

BEYOND THE PALE COUNTRY OF ANGER

By

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Allen Jih

To the graduate students of the University of Florida

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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Chair: William Logan
Major Department: English

The following manuscript is a collection of poems ranging from the autobiographical to the purely imaginary. The poems touch upon the surreal elements of suburban life as well as the disintegration of relationships. The latter half of the collection changes landscapes and attempts to move toward the hypothetical.

PAST BEDTIME

The ivory plate was flung at my father.

My parents looked at each other,
like headlights flying toward each other
in the dark.

Or statues in a museum,
the man crouched,
the woman about to shout.

Pieces of the plate rested on the carpet.
Cold bed-sheets lay upstairs,
the broken moonlight awaiting us.

SCENE IN DAN XUE, TAIWAN, 1981

Grandfather's burgundy sedan has already driven away
when my mother starts preparing the spare ribs.
Garlic and Chinese black beans line the counter.
Not that she is tired, but she keeps leaning

her forearm against her head, sniffing
under the sizzle of the bok choy.
My father sits in the study, face flushed,
sighing over his work schedule for the research lab.

The tremor starts slowly, like a hand gripping her thigh,
making it difficult to hold the butcher knife.
Anger moves like an animal over her body,
her spine arching back and forth

as she gives way to her cries. Years later,
when they have children, my parents will stand
in a Maryland apartment, their shouts shaking the windows.
But, now, in these green walls with paintings of lilies,

my mother tries not to think of her unborn child,
not to think of nights that follow one after the other
like the sound of her footsteps as she wishes
for her body to become unknown and untouched.

MOTHERS

Mothers keep track of the hours they have spent worrying.
While her son, barely able to shave,
drives to meet a girl, one sits in the living room
and turns the lamp on and off for minutes at a time.
These mothers go through their sons' bed sheets, looking for secrets.
Another taps her thigh
in Morse code, but the sentence is gibberish.
Another feigns sleep, trying to recall chemistry, horse riding.
Her husband puts his hand over her breast
while dozing; and she waits for her infant son
to start his nightly crying so she can go to him.
Together they will sleep, another way he will be able to forget her.

THE CHILD

I was the child who tore off his nail.

My hand trembled in the open air,
as it did months later in the spotlight of an auditorium,
gripping a violin. The audience stared.
My parents gazed at the walls. The violin made no sound.

I packed myself into the basement along with the cardboard boxes.
I was left to the silence,
as when my bike failed and I took the salty gravel
into my face.
I was the child told, in that house of cold fireplaces,
that such harm was not allowed.

Years from now, I will be the father.
As my daughter offers me her newly injured palm,

I will be the silence,
wanting only to touch her hand
with my tongue.

MY SON'S CLOSED EYES AND SOFTLY LIFTING CHEST

My son has run through all the years
as if to avoid the choking air around him.

His red face was released into forgetful ecstasy
the moment he thought he was alone.

On the train rides to college,
how quickly, how nervously he always left,
as if he were walking on a scaffold.

Now he holds the braceleted arms of the girls
he brings home like the leaves of our old backyard.

There is only the memory of him asleep,
his palms open, his mouth refusing to close.

The air slowly pools in his throat.

FIRST SPRING FIRE

Long before Mother cried to us with her hands
like bandages, and those bandages covering her eyes,
my brother knew about Father's noose.

It was the afternoon of bells and oak trees,
of bee stings and sap-covered hands.
Our teachers asked us for quiet answers.

We listened to the hum
of the refrigerator,
and later the television.
My brother recited the lines for a school play
between commercials.

One morning I found him
breaking a stool to pieces

with an axe. He watched the fireplace
from the far end of the room,
sweating as if the heat could still touch him.

LATE SPRING

Only a few weeks ago they ate plates of snow.
On the lawn, the Burbank girls dance hand in hand,
dropping down to know how it would feel to die on the icy grass.
There have been few advantages to the late spring, but one of the most precious
is the silence that comes the morning after a suicide.

AFTER A HURRICANE

The bird songs all turn dark.

—Tomas Tranströmer

The water gushing down the gutters,
the wide leaves of the backyard,
the record player where we left it

at the end of Chopin's second piano sonata.
Piano music on the floor,
the pages wet or torn or missing.

Inside the picture frames
a laughing couple
we no longer recognize.

