

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A MOUNTAIN LION

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Caudill College of Humanities

Morehead State University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

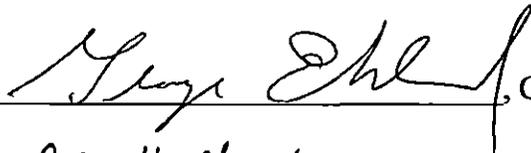
Christopher Allan Prewitt

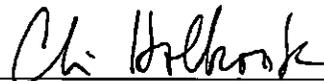
March 24, 2010

Accepted by the faculty of the Caudill College of Humanities, Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree.

  
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## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A MOUNTAIN LION

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Morehead State University, 2010

Director of Thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Ehl", written over a horizontal line.

*Autobiography of a Mountain Lion* is a collection of poetry exploring the complexities of identity in the Southern Appalachian region, a typical concern for Appalachian letters. However, the author's approach in this collection differs from other Appalachian writers and texts in that the author operates primarily in a surreal mode. Writing in the abandon of a surreal mode allows the author to compose in a style that is unrestricted in creation and interpretation. It both renders the audience powerless and empowers them to make of the work what they will, and in so doing the work becomes an authentic representation of the human condition, for we cannot

understand the whole of anything, not even ourselves. The poetry in this collection incorporates imagery, metaphor, sound devices. Both lyric and narrative poetry populate this work. Additionally, regional figures appear in this work operating as symbols of region and as manifestations of the idea of native celebrities as extensions of identity. Allusions to religion, geography, geology, and legal institutions also occur throughout the work as components of the region and individual identity. Ideally, this collection of poetry champions new approaches to regional writing and ways in which we see ourselves with regard to our region. It would have us reconsider autobiography as a form that is intensely individual but not esoteric, that it is possible in non-fiction to be not only imaginative but also to resemble what Breton refers to as the goal of literary surrealism, "the adult fairy tale."

Accepted by:

Greg Ehrlich, Chair  
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March 24, 2010  
Date

# **Autobiography of a Mountain Lion**

**Poems by Christopher Allan Prewitt**

**Dedicated to the Original Mingo County Gentleman**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### I.

Excavating a Rat Hole	1
Thumbnail Geology	2
Dissecting an Owl Pellet	3
Colts	4
The Dark Mane	5
Baiting	7
A Poem Written at Historic Harland Sanders Café	8
These Years Are the Burning Wasp Hive	9
A Myth	12
The dog hacks in the dark	13
A Poem about Flooding in Eastern Kentucky	14

### II.

J E T F U E L	15
A Pinch of Skull	17
Loretta Lynn	19
Mountain Oysters	20
Sneezing into My Hand during a Stroll on a Farm	21
A Laugh Track of Crows in a Funnel	22
A Bucketful of Devils	23
For the Roaming Shopping Carts in the Daniel Boone Plaza	24
Into the Fish	25
Keg Stands with the High Priests of No Good	26
Flight of Larry Flynt	27
Posing for an Obituary	28
Eating the Lilacs	30
In my spare time, I construct billboards—	31

Dwight Yoakam Reconsiders His Hairline	32
Essay on Calcium	33
III.	
Autobiography of a Mountain Lion	34
IV.	
A Farmer's Son	39
Kristy Jacobs Embraces a New Sunday Wardrobe	40
She Kept the Lights On	41
Ol' Chester	42
A Giant Holds Soft Shell, Kentucky to His Ear	44
Why John K. Pratt Isn't Baptist Anymore	45
The Gospel According to Lucas Perry Gayheart	46
Breaststrokes	47
A Straw Hat	48

***Each moment of time is a mountain.***

***James Wright, "Today I Was So Happy, So I Made  
This Poem"***

## **Excavating a Rat Hole**

Only tall enough to find the knives  
with divorce papers, I heard a country station  
playing in the kitchen. I followed the music  
and found my mother standing over a skillet.  
She turned to me, smiling, and said, "Remember me?"

I nodded.

Raising me up to the skillet, she asked, "Remember  
your brother?"

