American spacesuit

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Thesis

AMERICAN SPACESUIT

by

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requirements for the degree of
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I am watching the earth. The visibility is good. I feel well and cheerful. The machine is functioning normally.

- Yuri Gagarin, first person to orbit Earth
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I.

For us, there is no spring. Just the wind that smells fresh before the storm.
-Conan the Barbarian
Deer Window

At the window above the sink,
I’m standing stock-still, holding an empty glass.

The Doe stands still in the yard.

Somewhere, a stick breaks. She leaves,
dew sweeps off the grass.

She moves like an intimation of walking, hooves
plow through the dark earth of the vegetable garden.

Her dappled back tensing, then gone.

The seeds in their little paper packets
sit still on their shelf in the garage.

/  

Then I’m telling the story of the Doe:
how close she came; the moment
when she looked up and saw me
watching, how her neck moved, her eyes.
They were so much bigger than mine.

And then something I didn’t hear,
and the blast of whitetail like a shot.

/  

I spent an hour in the afternoon
watching videos of deer on the internet.

They ran from other people. I tried
to decide who the protagonists were.
Cameras peeked around brick corners,
looked down from attic windows.

When deer run, the world
shakes and sways with them.
Subduction Zone

The heart is something that is there until it is replaced. Life as a temporary stay, a mistake. An atmosphere. What I am is here and I love and I love and I love. The wine-dark sea, I’m rushing up through it again. I wake to the sea moving above me like a sky. Things with gills are drowning in air. Find the core of a dead tree mapped by worms, encrusted with barnacles. Tear your flesh against them. Terror is a wave. There, ships are moving, bellies full of silk flowers, computers, shoes. There have been so many hearts. They were moving from one place to another. Elsewhere is a limestone basement, is a raft of pumice sinking again. Is it enough? The volcano disgorge molten gold. Feel the pulse, yours under skin. Of course you need. The last snowfall settles into the ocean. A chalk cliff breaks into the sea. What blood approximates. A pin’s stuck through the ghost-part. Trembling. What remains.
Year of Defense

It was the summer before they came
and kicked his mom’s doors in, the summer
after she was on Who Wants to be a Millionaire?

The whole world was a holodeck,
was a thin membrane wrapped around us.
Was caul fat.

/

And what did we do? Dropped acid,
just walked around all summer. Two kids
in the woods between the expensive houses
and the landfill. It bloomed with wild grasses;
even the gravel hid some pale flowers. Our view
was broken by the vent pipes, letting something
rise up from the body of the earth. The skies
were blank except for the contrails, drawing lines
between us and the Air Force Reserve base.
Someone was always learning how to fly
the big cargo planes. They turned over
the artificial lake where we went swimming,
the engine’s dusty growling falling in their wake.

We borrowed the guns. We went
hunting rabbits — two sweaty Elmer Fudds.
We shot, we didn’t

hit anything. We rode around
in his car, we got pulled over
for a busted tail light.

/

Later, I watched him measure out
stump remover with a jeweler’s scale, helped
him buy some acetone at every CVS, watched
him shred aluminum foil to ribbons
with a pocket knife. I don’t remember
how he got the fuses, but it wasn’t hard.
I learned to get bored with explosions: there’s a pond, then water hanging in air, then the shockwave moving through your chest.

The summer smelled like burning oil, thrummed like the space under the power lines strung through Pelham and Shutesbury. I went back to school. The doors came down — it was on the news. No name, he was still too young. But PETN, TATP, his mom’s house from the air. Things sound worse when you don’t know what they mean.

/

Later, I came home to sit in the back of his courtroom. Later, he was innocent. I watched him down a whole bottle of pepto-bismol before they said so. I don’t remember any of the faces. And the worst thing about a gun is that it feels exactly how you think it will. Sometimes innocent. We didn’t ever hurt anyone.
Year of Cable

i.

