

Spring 2018

## Permanent Resident

Joshua McGarry  
*Old Dominion University, Jmcgarry1991@gmail.com*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/english\\_etds](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/english_etds)



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

McGarry, Joshua. "Permanent Resident" (2018). Master of Fine Arts (MFA), Thesis, English, Old Dominion University, DOI: 10.25777/ekt0-8k31  
[https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/english\\_etds/38](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/english_etds/38)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the English at ODU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ODU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@odu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@odu.edu).

PERMANENT RESIDENT

by

Joshua McGarry  
B.A. December 2014, Old Dominion University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

ENGLISH

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
May 2018

Approved by:

Tim Seibles (Director)

Luisa A. Igloria (Member)

Delores B. Phillips (Member)

## ABSTRACT

### PERMANENT RESIDENT

Joshua McGarry  
Old Dominion University, 2018  
Director: Prof. Tim Seibles

This thesis emerges out of the author's own experiences as a permanent resident of the USA in a time of increasing tension towards immigrants. As the poems progress they deal not only with the immediate political concerns, but also with the familial issues of living on another continent as the poems address the way distance adds an extra layer of strain the death of the author's grandfather in early 2016.

The thesis attempts to find a counterpoint to the increased sense of nationalism and distance through the use of music as a plane of aesthetic engagement that goes beyond nation. To this extent, it draws in more hybrid forms as it uses erasure poems made from the liner notes of several albums, and constructs playlist poems. Ultimately while the political tension remains the poems do find some degree of peace in the moments spent connecting with another individual over music.

Copyright, 2018, by Joshua McGarry, All Rights Reserved

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
New Here .....	1
I. Crossings .....	2
Permanent Resident .....	3
Citizen .....	4
Undocumented .....	5
[Passing] .....	6
Crossings .....	7
Prospective Student Comes to Ask About the Honors College .....	8
4113 .....	9
Alta Loma No Longer Exists .....	10
Poem for a 4 Year Old Rocker .....	12
II. Strangers .....	13
Berlin Riverside after Dark .....	14
Poem for a Ten Year Old at an Airport With Headphones and His First Album .....	15
Liner Notes to an Airport Mixtape .....	16
Night in the slaughterhouse district tenement apartment complex: 3am .....	18
Last Visit .....	19
Proud Boys .....	20
Chocolate in Wiesbaden Germany, 1947 .....	21
Liner Notes to a Post-Election Mixtape .....	22
[Documentation] .....	23
Fox News .....	24
Over Syrian Coffee in Wetzlar, Germany, December 2015 .....	25
Conversation Overheard After Coffee .....	26
III. Strangeness .....	27
Gedicht: Fragments of Poem in Translation .....	28
[Exotic] .....	29
You wouldn't get it because you're foreign .....	30
The Circuit's Dead .....	31
Last Transmission from <i>Major Tom</i> .....	33
Ode to a Fourteen Year Old Metal Head .....	34
America .....	36
Dissections of a Mummy found in an Underpass .....	37
Coming Home .....	38
The Conversation about albums .....	39
Waiting for the Call You Know is Coming .....	40
Live Music Origin Story .....	41

Chapter	Page
Home as a Pastoral Dream.....	42
The Usual Monday Morning Call in Late Winter .....	43
Poem for the Twenty-something Stuffing Grief into Imaginary Playlists.....	44
Elegies Bloom as the Phone Rings .....	45
IV. Homecomings .....	46
Two Seasons on a Graveyard .....	47
Before Flying Back to Norfolk .....	49
Liner Notes for a Mixtape of Coping Mechanisms .....	50
The Final Closing of the Shop: New Years Day .....	51
An Interrogation after the 2017 Inauguration .....	52
She Hums Punk Songs in the Shower.....	54
A Kingdom Away.....	55
VITA.....	56

New Here

The cold  
seems hungrier here,  
teething for marrow

The rain  
is a stranger, knuckling  
the sleepless roof

The cracked hiss  
and whistle of the radiator  
closest thing to a conversation

In which you share the home  
land of your language  
as it rusts on your tongue

## I. Crossings

*The rhythm of my footsteps crossing flatlands to your door have been silenced forever more. The distance is quite simply much too far for me to row*

-Death Cab for Cutie



Permanent Resident

In our segregated lines  
with conspicuously colored

passports and our green  
cards we face the officers.

A woman in a saffron head  
scarf is questioned: Reason? Duration?

And what's your number?  
your alien identification number

Finally he pulls the mugshot  
camera trigger. I'm lucky

can pass accent-free, but  
I still get an eye

back from cold weather  
officer says my coat

is too heavy, X-rayed 3 times  
today, he still imagines me strapped

a bomb: fertilizer and nails, because I am not  
a citizen

*Fingerprints* he says

*Left Four*

*Right Four*

*Thumbs*

*Face the Camera*

## Citizen

The threat is in your prints  
we have them, we take them every time

because we know what you're here for,  
the television told us, our future

president told us, you are  
takers, we will find your prints

on our jobs, our houses, our  
birthright-- this immigrant

country. And yes, we are watchful  
the constitution says *well organized*

*militia*: me a dozen friends—colts  
on our hips staring you down

over the deli counters of America,  
over immigration counters, in super markets

hotels, restaurants, what you call paranoia  
we call watchfulness, and we have learned

to be watchful, raise our noses—blood  
hounds at unfamiliar scents, curry or

Cajun, unhinged jaws  
The bared teeth: *speak American*

This is what it means to be law  
abiding—this is being the wall

## Undocumented

The last phone hung at 3am I wander the sterile  
markets, unreflected in the eyes of day old salmon

My body a thing without papers, living beneath  
bridges, in tenements without mirrors, along brackish

waters, filled with invisible fish, nameless as me  
though I bouquet myself daily

in new names, strange shapes into which my body  
flows. Mornings, I adopt them, Nights, I toil with them—

The other end of a phone sex line—pleasant, needed, they call  
me: Mary, David, Lilith, vessel, to be filled, until I rupture

and rapture again, new stranger, in a country of strangers: *The name  
you have called is disconnected please call again later.*

Maybe some try again, maybe again, and I must wonder  
what they want, must fear what they want.

