

JANE

by

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Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

## ABSTRACT

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*Jane*

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Julie Carr

*Jane* is a collection of poetry that investigates the connections between the (seemingly disconnected) material and immaterial domains, ultimately by mediating both realms through a direct experience of the divine. The thesis consists of three individual sections which progress into a final long piece that illustrates how such an experience affects the individual on an ontological level wherein distinctions between the objective and subjective are dissolved. Prior to this, *Jane* explores how objects and subjects interact with each other and themselves, treating both as uncanny articulations of Being. It also utilizes biblical texts (and the events, characters, and items within said texts) as a way to further narrow the gap between subject and object. Finally, in the concluding portion of the text referenced above, a personal account of conversion qua divine encounter is played out demonstrating how numinous confrontation brings all things together.

*For my family who have always fostered my care and creativity in everyway imaginable, for all of my teachers past and present who helped me channel that creativity onto the page, and, of course, for Sarah, whose love informed me of the one who IS Love.*

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## INTRODUCTION

“The simplest truth about man is that he is a very strange being; almost in the sense of being a stranger on the earth...He is at once a creator moving miraculous hands and fingers and a kind of cripple. He is wrapped in artificial bandages called clothes; he is propped on artificial crutches called furniture...Alone among the animals, he is shaken with the beautiful madness called laughter; as if he had caught sight of some secret in the very shape of the universe hidden from the universe itself.”—G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*

What can be within the universe yet remain “hidden” from the very universe itself? That, chiefly, is the question which this thesis seeks to ask and, if it is successful, answer. And while this manuscript is a thoroughly creative work it is structured in such a way that something of an exposition (if not an argument) may be formed. There are three sections that make up this work (I. Uncanny, II. Sola Scriptura, and III. Bread) along with a prologue which seeks to usher the reader into the world of the text as well as a literary “excursion” that links the first and second sections.

Section I, as its namesake suggests, investigates the uncanny as a launching off point to understanding what this universal secret is. But this only begs a more elemental question; what *is* the uncanny? Were one to ask five different intellectuals or poets one could expect to receive five separate answers, none of which this thesis would conform to exactly. For this work the uncanny is not defined in a *sui generis* fashion nor is it a direct expression of one single historically accepted and monolithic conception. Instead, the uncanny is here considered to be more conglomerate, defined as *that phenomenon wherein presence is amplified, doubled, or radically reinterpreted for, throughout, and within both subjects and objects.*

Regarding human subjects and subjectivity, Chesterton’s observations remain uncontroversial. All of us have had the experience of happening upon an object

(inanimate, dead, or alive) and feeling not so much that it is out of place but that *we* are out of place in its view. We spy on the Aspen tree in the backyard from our kitchen window and it appears at once more significant, looming, slightly oppressive, and somehow very un-treelike yet also “treeish, all too treeish.” And, the effect of this altered presence (which is spontaneously experienced without the aid of any particular substance or mindset) is that the viewer/listener/feeler has not encountered an out-of-place property within orderly reality but that they themselves no longer fit into the portrait of such a reality.

But it is when we extend this “awareness” to objects that we intensify and broaden Chesterton’s initial assessment; it is no longer man who is a stranger but objects which are strangers to others *and* themselves. This is not to claim that objects participate in human consciousness nor is it an attempt to degrade human mental faculty as such. Instead it is an affirmation of the great ontological background which is shared by all entities and how those entities are unable to fully disclose and experience all of the properties which make up their, and each other’s, ontological status.<sup>1</sup> And, if the universe is at its most basic level a collection of objects than the Edwardian lay theologian is correct; there is “some secret in the very shape of the universe hidden from the universe itself.”

However, if all objects and subjects (inasmuch as they too are constructed of objects) are tied down to and made manifest upon the same ontological fabric than why should humanity have any special access to this “secret?” Can it actually be true that man

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<sup>1</sup> Object-oriented ontology can be considered the philosophical branch that seeks to study and reveal how this admittedly uncanny theoretical phenomenon takes place. Water and wood, for example, may interact on a precise level of some physical properties (buoyancy) but not all of them (color, sound). See Graham Harman's *The Quadruple Object* (London: Zero Books, 2011).

alone—among the animals and the objects—is that for whom the secret is divulged? It is in the second section of the text, *Sola Scriptura*, that this notion is affirmed whereby *the spiritual is unveiled as the great ontological/metaphysical secret which, remaining hidden, gives shape to the entirety of the cosmos*. Mankind, in turn, has access to this “secret” only by way of God and the traumatic encounter between deity and humanity. And it is often *in* religious writing (such as the Bible) that a linguistic and textual space is cleared for this *other* reality to be wrestled with.

To better understand how this revelation (pardon the pun) came to be explored it is important to know the origin story of the work which comprises section II. The poems in *Sola Scriptura* are the direct result of a daily practice which entailed the reading of one randomly flipped to chapter of the Bible (alternating each day between the Old and New Testament) followed by a typed response titled after said biblical chapter. Revision has of course taken place but every single poem of section II began as a part of that original practice. And it was during this practice that an otherworldly character emerged whose import to the thesis is so great her name constitutes the manuscript’s title.