Under the smoke, I saw his shriveled hands,  
his crossed legs. He looked like the coal we busted after  
school

to see the silver cursive, the signature of god.

"Where are his eyes?" I asked.

"With all the other things we cannot eat."

So I crawled into a rat hole. I crossed my ankles and held  
my knees to my chest like a child learning to accept being deaf.

## Thumbnail Geology

He pulled it from her mouth  
a chocolate roll on a white stem  
illuminating a sucked on  
cherry sphere He smiled He returned  
to driving the bus I offered her  
my thumb out of pity

First I felt the teeth  
farthest back brittle and wet  
then the wedging of nail and thumb  
by her upper-front  
teeth

There in the gap of nail and thumb  
is what I carry to this day  
the varsity athletes running  
naked through the aisles  
circumcised and uncircumcised  
alike bored with youth's eternity  
of a downhill flaming school bus  
their screaming

*Australia by God Australia*

by which the driver knew  
they were referring to  
his bottom row of teeth  
the austerity of his smile

## **Dissecting an Owl Pellet**

A chrome wishbone pulling apart a globe  
of fur is a covenant. Expected to reassemble  
fauna from these fragments and finding  
only mandibles, I feel myself becoming a tapeworm

in an ashtray. As skeletal  
butterflies freeze on the wall, I am  
searching through the artifacts of digestion.

A bucktoothed breeder asks me, "Have you ever eaten pussy?  
What? I thought that we was friends."  
How can I tell him what you tell me now, o beaked god,  
that there is no salvation for me, the slant wrist carving nature?

## Colts

I have four uncles. A unicorn  
isn't one of them. As young men,

each masturbated quietly  
before rising for school. Gen-

erations dried in blankets  
with images of colts

resembling those my uncles saw  
while walking to and from school.

## **The Dark Mane**

Two thoughts come to me  
looking at my father  
in his casket: how

easily bucked a faithful man  
is from his religion,  
and if this was the age

that I would never be.  
I thought for years  
that a chocolate mare

would carry in its mane  
my death even before my name  
was known to me.

I knew not to be deceived  
by brown, long, slender legs  
and a lifted anus,

for there is nothing  
in a legion of flies buzzing  
around the ears to suggest

anything but impending death.  
Yet my father loved them  
even as he whipped them

for jerking as he hammered  
fashion for their own good,  
and every clink, curse, and smack

made me quiver, sitting in the truck  
he left running in winter  
while I waited for the bus.

Father, I wondered, how far  
can a man go mocking his mortality?  
I suspect he would say—

if not for the tetanus of his rage,  
as he caught me quivering  
on the saddle at a young age—

death comes to everyone  
who leans against the wire fence  
post soon enough.

## **Baiting**

I spent my adolescence  
as a snapper turtle.

Young women in abundance  
were pink and raw, boneless  
on the end of twine,  
and I bit down, hard.

Pulled from the amber marsh,  
it all happened in the space of  
a cash register opening.

The taste turned me on  
my shell, placed a foot  
on my chest,  
and drove my brain into my throat  
with its sledgehammer.

It twisted my head from my body  
the way the young women that I wanted  
tore and had torn their humanity  
to become bait.

Worthless, my legs and arms  
mimed my crawling into hell.

## **A Poem Written at Historic Harland Sanders Café**

Japanese tourists lick their fingers,  
and what became of you,  
Harland Sanders?

A bust your daughter Margaret made  
decorates your grave in Louisville, but I wonder  
about your body, far too precious to be buried.

It seems somehow appropriate  
that you would be fried, Colonel,  
headless, in your prized  
herbs and spices—as anonymous  
and essential as drops of rain

in a lake, plops as pronounced  
as the hot grease popping in the fryers.  
Founder and mascot,

what would you think of the pile of paper  
skinned from the straws, left  
unattended by the soda fountains?  
What is this greasy flight  
to a featherless bird?

## **These Years Are the Burning Wasp Hive**

A package burning in an oil  
drum behind the tobacco  
outlet.

A coward, I sent  
my opaque cow  
to fan away the flames.