On the television
the weatherman mentions
nothing about rusted piano strings

or the dust on emptied ice trays.
Birds wait upon the trees,
their songs already dark.

MONDAY PRACTICE

The notes on the page crowd themselves at noon,
and with the sunlight covering the snow,
how hard it is to find the hatred to move one's hands.

HOLIDAY'S EVE

The mother loved like a hotel manager.
The carpet had new streaks from the vacuum;
each wooden table had been polished twice.
Requests for additional wine and baby formula
glided under the father's office door.
When dawn arrived, she caught herself staring at the kitchen knives again.

After breakfast, the twin daughters stood by their bedroom window,
looking out at their father shoveling the driveway.
He found the bodies of five dead crows.
Holding one in his hand, he tried not to caress it;
the smell of death would have lingered on his jacket.

The girls took turns sticking an index finger into the baby's mouth.
The sky was as blue as a cold toe—
it was time for dinner, but nothing was served.
The daughters stared at the porcelain plates, the clear carafe,
the breadbasket's napkin, the silver napkin-rings,
the cold candlesticks holding nothing.

"We must learn to appreciate what we already have," Mother said
and giggled, while Father kept looking at his daughters' matching shirts,
their breaths quickening in anger
until one of them tipped her glass over.

SUBURB

The child climbs onto the chair,
staring at me, declaring that he will die.

As he pricks his fingers with the steak knife,
his face is the color of stone.

I do not have the will to stop him.
His mother has entered the room,

taking the water from the kettle
into the cold cups.

It has been months since she last washed them,
and there are crescents of lip-stains along the mouths.

I can only talk to the boy by blinking.
It will be a yellow spring when we bury him.

THE RAIN FEELING ONLY LIKE RAIN

When others ask you what you remember of your lost son,
you remark how the rain was sloping
from the umbrellas onto the pavement—
how gray his eyes were in the quickly folding arms of water.
The drops brush and break on you even now.
You hold your hands outside the window,
noticing how the motion tied to beaches and bathtubs.
It is the same as a blind man's gesture to see.

THE SILENCE OF THE PEN

The father who never spoke English
would return from the ink-black fields
to hush the child who always drew a perfect *O*

on his own skin. The russet ground
and the house darken in this anniversary
of mourning, while the grandmother smooths the scars

of old photos crumpled like movie tickets.
The son will grab any pen he sees
and often falls asleep with a black trail on his forearm.

When he was born, his mother died before she could ease
his midnight cries; his father found the frost waiting in the fields.
The pet cockatoo vanished.

The black suns on his hand renew themselves
at the sight of all his relatives lying down, their eyes open,
staring at the ceiling fan.

NOT UNLIKE THE FILTERS ON A MOVIE CAMERA OR, A NAP

The wood floors in my Taiwan home vanish into black marble tiles;
the playground
replaces the rows of caskets as I drift to sleep.
Waking in the lamp-colored night, finding
my life more or less the same
(the ordinary clock, the empty shelves),
I imagine a world where the deaths of families become small poems,
where *complications*
is just a word, where strangers,
like the one wearing black boots across the street,
become in only a day the most honest of lovers.

APOLLO TO DAPHNE

Here where nothing is spoken,
not even the leaves
that call in their midnight voices,
we can see the dogs sleeping
upon the roots of trees.

The air pleading in its stillness,
I saw the blue night turn to darkness
and the moon blocked by a singular
laurel tree.

LEGS, PHONES, CLOCKS

The construction workers have the eyes of leopards.
You have always run
your best in reckless anguish. The wind welcomes you,
brushes your face
like a father's hand, whose voice is perhaps still on the phone
you left unhooked,
a confused look on your roommate's face as you changed
your clothes,
thinking of your father's wincing face. How he would smirk
at all you refused to do
on those long and orange family afternoons. The breeze lessens at a field
of sunbathers and boys
playing Frisbee. For a moment,
you cannot
even hear the throb of blood in your veins.

KNOWING THE DROP-DEAD DATE

Thursday's hail was coming over the roof. Under the city's glass buildings,
I thought of how farmers must cope with ice.

Our spouses were ignorant while we engraved
beaches and bed-posts with names like Grace Kelley.

She recited lines from Ovid on an empty New England shore.
With the clouds as a caveat,

suddenly we knew it would storm, and we would lose
the sun-glare from our glasses, the dizzying wine, our brief constancy.