Jane is a prophet whose story is present in both Old and New Testament inspired poems even though neither division of the Bible showcases a female with such a role. Jane was also never an intentional creation but more of an invasive, even interruptive personality who demanded her own unique narrative. Additionally, those pieces wherein Jane is present simultaneously deepen and overshadow the other scriptural poems so much so that every piece in *Sola Scriptura* might be considered a “Jane Poem.” Beginning during an initial confrontation with the numinous and ending with her death in a state of grace, Jane’s narrative demonstrates how one comes across and embraces the

great occulted secret of the universe that is God. But Jane, as a prophet in service to the Lord, takes on a paradoxical mantle; she possess the greatest of powers yet her personal agency is part and parcel of divine mission; she is without limit in the realm of time and space but still finds herself at work in the most specific of locations and moments. Jane recognizes that the profound, uncanny quality of the everyday world possesses a spiritual backdrop and that the event of encountering and being chosen by the almighty places one directly within the great uncanny “secret” that is always already at work. In other words, Jane *is* the uncanny “made flesh.” For these reasons (for her embodiment of the uncanny by way of the divine) *Jane* as a manuscript is named after this character who muscled her way into the text and answered the question it posed.

Yet *Jane* does not end with Jane but concludes instead in a last long poem of fractured lineation and cathartic/traumatic imagery. The eponymous final section (Bread), sets out to poetically recreate the experience of the author’s own religious conversion and unlike other portions of the thesis, “Bread” is invested in relating an utterly personal experience. Up until section III the manuscript has sought to erase demarcations between subject and object, between the numinous and the material, and to re-establish the uncanny as a natural, even supernatural, feature of existence. It has attempted to trawl across the vast ontological and spiritual waters, examining any and every random catch that takes the bait. But now the text concludes with a piece which intentionally sets out to portray a singular and bizarre occurrence.

“Bread” is a poem whose sole function is to illustrate *how for the author the event of conversion to Christianity was more than anything else a moment of uncanny revelation and transformation where the individual fully becomes aware of the spiritual*

*background noise that radiates in all things including the self.* While other faiths have an equally (if not superior) conception of the spiritual realm, Christianity uniquely and violently marries the material with the immaterial. Catholics and Protestants may differ over transubstantiation but both recognize that the most banal physical objects (bread, wine, wood, donkeys, palm fronds, perfume, nails) take on an absurdly oversized significance in the story of God's life, death, and resurrection. Compound this with the gospel story itself, with all of its messy and surrealistic elements (that God is/was fully man AND fully human, that God came into history yet was always already outside of temporality, that God could meet death by human hands) and one soon discovers that Christ is the uncanny par excellence, in all of its perplexing splendor.

Therefore, to be "saved" or "born again" or "called out" is to be deracinated from a purely material or purely metaphysical soil and grafted into a garden that weighs more than every ounce of dirt in creation yet actually levitates above the earth. The Christian, then, is no longer the human occasionally rocked by guffaws due to a few stolen glances at the secret shape of the universe; the Christian is one who laughs, shouts, cries, breathes, and sleeps as a now recognizable part of that formerly occluded reality. "Bread" is the poem that concludes *Jane* because it is the poem that crystallizes the question asked at the beginning of this introduction.

Yet that question—"what can be within the universe yet remain hidden from the very universe itself?"—may be answered by the reader in an entirely different way. It may even be ignored right out. Every text is outside of an author's intent, every text is problematic in more ways than one, and every text confronts, dismisses, and realizes a multitude of differing literary interpretations. *Jane* is no exception. Hopefully this

introduction will serve less as a set of directions and more as an atlas where much land remains uncharted but reachable. Hopefully this text will not so much “live up to expectations” or even “surpass them” but cleave open a way for further ideas and linguistic possibilities to flourish.

Oakley C. Merideth,

4/2/2016

## Prologue

Sometimes I gaze at Orion all night until the sun comes up...

I don't know that many constellations, only a few. For instance, just below the dip of Ursa Minor (above and slightly to the left of the upper right corner) is a small messy string of four stars that remind me of gray roof water falling into a saucepan. Perhaps those four stars will bring pieces of plaster and pebble along with them. Perhaps the person who placed the pan at such a spot knew beforehand (even centuries before) that the ceiling above was bound to dribble. That's Ursa Minor. But of all the constellations it is Orion which always garners the lion's share of my attention. And not Orion entire but his belt, those three stars lined up in an effortless, rightward tilt. Like a wheelchair ramp. *Exactly* like a wheelchair ramp. Which means that the belt is really pointing towards a door in a building. Which means that the small piece of Orion I always look towards is not some component of a static image (a hunter, his club, or his kill) but a dynamic sign. But, what place does it indicate? What sort of shelter does the concrete ramp feed into? Perhaps you are aware that Orion is a winter constellation, which means in part of spring, and all of summer, I can catch no glimpse of it. In fact, I become most aware of autumn's re-installment simply for the fact that at night, at the horizon's blade (just where the dark bumps into trees and houses), I'll finally see the shimmer of the belt creaking skyward. And, as the days shorten, Orion falls further and further up. It is messianic yet always on schedule, seasonal in duration but sublime in presentation. Of course, if I stare too long at the three linked specks I cannot help but fathom things that ruin my experience. It is a fact that light, being constrained to reach us at a precise speed, isn't really "there" when we enjoy its presence, that we are simply feeling an echo glow whose source itself is burning away in an auto de fe already extinguished. No, I don't think that one night I will step outside and find, say, the middle buckle of the belt missing. But why should I have to imagine that three thousand, three million, three trillion years later Ursa Major will lose all her feet? Why should the sky at night suffer the indignity of reconfiguration like some sorry ocean that cannot replicate a wave? Knowing that there is nothing permanent in light is an insult and a terror. However, the real horror that tremors over me upon scrutinizing Orion's belt is the notion that there are constellations and asterisms which I will never see.