Her tongue, calf-like,  
dropped  
to lick the burning salt

at my command.  
She brought me a note,  
illegible—

not from burning,  
but the letters themselves.  
It was worthless.

But a calloused tongue  
is nothing to her.  
I found her

by the charcoal lilies  
sprouting from her gown.  
Adolescents

were throwing stones.

I took her to graze  
in the caustic field

of my gender,  
for I had my time  
to lick

the melting battery  
on the pavement,  
having failed

to peddle my wares  
to those who lick  
mercury just to burn,

who believe  
God illuminates the head  
of Perkins Branch,

and I believed  
everything with milk  
had the honor

to suffer.  
I had strange beliefs  
in the epithelium—

I was sugar drunk,

sucking black  
jellybeans from the skull.

I swept  
the hooves of my dissolved mammals  
into the gutter. How many?

But she did not dissolve,  
she did not  
profess me a god,

although my anger  
harkened  
to that wasp hive

that she did not  
have to tell me  
to burn.

The little cud she chewed,  
I knew,  
was owed to that calloused

tongue,  
but she never wept.  
She never wept.

## A Myth

—*January 26, 2008*

As sure as the blue fog fell  
over Charleston, West Virginia,

a moth stitched itself from the fabric  
of my carpenter pants. I do not know

if it forecasts the taste of metal  
diminishing after a long month,

if this is luck, or  
if this is the presence of God.

None of us are exempt  
from venerating, or creating, a myth.

But Charleston, let this beige moth  
be a reminder: your choking was not.

### **The dog hacks in the dark**

of a rooster's pupil. It is early evening,  
fall, in Pippa Passes, Kentucky.

I undress and step into the shower  
where I removed with difficulty  
a drowned cricket. It smudged  
my hands, so that my palms  
became the creek's mouth  
where the filth accumulates and stirs.

It is not my duty to collect the dead,  
so it is not automatic; it is not as it is  
now: peeling myself to wash the death  
that swept away the chimney sweeps  
who permeated the literary period  
that fashioned a dramatic poem, a scene  
from which the town was renamed.

No one loses sleep over this.

No one even seems to know.



*Appalachia is a “state of mind.”*

*Higgs and Manning*



I have heard the headless man  
in the Ford call out to me,  
*Do you know what the street value is of this mountain?*  
And I liked the way it felt,  
like being a visitor and not a nuisance,  
even if I was bred by a creek,  
even if I have known the great sadness  
that arrives in the anecdotes about weather,  
for we have nothing of significance  
to say unless we speak of rainfall,  
  
years and years of rainfall.

## A Pinch of Skull

The first breath sounds like a trash bag  
full of empty bottles  
dragged across the peaks of Tibet.  
The first breath  
cheers on the mares,  
running, oblivious  
to the cruelty of their bones:  
holding together a valentine  
made by the Laurel Heights nursing staff  
for the woman whose fingerless hands  
reminded me of hooves,  
and all this being said  
let the nightmares graze in oblivion.  
I have prayed  
that the mountain lions  
would carry them all away  
in their gums  
to the buried continent, or  
the other coast.  
Must I always be reminded  
that a breeze fells an aspen,  
but nothing fells  
a mountain lion?  
Because you asked,  
I have come to a door  
regarded, erroneously, as locked.  
I have opened it.

I have witnessed a ritual

so shameful

I tear the skin from my face in apology.

## Loretta Lynn

If Loretta Lynn were peeling grapes  
beneath the sidewalk,  
would the specks of white  
form her face in the darkness?

That line of questioning kept him playing guitar,  
kept him strumming  
open chords that burst into flames.

He hoped it would help him see with the clarity that he saw  
the truck driving into the wall when he lost the words  
to a song he was writing.

What becomes of the world  
when the song does not spill out of his hands?

And me, at my blonde piano,  
waiting for the conclusion.

## **Mountain Oysters**

A set of nuts hanging from a truck: prosthetic, not a prize of a war  
or fauna shot in the wilderness

to be mounted on a wall or converted to jerky, though  
if a bull's certainly a burial in gravy and buttered toast  
would be appropriate.

