belief hydration

Samuel Hebner
Samuel.Hebner@Colorado.EDU

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses

Part of the Poetry Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses/2003
Samuel Hebner

Departmental Honors in English
University of Colorado Boulder
March 15, 2019

Thesis Advisor-
Noah Eli Gordon, English Department

Defense Committee-
Noah Eli Gordon, English Department
Marcia Douglas, English Department
Garrett Bredeson, Philosophy Department
This collection splits in several poetic narratives, where each could have its own goals while still folding back on the others, as I wanted more than anything to let this book be about the interconnectedness of life. Giving might be the most common action in these pages, whether that be of knowledge, time or help. When Death gives to the well or presents itself to the world, among others, we are seeing balance. That balance and interconnectedness go hand in hand and is often overlooked in nature or glanced off in a way without importance. By naming this collection belief hydration, I wanted to first acknowledge all the water in my writing and the motion that goes on but more importantly, put a value and purpose to the partnership between balance and interconnectedness. It is important to believe in balance, and connections are something for which we should all care.

Having the ability to look back on the process, I can see that it was split pretty clearly into four stages. From August until late December there was pure gather. Over winter break I took a few days then to refine, then weeks to compose. Then weeks again to let breathe. In August I bought a stack of red single subject notebooks and put as much into them as I could. Usually three would be in circuit at a time. They held multiple versions of every poem and whatever discoveries came about while making them—there was even a creative dictionary for words I got bored with. When it came time to refine, I had seven journals filled front and back and no written order between the pages, just whatever mental lines I held onto when making them. In that refining, I ripped each page from its journal so it could stack more neatly with others that it was related to. Composing those stacks was equal parts excitement and intimidation, and my floors were covered for weeks as I converted them to type. Since I made each poem without knowing what its precise relation would be to the others, finalizing their features was difficult. But once the perspectives aligned, I could let certain poems be more playful, or reel them in to reflect what was happening in the larger arc. That was the letting breathe. I cannot say it was my favorite part, because I preferred that raw gathering from last fall, but to see everything collide was really special. My best memories of writing were made by this book.

I have always been most interested in thoughts without end, and my favorite poems to write echo that inexactness. Whether searching for the right words to give at an Oak tree’s funeral, or trying to find a solid shape to time, I love to lean into what cannot be fully known. To bring an audience on board with those thoughts has been hard for me in shorter narratives, and so I thought this longer piece would be a great opportunity to try and do that in a new way. I was very deliberate with my give and take between the extra-natural and concrete reality because I know going too full either way might have been exhausting or uninviting. Blending those two worlds together was extremely productive and even inspired some lines of thought I probably would not have stumbled across if I had taken another approach.

I read this in the winter the one day between my gathering and refining. Part way through this story, it became clear that both Death and Space were tertiary characters. Bukowski worked them in with such ease and mastery that I had to take note, especially since I was working on something similar.


As much as anything I learned the stage magic of writing from this book. Calvino’s stories wrapped and distracted me for the whole start of summer while his greatest trick was hiding in the plainest details. Each connection a simple spiderweb, no hiccup. His character Ludmilla always speaks of the book she would most like to read and in doing so she closely describes the work that Calvino presents to us. I thought of her when I was writing, and always tried to work towards what I would most want to read.


In these five main sections, lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility and multiplicity, Calvino set the direction of my focus going into revision. His sixth section, consistency, was never completed, but by writing and organizing so much in a rather condensed period time, I was hoping the voice and tones would be near enough to one another to abide by that too.


Before working through this book, I always saw a separation between my artistic process and the other goings on in life. And that distance made consistency and identity difficult to form. Writing morning pages and having the invitation to more deliberately explore my creative self was an extremely cleansing experience. I see this book as foundational to the rediscovery of my creative self.


I love this book for its wild depictions of a writer captivated. In the winter, with my floor scattered, I almost lost myself just as wholly as Johnny Truant. Perhaps my favorite page, in any book I have ever read, 484, has been written on my wall for the entirety of this project: “Very/ soon he' / will vanish' / / completely in the wings' / / of his own' / wordless' stanza”.

And even without pinning the precise meaning of that page, I have learned a lot from its thoughts.

Showed me part of how many people made a name for themselves by writing their own way. From language poets to masters of form and the line, the more I saw was I inspired too keep writing my own way.