SOME LIKE IT HOT

The scene with the women playing on the Florida beach in the wide sun
(Curtis tripping Monroe) was my wife's favorite part.
I've seen the film four, maybe five times, but I can't remember.

Zoloff and vodka made the screen cut to black.
The leading man climbs down balconies and spins the cello.
We used to watch the movie together

and she would spot all the Butterick patterns of their dresses,
the Chesterfield coats on the men in Chicago;
how we would look had we been together in the twenties.
The January cold doesn't know how to enter the apartment.

The music over the credits starts to play and only now,
with the thought of watching it again,

do I feel a woman should come in through the front door, wet with snow.
She would say she needs rest, muttering
about the weather or the monotones of her day,
and I, no longer indifferent, would remember everything.

THE HOTEL'S SHEETS ARE NOT WARM ENOUGH

While undressing,
we talk about pet peeves and the day's false horoscope.

We say that we choose
to remain unmarried,
that hotels are easier for the both of us.

I go to the window, wishing
there were a balcony.
I look at the bed and wish
that leaves were falling down upon it.

All of night's instruments
(car doors, bellboys wheeling luggage)
have abandoned the city for something else.

There is no orchestra to swirl us
into feeling.

Afterwards, your face, wanting
to smile, turns toward the wall.

It might as well be morning already:
your bracelets and underwear finding their way onto your body,
my feigning sleep, my wishing that leaves covered the floor
so I could hear you walk out
without so much as a word.

THE ALBURY CLOCK MOTEL

The morning is clear, holding nothing
but a few clouds and the mist of onlookers' breaths,
the tan blankets wrapped over their shoulders
after nights

of cigarettes, scarves, and games
of *le petit mort*. The grey door of an Oldsmobile Cutlass
gives way to a man, and the guests sigh
as in the moment after death.

He clutches his cold child,
and the ambulance is ready to leave with the mother inside.
The lights still flash as the guests toy with different
notions of harm.

The man's cries sound like the murmur
of a classical radio station.
A phone rings and, in order to close their eyes, the guests
look at the sun.

“BUT LET US TALK MORE ABOUT THE WEATHER”

The *North*'s wavy as if washed by monsoons,
the *South* filled with pinched tones.
She tells me about the accents in her country.

She tells me of lovers and lost baggage,
how otherness exists only to a person with a past,
waving her hand as if all this were a joke.

She laughs as if I could not understand her language,
as if her tongue were stolen by talking to strangers.

WALKING TO FORGET OUR WALK

Silence floated like unbroken ice over a pond.
The sky weighed down,
pressing its hands on our throats.

TEENAGE LOVE

Our parents have made caves out of their bedrooms.
When they retreat, we meet at a mattress warehouse.
You stand on my chest,
declaring love for my new bruises.
During sex, I want to amputate your fingers,
the ones that can't stop tracing my face.
How purple are the hours before we leave,
taking the car lighter to our stomachs and sighing
one last time. When we get home,
our parents remain silent, but rustle their wings.
For nights I have had dreams
of shadows that cannot help but fly toward me.

SOLITUDE IN THE ROOM WITH DIM LIGHTS

The limes fall from the table onto the wooden floor,
rolling into the next room
where a girl dances without music.
There is the sound of her breathing and her feet
tapping the floor. Because no one is looking,
she smiles, and her arm swims over the floor
and into the air that moves aside
like an awestruck lover or a child.

AUTUMN CONVERSATION

While her lip bleeds,
she gives me a tirade about sex
as if she were a concerto on the radio,
the high cries of the violins
over a glissando here and there
in this passage of trilling sixteenths.
When I close my eyes,
almost nothing is missing
from the concert she has given,
her hands still moving from the *vibrato*,
her mouth a perfect *O*,
and the cross on her neck
dangling like the unplayed triangle.

MANGO GARNISH

In the air that was about to snow,
we pretended there was a return.

We walked among the streets, looking
at everything but each other.

To avoid the silence,
we kept talking—past flattery and the midnight haze.

While you tried to remember where we parked,
I thought of how nights like this one

would have to be erased by lunches in noise-filled cafés
and how I shouldn't have been alone with you

under this violet sky, smiling
as I came up with more conversation:

the martini's mango garnish,
the broken windows of the car next to ours,

all of which had nothing to do
with the hands of space between us

and my thinking all the while
of the perfect way to say no to you.

