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The Sad Zoo

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

THE SAD ZOO

By

Amy Richerson

A CREATIVE THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Fine Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

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THE SAD ZOO

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The Sad Zoo is an exploration of contemplating life through the lens of anything involving animals, from the biological to the kitsch, from the assumed to the amusing. The idea of the animal self, as well as the relationship between the human mind and the animal spirit, is a constant obsession and, by choosing to consider the heightened senses that are often unused by human beings, triggers absurd connections. This text works with the absurdity in a way that is quiet and naïve, yet aware and artful. Discovering the world through the animal spirit has long been a way that can allow the human closer to his or her essential self. This text attempts to capture this closeness as the thin distance between the feel of the skin to the feel of the world, as well as what gets in the way.

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ONE

Kind of Blue

I remember what was
almost green

as blue.

The car I was not supposed to
be a passenger in

and the ocean that night.

I remember what was not blue—
your eyes,
the circles under your eyes.

The interstate is sometimes.

Driving until everything
was purple in the morning,
orange.

Missing the turn-off
for the quarry
you knew as a child,
but forgot how to get there
unless we were walking.

In the pancake house
with the blue plastic booths,
you couldn't believe your bad luck—
telling about finding
the dead cow on your father's farm.
Said it was like a conspiracy
the way the markings looked like hieroglyphics,
the blood on a stone.

Couldn't concentrate—
trying to find out a song with no words.

Kept going—
It goes like this...
It goes like this

Amphibian

Means double life,
life in water
life on land.
I know

both places. I have
skimmed ponds,
brought up shells
from the bottom,

laid out on the bank,
left town. Left
fish to fry, had
Midwest breakfasts

on my way back
to the ocean,
had plenty of land,
made do

with streams and
puddles. Took care
to step through
both lives

evenly, with a heart
for mistakes,
for better, for worse,
frogs, frogs.

Scarce Crow

stepping out in danger

the crow

I know the crow means death.

with a thin wing

an acorn heart

age.

poised on a chain link

I ravage through the trees here.

I savage what is left. over.

A frame of sky

through
between branches.

the heart is a must.

Old Crow

Ate the last ghost.
Had an inside-the-attic taste.
Moist wood when the door opens.
Wanted you back.

Who is that dude in the middle playing his thigh like a banjo?

For his birthday every year.
Pour beer on his grave.
Make a pipe out of a steel reserve can.
Drive back home on the interstate.

Where in the bible does it say?

Two years later he is thin, thin.
Stranglehold on the radio.
Someone says worms, gross.
Just stand there and imagine.

A black dog statue walked across the field.

Crow

The world is black
when I say it.
Lighted
on this roof rim
in this late night
early morning.

After Anne Frank
and everything.

Everyone I've ever met in a bar
and didn't sleep with.
That's about everyone.

I'm into forearms—
it's the whole
come back to me
come back to me.

By obeying the entity
I obey the entirety.

So much for Saturday.
I don't even know what that means.

Ditched, mud, new nests
on the window boxes but

ashes—
I am brutalized by the lifetimes
weighing on me—
the suitcase of the world is on me.

The Knees

Don't remember the cold free stone
knees, scraping
the floorboards.

Door shut, the steady outdoors
rush in through the cracks and crowd
the curtains, the glass
thins out : fragile at the center.

So what : any extreme will create a fondness
for the opposite, run
the fingernails across the heart : a grit, as if
everyday was yesterday, a bright
season, a taking back to, a swirl sudden of leaves, determining
their biography, as they fall.

Experiment in Marriage

I broke two eggs
in a cast iron skillet

and waited until I was
wearing the butterfly costume.

I've been an endangered species before,
I've been Kurt Cobain.

We went to the breakfast place
you wanted because you had fond memories,

but I wanted new ones.
The night before we were snakes in the grass,

we were REO Speedwagon.
I held a toothpick at the end of the world

and you kept motioning as if to say
how lucky of us, to even be here.

