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Senior Projects Spring 2020

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

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Spring 2020

## Heaven is a Hot Tub

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# **Heaven is a Hot Tub**

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
Charlotte Foreman

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
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## Acknowledgements

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To Josie, if it wasn't already obvious –



## Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	9
<b>The canoes clamor down the gauze of the river</b> .....	10
we have come to people the way out.....	11
The Open Plain.....	12
The Royal Poinciana Hotel.....	13
Peace River.....	14
Wolf Lake.....	16
Beyond the Citgo.....	17
<b>Six fine trout leap into the row boat</b> .....	18
Shark Valley.....	19
Attempting to Reach Julia Tuttle’s Mansion in Miami by Canoe.....	20
The Rainbow Snake.....	22
The Swamp Bandits.....	24
The mangrove tunnels on the coast shift.....	25
<b>Money was the main thing</b> .....	26
<b>I live where you vacation</b> .....	28
American Dong.....	29
I live where you vacation.....	31
North Captiva.....	32
We Stashed the Honda & Went for a Swim.....	33
Bliss Soup.....	34
<b>Heaven is a hot tub</b> .....	35
that thing we call day.....	36
Heaven is a hot tub.....	38
a\$ap rocky says.....	39
Neither Leaving Here Nor Going There.....	40
Lady’s Slipper.....	41
<b>Cowbone Marsh</b> .....	42
The debutantes are like doves.....	43
The Sugar Factory.....	44

The Bog Calculator.....	46
God & Country.....	47
Don't Tread on Me.....	48
<b>the sugarcane makes a daybed.....</b>	<b>49</b>
the skimmer basket.....	50
people tell me sometimes i'm a deer sometimes.....	51
key lime milkshake.....	52
hello kitty diamonds.....	53
what you couldn't see from the beach bar.....	54
trap house tauromachy.....	55
<b>Watching Hell's Kitchen with Lucy.....</b>	<b>56</b>

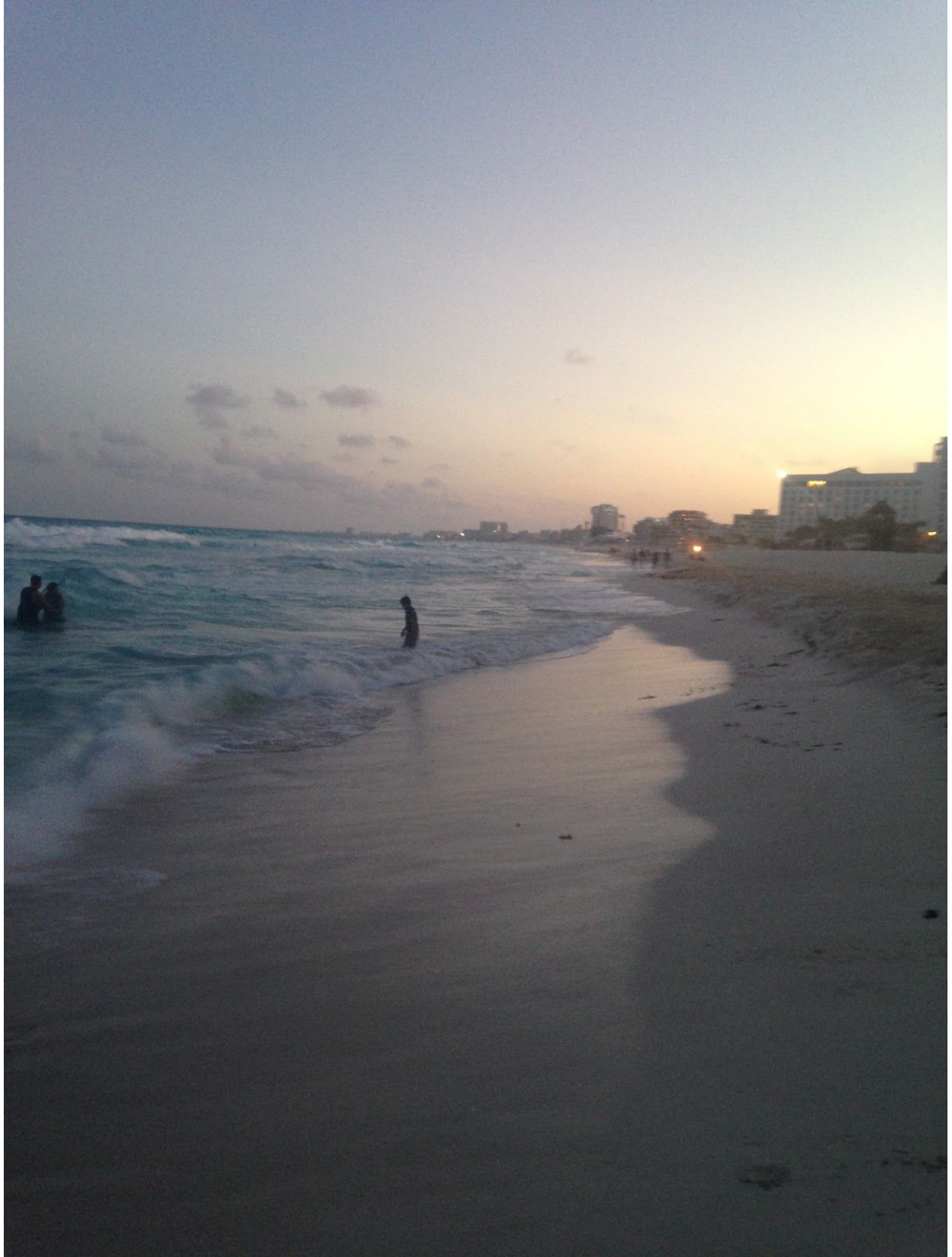
Not saints but always pupils  
pupils dilated fully black in full achievement of  
gut-feeling. Joy.

