BODIES AND OTHER FIREWOOD

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The chakra system consists of seven energetic vortexes ascending up the spine that connect to every aspect of human existence. These vortexes become blocked and unblocked through the course of a life, these openings and closings have physiological and mental repercussions. Knowledge of these physical and mental manifestations, indicate where the chakra practitioner is in need, the practitioner can then manipulate their mind and body to create a desired outcome. These manipulations are based upon physical exercises and associative meditations for the purpose of expanding the human experience. As a poem can be thought of as the articulation of the human experience, and the chakra system can be thought of as a means to understand and enhance that experience, it is interesting and worthwhile leap to explore the how the chakras can develop and refresh the way we read and write poetry.

This critical preface closely reads seven poems, one through each chakra, finding what the chakras unveil. Here, each chakra is considered for its dynamic creative capabilities and for its beneficial potentiality in the reading and writing process, finding each chakra provides tools: idea generators with the potential to free the poet from usual patterns of creativity while broadening vision and expressivity.

In this collection of poetry poems are experiences chopped into consumable units that show and tell the constant negotiation between what is actually happening and the stories we tell ourselves about what is happening.
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PART I
THE CHAKRAS OF POETRY: READING AND WRITING ANEW
WITH THE CHAKRAS AS POETIC HEURISTIC
Introduction

Chakras are seven components of the human energetic system that shuttle energy through the body. The chakras are produced when the three main nerves traveling the spine intersect. At this intersection, just as when three rivers meet, a whirlpool or spinning vortex occurs. This whirlpool is called a chakra. Whether a chakra is spinning normally or abnormally, meaning too much or too little, determines how energy flows up and down the spine. Consider a well-wheel: if it is spinning, it takes water with it and if it isn’t the water stays stuck in the well. The chakras operate like well-wheels, and if the chakra is spinning too much it will be hyperactive and if it is spinning too little the chakra will be inactive. Hyperactivity and inactivity both cause imbalance or dis-ease. The degree to which a chakra is spinning is visible through the physical, mental, and emotional high and low functioning of the areas associated with each corresponding chakra. Moreover, as the chakras stack and rise up the spine, they represent the evolution of the human, beginning with basal existence, rising up to identity formation through, emotional and experiential translation, apperception, and so on, while finally ending with self-transcendence.

Poetry, like the chakra system, considers the body, mind, and breath intricately and simultaneously. Form, idea, and life-force are never separate but always in conversation. The complexity of their connection is something mysterious. The enigmatic quality of a poem is comparable to the puzzling combination of traits that makes a person that specific person. The chakras give a way to universalize the human condition while providing the means to understand and analyze the idiosyncratic qualities of an individual. Likewise, when used as poetic heuristic, the chakras provide the means to think about the broad and specific aspects of poems. People working with their own chakra system analyze the wellbeing of the areas associated with their chakras to understand where and who they are, and to find what exercises and meditations will
yield the most worthwhile and balancing results. The chakras both articulate the human experience and provide means to enhance that experience. A poet can use the chakras not only to see and understand the human-aspects of her poems and the poems of others, but she can do as yoga practitioner does, turn the chakra’s meditative associations into dynamic, working tools to help her unlock and open modes of balance, creativity and expressivity previously unavailable.

The writing process is like the living process: beginnings and endings are constantly in play, and for each aspect of evolution, the definitions of success and failure are in flux. Just as with poems, in one instance, a form, technique, or metaphor might work, and then the chosen device might cease to provide the same magnitude of poetic weight or fire. With the human and with the poem, something that is working and then suddenly failing fails because it has lost its balancing power. Poetically, the device isn’t providing the necessary counter tension or counter pull, and the poem falls. A combination of the poem’s elements—its ideas, its lines, metaphors, music, words, voice, tense—is moving too much in one direction. The chakras can be used to locate what is poetically balanced and imbalanced and give rise to fresh connectivity and inclusivity, pulling the poem back to center, back to some adequate sense of inclusiveness and complexity of feeling and idea.

With the chakras, readers and poets find the new in poetry and are loosed from habitual patterns of creativity that might keep them reading and writing the same while repeating similar successes and errors. Just as when you exercise to create a body you’ve never had, you have to move in ways you’ve never moved. Likewise, to read and write a poem as you never have, you have to be willing to do things you’ve not done. The chakras create a new way.
The First Chakra

The first chakra, Muladhara, is a red spiraling vortex spinning energy downward. It is located at the foundation of the spine, represents the foundation of life, and is most concerned with the idea of fundamental existence or existence as seen from “the bottom” looking up. When a person seeks to understand the state of her first chakra, she considers how her actions and thoughts about existence align and misalign and how those make peace or chaos in her external and internal worlds. When used as a lens with which to read poems, the first chakra reveals the basal aspects of the poem or how the poem concretely exists, and what that says about existence.

Existence can be a slippery term, used in many different ways, yet here it derives its meaning from the first chakra: the necessary constants needed to maintain a particular poem. In other words, the foundational aspects of the poem that if omitted would “wound” or “kill” the poem. The poem’s physical existence is dependent on its concrete elements, words and form, which allow for the poem’s mental existence or its ideas. Let us apply the first chakra to consider Lucille Clifton’s “Sorrows” from her final collection *Voices*

```
sorrows
who would believe them winged
who would believe they could be

beautiful who would believe
they could fall so in love with mortals

that they would attach themselves
as scars attach and ride the skin

sometimes we hear them in our dreams
rattling their skulls clicking

their bony fingers
they have heard me beseeching

as I whispered into my own
cupped hands enough not me again
```
but who can distinguish
one human voice
amid such choruses
of desire (1-15)

“Sorrows” physically exists as eight, two-lined stanzas. There are no capitalized words spacing is used in the place of punctuation. Relying on spacing to do what punctuation usually does aligns the poem more with the spoken than the written, and with the physical, than artifice because in the physical world there are no commas to show connection, or periods to force endings. Connection is established by proximity just as separation is created by distance.

“Sorrows” argues that sorrow exists in the real world, or that this is a poem about the occurrences in the physical world, and the speaker is speaking, more than the speaker is typing. “Sorrows” is a verbal conversation. Moreover, “Sorrows” constant form suggests that sorrow exists constantly, and periods and commas do not have the strength or validity to structure and control sorrow. Her spacing argues: at best you can get a little space in the moment of sorrow, and between, but that is it—human existence is one of moments where the sorrowful occur regularly.

The poem’s mental existence hinges on invocation of the interrogative. The speaker asks “who would.” Who would say that sorrows have wings, are “beautiful,” and are so enamored with humans that they “attach themselves/ as scars attach and ride the skin” (5-6)? The poem seems to be asking, would anyone, would you, and if someone, then who? The ambiguity of asking “who would” does not undo the suggestive, descriptive power of the questions themselves: the reader imagines that sorrows are “winged,” “beautiful,” “in love” with man, woman, and child (1-3). Here sorrows are romanticized. Next, they are immediately humanized by being made into skeletons. They are the dead you can hear in your dreams. Dreams can mean both future desires and sleeping dreams. Sorrow rears its head in both.
One way to use the first chakra during the writing process is at the onset. While still brainstorming, the poet can use the first chakra as a generator of questions to find out the thing(s) she most wants to survive in her poem, or the things whose existence she will argue. Structurally, the poet uses these answers to find form. Ideologically, these assists the poet in knowing what in the poem needs to be nourished and protected for the poem’s ideas to endure. For example, if the poem is about a living thing, question its necessary sustenance, shelter, primal instincts, and basal activities. If the poem is about an abstraction, such as sorrow, the first chakra thinker determines how that abstraction manifests in the living and what is necessary and constant for that abstraction to arise. The abstraction is considered for its primacy, instinctual manifestations, and appearances during basal activities. Combined, the first chakra helps the subject and structure support the actual and conceptual existence of the poem.

However, the poet can also use the first chakra in an entirely different way. Each chakra has numerous associations that can be tools constructing new ways to communicate the ideas of that chakra or aspect of the human experience. If the poet wants to articulate “existence” in her poems, she can explore the associative power of the chakra. For example, to use bones as an image, or to think about the bones as structure, is a first chakra practice. Also, the poet can use the sense of smell in her poems the way primitive people do: to find food, water, predators, love, etc. Likewise, fear keeps the living alive, what is the poem afraid of that drives it away from danger? Gravity is the universal sustainer of life. What holds everything in the poem down, what keeps the characters from floating off into oblivion? Questions and associations informed by the first chakra reinforce poems’ foundations. If the poet can use the first chakra to understand her poem’s basic or fundamental existence, the poem can drift, explode, complicate and mature while staying grounded or balanced.
The Second Chakra

If the first chakra is about fundamental constants, the second chakra is concerned with changes. “One becomes two, solid becomes liquid, and we immerse ourselves in the element of water. The consciousness of this chakra derives from flow, duality, and the attraction of opposites” (Khalsa 36). In Svadhisthana, the orange spiraling second chakra, creativity, desire, gender, sex, and sexuality reside, as well as puberty, menopause, and the resulting physiological, hormonal initiated lifecycle changes that follow. A second chakra reading identifies sexual elements in poems to determine and analyze identity constructs. Let us look at “Home Ec” from Sharon Olds’ *One Secret Thing*:

It is an art, a craft, a kind of Home Ec, slowly pulling out the small rubber dome, this time almost full of brackish blood. It is like war, or surgery, without weapons or instruments. The darkness of it has the depth of truth. The clots are shocking and thrilling in their shapes. I do what some might do in their last days, knowing they will never have another chance, I rub my palms with it, and I want to go across my face once, in ritual streaks, but my glasses are on, and I’m in a slight panic, seeing my reddened life-lines. For a moment, while I still can, I want to eat a dot of it, but not the bitterness of spermicide. Many millions have been killed today—I hold my hands out to the mirror over the sink, a moment, like a killer showing her nature. Then left hand to hot, right to cold, I turn on the taps. And blood turns out to be flecks suspended in water, the washy down of a red hen. I feel that the dead would be glad to come back for a moment of this, in me the dead come back for a moment to the honor and glory. (1-28)
As with many of Sharon Olds’ poems, “Home Ec” fixates on a particular female’s sexuality, in parts and in acts, as means to reveal and understand her universe, which, in turn, universalizes the female sexual experience, making it more applicable and understandable to all. Poems of this type uncover and elevate the vast significance of human sexuality and reproduction. However, reading Olds through a second chakra identifies the sexuality less as a statement or discovery of sex but as means to find identity.

