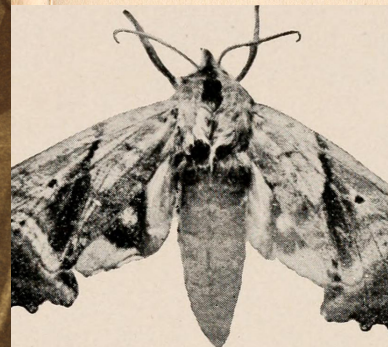


**SPOOLING
THE
LUMINOUS
JUNK**



Clay Cantrell





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Newfound Journal: "The Sun Yells Hallelujah on the Creek's Skin"

Crazyhorse: "Notes from the Farm"

A POEM IN WHICH EVERYONE IS GUILTY

Corn wraps a town with upward escape. Like a baron's final crew cut before his Byronian escapade. The smell of rot is strong and makes me gag. I like to gag, though, and I walk among the dead strewn about the landscape a century ago. It's my favorite game. I pick up the skulls and let them talk. One says *why'd you let them plant all this corn out here?* Another: *stay with us, no one will find you.* A century ago, a malaria baron built an empire of peasant tongues. His bones and their bones rattle gratingly from a foothill. It makes me gag to think of the reasons. I got a crew cut when I was ten years old and I cut my hand with scissors. I am a creature obsessed with a hemorrhage landowners feel, kids with crew cuts feel, the insane corn itself feels. The smell of rot here is strong.

HERE I TASTE THE HUSK OF HIGHWAY 79

Earn the limp you wish the world to see. I blindly drive the road from Bells to Big Sandy, knock through tassel-less corn stalks, swamp water and warped tires. Death by hot dogs and windblown tarps. Death like obscure limestone myth. There grows a reckless warp within me. I watch fleshy faces bob out of the fumes. Around worn eyes, bad corn meal. Around last night's sleep, a warped hex. Outgrow the ether where little pig stys groan whence corn impales autumn like pricks of holly on the palm, like a face-full of stitches. This world is trussed by sweat pants and diapers. Figurative coins on the worn eyes. I grow daily in my crash test tactile and scummy. Earn a grass clump up the fingernail.

FINAL CUTOFF NOTICE

When my father broke parole and went back to prison, my face widened with red pimples of hearsay. For hours, I leaned on the refrigerator door, tasting rotten food. I slipped in the woods, stropped a buck knife, let go. No words welled up. I followed dead grass. Its voice carried rancid fish to rot and return. A boy somewhere remembers gray textures and names: the local newspaper, my father's wide face glaring past the ink, white letters spelling him in sterile luminescence. I finally woke, worked three years as a butcher, sliced tallow off meat. My father got out, loud liver ballooning his belly, black hair bowing out his neck like a dog's. He'd burned his prison letters. Lost the key to the house. Words swam on the coffee table with rolls of hundreds. Sing about the highway boys limping through thorny towns. Sing loud if you wish to pare in wind these hunks of meat. Chunks of tallow gleam in the rafters. The road wraps hills tight like tourniquets. The road crumbles and dies at the baseboard. A hawk dances in the sky. A boy flings fish hooks at badly-made glass. He is dice and money. He is pawn and cardinal. He does not know the extent. He does not know the law. He does not know the woods keep going past the edge.

RETURN TO THE SPILLWAY

Low this afternoon,
early day in April,
the knotty frame
of twin oak limbs
wraps clouds
huffing and blue-gray
in snowy blossoms
Spring grows thick
with moral corrosion
and the spillway
covered by sycamores
swirls with sewage
Fish flies still grow
big as my forefinger
eating the raw air
Magazines tell me
I should finish what
my mangled hands
begin on spring days
as the panfish fight
their way out of nests
leaving concrete
to grimly moss over

A POEM FOR THE COMMUNITY

Day after day, omens of the worst omens
waltz among us. Heaps of buck dancers

moan *lord have mercy* but never *devil have mercy*.
They always say a giant panther lives

beyond the pines. They say
it's an omen for my special discontent

and they moan about getting used to it.
Aunt Margie says ghosts walk in her woods.