Levine shows his mastery of poetics in many ways throughout these pages, but the aspect of his writing I am most intrigued by is the subtlety. His play with focus on what is valued is so mindful and deceiving that it is hard not to read each page twice or thrice to gather more of what he is not giving.
belief
hydration

by samuel hebner
as water gathers
your eyes open
on a pontoon in the glass sound
to a wave pushing opposite the tide

the Sleepdealer caught it too

awake already she moves astern
with a bamboo long pole
picking fingerfuls of sand from her pottery
to test the air

don’t let your first impression be fooled
by her nude & curly hair
story has it she fell from the comets
or rather
slid with great collect

alive on concrete
she was sent by some nocturnal emissary
to clean the junk beneath shadows
to cast kites on the island of captured imagination
where children run

allergic to certain sounds
words
they hide in the trees at dawn
with fishing lines and perpetuate silence

much more inventive than the other river goddesses
her green eyes are good enough to hear the difference
between any sound in the forest and tell what it wants

for months before she arrived
you slept in tonic disarray

when usually you judged a room
off how many hiding places it had
yours was a realm with museum glass
had nothing better
than the thinnest curtains
to hide behind
it had been fascinating and ill
toxic even

in that air you heard people speak of her cloak
the sightless guide to her quest
lead by cosmic intuition
capable they say of foiling even the sickest poison

so you went with her to learn about dreams
drawing with chalk

dreams are
things we think about

like whether to draw with chalk
on cloudy days

when we know whatever happens
in our chaotic muddle

will change when rain
tugs those shades of powder
dream: March eight

you were building trees
in the back yard
at your old house

where your brother practiced to fall
and you couldn’t get leaves to grow

his all calloused branches
was better to climb so you
stopped yours to help with his

up and higher it grew
until you could sit and look
out at the perfect height
dream: April thirty

you weren’t awake
but you thought you were
in the shower

it was hot and too cold
and you thought maybe you died
sometime back when you were four
no way to be sure exactly
it was years ago
and ever since
had been living in a version of hell
exactly like real life
only no one ever told you
you were dead
dream: September eighteen

alone in the back of a bus
when it’s dark
you notice
the bus driver asleep
and you can’t move
because
you are too
you try to yell at him
but can’t because
you are still sleeping
and you keep yelling
and he lays over the wheel
barely keeping on
‘They are stale with Death’
she said
‘and they need cleansing’

‘moving further
we need to know
what your presence is in the world
and why so much
has been left
for sifting at night’
and so you reveal
then, in a day,
maybe a summary,
or a few hours alone,
the culmination and
results thereof
your impact
on the people nearest
your mother

raised on drips
from broken concrete in Baltimore
she’s swam nude
in thirty-seven different countries

   including twice in Austria
   with the Crowned Prince

and she’s not even Pisces

once she saved a baby dolphin
off the coast of Japan
and for years went back to say hello

she was a trapeze artist in the city
for six shows
before she jumped casually
to abscond with your father
on a different path

you could never sleep in her hold

it lacked the warmth
of someone who wanted to be
your mother
your brother

he always had some plan
however weak with strategy

it was Thanksgiving
he would pour eighty/twenty
whisky and water
to a 7-11 cup
and drive too fast
when things weren’t going right

and he’d have taken you too
if only a seat was open
interrupts his own conversation about whether or not Bruce Lee could kill everyone in the room with a q-tip to say

you know how in the movie Limitless at the end when this guy tries to virtue signal over Bradley Cooper and he’s like “Without that pill you’re nothing!” and Brad is like “Don’t you think, that after all these years of being limitless, some of those synapses would have stayed, and I’d still be limitless even without the pill”

I’m basically just like that but with weed
your niece

at five she had never killed before
but with a mouse trapped by a coffee mug
knew it was not an animal
that could be let go

first thoughts were of lobsters and cooking
because there would be no blood

she couldn’t get the stove to work
so she flushed it down the toilet

the mouse swirled and drained
then swam back up

she grabbed the plunger to force it under
it’s your third
morning with her

the wind is cutting
so you stick to the trees
where water is shallow
and the poles can stick

your olive milk breakfast
is warm from a full night in the moon

she’s taking you to her well
something luminescent to gaze in
‘where memories live’

back on another island
between trees
that have grown the longest
an aquarium descends
with internal torches
patterned like a bookshelf
holding the diaries
of all your favorite authors

‘If you look closely
you’ll notice
each of the stones are siblings

their parents
are deep mountains
and gave them that grey’

moving overhead
was a new smell

‘tell me
what do you see’
with my eyes closed
it’s an undulating black

only opaque on surface
yet ampliative

beyond

motion beckons
just past the rim of plausibility

what long-shot guesses I have
on that domino fall

but those waves pressing out
are real enough
to take a push for granted

despite these are lies I see
‘yes
beware
though

your sight is not good enough
just yet
to know
that not all lies are false’
On a night alone
you cross by the well
and hear from within
warm deliberations
about Time and shape
The voices unknown,
but with serious focus,
are not distracted
Efficacy, in terms of a dilemma