“Home Ec” compares the creative acts of mankind to the sexual parts, functions, and process of the body. The poem illuminates the physical, emotional, and mental repercussions of having a sexual existence and the subsequent identity that shapes and reshapes because of that existence. “It is an art, a craft, a kind of Home/Ec, slowly pulling out the small/rubber dome, this time almost/full of brackish blood” (1-4). The speaker is a woman, post coitus and on the last days of her period. The art or craft refers to the skill it takes to pull out the diaphragm. The descriptions of the removal of the diaphragm posture the speaker as someone who identifies herself as experienced and practiced. Imbedded in her self-statement is the notion that very little could surprise her at this point. However, she discovers a sudden new awareness of her menstrual blood, “The darkness of it/ has the depth of truth. The clots are shocking /and thrilling in their shapes” (7-8). These lines read for identity, perhaps, suggest a certain anxiety towards things becoming old. In other words, to always find new, defines the speaker as someone more comfortable with beginnings, than endings. However, anxieties aside, the speaker also identifies herself as someone who values wonder.

The poem turns at line 8-15: “I do what some/might do in their last days, knowing they will/never have another chance, / I rub my palms with it, and I want/to go across my face once, in ritual/streaks, but my glasses are on, and I’m in a slight panic, seeing my reddened/life-line.”
Internal commotion caused by the menopausal cessation of the speaker’s period creates urgency in her to do something ceremonial and sensational with the blood. This shows that is a person who is tied to ceremony. Perhaps, the speaker is saying that female identity one of ceremony given the cyclical ritual of menses. The speaker’s impending forfeiture of contraception foreshadows a possible critical loss of identity. Loss of her period separates the speaker from menstruating women, while connecting her to menopausal women. Immanent loss of her former sexual culture gives more fire to the image of her painting her face like a native: a native who likely has lost or is susceptible to losing her culture as modernity evolves.

The poem becomes an opportunity to make those who have died proud: “I feel that the dead/would be glad to come back for a moment of this, /in me the dead come back for a moment/to the honor and glory” (24-28). The speaker inflates a personal, possibly sentimental moment by summoning the dead. Even if the dead want nothing to do with the moments of the living, that the speaker nods to them shows a personal need to connect with the next stage in her life. The entire the poem, the speaker seeks connection, likely as a result of fear surrounding the unknown new that comes to the old: first menopause, then death. Read through the second chakra lens, “Home Ec” is a poem that elevates minutia and sex, making them important and necessary, so the speaker can connect with her importance and necessity during a moment when insecurities and anxiety threaten identity.

To write a second chakra informed poem, the poet can do as Olds has done: acknowledge the lyrical, multi-linear significance of sex and the sex-body to show and tell identity. Consider the subject of the poem as one would analyze a person. Ask second chakra questions, such as: At what age are the ideas? Have they hit puberty? Are they having babies or experienced menopause? Perhaps it is a love poem, but what stage of love? How can the processes of sex
illuminate the identity of those ideas in a poem? For example, how different would “sorrow” from the first chakra seem if the poem had said: it was the kind of sorrow with pimples still on its face? Pimples imply puberty. Puberty implies insecurity. Acne is unattractive. Likely, those who have it are jealous of those who don’t. And given the age of puberty, they handle their anger in immature ways. ‘Sorrow’ changes significantly. Importantly, the writer must remember that descriptions of abstractions have more to do with the identity of the speaker than the abstraction itself. That is what the second chakra can do: it focuses the writer on identity and gives her a center of the body to express that identity through, while also providing associations such as the moon, magnetism, and duality to turn into brainstorming powerhouses. For example, the moon can be present in a poem metaphorically as the entity that pulls the water around the woman’s body. Deciding what has magnetism in a poem can powerfully pull it in new directions. Duality is the yin and yang, the action and the inaction, and the contraction and the surrender. Expressing both aspects of push and pull keep the poem balanced.
The Third Chakra

The third chakra, Manipura, is a yellow concentration of energy located at the navel above the reproductive organs below the lungs and heart. It is the belly: concerned with what we can and cannot stomach. The best verbs to define this chakra are *can* and *do*. What we can and cannot do relates to the personality and the personality predicament. The third chakra defines a personality as the distinctive characteristics and traits shaped and demonstrated via power and will. The personality predicament is defined as the struggle within a person that arises from positive and negative ideas and feelings about power and will, and our ability or inability to amplify personality virtues and fix personality flaws. As such, during a third chakra reading the poem is closely examined for instances of power and will, personality, and conflict within the personality, finding these, gives the reader deeper insight into the speaker’s internal confidences and struggles, while allowing the reader to clearly see the biases and weakness of the speaker or the poem. To illustrate a third chakra reading we turn to Kim Addonizio’s “Good Girl” from *Tell Me*:

Look at you, sitting there being good.  
After two years you’re still dying for a cigarette.  
And not drinking on weekdays, who thought that one up?  
Don’t you want to run to the corner right now  
for a fifth of vodka and have it with cranberry juice  
and a nice lemon slice, wouldn’t the backyard  
that you’re so sick of staring into  
look better then, the tidy yard your landlord tends  
day and night—the fence with its fresh coat of paint,  
the ash-free barbecue, the patio swept clean of small twigs—  
don’t you want to mess it all up, to roll around  
like a dog in his flower beds? Aren’t you a dog anyway,  
always groveling for love and begging to be petted?  
You ought to get into the garbage and lick the insides  
of the can, the greasy wrappers, the picked over bones;  
you ought to drive your snout into the coffee grounds.  
Ah, coffee! Why not gulp some down with four cigarettes  
and then blast naked into the streets, and leap on the first
beautiful man you find? The words Ruin me, haven’t they
been jailed in your throat for forty years, isn’t it time
to totter around in five-inch heels and smeared mascara?
Sure it’s time. You’ve rolled over long enough.
Forty, forty-one. At the end of this
there’s one lousy biscuit, and it tastes like dirt.
So get going. Listen, they’re howling for you now:
up and down the block your neighbor’s dogs
burst into frenzied barking and won’t shut up. (1-27)

A third chakra reading implores the reader to first locate the central figure or figures of the poem,
or those whom will be studied for power, will, personality, and conflict. In this case, the task
seems difficult because the “you” that the poem revolves is ambiguous. However, no matter
what, there is a specificity of address; the you is rendered an “individual,” so the address is
intimate. The line, “Look at you, sitting there being good,” the speaker is talking to herself or
the speaker is addressing her reader as she imagines her. The second chakra lens reveals the
speaker’s choice of address to reflect power and will because private voice and public voice
differ and since the “you” is an intimate “you” I consider this poem to be a private conversation
of sorts. A person is willing to divulge more in the private and tends to be more vulnerable. With
this information, the reader processes the poem with keener delicacy the way one receives a
secret from another. Is keeping information secret powerful or weak? Is divulging information
powerful or weak? Both are arguable. Arguably, the speaker is disclosing personal information
which is brave, and communication itself is arguably inherently powerful.

What is this intimate thing the speaker discloses? That she struggles with power and will.
And, isn’t admitting one has a problem more powerful then not? Our society seems to think so.
Quickly, the reader sees that this poem is also in conversation with social constructs of power
and the heavy pressure applied so that citizens will adhere to set standards. “Look at you, sitting
there being good./ After two you’re still dying for a cigarette/ And not drinking on weekdays,
who thought that one up?” (1-3). Yes, smoking and drinking are associated with a lack of self-
control. And it seems that self-control is the scale that weighs her virtues and flaws. In one way, the speaker/reader is powerful having given up smoking, workday drinking, and the resulting slippery ramifications that, like liquor, are swallow-able, but undiluted, burn as they go down. On the other hand, the speaker’s/reader’s self-control seems to be a subterfuge of both personal and social deceit. It is the mask, costume, or uniform she wears instead of her authentic self where not being oneself can be potentially viewed as weak and cowardly. The poem asks if it is more powerful to allow the personality to be oneself, or is it more powerful to change that self. The poem tries to answer those questions with the figure of the dog, or with the idea, “if it’s not wrong, it’s right.” The reader gets to be the dog for a minute. She feels the fur and canines. She has the dog’s keen sense of hearing and locates the rhythm in what seemed tumultuous, “Listen, they’re howling for you now:/up and down the block your neighbor’s dogs/burst into frenzied barking and won’t shut up.” The reader is invited to act raucous, sexual, sensual, tactile, instinctual, and unapologetic because nothing she is doing is wrong, and it seems that when we feel right we feel the most empowered.

How this poem handles the personality predicament is by showing the power in being controlled and out of control. Though the speaker has chosen not to be the dog, the dog or dog-like behavior is not condemned but celebrated. Because of this, the poem feels balanced. “Good Girl” is a “feel good” poem because it is inclusive. It makes room for includes the personality types and proves them all to be there own kind of power. So by the time the speaker makes the demand, “So get going,” the reader is more confident in whether she will or won’t.

The thing about being told to do something is that you have to decide if you will or you won’t, and you wonder whether or not you want to. And if you don’t or do, should or shouldn’t you? If you should, can you, and if you shouldn’t, will you anyway? The poem influenced by
the third chakra pays attention to what is being done or not done, and who or what has agency, knowing those choices in the poem express the subject’s personality. Likewise, intentionally considering the personality of an abstraction is a powerful way to make choices that seem born out of fierce necessity. Consider our earlier tweak on “sorrow:” “It was the kind of sorrow with pimples on its face.” Now let’s add a line that “does” something: “It snapped my bra, finished tests before I could.” Adding on to the earlier example, “sorrow” is not only young and flawed, it is petty and smart in that way that makes the best sometimes feel defeated. As with adding pimples earlier, having it snap a bra reinforces the idea of immaturity and that it feeds on beating the class to turn in tests shows it is competitive and maybe a tad nerdy.

As with the other chakras, another way to invoke the third chakra is through associative brainstorming, insertion, and metaphor making. To talk about the poem’s stomach will always suggest and highlight what is being consumed and how that consumption digests. Yellow can represent courage and cowardice, or gold, and fool’s gold. Fire sustains life, takes it, ruins the soil, and returns it. Think of digestive fire and the fire of indigestion. Think of fired up and fired from a job. How can “fire” make these things happen in your lines? Where would it work, or, on the other hand, maybe there is too much focus on a specific personality in a poem, tipping the poem, these could be countered, pushed against, proven nonexistent.
The Fourth Chakra

The green, glowing fourth chakra, Anahata, asserts that love cannot be expressed without expressing all the emotions that are not love because the blocking of one emotion blocks them all. Therefore, the fourth chakra maintains that a love poet does not necessarily write exclusively love poetry but the poetry of all emotions. Similarly, a fourth chakra reading not only looks for love but all emotions. During this process, a fourth chakra reading reveals to what extent these the poem’s emotions are opened and closed, whilst determining how and what the emotions serve or disserve for the purpose of acknowledging how the emotional embedding in poetic choices sculpt the poem and make meaning. Let us look at a piece by the love poet, Pablo Neruda, from his book of love poems, *The Captain’s Verses*:

Always
Facing you
I am not jealous.