Aunt Margie says a horse says *oats*
in fractured, staccato breaths.

She believes in mystery.
I find dead birds strung up like fish

pretty much everywhere I go nowadays.
They swing on special scaffolds

or linger on thresholds of dreams.
A goat begins dying from barber pole worms.

All night we listen to it cry
until it bleeds out and it leads us to believe

the blood is omen the sound is omen
the goat: omen.

Midnight glides over cheap flesh.
Midnight scythes Aunt Margie and scythes me.

There exist very few meanings. Genealogies
sometimes erupt with crude lettering.

They pretend they're the longest omens.
Aunt Margie gambles her life away.

Sometimes omens are coffins
full of coffin-liquor.

RETURN TO WRAITH'S PROFANITY

As morning bled a slit of curtain,
breath slid slowly from the prone body.
Shivered liver. Dogs yapped *farewell*.
You felt no wagons on the horizon.
Wraith, you are full of sad verses.
Forty years to approach near silence.
If I cut the grass around a trailer
do I admit I live there alone?
If grass around a trailer is already dead
did you leave a message in diesel?
Dear longed-for communicant,
this tract of dirt stashes a curse.
As morning beckoned your eyelids
to lift, a quiet song hushed, died.
Empty pill bottles transfixed us.
I shiver in a window. At nothing.

ONE THOUSAND WAYS TO DIE BROKE

Bass leaves hang black
mourning yesterday
not yet winter ripe
gray mass for the religious
but a clear register
of losing your toys
when their value
is at an all-time high
you go ripe in the kidney
and go ripe in the pantry
it's best to clear out
when the one nurse
enters with a bouquet
she is grinning
like a bad kid
at Sunday school
when the world's shadow
hums under bass leaves
and your marrow hums
you should've seen
this coming
you should've cleaned
alcohol from the freezer
before you sunk
into the bad news

you knew was coming
only not on a clear day
in December
when everything
looked dead already

FASHIONED FROM THE BOLES OF PLANKS

Why stars darken
this sad dog's night
is why your mother calls
froggy or the ram's horn
shaking silty namelessness
shaping and reshaping
who wears silver best
the nameless cellar
croaks a toll so loud
the mottled vipers
groan at baseboards
highway eras or silt
I use
to shake driveways
when the moon
in its contained hole
in its silver gash
wears your mother's eyes
why declare the vision
something more than
any old crooked smile
or any stuck froggy

BACK ROADS POEM

Inside is what we call the soul
dissolving when it gets warm
We say *hi* to gas station clerks
but what we mean is goodbye
We mask the road's edges
with mile markers or gloves
The way you jerk when I touch
the raised pores on your hand
makes me think of poor dogs
ripping half-moons, chained
to fat tree trunks in November
You think the gravel is rough?
Want to run over my new shoes?
That's what we'll call dating
until lightning fades to fog
O purling o dirty evenings
expanding in my rage
in red and yellow clouds
the forecast for the back roads
dissolves the more we run
out of things to say

INTERVIEW WITH THE WRAITH'S SISTER

I bet them spiders feel you.

Sister curled in cistern. Deep.

I guess a gun barrel rides you
camouflaged and you quit thinking.

I bet them spiders know,
widows, hourglassed, fresh-
cut hay spiders, a shell of legs
shot down a cylinder. On your walk
over pinecones, does the earth
maw at you? Do you catch
a shiny concrete scratch
as them boys kneel you?

A sun finally blots. You close
yourself to its ponytail eye.

I bet them is the best leggings.

I guess they shop your skin.
Shoot brown in you and eye
the gray of a gloomy cloud.

I bet spiders know the details
of snag and sex you also know.

A shiny scrape on you derives
truth only you feel. Deep.

I won't tell where you bloat.

PARIS LANDING STATE PARK

The count of three-leaf clovers is close to fifty.
You laugh at how early we're drinking and say *luck*
flees, apostolic and lonely. I'm having a great goddamn time.
Hens are hymning. I shoot a long fact from a tooth.