[Passing](Adjective):1: Brief, fleeting, or transitory: crossing borders is more than the act of brushing off home, no amount of steel wool will help. 2: Going by or past: As in the act of creating past that was never elsewhere, scooping the young bud of self, trying to strain every grain of the unfamiliar through fists, replanting in typical suburbia. 3: Indicating satisfactory performance: I needed merely to gloss my tongue, imagine the bottles of bleach kept behind an immigrations counter, the bottles of perfume for any stranger scent(spices and rosewater, Ethiopian coffee, everything not yet sold).

(Noun)1. Being marked as part of the native majority: As in you have learned to be quiet, *You're practically American*. 2. Peaceful Death: The accidental use of *WE*, holding home under the saltwater counting the air bubbles, counting the seconds and years.

## Crossings

### I. Imagined

As easy,  
 metal railings leapt  
 bridge to river  
 the clean brown  
 water, the dragon  
 fly hanging above  
 glimpsed through  
 a border so thin  
 as to almost vanish

On the bank, the sun  
 pulls slow rolling  
 droplets off you-  
 r back, with warm  
 fingers, and even  
 the gnats keep  
 their sawing distance  
 small shapes in the  
 shadows of leaves

### II. Seen

As a family with wrong  
 papers, family tearing  
 the luggage apart, what  
 is the weight limit of sent-  
 iment? Family fighting  
 strange new tongues—hold-  
 ing constellations of untranslatable  
 syllables, that hang like scraps  
 of black cloth on the barbed  
 wires of borders.

Sometimes hope, the Visa  
 the job, the crossing  
 is a broad mouth with beauti-  
 ful white teeth, the kind  
 polished in Hollywood, the kind  
 shaped like tombstones, the kind  
 hiding something horribly  
 unkind

## Prospective Student Comes to Ask About the Honors College

I was worried when you told me about the recommendation  
 You were getting from your ex-army teach, bragging  
 About his arrogant swagger, about the self-inflicted injuries  
 man at sixty-two still desperately fighting for twenty-five

You affirmed, each and every worry when you asked *Are you  
 Of Nordic descent* as if this were a place where *What are you?*  
 Is an acceptable question, though I assume America's becoming  
 Just that. Listen, were I not the white guy fielding your questions

You'd be speaking to one of the black women who work here, or perhaps the Dean  
 Who is Jewish, would you ask them what they are? I imagine you might  
 with that same damn smile. In a couple minutes you will tell me that the wall  
 Will be funded with a bullet train built on top of it, where that goes exactly you don't say

In another couple minutes you will tell me that: *there is inclusivity, and then there is suicide*  
 And I will resist the urge to call you a fascist, because what little optimism remains  
 In me hopes this education will do you good, but for the record- the only inclusivity  
 That is suicide is the kind that lets soft-boiled supremacists go around probing ethnicity

Let me tell you that my Grandmother's earliest memories are what fascism left  
 Of my home country, silent cratered out streets, small fires still going behind  
 Some windows. There are bombs here that will not be excavated for 70 years  
 And the sound only now returning are the sobs of five year old girl, who never asked  
 Anyone just what they were.

4113

Miles, will leave you unstuck  
in time, counting on calls  
on routine to hang on  
to home, between visits  
infrequent, out of necessity  
Oma calls every Monday  
and I can't help but reach  
for the texture of home  
in the static, the untouchable  
cobblestones, all the old town  
backways, which buildings  
have been hollowed for condos  
hundred year old  
storefronts vanished behind  
some magician's curtain? there is new  
restoration work on the Dom  
the cathedral around which familiar  
streets wrap like a skirt: green grass  
the gargoyle statues on the fountains  
the hills and headstones, I can't  
hear any of that, but I imagine  
it all behind the conversations  
of the weather, and the happy  
family news, only ever the happy  
family news.

## Alta Loma No Longer Exists

-Paraphrase of Robert Forster courtesy of the liner notes of an Extra Lens Album

By which I mean that coming back  
 everyone has a different face  
 and there are no more Alta Loma  
 phone books, all the names new.  
 Which means at my motel, the list  
 of restaurants is full of strangers,  
 every meal mismatched with the senses  
 the waiter, with a smudge on his right  
 sleeve that he hasn't noticed, feeds me  
 a piccolo piece played with his evergreen-  
 branch fingers, smiles at my confusion.  
 even the McDonald's across the street  
 has changed its sign, promotions running  
 for the Large Mac. And the gas station  
 down the street only carries crystal  
 Pepsi, and the teenagers in the lot  
 come over to bum cigarettes, and jam  
 to the stringy acoustics stepping through  
 my speakers. They sip their Pepsi through  
 straws, and the conversation goes  
*Yeah I know them*  
*They played here didn't they?*  
*No one has ever played here*  
 and they grin and give me names  
 I have to listen to. And one of them  
 asks if she can stick her gum  
 to my tires, so she can taste  
 the pavement the cross country slide  
 a dirt track in Missouri on the roof  
 of her mouth. I go back with my finger  
 and squeeze the little pink blob, strawberry  
 into all of the ridges make sure it isn't  
 lost. What I mean is I'm still thinking  
 of them behind the heavy blackout  
 curtains of my hotel room, the way  
 I could imagine my face on every one  
 of them, growing up in this city, is not  
 growing up in this unincorporated territory  
 in which even the trees carry a stranger  
 breed of fruit, stony blossoms  
 utterly inhospitable  
 to teeth, the sort that grow  
 in between names. Outside my window



a woman picks one from a tree dense  
notices me, beckons me down,  
*Do you know how to eat these*  
she drapes the little bud over her ear  
*They open with warmth, look:*  
close to her skin the flower  
opens its mouth: the insides orange,  
and glowing like sunlight, and she  
beckons me with a finger  
to lean in and nibble at this nameless  
thing still tucked behind her ear.  
Somehow, the taste is nostalgic.