Come with a man
At your back,
come with a hundred men in your hair,
come with a thousand men between your bosom and your feet,
come like a river
filled with drowned men
that meets the furious sea,
the eternal foam, the weather.

Bring them all
where I wait for you:
we shall always be alone,
we shall always be, you and I,
alone upon the earth
to begin life. (1-16)

The fourth chakra begs: find the emotions, the Eros, the commitment. “Facing you/ I am not jealous” (1-2). ‘Jealous” holds tremendous emotional fire. It is an emotion that clutches. The long pause that follows creates space for the sensation of that emotion to build. Then the speaker continues, “Come with a man/ At your back,/ come with a hundred men in your hair” (3-5). The
speaker claims he is not jealous of the other men his female counterpart has been with. He invites her to come; that is to join him. How he feels about these men is expressed by the emotional syntax and semantics of his invitation. When he says, “Come with a man/at your back” (2). The “man” is situated behind her, in her past. He is in front of her, in her present, making commands. The imperative statement is one of passion and dominance. I don’t think the same urgency would exist if the speaker asked instead of commanded. To command is powerful, showing the speaker’s personality, but it is what he demands that shows his emotional relationship to the speaker. There is no doubt. He wants her.

Besides “jealous” the words are not particularly emotionally tethered. The speaker doesn’t use romance language to depict his romantic feelings, and it is this resistance, or omission of typical “love language” that imbibe his statements with a sense of truth and honor. Sentimentality does not exist in this poem because it resists traditional affects without losing the emotional fire, again, created by his command of the truth of the matter: she has been with men, but it doesn’t matter.

Bring them and, “come like a river/filled with drowned men/that meets the furious sea, /the eternal foam, the weather” (7-10). Now, the hundred men, the thousand men are dead men. Drowned men are not men still swimming. They move because what they are caught in moves. They are men who met their demise in the water, and the water is her. It is as if the speaker is saying, “Who among the living is jealous of the dead?” The emotional vigor of the words intensifies with “drowned,” and then with “that meets the furious sea, /the eternal foam, the weather” (8-10). “Furious” is full of fury, great anger and frenzy. Who or what the furious sea represents is questionable. She is coming like a river full of dead men that joins or links to a powerful sea, the place where all water gathers. Perhaps, all orgasms and all connections happen
at the source. The source is the place between one person and another. The source is a place with “weather” (10).

Weather represents changes in the physical and environmental aspects of the lover’s lives and also changes in the internal environments of one another. He wants her in total. If we look deeply into the emotional relevance of weather, we understand that weather is not just the physical manifestations or outcomes of invisible forces but the forces of change themselves. Weather doesn’t just refer to the rain but the processes that make the rain. The speaker isn’t only telling her to meet him at the feelings but also the invisible forces that create the feelings. He wants the weather like the earth does. The weather makes the Earth begin and begin. Just as the speaker desires, “Bring them all/ where I wait for you:/ we shall always be alone,/ We shall always be, you and I,/ alone upon the earth/ to begin life” (11-16). Here, is a strong example of emotional punctuation. The colon indicates that the speaker is not stating lines 13-16, but that those lines define what he means by “where I wait for you” (12). Moreover, “We shall always be, you and I” can be read that they will always be together and that they will always be who they are. Which is also to say, who they were because past always informs present. “We shall always be, you and I,” reinforces his acceptance of her (12). Acceptance is as powerful an emotion as jealousy, but it feels good.

The speaker’s willingness to experience the totality of experiential emotionality makes this a love poem even in fourth chakra terms. The emotional inclusivity and multiplicity exist because the form reflects the commands, brief lines chopped out on the page, and because the less emotional word choices counter the emotional subject, keeping the poem balanced, making the speaker and the poem have the same quality of feeling and emotion.
Allowing the fourth chakra to inform the writing and revisions of poems emphasizes the emotional fire of a poem. Being aware of the obvious and hidden emotionality of words, arrangements, devices, and rhythms empowers the writer. Fourth chakra consideration looks at each word and line break to find its denotative and connotative emotionality. This way the writer can see where she is too much located in one emotion, finding what she might be leaving out or neglecting. Emotion is strong. A simple word or device can shift a poem away from its intention. Likewise, it can snap it back.

Use the fourth chakra associations to brainstorm how they can access emotions untapped in our poems. We have a tendency to think of emotions as “matters of the heart.” Think of the poem as having a heart. Question the “heart” as to its state. Reflect that state through the areas associated with the fourth chakra: the arms, hands, lungs. For an example consider “sorrow” through the fourth chakra: “sorrow is claustrophobic”, or “keeps his hands busy untying the world’s shoelaces”, or “her back was rounded as if sorrow had not let go after their first embrace.” These quick images either show or tell the arms, hand, and lungs while interjecting emotion. Do the same for the abstractions.

Consider, then, how the form can behave or misbehave like those parts to create structural continuity or angst. Then the poem experiences emotion like a human: a person will often say they feel one way, but their body language shows different where other times a person’s body language will absolutely express emotional state. Like this, the form supports or contradicts the emotion, adding layers of complexities, while expanding authorial control.
The Fifth Chakra

The spinning, blue, throat chakra, Visuddha, represents human communication. Since communication begins in the mind but is expressed through physical acts, the fifth chakra defines communication as a mental phenomenon with physical manifestations. A person discovering their balances and imbalances in this chakra considers how he gives, receives, and “feels” about communication. The fifth chakra reader analyzes what the poem states, how it states, and how these combine to say something about expression itself.

Every poem’s communication is a combination of what is actually on the page and what the reader brings to the page subconsciously, unconsciously, and consciously. Therefore, poetic communication is not a pure thing but a synergistic process. And where the author begins and ends and the reader begins and ends is muddy, complex, and changing. The fifth chakra helps “sort out” what is and isn’t actually on the page by focusing the reader.

Fifth chakra readings are a valuable enterprise for any poem, however, poems that pose difficulty in understanding what they are “about” or what is being expressed need a fifth chakra reading. They are the poems that seem just out of grasp like a sign in the distance almost readable but not quite, poems like Jason Bredle’s “Parasol” from his debut book, *Standing in Line for the Beast*:

Jesus Christ, Suzanne hung that parasol
in the corner of the room and now all
our thoughts and conversations either make
direct references to parasols or can somehow
be linked to the parasol. You know, how we sit
cowering below the parasol on this tiny,
backless couch, the clock ticking like a parasol
tapping another parasol, the three o’clock
parasol parasoling a wistful parasol.
And when you refer to the man waving
his rubber thumb I’ll know you meant to say
parasol and when you ask if I want
to eat a rattlesnake, I’ll be thinking parasol?
And the parasol will become an object of loathing
and I’ll begin my personal vendetta against
the parasol, and I swear to you, friend,
that I will eat, sleep, and breathe the extermination
of that parasol until the morning comes when you
and Suzanne leave and I break in
and have my way with it. It won’t be pretty.
I’ll break it over Julie Piepmeyer’s
head, repeatedly, take a saw to it, let
the dog bite it, burn it, and I’ll hurl those ashes
into the Ohio River like I did my guitar after weeks
of practicing and not obtaining rock stardom
or the female companionship associated with rock
stardom. And then you’ll see me smiling
like a parasol covering Tom Wopat at the Fall
Festival parade and a horse will look at you
from a beach before the setting sun as if
to ask, Why is this dining room chair
sitting here, and the beauty of it will be
it’ll have nothing to do with parasols. And I’ll
storm into your house like some flagrant
parasol to eat a salad like a dainty
parasol and a piece of chicken that goes down
about as well as a parasol and you’ll be
wondering, Whatever happened to the parasol
and I’ll act dumbfounded like the president’s
parasol when asked about his illicit affairs
and everything will return to normal, except there
will be no more parasol talk. Then Suzanne
will put out this wicker wastebasket
with all these aggressive plants protruding
from the lid that’ll become so distracting I’ll begin
placing corn cobs in my pockets to avoid
thinking about the wastebasket. (1-47)

Upon finishing “Parasol” the reader is most likely mystified and stumped, asking “what did that
mean?” If you don’t get something, you ask yourself, “What was I supposed to get?” A fifth
chakra reading begins with a general perspective. This poem is about language. Language is the
way people usually communicate, though in “parasol” usual communication is replaced by
substitution. Why? What does that communicate? Is there something being more precisely
communicated by breaking clear communication? “Parsol” the poem forces ‘parasol’ the word
to take on layers of meaning. Why? Perhaps, linguistic repetition, instead of typical, narrow definitions, can better express some ideas. As in, the more the reader sees the word “parasol” the more available it becomes to meaning-multiplicity. For example, see lines 8-9, “the three o’clock/parasol parasoling a wistful parasol”. These lines exemplify that the poem is consumed by thoughts of “parasol” which goes to communicate that it is a poem about thoughts that consume. In other words, a poem about mental consumption is created by allowing “parasol” to consume all the other words that might go in its place.

An obsessed mind is expressed by an obsessed poem. It begins, “Jesus Christ, Suzanne hung that parasol/in the corner of the room and now all/ our thoughts and conversations make direct references to parasols or can somehow/be linked to the parasol (1-5).” “Jesus Christ” is a mannered-term that marks frustration or an attitude of absurdity (1). “Suzanne” is introduced as the one who is innocently or malevolently to blame (1). Is the speaker mad at Suzanne? Is the parasol oppressive? They cower under it as the parasol marks time, “the clock ticking like a parasol/tapping another parasol” (7-8). As a clock, the parasol is an instrument that signifies the passing seconds, subsequently reminding the listener they are mortal and dying. The eccentricity and surrealism of the lines establish a warning for the reader. The poem provides a lodestar saying: look-out, what appeared static about the parasol is not, and the speaker may be nonsensical and untrustworthy.

At the moment the reader is most confused about how to read “parasol,” the speaker further complicates the poem with strange statement making and a sneaky shift into future tense, “And when you refer to the man waving/his rubber thumb I’ll know you meant to say/parasol and when you ask if I want/to eat a rattlesnake I’ll be thinking parasol?” What? Here, it isn’t that those things couldn’t happen or that total plausibility is false, but more that the images of “rubber
thumb,” “eat a rattlesnake,” and “parasol” have so seemingly little to do with one another it makes the speaker seem like someone who doesn’t care if they are being understood by the reader (11, 13). Why write a poem that prevents the reader from understanding? Perhaps, it is a poem about the inability to understand poems, poetry, or language, since language is so easily manipulated.