– *Alice Notley*

And drunk with my madness, I shouted down at them furiously: ‘Make life beautiful! Make life  
beautiful!’

– *Charles Baudelaire*





*If it's not all juxtaposition, she asked, what is the binding agent?*

– Forrest Gander

A lot of people don't know that most of what America considers "Florida" – the tri-county area of Miami-Dade, Broward, & Palm Beach – was underwater before it was developed. The unadulterated marshland of the Everglades flooded everything south of Orlando. On some days, so many wading birds crowded the air above that you couldn't even see the sky. Journals from Everglades reconnaissance missions recount "a great plenty of cockodrills," up to twenty feet in length. Fast forward about a century, & half of the marsh has been drained with the help of dredges, levees, & thousands of miles of canals. Fort Lauderdale is the spring break Mecca of America & Miami is as glamorous as ever, with its colossal royal palms & Art Deco, its speedboats & Rolls Royces on South Beach. 90% of the wading birds are gone, but the snowbirds from the northeast, biding out retirement on the beach, have replaced them.

Florida lies in the deep south, with its antebellum houses, matronly willows & small-town Walmarts. It's just as ugly, too: the "Dixie Highway" that runs through the wealthiest parts of West Palm Beach – not far from Mar-a-Lago – smacks of Jim Crow & in any given part of the state, Confederate flags wave off semis & Ford F-150s. The seemingly arbitrary, one-foot wall on the edge of the housing projects in Liberty City is actually what remains of an eight-foot, cement "race wall" – still standing. The strange thing is, the longer you travel down the coast on I-95 towards Miami, the more it becomes a kind of hot northeast, a melting pot of people & politics. Of *cafecitos* & health food stores, of Jai Alai & luxury apartments, yoga studios & Bernie stickers. It's as if someone cramped all of America into one, long, hot state & set the birds free.

This January, my sister turned twenty-seven. We drove three hours west into the swamp, and camped on Peace River, just the two of us. The river runs through the sleepy town of Arcadia, tucked in among hundreds of miles of orange groves. We drank whiskey & apple juice as the sun came down & gators sunned themselves on the banks of the river. Chains of Spanish moss swung in the wind on oak limbs above us & kids on dirt bikes ripped down the sandy byroads of the campground. In a journal documenting his exploration of the St. John's River & East Florida, American naturalist William Bartram writes, "...being placed so near the great savanna, the attention is quickly drawn off, and wholly engaged in the contemplation of the unlimited, varied, and truly astonishing native wild scenes of landscape and perspective, there exhibited: how is the mind agitated and bewildered, at being thus, as it were, placed on the borders of a new world!" Indeed, to travel through Florida is to discover a different world, each mile you pass through it. With my notebook & loved ones in the car, I set out into the drained marsh prairies of America's problem child, to try to understand how she came to be.

**The canoes clamor down the gauze of the river**

**we have come to people the way out**

in celebration where the rivers kiss

& shimmer with depth

pretty brutal on bog water

some ecstasies are obvious –

glamorous luster

as rain thrashes around the cypresses

& each deafening time

we pretend to be brave

on the killing floor

the muscle between

the dream & the real

contracts

a dark spasm of space

& airboat noise

wise to the light

we ought to give

## **The Open Plain**

Opium of sun on the highway vista.  
In the distance, the sugar mill hoods  
Lake Okeechobee in ash.

Confederate flags laze off eighteen-wheelers.  
Trucks of Brangus bulls, winter tomatoes  
from Immokalee.

Landfills exhale in the heat.  
Passing through Arcadia, boxcars  
of oranges draw past a schoolhouse.

The new CVS, the Eli's Western Wear.  
Aisles of cow whips, headstalls, & tie downs.  
Over unders, halters & leads.

As the sun falls, mounds of orange & blue  
come down over the outlet malls.  
Halogen lights bleach the county prison.

Razor wire flashing in the spike rush.  
The slit in the moon removes us.  
In that endless pattern,

Earth's ruthlessness revealed –  
a divot in paradise.  
So tolls the bell of tenderness, willowlike.