Poem for a 4 Year Old Rocker

I remember the scene, the way the gold  
the late afternoon poured between the gaps

Trees sweet with a season I can't remember  
the way I can't remember which tongue

English or German, at that age forgetting  
and learning, is easier than remembering

Maybe, there was an open window,  
music wafting out, maybe it all came

from the way every child seems to chitter  
and pick at the loose strings of the world

But I told my mother *I like Elvis*, and she  
veteran of her own rock and rebellion years

Told me I'd never listened to Elvis, but nodded  
understanding this start of a new geography, tongue nudging

the salt sweet shores of the sonic country  
surfacing in my mouth like a loose white tooth

## II. Strangers

*-The music our collisions would make is a sound that turns the road-that-leads-us-back-home  
Into Home*

-Mewithoutyou

## Berlin Riverside after Dark

Clean geometry of the dance floor  
infinitely tall mojitos, collect  
dew, feet in imported sand  
The music starts at dusk, Wednesday's  
swing night, all the locals two-  
toned and zoot-suited, DJ  
between his ragtimes warns:  
*We've got guests tonight, so keep your kicks*  
*low.* and all the old hats do and all  
the unfamiliar faces breeze  
in from Cairo or countryside, in sandals  
or nail-soled boots, and not a hand  
goes untaken, fresh off a red-  
eye a woman counts the Charleston  
her partner laughs and tumbles, sprig  
of mint on his breath, moon-shaped  
bulbs lighting the river  
leaving all steps  
as utter grace

Poem for a Ten Year Old at an Airport With Headphones and His First Album

Carved from the Liner Notes of *Full Force Galesburg*

no crime on my conscience,  
 But life never very smooth  
 now bristles with  
 Foreign Languages  
 rich black soil young trees sucking  
 Oranges from Spain Islands.  
 Roaring New April all wrong  
 but never getting out strange sounds  
 Sunlight. Almost broke my own  
 anchor All that was left the vision of crossing  
 These songs made that moment  
 possible inevitable  
 this year swings suddenly  
 wrong enough to confuse the geese  
 winter's over I hear them  
 from where I am. They sing happily you'd think  
 evolution would allow home.  
 remember what they're about  
 come closer to the earth hang heavy on the  
 sound again and look up  
 fear  
 the middle of winter.  
 so cold that we will almost forget  
 entire lives  
 our small town the full sun bright  
 like a death in the family  
 even our dreams  
 GO NUMB we tend to forget  
 this, and fear  
 , elsewhere. a  
 burning not even winter can kill.

## Liner Notes to an Airport Mixtape

Why is it we can't help

"A Strangely Isolated Place" by Ulrich Schnauss

*A Strangely Isolated Place* ©2003

Transient coffee shop-- conversations, speakers  
 playing only things you know, hunched over melting  
 glaciers in our coffee, an unrecognizable bird  
 perching on the other side of glass, and you resist  
 the urge to rap the window, to pull at soft plumage through  
 the cold, finally something, scares it off, leaving you dreaming of feathers

writing sad love songs to

"None of the the Above" by The Weakerthans

*Fallow* ©1997

I'm starting with the stolen  
 line *Trace your outline in spilled sugar*  
 not a thing I recognize anymore, like  
 the shape of your humming-- finger  
 raw from the scraping, blood leaves sugar  
 like pink sand, a beach we never saw at sunset

distant places and people pretending

"Nothing's Gonna Hurt You Baby" by Cigarettes after Sex

*I.* ©2012

Is it that perverse? whisper, tongue almost in  
 your ear-- *it'll be fine* warm shroud of body  
 on body hiding, the cuts, the considerations  
 of a broken machine, untilled soil, weed peeking  
 soft swaying through the cracks in your bandages-- know  
 it's cold, there are no mechanics here, and all I am is a hammer

we come back

"Every Planet We Reach is Dead" by Gorillaz

From the album *Demon Days* © 2005

Beat shift I know, the lyric wanders in, and begins to strip, even its limbs  
 How many layers of synth plastic does it take to be anything but beautiful?  
 This is a howl for all the heaven heads, head bobbing on the dusk border  
 This is a howl, or a first taste of it for someone whose ears have not yet understood  
 This is the howl, of a body gone feral locked in a train compartment headed north  
 Imagine Liszt with this kind of full madness. or Duke hammering that sweet finale

the same

“Length Away” by Lemuria

*Get Better* © 2012

Past the rose thicket of the country  
line, the lipstick washed off you-  
r collar, how desperately we plug our ears  
cling to the last smudge of sunset in the grooves  
of grey matter, this is holding on, the image  
of a great spill, stains left everywhere

Night in the slaughterhouse district tenement apartment complex: 3am

In a top floor studio the painter licks the blood off his knuckles, the painting of a non-reflective mirror is wrong again, there is another fresh hole in the wall another fist shaped hole of frustration and the canvas is black. Brush scratchings catch the dim bulb. His boyfriend sleeps on the futon, the painter too wants to sleep, knows he can't as he wraps his hand in a layer of gauze. Then he stretches a fresh canvas, and gathers himself for another leap. A drop of blood rolls across the palette. The vibrations of a passing train form ripples in the paint

\*

The roof is full of dance steps and spilled beer. The lovers fuck. They tangle their bodies into unfamiliar shapes, trying to make this pretend real then unwind into the lightning of cigarettes, smolder springing from one to the other in an ashmouthed kiss. Quietly, smoke and eyelines drift over the edge. On its side one can read *Nonalcoholic*. Duke Ellington jazz strolls out of an open window two floors down.