The brilliance of the parasol metaphor is that parasols are unusual in that perhaps not everyone owns one, but there and more than a few of us have, like Suzanne, who have used them as decor. As such, the parasol is an object of use that has passively lost its intended purpose. The parasol is a metaphor for how specific thoughts become generalized and less clearly purposeful by our repetition of them. They lose their original individuality and meaning, and are kept by the mind like artifacts are kept as decorative elements that define the room as this kind or another. Bredle’s use of “parasol” does double duty. It represents the way thoughts that overtake a mind stop serving a function other than to decorate the rooms of our perceptions. Just as when the parasol is removed from the actual room and starts being found in the speaker’s rooms of thought. The speaker is taken over with thoughts. The poem is taken over by the same word repeated.

The writer using the fifth chakra thinks about communication. If the poem is about “things that go missing” the poet can leave spaces where things logically should be. If the poem wants to communicate the sensation of being lost at sea, it can bob like a bottle or a raft. If the poem is calling someone home, or is a warning, or is a guide, it can copy the communication of the lighthouses, semaphore, or morse code. These techniques can be created through brainstorming and asking: how could lighthouse translate on the page, maybe through the development of an image, metaphor, or by mocking the rhythm of the light in the lighthouse.
The fifth chakra poet tries to design new ways, or more precise ways, to say something. Semaphore, for instance, is the tying of flags to things to guide travelers to their destination. How can a poem use a word like a flag, so that when the reader gets to it, it knows where to turn, or in what direction he is going? The fifth chakra focused poet, asks each idea what it communicates singularly and in conversation with all the other aspects of the poem. Perhaps then, if a poem wants to warn men and women about the warrior who lives inside it, it finds a way to mimic a totem pole. If the poem writes of the isolating urbanity of his moment, the poem could be a text, a billboard, subway graffiti, or pigeon splatters. Again let’s return to “sorrow:” Consider: “Sorrow passed me a note in class. I smelled my mother’s perfume and eraser on my hand as I opened it, “do you love me? Circle yes or no.” Communication in the form of a note is a fifth chakra construction. That “sorrow” passes notes is juvenile but sweet unlike the “sorrow” from earlier. Invocation of the hands associatively connects the reader to maternal and youthful emotionality. In this example, the fourth and fifth chakras were used to communicate.
The Sixth Chakra

Robert Bly, in *Leaping Poetry: An Idea with Poems and Translations*, maintains that the conscious and the unconscious are the two main wells from which poems spring. He offers that poems of the West are highly derivative of and primarily speak to the rational consciousness whereas in other cultures a wider range of poetry that draws more from both the conscious and unconscious exists. He follows by outlining three categories of poets: The Poets of Steady Light, Hopping Poets, and Leaping Poets. The Poets of Steady Light write primarily from the consciousness, the Hopping Poets hop from the consciousness to the unconscious. A hop is a small movement so their shifting from one to the other is measurably slighter and quicker than the Leaping poets who dramatically shift from the consciousness to the unconsciousness with lengthy motions. The leaping poets move “the known part of the mind to the unknown and back again” (Myers 98). These poets then could be said to offer a sort of poetic double-vision: rational and associative. Leaping poems can be considered sixth chakra informed poems because they embody and are absolutely informed by the unconscious.

The sixth chakra, Ajna, means perception. It is located above the brow bone in the center of the forehead. It is most commonly referred to as the Third Eye. One’s Third Eye belongs to their intuitive, physic-self. It is one’s second sight. Second sight is that something that contributes something that the conscious can’t see. The Third Eye brings into one’s consciousness what had been unconscious, enlarging one’s scope of sight and understanding. Recognizing the poem’s sixth sense allows the reader to understand when to suspend normal modes of understanding in deference to the poem’s unconscious.

The person said to be balanced in the sixth chakra gives equal importance to her conscious and unconscious; the poem read with the sixth chakra does the same. Therefore, a
sixth chakra reading asserts at least two equal significances of meanings at all times. A sixth chakra reading never loses focus of the way a poem’s “meaning” is not something static or hard-lined when the subconscious/unconscious is involved. To flesh out these concepts more fully, we turn to Li-Young Lee’s “Changing Places in the Fire” from *Behind My Eyes*:

> The wind in the tree
> Arrives all night at a word
>
> And the man who can’t sleep
> and the man who can’t wake up
> are the same man.
>
> A memory of the ocean
> Torments the trees, a homesickness.
>
> And the man who watches the shadows of windblown leaves
> And branches on the curtains,
>
> the man who believes
> a single page of the falling leaves restored
> may be carried back to the living,
>
> can’t tell God’s blind hand from God’s seeing hand.
>
> The wind, stranded in the branches,
> Like a memory of fire,
>
> Tells the oldest stories of Death
> Disguised as a traveler, or overlooked familiar,
> Friend we shunned for less
> faithful playmates.
>
> And a man who’s afraid of the dark
> and a man who loves the dark
> are the same man.
>
> A man who’s afraid to die
> he would pieces the tree back together,
> each part numbered and labeled:
> branch, leaf, breath, cry, glance.
>
> A man who’s afraid to live,
> He thinks to himself: *Postpone all morning bells*
The ore lies awake inside the rock, a dream of origin pealing

The bread that rises in a house that fails, a man weeping.

The happy grain who elects the oven, a man laughing.

And it isn’t until the wind pauses that he thinks he knows what it says.

It isn’t until the man dismantles Wind, trees, listening, does he know there are wind, there are trees, and no listening but a dream of listening, a dream with infinite moving parts, hems, pleats, train cars, recurring stairs, an imperfect past, a rumored present, figures multiplied inside a mirror.

It isn’t until he begins to wish to sing the whole flower of his breathing, does he recognize himself, a blossom mortally wounded on its stem.

“Changing Places in the Fire” is about individual and universal man, both the individual’s psyche and the collective psyche. Each stanza has double-vision: from the eyes and from the third eye. For example, the first stanza reads, “The wind in the trees arrives all night at a word.” Concrete sight sees the trees blowing in the wind and rational thinking maintains that wind arrives when you realize it arrives, and one realizes something by stating it. Though, arguably, the unconscious realizes the wind before the eyes and the mind. For example, does the follicle feel the hair blowing before the mind says wind? That just as the earth is whispering mountain in its crust before the shape of mountain appears on its surface, the cells are affected by the invisible force of the atmosphere even before the wind blows? And that whispering in the cells of
the coming wind can only be heard by the unconscious? Lee’s consideration of the wind brings
the reader’s awareness to all phenomena that might be happening without her realizing.

The second stanza, “And the man who can’t sleep/and the man who can’t wake up/are the
same man,” also describes conscious and unconscious states. If one cannot go to sleep they
cannot wake up from that sleeping. They stay awake instead of experience waking. On an
unconscious level, what the sleepless man might not realize is when a man is asleep, his
unconscious is awake. Therefore, going to sleep turns the consciousness off and wakes the
unconscious up.

In the lines, “A memory of the ocean/Torments the trees, a homesickness,” the reader
doesn’t know where the trees are. Perhaps they are ocean trees transplanted to some urban
location. The speaker is reminded on some level, perhaps by the oceanic wavelike motion of the
branches, of the ocean which was once home.

Often, the larger the leap the more the poem is inclusive, the more it invites the reader’s
interpretive energy. Reading a poem through the sixth chakra allows the reader to live in this
inclusivity. In other words, poems that leap can feel like they leap over the reader, making the
reader feel like understanding is distant and they don’t “get” the poem. However, reading with
the sixth chakra makes the more intangible aspects of a poem accessible, if only because a sixth
charka reading gives permission to the reader to recognize the blurriness of the poem not as
something that can’t be interpreted but as something with many interpretations. Frustration is
replaced with pleasure, confusion with assertiveness. A sixth chakra reading gives authority to
the reader. If finding one specific meaning isn’t important anymore then the anxiety of right and
wrong is replaced with creative meaning making.
Jumping to the last stanza, we find this to be true: “It isn’t until he begins to wish/to sing/the whole flower/of his breathing, does he recognize/himself, a blossom mortally wounded on its stem.” The conscious mind would have a man believe that he is in the process of blooming or knowing, and the unconscious says all things are known already. The speaker is telling the reader (you) to speak as if you know, because you do. It is as if the poem is saying trust, over and over again.

A sixth charka reading shows Lee’s poem to be a “leaping poem” and proves false the possibly largest misconception about leaping poems, that they exclude the reader. In fact, they give more freedom and space for the reader than most other types of poetry. A sixth chakra reading celebrates interpretative multiplicity. Rational understanding is satisfying. You feel you know it when you find it, where imaginative faith is another kind of “satisfaction” that is loose, falling, floating like light in curtains, and the poem on one day will mean one thing and on another day, something else. The poem changes as the reader changes.

When writing a poem with the sixth chakra the poet has three eyes. There is what is in front of the eyes, within the eyes, and behind the eyes, or the physical, the conscious, and the unconscious of the poem. The poet might replace clear definition with juxtaposed meaning through parataxis and space. Meaning is created by relationship and not explanation. The poet would ask, what is the conscious connection she is trying to make? How can she eliminate the exposition, keeping the metaphor without extraneous, typical explanation? The poet tries show and tell by tapping her unconscious. She asks the line, how would my Third Eye see it? How does the Third Eye read the line differently, mystically, fantastically, and how can that be included in the poem to broaden the poem’s significance?
The sixth chakra associations can also be tapped to invoke the unconscious: eyes, sixth sense, hallucinations, dreams, and the owl. The sixth chakra poet is the owl. A poet that finds what lurks in the dark. How can the sixth chakra change the way we’ve been working with “sorrow?” What if a girl committed suicide, leapt to her death, but instead of saying that, the poet said, “Sorrow is stronger than acid. Once she took acid and thought herself an Aztec princess. On Sorrow, she thought herself a bird.” All three sentences are strange. They fit. They express something, the “what” may be questionable, but it’s there.
The Seventh Chakra

Keith Sherwood explains that balancing the first six chakras produces a person who has achieved, “wholeness through psycho spiritual integration.” However, Sherwood continues, “His development is not complete because although he knows himself in his multiplicity, his experience of self is still differentiated from the ALL” (155). Thus, he continues, the final step that is the merging of a person’s personal energy field with the universal field (The merging of the I AM with the ALL), only takes place when the thousand-petaled lotus blossoms and the Kundalini arrives and fully awakens Sahasrara” (155). The Sahasrara Chakra is the seventh and final chakra. It is often described as a thousand-petaled lotus flower that exists at the crown of the head. When this chakra fully opens complete integration occurs. In this state there is no self, or no-thing that is not connected. The poet can use the seventh chakra as a way to read poems for their moments when semiotic difference disappears and the ineffable is closest to being written.