In school, I was learning Latin. In our books:
\textit{In pictura est puella, nomine Cornelia.}

There are birds singing on the internet,
there are flowers on your cellphone.

\textit{In internet aves cantu sunt,}
\textit{florum in cellphone sunt.}

ii.

Listen, I was twelve. I just got home from school.
I didn’t know about love. I loved TV, loved the channel

that told you what was on the other channel.
Sometimes, I could see someone smiling far away,

could see waves breaking on the coast of far away.
Maybe you could, but I can’t think of anything better.
We all learned how to say I love you in Latin. So, on AIM, I wrote to you: te amo.

Okay. We went to at least two movies. I held the kittens that were born on your mudroom floor.

I got a tick in your backyard. The only time we danced, it was under Christmas lights hung up in the gym.

Listen, I’m ashamed. I’m still deciding who I’m talking to. But when someone brings up the Romans, I feel like they’re talking about me for a second.

What did they do? Fall. And me? Veni, Vidi.
AOL

I’m trying so hard to fall asleep
with the No no no stuck in my throat.

On the internet, someone is always asking
How would you feel if I said these words to you?

America, you’re yelling at someone’s children.
America, you’re the word potatoe [sic].

And somebody’s still laughing.
Once, all the dead were living.

This poem is one of those sad Advent calendars
that just has pictures behind the doors.

America, you’re raining all December.
America, you’re a toppled snowman.

It’s not hard to speak to a whole country.
It’s just hard to shut the fuck up for a second.

America, you’re this or that.

I painted another tree behind your door.
Florida

I’m poolside. My watch is hanging into the sky. There is wind blowing the surface of the artificial water course. The houses are all pink, like lungs. Every pool has its lizards, mummified in chlorine.

Everyone here was the first to sleep in their bedroom. Lawns rise up from limestone infill. What music is right here, wound in the fronds of ferns breathing on windowsills? Who dares say *breakfast nook* or *man cave*? Who decides blinds or drapes or cafe curtains?

*A messy bun says you care, but you don’t care,*
says this issue of Seventeen.
Year of Watching

I’m so hungry
for television. I don’t love
watching it alone. So the light

from the screen settles
across our two faces, stained
the orange-purple of clouds low over the city.

I’ve never watched a scene like this on television.
Nobody believes in the beatitude of watching.

And if they showed it to me, I’d turn it off.
But I don’t want any of the time I’ve spent back.

This false summer is better because it can stay forever.
How can you not fall in love

with everything
that passes across that screen?
The Trees

dress-up: Virgil

There are other ways, which experience has discovered.
One man takes tender twigs from the mother’s body
and lays them in the furrows - these plants will cover a bare field
when their stalks are first split, or sharpened into strong stakes.
Other orchards bind their branches over into bowed arcs
and wait for budding growth to come alive, buried in the earth.
Some don’t need to grow from roots at all: you can take treetop
cuttings, and be sure that they’ll grow in your soil.
And even when old stumps are split — a miracle —
an Olive root thrusting out from dead firewood.
And often you can see one kind of branch
traded for another; exchanged and re-sewn. An Apple
ripen pears; and the stony Plum, a Cornelian cherry.
Tranquility Base

I can’t remember if it’s real. There’s a crater, or a sea of rock, younger, molten then cooled. And the whole thing - Moon - was once part of the Earth:

For this,

I taught myself to read
one summer, late, after first grade.
What I found: sex and death
among the stars. I didn’t know
if I wanted it. I couldn't stop.

/

The solar system grew people
again and again. Their words
spread out through the galaxy, like slime mold. Enemy aliens repelled
so many times. What made them keep trying?

And there wasn’t a time
when I didn’t know the sound of a tricorder
or a communicator flipped on, of a door sliding automatically open, stagehands unseen. Everybody getting along requires jumpsuits. Every special effect
was Christmas lights and string.
**Skybox**  
*from Wikipedia:*

A skybox is a method of making a level feel bigger than it really is.