\*

The needle catches in the pitted slab, the only light is the moon reflected off of the wax, but the piano keeps casting its shadow over the young woman her body pressed tight against the plaster, shrinking. A frozen steak over an eye hides everything the music doesn't. There's an airless moment between tracks, then the tender brass announces *Star Crossed Lovers*.

\*

Through the glass thin walls someone stirs to the fanfare, but stays asleep. In his dream he makes a phone call and gets an answer *Yes, Yes I'm here and it's okay. I'm long gone*. He hangs up and lingers for a moment, the honeyed memory of dark skin hangs in the air, before the scene snuffs out.

\*

like the Rosemary candle that lights a letter one floor up. *Dear.... I should say father, I can't say father, I don't think I ever will. I need help, What is the price of help?* A small doodle of Sputnik orbits the words, caught in the gravity of broken connections

\*

Preparing to leave before light, someone slaps eggs and toast into a pan. The fire off the range illuminates wrinkles that she swears weren't there yesterday, but she whistles anyway, carrying on the night's score where Duke left off. On her plate the yolks run like slow dawn.



## Last Visit

A Lebkuchen\*  
Split in half  
smells of ginger  
and cloves, of holidays  
fills the small living  
room like the delicate light  
from the open winter  
windows. I do not know  
that is this the first sweet  
bite my grandfather has touched  
in four months, have not yet heard  
Of the cancer and chemotherapy  
the stories, that don't cross  
The ocean, him on morphine  
bedbound, writhing with hallucinations.  
Hair is only now returning  
moth thin to his head.  
Right now this does not matter  
as we share the  
warmth and ginger that  
fill the soft brown corners of the room.

## Proud Boys

What have you put your pride in?  
Two days after Charlottesville,  
someone is still weeping over tire-  
marks on a now cold body.

It is two days after Charlottesville  
and you are here, with your brothers  
your Nazi brothers, protecting an altar  
to chains, downtown marker of confederate

dead, thrown up long past the decay  
of confederacy, or any musket balled  
corpses. Your razored heads, and red  
armbands say *yes we are*

*everywhere*, and not afraid anymore  
and a friend of mine says that resistance  
is like a cathedral, even without gods  
there is something holy there

by which he means, that yes you counter  
protest, and on this day, two days after  
Charlottesville he is there, and proud  
of that, and I don't get the message

Until it's all over, and even then I think  
a green card, is shaped like a guillotine  
deportation hangs over some of us  
making us doubt the safety of our own doorways  
imagine the ICE agents in the shadows waiting  
for a reason, waiting for us to raise our fists.

Chocolate in Wiesbaden Germany, 1947

Was a thing she, at age twelve, treasured  
and hid away from siblings, wrapped in news-  
paper, buried beneath a bent streetlight,

like a rare thing, like the rare thing it was  
in the aftermath of a country overrun by black  
boots, heel-crushing even gravity

which now, rebelled and danced free, emptying  
pockets of loose Marks, sending them spinning  
skywards, tiny sun and moon constellations, glinting.

Gravity emptied all the cupboards, and left  
everyone counting calories, as if every burnt gram  
was one step closer to walking into rain clouds.

Every couple days, or when hunger really struck  
the girl, she would unearth her treasure, count  
the remaining squares, and fill her mouth

with happiness, even as every other food drifted  
away, and she had to lay down life-lines  
on tree branches to stay grounded, she grinned

with missing teeth. When she finally did begin  
floating she had her chocolates in her hands  
and laughed as she hung high above everything,  
free to eat her chocolates untouched, free.

## Liner Notes to a Post-Election Mixtape

*You'll know when the time has come. You won't like it. You won't feel like singing. I want you to remember, when the time comes, that I told you the singing would help. It will make you look crazy, and there's nothing like looking crazy to give the edge.*

*-John Darnielle*

### 1. "Cruel" by St Vincent

*Strange Mercies* © 2011

Pill thin howl of a buried house  
 wife, scrap of yellow dress in the dirt  
 somewhere in the kitchen a bottle of Bullet  
 soaks into the cracks between dinner plate  
 tiles, Is this what domesticity(love) smells  
 like? rat poison, incendiaries, numbers on a cake counted too high

### 2. "Strange Hellos" by Torres

*Sprinter* ©2015

2016: year of bared teeth and things eaten  
 imagine a body in full collapse, motion like a house  
 under hellfire, a woman breaking her spine into the parallel  
 of the stage, her mouth full of storms, sinking ships tear  
 at her throat. The album cover is a binary hypnosis, open  
 the top of your head to cradle this truth telling

### 3. "Gamma Ray" by Beck

*Modern Guilt* ©2008

*The sand will glow for a thousand*  
*years* this is the national threat, motto of the bomb  
 enthusiasts, this isn't what makes Incredible  
 Hulk incredible, the ray bather sprouts, a field  
 buried beneath his skin, the crops: tubers,  
 tumors, potatoes shaped like skulls

### 4. "Das Modell" by Rammstein

*Das Modell* ©1997

They'll say *she asked* on the slaughtering  
 block, the oval office desk. the hogs teeth  
 deep in her body, this is pork barrel  
 politics, someone going still, the body  
 a trough, her body a feast

[Documentation](Noun): A furnishing with documents: green card renewal is \$1,000.00, beyond the metal detectors and armed guards an agent speaks in rising volume to a woman still building a house of English on her tongue. 2: The use of documentary evidence: to establish silence, Immigration goes through phones *You like posts on antifascist violence?* He means *We are good at taking away*. 3: Manuals, listings, diagrams that describe the use of hardware or software: Photos, fingerprints, retinal scans, interviews, reams and reams of numbers tattooed just beneath the skin.