There are moments in poetry where it seems like a merging with the All occurs. There are mysterious instances when the space and difference between poetic elements and expressions, change and join. The way fire can turn dissimilar things into similar smoke. The seventh chakra reader looks for these moments, and tries to understand how it is happening. Poems of mystical or ecstatic tradition are generous sources of attempts at descriptions of merging with the All. For example, in the Tao te Ching, Lao Tsu writes:

I do my utmost to attain emptiness
I hold firmly to stillness
The myriad of creatures all rise together
And I watch them return.
The teeming creatures
All return to their separate roots.
Returning to one’s roots is stillness.
This is what is meant by returning to one’s

30
Returning to one’s destiny is known as the constant.
Knowledge of the constant is known as discernment
Woe to him who willfully innovates
While ignorant of the constant
But should one act from knowledge of the constant
One’s actions will lead to impartiality
Impartiality to kingliness
Kingliness to heaven
Heaven to the Way.

The poem begins in a kind of surreal space, establishing expectations of unknowing. Perhaps, it is better to learn something new when you do not think you already know it, better to find where you are if you don’t think you are some specific place. Thus, by the time the speaker begins to define and redefine, the speaker is readied for the new definitions.

The speaker begins with stillness, “Returning to one’s roots is stillness” (5). The speaker thus turns “stillness” into a process. And because “stillness” and “destiny” are given the same definition, stillness means destiny and destiny means stillness (6-7). Then “destiny” is again defined: “Returning to one’s destiny is known as the constant (8-9). Then “knowledge of the constant is known as discernment” (10-11). A shift in form focuses the reader not on the single word stanzas, but the line breaks. From line 11-19, the end words and phrases can be read as a sentence that further supports and states the connectivity of all parts of the poem: “discernment innovates constant knowledge of the constant, impartiality, kingliness, heaven, the Way.”

“Discernment” is “knowledge of the constant” and the “constant” is “Returning to one’s destiny” where “destiny” is “Returning to ones’ roots” which is also “stillness. Therefore, “stillness” and “discernment” are the same. By making the poem a circle and a chain, the poet unifies all the elements of his statement.
The seventh chakra helps recognize this enigmatic technique as a way to write about the non-physical world with language from the physical world. Capitalization initiates a change in definitive significance. The speaker continues in this fashion until the last four stanzas of the poem: “One’s actions will lead to impartiality/Impartiality to kingliness/Kingliness to heaven/Heaven to the Way” (18-21). Usually, the casing of a word separates the elevated meaning of a word from its normative meaning. However, since the speaker includes both casings to express the same thought, casing becomes a way to show similarity and not difference. For example, Kingliness (capitalized) is reserved for “actual” kings and kingliness (lowercase) is when non-kings possess the qualities of actual kings. The speaker switches between capitals and lowercase to say that actual kings are the same as those who only possess the attributes of a king, and that to possess attributes of a king makes you a king. In the end, by both asserting and negating difference in language, the poem becomes a poem of integration.

In our poems, the seventh chakra can be invoked where the opportunity arises to dissolve the space between things. A seventh chakra writing and revision is not only valuable for a poem purposefully focused on the invocation of the All, but also for any poem suffering from too much dissension. The seventh chakra poem asks: What is the opposite? And then answers: There are no opposites? It is surprising and delightful to think of things we do not consider to have opposites as having them, and then even more surprising is to reconcile the opposition as only seeming. Instead of writing a seventh chakra rendering of “sorrow,” we turn back to Clifton’s poem “Sorrows,” “as i whispered into my own/ cupped hands  enough  not me again/ but who can distinguish/ one human voice, amid such choruses/ of desire” (11-16). The speaker dissolves the separation between prayer-types. There are no good or bad prayers. They are all desires. Like Clifton and Lao Tsu, the seventh chakra assists poets in stating seventh chakra thought: the truth.
that everything is one and all opposites have poetic potentiality of merging, even if absolute merging defies the nature of language.
Conclusion

As a yoga instructor for the last decade, I am someone practiced in the art of asana. I trust that asana frees us from our vasana. Vasana is the daily, habitual routine of action and thought that grooves our lives, carves out our world, our identities, and in its constancy, it wears deeply. Like a machine doing the same things over and over, our parts get old, get worn. Asana is a system of postures that exercise the mind and body differently then what our daily lives typically allow. This difference reverses the wear, tear, and bore of our vasana. All the time with my students, I use the metaphor: the way we live our lives is like the way we speak, though so many words are available for us to use, we chose the same again and again. It dawned on me, this also the way we write.

In life, the words and lives we choose over and over again have to do with our physical, mental, and spiritual states. Knowing our “states” is complicated because nothing seems to be separate from anything else. Which begs, how can singularity be recognized in unity? Perhaps, in actuality, it can’t. Understanding a single aspect of self is very close to pulling a drop of water out a glass and then naming it something other than the water from which it came. But we can do is get close, by sorting, naming, and grouping like with like. The ancient chakra system provides a way to acknowledge and analyze groupings of self and the interactions between those groups so that a person has the opportunity to intentionally change and enhance their lives. As a poet, I supposed that the chakras would do the same for our reading and writing of poems. For it is by the veer that we get to the new, and I realized the chakra system could provide that veer.

This critical preface is a guide to break out of usual patterns of creativity and a generator of new ideas. Poems articulate the human experience. Chakras articulate the human experience.
They both seek to understand, express, and enhance. Together, the chakras help us look at our poems, our poems help us see that our chakras are poetry, and we are our chakras.

I am grateful for the seven poems that allowed me to express how a poem can be read with the chakras: Lucille Clifton’s “Sorrows,” Sharon Olds’ “Home Ec,” Kim Addonizio’s “Good Girl,” Pablo Neruda’s “Always,” Jason Bredle’s “Parasol,” Li-Young Lee’s “Changing Places in the Fire,” and “I do my utmost to obtain emptiness” a translation by D.C. Lau of Lao Tsu from the Tao te Ching. Though remember, all poems can be read with all the chakras. If a poem read with a specific chakra shows no link or associations with it, the poem can understood as neglecting that part of the human experience. This lack might work for the poem, or it might explain why the poem feels somewhat empty or missing something. Also, if a poem is written with only some of the chakras in mind, the poet needs to be making this decision voluntarily. Sometimes our poems need to be dis-eased or leaning to one side, but not always. It is the chakras that innovatively help us know when, and when not.
Works Cited


PART II

BODIES AND OTHER FIREWOOD
I. Nests
Yoga is telling me to empty my palms of their fists, the fists are holding onto balloons, the
balloons
are my thoughts
in a great suffocating bushel I hold around my head. Yoga says, it isn’t that my releasing them
will mean
I won’t be able
to see them, it’s that I will be able to see them as they are: easily escapable if loosed, every last
one of them
made of the same
material, plastic and gas—color and gas, stretchy material pulled into a shape by the exhale
inside of it,
which is to say
the words inside it. And as they float, yoga tells me, I’ll see what is not balloon, and what is not
balloon
is me,
or is me too. I am more, and it is as silly for me to call myself thought as it is for the sky to call
itself balloon,
or kite,
or airplane or blue. It has those things, It is not those things.
Yoga says, stop,
stop the working of all that holding on and I can lay in the sacred stillness and silence, but all I
can think
about is
that I never realized the shape and reshaping of my mouth works the air like a Navajo works
a blanket
over a fire, and that all my words live a secret life as a smoke signal I can’t see. So I am must be
doing it wrong.
You think
you do most things wrong, relax, you are a human being, not a human doing, and silence and
stillness
are only
abstractions humans have named for that which they can never reach. For the heart, no matter
how quietly
you still it,
pumps songs, and the lungs, though you can keep them invisible under the ribcage continue
moving
in and out.
See, silence and stillness are unobtainable for the living, for the body is a boat that keeps on
pushing forward.
But on what ocean?
Please let the answer not be minutia. It seems like it when I am at work: a young, well person in
an old,
sick man’s room,
both of us staring at the dirty white walls. We’re like two things tucked into the khaki pockets of well-worn work trousers.
He wore suspenders, now the black leathers are looping like snakes in a box that I kick under the chair that looks
Like another old man has come to die. All frame and no stuffing. This job shows that if a man is lucky enough to stay in his house, his house will resemble his death. Yoga says something about my house looking like my death, and I pretend I can’t hear because my hearing aid battery is dead. His is, and I have to scream at him. He can’t hear and I am screaming, eat, eat, drink, relax. And yoga says, I am screaming, eat, drink, relax, and you are dying too, and you are changing his ass-less gown, and I am changing yours, and you’re body looks a like a bird, and his body looks like a bird. Birds that either died in the egg, or are still trying to be born.
Pruning

The first thing motherhood teaches a writer
is to keep quiet and to keep rocking
the cradle of his car seat, an ovum,
an egg timer of back and forth, a cormorant
boat, and I am the water that ups and downs him,
while my right hand sculls for words
like a fisherman—to catch enough to keep
this family alive.
A fisherman negotiating a cursive gale
and a white ocean, I black the page
with words like anchors dropped
to keep me here, so I can stay
at the longitude and latitude
of his lashes resting down
on the butter-cliffs of this cheeks,
at the origami of his mouth,
at the red specs of new-heat bubbled, like tiny,
red star fish washed up on his forehead
from his waves of hair. I want to keep up
with the sweet gallop of breath that rides
into his village, out of his village.
Six months old, six months towards
another six, towards when I will say
you were just a baby then, as I tell him:
Your hands were always clutched
around the invisible
like a baby carrying a bag of dreams,
or magic gunpowder, or lucky nickels—
two fighters fists, so tight that when I tried
to cut your ten nails, thin like edges of paper
you paper-cut me. And that as I pruned you,
trimming little bits of my bonsai-boy off,
I knew what I wish I did not know,
that unlike the tree
you would not stay small
the more I cut.
Of Milk and Honey

It seems that after all that sucking
and then drying up
and then being dried up,
a woman’s body
becomes like the washing,
her chest,
two fleshy gym socks closed-pinned
to the clavicle, that line of bone
strung from shoulder to shoulder. But

milk is pollen and children are bees,
making the mother the flower
unable to see what she makes, the honey
filled hexagons, the inside
of the hive, which she can handle
because she is also the river,
and her children are bears
rooting their noses to her.
Her chest is the white water,
her blouse, torn back, is the banks,
and she is screaming,
which is what a river song is,
Drink Me.

It feels good. Better than that. It is the color pink.
And it is the skeleton
that all their constant growing clings to,
to make a body that a mother holds in her arms
after her children become men and women.

