

i point toward passing leaves.

i take trees in my wake


each pore on my body coursed
with antibiotics
your hand snapping branches
a movement toward inevitable uprightness

still, in a stall shower
i hadn't seen a basement
in months picking wax
or an ink stain, raw and nearly permanent

the township firetruck slowing as we passed
you struggle with a latch on the roof rack
it's not right for the moment so i ask

about the lighthouse.

there's a comfort in sudden shifting.

i fold origami in your memory
that june.

seventy four paper cranes while you sound out
a mox i cil lin
sitting behind your father's desk.

you realize i am folding maps
of tampa, florida

i notice your shoulders, shaking.
i had a fondness for the duplex.

a list of items from the attic

sometimes there were cloudless days

–

on a monday
we count out glass tumblers

i mention my inevitable uprightness
in a moment of winter.

your right foot bent against the stacking floor
long fence toward the back
of the bean field, your right foot bent
against spring, 1997
we drove out the buick, an owl in a wood
with its wingspan

going to the flea market with your parents
i throw a pack of postcards
out the car window.
in a month or a day

it won't matter

my neck will go numb.
i'll be covered in new hair.
you take me to the back of the bean field; the call of chain link. it's not a stillness, you say a cough against some quiet comeuppance i show you the best curve of my spine.
HYSHAM
i guess we found a glamour in secrets. in spying. we stood in between angie's house and the neighbors’, a pair of detroit tigers binoculars between us. there weren’t bushes but we assumed bushes. we hid behind i don’t know what. i guess behind nothing. i suppose we must’ve stood on something. a milk crate. just a thing to make our four-foot-somethings tall enough to peer into a high kitchen window of next door. we saw a boy, or a man, i guess probably a twenty-something at that point, with his arms around a girl, a girl who became his wife. they had two kids. she was from the south. i remember a story she told us about a velcro puppet kit and pairs of eyes or single ears or fur moustaches stuck to her brassieres. she said brassieres. i didn’t know what this meant. but the look on her husband’s face said something quiet, something lace. but this was all later. before this, we stood, between the houses, peering. spying. pretending some play binoculars did more than magnify. they had their arms around each other, and i guess they were kissing. maybe his hand on the ass of her jeans.

angie's brother came out through the wooden fence once as we spied. he wanted to play. but spying was secret. to distract him, we said we had seen multicolored fire flies around the pool by the shed. at first he didn’t believe us but then somehow he believed us. or just wanted to play along. we’d let him play pirates or explorers sometimes, but this was
a game too grown up, we said. later, she and i played
teenagers by the pool. teenagers was also a secret. we sat on
the steps up to the deck and pretended to smoke on some
stoop. pretended our fake boyfriends, with their hands on our
asses.

we had recurring fake boyfriends for a year in fifth grade
when we played a new game of teenagers. a couple of other
girls played with us. in this game, my fake boyfriend smoked
cigarettes and murdered a lot of people. i thought this made
him desirable. her fake boyfriend was kind of an idiot. she
thought this was funny. two years after we ended the game or
maybe just ended the friendships with the other girls, we
started to write the story of this game in a five star notebook.
there was some swearing and hands going up under shirts.
her mom found it on her bed and read part of it. we blamed it
on my sister, who didn’t have fake boyfriends. we said it was
hers. but it wasn’t, so we knew we had to get rid of it. we
went into the woods through her wooden fence with a shovel
and the notebook wrapped in a series of plastic things. i took
some orange tape from the garage to mark the grave. i
figured, at some point, we’d dig it up again.

in the woods through the wooden fence there was a dirt road,
curbed by turn-offs covered in clumps of flowering weeds.
we named those clumps of flowering weeds meadows. some
spring, easterish, we dressed ourselves in airy skirts meant for saturday’s vigil. we dragged a basket with hormel pepperoni and quartered squares of muenster cheese through the fence. we found a meadow. our fake boyfriends, who were princes, were on their way. they were out exploring something, on horseback. we ate whatever. but it was something’s mating season. the weeds erupted with conjoined insects. we screamed. a man came down from his backyard to make sure we weren’t being kidnapped or raped. we said don’t worry. we felt embarrassed. we said our boyfriends were on their way. later, we’d call this man “the man with the mohawk.” maybe he had one, i don’t know. later, we’d walk around that meadow, hoping to catch a glimpse.

i never had real boyfriends. i had her. now, we’ll laugh and call each other boyfriend. we realized that we represented lovers to each other one boyfriendless summer spent west. lovers driving west into some field of storm, arrowed mountains before us. settlers horsebacked into a stretch of territory; a breaking off of earth, too persistent to admit a rift or ravine as defeat. sometimes we played explorers. sometimes we played spies. we drove west beneath a single cloud of downpour, green rolled wyoming, eager for some sighting of strangers, an act of spying. even through another’s car windows. any bumper sticker, any thing around a rear view mirror, any print of pillowcase pressed to a passenger
doorframe. i saw a man brushing his teeth a day earlier in the sioux city commute. we saw some length of white tape or paper trail from the bed of a truck at some point on i-90. we laughed about this. we took a picture. we saw a license plate in iowa. MANXCAT. she said, *man times cat*. i still laugh about this. you can’t tell what it says in the picture. months later, in north dakota, a sign for the town of hysham. she said, *his ham*.