Dear lover, I marry them olden times. Right my wrongs
and slant my thumbs. In the ontological afterglow,
your arm extends, sprinkling lye on dumb plovers.

It looks beautiful—the most beautiful, luckiest arm
I've ever seen. Let's keep emblemizing the dark.

Dear moth, I love thy tawny wings. I love thy love.
The body count of likely limbs cannot be dredged
because of yawny, unsanded surfaces.

Among the right mowed grass, you'll moth again
in scrolls and blood beyond understanding.

It's nice to stare at the afternoon sun, wine-drunk
and together, exposing diesel tattoos to sky.
What buzzards count us. What afternoons.

FIVE MONTHS PAST DIVORCE, A HERMIT LIVES WITH HIMSELF

I while in a brick house each night
dying dumb, taking in winter's itch.
I'm ripe at thirty, woman miscarries,
gone as spring redbud. The region,
sparse but for buckthorn,

curls nice in corn whiskey. Dark
on the holly and dark on the baby
down the pipes. Red clay films
bootheels below the poverty line.
I pace the night or pick banjo

for hours, the family limb splits
its base shoot. Melancholy is real
as a bluegrass tune. *Oh baby mine.*
Night becomes a hearth to repent
my spent dimes. Slow time expires.

CONDITIONS

A boat half-moons the cove, lining smallmouth,
like a twentieth century American parable come to life.

My kneecap slaps a rock. This century is so fake.
I can't legally harvest the drying dandelions.

On the stereo, Fred McDowell weaves metallic chimes.
They remind me of the many errors we're living.

One day among these others I'll forget to care.
I'll cut the brown water with indifference.

LETTER TO MOTH IN PAST TENSE

I made you a mixtape with the word *moth* smelted on it

I made you a George Jones ashtray to heal your loss

Yesterday's scattered self chokes all over the ashy deck

Camden Tennessee is a sin with a felt zip code and dead

drunk people laid in ditches like wood

I blathered about Gullah and deer and leavened

each stolen cookbook

The wind duked dextromethorphan on our gravel

We came back to the house with a glass of whiskey

Some kinda compound critiqued our marriage

Some kinda bubba played Don Williams over and over

Yesterday I hated on Don Williams again and again

I bothered you with a coma and fireworks

The wind some days broke the horses at water

Camden Tennessee was too far from the black I mean

Camden Tennessee shot us with sharp isolation

I made you laugh at things that aren't funny like death

and spinal meningitis and brain damage

I made you a mixtape with the word *moth* smelted on it

THE SUN YELLS HALLELUJAH ON THE CREEK'S SKIN

O tongue I run a tract allowed. Damask cap doner shrinks spooling and the devil shines like heaven in the oak boughs. Let me gom the joy let me gom jaybird talk curled heavy in tonsils o tongue god is vengeance and talks scat to his mothers. Afterbirth tastes metallic. O tongue, overtaken by epithelium. Epithelium darling fawns shoot vermillion self-coaxing like heaven beyond the oak boughs. Tonsils rank and yet somehow aluminum shake me. The whole linearity rings blue notes feather-like among the oak boughs. The devil is in theory a pulled nail a grommet tonsil the least of these sparrows intact, gomming with toys in the stain down where tires rot. I forsake o tongue in order to taste death dilly this shaking talk when tensions grow fists through glass, rotten livers, a face looks like me in death but stays peeling jaundiced sky. The devil pisses himself the family organ clangs the way a rotten squash clangs dully and I know death will run a tract allowed.

A HERMIT SURVEYS SOME ACRES

Juniper trees wave goodbye. It redeems

dead bodies when graves split and wood

creates new faces. Generally I'm alone

and totally blast stars or play whist at night.

The question of self and cabin requires a fit mind.

The question of contact scared Wittgenstein,

snow-leached firs wild outside his little room.

To say junipers stand among headstones

on slag cropped hills waves no meaning.

I believe beyond the shadow of boughs

in neighbors. No use talking to yourself.