Fox News

Live from your speakers and Spicers  
here is your nightly opposition

party, your White House approved  
enemy of the state. Children,

ready your codebooks  
you know what we mean with

inner city, thugs, Hollywood  
Globalists, In the next story

we will allege, we will speculate  
as to the color and creed of the latest

white school shooter, maybe he is  
radicalized, he is playing out the gay

agenda. Let us tell you who is threatening  
you in bathrooms, the answer is republican

senators, the alternative answer is trans  
women who need to pee. Let us tell you

health is not what you need, consider  
instead choice, like the choice to enroll

in any one of our wars, against Christmas  
against whites, against cops, against straights

against the people who think owning  
a tank is overkill. And once we're done

tune in next for the weather:  
biblical floods of bullshit.

Over Syrian Coffee in Wetzlar, Germany, December 2015

Stirring out the hot scent of earth  
 Karim ends his story: *They came*  
*for the man who watched our house*

*and his son, after we fled.*  
*Men banging on the door at 3am left*  
*nothing but I.D cards for the new widow.*

Olla comes in with more desserts.  
 The aunt who does not understand  
 English chuckles: *All hospitality*

*is the same.* A bowl of Angel's  
 Hair smells of vanilla and rose water;  
 and Karim, a man who has survived

flight, terror, hunger in five languages  
 grins at me. He knows this town is famous  
 for Goethe, but Beethoven was always

his hero--- Not just for the ninth  
 but because Beethoven  
 did not bow to kings.

### Conversation Overheard After Coffee

I only caught the shadows  
on your x-rays, in a passing conversation  
my uncle and Karim, quietly in the after-

coffee haze. The first mention of more  
tests, the black slugs in your abdomen.  
all this a reminder, how hard

it is to share any ill omen, to shoulder  
any burden with absence. distance  
makes a quiet people of us

outlines along foreign shores, blurred  
edges of the sea chewing at our shadows.



### III. Strangeness

*Aboard a floating savior what does language mean?*

-Torres

Gedicht: Fragments of Poem in Translation

The Rhyme *Gesicht* is Face: her face opened upward to hold the rain, stanzas emerged in the  
gargle wearing bouquets of seaweed.

The Rhyme *Gewicht* is Weight: Melting down the entire letter press, the lead sculpture sings

The Rhyme *Gericht* is Court: What jury questions the leap, the leap from a word onto a building  
and down onto the pavement of meaning where the brain is an  
artful nude, someone blushes and looks away

The Fragment *Dicht* is Watertight: A subsistence diet of poetry, lays itself over the ear like wax  
seals from familiar fingers, inviting in truths that always  
wipe their boots

The Fragment *Dicht* is Dense: As in one day he found a jungle in his words, and vanished  
his friends dreamt of tigers

The Fragment *Dicht* is Close: The manner in which we hold satellites in our sway

The Profession *Dichter* is Poet: A meeting point of monosyllables making closer, the satellite  
enters the body, lights fill the head, teeth pickup  
radio signals from imagined planets

[Exotic]: Adjective: 1. Of foreign origin: As in over drinks she learns where I am from, giggles *you're so exotic*. 2. Strikingly unusual, or strange: Glass fish, their small organs on display for the world, or jellyfish trailing strange parades: think exotic pets, elaborate fishbowls in which these things slowly die, the velvet collar around an Orangutan's neck someone shouting *now say something in German*. 3. Introduced from abroad, but not fully naturalized: The interrogation always goes *Well why aren't you a citizen*, on the fourth of July I melt butter in a pan and pound cutlets thin for schnitzel, a handful of breadcrumbs, a reminder of hillside wheat fields, stripping grains with our teeth. 4. Of or involving stripteasing: the dance Americans do when they find you a foreigner, pulling off sections of skin *this here is French, and this part of me* one side of the skull is bared, as if for my approval *is 32% German*, but their tongues remain clumsy things, untranslatable, pink maggots stripping the bones clean.

You wouldn't get it because you're foreign

How is every star in your flag  
 Another mass shooting, another 10  
 25, 50 bodies another pile  
 Of magazines, shells and shrapnel  
 From church walls, from school  
 Walls, from human skulls, what country  
 Wants to be a Colt with head-  
 Busting magnum rounds, and AR rapid  
 Firing: News today shooting, news  
 Tomorrow, shooting—someone says  
*A good guy with a gun*  
*Will save us*—imagine a flak-  
 Jacket Jesus, mowing down all  
 The bad guys, all the *Thugs*, brings  
 Back everyone in the cross  
 Fire, smiling, blood in his beard  
 And the one round that hit him  
 Is blocked by his bible, lodges in *blessed*  
*Be the peace makers* and the piece  
 Makers of the American second coming  
 All the good and armed, raptured, naked  
 But for their high calibers, high-stepping  
 Into heaven on draped flags and second  
 Amendments, the bullet holes  
 And blood stains hint at who  
 They're marching on

## The Circuit's Dead

After the 5am call,  
After the word metastasis  
slithered through the receiver.

You are an ocean away  
in the house you've always lived  
in, and I'm obsessed with David Bowie

Black Star on perpetual spin  
I wait for the call I know is coming  
soon. Questioning this crossed connection

It's because you were your own musical giant,  
in the soft corners of your instrument shop  
guitars, and ukuleles on display, shelves of song-

books, and the woodwind section under glass.  
You used to carry pianos, used to deliver them with  
friends, now there's just the one upright in the back,

that you tinkle out oldies on. *Singing*  
*in the Rain* against the cryptic skies, or classical numbers  
the notes to *Fur Elise* taped over the typewriter in the tiny office.

I remember the last time I was with you when we were coming back  
from Sunday lunch, you spotted the child pressing his nose against  
the glass, big eyes on a guitar, and you opened the door wide, made sure

he, and his family went home with a half-size number in blue.  
Or, on slow days you would sit across the narrow street at a bakery  
sunlight glinting off the buckles of your suspenders, watching the storefront

You'd bring back an extra nutwedge for me. Upstairs, in the house above  
the shop, you had your dedicated chair in the living room, the walls filled  
with photos of family, of you and Oma traveling Caribbean vistas.