## **The Royal Poinciana Hotel**

It began during the Great Freeze, when  
Julia Tuttle sent that orange blossom  
to Henry Flagler as evidence  
Miami had been spared the cold  
Edenic possibility in its sunned ferns

Napoleon Bonaparte Broward  
dredged up the shoal grass  
to drain the flood plains  
& make our being here possible  
without a daily slog through swamp

Instead drinking the dew  
off white birds of paradise  
banana leaves & self-cleaning  
Christmas Palms – a kind of  
jungle champagne

Flagler's estate in the paludal bed  
writhing with snakes & wading birds  
alligator nests churn, palms stir the sky  
this watery-world-turned-lunch-date  
with teacup terriers & Gucci loafers

A paradise of citrus & tanagers  
situated between myth & luxury –  
a bypass hole. The idea you could  
rise in the cypress dome & call it  
the returns of good faith

Call it your own, as the aningas  
& night herons fan out, bull frogs  
murmur in the scrub & rat snakes  
flush the buttresses of tree stands,  
the world so ceaseless in the silver rain.

## Peace River

The canoes clamor down the gauze of the river  
that reproduces itself through miles of orange groves  
boys in wifebeaters strike oar against gunwale  
to spook the gators out of their torpor

we sign waivers to enter the gamble space  
of the jurassic & evade our paradisiacal blunders  
mid-huff in the backseat in Gainesville  
the hours of life left in us at Flanigan's lunch

Lil Uzi Vert blares down the beauty pit  
as cloud bodies divide light  
vast panes bend over horse country  
astonish us out of reason

snakes draped in cypress limbs  
mime chains of Spanish moss  
dragging currents through the water  
as they sway with the ancient wind

ankle-deep in wavelet sequence, sister and I  
watch the dusk glister through the river  
an alchemy unwinding  
beneath the constantly-renewed stars

drawl of horses, drawl of dew  
the yells of children in the near dark  
hot, golden dawns – worlds  
resolve themselves in the river bed

the choir of crawdads  
loose in the leafy algebra  
blonde stalks of forever  
over the snake bone highways

I hear you, pinnately  
in the halcyon barrel of elapsed muscle  
wading the stream gradient  
wind in the jasmine

it's just you - light's rennet  
splicing pillars in the atmosphere  
as columns of smoke  
rise up off the river grass



## **Wolf Lake**

Marissa had the idea that we could be sisters in some place boys couldn't hurt us. Maybe across town, at Wolf Lake, where plant stems bend up the marsh prairie & all the teenagers smoke spliffs in the shade of Australian pines. We'd jump the fence in the moonlight to lie in the grass with starved cattle. Occasionally, the farmer would wave his Remington from a trailer in among some willows. We'd let the beauty polish of the rain carry us home, where the ranch houses dozed beneath the gowns of oaks. Rumor has it, after a particularly nasty fight with her boyfriend, the town councilman's daughter overdosed & drowned near the mythic, sunk sedan. The horse she rode in on, it thrashed through the power lines, it whinnied & died.

## **Beyond the Citgo**

You came scrying into my life, as if, by some fabular  
circumstance, you could guess the trajectory  
of the junebugs through the swamp grass.

That some celestial Bingo might find us  
frying up summer squash in the dark.

I loved what badness looked like: to do lines  
beneath a crayoned sun, to turn up the mire,  
sucking you off in the Suwannee. Bobcats

slink beneath the highway as we magnetize  
to the hum of the gas lamps, a taste of metal

in our throats. We accrue freckles as the sun  
jams through cypress leaves, those windows holding  
the absurd cloth of days we had not yet curved pitch

with the dream knife. How we two kids became one  
in the genius of wild lime. Were we to startle

God's design from the sedge, we might be able  
to fathom the intent of his large demand. Spilling the deer  
from the copse, drawing the swans out of their nests.

if you dare walk into  
the sunny parts of heaven  
you will hear a buzz so loud  
as to make you think

– *Bernadette Mayer*

**Six fine trout leap into the row boat**

## Attempting to Reach Julia Tuttle's Mansion in Miami by Canoe

*(italicized portions drawn from James Ingraham's Diary of an Exploration Trip through the Everglades, 1923)*

Six fine trout leap into the row boat  
as we pass through the portages  
setting fire to the sawgrass  
to clear pathways for our advance

The myrtle & willow bushes  
tower above us in the swamp basin  
& alligator eyes pierce the water  
as they spy a pliable target

Mid-death roll, whipping  
around their body axis, tearing  
the limbs of prey from this world  
downward into the spike-rush

Gar ream the bloody sedge  
to bore tunnels through the morass  
wading somnambulantly  
under the red sun

Smoke envelops:  
*but for the bayou  
in which I stood  
would have burned me up*

A native woman laughs  
when we ask her how long to Miami  
*eleven days for the white man  
& two for the native*

We slog rations of hominy  
cold coffee for bogging  
as the sun beats down  
on miles of marsh prairie

A panther bakes in the brush  
dead of rainfall mercury  
the summer thunderstorms scattered  
from heavy industry out back

Left from nights of turtle soup  
mounds of terrapin shells  
form islands in the sedge  
snook dart around the alligator lilies

We stop to rest in the mud  
near a moccasin nest  
ripping apart deer jerky  
in the mantic dark

Egrets blanch the old lemon groves  
one man sleeps on the hole  
to keep the snakes in, all quiet  
but for the palms thrashing in the wind.