There’s a problem, sir,
with the reality you’ve laid out for us

I’m having trouble understanding
some of your definitions in this equation

and how they fit with your proposition
that life is a dream

You used Rustin Cole
as your ‘good example’

citing his thought of life as
‘one expanding circular fuck up’

happening on loop
inside some head imperceptible to our own

As he says,
‘How many times have we had this conversation?’

But could it really be that these projections
in our ‘locked box’

are derived outside of the spacetime;
rapt, in a sense?

It seems to us that life would not be so extensive
if taken from a room like that

That any room apart from the bindings of time and space
would have trouble even calling itself a room

That even the introduction of a lock on the room itself
implies some segmented still

Besides, from what I know of time
I’d say its actions are too much for a circle

And if giving any comparison, why not go grander?
Doesn’t it move

like a snake in the desert,
roaming casually but sometimes faster than usual,
urging on thirst or boredom, and heat!
Yes, heat might be involved,
its link to motion is undeniable
and has absence or not in all places.

I think that motion fits much closer to time’s
and better explains its quirks

So, in short, no. No, I don’t see life as a dream,
and I think you are wrong.

~

Well, I hoped you’d see the locked room
is an act of a circle itself

How to comprise it closes always and always
   enough to fit whatever it wants

Regardless of whatever whatever is
   And life might be one of those

The room does lock but in a way that was designed
   and not imposed later

   And in the sense of a snake, yes
   Yes it might move from fast to slow

   its urge would be in curiosity,
   and as time, there’s only one such place

   it could be left unsatiated
All change stems from a question, want or unknowing

   And beyond the physical,
   all change might stop when every question is solved

   So in a sense
   there’d be no need for time without questions
Let’s take now your snake, who might have everything of need in his circle, including all the powers of Time, there would still be one question he could never have answered and that is knowing who brought him there to that desert

So as he searches and dreams and simulates project after project, a thousand worlds and a thousand reasons, combing again through everything he’s solved, we get what we started with Life, as a dream

Their voices fade
and you notice
the Sleepdealer
beside you ~ Without
a word she pulls
from her cloak
a vial of tears and
pours them in the well
A story then untwirls
persuasion, at a glance

he’d never been this early

usually the birds got up first
talking about this or that
but even they were late to rise today

the stars patterned everywhere
it all looked inches away

he unwrapped his breakfast from a napkin
shook crumbles into the water
to see if minnows would come
and bring the bigger fish

that had worked before

his coffee was almost finished
as he’d been out a couple hours
but it was still dark

suddenly then the water swelled
and he fell to the floor

gripping the sides so it wouldn’t tip
he peeked over the edge

there was the head of a giant turtle
huffing great mists

they stared at one another
and the turtle circled the canoe
rocking it all the while
as they were almost the same size

the fisherman reached into his bag
and grabbed a tin of worms
opened then tossed a few to the turtle

it ate the worms and
lapped around the boat once more
then glided off in the silence
The next morning you are up early
there’s a cloak
you’ll need to construct
for mapping these thoughts
and other truths
people place on you
in it you’ll first put a lot of patience
because everything else
will be much harder to acquire
when dreams come
it’ll be something to turn to
to help chart a path in life after them’
'stitched on the inside  
should be a number of buttons  
for you to hang different pouches from  

mine are made from softened walnut  
knit thrice inside each of the others  
making about the size my thumb could fit into  

one has sand smashed by mountains  
at the top of their stream  
sometimes I'll pinch it in fire  
on a night that doesn’t have enough clouds  
to learn from  

in another there’s an egg from a dove  
I keep it by my breast  
where its warm  
and stroke it occasionally  