Some days sitting up there you'd ask me what I was listening to  
I don't know you would have recognized Bowie if I'd mentioned him  
your radio down in store always set to classical, but waiting for news

I can't pull you two apart in my brain, maybe it's the two year difference,  
or maybe it's Bowie's last video, in which he sings as a blind, bedbound  
phantom of himself, and the bones of Major Tom drift into the dark cold.

Soon, track the will end and the needle will slide into the dead wax and lift.  
I'll run my fingers over the grooves, and imagine the way  
we used to preserve the faces of our loved ones in wax.

Last Transmission from *Major Tom*

I imagine someone might steal  
my skull, cast the quiet thing in gold

as if to make this body whole or holy  
shriveled in the white shroud of space

suit. It was hard staying  
silent about the way the dark pulls

at my hands, like an eager  
child, something over the ridge

and all the stars looking like signal  
flares, what I mean is

someone had to go ahead, needed  
to see what lay ahead for you, and  
hope it is a weightless place.

## Ode to a Fourteen Year Old Metal Head

Poem Carved out of the liner notes to *All Hail West Texas*

I AM [REDACTED] GOING [REDACTED] A LITTLE WHILE  
 LONGER. I'LL [REDACTED] BEAR [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] WHAT YOU [REDACTED] LET [REDACTED] GO,  
 LET [REDACTED] GO. IT'S EASY [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] IF YOU'RE COMMITTED [REDACTED] WINDOWS [REDACTED] DOORS  
 [REDACTED] ON FIRE [REDACTED] MAKE ME LEAVE.  
 [REDACTED] STAY [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] LEAVE. [REDACTED] MAKE ME  
 ARE ON FIRE [REDACTED] THE WALLS  
 [REDACTED] COMMITTED [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] JUST [REDACTED] LET YOURSELF GO [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] I AM GOING TO TAKE THIS A LITTLE WHILE LONGER  
 [REDACTED] . I AM [REDACTED] GOING TO TAKE THIS [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] there is seldom much to say  
 [REDACTED] the strange case [REDACTED] worth considering  
 for a moment [REDACTED] Bought [REDACTED]  
 functioning [REDACTED] cheap [REDACTED] brutally sophisticated and [REDACTED]  
 to changes [REDACTED] unless [REDACTED] I didn't react  
 [REDACTED] overwhelming [REDACTED] oblivious [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] sensitive [REDACTED] moving parts  
 [REDACTED] representations of sound [REDACTED]  
 ferocious wheel-grind [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] jutting in and out of [REDACTED] view [REDACTED] noise [REDACTED] the spindles  
 [REDACTED] in no way [REDACTED] incorporated into any [REDACTED] one [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] In the summer [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] frustrated [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] is corner [REDACTED] I might have repaired [REDACTED] during the long time I had  
 spent standing all alone near the window.  
 The results are [REDACTED] a long-broken machine [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] interference [REDACTED] prayer vigils, [REDACTED]  
 unaccompanied [REDACTED] inexplicable [REDACTED] echoes [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] populate [REDACTED] Some of us [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] facing an unacceptable loss [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] "signal-to-noise ratio" might mean,  
 [REDACTED] the original signal [REDACTED] never actually [REDACTED] near any [REDACTED] anywhere [REDACTED]



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] where no one will ever  
[REDACTED] thank [REDACTED]  
electric [REDACTED] Morbid Angel [REDACTED] future [REDACTED]

America

Some wasps breed  
in figs, bodies  
and children's bodies

hungry for sweetness, but  
not all figs are  
shelter, some are

coffins, as in tunneling  
tears off wings,  
antennae, a crushing mold

for an unfit bit of yellow.  
Listen, the crunch  
of a fig is not a skeleton:

it digests its eaten mothers.

## Dissections of a Mummy found in an Underpass

Wrapped in black  
garbage bag,  
a polyurethane  
sarcophagus, holding  
every last possession  
layers of shirts and coats  
the last collected warmth  
calluses and old  
scars on hands, on one  
a ring, polished with rain  
empty pockets, the first  
incision shows emptier  
stomach, hunger fills  
the watchers, second incision  
on the throat shows what's left  
of a voice that hummed  
Chopin surrounded by paint  
fumes, and exhaust-  
ion, a final cut  
shows the muscles  
of the hand, the tender  
way they moved painting  
or holding other hands  
in the light of other hands  
some of which remains  
trapped years later  
in the small tent  
of lifted skin

## Coming Home

Over the Phone that's what Oma calls it  
A nurse straightening out your new white  
Sheets, like a shroud in the living  
Room, what have they moved out?  
How did they empty that room for a sick  
bed? Old bed utterly out of  
reach. Is your armchair still in there, with all  
It's wicker and faded green, closest  
To the radiator? What about the piano,  
Did it ever leave, on birthdays you'd  
Play and sing in the background while  
Oma wishes a good whatever age. A part  
Of me misunderstood, for just a little bit  
Took coming home as a win, as cancer  
Beaten down again, even as the fentanyl  
Drip quietly echoes in the background  
And Oma asks me to stay  
Where I am

## The Conversation about albums

pops up sooner or later on any cross country slide. five hours along the late highway, stereo idling with easy listening as Kyle says: *Ringworm* the only band that matters: the crunch, grind, noise guitars fans tearing up the bar. Banging fists on anything and each other. Kyle used to race six hours to New York, once a week, used to come back with grinning black eyes, used to until he was hit with fucked up dosage of antidepressants, spent months addicted too busy sleeping, or shaking for shows.

Eric opens his mouth. We know He's on a perpetual pendulum, today He says it's got to be *Brother Sister*. It's got to be the soft breaking of a God The way every lyric crawls under the skin leaves you needing some sort of faith or a place in which to weep over what has been lost. Eric hums "No more me, no more belief" imagining wilting fading to brown tender dust.