Pear

Sinking teeth into land I
 married my husband I
 found a dried leaf was a
 large moth on an outdoor
 staircase on a day like today
 in between green and yellow

it was in between your
 birthday and my birthday
 it was kitchen counter flat
 it was oven door hot
 a nightmare happening in a
 mirror not-wearing-
 lingerie-to-bed-night a-
 never-wore-lingerie-to-bed-
 anyway night he's not
 coming home night
 wouldn't matter if we was
 night a hardwood floor
 in October kind of feeling in
 Georgia kind of feeling I
 kept stacking drinking glasses
 in the middle of the floor it
 was like I couldn't help it it
 was a

dried leaf on an outdoor staircase
 was actually a moth actually
 extremely rare actually like
 sinking your teeth into a pear
 when your teeth are when your
 pear is

In Pearl S. Buck's Yard

We ran wild taking pictures in the lightning before the rain,
as if we were both young. The whole time thinking about *The Good Earth*,

trying, desperately, to explain about the first poor wife, the pearls she kept where, how
she was treated so bad. The afternoon before an early snow, West

Virginia. Looking through the windows at her cellar kitchen, the dishes stacked still,
yellow and blue. The yard made a sudden playground, everything was joy.

The mountains around rested at our shoulders. We were on a track, circling the painted
house like painted horses. The cold made for more excitement

as we ran to stay warm, to the barn, the outhouse, the wooden barrel we could not
understand, where the leaves were and the hem of our pants.

We contemplated the brown stick patch of crop, what grew there when.
You, a long time divorced, but a cut that lasts, the body mad. Later the heaviness

of stones we picked up for souvenirs settled as we drove up the mountain.
The car close to the edge as a person on a path. I pulled you and pulled you back.

The Problem with Jack Gilbert, or How I Spent my Summer Vacation

It was all about sex
about not having it
and having it.
And what happened in Prattville, Alabama
10 years ago
or last night
when I looked at what I thought was an oak tree
for 5 hours.

While he washed his grandmother with a wet rag
in the living room
I waited in the screened-in porch
next to the African violets
in a thin white slip
for him to be done
and noticed how the grass was beginning to grow
over the filled-in swimming pool.

Heat
and if what one can ever know about it
really means anything in the end.

Sometimes I would hear her crying out
from another room
and I would hold still
until it passed.
Afraid about what to do for her
at this point.

At night we drove the old cotton highways
where he grew up
and he told me stories
of what used to be where and what happened.

When once we came across
three cows that had cut
through the wire fence
and were angry to be walking down the road
in the middle of the night.

They turned their heads to snort at us as we came on.
The headlights catching onto the silver and gray

and brown of their necks.
The dirt caked where
the barbs
had caught them just enough.

TWO

Bury the Hatchet

After all this time
I do not wonder
what was the problem—

But where?
I never felt I held a little purse
or put a note in a shoe.

To share
a bad growing,
It was everywhere inside me.

And where my hand
could not move, a mowing—
my heart could, would.

I still think of the red dress
I bought on sale
for the event.

Was going to be beautiful.
A teenage stint,
a number.

A hell
flowing out
from a bridge or window.

It was too big still
and I swore it off.
All night with a high heeled

Shoe in my hand
thinking—what? what?
like a cough.

Asking the wrong question.
When I would do anything to feel—
Do a handstand on grass—

The time has come to grow older.
I am bold by now—

a glint of a girl

As a woman walking,
terrible,
and on stilts.

The cull of myself
a trap into life.
I do not regret it.

Dr. told me—blitzes—
and I knew.
That's me!

I am the longest nights.
~~I am. The loudest.~~
The loudest.

My new hands
are a string,
lifted—

Up to, into
an abyss, bliss.
I do not know

The travelers, the road anymore.
A happy sack of self.
A solitary

Tree split into a forked tongue,
lightning—
above a nothing Armageddon.

It is not so grand,
baby on the piano,
naked all night.

The pictures of
I took
to create a painting from

Are sweet now, only sweet.
I can see the tabletop I miss with,
lightly, my little red fist.

Winos

I wonder what happened to the room
with the mattress on the floor.

Every night
we practiced portraits in oil pastel

drawing on
what we knew about lines,

the shortest distance between
or the going around.

We would never know
what we were doing,

pretended at wine snobbery
as if we could tell

the hint of walnut

over boysenberry.

Lighting Jason Molina's Cigarette

Was awkward, I was all fingers, fists
trying to be doves, not working,
talking about Halloween,
how he dressed his dogs up as pumpkins.
I was thinking about how short he was,
how he had lost a lot of weight,
he could have been Prince.
He could have been Dorian Gray.

Working on the Candle

Trying to make all three wicks burn at once.

It has rained so much
I can smell the river.

What is anything but
looking, touching, thinking.

I can't see
where the dark ends
on the branches of the tree
against it.

I use a used bath towel for a blanket

and think poor little—
diddle, diddle.

Push the wax down all the way around.