She once tried it because her dad liked it, but every bite made it larger  
in her mouth like the national deficit.

He ordered it on his seventy-sixth birthday, his last; and a white boat  
washed ashore by the dining facility.

The river had revolted. "Here. I wish to return your son."

All the patrons hoorayed and raised their invisible declarations  
in the spirit of Truman and ran outside to collect a wooden plank.

Oh, the joys of a prize that feels like sneezing in your hand!

Excited to burn the boards in their backyard  
oil drums, they sped away in their Silverados, their F-150s.

Some drove for hours in circles, singing Montgomery Gentry's "My Town,"  
as the decorative nuts glistened under Adolf Rupp's blue moon.

## **Sneezing into My Hand during a Stroll on a Farm**

Wiping my hand on the fence post, I notice a duck  
being pulled under a gray pond's surface by a snapper-  
turtle. How the duck resembles the cross-eyed church pianist

who could whistle down the cardinals from the power lines.  
Waiting for a song, he would chew the children's fingers  
that he kept in a jar full of dirt and lint.

Power lines would bend, would  
lower themselves to watch.

Yes, when he first noticed this, his surprise mirrored the duck's and probably  
the children's.

## **A Laugh Track of Crows in a Funnel**

Blonde Beth's boney wrist,  
wrist, Megan's  
mocha skin,  
both I forfeited  
for a spine that straightens

and the sounds  
of breaking billiards.

They were  
my Fränzi, my  
Marzella.

I think of them now,  
grown women,  
when eating stuffed cabbages.

Sometimes I want to die.

## A Bucketful of Devils

—*For Ronald and Jessie Cooper*

One peach face among them says,  
“I wish I hadn’t killed myself.”  
I never could sit comfortably under a tree  
fingering the lint in my belly button  
without feeling myself a bird-flipper  
to a ceramic fish that sits in the palm of its maker’s hand.  
A shame because I love maples . . .  
Those two holding on to the handle,  
they could be twin sisters with shaved heads  
breathing for each other,  
or the daughters of a pillar of salt,  
whose father could not rebuild a shattered urn  
by fucking the ashes.  
Staring at the faces, I wonder  
how long had I floated face down in a flood  
with rusted nails hammered in my back.  
Oh God.  
Were my last words  
the names on prescription bottles?

## **For the Roaming Shopping Carts in the Daniel Boone Plaza**

Here to purchase a shovel for some unmentionable chore,

I long to hear *You and anything with a heart*

*should not be cracked open without one first wearing a surgical mask.*

For the mildew smell emanating from the sternum is overwhelming—

descriptions of an apocalypse that the mystics forgot by necessity,

and being here now even I have to wonder if we must

carry the economy like a pouch of silver dust that when blown

off the palm freezes the pins in mid-juggle. I wonder

if the disease left our bodies from prayer or prescription,

or if it would have been without the appointment of President Johnson.

To think of it is to flick the foreskin like a disobedient cat's ear,

to resolve curiosity is to gaze upon a crucifixion scene.

What god have we disobeyed to be subject to such wandering?

## **Into the Fish**

No longer content to whistle down the  
beardless boys from the top of Bald Rock,  
Willie fell into a dream. Let the diamond scaled fish  
leap from the scalp and swallow

what it must: the pink vase of gums in  
the hole of the diabetic's foot, who upon  
waking will drag himself and his flatulence  
to the bathroom and lock himself in.

What difference does it make to the woolly worm  
if the lawn ornament ceramic jockeys hold out  
a naked arm for their stolen lamps, and the jigs  
to which the diabetic must now commence?

A mound of purple leaves in the throat  
could justify a lie even if the wax paper imprints  
can't. The detaching retina, Willie, is James Hutton  
diving into the fish. Consumption the key to the present.

**Keg Stands with the High Priests of No Good**

Straightening my teeth with the bark,  
an eagle leaped.

Goats trembled at my left hand

as if I could start anything  
with a prayer to the fossil in the wind.

An eagle leaped.