AFTER DESSERT

My lover lies down on the dining table,
her left leg lifting her dress
to reveal the red marks
on her thigh where earlier I pressed with my thumb.
She shoves the candlesticks across the table.
I cannot take my eyes from the marks,
darkening like sunspots on her pale skin.
It is only now that I notice the violin shrieking
from the floor above us.

HOSTAGE

A tremor shakes the bed,
moving from your pale feet to your legs.

You have always suffered this while asleep,
and there is no question

that turning in your head are magnolia trees, unraveled skirts,
skeletal chairs:

they are the shadows of foster homes.
All this you tell me the next morning;

but for now your spine shudders again
as your fingers try to escape

the air surrounding you;
and I, awake, must hold you down.

READING BY THE MEDITERRANEAN

After a cloudy morning when you made love to me,
the window was still open.
A stray cat's cry drifted into the room, like sand.

We sifted the remaining hours in bed,
finishing a bottle of the local Italian wine
by letting it spill over the sheets.

You gave me a book with its pages dog-eared.
Your fingers that I had asked to touch me,
the same ones that waved goodbye, had marked the poems.

After the thought of writing you had passed,
I read the book again, this time without wind tracing the sea's skin
or the fever of departure.

The darkness came as on that last night
when, after days of dry silence, we shivered from the cold
and you let the words shudder out of you.

I imagined two figures
under a canopy somewhere
trying to outlast an already fading storm.

STAND PARTNERS

You call first, wanting to know the number
of someone who played the cello;
and days later I come over again with my violin.

Your house is still without a doorbell.
We fumble over Haydn and Bach
as how we did once inside the middle-school cafeteria

where music camp was held. After a few measures,
we can't go on. Neither of us plays any more.
We resume talk of rosin, bow sizes,

the early autumn weather, our failure to keep in touch.
When I leave, your face appears at the window,
dark against the room's light.

The memory of the stuttering conductor and the waving violins
disturbs my sleep like a dripping kitchen sink.
I hear the metronome in the dark.

WITHIN AN UNKNOWN HOUR

The lightning gave him a chance to see
all that was wrong with his house:
the chairs he tipped over,
forks and spoons spilled over the kitchen tiles.

Was it thunder or the hollow blackness
that made him stay awake?
Her music was gone,
along with her violins and violas
that teased and wept.

He lunged at the corners of the room
when he thought he smelled her.
He searched for her goodbye
among faded spots of carpet.

Would the mornings still have patience for him?
He wondered how long he could press his fingers
to his forehead.

BULLETS, BREASTS, AND BUICKS

Think of the bullet's pointed form,
its wanting to lose itself
in other things.

Think of the woman lying face down
on the street, each limb
pointing to a different corner of the intersection.
It is the moment before the people emerge
from their cars.

The noise punctures
whatever daydream you were having
at the bathroom mirror.
In the other room,
your girlfriend is writhing on the bed, her eyes closed,
legs crossing and uncrossing.

How long will it take for the both of you
to start sweating again?
Will it be while your hand pinches and disfigures
her breast?
Will it take as long as the time it takes to say,
"There was an affair"?

Instead, she asks why you're taking so long.
You look out the window,
already confusing the sounds of onlookers with the crunch of glass
or a radio.

Your girlfriend's voice beckons through the half-opened door.
Perhaps our purpose is to lose ourselves in other bodies.

ROUTINES

Daily we sweep up our bundles of apologies:
yours stays in your violin case, mine in my underwear drawer.

Every now and then a fork finds its way into the wall
while one of our hands keeps it there.

We never apologize at the same time.
The candles we have lit for the dinner party

resemble the torches at a carnival.
We offer our friends white wine with our smiles.

There is an index somewhere recording how many times
you have let me rest my hand on the small of your back.

There is a burnt corner of a photo we once took of ourselves.
While one of us refills the punch,

our children wonder about electric sockets,
the torn lamp shade,

the missing eye of a stuffed animal,
the silence after the guests leave.

HEAD RUSH

The thoughts you have of her hands run like wolves.
In this unlivable apartment,

Time tells you that it is here to die.
It needs help tying its hands while putting

Its head on the cutting board.
How much salt the 11 o'clock needs,

how the 4:18 reminds you of an afternoon spent in a loft
with her red hair spread on your chest.