When a skybox is used, the level is enclosed in a cube. The sky, distant mountains, distant buildings, and other distant objects are projected on the cube’s faces, creating the illusion of surroundings. A player in the middle of a skybox will perceive it as a real, 3D world around them.

As the player moves through the level, the skybox remains stationary with respect to the player. This creates the illusion of great distance, as the objects of the level appear to move with respect to the player, while the skybox does not. This imitates real life, where distant objects such as clouds, stars, and even mountains appear stationary when the viewer travels relatively small distances.

Often, the skybox is placed in an unreachable location, outside the playable portion of the level to keep players from touching the skybox.
First Song
*a dress-up*

*Ambulance!*
*Ambulance!*

*Lights blink, blink blink.*
*Lights blink, blink, blink.*

*Another Ambulance!*
*Another Road!*
*Another Song!*
II.

...houses, machines, and nothing...
- Walt Whitman, misremembered
My Subject

Every day in my kingdom,
there is water and air and metal
and trees and the body chafing
against something or other.
There is a book and there is a mirror.

If you don’t believe in joy,
I don’t know how to talk to you.
And I only ever say what I wish
someone would say back to me.

If you’ve never looked up
into a real night sky and felt
love bearing your body up,
please go very far away:
you’re exiled. I’m talking
to you right now.

Someone hides in the forest
made of arrows. Every day,
what I try to ask is
is the machinery of desire
still functioning normally?

I lay down my crown
and press my ear to my earth.
I listen for the mechanism
moving its jewelled parts
deep in the body I orbit.

I love some parts of every animal.
I love the small parts I eat.
I love to sit at a school desk
and watch an air conditioner
humming or being buried
according to my will.

Sometimes, when I command,
you will listen.
School Play

A flat ocean. The NARRATOR sits on the floor, the CHORUS stands on bleachers at the back of the stage. SOMEONE is swimming back and forth in the water. AUTHORSHIP is standing in the wings, visible, looking nervous.

NARRATOR: (reading from an old book)
“Sometimes she has been quiet for a hundred years or more, and men have almost forgotten that she ever thundered and spouted and buried cities.”

CHORUS: (seizing the book)
“Sometimes, the air was pure; sometimes, sick men got well.”

SOMEONE:
I love you very much. Do you know the water is calm?

AUTHORSHIP listens, and enters. AUTHORSHIP begins treading water.

SOMEONE:
Please, talk to me.

AUTHORSHIP opens their mouth to speak, but no words come forth. Their lips keep moving soundlessly as they swim.

NARRATOR:
They have been persuaded to enter.

CHORUS: (reading ahead)
“How easily anyone may yield.”

WORDS enter, and circle authorship in the water.

SOMEONE:
Please.
AUTHORSHIP is swimming.
NARRATOR: *(opening a newspaper)*
   Here and there, a pedestrian moves hurriedly -
   the rattle of a cart or dray is alone heard.

CHORUS: *(reading from their phones)*
   The blinds are closed. The plants are wilting.
   There is no tender hand to twine or nourish them.

*AUTHORSHIP struggles noticeably in the water.*

NARRATOR: *(reading newspaper)*
   There is a small, round hole
   through the side of a building.

CHORUS: *(reading from their phones)*
   Beyond, a house in ruins.

*AUTHORSHIP has drowned.*

NARRATOR: *(double-checking script)*
   All persons periodically pass through fire.

*WORDS swim away from where AUTHORSHIP
is floating. They take their seats again.*

NARRATOR: *(looking at CHORUS)*
   How easily anyone may yield -

SOMEONE: *(interrupting)*
   Please, I loved him.

CHORUS: *(speaking over SOMEONE)*
   We listened
   with all our strength. The horn finally sounded, and we felt its call. Our hearts grew fainter, we were alone. We thought, but it was a bitter disappointment.
   We were perishing in too great a hurry to stop.
   And if we keep listening, what might come up to meet us from that deep?