## I. Uncanny

CFL

The sun is so small it fits in a coil.

When you say “clap”

the whole things nods off

yet a hum still folds over

like haze puncturing the dark.

## Fetching Dead Leaves from the Air

In a few moments the tree will decide to shed skin. I am here, just beneath a limb, and I call this collecting: a few strands of yellow and red, even a crackled brown, all for the palming. I call this collecting: standing beneath the tree and refusing to jostle even as wind over-cradles my head in dust.

## Night Work

No matter what, don't look up—  
the stars retract and bulge without superstition  
despite our noise.

Paper Box

The lid over the  
square

balms a space.

Shake it.

Four dead double As

racket inside space

your box splinters open

you say “empty”

a last time.

Portals

Breeze tussles garbage cans

a hallway divulges a new door

the garbage visits new street corners

and the door unlocks with fresh murmur.

In all these things a short exhale emerges

which leaves a scratch too delicate to ignore. Particles

spill out, smaller than thoughts and collect in the spaces

no one thinks to look.

Excavation

The chamber groans.

Not a hole but a cave

its darkness thrown away

by flashlights.

Every tunnel swallows its own shadow;

that's what they call excavation

hands and feet pushing through

until the wet glimmers beneath us.

Nothing to discover

but expected burials

crowding out rare earth.

Yet this artifact at least is human

or, at least a human's daguerreotype

stained and scratched into limestone.

We renamed the scars

on that rock,

we baptized this fossil;

called it "handprint of the posthumous

unable to speak."

## Uncanny After the Fact

All my fruit collapses. The peaches and avocados fall back into pits. The apples paint themselves green and shrink like ice cubes on crimson cast iron. But the smell of an orchard refuses to dissipate—no corner of the kitchen is stainless, the phantom entrails of bark and harvest ripen in lanes of grout. I throw one peach pit after another into the pantry until the air heavies like smoke. True to form I lose every thought.

## Before the Machine Age

“Before the Machine Age everyone walked. One had to have shoes without memory because hazard always waited. Shoes had to forget their steps. Once I staggered towards a spot on the ridge (below an Elm/above ravine) where hornets knew too well my amble—A SHOT IN THE DARK! My feet betrayed me! Welts and their cousins were frost on the windshield called my body! I trampled myself down hill only to slip. There I was; a quaint cylinder of pain rolled down. Even my eyes ran in circles...After that day I never wore another pair of shoes without amnesia.”

He stopped speaking for a time as the room took his temperature.  
The wall laid him down to sleep, just shy of 98.6.

Traveler

Your car makes drift  
through yesterday and last year and tomorrow and after and later and before  
marking each stop with a popped clutch and oil pockmark; those drab  
ribbons of engine grease inscrutable to most eyes after the sun sets.

IN THE END  
tire deflates

your  
  
by running across  
an over-sharp femur  
gone grimy in rain

OR

your antenna loses signal  
when the air beneath Pompeii shrink wraps  
in cold crimson glitter.

## CPAP

Each night  
face

swaps with tubes

through your head

the jeep trailing

you dream

mist;

when you sleep

or every other night

after which

a dream

away from you

about standing still

that air which pushes

a new face

please remember your

supply lines drift

about the war

in the fog

within abendroth

exhale into the sleeper

takes care of you.

## Plastic Bag

The tree with unusual lungs in its branches  
the tree that oscillates with white and blue flowers  
the flowers that switch limbs after breeze,  
the flowers that nest only for a time  
that inhale and exhale or fly away completely  
the flowers that jump out of the garbage and marry the tree.

## Unfamiliar Uncanny

I think the  
opposite of truth  
is a gesture of you  
folding bed sheets  
in front of the mirrored closet doors;  
the backwards apparatus of arms and linen  
doubles into a package  
of two things fleshed  
signaling  
me/you. But that's not you, is it?

## Teeth, Mouth, Graves

These are the things I can no longer write  
but they inch closer and closer to the poem  
like a fresh pack of jackals anxious to lick off  
the sticky undergrowth from their paws  
the moment they track across my page.

## Glass Bottle of Mexican Coca-Cola

There was this gleam in the dirt more than debris.  
Ribs clear and sculpted onto the vase, reminder of appetite.  
“There were a voice  
in that skin!”  
That was what animals said whenever my hand fell  
to grab it.

## Paper Cup

What has space for birth? Afternoon loosens  
into wind beyond a turn of Earth westward. A gesture of battlements  
shimmying left and right and then off and the whole castle feels itself decay. The sea  
absorbs  
the sand. The cup hews another tower.

## Something Rises

Snow mimics sweat. It curls off  
the asphalt and steams up, like a curtain (a white curtain)  
fleeing the wind.

Windship Weapon

Without wind

bombs hassle the ocean

watch a balloon

fumble oak branches

the needles blazed away

the bark skinned orange or red

an entire nest hiccups and drowns

watch a balloon

replace a cradle and hunt away.

## Frying Pan

Watch this; if I throw a reddening pan out the window  
and if the glass shatters into a hot web (and if the pan  
leaves a glowing circle on the lawn just beneath)  
then the kitchen will die. Cast iron mulls over the grass  
and the house bulges like a dishwasher overloaded.

## Uncanny Memory

I was an eight year old at Navy Pier  
releasing wafts of cotton candy into the still throat of Lake Michigan.  
The memory emerged between blemishes  
like fingers pushing against temples  
marring vision with after-burn.