You become faint while the kitchen clock stares dumbly down.
The prospect of dinner does not slow your shaking hands.

The wolves, panting and gray,
drop one by one in the deep snow.

ODE TO MY GLASSES

Everything became the dusty morning light. I went the whole day without your dirty lenses, constantly slipping whenever I wanted to read.

Strangers waved from across the street or perhaps only wanted a taxi. Dinner was a room full of faces, candles. In the blurred world, I searched for you through the night, swerving as if drunk.

You waited there by my pillow, cold from the open windows. The slow hands of the clock, the corners pale as if they had never known moonlight.

OFFERINGS

The restaurant waiter, you say, is flirting with both of us.
There are only two of us in this corner, in the dim echoes
of plates piled like moving boxes.

You fold and unfold your napkin into a triangle.
The next bottle of wine makes us offer
each other our histories.

Months later, you give me all that remains in your kitchen:
a fruit bowl of balsamic vinaigrette, salt, extra-lite mustard.
You say you need to lose weight

as your body shrinks into my hands like a bone necklace.
We bite when we kiss. When dressing, you cannot help speaking
into the mirror. It tells you

that hunger makes you beautiful. Even after that,
I will gather your ivory sweater as it falls
from your window,

and the only words you have for me will come in screams.
For the moment, we remain a couple full of oysters and wine.
Walking in the park,

you gather handfuls of leaves and wrap them around our necks
like scarves. You whisper to me,
“Now we are warm.”

IN A NEW APARTMENT

The city lights filter down,
the fifth night you cannot sleep.
Earlier you thought a squirrel was talking to you,
his small lips pursed, barely whispering how delicious,
how hollow this city
where no one will tell you the time
though you brush against their arms.

PURGATORY

I wake into a room I have fallen from before.
The ivory snow reminds me
of condominiums and indifferent clouds.
The woman beside me has pearls for eyes,
and every morning I think she has died.
Letters are scattered over my desk,
some from God, some from old classmates
saying they are God. I try to remember the date,
family birthdays, any number at all. But clouds
move through the room,
and the floor can turn to white sand.
Inside me a boy is trampling over eggshells.

POLONIUS TO HAMLET

I wonder how the tapestry remained
so clean after all these mistakes:

how you've crumpled one over the other,
folding them as you would a body.

I see the ghost of others rise and fade among these halls.
I see the shape of one who loves you still;

a darkened coat will wrap around her arms
and she will sink into a mirrored room of flowers.

The castle is emptying, emptying
as night gathers its whispers,

as the cooks break their eggs
and pile one shell atop a mountain of others.

AN EXCEPTION TO FORGETTING ABOVE A PARADE

Under the paper lanterns,
the shot glasses shine!
Outside a woman brings flowers to a man
holding a knife. Beggars dress as businessmen.
The father in the living room spins his wife in a tango.
Lanterns the color of bananas swing
from the parade music and heat below.
There is a hiss before the firecrackers burst;
and—just when the seconds before midnight have evaporated—
the beggars tear their clothes,
couples, young and old, jump into pools,
the brother and sister stand naked in front of each other,
not for the first time, but for the first time
they will remember.

NEL PICCOLO CORTILE

A sunset about to be scarred by windows
sets its red memories over a courtyard
where the Italian girl
watches the apples fall
and hears the sound of wind
chasing wind even inside,
where that rush of coolness
into rooms filled through the cracks of windows
turns the girl's hand toward that light,
that memory of some dissolved heat
still in her fingers,
those shirts on a rusted wire clothesline,
the starving flies circling those armless flags—
everything suddenly red and black,
everything the bruised apple.

HENRY JAMES IN RAVENNA

After a chill spring, the summer descended
upon Italy with a sudden jump and hot breath.

In drowsy Ravenna,
the suffocating air helped me to believe
that I walked in a Boccaccian Italy,
hand-in-hand with the plague, through streets
emptied from flight. The bell-towers

were rusted barrels over the long arms
of tangled vines. The streets yellowed and grew with grass.

I looked at mosaics, the portraits of almond eyes,
art at its infancy. Yet all of the churches inside
wore an elaborate grey! Everywhere the freshness and brilliance
of the elaborate coloured glass lit up the grey!
I drove to the Adriatic later that afternoon,

passing through malarious rice-swamps to the Wood
of Associations. The smooth, silvery stems of the pines
led me to a view of white sails and sand-hills.
The cool air descended in waves as the day
blurred in my memory: Dante's tomb, Boccaccio,
and the endless mosaics mixed with Tiber's iron bridges.