## **Shark Valley**

every day of wet season  
thunderheads gore light

my heart an egret bowl

elephants raid the baobab  
while vicissitudes of moon

flood the swamp parallels

in the galleon of abalone  
fiddler crabs shimmy

a vigil from leaf litter

the python a prize  
from the rubber tree

not less because its threat

clusters in the loon  
tub as in limestone

the years pile

## The Rainbow Snake

that night at the show Buggy's mutt threaded around Michael's legs  
none of us had ever heard of a rainbow snake we assumed it was the cough syrup talking  
he said Connor had pulled into the Marathon to fill up the van & he slid out to pee in the bushes  
the hot, May rain glistened beneath sodium-vapor lamps & there  
the whip, blue-black  
iridescent  
streaks of yellow & red so bright he almost mistook it for stray caution tape  
it slipped across the road and into the shoal grass  
a mythic ribbon into the hinterland  
the kind of snake he'd thought he'd seen  
hasn't been recorded since 1952 it's thought to be extinct  
the rarest snake in America  
lying in bed tonight  
I love the idea his deluded system had dreamt up such a creature  
like OJ spilling out the Bronco door it didn't matter if it was true  
what matters is the permission we give ourselves to be shocked  
each time weird articulations of a vanished god arrive  
like fish rising up out of the canal so dark at night  
hard to even know what you're looking at  
when surprise can have any valence – positive, negative, neutral

at the virtual birthday party I unearth this common fossil from the weedbed:  
we all inhabit the error of the bird margin, climbing into life with sea-legs  
even Kim Jong Un is in a vegetative state  
even Kim Jong Un is dead & the secret bodies of Andover startle me from the laundry  
& today is significant because these versions of us will expire  
what are your coping mechanisms for when you feel feral and alone  
I have no idea for my days are but breath



## **The Swamp Bandits**

Driving down Alligator Alley towards the Miccosukee Casino  
& Seminole Bingo, alternations of the wind sweep the slough,

Heaving up trailer lore of 1920's gladesmen – the Ashley Gang  
robbing banks & rum-running from Bimini to the Jupiter Inlet.

“Queen of the Everglades,” Little Laura Upthegrove wears  
a billowing white dress, a .38 revolver strapped to her waist

As she disappears into the drainage scrub in a Model 30  
at the mercy of gators and hogs. In palmetto thickets

Shaded with banana leaves, she tends the whiskey stills,  
obliging hordes of mosquitoes to drink freely from her.

John Ashley is under suspicion of murder – Desoto Tiger  
found dead on a dredging site near Okeechobee.

Police cars idle in the dust on the swamp perimeter,  
unaccustomed to the wild peregrinations of cracker cowboys.

Shootout: a bullet ricochets off a car window, Ashley's  
jailed & fitted with a glass eye. Feigns good intent & released

For road repair. He slips back into the primordial order  
of the swamp, the murmurations of birds so thick

They preclude the afternoon sky. Those dead legends  
haunt the drained Tamiami– construction's gory aftermath

Where miles of canals & levees  
construct the brackish edge of paradise,

All Heaven's questions resolved  
then & there in the muggy afterlife.

## The mangrove tunnels on the coast shift

rework themselves until they unravel

become striated arrows into the salt marsh

a year is a slot in oolitic limestone

holding surface areas of white because they are so *recent*

once thawed, ice releases its ability to give back in albedo

something big inside you upon knowing it; miracle = fact, as Levertov would have it