I come out on the porch
to work on the candle.

Susan Sarandon's Breasts

We fight in the middle of the kitchen
seeing
who can google it first.

About whether they're great
or could you see them in her last movie.

When I call it off, call a truce
he asks

what will happen
to all the years we were together?

Do you mean, I ask,
about what happens afterward?

The body doesn't go back to before we met
so you wear every sting, every habitual breakfast.

It's like building a really good sandcastle
so you can destroy it right before
you have to check out of the hotel.

It's like knowing the right answer
but no one asking the question.

I say,
tell me about peaches, passion fruit,
pumpkins.

Tell me how you wish you were.

Ryan Lochte Will Let You Down

Like any sweet handsome
in sunglasses
a good man will
fall to lucky unfortunate
and syntax.

A Michelangelo in motion.
You want to tap your fist lightly on a ken doll chest.

Run for cover. Run for the hills.

The body is a machine, but
like a mother-of-pearl machete, it is beautiful, brutal.

Courtney Love playing Blanche Dubois
in an off-off Broadway play.

Chuck Norris swimming through land.

Luke Bryan dancing.

John Darnielle covering
Ace of Base.

It doesn't matter if you know
any of these people.
That's not the point.

Because when the Cowboy Junkies' cover of *Sweet Jane*
plays at the end of the night,
at a strip club in Nebraska,
and a sad brunette walks out on stage
with her head down and no makeup on,
slowly grips the pole
and swirls to the ground

you kind of love her a little bit,
as much as you can love anyone.

Growlery

A girl clogs down the slow cooker aisle
like a parade behind her mother.
Behind her mother like a parade.

Anywhere you go it's like toe heel,
toe heel, whatever.

Remember when she put ice cubes in milk?
It was that kind of day.

Would pour it in a bowl, set it on the floor.
To eat it like an animal
next to the grown up table.

Her horse/cat/dog moves are very realistic.
She has it down pat.

Remember a spider as big as the swing set.
Past that terror and onto the new one.

Only a huge raccoon trapped in the attic.
Only a coyote stalking the edge of the yard.

What the World is Coming to

I had to walk down a busy street
with no sidewalks
and what I remember most
were the cigarette butts
lining the roads, especially
condensed around at intersections.
I thought—this is myself.
If it's going to be a long light
why not light up another one?
It was the most fun when
I learned to flick the ash
and then the butt
to the gutter.
The curb held it all, happy because
look at all these people thinking about
what to do next
and when to let go.

Where this Country is Going

It's like hearing an ambulance siren during a lecture.
Or when it sounds like someone is yelling your name through the open window of a passing car. Except they're not.

When your faucet leaks how long do you live with it?

When you had lice as a child how long did you live with it?

When did you stop wishing you could have one of those huge stuffed unicorns you could only win at the fair?

I've got this joke that begins: 4 Statue of Liberties cross the street and walk into a Wells Fargo. True story.

One time I listened for 30 minutes to what I thought was the summer-night-bugs sound from my grandmother's house in Tennessee but it was actually the potato in the oven. I guess because of the oil.

There is a lot to life.
Not every fortune is sewn on a string.

Sometimes it doesn't hit you

until you are taking down a Christmas tree, Christmas tree, Christmas tree,
one ornament, light strand, needle, branch, at a time.

White Crane

we come upon
a down phoenix
phoenix down

were going to do it
in the trees
until

this white bird there
only an outline of itself now
the insides only

bottle caps and fishing line wound into
little organs of what
could be beautiful

I could make out a cerulean cigarette lighter
where the heart would have been

THREE

Frida Kahlo Makes Me Answer Myself

When I was fifteen I would take my grandmother's high-heeled church shoe
and beat it into my kneecap.

That was fucking stupid.
But I was addicted.

Knew what glitter felt like in an open wound.
It was regular green or
It was pink like girls like.

And then I came back.
I was still pleated.
And young.

But I understood changing now.
Like: why?

I stood in a white slip in the window all night. Instead of looking out
I could only see my reflection.
Yes, I am a ghost.
Yes, I am a witch.

I listen for the birds to come one.
The lark, dammit.

Love is like that.

Shimmy out of bed and back into your car.

Tendrils. Potions.
Knives.