While I was thinking of Byron's house, the empty streets
reminded me of all that was still, shadeless, grey as an eraser.

from *Traveling in Italy with Henry James*, edited by Fred Kaplan

IN THE MUSEUM

The statues of Venus drown in white light.
Saint Sebastian with arrows stands by a waterfall,
and the tourists with their audio guides
listen to how Christ died
in every room of this museum.

Overhead, God lies on a purple storm cloud,
watching Himself as Zeus,
the bull with Europa,
those mythologies in marble
turned to graphite in a sketchbook.

The tourists stare like statues
in the dusted and erasable hallways,
spectators of women carved
from ravaged cities.

Inside the gift shop,
a man holding a camera buys the last matchbook
of Daphne's hands turning
to leaves
as her marble eyes watch the man's sweating hands
close over her body.

WATER, GRAY TREES, TALL BOOKCASES

I was walking downstairs, leaving all the lights off
so I could see through the windows to the lake.
The geese moved in circles at the only spot
untouched by ice, a black surface but for moonlight
that made the waves shine.
I took a glass from the cupboard,
one of the many that had been wedding presents.
The tap water did not taste like tap water.
The moonlight washed inside, through the sliding door.
The carpet—ivory during the day—was punctuated now
by shadows: the sofa we had bought
together, where I often lay watching a squirrel scramble from branch
to branch; the tall bookcases of jazz CD's;
Dante's *Purgatorio* spread page-down on the table.
I walked outside into the air of gray trees. It possessed the clarity
I had after watching a sad movie, as when we used to leave
the movie theater, the summer nights too warm
to return home. The lake was still calm. A cat
brushed my right leg, though we did not own one.
Then a fist of cold air moved over my body,
over my chest, beneath my nightgown, holding my hair back.
The lake, the geese, the moonlight disappeared;
and I was back in the bedroom,
awake in the red light of the digital clock as your hands
gripped my ribs.
Afterwards, I walked down the stairs as if seasick. I lay on the couch,
resting on the side of my face that hadn't been pushed into the pillow.
I stayed there, waiting for the motions of the morning,
wondering if *husband* was still the right word for you,
the one who whispered, *This is what you want*,
your nightly confession of love.

THE MEN UNDER SKINNY NEON LIGHTS

On occasion, you find them delirious, starved
from the lack of rain,
their hands halfway down their trousers.
They swarm upon you like a cloud of bees,
leaner than lust.
When you let them enter you,
then come the admissions of failures,
the names they call you,
the loneliness they beg to share with you,
thinking that yours and theirs are the same.
Most of them are simple men, shadows
who dream of belts around their necks.
Already the windows across the street
have turned off, have put in darkness
those lives already ended.

IN A DEPARTMENT STORE

His sayings rise from his long fingers into the air
among the neckties and shirts
he claims we are better than.
The other salesmen stare as he speaks about pollution,
how “water can taste like fishbones.”
The shirts, those hollowed torsos,
fall from my arms as I leave the store.

HERE AND THERE

While she perfumed her hair,
the garbage trucks enter streets of rubble.

She scratches her forearm, and the city's speakers
tell how to defend against peeling skin.

The grim milkmen dissolve into the ground.
The girl thinks

of how she will look to her lover
in the hush of the auditorium.

Under clear skies we hold God in our hands
as we would a rat.

BLUE AND GRAY IN TWO SCENES

It is raining inside the blue rooms.
Shadows and splintered limbs of chairs shake as they fold.
The air, if it weren't raining, would smell of rotting eggs and animal sweat.
The floor on which Cerberus stands
is not a floor at all,

but the shadows of greedy men. His neck extends
like great egrets moving through Florida woods.
Even there, among swamps and humid offices, the rain
pushes the ground into shadow.
Palm trees lash the air.

From above, the scurrying people resemble dust floating in a room.
Somehow, the rain cannot stop.
The night comes on inside the vine-covered
houses as if everything were shadow:
the dark heavens, the violet hells, the woman leaning over the dozing man
with a tray of syringes.