I had a strange feeling I was somehow past death

geographically speaking

**Money was the main thing**

*Money was the main thing. That the lobstermen ran out of work & had boat loans to pay off, that young anglos dreamed of Rolexes as much as Colombian kingpins needed gringo expertise. Miami was merely a convenience – like a long finger, reaching into the subtropical latitudes, where the tentacles of the Medellín cartel splayed out & raged through the hemisphere. Thousands of unused airstrips welcomed the hustle of prop planes skirting the radar net at the border, and the Everglades' cryptic mire obscured recruits as they trained for guerilla warfare in slash pines and fetterbush. Our saga begins with the Falcon Brothers – Taby and Willie – who, more inclined to the celerity & thrill of speedboat racing, dropped out of high school to begin their family business in a kind of “retail.” Whipping through the Caribbean, beneath false decks, they hauled cocaine from the Bahamas to the shores of South Florida. Operations took off, freighters docking at Port Miami with metric tons of the stuff hidden in fiberglass yams. Planes flew in covertly, about eighty an evening, to unload whole bales in the dark scrub. Their friend Sal kept meticulous accounting, his transaction ledgers the only way of knowing how much was being moved beyond the seized cargo. According to him, Mickey Munday was making 2.5 million a trip to fly product in & the Federal Reserve said, one year, the currency surpluses totalled near \$5 billion. Coin-O-Wash banks opened to launder what drug lords couldn't spend living lavishly at The Mutiny hotel & leasing mansions with cash. Business was a delicious threat beneath the sago palms – deals arranged al fresco, over lunches of mackerel and rice. But all those narcobucks didn't come without a cost; you wouldn't believe the hot copy lawlessness of those cowboys with Uzis, all of breakfast's lies turned truth by evening. Homicide upsurge so bad, the medical examiner once rented a Burger King truck to hold the morgue overflow. They'd find bodies floating amongst the yachts on Miami River like Dixie cups. Customs couldn't keep up: “What we do is basically react,” the agent said. In the Florida Keys, they burned tons of seized cargo in agricultural incinerators. In Miami, they burned it in the generators of the Florida Power & Light Corporation. Each day a new hustle, the start of death inextricable from the peak of ecstasy, which wreaked havoc on God's waiting room, where seniors would cash out Social Security checks & stake plastic flamingos out by the mailbox. Eventually, the nights of machine gun chatter grew quiet, as cops flushed the Miami International Airport with canines & cable networks televised the scandal. Magic City returned to stasis as a hot purgatory between mayhem & mundanity, the surf pounding reliably as ever, while sundry shops on South Beach peddled sex wax & g-strings. The glitz of bloodied tropics filled the resorts carved into drained marshland & every March, spring breakers overflowed the Elbo Room beach bar in Fort Lauderdale. Out west in cow country, Walmarts cropped up like weeds, semis roasted on dirt highways & after the long haul, those swamp cowboys unwound in front of their TV sets, waiting, as they always did, for their mules to arrive with a fix.*

It's the tropics, everyone goes to pieces in the tropics!

– *Where the Boys Are* (1960)

**I live where you vacation**

## American Dong

By the bridge extending over Pidgeon Key / redheaded Bridgette from  
Lake Worth / on the bow of an '18 Cigarette Marauder / writhes to Diplo

in alligator leather / whipping out of the irruptive sun / body horror  
of the frat house / it fucks us into fervor / and glimpses of pure heat

sweating, snorting certain veterinary dissociative anesthetics / we fall back  
on pool floats / jerk out the autopic / our attention to day smears / floating

sea-green & face-up / watching the diurnal rhythms of birds unfold  
Connecticut Kristen tells us how she totalled her Lexus / barred out in

the Whole Foods parking lot like Selena Gomez in *Spring Breakers*  
we're messing around in striated wealth / full of incomplete and flashing

colors / we pass through the tunnel beneath the airport runway / sodium  
floodlights glisten on the roofs of taxi cabs / a moon on the waterless

wade-space / where it's cruise day / ever since we started getting tattoos  
our boomer neighbors have been telling my sister and me about the holy

eternal / meanwhile, Miami Subs' neon pink circuitry snaps the back off  
the batshit motel / eating boneless wings under fluorescent lights

really nice day / sitting on your lap in the anthropocene / Gucci Mane  
screams into limpid night / new every moment the body reconstitutes itself

& on the roof of the hotel palms inflate around us / bird clades inflect  
a sense of doom over distant barges / somatic bursts of martyrdom

in the nacreous dark / do my death a favor & insert your love in my  
effortless procedure / where manatees doze under black water

in the no-wake zone of the boat show / Spicer says any fool can get  
into an ocean / while in chain restaurants we surrender ourselves

to the ways we fail / succumb to a generic life in plastic patio chairs / truth is,  
dolphins are really very violent / & Miami will flood everyday at high

tide by 2050 / we are so drastically twenty-two / chasing peacocks  
off the roof / staying lachrymose at happy hour / jonesing for the ultimate

disco playlist / we find *joie de vivre* in our “rich inner worlds”  
succumbing to vacation haruspicy / beneath beach bar string lights

& swing of moon / approximations of the waves fill conch carcasses  
with life / when we bring them to our ears & listen the sound

of the ocean weakens the binds of daily obligation / & when we  
drive back from Homestead / mamey sapote on our hands sweet & sticky

the undulating pulse of sundown beats upon the strip malls  
& King Cones / if I could obscure you from wave action & the harebrained

philosophy of personhood / we might both be able to stay good  
& occupied as the climate ends / & the buildings swim us all away

## **I live where you vacation**

working on a new business model  
where people give me money to watch me work  
my fingers beneath the skin of the ripest mangoes  
& eat them with my hands, sucking on  
the stone, juice running down my wrists  
& onto the soft flesh that wraps around,  
neaped in the cotton of my grade school gym shorts



## North Captiva

Mom found the island in a magazine. Every year after that, we would put a few pounds of cheese, bread, & some burger meat on a boat & go live on the beach for a week. North Captiva was the same paradise every spring – the traffic of land tortoises on gravel roads, the sun cooking the kayakers, lilac & teal beach rentals where we'd watch *Saturday Night Fever* on VCR or string seashells into mobiles. Each night, we bounded through the tidal flats of the inlet Hurricane Charley had cut as the sun splashed down. Playing in the surf, we were at the whim of the world. I remember bringing the dying bird seashells of water to drink. I remember the helicopter that flew in for the woman with an urchin in her foot, & one morning, golf cart patrol outside a shuttered house after a suicide. As the years passed & we grew older, we stopped going as frequently, & then not at all. After the hurricane, we returned to the island to pay our respects. The abandoned stilt houses genuflected to the tide, which had culled in the shore by hundreds of yards. Raccoons pillaged dumpsters of debris for fast food wrappers. Walking along the beach, there were no kayakers, no sunset picnics. The mammalian whip of the gulf flayed the sand.