Love is like that.

fountain of you

we were looking at these peacocks like
let's try to get one of them to open their thing
that wing, blue-green, eyes and all
just like at flannery o'connor's house, so
we could take a picture. but they just hawked
and hawked and turned their backs on us, gave us
the cold shoulder, the butt, the brunt on all odds,
stupid, like some thin brunette who won't talk
to me, like some some university football
player being rude on the bus. oh
look it thinks it's hot shit, all this peacock shit
everywhere and it all thinking it's fancy. the
fountain of youth was too much money so
we just went to the gift shop. you bought another
magnet with a peacock on it. i wanted a civil war
cannon pencil sharpener but you said you
already had some like that and i could have them
when we get home. so i got the little angel inside
the clear plastic pebble. i was glad even though
you took it as your own and i'm glad because
everyday when the sun comes in through the
window and the pile of stuff you put in your
pocket sits on the shelf i remember when we
realized we were suddenly under a lime tree in
the middle of a busy shopping place and
we wanted to steal a lime but they were all so
high. but you straight jumped up like an orange ninja
and grabbed one, perfect palm size, you were so
funny and that is the best part.

Raccoon or Lizard

I'm glad I'm not a critic.

Up against the roof, they are

and everything is football or
Derrida.

It takes so much energy to care.

In the room no one could talk
about how it feels
to be either of these things.

The Letter Blue

The drum machine in a fire inside.

Kept saying the letter blue
and everyone was like *what do you mean*.

The color.

He asked what color are your eyes.
Always a line. I don't know,

how old do you think I am.

What color is everything in the whole world.

How old is the world.

Python

They found the python that ate the deer whole.
Hack it up with an ax. There.
Tight as a suitcase,
the body inside.
The two dead on the side of the road.
Too bad.
I was in love with a snake.
She had hair like ropes,
like a fate's thread.
Like the stems of clovers can make a chain.

I was a Plaster Caster

I was up to my forearms
in warm wet
manhood
for art's sake.

Let the muse make
you a song,
a song for you.

The penis in cold
clay

in the back,
in the back.

You can live on forever
on my mantle.
For long enough
to make me

miss the days of soft,
what light,
on the floor,

holding out until nothing.
The way of time,

blame time—thief—
taking these days

and making them a solo.
I cannot forgive

the circadian rhythm,
the rhythm method.
Cannot believe

it goes like this, mess,
or like this,

the body, a machine,
a temporary, a wanting
working.

Stag

When it got really bad
I would imagine my husband fucking the women he fucked
before we met.

Or after we met.

Or before I was born.

It feels like someone is pressing you
against the wall with a picture frame
and calling the picture
 who you are
 now instead of
 what you really are.

No, not exactly like that.
But something else.

Shellfish

In the parking deck you say something
about being selfish.

We remember our color and level, Purple 3,
the elevator is quick this time,
the silence ensues, the sutra.

Have you ever wrestled a sturgeon
out of the Cuyahoga with your bare hands?
Why would you want to?

I forget what but know we laughed
about shellfish, about how we feel
about shellfish and whether we like to eat
shellfish, whether shellfish really do have feelings,
if we ever knew anyone
who was allergic to shellfish, about the last time
we had a good
shellfish.

There are jokes about Cleveland that I still don't get.

Later that night, in your old house, in my new house,
as I squint to see where the sheetrock meets the baseboard,
I wonder which woman's strand of hair am I painting into the wall.

Horses #2

I want to paint every surface blue
and feel those heart shapes
as my own heart.
Want to feel the rounded coffee cup
around my palm
as a hand inside my chest. Beating, cold, crisp,
better than the real thing.
I put everything on the table.
This is how it is.

I decorated my walls with handmade
cardboard horses
and now I know it was a mistake.

I hate their leaning,
their constant gallop.
Their ribbon manes,
tacky, the buttons I threaded
with thin wire.

Go West

We climb and climb
to Central City
and I realize all the parties
I've missed.

What I wasn't around for:
Jack Kerouac and the face
on the ballroom floor.

The girls who were there
and what they said to you
and what you said to them.

The streets steep
and sheeted with ice.

I Used to Drive Nick Drake Around

Only in bone structure, the jaw,
with the jawbone of an ass,
was this boy, man,
a Nick Drake.

Played no guitar for me
but suddenly the springs,
a Chelsea Hotel #3,
after driving around for two years.

To Milledgeville,
one night out of two hundred,

watched the crows take over
the sudden green of the yard
at dawn.

I think of his mother in the background
pulling her roses up

with her bare hands
until she bled and went on to
complain about it for days.