I also have vials  
to collect drips  
from things that drip'
once wading through seaweed
you came across a sash of orcas
which she wore
proudly

swimming within a small sea
six or seven of them circled about
enough for any mother
‘as with any cloak
there will be a dagger to go with yours
made from the congealing darkness
you’ve seen in the well
and taught by its instincts
the blade should serve you well
sheath it in a horn of elm
and practice with care
as your cloak knows truths
this tool will see to Time
and tracing its path’
‘confidence is a weapon
you’ll use give and share

not black like the teeth of metal
but disarming like a smile

it’s a most important virtue
and can be fast to go

breathe in through your shoulders
a fresh certainty

it is getting warm out’
‘belief will be posited in your fannypack
ready for access a few ounces at a time

believe in the concept of trust
and eventually it won’t fail you

be present

be balanced without your own wants
structuring the pauses of your speech

be careful with every goodbye
& know somethings left unsaid
shouldn’t need another pressure

be okay
with what you are

and hold onto that truth’
‘I heard and hope it’s true
you understand where we are

standing at the edge of the well
looking down into
what cannot be wholly ours

the thoughts it has
have been too tainted
by something deeper

and as you’ve built yourself back
more whole and true than before

there is still a gap in your path
and a leap you must take

so I ask that you go
down to meet
what has been watching you’
In the morning I stretch
    and shit
    and jog a few miles

Put the coffee and heater on
    before I shower
    so it extra-fogs

Vivaldi comes on at six-forty
    to walk me
    back down the stairs

If I’m lazy and leave it out
    the cats will eat my leftovers

    and I have been

So it’s a day for hunting
What I’m looking for are stories

They dwell in the well
on the patio behind my garden
Where ivy grows

Every genre between silence and despair
like those days you think back on
with more clouds

Darker the better

I can tell when a story’s
never been told before
because it’s far less sure of itself

It needs a helpful first-listener
What now surfaces
in the well is an
odd amalgamation
of swirling melancholy
Memories future and
past, speculative,
away and somehow yet
very close to Death
of them all

your moonlight reminds me
of the dock where we sat
and made up our own names

we used to float out there
in the darkest space
wondering how long
it would take
for time’s magnetic touch
to snatch one of us away

I thought about the word forever

but now that you’re gone
I realize it was just the question
that you wanted
on the topic of misunderstandings

you got off
at the wrong bus stop
going to LaGuardia
we kissed and cried
it was cold
and not much more than that.
Habitual neglect

There are
some books I won’t open
because I know
that’s where I hid pictures of us
so they wouldn’t get ruined
during the move

Good ones too

War and Peace

which can be a difficult distinction
especially in

Our Mutual Friend

who I wish never to see again

his

Crime and Punishment is

Gone With the Wind

just like her and the

Leaves of Grass

and now I am

The Stranger

who probably best belongs in

A Confederacy of Dunces …

One Hundred Years of Solitude

I’ll never know how it ends
met with a Sparrow

There is a grand piano
on the 35th floor
of a tower in Manhattan,
sitting across from a family
where only ambient love
from their conversations
care to keep it company.

Its wood was touched
by fine Italian hands
and warmed every day
though now, in dust,
it waits to invite anyone new.

This is all I could see
from my perch on the ledge,
the last champagne twisting
in divine riviulets.
the pianist

numb from three Friday’s work
the pianist’s fingers find
someone else to roll their spliff

she’s practiced in this and rolls tight
without a word
then flicks through television channels

it’s darker in the close to morning
the street’s stopping to move
and he has a toothache

withdraw from friends and ambitions
withdraw the idea of too much beauty
pull and spit at the night
2am on the 13th

Something about emergency sirens
turned her on
so
we spent the whole night
calling in anonymous tips
about
things happening in the
neighboring apartments
preemptive medicate

because I left shortly after
to shower
and find an okay in saying
that’s not
what’s holding me together
I remember when she said
‘you need me’
before letting go
consolation

a snail was having a hard time on my window as it was getting colder so I moved him to a jar by the light that had been warm with basil and blueberries

a condensation of his highest good set my bookshelf
constellation

I did the same thing
with inchworms too
but there were three
put in a snow globe
mint & honeysuckle

tasked with lazy separation
my shelves filled with these

a pine sloth
rigid from constant tire
stretched on lanolin

beside rocks I found
some cicadas chattering

ten ants ran terrified
without expansion

it was an orbit organized to poetics

a honey bee lit like
god across cut roses
from Death ii

Some days
I give stories of mine
back to the well
as a contribution for taking
It keeps a healthy motion inside
like cracking the window of a smoking car

I am the car
As the well speaks in the innocent gloss of a boy who wants to learn
the surroundings grow unphased as he by all their unknowings
Here the world is grey and cool and grey
moths came to the candles
on my grandmother’s windowsill
we’d watch from the dark
I always liked them
before bed she’d blow carefully
catch their wings
pushing each into light
the summer nights got longer and
there were less
the candles fluttered so low
in their pools
the last moth she blew
just stuck
there in the wax
as told by an 8 year old

you
go like this with your eyebrows
to seem really mad
but your eyes are sad
and your mouth is sad
then
go like this with your finger
and point
and yell
and say
get out of here right now and shut up
because it’s time for me to take my nap…
that’s how you be an adult
by the scones

the man in blue’s
    look
    was growing concerned
from the way
    I’d been staring