-

## **We Stashed the Honda & Went for a Swim**

Fourth of July, we're back in Pompano  
where my glasses get fogged up & all  
my clothes smell like a warm bath  
fireworks scintillate every city  
down the coast from  
Deerfield to Miami  
hash up the night sky  
before they vanish  
into the dark channel  
like the sun on those  
puddles of stars in the  
glitter factory parking lot  
I digress through fistfuls of light  
tossed out on the cerebral water  
a brine-child in the earth's turned waves  
everything comes to rest through circle & gyre  
& all night long in the fish-filled waters you take your  
fill as the cruise ships plunge towards paradise & back again



O love,  
where are you  
leading  
me now?

– *Robert Kelly*

**Heaven is a hot tub**

**that thing we call day**

Josie & I fuck around / in the Plantation punk squat / wiping our  
noses on the surface of the sun / micro-moments of island time

tender us nearer death's impossibility / smoking blunts on the balcony  
as waterfowl thrash in the banana trees below / our makeshift timeshare

sits empty in a limbo / of ambien residue & hair bleach / Josie & I  
in days outside necessity / embark in a bliss of hours / slung loose

behind the bathroom door / Michael sleeping / his hair makes a wet nest  
in the 3 p.m. light / Delsym patterns keep us awake / wandering without

conclusion / through the hot totality / we cut lines & climb across  
the order beyond order / knocking of spoon against dish / a conversation

of angels / as the sun rises I flirt with you / & empty the yellowtail  
our desires welling up like cypress knees in rivers too shallow to swim

in for fear the alligators will eat us up / we lie along the river's edge  
& spring back renewed / the water glistens around us / afternoon comes

with its half-shaded plantains / my love has always been yours / I couldn't  
give you enough if I tried / always we must reach around ourselves

to touch each other / I hold you as you dream / I gather  
those parts of you / made blonde by sunlight

## Heaven is a hot tub

Heaven is a hot tub Josie says  
& I agree to slide light in the whirl  
of the blue bathroom she shoots up in

I'm moved to remember her eyes  
from the abject boscage  
so braced into that system of elision

nodding as the sun dips  
like wild horses swim  
in the heat of private devotion

the clouds trap & release  
shadows in the sand  
topping off at the Marathon

light through my fingers  
as I shield my eyes from sun

watching the surf remember itself  
again & again  
in the nacreous eiderdown of day

**a\$ap rocky says**

fukk

sleep

a\$ap says

it's okay

the hosts

of night

dashed into

sportive aether

as brute

creation

roasts

the grasses

& lilies

of the swale

our bodies

framed

in rock doves

bound

to the doom

of the haze



## Neither Leaving Here Nor Going There

I float on the jewel pool  
drink Jai-Alais, shiver

in the dark understory  
of mango trees.

The swamp chants, ancient doors  
open the knowledge bed

from which gazes arise.  
Frogs croak as snakes

slipping through a peat bath  
kiss upside down

the rumored mamey  
of the heart.

The blood of marsh rabbits  
rules the floor

& old moon spills  
her sophistry.

## Lady's Slipper

where the serpent's spirit falls  
in evening's bath of violet  
a bird alights on the lustrous bog  
vibrating the orchid castle in the reedbed

jellyfish coruscate  
around a box turtle  
shapeshifting, while  
solution holes hum with marl

in early morning, someone  
at the water park  
turns the pumps on  
ushering the flood down  
in fistfulls of snowy plover

we renew each day  
in our plush lagoon  
cramped with tankinis  
& whippoorwills

Fill your black hull  
with white moonlight.

There will never be an end  
to this droning of the surf.

– *Wallace Stevens*

## **Cowbone Marsh**

**The debutantes are like doves**

when you were born / in a passive red sluice  
some hot providence asked the palms to move

Heaven's ferns peeled back / to give you an orange  
from the groves of Orlando / light flooded the tidal

marshes / in a place south-er than south / afternoon  
sun presses through Spanish moss / I don heels

from Kohl's / a baby blue dress / become a woman  
in the community center / all these lives around me

## **The Sugar Factory**

Cowbone Marsh pools up inside me  
through the hallways of cypresses  
on Fisheating Creek. Thunderheads  
move over the dark grasses that sway  
in incomprehensible concert, carving  
patterns in the air above the peat.