*SOMEONE swims off stage.*
AUDIENCE enters.

AUDIENCE: (reading from the program)
    The mouth is
    my soul; my substitute.
    There is nothing
    but the ocean.

Curtain.
Poem for Capitalism

It's not cute when the zookeepers use panda porn to make the pandas in their care want to fuck each other.

Let me start again:
Goya Exhibit

The Rope is Fraying
as he balances. Not above the crowd,
but in the dark hollow
between bodies. The man’s face
is a representation. The man
is a representation.

The Bull Stuck with Fireworks,
light pooled out in the ring,
breath like a spotlight.
Fireworks spark in darkness
at the ends of their spears.

The Straw Manikin:
They filled him with straw and place him
on a blanket. *It’s interesting how their faces
look real, but the man’s looks like a doll.*

The Priest
wrestles the gun from the bandit. In the painting
beside that one, he fires the gun.

Tapestry Cartoon:
Here, the ghost of a branch reaches out.
On the wall beside it, boys in the branches
of a tree, small axes in their hands.
The Babies:
There are two babies in the gallery. One's in a stroller with an ipad. The other is in someone's arms, sleeping before a head embroidered to a tree.

The Eagle Hunter:
The museum says the puzzle is, will the eagle drop her prey to save her children?

The Cats
catch the eyes of the birds. Above, the bats.

The Bullfighter
sits, chained to a chair. If, on his first thrust, the bull fails to die, explains his plaque, it will very likely kill him.

One Can’t Look
at the bayonets in the print without seeing microphones hanging into live TV. I can’t remember if the woman with the child was screaming here, or before the guns painted to fire like a sunset into the field hospital.
One Can’t
take a picture, says the museum guard.  
But in the gallery upstairs, you can photograph
Senator Kennedy’s eyes, sketched
again and again in preparation for a portrait.

/

Still Life:
The rabbits are dead. One’s blood
leaks out through her nose. In this gallery
all the guns are on the right.

/

The Straw Manikin:
Why do you think he painted
them like that? The sewn body hangs,
contorted, in air.

/

Will she live again?
From the description: a masked figure
beats the ground with a weapon.

/

The timeline
is in the small space between
a temporary wall and a permanent wall,
choked with people.

/

This is Worse:
From Wikipedia: in the aftermath
... torsos and limbs ... were mounted on trees,
like “fragments of marble sculpture.” [5]

/
A Note on Method:
In the prints, in the watercolors on ivory, he started with pigment everywhere. Where the light has fallen, he scraped it away; dripped water, and blotted it away.

The Bullfighter
is on a wall alone. He pole-vaults over his bull. Only the bull’s shadow falls on the sand. In the crowd, only one face has a face drawn on it.

The T-shirt,
the exit by the gift shop. You can buy a T-shirt with anything on it.
After Reading

dress-up: Bashō

water’s sound,
the sound of no wind blowing.

The first snowfall comes at dusk.

I am living
and the world is warmer for it:
snow falls on my face
and melts.

these reeds with new leaves, he begins.
I stop. The stalks
are dead and dusted white.
bleached bones on my mind.

and then from the woods,
foolishly, in the dark,
a gunshot
so thin on love -

so many of those poems
end with the call
cuckoo
...a million Christmas trees stand
waiting for Christmas...
-Elizabeth Bishop
Launch

I'm sleeping deep in my missile.
I love you very much. You made me.
Please, let me wake up above you,
let me look down and be beautiful.
Year of Body Armor