## Familiar Uncanny

I stood in the false gravity of another warped constellation still spilling. The leaves fell in loose bundles that made smother my shadow, that all-swallowed my being-there.

(the) First Person

*Your* name has no shadow    its repellent little face    discharges a cough  
not even the contours of    the alphabet subdue the lines    that mark the cheeks  
and the retch of word    pantomimes the creation of Adam    inside of *my* breath.  
Amen.

\*Excursion\*

## Marian Apparition

On volcanic soil

the permutations of a fleshed thing

before them

their hands shake more flicker

than candle

their hands grope the vision's

bright fog

Madre de Dios chained by lights

on a coffee mountainside

their footprints

drip with anxious steps

towards the mother in fog

her face deteriorates into shadow

miracle becomes murmur becomes mumble

offerings of gourd and lilies

of velas blancas and soft matches

drop from agitated arms

the vision dandelions away

as if zephyr held such power

¿por qué a disipar madre?

these people—their ventricles wheeze

slack bloodless sack of heart

flipped aside—these people

are dumped candle wax and shorn wicks

someone grabs a rifle from the pile

of coffee flowers

machetes and carbines

that emerged at the spot

where mother stood

coffee cherries fall with each spout

of gun fire and the forest floor

blankets in wilted scarlet

¿por qué a disipar madre?

rifles sing

the air is hegemonic with smoke

blades marry branch

the air is a positively charged void

as petals shatter off the stem

the air is a charred smile

and everyone scatters  
but another runs deeper into orchard  
twigs sting and lacerate this figure  
he runs towards mother  
because there must be mother  
levitating somewhere in the plantation  
instead he finds a spider web  
that catches the spirit  
and falls into its colorless dendrites  
¿por qué a disipar madre?  
falls head first  
a disappearing act  
all coffee fruit is splitting from boughs  
he is mid-tumble as each tree collapses  
as bright fog clutches his arms  
his body an icon  
suspended between bark and sky and spider web  
lips cradle the third decade  
*(Santa María, Madre de Dios,*  
*ruega por nosotros pecadores,*

*ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte)*

his voice utters

some questions

that billow up unconsciously

he asks the invisible

*“Can you see the spirit*

*immaculate of dust*

*can you see*

*the shiver of light*

*nailing me so high above?”*

Someone stands

on a trunk of downed timber

below

and answers his query;

“My name is Jane

and I am no mother.”

## II. Sola Scriptura

## Deuteronomy 10

Jane was swimming at the abandoned quarry outside of town. There, one can find a thin drool of fossils (mostly leaves and snails) imprinted vertically on the North East wall of the drowned stone mine. After a few laps, Jane would swim directly toward the fossil line, lift herself out of the water, and clean out as much dust and grime from the petrified shadows as possible, sometimes with her tongue.

The spines of ancient leaves and the shell lines of long dead terrestrial mollusks possessed a faint sweetness, like a drop of honey in a day old glass of water or a molecular suggestion of saccharine polluting a warm corn tortilla.

Sometimes the fossils would vocalize. They would not speak exactly but “sleep talk”, producing noises that mimicked the structure and contours of speech without ever displaying a sign of communication. Once she swore she heard the phrase “outstretched arm” but upon reflection realized the rock would never say anything apart from earth-jargon.

And then there was the day when Jane neglected to swim. She arrived at the quarry without bathing suit or towel and, tattered Converse half-laced, sauntered the circumference of the pond wherein a ribbon of bruised stone just barely edged out over the water forming the perfect boardwalk. Around her neck was a drug-store stethoscope, price tag still clung. When she reached the strip of embedded relics Jane inserted the ear tips and placed the diaphragm against the veins of a sedimentary leaf. She slowed her breathing down two steps, closed her eyes, and listened.

“.....I am two stones. I am two stones. I am all excretions of my own creation. Eat these words. Eat these stones. Carve these words with these stones. I am. I am. I am...forever..”

Jane ripped the stethoscope off, threw it and herself into the water, and ran/swam across and out of the quarry. Due to surface tension the instrument cruised slightly over the pond before plummeting hastily into a crevice of rock.

A mustard seed was in my pocket so I burned off my pants. And the mustard seed looked like a hard pebble of unpolished obsidian. So I threw it into a municipal garbage can. And the garbage went up in green flames and flashed and began to smell like baskets of hollyhocks and a half smoked pack of American Spirit Blues. All glowed like a room stuffed with moonlight. And the mustard seed was stuck to my forehead. So I peeled it off and swallowed it, a little ash pill. And a woman with a disabling spirit at the bus stop across the street began to stand with an erecting spirit. Her legs were stilts that thought. And a tiny door without nob opened up in the gum-drenched sidewalk. So I jumped through and hit a damp rectangle of concrete and shadow. And the mustard seed jiggled my stomach. And my whole body (arms, legs, neck, shoulders, feet, hands, fingers, toes, teeth, sex) was a nest of yellow vines. And the door shut above me. And someone was grinding fangs right into the wood and someone was crying right into the keyhole but I couldn't open it because my arms were vines, and my head was vines, and my legs were vines and everything was growing and something like the sun poked into my head and something like the sun was squeezing blood into my heart and everything was so warm that I started to speak but really it was a language that only made sense without memory.

## Lamentations 5

God has wrapped  
my city  
in clay.

## Psalm 87

Jane watched the city from a nearby hill where olives and oranges had stained the grasses in shades ochre and ebony. Fruit had been falling everywhere except in Jerusalem below where the trees still glistened with orbs.