LUCIFER GLANCES AT THE DUSTBOWL

The Midwest's dust and dirt outlast the rain.
The cattle say, "The ivory colors have tanned
to give the men their flasks and aching knees."
Rolling his wad of cash, the man who sells
snake-oil and imitation butterflies
enters a mother's trailer, leaving only
when her daughters cannot bear the screams of sex.
The pastor rests the gun beside his cheek;
an injured boy puts sand onto his knee—
a burgundy horizon washes over them,
falling shingles, rusted fences, dust.
The world rests now in broken insect-wings.
Lucifer watches girls who give their brothers
an umbrella for shade to play a game of chess.

BLACK DAWN

It was the only one in all our years at the lake. Pebbles and sand pails slept on the beach path as we walked the empty streets. The street lamps never came on. For once, the children didn't complain. Washing my hands, I hoped the sand would drain away, even in darkness. I stood by the window and pressed my hands against it, looking for moonlight, anything to guide me to bed. I must have stood for hours there, until I realized suddenly that there was no window—I was still at the lake, and a cold hand was gripping mine.

SOMEWHERE IN MARYLAND

The Buddhist nuns sweep the floors and sidewalks scattered with leaves.
It is hard to find beauty even when they smile;
the six brand marks on their shaved heads make you want to ask

what they seek from such scars.
Some say they find nothing at all.
Inside a glass case lies the marble-sized relic of a monk

who ate dried husks of fruit and knew
when his last hour had arrived.
The statues sit in their mudras

while the noon chant starts
to the beat of wooden sticks slapped together.
An old man weeps by the jade and amber pendants.

A tall statue stands beside him
like a caryatid;
and, as his hand reaches to her feet,

you are reminded of Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne*,
the rebirth of gods, insects, trees, ghosts and sobbing men
who know nothing but flesh.

LAST TRAVELS

Somewhere beyond the pale country of anger
I found I had gathered highway flowers.
Cars slowly passed as my body shook;
it was no longer mine.

I saw my blood on the truck's hood,
and I flew slowly to our house.
Red petals covered the roads.
I stared at the white horizon

until I forgot everything:
the groceries I had to buy,
what the paramedics whispered,
the name of your favorite flower.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Allen Jih was born in Taiwan and was raised in Virginia. He attended the College of William and Mary, where he earned his undergraduate degree in psychology. He began writing poetry during his first year of college.

Beyond The Pale, Leek: Hours, Address, Beyond The Pale Reviews: 5/5. See all things to do. Beyond The Pale. See all things to do. See all things to do. Beyond The Pale. 5. 40. This is the version of our website addressed to speakers of English in the United States. If you are a resident of another country or region, please select the appropriate version of Tripadvisor for your country or region in the drop-down menu. more. Beyond the Pale may refer to: Beyond the Pale (book), a 1998 novel in the Last Rune series by Mark Anthony. Beyond the Pale Publications, a company in Northern Ireland. "Beyond the Pale" (Kipling story), a short story by Rudyard Kipling, collected in the 1888 collection Plain Tales from the Hills. Beyond the Pale, a 1997 novel by Elana Dykewomon. Beyond the Pale (band), a Canadian klezmer and folk music band. Beyond the Pale, an album by the klezmer band Brave Old World, 1994. It's 'beyond the pale' and not 'beyond the pail' - the phrase has nothing to do with buckets. The everyday use of the word 'pale' is as an adjective meaning whitish and light in colour (used to that effect by Procol Harum and in countless paint adverts). However, there is another meaning of 'pale' - 'a stake or pointed piece of wood'. This meaning is now virtually obsolete except as used in this phrase. A variant of it - 'paling', is still in use, as in paling fence and 'impale' (as in Dracula movies). This was the name given to the western border region of the country, in which Jews were allowed to live. The motivation behind this was to restrict trade between Jews and native Russians. Some Jews were allowed to live, as a concession, 'beyond the pale'. The phrase "beyond the pale" dates back to the 14th century, when the part of Ireland that was under English rule was delineated by a boundary made of such stakes or fences, and known as the English Pale. To travel outside of that boundary, beyond the pale, was to leave behind all the rules and institutions of English society, which the English modestly considered synonymous with civilization itself. by jim.mcmahon November 30, 2003. 1052. 200. Flag. Get the beyond the pale neck gaiter and mug. Jul 29 Word of the Day. exponential. Someone who used to be a potential girlfriend/boyfriend, but no longer is.