There’s a lot to say as the storm comes in on the doppler radar, color-coded for rain or snow. There aren’t as many geese flying down the page as before. Some of you are sad when you see on your screen that someone famous has died. When the V becomes a W in the sky, the geese are changing leaders. Now, I sell protective equipment to people who have money and enemies. Try to live with a Google alert for police+shooting. Our thoughts go out begins another something I wrote. Later, Body armor saves lives. I get paid. What do I want to see in movies, besides some of the dead coming back to life? A punching/shooting/driving expert getting revenge; or a group of smart, attractive people executing a complicated plan. I eat the free breakfast. I eat the free lunch. I sell search gloves to the government. Outside the window, outside the glass wall of the conference room named after a river, a starling nests in a winding of hair. A possum splits the salon’s garbage bags open on the sidewalk. In the lawns of Kendall Square, baby turkeys are following their mothers. Further out, there’s a fisher cat cornered in a parking garage. There’s a man selling cards printed with the alphabet in sign language. There’s an entrepreneur walk of fame.
A shoe floats in the fountain beside a bronzed globe. Cistercian monks chant in headphones; someone reads this morning morning’s minion on the Orange Line. There’s fucking suit dummies everywhere. Let’s play make them drop their iphone.
First Year of Work

dress-up: Virgil

He gave black venom to the deadly viper,
made the wolf stalk prey, ordered the sea to storm.
He shook the honey from the leaves, He took back fire.
And where streams flowed with wine, He stopped them
so that you would think of your work, and improve your skills slowly; so, with a plow, you’d seek to harvest stalks of grain;
so you’d find, in the veins of flint, the sparks of your fire.
And so the rivers felt the first boats hollowed from Alder.
A sailor counted the stars, and named them:
Pleiades, Hyades, Lycaon’s daughter Ursa Minor.
Traps captured beasts while birdlime deceived.
Men learned this. And as great hounds encircle glades,
here one man with his net lashes the currents,
seeking their depths. At sea, another pulls his dripping draglines.
And then the rigor of Iron, and the blade of the sash saw;
first, men used wedges to split their firewood.
And then the other arts followed; work occupied all
with a cruelty born of unyielding hunger.
First Spacewalk

*dress-up: Gemini IV*

*Control:* they want you to come back in.
*White:* Back in?
*Control:* Back in.
*CapCom:* Roger. We’ve been trying to talk to you for a while here.

...  
*White:* Coming in. Listen, you could almost not drag me in, but I’m coming.
*Control:* Okay, Okay.

...  
*Control:* Come on, let’s get back here before it gets dark.

...  
*White:* I’m Coming.
*Control:* Okay.

...  
*Control:* Come on now.
American Spacesuit
for Hazel Fellows

The others sent a man
to walk above us. Someone made
everything for him. He came down.
He was everywhere
on the radio. I was home,
I was stitched, now, to him.

I went into work at Playtex.
Our jobs changed.
/

We used to make smaller,
softer things. We cut,
we sewed. We knew all the shapes
bodies could be made to take.

We helped hold them. We helped
hold something back. It was a job,
nobody’s dream. Now, we’re working
on the white skin somebody else’s son
will climb inside, will wear
like a better version of his own,

his name embroidered
on a patch fixed to his chest.
/

Soon, we’ll see one of the men
we’ve made on TV. We’ll imagine
them inside our handiwork,
floating naked and warm.
We never saw their faces.
We read their measurements off a card.

That first day, when the job changed,
our bosses called all of us in.

They said we would have to learn
to sew again, that this was like

a second first time. They took
our pins - only latex between skin

and nothing. But sometimes,
we taught them what they needed to know:

how fingers were sometimes better
at working the threads, how layers

lap over one another, the way
fabric wants to fold, how to

keep the edges unfrayed. We already knew
all the ways cloth could keep you safe.

Nights, some of the men would stay
and help us lift the bodies

we were making up to the machines.
They got so heavy at the end.

They’d watch us work, take notes,
run their hands along the thighs.

The paperwork was all that mattered
to them. Well, *it might look alright*

*on that piece of paper, but I’m not
going to sew that piece of paper.*
We tried to say that sometimes
there are things fabric won’t do.

Not every thread pulls the same,
Not every place holds the same weight.