Had she been born there, within those gates? Had she crowned out early one morning in a limestone shack with one window where mother, midwife, and daughter were in ensemble? Or was it some other place, without heifer's blood smeared steps? Where rain would visit in thick drum taps upon roofs that were so dense the occupants inside remained undisturbed by its knocking? There plant life was not some incidental decoration creeping between stone blocks but an organic force that painted every available space. Oh, and the sun in this other birthplace? The sun was plum red and you could never go blind.

Jane hated Jerusalem. Hated the heat. Hated the clink tease of coins falling in the street. Hated how they rolled away and eventually stopped in puddles of crimson tallow. Hated the fact that it rarely rained and then only at night. Hated the ripe swelter of temple voices intoning unendingly without music.

She picked up an orange and hurled it toward the city. It hesitated in mid-air as if colliding with an invisible fence. It descended slowly onto a black stone. And then the olives scattered around her began to glow red just as a tuggle of voices behind and above her admonished:

That city I love and in her you were born and in her even Babylon was lullabied.  
There is water in such a place, even if you fail to hear its cackle in the gardens.  
Hush and enjoy!

And the olives buried themselves and were replaced with tufts of Lamb's Ear tipped in yellow thorns that scratched Jane's ankles as she ambled home.

Ezekiel 26

Tyre is Babylon's mud print.

Tyre is a window that views only  
a dirt floor.

Tyre is flush with purple drank.

Tyre is wet penicillin.

The People's Gate  
of the Communist Party  
of China dissolves like shaken Jenga.

shit.

Every turnip in Moscow  
flaunts Lenin's last words

Tyre is nothing.

Tyre is bedroom pregnant with axe  
heads and butterfly skeletons.

Tyre is a grave robber's  
pissing pot.

Tyre is the constipation  
of extinct volcanoes.

Tyre is every white horse's  
shadow self:  
a bone donkey rattled off  
into a blazed place.

The Washington Monument  
fondles itself into a tower of eagle

and British Petroleum replaces  
each lily pad on the Thames  
with a fingerprint of smoke.

## Revelation 11

Jane took her tape measure out and, wedging the chrome lip between sandstone blocks, ran backwards around the temple, both hands grasping the apparatus the way a masochist might squeeze a saguaro cactus pad. The yellow ribbon crinkled continually, its color rubbing off onto the temple walls. She circled once, twice, five times, and still a voice from the sky said she was only half way done measuring the structure. At some point two lamp stands with unlit oil appeared on either side of her path.

*Was that the finish line?*

The tape measure dissolved into a fog that shrouded all things. Temple, olive trees, lamp stands, sun, moon, and even her hands were packaged in gray. And then another voice from above (that sounded below due to mist vertigo) told a story:

Two guys kept trying to open up a fire hydrant on the hottest day of the year in the city. But every time they attempted to cool off the melting street, the melting people would come by, whacking them in the head with the red, hot rods of the day's scorched newspaper.

"It's freezing!" shouted the melting ones, down jackets wrapping up their pliable, disintegrating flesh.

Eventually the fire hydrant was broken. The street took form and the people hardened and the air was without smolder. Protesting, the people hooked together like a school of fish, but instead of fish they were a rhino from the sea, and the rhino gored the men to death leaving their bodies to be swallowed whole by the road.

Of course three days later God started to breathe and the street regurgitated the men onto a bronze cloud which took them to heaven. The rhino fell apart into people and the people dropped themselves onto the asphalt.

And God started to spit. And the Earth jostled awake. And the city slumped over everyone.

After the story finished fog dissipated and Jane stood outside the temple. There were no voices. Only the shifting notes of a trumpet, somewhere in the distance, could be heard. And with each note another grain of sand rose.

Job 14

I stand beside my campfire  
of parched tree skin  
and freshly torn 2X4s  
yet to transfer from body to ash.

From the flames  
the sparks tease the dark  
and the dark loses voice.

Somewhere locked between boards  
is a hazel nail gone glowing  
and ripe to dislodge and sweat upon the coals.

It leaves behind a broken nostril  
now spilling ash  
and ready to breathe.

#### Revelation 4

Jane gazed at the chair yet her eyes were sewn shut with light. There was a thing called seeing but it had no relationship to that which was viewed.

Was it like that, an experience so alien that her hands would clasp icicles and confuse them with flames?

Jane tried to step back but space had multiplied so greatly that any attempt at departure was a synonym for orbiting. God interpreted her stumble as a question.

John 12

Your bruises are too beautiful to cloak.  
Let your hands, like mine, glisten with scars.

### Acts 3

He was being carried into the gate with a paper cup at his feet whose color had shifted from pearl white to concrete on the inside after so many nickels and dimes had drifted down its open throat. He had legs and arms but neither could rustle themselves into movement and on his head was a Burger King crown upon which someone had written “milagros perdidos.” His name was Alms so that whenever he disclosed his identity a coin might appear in the cup’s mouth.

He was being carried into the gate when Peter and John gazed upon him. And Alms said something along the lines of “dinero, por favor” to which the apostles continued to tunnel their vision into the lame man, four eyeballs peering into a tar pit until it became snow. In the distance an elm tree’s skeleton was awash with pink leaves that beckoned rain. A car horn beat out the exact rhythm of surrounding conversations until the traffic pulled over to listen.

Peter (whose name means Stone) ushered a sigh that to Alms sounded like “Míranos.” So he lifted his eyes and his bones began to set before thought could argue. And his arms like the elm were branches of pink leaves that lifted and grasped and pushed. And the leaves peeled off like snakeskin and revealed new flesh. Alms lost his name. He ran, he swallowed the paper crown, he abandoned the paper cup with a kick, he careened the temple gate, he blushed noises to heaven.