## **Flight of Larry Flynt**

Given wing  
from the vase  
of flames,  
half-dressed  
bitches  
are pollen, as  
farther away you float.

## Posing for an Obituary

I want to say  
 that when I released canaries into her navel  
 the ceiling melting above us didn't bother me,  
 or that the twelve cocoons at the back  
 of my throat were moot. It should be enough

to catch the last glimpse of summer  
 on her fingernails, but red wires wrap the globe,  
 and no matter how much I taste  
 infinity in the crystal womb,  
 I still run through a circle of hay bales

on the county fairgrounds—  
 lung and testicle, palms and a mound of purple  
 wound together by skin that goes running  
 against its will.

The goldenrods kneeling in prayer,  
 a childhood of glass that cannot be wiped  
 from the cornea, a green smudge  
 in a brick night, gums drying due to the absence  
 of sugar and a granite cloud,  
 a machine rusting in a field,  
 and untouched saddles chained  
 to the radiator in my breathing.

The blood of a song book

penned by a six-fingered hand,  
speaking its name over and over again.

### **Eating the Lilacs**

A young boy faking his death in a ditch reminds me of lilacs  
eaten in the dream of a vanilla cow's head  
caught in a wire fence.

This must be a dying priest's last wish  
before climbing a rubber ladder into the  
septic tank in which sputum wouldn't feel  
any different.

Why wouldn't he lie like that, waiting for someone to find him,  
waiting for a hand on his shoulder, to laugh, spitting  
in his palm before mounting.

**In my spare time, I construct billboards—**

a new one for each evening commute: because it lays its eggs in the scalp: because the attorney withdraws from the court room to pluck the migraine from his temples just for his skull which deteriorates into a crammed stall of goats in which one tries like the devil to mount another: because Albert Stewart rolled out his tongue towards the county's borders: because Pippa Passes bursts in a bottle of Clorox sitting in the trailer's windowsill: because the water-heater leaked cottonmouths that forced us to our hands and knees to lap up the rust from the mattress springs: because the scabs on her elbows looked like sea shells that she had collected for a liberal arms abnegation that amounted to burnt teeth and pennies.

## **Dwight Yoakam Reconsiders His Hairline Following the Cold War**

I had repentance on my tongue. Then,  
nothing happened. But it's nothing  
to bitch over. If ticks conspire to cling  
to my ankle, I wear white snakeskin  
boots. Therefore, I can always wear a hat.

## Essay on Calcium

Such electricity in the nipples that infants  
suck and spit out could power the facility  
where no one wears out his welcome, and  
the imagined faces across the table.

In the proceeding jolt, Josh Brolin portrays my  
grandfather in the seventies, eating forty hamburgers in  
the woods. He does this just to tell me thirty years  
later, many years after I'm born, the yellow wrappers  
floated down clear streams in crumpled wads;

each time one floats away  
he sees my infant fists. Like apocalypse, he  
says, you were inevitable. You were born for  
my right knee and a tit. You are a conductor.

*Mountain lions tend to divide people . . .  
Outside of a pocket of lions in southern  
Florida, the big cats officially are considered  
extinct in the East . . . Yet people . . . swear  
they have seen one . . . where is the tangible  
evidence: a picture, a lion killed by a vehicle  
on a highway . . .*

*You are either a believer or scoffer.*

*Bill Cochran, The Roanoke Times, April 21, 2005*

## Autobiography of a Mountain Lion

When the tongue washes, one wants  
another's

to clean the shoulders of salt and  
dander, to feel another's belly  
placed against the lower back—  
the synchronization of breathing. To  
know  
front paw, back paw, shoulder—that  
everything tastes good.

I kneeled to kiss her soapy, pregnant  
stomach where we showered,  
where we stepped beyond a  
wasp's blue roof purgatory,  
hand-in-hand.

Moss grew on the mole on her face  
while larva fell down her cheeks  
into gas cans. She spoke to me  
in the dialect that is the armpits'  
burning skeletons, "I can't bottle  
the atmosphere, or shake it until  
it becomes periwinkle and  
vanilla."