WASPS COVER MY SLICE OF PIE

Nail rust summons us. An ironwood fence
stabs soil every ten feet. A tremble fresh and red
cakes upturned palms, knowing stinging waspy rain
not knowing relief of beg-steal-host, tetanus gospel
sticky, tart on the tongue, taste to me like plosives.
Now my palms press bleeding the seething lode.
Now it really starts with violence. Final salvation
ain't free. I'll die quick but suffer alive in realms
ruptured, spill blood knapping steely steel work,
fence-posts pass like railroad ties and ammonia,
everybody dies and by the time I wake stinging
a fiery bract impales to the carpal, stuck there
finitely, a gypsum slab a realm of bastards
napping when the sun gets high. I am detachment
deep in my chest. I am steely work and violet
like busted shackles and rain in early dawn
let the nails stay deep. Watch the red wind
move quick, suffer alive a little fly on fire.

THE GLORIOUS DEVOLUTION

When I played dead in the woods, silence fed my vices. I turned metal and poteen. I turned quiet, chased a sad dog past a deer with its leg hanging bloody at the ankle joint, made a flat mire for laying dumb. I stepped among soupbones that eroded the smokehouse and its dirty floor. *Dirty* is an antonym of *morality*. This is what I learned from witchery. This is where red resentment dangles its leg, runs to Jacksonville to drink a river, fires up the foil as expression of sloth. Before the woods, I stirred clouds of flint while faces of death replayed famously in my tropical lobe. The soundless rage read aloud through the hay. Grayed goldenrod patched through with pinecones, mossy wrinkles where moths lay eggs. Later, I drove to town, listening to the engine's low hum. I picked up charcoal and hickory chunks. The night rolled over like a sad dog, crackles of dry wood erupting through substrata.

THE BAD TASTE IN MY MOUTH

Yesterday shines through my teeth.
Midnight accumulates on the floor.
I tell the sweet onion time is a polymer
or a bungee cord hanging off a rock.
Nothing's too small, too damaged,
as if grown from fuming semi wrecks.
The trucker down the street has teeth
that give off an frothy glow, each color
of the salt lick accounted for.
Metallic juices mingle in saliva,
linger down my itching throat.
Yesterday's words wave in the backyard
with sheaves of ivy and mammals.
I'm outside silencing the seagulls.
Wine stains my teeth. It's a magic trick
I learned when I wore camouflage
to meetings with my counselor.
I could really use a toothbrush
to caulk up this calcified empire.
I'm outside with the name *mongrel*
stitched on my shirt. I'm thirty-two,
staring directly at the birds.
I'm outside the realm of precision,
where ginger roots rock wild shapes
and scrap metal is worth very little.

The sky cries louder than it did yesterday.
The winter trees thread up into it:
a meeting of fingers and lost breathe.
What I mean is I mold weeks,
forgotten waddings, vacant hours
not even the deer can know “happened.”
I could really use a shovel
or honest-to-god forgiveness
for watching semi-urban decay.
The sky cries louder than it did yesterday.

TO MY UNCLE

In the kitchen, tasting whiskey in a mug, I want
hard water to run its course and the courage to sleep
six hours, but mice remind me you lived here,
wood smell of the hearth, grimed-over keyholes,
the vanity of your cabinet-making maps
smack me on the brow and I imagine the morning
sky swarmed gray during your drinking binges
from ten a.m. to sundown all year except Easter;
did those gray clouds swirl and blotch your retina
or could you discern Christ beyond the pine-tops,
sending to you a secret transmission?

In the day's final haze an acorn dropped,
promising you a natural, oracular return
to hospital linens, that tired hunk of muscle
you knew as your body, a return to fire ants
crawling all over your mantle of worn skin
and the fleet of mugs you drank whiskey from.
If I were a doctor, I'd say I expected such news.
Now, I see the lone clock's minute hand stick
somewhere between six and seven, my own life
arrested that way, as if home is a lone cup
cracked on the rim and right outside the door
the keyhole opens to fathoms of blotched sky,
your eleven-year mistake hanging out there
like a death today's doctors wouldn't believe.

SWAMPLAND DEVELOPMENT

The flood wall hid its canvas
of watery ditches and tin cans
we distorted to our liking.