Because children leave, rivers dry, women
get drunk up and then say sorry
for their hanging breasts
and the sinking nipples
and the stretched, thinned skin, forgetting

how to speak River or Bee,
forgetting that Nature, like a woman
could be,
is always in a state of Thank You
or Your Welcome
To the Fountain and Back

We toss what is loose in our pockets.
The extra wishes will make up for
the wrong wishes we are likely to make.
You laugh out loud and the winter
holds your breath likes small bunches
of white roses. Even in the snow
you are springtime, each tooth a petal,
each step a step somewhere I cannot go.
I am so much older than you,
and it is below freezing. I ask can we leave?
But it’s a fountain you say,
and I cannot argue, it is a fountain, so we stay,
then start off. Back to the house
your small feet leave prints
on the mirror of snow. Your hands
crumple up the white
sheets like paper poems you don’t like
anymore, and you toss them
at your mother who keeps track
of your losses, your failures
to hit, you keep count of your wins
on your fingers, then your toes,
and a knee cap, then you’re tired,
black circles rising up to the surface
like trout just under the ice. But before we go
and we cannot go before this,
you turn while standing in the somewhere
between my kiss and the front porch,
and take a bow
as the air, the trees, the cold
stands and sits like a crowd doing a wave
in your honor.
Newborn: An Acrostic

Gold pads at the tips
Of my boy touch me like a prayer sung in the
Deep voice of two skins
Loving. The mix of spit and milk and learning to laugh are
Inside of a hymn, so are
New eyelids,
Ears,
Stomach, and
Stars that seem to be circling his head
Lice Hunting

A shirt-less boy in chair at the center of a kitchen
sits still like the silt lip of a slight waterfall
and lets the sweat pour. There is so much saltwater
in a house with a broken air conditioner
that all the people must flail their arms
to stay above it, and with all that splashing
like mad dolphins, flipper hits flipper,
and thing after thing gets hurts.

His parents will not go through the terrible process
of picking the nits. *Like Monkeys, like fucking monkeys,*
his mother keeps saying. She hates monkeys. Too wild.
Too hairy. They’ll shave his head, thought they know
he loves his hair, because boy hair doesn’t matter. He cries

His tears only fill up the house
with more water, with more salt, they are as insignificant
as the rain filling up the ocean. No one notices.
She beats him with the hair brush, and he gasps, but it seems as usual
as the breath that accompanies the oar
as it pushes some small, sad dingy back to its sad shore

It’s nearly an hour passed his bedtime and he’s still in the blue
folding chair when she yanks him up and down,
and shakes him like she shakes his wet clothes
from the washer, just to let him know she’s bigger.
She’s the sea. He’s whatever she’ll allow, maybe a minnow,
Maybe a diver in a diving bell with his great silver
unpoppable bubble, silent except for the water and the prayer
for his lice and his mother to die.
An Aftermath

It’s how the shadows of the room settle
into the shape of a book
with the baby crib the narrow bind
and the parents the cover,
spreading out above the covers,
covered in the snow
of the television,
the television showing
the same scene again and again,
tragic pornography, the buildings erect
and then not, or there
and then swallowed by the sky,
up then down,
as the husband is in and out,
or her breath is there and then
everywhere around the room.
And the fact they can die
but did not
is in the way they touch
as if they will never arrive
at the other’s body.
And the fact that they might not ever be able to feel
is in every hard thing they do to one another.
And that in the sudden surge of being shocked
by the human instinct, she pulls him in
like a pen into a palm which is like a match between fingers
if every line starts a fire to clear a forest
that he seeds
so she can give birth in all this death,
so she can make love at ground zero.
Wisdom

We walk along the path with a gallon-sized Ziploc. All the rocks go in the treasure bag until it’s almost too heavy to carry, even for mom. I tell him to save space in case we find some that are different. He tells me, *Look Mom. They all are.*
Well-Kept

I bend,
smooth my hands down my length the way I do the sheets, but it doesn’t smooth. The blinds, morning light, and fat stripe me. I try and name the new anything but ugly, but it’s hard to find any good left after the storm peeled the bark off the body, leaving a white, soft thing—a tree whittled into what? A mother, or two utters, or two canteens, two swollen leather bags—twin, benevolent decanters of wine poured heavy into a goblet of boy, the man-child asleep in the plain bed behind me. A light atop a sheeted candle that wakes and comfortably, as if they were his before mine, glides over these bumps and folds like a monk’s happy, quiet hand dusts a temple, keeps a garden. And like a well-kept garden I bloom, is what I whisper as I calm the stir in his waking with the good I find falling out of the two heavy clouds that make sense of the words: communion, storm, earth, sky.
Baseball Season

Like an ant hill
and then an ant hill kicked over,
the school explodes with running children
who disappear behind the tinted glass
of their mother’s cars like light
behind dark curtain.
Except for the children who walk home,
they push to the sidewalks: busy,
little ships on slight, cement straits.

Or letters
in an bright alphabet parade on Sesame Street, happy
(so much happier than any adult has been),
they bounce themselves out of order.
The A pairs with S, the N
comes after Z, the U before B,
but not these two boys,

Call them L and M.
Perhaps, M stands for Morbidly obese, or Matt,
or Maybe I will never be like them, and L is for Larry,
or Lean, Liked, and Longing to Lose
his Loser brother. Either way, you can tell they are a team
of two sizes—like a double digit number,
like the number 10, with a long, lean one
and a round zero.

And out of nowhere,
(but it had to come from somewhere)
Mat’s fat belly catches a baseball
as well as any outfielder,
as if it was made to catch heavy things
from the sky, like a crater gloves the meteor
or a trampoline, the foot.

Laying on the ground,
the wider one seems so much smaller
like a ball of clay rolled out flat,
with his face down, not looking to see
from where, just putting his hand into the whole.
Maybe thinking how his brother escapes
again, a smaller target—it will take a web

49
to catch him, tweezers,
or an album for slight things pressed down,
just as L is down on his knees
doing what he can do
about what he can’t change,
picking up his brother
his brother’s pack, loading them
like an ant loads
double his weight.
For the Young Who Marry

You wore a dress from a thrift store, thinking the eye-lit lace, the eye-hooks, the herring bone corset, the ghost of the more wholesome woman who wore it before you, would make your love traditional, that archetypical kind that will last forever, and for a minute, you looked like a regular bride, but then, in your whimsy and youth, you added a white pair of masquerade wings you'd gotten from a costume shop. And we were too busy putting glitter on your to face to stop and consider that perhaps your symbolic thinking of the wings as means to fly freely through the sky of love forever with your mate, would only work, as metaphor for the two of you, if you married a bird Had we paused and asked if he was bird, we would have quickly answered, no, and then realized your wings, symbolically postured you more as parrot on a perch marrying the zoo keeper. Even so, you definitely clung to the idea that you were. But those were fake wings, and every time you jumped off another higher platform, first the couch, then the ladder, then the roof flapping your wings like a chicken, a little vibration from each fall got stuck in you, the way the vibration from a gong gets stuck in the crack of the cement below it, shaking the floor apart a little more each bang. Eventually, you got so sad you stayed folded like an egg trying to keep in its yoke. After your divorce you stayed in a ball, not a baseball that flies out and over, but a rubber ball with a manic, up and down bounce like the fibrillation of a sick heart. But, and as we hope we all can, you got happy again, and told me on an afternoon where the clouds looked like thin brides waltzing with one another, Happiness Matters. You said it as you ate strawberries. Your smile made you chew them differently then you use to, as if the fruit was a found declaration of the simplicity of the love condition: sometimes we are strawberries and sometimes the strawberry eaters, sometimes picked sometimes picking.
II. Timber
It was the age when all things came in the colors of gumballs,
Our panties, slips, skorts, bobby socks, Blow Pops, Poprocks,
plastic bracelets, charm necklaces, lip gloss, mouthwash,
and I suppose, under the skin, there were gumballs too,
hard circles of sweet our chemistry jawed and would blow
into breasts. I think I could hear the chewing whisper sex
though I didn't know exactly what it meant, it lured like the fish hook's
flash lures. And like fish, we spent all summer wet in the pool
or soaked with hits from one another's candy-colored water guns
as we played Charlie's Angels. I was Sabrina, god I hated her
stupid hair. But the other's got to pick first, they were blonde
and old enough to know how to give blowjobs, and look at Playboy
as textbook. They were wonderful, and like someone with less
I took everything handed down: how to pose, how to soften
my eyes and blink slow to make the lashes lift like the ruffled hem
of a skirt as it curtsies, and how to dance with the bones
that would become my hips, to Raspberry Beret
constantly playing in their garage, that cement and musty
temple of my secrets, such as how Prince made me feel
like a hot and tightening hand desperately trying to hold on
to too many balloons, like a hand squeezing a lemon, like a hand
wringing out wet hair. Prince made me hotter than the water
that came out of the hose as we sprayed each other.
Even bathwater, I felt hotter than, and then guilty.
I guess it was the kind of guilt you can’t keep secret, like if a honeysuckle’s
smell was guilt. the grass’s green was guilt, the summer’s heat or the water’s
wet was guilt. What I am trying to say is: I was the age when blushing
and bubble-bath was bubblegum pink,
and it was the summer my father flinched at my naked body
in the bath and stopped kissing me goodnight. And this is about
how I lie in bed and try to reach my hand to the summer before
this summer—to my father’s hand on the wash cloth washing me,
when all he had to was keep me clean,
when he thought he could. When it was possible.
Epistle

Husband,

When we fuck I find myself wondering if you are the horse or the saddle--the animal or the machine that lets me to ride the animal. If you’re the saddle I don’t feel so bad about how often I treat you like something to sit on. If you’re the saddle the horse is the benevolent atoms, wonton-gaited, electrically trotting in the space between our bodies and the bodies of the things we love against—braying. And your anatomy becomes the anatomy of a saddle: horn, housing, cantle, cinch, leather, stitching, the sturdy words or a sturdy thing, because a saddle is the way to hold on through the gallop.

But the truth is, you’re neither horse or saddle, if you were, I could dismount, and leaving for me is impossible. I’ve always been doing you. I always will is what your eyes are constantly asking me say, but what you don’t understand is, asking me to say forever is like the Sun asking the Earth to move, of course it will, of course, sure, and sure I could pray, but it would be as futile as God praying to be released from our prayers. So, I’m going to keep you up inside me, and not say in this, or any other letter, enough is enough., instead, I’ll make the sound of an engine and mimic speed and tight corners with my body, I’ll lie and call you a muscle car and your reach around the belt that straps me, and when we’re soft I’ll call our fucking ethereal as I make like a cumulous cloud dancing on the top of the active volcano of our marriage, I’ll call it perfect, I’ll call it magic.