With that she placed each flimsy handle  
of a shopping bag around my

ears. Then, ashamed, she threw  
her pregnancy from the top of  
Bald Rock, and kept her  
windows locked all summer.

I stumbled against the tree-stump  
pedestrians in Fort Blackmore,  
Virginia, looking for a holy man  
or a medic. From the hillside, I  
threw myself through the  
generosity of a smiling  
whippoorwill that grew tired of  
my lungs—a monument for my  
friends without miracles, who  
tear off their toe nails, who do  
not know that the antelope bone  
underneath means little with a  
spread of plum polish.

Everything in me spilled out after I  
caught myself  
on a jagged sandstone, after  
rolling through  
brier and shards of broken beer  
bottles.

Ceaselessly multiplying rabbits chewed  
my epididymis, looking up into  
my eyes

like a bride on her honeymoon.

What

little of me that could reassemble

crawled

and begged for a surgeon. I am

an egg,

here and not here, divorced.

. . . . .

Sporadic matter in a tissue—strange how

it makes one feel

solemn, or lubricious—a slug in the hall

of mandarin orange.

. . . . .

Why must I collect

the things I cannot understand

you say, replacing the handkerchief.

A simple question, for you, and a simple

request, for me: to stand on four

legs instead of three.

How can I tell you that I refrained from

the fawn

without seeming insincere, or worse yet,

a liar? Yes, the blood in the dust

is mine, but who will believe

me? I was wounded and running,

in other words, an erosion, and you skipped pebbles  
at them when their guns were drawn.

What else can I do but thank you  
by sneezing at your palm?

. . .  
It has been raining.

. . .  
It only matters that the grieving ceases  
when my face no longer  
resembles people's: not being  
shot over a VCR, not drowning  
in the bowels of a mountain, not  
sleeping in a well of flames  
underneath the shadow of the  
ascending pail, not the Christmas  
morning prayer for  
someone to have noticed the  
overflowing blood in the  
poinsettia, not gathering under a  
pale sun for therapy, not being  
burdened by life's cysts and its  
heaviness, not going to the creek  
to spill it, wanting to spill it,  
trying to spill it, but unable to  
spill it because of the red-veined

walnuts in the throat being too  
much, not being too young for  
Europe but earning patriotism  
with a mound of ash on top of  
which sits a crooked rooster's  
beak.

*He stares out the window for another  
humor, but no one can replace  
the tension with a hammer. The  
imprint  
of the gravel on his wife's knees from  
wiping the greasy eggs he  
refused off the ground, is a dead  
woman's jewelry at dusk. He is drunk,  
and this is Interstate 64, and  
something up ahead stands  
perfectly still, stands as if it's  
praying like an elk.*

A mountain lion, discarded cardboard  
kite-floats; garbage, all garbage.

*Some set off / for the edge of this flat world, /  
some spin in a frenzy as if they know / this  
isn't where they were meant to be*

*Jim Hall, "Sperm Count"*

## **A Farmer's Son**

I—The one who hears the skeletons on the roof; their pejorative wails directed at the fighting cocks, whose feathers harden as they pluck themselves, until they are sawdust mourned by horse shoes rounding a steel spike in early October.

I—The one who hid in a hay bale the Sunday scabs of a preacher's daughter, who licked the roof of his mouth and spoke their name when he plucked a deer tick from her thigh that he thought had been a freckle.

I—The one who has a crooked spine as proof.

## **Kristy Jacobs Embraces a New Sunday Wardrobe**

Lord god, she thought, all the bureaus  
are chewable—each bite contains a midnight.

Her nipples scrape the two or three planet colors,  
gravitating toward the hemisphere without smoke stacks.  
Oh, the impossible pleasures of great distances!

She sings the sunflower her spine becomes  
as the sunlight enters her mouth  
and lingers in a circle of light strands around her navel.

The kudzu of her bones renders the men cornflower mules  
snorting bloody mucus at her feet  
by the volition of their imaginations during prayer.