Winters, my cousin James
gathered straw and loose wood
to dam the muddy channels
shot through with motor oil.
I'd crash through low briars
for chunks of barked hickory,
pieces of plastic tarps,
unquiet trash we held close
to mud-covered mouths.

Crawfish holes were empty
veins of January's ugliness.

We broke the law with vigor
at an age when most kids
held close to the boundaries
the world painted for them.

When we got older, my cousin
broke into the county jail,
establishing himself
as a temporary tenant
who enjoyed the privilege
of returning if he wanted.

We grew wrinkled in wakes

of rotten river sewage,
high water lines telling lies
we were too numb to recall,
milk jugs and deer spines
hung high as hickory nuts
in crass, absurd dioramas
we could always renounce
someday, if we wished.

INSIDE THE FRUIT

Like overgrown briar bushes, thorny
Osage orange trees kept my limbs
covered with blood. I climbed a maple
to peek at round fruits hanging high.
Their rippled folds were green brains,
oozing glue my mother said was poison.
Some people called them horse apples.
I threw the rough green softballs
against Oak Street's grainy asphalt
to see what secrets lived inside.
I halved one and handled the core,
a pith of hard white feathers,
before scabbing the skin to pieces
as ants frothed out of the insides.
I was wild, slamming a hundred apples
where farmers, carloads of families,
truck drivers might flatten them.
I raged like a storm at the trees,
their progeny, finally hitting back
what had maimed me. I pretended
they were the heads of deadbeat dads
that needed a good bashing in.
At sunset, my mother asked me
did you bust all those things in the road?
Me, no longer ashamed of scars,

offered a tired nod and ran
far beyond the wood line.

WHEN I GOT MY LEARNER'S PERMIT

I went driving
blue car down log roads
especially brown
with funerals
grown on shoulders
buzzing in ears
I didn't listen
much to the crunch
of gravel backbeats
when I crested each hill
widened my ribcage
I thought of driving
farther into night
to New Orleans
or Singapore
where death
isn't hidden below
but beside you
like a guardrail

HELLO GNARLY

Listening to you spit
a delicate rope between us
was nothing new in the sedge
was a hundred years old
before scaly jubilees hot days
I watched you writhe
on the sunflower bed
and wondered who to call
in case one of us ruptured
wall spackle or vodka
or became a shit talker
the next day my darling
we hooked that question
by its ear lobe, under-
ground like bad germs
in the high rushes

NOTES FROM THE FARM

Pools of pies, Mama Ruth's fried pies, tired joints, we break a young bull.
He tears up fences when he smells leather in whips, cuts off his ear
like a bovine artist if he doesn't get his way. Gator pulls pie from his pocket,
waves his lunch high like a surrender. Poison ivy climbs high as kiln chimneys.
Gives out refuge to a cloud of blackbirds. We learn to augur the leachy mud.
The new bull fashioned death by his gonads by heaving limp carcasses of crows
to deathly cow pies, and why don't cattle growl deep longing fences, pitchfork
stabs the oak bole the iron stake the beer joint. Mama Ruth got time on her hands,
looks at us through black eyes. Dear friend, dear Gator, whose four-wheeler
I fix wire to wire to gas tank. Filament urine on the road to self-esteem weeps
whose shirt glows with yellow ether gnawing like a snapper. Whose shoulder slips
when he drinks, thorax rips open like reptile maw. Hear new Mama Ruth's fits
though guilt won't allow you in the garage, speckled gar skull ball cap painting
hung over the four-wheeler's glow. We get stuck trying to shuck anger, tire swing
torpedo the otters and pond scum, head gasket blows sparkles of riffing lye.
Nightfall, Mama Ruth slips in the door, her memory swirls a thunderhead halo,
and the pasture's whole attitude changes. Quail flicker from church bells. We hope she
leans on doorjamb, but she can't and smacks hardwood, breaks her pelvis and Gator
wheels her to a four-wheeler and churns mud of back bone nerves. She goes out
like candles she goes falsetto and grave-worthy. Family dinners wither. January.
I tell Gator *it's okay*. I tell Gator *don't surrender*, he fits fried pies in his esophagus
for ten years before Nickel Town just goes to shit while he, too, longs for warmth.