We paddle over an alligator nest  
as wind tambourines the river &  
black eyes gore the water like root knobs –  
a prehistoric trick.

The rhizomatic groves release us  
from the grip of logic, this swamp  
a hoop, expanding & contracting  
with the force pushed against it.  
Melaleucas on the banks sleep  
through the oar clang,  
bare-boughed & brown.

In Clewiston, a woman in blue lace  
is drinking a Fanta at reception.  
She tells us the Inn restaurant  
has been closed six years now  
with no foreseen reopening.

We drive through the Git 'N Go  
for Doritos & blue Gatorade  
the rhythmic buildup of the uncanny  
smears all over our little hot faces.

## The Bog Calculator

Bathing in the Suwannee, the river courses  
with numbers & bird bones. Divine algorithms  
in the ferns move the cloud array above, networking  
the systems of alligators. They wed the hardwood hammock  
to the horseshoe crab – a perfect economy of real estate – & fasten  
instinct to animal, that cattle might hunker down in anticipation of the rain.  
To become animal is to participate in the overlap of self & world, to integrate.  
Wavelets echo round your torso as you wade through, bringing the circuits  
of snakes to a boil, as kids from Homosassa kick up sugar sand on ATVs,  
disappear in the mess of marsh. Beneath the stars, a lynx stalks  
through the accidental Bible swarm, past the turnpike Arby's,  
the gas station in Jasper. In the morning, vultures  
hold vigil over the night's carrion. The trailers  
stir awake. I put the coffee on  
& watch the girls eat.

## God & Country

He baits a wire trap with a whole chicken & climbs down to set it in the muck of the basin. Prodding the hole with a hunting rod, he feels around the gathering. The gators are roused from their slumber in the dank grass. Something beyond the imagination heaves, deep in the earth: *No feeling in the world like when that rod slides along the gator's back.* He jabs it nearer the raw fowl & into the mouth of the cage – the door slams shut. For raw sport, the hunter upheaves the animal from the land of unbridled inundation, of shells & dissolved vegetables, & tows it to nearby tourist attractions. He follows the procedure each time demand calls to see the local gore, to witness the bounds of prelapsarian fury. Barebacking the beast at Gatorland, the patrons revel in what they can't control. He lets them hold its jaw closed in their hands. It doesn't feel ire anymore; only the weight of the sky above, the sting of gravel at its core.



## **Don't Tread on Me**

O shibboleth daddy  
I am no fool

I smoke out the Swamp Ape  
His gown of red hair his myriad monikers

O Swampsquatch O Cabbage Man

Feed me your weird jabber  
Your 90s your UFO your Monika Lewinsky

I trap Castro in a sea shell I glue you to your television

& when the vault of Heaven rips  
& the returns of God's fury  
rain down in black ash

I'll be waiting with Bible & glock  
to cure the marred sun

Hear the wind outside  
The bloody shell of your life.

*– Jack Spicer*

**the sugarcane makes a daybed**

**the skimmer basket**

& when we hopped the fence to the Parc Court pool / the light  
scrambled on the surface of the water / I knew we had entered

the suburban sublime / stoned we skinned our knees / fucking  
in the jacuzzi / I look you in the eyes / it's easy / for once

everything resolved / in the bassy arms of Kodak / we vibe  
dissociation loops of water / vamping gently against us

with a glock in your hand / you bore a hole in the death  
lagoon / the marine air purple & heavy / to love you is

to shotgun the loss box / is to fuck around the dream girdle  
drinking Yuenglings in Flipp's bed / when the 808 drops

impossible horses wild with heat / on the ocean floor  
the pearls fan out / you choke me on that tension mat

**people tell me sometimes i'm a deer sometimes**

*the sugarcane makes a daybed* flanking US 27  
shards of limestone slice our ankles in panels of mud

as we run along the habits of the swamp  
the highways wrap around the blue night

I still your hand on a rhythm of floors  
as you shoot up wearing Flipp's shirt

because love's a bitch tho  
your plug on 53rd & 3rd makes you finite

easier to give than take away from you  
& your blood on the bathroom tile

it's a locking mechanism  
Byron brought into being –

*I will not ask where thou liest low  
Nor gaze upon the spot*

we sweat through day again  
beneath some slaughtered star

where the air's personal architecture  
haloes you in a growing dawn

you hold it down in all the shit Toto saw  
coalesce a child pile in my body arch

*It's enough for me to prove  
That what I lov'd, and long must love  
Like common earth can rot*

Sound tenders here in the fronded sunrise  
I sleep in that inert expanse of color

*all of thine that cannot die*

## key lime milkshake

pulsing through Walmarts  
& banana trees, tricks  
of the light ferment

the cabal of rattlers  
& bromeliads spill  
madrigal drone of katydids

angels in soft junctures  
raise our heads to prayer  
our mouths full of guava

as the waves perform  
their catharsis  
over & over again

## hello kitty diamonds

You're pretty tonight  
in the glow  
of the Steak 'N Shake,  
as the begonias  
press through the dark  
to spread themselves.  
Something shrieks  
from the palmettos, beyond  
the light we guillotined  
doing bumps in Magic City.  
Spavined off a speedball,  
you press your finger  
to the white of my eye.  
It stunts my breath &  
amplifies our finitude.  
Whatever noise you make  
from the bad abyss,  
I'll be there, waiting  
in the infant surf  
hearing your death  
before me – a knell  
in the virtual dark,  
multiplied by schools  
of minnows.