But know, I am not a cloud, not arbitrary, or barely here, wherever here is for a minute, this is most my life, which is the saddest phrase sometimes, but I get over it because marriage is the song of fitting and unfitting, year after year, like fingers closing and opening the holes of a flute, all the music comes from the hollow’s emptiness. I want to say I know you think I am unhappy, and I am, but I am also this: the salt shore that keeps and takes the breaking of your white water, your rush, just as you contain and let for the white water, the rush of me. Because love is the constant holding and licking up of each other’s banks that makes it possible for this life to flow through.
he has one in the kitchen,  
barely closeable—a suburban shuffle of random  
necessities: Scotch tape, duct tape, measuring tape,  
thin Sunday paper rubber bands,  
hotel matchbooks of needle and thread, blue pens  
with black hats, un-phoned phone numbers,  
batteries, recipes, business cards, directions to places,  
unvisited, directions to the universal remote, a warranty  
for something already broke, check stubs, stamps  
that need more stamps to make postage, Picasso-print  
Thank You cards for when and if, paper-sheathed chopsticks,  
and spilled throughout like prehistoric pine needles  
are bone-colored toothpicks—just in case  
of a blackout, a torn page, a loose button,  
a hole, a twisty-less bag of bread.  
He is ready. This makes him feel good when he slides asleep,  
but mostly he likes his drawer because when  
he turned thirty-five last year, and because twenty-four candles  
come in each pack, thirteen sparkly candles remain,  
to light the cakes of the future, and that makes him realize  
he’s junk drawer kind of person: he’s got a lot of fire,  
and light and sparkles, stick, and whatever else anyone might need,  
and that makes him happy.
We are a lumberjack, a tree, and the blue behind us
is a flannel sky of sheets. At the top of the tree
is an eagle’s nest--my bird-brain,
gray tunnels stuffed with feathers, eyes, claws,
and all the heavy dinosaur
a bird holds on to. Other birds sing.
My bird squawks poems
about what I’d rather have happen
as what happens is happening:
I’m getting fucked
by an ax,
that is not your wonderful,
actual penis. If it were that
I’d laugh at all the chopping,
pretend to fall down
through your expensive down mattress pad. And the sound
of me cumming would be all the animals living in the tree
scattering for shelter,
and what you utter or do not utter
as you cum
would only ever sound like
a smiling Timber.
But, no,
the ax
is a story I tell myself
about your ax.
The story I tell about you
that is not you
is chopping me up
into measurements
to small to make love to.
I am a dismantled forest, an assembly of logs,
and logs, like lines, are easily arranged into letters,
then words, then whole parables
about my one true love.
Love is birdshit—pretend.
Because you aren’t a lumberjack, and I’m not a tree.
We are too similar to be different
Kinds. Really, we’re all battle axes
with blades mad to know,
how do cold, metal things find heat
when the strike and the striking
only make a few sparks?
The Howling Necessity

If I never dream of my husband, if he is never there when I sleep, for or against me, does that mean, subconsciously, I am not married? Or what does it mean if you dream of your child, every night, turning with you into a wolf?

We can become wolves if we try, the whole dream long, the two of us can squat down like mushrooms close to the chill of the ground, and close our eyes until the world closes its eyes and there is only darkness. The change feels like champagne and sounds like two-by-fours cracking. The teeth are my favorite. They sound like pencils piercing notebook paper and feel like boats leaving a slip, slicing easily through the water-skin. We stop wanting to change back into humans. There is so much power in not speaking, apologizing, not being a wife, a wife: that spirit forced into the shape of something that does not howl or keep itself warm.
bites herself
instead of her husband,
their son, or the dog.
Her war is a civil war,
body against its own body.
It’s because she’s got the curse
words of a sailor, a plumber, a whore,
she’s become zookeeper, corrections officer,
dog trainer with teeth that double as muzzles,
and any well-behaved dog will tell you,
*every good bitch needs a muzzle*
*in order to keep on being good.* And she wants that
very much, so she figures
she has a gate around her pool, why not her mouth.
She locks up the gun, why not the *Fuck,*
why not the constant *Fuck* fogbank
thick in her throat, a choke.
She’s a staple, a tack, a hole-punch,
an apple-corer, eliminating
some indigestible black seed, dark, wooden,
and the in shape of a tear,
buried in her lip.
Or does she
bite
because the lip break
breaks the silence.
Listen
to the clothes with no bodies
piled on her bed
tell her nothing.
The crippled cotton backs, balled feet,
twisted legs are dead
silent.
And she knows it’s not their fault
their sad folding reminds her of love letters
she won’t be asked to open,
or that everyone who is going to love her
already does, or that will touch her
already has, or that the drawers
seem like empty envelopes
she stuffs full of more emptiness, or how bad
the cut in her lip fucking hurts
and won’t scab
because she keeps on biting back the scream
when the screen door gets left open, and the dog gets out
again, as her husband walks in again
having forgotten the one thing,
the one fucking thing she needed from the store
just like he forgets
in their bed, in the night, as she bites.
To Be Buried

You go down on me as if you have to
as if am the last water
for the next hundred miles
and you are a dying man in the desert
that must sink his mouth into the pulp
of my cactus and suck

You are faster than my words
and I can’t get time to say:
Sorry, I haven’t shaved for three days
because I didn’t know my legs
and your lick would light a campfire
in this desert of skin
under the full and the howling
O-shaped moon in my mouth

I say instead:
I am prickly and sensational
Like a cactus in the desert that blooms
when most people sleep I whisper:
I am the cactus on your window
ledge all my water is on the inside

Drink, drink, then it’s drunk

Then you stop like a sand storm
stops and collapse
your body on my body
like one dune laying its heavy
down on another dune
and I lay like that covered
by an avalanche
of single flesh-toned grains
all my topography buried
all my peaks sea-level

And then as if it were a simple
measurement of pressure
from the force of you on the solid
of me I realize:
After all this time of looking up
God is underneath me
while you are on top
and I can hear both you in an ear
whispering  You’re beautiful
and just like the cactus flower
I bloom.
Baby Daddy

When a toddler laughs all the edges of his body bend up and he becomes a smile. You do this to our son with so much ease I have to remember to feel angry. So, I think about the cd you just finished with the cover picture of the two of you kissing, I hate it. In the morning, tears grab handfuls of my Raisin Bran before I can swallow and it feels like breakfast spills from my eyes. You told me, though. You told me that all a man needs is his clothes and his passion. I am neither, neither is your son. We can’t fit in your pack. You can’t play us. This is the last compliment sandwich you’re gonna get from me: you write good songs about fucking, you fuck really well, everyone on your conveyor belt of life where only the girl’s and the kid’s face change
Sliced Bread

You get what you asked for and then
you wish you’d been more specific about when:
After you’d make love to more men,
or at least your ex one more time,
or after this poem had been published
because your writing this will break his heart
and you’re a heartbreaker, but your no heart breaker.
You’re going to marry him.
He’s all you could dream for, really,
like a toaster that produces
just the right amount of gold,
he cooks with the same patience
and even temperament
and you taste better
than you ever have because of it.
That feels good. You feel good.
You’re a mattress. He’s a well-worn sheet.
You’re a head. He’s a pillow lumped in the shape it.
You like him, his humor and his bottom.
You want to surrender yourself wholly to them, but it’s just
there are so many toasters
and a whole loaf of you.
Baby Daddy II

You come home from sleeping with her on a roof in Santa Cruz.
7 nights of stars sitting on your face, and maybe she felt
she had come home to find the door unlocked, your arms
an archway, your chest, a bed. She might have laid there all night
above the ocean, drowned. Maybe she could not stop making wishes
on the sparks of light in your eyes. My heart is the one inch in the cement
cracked by a relentless weed. My heart is a squinted eye
in the center of my chest with a hair in it I can’t get. My heart is one killing drip
at the center of a forehead. I want to do what the instructor tells me to do
in splits—surrender. I want my heart to be a body in the splits,
two legs letting go, slipping to the floor, allowing the part in the middle
like a child between two people to steady, calm, and open.
Your heart buys plants it can’t water, dogs it can’t walk, babies it can’t feed,
and it’s ok for you because you need to be able to sleep in your car
run on two dollars, gamble your last four, and sleep with a girl on a roof,
no matter her or I, just as long as she is someone who thinks you are a dream,
or a wish come true.
How It Was and Was Not

You plus me was hardly larger than you without me, which made is easy for us to share the sleeping bag. It was musty, heavy, thick, big enough to hold a lumber jack and his ax with a forest of quilted quail and pheasants in all stages of flight printed to excite and to prepare the young men for sleep, so dreams become a hunt and a hunter satisfying his instinct to take home what's been shot from the sky.

And at first we laid as if we'd been shot and stacked in a hunter's bag, one on top of the other, and I looked from the zipper to the birds, still alive behind the blue, stitching, not knowing that a boy's sleeping bag has a way of telling him what life wants from him. I didn't know anything. I was there to find out if I was the game, or the one holding the gun, or the gravity between them. I was sick to know, eager to lie in the forest green bag on the silver winter grass where what was left of Fall cracked beneath our weight. We were children learning to walk on the moon of our bodies –meaning, gravity was irrelevant.

Just as that this is only the story I tell myself about us is irrelevant, or that I know what we were actually thinking then, we are still thinking: Next, Next. When is the next time the white breath escaping between kisses will give us halos or horns to lock and unlock as we fight to fill the other, with my mind in the gutter, and your mind in the gutter, never realizing Next is the gutter that washes away the Now.

So what, what matters, is that one we were sweet. You were sweet, lifting my hair like a skirt, your arms like the wind. The Earth had five moons that night, the one of above, and our four, full, wide eyes that watched my breasts fall into the dark like stars we had been wishing since we learned they were magic.
III. Smoke
The Dream

The baby is on my hip
like a monkey on a trunk, and my other hip
is trying to hang onto the eye of a stranger.
I shush the fussy baby while I wink at a man,
batting my lashes like hawk wings
beat clouds apart. And there she is, the girl
that never forgets how. With the customer,
I open my mouth a little more than when I talk
to the baby, and the yes, and the yes, and giggle
come out not like a kite-tail, but a curling finger.
I have an hour-glass shaped tip-jar filled
with pastel bottles, baby socks, wadded money,
and I can’t remember where to set the drinks
down, I keep ending up in the bathroom stall,
looking for a hundred dollar bill I dropped,
while my older son watches from the bar,
perched on a stool like a monkey on a tire-swing,
picking cherries out of his Shirley Temple,
and an old blue neon sign stutters Open.
Just because money smells like blood,
and she can find it in pockets like canyons, pockets like the sea,
the cocktail waitress is not a vulture or a shark.
She’s a typical, small planet revolving around a table as if the table was the Sun,
but it’s not the table or the tips,
it’s the attention that makes a woman a Mars, it’s attention the waitress orbits,
spinning around anything that says, *You’re so beautiful.*
Thank you, she responds, and not at all uncomfortably, though she is,
because to cocktail waitress is to perpetually dress
for an interview to get a job giving people boners.
Tight jeans show her body the way sheers show a sheep,
and everyone’s mouth
waters. Men love her the way the armed love the gun-less.
She gives them beer and she is beer,
something to be drunk, something smooth
with a beautiful glass body that can be broken
and used as a weapon. And though jeans keep secret
a tackle box of truths, they tell how much she wants to be consumed, tonight.
Tonight is a couple years long, or it’s a bad Tuesday,
dead slow, hardly anyone but these two guys that’ll recognize her, and she them,
from the movies they shot of her losing
her virginity and some other stuff language forgot to name.
Things she couldn’t put her finger on, but felt the hole
of when they left, things she would later name: vista, knoll, bear cave and puddle,
in order tell herself a nursery rhyme about Sex the Ocean
and the land it flooded, but that is in the future, in the past, like at a deer lease,
the boys waited and shot her coming
to his bed. Her face was fourteen, his face was clenched like a fist folded like the Earth’s plates
are at the Earth’s faults. Thank goodness,
it only takes five minutes to pry off virginity,
proving virginity is something loosely bolted like a name plaque on a door or a hubcap.
And maybe if virginity wasn’t the same red as the blood on the condom
she could’ve put it in her jean pocket and taken it home to apologize.
Maybe it should apologize to her for being the crimson ball of heat circled by the smaller,
weaker ball of innocence, for innocence is a tiny planet lost without the gravity of the cherry.
Virginity should say sorry for sending all our tiny planets adrift. How are boys and girl supposed
to recover from something like the explosion of the sun? Maybe we become waitress,
and make ourselves into desire, and turn cum into a thick, wet compliment
that says *You’re so beautiful. You really do look just the same.*
Thank you, she says. And when they leave they leave a big tip
Meth I: Insects