It's only later when I can miss him, thinking of stupidity,
my fingers on his scalp
as if I could feel where the itch was,
as if I was checking for lice,

or when Manley Pointer said
what kissing Flannery O'Connor was like.

I don't know which one of us was Manley
and which was Flannery. Which.

I don't like to repeat it. Mean. *Like
kissing a skull.*

His hair thin
and sparse at the root.
My fingers spare and thin.

Horses

My mother spent 27 years
with wicker furniture
that my sister and I
worked to shred.

Because we hated it,
hated each other.

Galoped plastic horses
in a stampede of fever
up and down
the woven armrests.

Until the paint chipped,
the braids splintered.

FOUR

Photographs of the Ex-wife

She is complete bird,
not blonde yet,
thin or like a single line
of gray eyeliner on the lid,
the baby weight sucked off
from the breastfeeding,
from eating nuts and seeds.

She is all nut and seed,
the natural thinness
that some women wear forever.
From the diet for a small planet,
from the apple cinnamon sun tea.

The apple cinnamon sun tea
sits on the porch
until my life is not my life.
I have Paris when it sizzles.
I have the bane of my existence.
I have you fool, you little fool.

I find a bag of bones
and move them.
See, I can outline the campfire.
See. I can make a log cabin.
See. I can make a woman
out of what is left over.

Geese

They come up on our small shore everywhere.
When you counted you got 102.
I can't count, keep up.

On the edge of the picnic table
you sketch them pecking and moving.
They are slow like a heavy liquid
moving backwards up a slope.

We talk about divine intervention
as your pencil scratch out
each individual neck, every webbed foot.

I am 5 days pregnant, or 10, or a week.
We don't know
why the mosquitoes won't bite me.

Happy Fourth of July. No one
is around. There had been that storm
that lasted for days last week.

A huge oak had been uprooted and laid flat.
Sawed up. But we could see the bottom
turned, mud and flat roots,
to what looked like a grounded sun.

Small Chirp

Either it is the shrill of a bird's chirp outside the window
or the metal joint on the bed frame rubbing when I breathe.

Strange for this night.
I cannot walk to the kitchen to cook eggs in the microwave.

That is why,
this sighing...

Folding my feet together they are two halves of an each.
What of mandrake root,
where the essence is often branched,

or one mock strawberry, two.

Small Chip

Either it is the shrill of a bird's chirp outside the window
or the metal joint on the bed frame rubbing when I breathe.

The bellowing is a lot
like the breasts on the bed.

You crack two eggs into the cup,
one, two: me, one, two: you.

Carry them into the kitchen,
your broken yolks.

Waiting to see what you would do with the two halves
of each.

Compost heap, seedling starters.
You and your ideas.

Small Hip

Either it is the metal joint of a bird's chirp rubbing outside the window
or the shrill on the bed frame when I breathe.

A female vastness comes on, night.
Egg whites like pearls.

This navy blue
bowl holds,

blows,

a tiny galaxy, barren, perfect.

St. Simon

We see the Studebaker
and pose for pictures
beside it
as if we are famous,
as if it is ours.

We are wearing sunglasses
and the people who
own the car
stand off to the side and stare.

In between the May, December—
the Carolina coast
in April, the cold.

You are ankle-length suede and I am buckskin
but mainly our coats—

We walk on the beach in these new styles.

Right when we mistake the loggerheads
for sharks or dolphins

you say
it's turtles all the way down.

Dance Floor

The dance floor is heavy tonight.

Is bitter after half-hearted intimacies by the pool table.
Drop a rhinestone earring on the wooden planks
slick with spilled beer.
Catch your step on it

in shoes with no tread, slick flat soles, purple suede,
under the James Brown poster.

The bassist for Turf War is
drop kicking the potted plant out front.
What good does it do.

I'm kinda buzzed and it's all because.
I'm trying to work with it. This smoke machine,
disco ball feeling.

The Saltmarsh Sparrow Prays for the Wellbeing of Nipples

The world is a sphere—all that dances upon it is part of it—
the neon lasts until it doesn't—all is a wreck to the eyes
and hands—we clean it up—but it is still there.

Like snowflakes.

Not with me but with the idea—if I can act the whore
enough—be the only piece left when and where the body
is a piece, a vessel for this translucent living—the physical
or break—a break in reality that lasts and lasts—what does
a real human look like—if I carry myself to your grave will
it matter—there is such a difference between being alive
and being dead—I cannot even name it but know it matters.