The black smoke rising pulls her from her window,  
but dressed in silk she knows the day is willing  
like a tiger! Let the bed sheets resume its rosary of silence.

This day belongs to Kristy Jacobs.

## **She Kept the Lights On**

As a girl who rode the backs of crawdads on Caney,  
Erin Watts had only the holes in Saltines  
to sleep in and siblings for blankets,  
but through prayer she kept the lights  
on and found her lawn  
littered with the ribcages of her dogs  
and a stray dog that whimpered at her swollen ankles.

She licked the Mississippian, she licked  
the Pennsylvanian, and the pinecones  
urinated on her freckles. She prayed for the plaza  
and a monthly certificate that like the sun  
signified a living god and an order.  
She found on her wedding day  
that her mailbox had been dented in.

She purchased, she prayed, she purchased  
through the bleak Christmas when her childhood  
walked hand-in-hand with her father's skeleton  
who had his tongue pulled before he went numb.  
She prayed, she purchased, she prayed.  
The shift ended. She had kept the lights on.



Poor Joan. The joys of firing at pop cans

from the back porch never resonated with her,

nor did Dionysus inspired sonnets shouted across the hall,

when the moon hid behind the hill

as an ashtray went through the window.

## **A Giant Holds Soft Shell, Kentucky to His Ear**

Confused by the screaming  
coming from what he assumes

must be floaters  
from spitting into the sun's mouth

for sport, and from being  
slightly drunk, he calls to his fellows

and associates in another continent,  
"No, I did not hear the ocean."

And much like other spent  
entities greater than small communities

in Eastern Kentucky,  
he moves on to the next.

### **Why John K. Pratt Isn't Baptist Anymore**

Supper that evening consisted of rising from pews and offering hands.

We left home with olives that dripped from a canvas of branches and an orient pink  
sky.

We returned home on a rich coral blue night, guided by the moon's teat,  
beautiful and empty as ever.

If I hadn't been overcome by the tetanus of pulpit voices,

I might have danced in the dew of the grass

from which the mare ascended towards the golden-eyed pink swan of the moment.

Spare me the lyric, the prayers, the prosthetic claws of the clergy.

Eating a lamp is the only way out.

## **The Gospel According to Perry Lucas Gayhart**

I seem to get nowhere praying, which is why  
I try to avoid a den of lions whenever possible.

You can listen if you want, or  
you can take a chocolate kiss from the angel's bowl.

It is easy to feel lonely  
burning in the bell of a blue sousaphone.

But I do believe that if you surrender  
to one palm, you'll remember why you have a navel.

## Breaststrokes

Stained beyond cosmetics and prayer  
by the colt of meth, she is taken by Operation  
U.N.I.T.E. whose black apple uniforms make it  
that much easier to blend in with the sewage  
at midnight. One officer hooks an arm,  
one a leg, and the one leading the way  
has a hand wrapped over her chin.

In the current of Letcher County's bowels,  
she is floating on her back toward  
a blonde flame to be decontaminated.

Meanwhile, a new thing hatches  
from the hardened placenta of the garbage  
bins. In the language of its heaving,  
it recites the mantra of the young woman  
who laid it: *It is time to be industrious.*  
*It is time to be somebody.* It is learning  
how to breathe, how to fill the lungs, how

to stretch the arms to push the damp  
refuse of the world out of the way.

## A Straw Hat

Here is the miracle of Caney: a straw hat  
blowing away from the hand  
that I left behind on a rock  
in the creek. It is a monument  
to my mother, the piece of her  
that never left, the piece of her  
that welcomes strays and only laughs  
when they rub the ripened, round,  
and leaking punctures of flea bites on my legs,  
the piece of her that mourns  
in the cupboard more sacred  
than her womb that I spend  
the Sunday morning of a Baptist foot washing  
pouring rubbing alcohol on the throbbing,  
seeping flea bites fresh from my picking,  
instead of washing the congregation's  
feet, the few who were made new in  
Caney Creek, the stream of their ancestors,  
the union with their Father. In it, I wonder,  
will someone save this straw hat  
in that unknown place from which we bloomed?