I used to say it was *Demon Days*. Used to say that's the album that got me into music. Now it's *Tallahassee* because getting into music means finding the exact words of your life somewhere, means the screaming catharsis of *No Children* the chorus chanted on bad nights "I hope you die, I hope We both die" the angry acoustic a better reminder of loss than silence.

Waiting for the Call You Know is Coming

*For Tim*

## Live Music Origin Story

There were no rivers to cross  
the bar *Strange Matter*  
opening its mouth easy  
to me, teenaged, doc  
Martin'd and trying  
to look hard, another  
for the salt kissed press  
of black leather escape artists.  
With all that electric kick,  
and sway, I couldn't help but dream:  
the foot pound and adrenaline  
rhythms of the first men hunting,  
the thrum of their muscles, and the beating  
of the Mammoth's heart, there are things  
once heard, that recurl your DNA  
what I mean is there was no fate  
for beast's skins other than the drum  
pealed slow, with gentle fingers,  
then beat, beat until you get to a bunch  
of kids jammed sardine close, synchro-  
nizing breaths until everyone is caught  
in the violent thrall, and one punk pulls  
two pound bag of sugar from his coat, bites  
it open, and whirls through all of us  
sweet and beautiful, crystals  
hanging from our hair as we spin wind-  
mill feeling sweet and beautiful  
under the blue of our bruises

# Home as a Pastoral Dream

In the fishscale shade of riverside  
birches we built fire

built it with our hands, the way  
one builds a home, fingertips  
cool on damp moss

Imagine the warmth of it, opposite  
the water, so clear one could dream  
of reaching into the light.

How clear is skin unafraid of fire?  
Thin lines of blue veins, bodies  
unto themselves, box jellyfish:  
an entire cove of them. The truth  
of our bodies machinery—

perhaps, it is this display that kills us  
the way the tendrils in water long  
for other bodies. Do not linger. This transparency  
is poison Instead imagine further into the fire  
in its yellow heart and reach for it,

a little ball of warmth, like a summer orange,  
like something you might swallow with a child's grin,  
a little treasure for those who still reach into fires



The Usual Monday Morning Call in Late Winter

When Oma sees your eyes flick open  
Pupils clenched as tight as your fists  
To the bed rails. She presses the phone  
To your ears hoping. On the other end  
I can't understand a word.

Poem for the Twenty-something Stuffing Grief into Imaginary Playlists

-Carved From the liner notes of *We Shall All Be Healed*

chew through the bandages brown and white  
Sparkling  
I would lie  
there boiling think  
fondly of you.

RECOVERED  
MORE  
COMPLETE

reach for the telephone  
grab hold of a snake  
hooked cheap bolted-down Eating  
all day

THE WORLD  
the Continent

the great heat the part of me the  
final disconnect beginning practice  
strength still  
not enough this sick feeling  
past  
through the bandages joyful  
Ripping and tearing free.

hold it down.  
with all the love that's Brave young  
fabulous

*Hold on.*

*Hold on with both hands.*

Elegies Bloom as the Phone Rings

In the grey of the late day  
parking garage the wrong  
number on the wrong  
day, the sheaf of poems under  
my arm, no longer premature.

#### IV. Homecomings

*The most remarkable thing about coming home to you is the feeling of being in motion again*  
-The Mountain Goats

## Two Seasons on a Graveyard

### I.

They found this place for you in the spring,  
In May just after... black branches

Festooned, as if by the hands of some clever  
Craftsman knotting together pink

The very color and scent of the color  
Perched to spill, into shade of other

Trees, pine and birch, and to be nibbled  
By the small deer, that love unclosed

Doorways, and tend flowered graves with velvet  
Snouts. I was not there

When they brought you, in Hawaiian  
Shirt, suspenders and Birkenstocks

No suit, no sonatas bright enough  
So steel drums pulled the blossoms

Down around the heads of everyone

### II.

I am here now, with cold on my heels  
Last week, I fetched the bouquet

Evergreen sprigs, and a red blossom, but  
Ran errands while Oma pinned the arrangement

To the breast of your cross, as a boutonniere  
Or a reminder of your seat by the window

Always full of light and trumpet flowers.  
Last night, the fog began to curl upward

The cold dragging crystals out of its edges  
Crowning everything.

And now I am here, like a second spring  
The cherry branches

Hang with blossoms, these of rime

And red mane of the bouquet shakes  
Its frosted head in the quiet breeze.

## Before Flying Back to Norfolk

I hauled all of the old books  
down from my kid room, walls still  
full of atlases and Pokémon posters  
everything for donation or dump

nothing large enough to hold all  
this time, so I cut my inheritance care-  
fully from the bones of the house  
your pocket watch and suitcase

tropical colors, too bright for the overcast  
and fifty pounds or so of vinyl, pilfered  
from the attics, walls vaulted  
like ribs, everything like treasure

dust catching the dull gold  
midday-- the Jethro Tull, my mother  
stole this from down stairs during the boom  
years, nipped it at night for the cover art

and here, my uncle's collection:  
jazz and the Beatles, unplayed  
Now for years, record of a younger man  
mad collection-- 3 copies of the blue

album on blue, back to back with Nina  
Simone, and rubber soul and Thelo-  
nious Monk, grooves still  
pristine, next Bach and Mozart

Only Liszt is conspicuously absent  
No *Years of Pilgrimage* here, even  
As we prepared to take ours from the house  
That would never sell in the end

## Liner Notes for a Mixtape of Coping Mechanisms

### 1. "Tis a Pity She was a Whore" by David Bowie

*Black Star* © 2016

Just listen to those first two seconds, the breath hissing  
On the recording, and the horn, the kind of brass so mean  
That it eats itself. What I mean is you can pretend to hear  
Organs filling with fluid, even as you imagine the manic  
Bounce behind that. Adrenaline doesn't begin  
To cover it, this sonic presentation of a body for autopsy