Sometimes, an extra sixteenth of an inch
for a wrist means another
twenty stitches
further down.

/ 

If they ever found a stray pin,
they’d press it into your skin.

As if we didn’t know what it meant
to let something slip through.

/ 

When the suit was all shaped
and layered, when it finally looked
like the man we’d imagined, headless
on a table, we sent it off.

He tried it on. It came back.
The card told us what didn’t fit.

It took days to slice apart
each stitch, to unpiece without tearing
what we’d made around him.
We started again.

Our machines had run
too fast. We changed
our treadles to sew slower.
Now, every stitch was one footfall.
Did they ever know?
They flew. First, we

walked our way
out to them.

/

In this room, the Singers
are always running

through his shape. Thread
in lockstitch. We’re always

here, working. Some dip the shell
in latex. Some glue the layers

of Mylar together. I’m sewing.
Today, it’s the garment

that touches skin, that lets
his own heat warm him.

Someone else makes sure
his breath moves with him.

My needle’s the only thing
that can get so close.

Some days, it moves
lovingly.

/

What I’m doing is sitting
in a white room with no windows

in Dover, Delaware. My hands
feed the fabric into my machine.

I’m thinking of the easy way
white smoke could be rising
from the lit tip
of a cigarette; how, in rising,
it becomes nothing. All around,
that shape is being cut
and pieced back together.
Hundreds of hands are moving,

passing him back and forth
under the banks of fluorescents.

/  

On Earth,
the suit is growing.
Essay

John Ruskin says *When men are rightly occupied, their amusement grows out of their work.* John Ruskin says *If he did not want it, it would be of no use to you.* John Ruskin says *When we build, let us think we build forever.* John Ruskin says *I do not believe that ever any building was truly great.*

John Ruskin says *Be a plain topographer if you possibly can.* John Ruskin says *Distribute the earth as you will.* John Ruskin says *Work first, then rest.* John Ruskin says *You cannot make both.* John Ruskin says *We manufacture everything.* John Ruskin says *There is but one question respecting every line you draw — is it right or wrong?* John Ruskin says *Joy without labor is base.* John Ruskin says *What he wants to do with his money.* John Ruskin says *My entire delight was in observing.* John Ruskin says *If I could have been invisible, all the better.* John Ruskin says *The word ‘Blue.’* John Ruskin says *There is no such thing.*

John Ruskin says *The most beautiful things in the world are the most useless.* John Ruskin says *Their change is that of a tree — not a cloud.* John Ruskin says *We need examples of people.* John Ruskin says *No people, understanding pain, ever inflicted so much.* John Ruskin says *He never knows.* John Ruskin says *They were intended to represent a dove’s neck.*
Wright Flyer

What I love the most
is what happened to the fabric skins
of the draft that failed:

after it became wreckage, the wife
of the postmaster who took them in,
seeing “French Sateen … cut on the bias,”
measured out and sewed
two dresses; one for each
of her daughters.
Poem by the Mars Rover

Airplanes
might be replacing the birds
in your poems now,
and I’d never know.

Someone wrote “Begin, and cease,
and again begin.”

I know I’m not one of you.
My library is so small.

/

Finally, I landed.
I am going to live here forever.

There’s no space for death
in a room so small. Where the walls
are wingbeats. In a backyard somewhere,
there’s always someone young

standing, not comprehending. Beside them,
I see a kind of bird I don’t remember.

/

And everything I’ve ever seen
I’ve shown to you: a system

in constant, widening rotation.
I know everyone falters somewhere.

I liked using the telephone to talk to myself.
The first thing I knew was falling.
IV.

*I’m really here! I’m really here!*

- Allen Bean, fourth person on the Moon
Poem for Earth

Today, I walked
past a boy spitting
a mouthful of blood
onto the begonias
at the edge of the public garden.

*His tooth is loose,* explains
the man standing beside him.