John said:

“Hermanos, hermanos, hermanos.”

The sheep fumbled out of the forest fire, one at a time. Jane, standing at the edge of the woodland, inhaled thimblefuls of cedar smoke while patting each passing member of the flock on their head. At times fragments of wool came off in her hand but before she could pick it clean the fibers, like the still smoking cedars, evaporated into ash. This happened enough times that eventually the wool between the ears of each sheep turned a chalky ebony. Jane wanted so badly to wipe her hand against her jeans but every sheep needed greeting and the transfer of wool-ash to head became a cycle that increased rapidly at every turn. The assembly line was unforgiving; troubled bleats escaped the flock as ash drifted into their eyes and sputtered across their noses.

Jane felt her hand blistering somewhere beneath all the dark smudging and each new stroke of a head was like sunburn rubbing against a hot seatbelt buckle. Grimace and protest was mutual between prophet and beast. And just as the ash migrated further and further over the wooly bodies so too did Jane's wrist and forearm blacken. When the final stragglers had passed on only a tuft of gray tail was left unaltered while Jane was smeared pitch all the way up to her shoulder. She sighed, clenched and unclenched her fist with teeth bared, and turned toward the path leading away from the woods. And that was when she heard one last, minute bleat emerging from the forest fire between cackles of flame.

It was not an adult but a lamb who now trudged toward Jane. He was not simply ash covered but burned, with singed wool and orange coals for hooves. Jane fell to her knees and frantically attempted to clear away some of the dark residue by spitting onto her hands and rubbing them over the lamb. But her hands sizzled the moment they touched his coat and she jumped backwards, waving her arms in the air. The lamb, whose feet were making the grass smoke, trotted over to Jane as she sat half-sprawled and dumbfounded on the ground. He began licking the ash off her hand and with each contact of tongue and skin Jane sensed the blisters and scars dissolving. And when the lamb straddled her knees to get a better lick at the arm and shoulder his hooves did not burn but were more like damp wash clothes warmed over in a microwave.

The lamb licked one final spray of ash from her shoulder and jumped off. Jane, still on the ground, gazed into the lamb's eyes and he in turn gazed back. Jane wanted to say something, to make some sort of sound, to emit any kind of communicative gesture. But she couldn't. The lamb let out one long "bah", deeper than his body size should have permitted, and turned around, ambling back into the blazing coppice.

Mark 8

God made some more spit  
and the trees disappeared.  
Blindness like a doorjamb  
was pried of its frame.

## 1 Kings 20

Jane was in the process of safety-pinning strips of gauze together when she heard the platoon coming down the road. One hand pressing an end of cloth to her left eye while the other busily twirled the blindfold around her head, she haphazardly ducked out from under a crooked doorway, half gazing at the king and his coming entourage. The blindfold was still un-snug and threatening to fall when she heard marching, inches from her face, in a gait just loose enough to keep the dust from overtaking doorways and low hanging window sills. Jane dashed into the street and, in one rapid swoop, genuflected before the sauntering statues of an over-armored sovereign and his squad. Blind but confident she spoke:

“I think you’ll find that the dungeons are so empty even the lizards are escaping.”

Before she had time to stand the king ripped the bandage off. She shot upward and the harsh tones of sunlight that glinted off the many breastplates, spears, and (now unsheathed) swords forced her to squint. And then it was his majesty and his men who fell to their knees, unsettling the once pristine road. Jane sneezed three or four times as a dust cloud rose up. Her eyes ached with each violent shudder. Catching her breath she took a moment to lean against a still kneeling warrior who took the weight of her body with no notice or complaint. The King, eyes on the road, tried to say something but only made a sort of puh-puh noise, like an engine trying to wake itself up.

“Shhhhhh.” said Jane. She walked over to the king and with her right fist boxed him on his left ear until it blushed an agonized pink.

“Listen,” she whispered, speaking directly into the reddening ear, “you need to pay attention to your order. HE wanted him dead, not imprisoned, not freed. HE asked you nicely...”

The men rose up and, without a single glance towards Jane’s direction, turned on their heels and ran out of the city in a great clatter of iron and feet. Only the king remained, kneeling in the dirt, eyes on the road below. Jane threw her makeshift blindfold at his head. She stomped her feet twice and then scurried back into the doorway. One by one flies began to land on the king. Gradually his entire body became weeping mass of wings and buzzings. Not long after that even the weeping subsided and the individual sound of each fly coalesced into a festering drone, like a death rattle indefinitely sustained. Still protected in the doorway Jane stomped her foot once more. The flies lifted, revealing nothing more than chainmail and an empty helmet hovering in the air. Jane watched the pieces of armor float for a few moments and then clapped her hands.

Esther 6

What marshals sunrise but a robe?

See to it

that storm clouds huddle themselves in only one corner above the palace.

See to it that air manufactures itself

until clouds have no place to rest.

You and the sunrise wear the same robe. You and the air chew on

the same storm. The sky above pushes infinity upon your open palms.

## Exodus 11

Moses ran toward Raamses rehearsing the prophecy G\_d had given him but soon all he had left was a small collection of nouns and one verb striking the sides of his mouth: “tears, corpse, stone, stumble, tears, corpse, stone, stumble...” Soon the words faded and there was simply an image (a child’s crown smeared with blue capillaries) that said something like a story. In fifteen minutes or less he would be entering the palace gates. Already guards and scribes must have spied him crossing into the city and soon, bound and beaten (but to be freed, he was sure of that) they would bring Moses to his former brother, and he would have to speak. Oh, he hated that, how the words always gargled out like marbles or peppercorns that only repulsed and distracted the audience. Oh, Lord, what would he say?