I was the drunk slut—the drunk slut gives herself because
there is little else—that little else is useless—the body
at the bone is—the body at the bone is—problem—mistake
and shelved—call me captain badass—or call me a cab—
or call me.

I smell a candle going out.

I smell a cigarette dropped into warm beer.

Perspective

After I see his mattress is on the floor
I can focus the location.

The flatness and the comforter.
The American girlfriend.

What the body is
I learn

by rubbing up against.
Let my hands go up the sides

like I am the man here
and he is a soft smooth tree.

My great great great great
grandmother sat in rocker
until she was very old

and waited for David Crockett to come home
until she knew he wouldn't.

On the porch with carved lines
that match the time of day

she would think how she would jump up
when she saw him, run out to him

as she imagined him walking up the road

if she had had
the chance to again

the rest of her life thinking of how she would
if he did.

I was feeling like that—

in between the jumping up feeling
and the what will never happen again.

what if animals were plants

some spring come early and

bloom go bad at next frost

some baby bird at tree top

call momma but blessed be

the wretched and look here a

gray fallen at the foot of the

bed nest a bad timing a good

try a hard knock a hard knock

Octopus

I sit down backwards in the shower
to shave my legs
and consider the various ways
I might go about eating my placenta.

For the prostaglandins, for postpartum depression?
I'm thinking pizza, lasagna.

Can it really be cannibalism if you're eating yourself?
I don't even like organ meat.

The Yanomamo eat the ashes of their relatives in a plantain soup.
The female octopus can eat her arms
during the 10 months she guards her eggs.

It's that kind of waiting.

If we're not animals
I say prove it,
but I don't mean to be mean.

I stare into the wisps of tangled loose hair that I've smeared
onto the edge of the tub.
It looks like an octopus, an outline of winding
tentacles, the uterus-like head.

The bag of waters,
the sad sack.

Helpmeet

Could be her or her or her.
The one in the yearbook laid out in a canoe, legs crossed at the ankles.
Foreshortened from the feet up.
There is magic in the hills here.
She is radiant chocolate bar. She is golden papoose. She is crop-top drop-top tube-top
stop.

Stacked
on rocks on cement blocks.
Sun two past high noon. Coming soon.
Hot inside. Waiting for air conditioning on top of bleached hair.
Waiting for baiting
mating

berating sedating elongating across plastic wrapped couches
olive yellow and green olive.
Think of corn growing on both sides of the road,
makes you think of the yellow inside when you cannot see it but green.
Just green on the outside.

Postpartum

The seagulls suddenly
in mid-March
light
over the condominium
porch
as the newlyweds move in.

Here's to the
beginning of our
babies born and driven
home
to painted white walls—
the open kitchen
drawers, life
compartmentalized in the clean
sections, even the silverware
nests.

After nine months of body
fluids we drink perfect
puddles
of wine that coat
the insides of good
glasses with the thick of
oil that could be
how the belly
burst to jagged lines of
tender,

tender. Of what I would make a map of our
marriage with
begins
where the moon over Energy, Illinois
meets
our bodies
moving through the
kitchen like manatees.

When they grow up and go
to school and we have a day
off
we smoke a pack of cigarettes

and clean out the attic—
find your butterfly costume
and do it on the floor.

Like we were the energy that
keeps the world together.
As if we were responsible for

this purple sky.
A purple sky making
light,
making blue,
making
clouds between
branches
and from here
I can see the
best thing.

Appendix

Dear Readers,

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my thesis manuscript.

Many of these poems come from a desire to take a step away from my usual approach to writing poetry of being what I might call overly strict to a more relaxed and comical approach to poetry in general. Taking oneself too seriously was not really an issue for me to begin with but I started easing into a poetic style that allowed for much more humor and experimentation. I found that this more relaxed style allowed me to explore more subjects, and suddenly, no topic was off-limits.

The idea for “The Sad Zoo” came to me when I noticed I kept writing poems that I titled after animals. It became an adventure for me to imagine what kind of poem would arise out of “Badger” or “Octopus”. I was following the idea of “The Sad Zoo” being a chapbook and wanted to use my thesis as an opportunity to explore this idea. This idea led me to reimagine my thesis more than halfway through the process and put aside the majority of the poetry I had been working on. My original plan was to create a manuscript that mainly focused on the women in my family through the generations, with a focus on their complicated southern lives. However, the project requires more time, research and exploration than are available at the moment. I foresee this project ripening as time goes on and look forward to giving focus to it again.

Again, I appreciate your reading and insight with the poems here. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Amy Richerson