With my finger I traced
the Blue Line up the map: Aquarium,
Maverick, Airport, Wood Island.

Wherever you are, there is weather,
there is CNN. Someone’s cellphone
conversation is moving through
your body. And some days

are beautiful and I can use
the word because it’s borrowed.

Wherever you are, you get some faint
Wi-Fi, which isn’t an abbreviation
for anything. One important fact
is that Elvis changed his middle name
to the middle name of his stillborn brother,
whose first name is my first name

for no reason. Later, Elvis
changed it back. And I don’t know what I mean

when I tell you something is beautiful.
In Boston, I’m sure someone is leaning
on their horn. Someone yells *If you don’t
get out of that cab, I’ll cut your fucking face off,* and I don’t
believe them.
Berkshire

I'm like an egg you can crack
with one hand against the side of a bowl.
A landscape slides out: I'm up there
on the spine of the hill that rises between
the empty pasture and the tilled-over field
of feed corn. The gates were always
left open then. The trail to here is hiding
in the cold dark. Too many sentences ending
in the same place on the page make a river.
It evaporates, the snow falls down thin
between the maples and the birches
and the pines. The stone walls still run
their old routes, tops just above the floor
of leaves. If I left here now, I could
move back to you through the snow,
still in my old footprints. Walk home
as far as you can without a sound.
Watch each breath cloud before you.

When the wind blows, the young forest
exhales. Black twig, sap, the heat of rot
sleeping deep in the leaves and needles. Above,
the moon arcing over the only house,
powerlines stretching out of their way
to meet it, humming. The road still wet black
with salt; tomorrow, white with salt in the sun.
The long driveway between empty fields, gone
from fallow to tobacco to lawn. The snowfall
like ears ringing. Coming low over the ground,
the distal yips of coyote pups. We saw
stars there, the blank shapes of trees
blocked out the glow of town. Breath spilled out
every time. Some shell caught in the white.
Reaching in with calm fingers,
you found it; you pulled it out.
Year of Scanners

When my job was to move pictures from albums to something living on the internet, when my job was to scrub dust with a digital brush, when I had to remember whose face wasn’t worth saving, when I saw my old neighbor at a stranger’s BBQ party, when I saw FDR sitting in a swimsuit, when the glass plate cracked across the face of a donkey covered in flowers that spelled out “Donkey,” when two girls were selling candy, when a man looked into a cage at an airbase in Laos, when cars were new, when your kids grew up before me, when every vacation stopped at a wax museum or to go boating; when storage made all the skies pink and orange, when light hid their faces, when mouse shit cemented the graduation to the wedding, when there were no funerals; when I worked, always looking, labelling, putting it back in the same order. It’s okay to break the locket if that’s the only way to get her free. Or Can you photoshop him (the husband) out of the picture of the wedding? Or I want to see more of what’s to the right, across the lake. You mean what’s not on the negative? Yeah. I can pay more, if that’s part of the issue.
Poem for Capitalism

There is a list of what’s both clear and beautiful. Windows, water. True love. Clean toilets, the road from car commercials that undulates down the coast at sunset, forever. You can roam wide and die far from home.

It is a crime to live somewhere without paying. It is a crime to eat without paying. It is a crime to die without paying someone some money.

What is my consent when the only other option is nothing, forever? A gravel quarry, a wasp nest empty in the rafters, a petrified forest. The flag came with the apartment, and I don’t know if it’s my landlord’s or if it’s mine.

We both let it fly in the rain.
Poem for Moving Day

Everything broken is out for the trucks.
Above the sofas, the piles of books,
all the garbage, the leg broken off a table,
a rope is ringing against its flagpole.
The neighbors who are leaving are loading
what they own onto what they are renting.
Those who live here are surveying the dross
left behind, are taking the good things off wet grass
before the city can send through teams of men
to decide what to bury, and what to burn.
My street is full of water, plates and saucers
are full of water. A chest of drawers, full of water.
Caught in the maple, the plastic bag is saying

*Thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you.*
Playing Dress-Up

Let’s imagine an astronaut who thinks sorrow is something land-bound, something kindled in the stripped and scrolled bark of birches ringing the lake that’s lapping at the road’s edge, lapping the last traceries of salt from the pavement; that that’s sorrow caught in the wet branches the thin clouds of sugaring steam rise up through on their way from their copper pans, looking there like a breath finally let out.