A girl in strange clothes appeared before him. She clasped his wrist in both hands and said:

“Tell him; ‘The weeping will not be faint.’ ”

Moses felt the phrase burned into his wrist, like a ten year old branding smoldering anew. The girl was gone. He ran faster, and faster into the city. Ahead of him he saw a statue of Anubis that was missing an ear. As he passed by he swore he heard whimpering. The gates of the palace loomed ahead. He felt a compulsion to slow down but fought against it. Suddenly a hand was on his shoulder.

1 Peter 5

Be perfected in destruction.

## Nahum 2

Scatterer waits in a sewer. Scatterer opens the manhole and emerges on a Tel Aviv boulevard. He throws himself at a city bus and snarls it off the road. Scatterer feels armies, like skin flakes, fall off his arms and legs until the entire street is crawling with little red lions. Their claws plunder cars of their drivers and passengers, of loose change and trash. Scatterer grins and unattaches himself to form two final scarlet lions. What's left behind (a shadow and a bone) dissipates into a bundle of green smoke.

The pride moves into a tunnel, running against the traffic. They roar together and every vehicle oncoming drifts sideways, unfurling a path. The lions rush ahead. "Where are they going?" asks a child, still strapped to a car seat inverted at 90 degrees.

They hustle across streets and sidewalks and rooftops and parking lots. They tear glass into wet paper as they drift like flung hammers through office windows and French doors. Their red bodies refuse to bear either cut or scratch.

Tal Baruch beach spreads ahead of them and beyond that, the Mediterranean, jittering like popcorn. The pack scurries across the sand and assembles into a crimson knot. They peer into the breakers, waiting for an adversary, a prophet.

The waves begin to fit and stir until its waters crawl backwards.

Jane is thrown out of the breakers, settling face first onto the beach. She pushes herself up off of the sand and dusts clods of seaweed from her hair. Her tee shirt and jeans are dry but a small bruise on her ankle stings from the salt.

The lions respond with synchronized roars, collectively emitting a sort of war chant with a  $\frac{3}{4}$  rhythm but no waltz. After a minute they close their mouths and with one profound thump, perch simultaneously on their haunches. Jane clears her throat:

"Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts."

Jane staggers backwards and slumps into a heap. She bolts up and coughs, one, two, three times, and with each sputter a handful of sparks escapes her nostrils, singeing her bangs as they drift upward.

The pack shrinks, one by one, until all that remains are a clutter of paw prints staining the sand.

John 20

“Do not cling to me...” he said.

So, a steel colander  
strapped across my hair

I mutter

*Laudetur Jesus Christus*

and head

into the electric storm

rain licking the mud

off each step.

## Psalm 100

Jane is old. Many things are missing. The city is missing. The armies have vanished. Even the ocean isn't there. Yes, from her stone seat beneath the fig tree she can see the flat cascade of ebb and tide genuflecting beneath the daytime moon. But upon approach the water, the waves, and even the odor of salt trails off further and further away. Only the noise of the sea remains a constant. She retreats to her rock and sits.

Jane is old. She sits beneath the fig tree and listens to the sea. If her eyes close she senses a harmonic strain within the sedated break and thrush of surf on sand. It sounds like cotton and fire in euphony wherein neither one is consumed or extinguished. She calls it "damp music" even though she can't be certain of any water out there in the distance. Maybe Jane so named it this because after keeping her eyes shut (below such solar glare) everything turns blue upon opening. She'd read about something called "after image" where the eyeball fatigues from too much exposure to light, even beneath the scrim of the lid. And it is right at the moment of opening when the fig leaves grow azure and the sea picks up its voice. At that moment the disappeared things fall back into place, refashioned in smoke and fire; New Jerusalem blazes against the horizon with every building cloned as a temple, the soldiers bustle about smothering the air with ripening prayers, and the ocean, like a fresh blanket, replaces every blade of yellow grass. But the final revelation is music—song swallows every loose atom wading across the surface.

If and when (in such moments) her foot slips off the rock Jane's muscles pulsate and shudder and relax and constrict and nothing feels future or past and the present is a circle set to devour its tail. Jane is old, was old, will be old, never was, never is, never could have been, always must be. Jane is here on the ground under the sun and Jane is disappearing, now and yesterday. Jane is feeling the voice collapse in her throat. She opens her eyes.

Luke 5

Call it invasion—he foists over bow

and spills across ribs

his voice has no sound  
it smells like the breaking  
womb

he says duc in altum he says out into the deep he says your net is petrichor before  
the storm

swollen boat swollen gills  
your net plagues with burst

he says

deep is a place he says

watch me cleave apart the waters

you ask

what does electricity taste like?

when boat drowns

you ask

how much weight falls from heaven?

### III. Bread

Bread

*“...because God did not make death...”*  
*—Wisdom 1:13*

Where the table sits  
a hole yawns  
and everything

(flatware

mugs

napkins

butter)

levitates. Air smeared with weight

is called gravity—  
anchors crumble

the table cloth floats.

Candle wax intermarries

while flame petrifies.