I asked
    how did you get those tattoos
like he’d been expecting

& from then I got the story
    about Dali’s foreskin
    and candle wax
Poem

Bobby Fischer has vanished!
He was just playing along as it happened.
There was some thinking and whispering,
that would have really been
heard as crying, if anyone just listened.
But I ran so fast like my heart to follow
those sounds when I first heard those words
_Bobby Fischer has vanished!_

There shouldn’t be whispers in perfection.
I’ve dreamed a different ending
for every story I ever heard.
But I never vanished.
And I’m jealous of you, Bobby Fischer,
I wish I vanished too.
for bonding

in a box of bones
my aunt put a note
that said to pray

with not much else to do I did

took out and organized
a white not entirely clean
perhaps from use

I am to do this often

and see an empty box
solve one of its
endless puzzles
for breaking

like a fly between ink and paper
nail got stuck in bone

the coroner said running wouldn’t have mattered

when you dropped a bucket of water on it
I could have pulled off one of my toes
three weeks ago

it comes in drawings and panel vans

I don’t know if my nostalgia is worse
for cigarettes or being taken
at the clock shop

when I died
Jesus taught me
a coffee table game

all you need
is a coin two cards
and a couple minutes

we would play for days
without keeping score

there are guesses involved
based on what
happened before

if only one of the cards
is facing up
and he isn’t looking at me
or if
the coin is spun too fast
when the cards aren’t out
I’ll know it might be like the last time
he was hiding
what was really important

every move is a guess
until you don’t need to anymore

when you’re that good
you can restart the world
from Death iii

I want a piece of seaweed
to float up from the bottom of the well
so I can finally know what is down there

I see a light and touch from the moon
but can’t tell if there is a limit

Last night I dreamt that
someone was looking in from another end

Muffled by the long hollowness
we could barely see each another

But I knew that was who I’d been talking to

so today I jumped in to meet them
belief hydration

start inside a water bottle
on a dock

not a reusable one
that cheap plastic

but something sturdy
thick and stuck sideways

maybe at work
or on the bus

it doesn’t matter where
because you’ll still be inside

on a dock

up there are islands you can swim to
and following down when you dive
is a chain you’ll never reach the end of
but it starts here (the same)
(perspective)

A wardrobe once fit four kids
for long enough to think up a lion and witch
so what might be possible for us

Though there may not be time for much
I know you’re thinking
there’s a lot but not endless breaths in here

it’s okay

I’ll light a candle
our own timer, better
from the start, it’s clear they’ve
done this before

drama practiced
As the candle burns
I won’t be able
to fully grasp the neck
of what I mean to say
though I hope to get close

Once I took a month off to sit in a cave
and form a full scope of stories
that don’t revere me the same way

I am a discovery not a promise
a doorway and nothing more
Yet most do not see that

There have been Queens
who worshipped me with gold coins
Entire religions that promised to skirt my path

From mastodons and Adam
to prophets and politicians
rainforests, alligators, sea monsters,
and Charlie and Willy
to the greatest filth on earth, Greed

The fuel of every progress

I have met them all

These reigns I hold need new vision
too much of my creativity is lost in the past

and you

You have to keep going

Your cloak is clutched on truth
and now your presence in the world
can match that power

Speak your last words now
because no one else can

One all-encompassing breath to round out
any questions you have

and let us see how much weight they hold
It’s right in front of you
He, who’s calling from
beneath that cloak, with
the voice of your brother
It is Death, true, an
entire weight pleading
to be lost from his position
Reaching after you for
answers, for commitment
And you can’t run, no,
not on this dock,
not in this bottle
So, you need to speak, and
answer the earth, the one
who needs a new Death
and you’ll say...
no

You are not
what I want to be

and I cannot do this

not even for you
Forget the moon and everything bound in gravity

You irreparable coward

Your cloak is thin & still a moment too thick
my blade is sure to find its seems

Face me now
our hoods are drawn

This look should not be indelible

You’re saturated with sanity
globbed uneven
unmusical for your most lucid moment

Equip yourself
tongue in cheek & cloak & dagger

Allow me one last chew
from my cedar box of peppercorns

then step forward
Death struck pure
and fast
but not first

the same

you got him too

& so
death
passes on
to himself