She lies on the bed, an “X” marking the spot. Belly down, while two-day leg hair sits and stands like someone anxious for a visitor rises, looks out the window, sits back down. Bruises and chipped nails look like black birdbath water. The tongue shakes its head no or yes, as if it is telling the person looking out the window whether anyone has pulled up yet. The palms and pussy are wet with droplets like they caught some morning in them. If she is wearing boy-shorts there is a zodiac sign on the ass that is not the same sign as she is. If she is naked she is wearing the sweat marks of a man whose zodiac sign is not hers. He left. He might be coming back, but she isn’t sure when. It is a roller coaster, and she’s not ready to exit to her left. She wants to keep the bar down, keep her arms and legs in, keep her valuables safe in a cubby. She is on the couch with her knees up to her chest making a teepee. She thinks of this because she thinks of sweat lodge, there is sweat running down to her heels. A slug traveling from every buzzing place, and the place is a‘buzzzzzz. A cicada, she’ll be up all summer
Horseplay: Portrait of a Submissive

Her hair is a coarse black pony tail that swats at the fly-sized bead of sweat. It’s work to hold a bit in your mouth. The black on her eyes, her fake eyelashes, they are carriage blinders. Her mouth is a slavering motor, rictus for carrot, And her breath is hooves turning a corner. She smiles when he rides her ass with his crop. I don’t know who these people are but they’re getting it, and I’m a little jealous of his attention to what she is and isn’t doing. After all, you can’t get in trouble by someone who isn’t paying attention, but then I’m also thinking that if a mare watched this asshole fuck this chick like a ranch horse, it would make her mad because it hurts, in the bad way, to be steered by the mouth.
I wasn’t the first girl to have kept on doing drugs to keep on being skinny. It was better than chocolate laxatives and self-induced puking in the drugstore bathroom while my boyfriend waited in the car for me to steal a pregnancy test. I loved coke or whatever else I got my bony, black-nailed fingers on. I know—of course. Of course black finger nails, because who I was trying to be. And with great success I was her, her being mostly an idea. And an idea is a ghost like a thin girl is a ghost and a thin girl and an idea can both be pretty stupid. I was: I had to be to think I could drive twenty miles to what is now the 7th Best Place to Raise a Family but was then dead grass, a Dairy Queen, and a vet store.

Though I couldn’t have looked like I knew how to ride anything but maybe a boy the man took my twenty and sugary-sob-pony-story. I walked out with horse syringes in a brown paper sack, feeling pretty damn near genius all the way home to the cemented side of town, to a drugstore, to ask a pharmacist to help me give my puppy her medicine with smaller needles. Just a girl in a long sleeve flannel asking for diabetes because if works are to work they have to fit vein. I was thinking about how we use things changes them like horse shoes becomes a game, as the woman gave them to me. I am awesome, I thought in the car, as I rolled my sleeves up my tiny arm like I was pushing a wrapper off a straw. It was the best day of my life. If merit was counted in stolen goods, I already had merit badges up to my wahoo, but if it was counted in staying cool under pressure, this day, this summer shit-bag North Texas day, was the first I recognized my potential.
Your Bartender

Eats muscle relaxers after her shift because she wants to get lower than the low that comes from hating people more every time she walks out of this shit-hole, you know she’s trying to race out the door and hand-off the money like in a marathon, but your hands are fast runners, race horses shot out of the box they start touching her, the barrier of the bar-top is gone, her ass is up for grabs, its like a fur rug, you have to stroke it. Yeah, you tipped her twenty-bucks but that’s her neck. And you, you didn’t buy anything from her all night though you saw she was wearing spandex for you. Now, you’re going to ask for a hug. She doesn’t need a hug. She needs to have the till taken from her hand. She needs to go home and get under your heavy.
Up on Her Toes

I knock while her index finger is busy down the drain of her throat
calling up what she could not help but shove down.
When she answers, I think that a woman gets her body down to nothing,
slim like a credit card, a hair pin,
so it can open doors.
Her costumes bend over the arms
of all the chairs, paper clips of teeny thong panties, triangle tops, and shoes on stilts,
everything shiny like pennies rubbed for luck.
I clap when she puts one on, and bounces into the splits.
She has the same smile as when we were girls and she danced
in and out of her hips, those bony doors the beat swung open
and forgot to close. I thought how she still likes to slide
down poles, but now she’s not young, or playing,
and every cock she rubs against leaves a mark
somewhere, so she drinks, drinks and sucks off
the ones who come with hundreds. The taste is stuck
in her throat anyway, and the money helps her pay
to become a real dancer. Then up on her toes she’ll twirl away,
spinning off the spunk at the corners of her mouth
into the black space where the things we mean to forget
get hung. But for now, she’s in a club perfecting her booty pop,
milkshake, tootsie roll, back bends, lip licks, cum face
in front of a spread-legged schmuck who has his hands
like bookends on her volumes of ass
as she drops for him and he snorts her vanilla
sweat, her Monopolova and cigarettes, her dirty pussy
and Cheshire mouth. Am I missing out? I wonder if for two hundred
I could nab those legs, they dance so well,
or her hands, a bargain to paint things as they are.
And how about that voice where each sung syllable
is the child of dusk and honey?
For it I would empty my savings, I tell her this,
and she jokes, *most everything else has been sold.*
The Teenager

If I wrote a poem about your body I would have to say it is a paper-cut on the finger of whatever moment you are standing in. You are invisible to the naked eye, almost. But, you on the inside, you are a whale hardly making it in an ocean of oil, like a booted foot trying to step through blood, every print you leave gets swallowed up by the thick the moment you make a move. It’s terrible to watch this swim. To watch you barely breathe.
Counting to Ten

One
time you smoked speed from a 60 watt bulb and took a naked picture in a lake with a girl
you would forget. That picture hangs above our bed.

Two
people can eat on one another to stay alive given that they choose insignificant parts. We chose
our loveliness.

Three
times, at least, you find yourself wishing that one of us could die, either/or, it really doesn’t
matter.

Four
leaf clovers and Chinese dragons cover the pages of the magazines you look at when we score.
The hours spent choosing the next tattoo you never get, are as many as most people spend
on long honeymoons.

Five
fingers make a fist. You have watched so many fists up so many pussies you begin to punch
more than you use to.

Six
spoonfuls of Pepto Bismol will shush an sick stomach, beyond that you only hope is more dope
or sleep, which both become hard to find.

Seven
teen hours a week you teach aerobics

Eight
teen people, at least, are in every class watching the way your body screams FIT and whispers
failure

Nine
lives, you hope.

Ten
is double fisting it: two bottles of beer, or one pipe, one lighter.
Meth II: The Infinitude of Masturbation

If a tree mid-storm wanted to end the sensation of its leaves blowing it would have to throw itself down to stop as many as it could that is what I do with the pillow:
Ordinary Loss

When you walk the house you run, turning corners as if to catch the cockroaches 
before they scatter. 
There aren’t any startling noises but you race your head side to side as if there are, 
as if to catch ghosts 
who tap you on the shoulders and hide You never find them or anything else you look for, 
but you keep on 
looking out the windows of all the rooms as if your eyes, as if you 
are the light 
inside the lighthouse that must circle to keep the sailors off the rocks. The Don Quixote 
of archaeology 
you dig deep through the cardboard boxes of poems. Then randomly scatter them until they look 
like runes thrown on the carpet 
or bones of an extinct animal that hardly was, and never will be, but you still brush your eyes 
delicately across each line 
mistaking yourself for the woman who wrote them. You are different now and though you claim 
her body, 
like a forty-niner finding gold and then squandering it, you can’t claim the poems 
they filter through, 
not nugget enough, or hard enough to take the sifting. You are up and down and down and up 
and up and up and up— 
the eight hours you spend in bed you can’t wake from, being already awake. So, you pick lint 
from the sheets. 
Masturbate. Unstitch crooked seams of hair from sweaty pillowcases. And then fold one in half 
and shakily mount it 
to ride yourself again. Proving, over and over, the meth addict’s clitoris is a worry stone. 
A smooth, small thing 
that fits between the finger and thumb, or pillow, or man, and takes the worry. 
The way the rag 
will absorb the spill, or the hand can stop the guitar mid-strum—the gong, mid-gong. 
The clitoris 
is a lightning rod that swallows what the storm sends. It keeps the house from burning. 
And there is so much lightning, 
the masturbating becomes the rocking of a mentally retarded, the stimulating 
of an autistic’s leg 
that is self-caressed into a sore. And, it is only in the busied counting of hair in the shower 
that allows your clit to return, 
to un-swell like a sailboat finally in calmer waters. Look at it. Look in between your legs at what 
you’ve done. 
You can’t. You are busy with the rib jutted brown hide of your thin back where the vulture beaks 
of your finger nails 
pick, pick, pick the dead hair. You pull black branches from your flood of skinny. You snap up 
lone rattlers escaped from the bed 
of black hair like a trapper and gather the black snakes in the wicker basket of your left palm and 
count.
to keep track of your losses. You want to have a way to know how much you’ve lost. You replay the television program on hair-loss. 50 is ordinary—you push the hairs apart estimating. The woman on the T.V. says not to worry until 100 dead eels wash up on the body more and more mornings. She says there is a point of no return—that it will come suddenly, and you are not too high to know that if hair has a closing door, so does speed, so you count, today, 30 max, and smile, all your teeth are still white. You go back to bed, happy that you’re fine.