we stopped there, in hysham. his ham. it was a town of dust. it was one gas station. we were probably high. i got out to go to the bathroom. i held the door for a woman behind me. she said to the man at the counter, *going to the demolition derby today, earl?* he wore a nascar cap. she looked like 1930. like drought. her name was darla. like she was from the south, but this was north dakota. she probably said brassieres. if i said she came in on a horse, i would just only be lying. we laughed about these people. we wanted to park there forever, staring, listening, hidden behind car visors, no binoculars, waiting for someone more imaginary. they had no secrets, just this town of dry dirt. just something tumbleweedy pulled across the road.
then:

we become victims of the drift.

    all lighthouse, all seizure.

    no movement towards home. ripping back and exposure,
bank-swept up tributaries.    i won’t quite ever

remove my hand
    from your wrist.

whole years

we’ll have forgotten.
Annotated Bibliography


This album, though technically a retelling and a collection of Japanese fairy tales, emphasizes above all the power of the sonically fragmented utterance—the beautiful assault of sound ringing. This music provides such an emotional experience for me through both my experiential associations with it and its piercing attention to language that I can’t not include it as a source of much of my poetical thought. The lyrical focus on natural image as metaphor, as well as the masterful linguistic adaptation of its source text force the experience of this music to forever remain inside my brain, informing all parts of my attention to the sonic, to musicality, to language, image, repetition, and beauty.


Dan Beachy-Quick’s attention to the possibility of the utterance and his command of natural language litter this book with moments of almost incalculable genius. This book is one that will always bring me back to poetry. The fragmented and often buried sense of semi-narrative, of the way people and nature must interact, coupled with his linguistic economy has brought me to tears several times. While there are no specific moments in this manuscript that I can attribute to Beachy-Quick directly, I believe my entire career in this program has been informed by my devotion to this book.


Ted Berrigan’s collection of sonnets explores the vast possibility of repetition as a device for meaning-making. Assigned to read and present on this book at some point, I found it, at first, somewhat underwhelming. But soon, while reading, the impact of repetition of
lines and phrases within the poems took hold of me. At first, I thought, “Why do I care about any of this?” By the end, I couldn’t quite answer why, but I knew that I did. Each recurrence of language piled on top of its previous use, cycling back through my brain, drawing more context and asking for more attention, which I could not help but give.

This book informed me of the possibility of meaning excavated from the familiar, through repetition, inspiring my initial desire to explore the impact of the repeated image, the power of the repeated phrase.


Julie Carr’s meditations on violence, motherhood, fear, pain, and control come together in this book to expose the pure and beautiful vulnerability of human physical and emotional existence. While this book features a number of narrators, the common themes tie all the voices together into what I consider a multitudinal whole—that of humanity. Carr’s simple yet powerful attention to language and fragment, her explorations of varying form, and moments of self-aware confession contributed to the “finishing touches” of this manuscript: “one recall poem,” “first,” and “then.”


Though now a somewhat well-known “alt-lit” presence, Steve Roggenbuck was once just a comrade of mine. As a younger, more traditional poet, Steve’s focus on the synergy of sound and image within his language taught me, by example, more about the effects and affects of poetry than anything else. Being able to apply a personal connection to works of poetry was vastly important to me; attaching words to a life I knew allowed me to explore my own experiences in poetical ways I never before had. In his current work,
Steve encourages solidarity and social activism, while also straying often in the absurd, creating a sort of outside-inside joke that anyone is welcome to get in on.

Steve dropped out of his MFA at Columbia some time after his work was termed “throw-away” by an instructor, and began self-publishing small chapbooks of fragments and making inspirational youtube videos. If I hadn’t known Steve in my past life, I admit I would find him exhausting. However, here too, being able to apply a personal connection to his work was immensely powerful in not only my acceptance but also my enjoyment of it. I can’t attribute any specific works in my thesis to Steve, but his sentiment/video “Make something beautiful before you are dead” has encouraged me every day to continue making poetry, to commit to my own definition of beauty, and to never (totally) give up. In his words, “Never give up. If you give up, fuck you.”


David Shields’ conglomeration of essay excerpts, interview comments, newspaper snippets, lyrics, whispers, and thoughts reveals for its readers the impossibility of truth untinted by opinion. While this exploration of untruth seems at odds with my desire to express truth, or history, the importance of bias and my attention to my own was inspired at length by this work. It seems, sometimes, like “what’s the point” of committing to my own history when it is such a truth unattainable, but the presence of opinion in this book encouraged my desire to commit at least to record. The truth exists in every retelling of it: this manuscript is my own.

Steinberg, Susan. *Hydroplane*. FC2, 2006

Susan Steinberg’s collection of short stories explores the complexities of womanhood
through a masterful weaving of narrative threads characterized by purposeful repetition. These works are possessed by a voice of insistence, a voice that also possesses the reader. Her attention to syntax and form strays on the side of the poetic (though don’t tell her I said that), and was the inspiration behind the longer prose pieces at the beginning and end of my manuscript. Her use of spiraling, cycling images and ideas injected itself into my own writing, teaching me to build narrative importance through intentioned repetition.


Rachel Zucker’s relaying of the anxieties of woman- and motherhood express an honesty and directness with regards to relational experience to create a sincere and confessional atmosphere of the body. This book is also one that I have carried with me throughout my experience as an MFA candidate. I am most drawn to Zucker’s ability to convey narrative through fragment, as well as her unabashed attention to female experience.