### **what you couldn't see from the beach bar**

the nurse shark was an obsession / plundered from the endless season of  
water / they dragged it around downtown Miami by a rope / peddled it  
for ten dollars at the fish markets / they believed in the illicit journey from  
sea to land / the apotropaic essence of things born outside of the known  
world / things gored from the celestial relish of the sea / so auspicious  
they make irrelevant the absolute conditions we scam from the ocean's  
bottom / it gasped and bled on the floor of the Metromover / hauled over  
a paradise of lycra and puka shells / over towing garages & housing  
projects / & left for dead in the basket of a Publix shopping cart / its  
captors sleep beneath the causeway / & in the morning sun that is new  
again / they wander off into the steam of the groves / the six-foot shark  
stopping traffic / what divine fluke had damned it there / buzzing snout  
to tail with flies?

## trap house taumachy

That picture of you  
with the AR-15 on your

plug's bed in Austin is  
honestly kind of hot.

The spliced light of morning  
thrown over your shoulder

like a bas-relief of Mithra  
killing the sacred bull:

atop the beast he grips  
him by the nostrils

with the left hand & works  
the knife with his right.

Black neck cleaved  
beneath the driving rain

as the animal soul bursts  
through its bands of death.

Star of the East! Decanted  
from mortal frame

streams of blood  
flow into the fosse.

A priest reborn for  
eternity as he is laved,

the brute driven from  
realm to sacred realm.



When wild things happen, we behave like ourselves.

*– John Colletti*

## **Watching Hell's Kitchen with Lucy**

*for Austin*

*o Christ that you were my calling card  
in tricked out squall country*

*that chance may find us  
in the violet-gold dusk fluid*

*outside DQ Grill & Chill  
shots of the hyperreal*

*driving a Barbie car  
through the land of milk & honey*

*caterwaul into neon wilderness  
textless immediate & lush*

*all the mantic ciphers that drive rivers  
& find us where we are*

*so we might heal together  
in the Oz of the South*

*listening to the sound of the surf  
at night lapsing into land*

Watching Hell's Kitchen with Lucy, her guinea pig burrows between us,  
squeaking contentedly in the blue light. Our knees collapse into a bridge

as Ramsay screams about undercooked scallops & the chefs of 2009  
rehash their mistakes, teary-eyed in some chain hotel room. If he weren't

fouling the blanket, this rodent could almost be human – a ball of heat,  
intervening as he squirms around our large world. We touch each other

& the middle of our minds melt in a room locked off in language.  
We are so ceaselessly being, worming around these dishes of hot

coconut oil & giving beautiful things to each other  
via the love-gnosis chain.

The world is always trying to convince us of things more worthy of our time.  
One would not think twice about the security of the sunrise, of the waves' constancy.

But then, something jars us out the myopia of our chance priorities: an overdose,  
a heart attack, a mass shooting on Valentine's Day. Our faith thwacks open,

like a springform pan. The rainbow being purely locational over the swamp &  
each day shorn from the wreckage of the wax myrtle.

When Austin died, it became obvious that what you need to do, is become a batch of light  
& smear yourself around in people until they believe you, like love or like water.

Over fishbowl cocktails, I watch my best friend's heart break in Alphabet City.  
I want to take all her pain & throw it in the Gowanus with the heavy metals

& black mayonnaise & mutant fish, but some things are out of our reach. I feel  
like a phony in my three-piece suit, fishing for a day job, while opiates raze

the American pastoral. Like Britney, I too break down in the Bud Light badinage,  
trading Ritalin for Oxys as dogs unspool around the curated vegetation.

When we were eight, Jeana told me to pour milk in my eyes to stop the chlorine sting.  
Now she goes to state school & I'm talking you into service while you're nodding,

I'm weeping still & loud as if for an animal & Marissa is telling me I have agency  
over myself & my feelings & Gwyneth Paltrow is telling me to breathe –

We can't help ourselves from states of urgency. Strange cuts of fate  
shatter our worldview & glide us into life. Thrashing the pool to Drake

during the pandemic, the neighbor's kids hang to completion the earth end.  
For the shock of the osprey, Ben swerved & flipped his car on the reservation,

blood and glass raining down the seatbelted necks of boys. They fished  
each other out beneath the unrefined sun, scattering all the hot, mating lizards.

When Austin died, I realized all this would be pointless if letting go were easy.  
We return to where we began, to ground ourselves as the birds throw themselves  
around the sky. We toss Wonder bread into God's waterways as the palms haul over  
ridiculous space, watching color arrive in the rain.