Now bread is water

bread aflow

into blaze aflow into me

I have only one jaw to withhold tongue  
and that jaw snaps away

and a gash speaks

pleads hunger  
a prayer thrusts  
everything into the place

where tongue and teeth recognize

each other in the same flowerbed  
of a voice

my mouth deteriorates with  
petal fragments pieced together on the corpse I wear.

Prayer is a draft of cobalt smoke lifting arms and legs and lungs.

Short-circuit  
bread into birth

make lemons and oranges  
and soil and paw prints  
replace the sky

there are no clouds

there are only suspensions

Womb as a verb

and water

steams into

birth

the ocean, fierce with weight,

lifts with the moon.

The candles

the dishes smolder white or black or remain

the present things refuse their shadows

I am water  
and cannot drown.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chesterton, G. K. *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986. Print.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton was a British lay theologian, poet, and novelist who is frequently referred to as “The Apostle of Common Sense.” Such a moniker, however, discounts Chesterton’s rather counter-intuitive approach to thinking which is ever present in both his fictional and non-fictional works. In this thesis the two most referenced of Chesterton’s works are *The Everlasting Man* and *Orthodoxy*, both of which take a unique and non-rational (as opposed to irrational) approach to apologetics. In *The Everlasting Man* Chesterton investigates the incarnation as the ultimate paradoxical event while *Orthodoxy* elevates such paradox to profound heights as Chesterton climactically asserts that God experienced atheism on the cross. Both works were instrumental in realizing this manuscript.

Harman, Graham. *The Quadruple Object*. Winchester, U.K.: Zero Books, 2011. Print.

Philosopher Graham Harman specifically focuses on a subset within metaphysics known as object-oriented ontology. In *The Quadruple Object* he argues that objects are too often undermined as simple packets of reducible material or “overmined” as explicit signposts to an ideal reality. Instead, Harman reasons that objects are neither reducible nor foundational but are utterly individual facets of ontological substance that are both mysterious to others and to themselves. While this thesis cannot claim to wholly represent such views (*Jane* tends to “overmine” objects with abandon) it has taken Harman’s notion of objective mystery to heart.

Šalamun, Tomaž and Brian Henry. *Woods and Chalices*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2008. Print.

The poetry of Tomaž Šalamun, and *Woods and Chalices* in particular, attempts to bridge the gap that separates the subject from the object polluted landscape that surrounds him or her. More precisely *Woods and Chalices* sees the interaction of the human with the non-human (often the inanimate) as a far from quotidian exercise which culminates in spiritual and surrealistic experience for both subject and object. Šalamun, then, does not undermine objects nor subjects but allows both to “overmine” one another, as is a goal of this work.

Robinson, Elizabeth. *Pure Descent*. Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2002. Print.

At the core of *Pure Descent* is a falling into and towards death. For Robinson this death is not merely physical but predominantly spiritual or, at least, can be seen as the failure of the spiritual operating divorced from the material. Death, of course, is understood as “of the world” but *Pure Descent* suggests that for grace to have any foothold in reality it must contend with the decaying

world and, in turn, one must be overtaken by such a world. Throughout *Jane* a similar theme is posited wherein the immaterial is insufficient to deliver grace alone.

Berg, Aase and Johannes Göransson. *With Deer*. Boston: Black Ocean, 2009. Print.

*With Deer* is a collection of poems that displays the decay and materiality of the world as both beguiling and horrifying. In Aase Berg's poetry living things continually attack and consume one another, not due to malevolence or even instinct but out of a perverse mission to sustain the quasi-religious cycle of creation and destruction. However, at the very end of *With Deer* this cycle finally terminates in an artificial act of logging wherein the wounds of the cycle "will slowly start to heal." (p. 93) This concluding message may not be ethical but it is profound; the goal is not a prettier creation but a true spiritual cleansing of even greater violence than the organic rotations of death and creative destruction. True redemption is an interruption, not a rhythm.

Kryah, Joshua. *Glean*. Cold Spring, NY: Night Boat, 2007. Print.

Kryah conflates the physical act of harvesting with the challenges of faith as both rely on one hoping in the same promise of new life. Whether it's fresh rye yet to sprout or the hiatus between the savior's death and resurrection, the farmer and believer must endure a period of uncertainty. *Glean* establishes that such a time is often experienced as traumatic wherein the absence of something becomes more important than its eventual presence. Faith, then, is for and against itself, simultaneously negating and preserving the object of its adoration. Thus faith is the impossible given a body.

*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (ESV), Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011. Print.

The ESV translation of the Bible is intended to be a more accurate rendering of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek language of the text while maintaining the poetic quality of the King James Version. *Jane* is obviously indebted to the Bible, especially the second section which is comprised of poems that all respond to a particular chapter of scripture. And it is this particular translation of the Bible that was utilized both in the originary daily practice and the subsequent, revised pieces in the thesis.

Otto, Rudolf, and John W. Harvey. *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958. Print.

Terms such as "numinous", "transcendent", and "immanent" litter Rudolf Otto's book of primordial comparative religion. Looking at as many of the faith traditions he can find, Otto

concludes that the “Idea of the Holy” is not a matter of logicality or rationality but of the numinous asserting itself violently onto the rational and logical. The divine order is then both immanent (in all places and all times) and transcendent (unreachable through merely ordinary/rational means). Yet, try as he might, Otto remains a Christian and asserts that the Christian experience is *sui generis* in allowing one participation with the numinous presence. However, Otto maintains (even warns) that such encounter with the Holy, while always transformative is equally a matter of distress, spiritual laceration, and intense bewilderment. This, hopefully, is expressed throughout *Jane*.