### 2. "See America Right" by The Mountain Goats

*Tallahassee* © 2002

This is for the crate of vodka in the passenger seat, and the broken  
Air-conditioning unit, this place is so hot that even the open window  
Air feels like concrete. You can almost hear the lunatic beatnik  
Road screech coming down this back alley of America, as out of brain  
As I am. All the bass has given out, and my throat has given out, and I  
Imagine at the next stop someone will look in and think this so fucking romantic

### 3. "Title and Registration" By Death Cab for Cutie

*Transatlantacism* ©2003

Slow it all, blood thickening against cold, rummage  
the glove box of an imagined car: unresolved  
photos, an empty bottle of nail polish-- an attempt  
to be someone else, black ink quickly scraped  
off strange fingers, a complete lack of documents, unidentifiable  
in case of fire, a book of matches familiar bar, all heads long wet

### 4. "King Rat" by Modest Mouse

*No One's First and You're Next* © 2004

Everything that is said here is in the taste of your mouth  
After a night of waste, I mean the angry kind of waste, the hoping  
For organ shut and the morning soaked in bitter medicine. The tongue  
Moving in stutters along the day's seething edge. There is a rat  
Swimming through the gutter, droplets scatter off its tail—fruitless  
Seeds, its eyes are a mirror

Friend I'm trying to be the best kind  
of kind I have in me, songs  
as keys shake the body, some ghosts tumble out



The Final Closing of the Shop: New Years Day

Some key-turns ring  
with utter finality--  
the bells in the distance

Hitting one, the music box  
of the house, twisted  
everything now recast

wrought iron lamps, bulbs  
like moons, now scrap  
marked for sale

everything else ushered  
out, given or sold or  
going, to make room

for the kind of ghosts  
we make all on our own.  
Oma, looks back briefly

snow lies before us,  
tapestry of what's to come,  
our boots leaving  
ellipses

## An Interrogation after the 2017 Inauguration

What does Permanent resident mean?

Means I have planted my boots  
Here, and watched the Ivy grow  
Means home is a schizoid thing for me,  
You slip out of time in places,  
Clocks only reset so many times,  
Means, I can cross this border,  
But have to gag myself in passing  
Lest they see my tongue

How long have you lived in Norfolk?

Is living an uninterrupted thing?  
Disappearing is in my nature, I  
Could say years, straddling oceans  
Some strains you get used to, roots  
Grow hardy and prehensile, how many  
Times can you uproot the same tree?  
Replant it, feed it a new language  
Is it still the same tree so long  
As it flowers the right documents?

Why are you not a citizen?

I've told you about disappearing, my  
Magicians act, my clever Houdini  
Howling and cracking cuffs, social  
Security, seems to be grabbing  
Me by the pockets, and all the oaths  
And flag stare on from their high  
Perches, toothless things best  
Suited for globetrotter shorts  
Or a new tie for the man who would  
Call me parasite, shouts it right  
Into the country's ear, that's a trick  
Too, and everyone laughs

You liked posts of Richard Spencer getting punched, do you want to hurt innocent men?

The word innocent does  
Not exist in the tongue  
Of genocide, is not stitched  
Of tailored suits, or white

Faces, every torch is  
An intention, the dream  
Of the first bonfire, the first  
Person thrown onto the pyre,  
The tinder box on the black  
Steel trains, barreling through  
The night, right outside  
All of our windows, I  
Mean to say  
Yes  
Let them hear my knuckles  
Crack, let the Hackenkreuz  
Be a target, and let them laugh  
At the embassy when I tell them why  
I'm hiding out

She Hums Punk Songs in the Shower

The soft tattoo—a heart  
Pumping the hum, bounc-  
Ing off the the tiles, rising  
With the steam, a curtain  
A magician's trick, a day made  
Entirely of sunshine. Quietly  
So as not to miss a breath  
Of her sweet bird  
Tune, I slip my bare  
Feet through the cracked  
Door, leave a kiss on her  
Dewed shoulder, and neck and soft-  
Ly on her lips, as if to pluck  
The golden harp in her throat  
Fill my mouth at the spring  
Of her music, and carry on  
Some small piece of harmony

## A Kingdom Away

Black branches outside sway  
Like antenna the indecipherable radio  
Signals we send coded in needle  
Drops—last light flicked off  
A candle burns quietly as the snow roosting  
In the trees, she tells a small story  
With the A-side *The first time I heard...*  
All loved things have stories  
Living in the small waves, pressed  
Onto wax, the way we are trying  
To press our bodies closer to stay  
Warm, to be warm and borderless, songs  
Sliding into songs, the traffic pushes  
Towards home beyond the glass, and we  
Flip the record, let it slide down  
Light another candle, lay on the next  
Wax from pile, another brief story  
Another brick in our borderless kingdom  
That isn't here.

## VITA

Joshua McGarry  
 ODU Department of English  
 5000 Batten Arts & Letters  
 Norfolk, VA 23529  
 757-683-3991 (office)  
 757-683-3241 (fax)

## Education

Old Dominion University, Creative Writing, MFA

- May 2018
- Poetry Emphasis
- 4.0 GPA

Old Dominion University, English, BA

- December 2014
- Creative Writing Emphasis
- International Studies Minor
- 3.71 GPA, Magna Cum Laude

## Work Experience

Old Dominion University Honors College

- August 2015 to present
- Graduate Teaching Instructor/Advisor
- Taught ENG 127: Honors Literature, Fall 17
- Certified in Appreciative Advising
- Worked closely with Honors students to help them complete Honors Requirements and prepare for Graduate School/Employment after graduation

Old Dominion University Writers in Community

- September 2015 to May 2017
- Volunteer Instructor
- Taught once weekly creative writing classes with local elementary, middle and high schools

Barely South Review and Four Ties Review

- September 2015 to August 2017
- Poetry Reviewer

## Publications

Joshua McGarry has published poems both online and in print through DoveTales: Writing for Peace, Boston Accent Lit, Anti-Heroine Chic, and the Ekphrastic Review