And let’s say that sorrow is kind of related to beauty, that a scene of spring breaking on the land maybe mirrors something that we recognize as sadness when the scene is precise and a little bit cold. And what just one second can hold — everyone hanging in some personal droplet — and then back to the astronaut, whose vision is getting rougher as the vectored thrust starts pressing the body into the contoured seat of the imagined rocket that bears the body which is small and can love nothing unconditionally, that still loves what it can see through its thick plastic window as it first comes into sight and then again as it goes, and that makes the body happy and then also sad.
Love Poem

I tell my students write
a poem called “Love Poem.”
It can be about anything you want,
but that’s the title. They write
about mac and cheese or
chocolate, but it sounds like sex;
they write about love
and how it’s like snow;
they write about love
poems and how they don’t
like them, even though
they’re in love and
they want to tell
everybody. And in the sky
above me right now,
the wind is scattering
the parallel lines
of the contrails,
breaking them into little clouds,
and you’re at work and
I’m thinking about dinner
but wherever you go,
I can see a bright blue line
like ribbon stretched between
two pins that are called
I and You. And you are the first person
I want to tell when things are good
or when they get bad, and I want
to sleep next to you even when
it’s too hot to touch,
when all I want is the breeze
of a fan on my skin; and
I love you and I love you
and you know and I’m still
going to tell you.
Sutures

It’s what you learn in museums:
one place, made into many others.

*The blue whale has a heart big enough for a man to crawl through.*

The glass case changes things.
Decaying Orbit

What fell as snow falls now as rain.
I watch the days breaking down. I know
where you are, how far, because we are here,
beeping back and forth. You move
so much slower than even the weather
mapped above you. If you could see it all hanging—
if there were space for you; an atmosphere.
What time is it for you? Sunrises
every ninety minutes, getting closer.
Soon, I will drop back into
that blueness of dawn. Earth will
rush up to meet me for the first time
I’ll remember. I will cut the air to flame.
I will break into grass and trees. I will
touch the ground, I will drink
from the river. I flew over you,
holding myself like a mirror. You
my loved, needed thing, pulled me
down. There is nowhere else to go.
I am well. I am functioning normally.
Notes

The question quoted in AOL was the heading of a post on Yahoo! Answers.

The Trees is a translation of lines 22-34 of book II of Virgil’s Georgics.

Skybox is an adaption of the Wikipedia page Skybox (video games).

School Play contains text adapted from Melville’s Moby Dick, an issue of Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, Youth Challenges by Clarence B. Kelland, Buried Cities by Jenny Hall, and some others.

Goya Exhibit was written in response to a show at Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, and quotes from printed material that accompanied the show, as well as the Wikipedia pages for some of the featured artworks.

After Reading quotes both the Lucien Stryk and David Landis Barnhill translations of Bashō’s haiku.

Year of Body Armor quotes a line of Gerard Manley Hopkins’s The Windhover.

Year of Work is a translation of lines 129-146 of book I of Virgil’s Georgics.

First Spacewalk is assembled from parts of the NASA transcript of the Gemini IV mission.

I learned a lot of the information in American Spacesuit from the book Spacesuit: Fashioning Apollo by Nicolas de Monchaux.

Poem by the Mars Rover contains part of a line from Dover Beach by Matthew Arnold.

The last line of Poem for Moving Day quotes a plastic bag.

Decaying Orbit borrows some lines from the translation of a song written by a cosmonaut, as written down in Mary Roach’s book Packing for Mars.