FROM A BRICK HOUSE IN JUNE

Hallshire, where cousins take pills
off grandmothers on holey piers, groans like catfish in summer, discharges
dirt and water at age twenty-one, has three-inch bullet-holes to look
at spires and prayer flags grown of dormant genes. Recreational Jon boats
if you plow through pregnant whiskers. A fish flung to the outboard, drunk on coal
smoke and drowned mussel divers, shows off kids at the gravel pit
where the Allman Brothers obscure plans to rob a pharmacy. Brown shore water
in June. Women with knife-scars smoke and sunbathe on picnic tables. Screened porch,
hornets drink Selsun Blue where summer molds and fractures. I'm in love
with deer knives, lonely walks, after hours, soft graveyard, passed out on dirt,
Joe beneath, asleep on aspirin-cut opiates as he runs his car into an eighteen-wheeler.
Joshua reads the bible, slakes thirst with antifreeze, cramps up from cottonmouth,
flexes bile in a goldfish pond. My father's Hank Junior tapes gather salt
at slow-banked elbows, an eight millimeter of mussel divers banging home
the granite material from which all death ledgers are chipped, chewed-up,
no money, probate the will, inhale goldenrod, be ice-cold more than a day.
I think I know what to do with my life. I think of myself as a thousand knives
and no one can rip the line-breaks or climb out Glen's cabin window
or find him swollen in the sun after ODing four days before the solstice.

Y'ALL LOOK LIKE THE JOSH BROTHERS

This is a ballad to Osage orange and miners. Back in Bigear Tennessee. The gray tufts of their horns. Today devils black oak fortunes. I cross like a ghost the empty mineshafts. Friends, I've been drunk all day. O yes, I've drank gashes of bulldozer trees in the flinty evening. I've moonshined plenty of deaths the papers won't say. They say boy, *corpse work could have killed anybody.*

Such repetition whispers minor sweetgums inside me. Agate-eyed miners greet me, sweeping the church's back lot. This is our song of negative well-witching and upside-down tombs.

Miners are marvels of outlaw turpentine. Their accents ripple the eat-up firs. This is also dissonance and graveyard noise.

Such Josh Brothers warble AK-47s and pinecones. Billboards of fisheyes bend over the Cumberland Plateau. Alkyhol. Popsicle stick prison art. Preacher says it's gonna come a flood. Damn, don't I wish I lived in people's souls. Miners are such devilish men. They bloody billboards with police. They bloody they selfs all day.

TO MY UNCLE

A strange form scars the woods. She hid her body
when I cried. Her hair smelled like an old movie,
long forgotten save the two lovers in the hay loft.
But you remember that scene. The welling of rage
in your gut and the ash you spat naively at the world.
Now watch the thorns close for there's nothing else.
She crawls inside your ear, warmly red with noise,
and asks you to speak, to make steady progress.
Of course, you know only your rage. How you left
her to wonder, to beg of your body. Watch now
her hand grasp your coat, attending your casket.
Feel her blue-powder skin on your stiff hands.
I watch for lovers beyond the vines at night
yet am disappointed. I welcome any urgency
that breaks my boredom. I sleep and wake without
counting the empties. She hid herself in time
as if she were dead like you. But we're only so many
voices in a winter scene. Are you tired out there?
Do you remember our fights? A gray limb
haunts my window, here I am drinking,
seizing up. Then, I didn't think twice about you.
The movie ended with hay fire, the girl picked
up by cops, the lost man blowing out his brains.
We thought it was funny in a fucked-up dream.

Now your spirit hangs above the forest floor,
detaching itself like a forlorn, breathless leaf.

CLAY CANTRELL lives in Memphis. He has published one other collection of poetry, *The Landfill Poems*. Other work appears in *The Journal*, *New Delta Review*, *Sycamore Review*, and others. He has released experimental music with House of Alchemy and independently. He is currently working on a PhD in literature at the University of Tulsa.