

berfrois

# SO LAME



[ A POEM ]

**DEVON WALKER-FIGUEROA**



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Published by Berfrois

Cover design, typesetting, and frontispiece by Evan Johnston

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## “SO LAME”

Imagine being popped  
like a cherry into the mouth  
of a city that rarely swallows  
anything but your thoughts  
of leaving it. Better not  
to commit your thoughts  
to paper. Better not to commit yourself  
to riding, flask in hand, the new  
& rousing carousel, our pride  
& toy, with the knowledge  
this life is, like every other,  
secondhand. I orbit, on my hand-carved  
mare, a mirror on which faces flash  
& understand my being  
here among the innocent  
& amputated syllables of a holy  
land means someone else

has been picked by a ticking  
hand to exit  
this state or stage or ride—  
whatever—& never  
talk or walk again. It's called beginner's  
luck & as luck would have it  
I'm one of the only people I know  
who's got a job  
during this never-  
ending depression. Call it a break,  
this shaking up  
a Corpse Reviver  
II for Table I, this burning  
wells, re-stocking  
bitters, counting down  
tills that come up  
eternally short, splitting  
tips & hairs & head-  
aches, this sweeping  
up the aftermath  
of love made breathlessly  
in a bathroom stall & all  
you can do to get a breather  
in "So Lame" is to draw  
ten minutes worth of smoke  
into your still-young lungs  
as you observe a florist  
line his dumpster with baby's breath  
because not enough people  
got married or buried or turned  
15 today. While you, as in I, exhale,  
we hear someone  
yell in the alley, "I was all,

‘no way in hell am I  
driving myself!’” while the wind  
makes sneakers suspended  
from the power line appear  
to be headed places—  
the wrong way,  
the wrong way.  
Namaste.

This poem isn't about learning  
unless it's about Chemawa  
Indian School, at the northern  
limits of “So Lame,” where  
kids stolen from  
their mothers & tongues once crafted  
chairs on which certain ladies  
might sit & soothe the babies  
they taught themselves to want  
so bad. The story  
of cherries bleached & dyed  
incarnadine is the story we are  
more famous for, though,  
our Royal Annes immortal—  
steeped in what Mount Hood  
secretes in its fevered  
sleep, sulfurizing the air  
Victorian doctors so adored  
sending the dying  
away to breathe. All this  
to say, Salemites don't much care  
about garnishes, unless they involve

wages or sins or the Feds  
rubbing their fingers  
together like they've got  
the right. But right now  
we do care about Exit  
Real World, which is on its last  
legs, selling off killer  
skateboards for songs  
no one can afford to sing.  
So I change my tune, my socks,  
my inalienable wrongs because I possess  
a mattress, my dead mother's  
Belgian bike, & a sob  
story that lets me stray  
in the usual ways (my wages  
supplemented by local  
pity & foreign  
spirits). But forms  
of recovery—think  
addiction, economy, data, grief—occur  
like the weather, gusty  
& unpredictable, weird cures  
rushing in like guests  
no one asked  
to the party that was only ever  
a wake, a duty  
to ghosts given up  
& given up on.

Did I mention the Reed  
Opera House, which

though a century empty  
of any aria, once held  
Susan B. Anthony like a fretful breath  
for an hour it wanted not  
to wake from? “Let the question  
of the women be  
brought up first,” she cried,  
knowing just  
whom she wanted to be  
brought up last. Like opera,  
I’d like to make  
a comeback, but no one here  
will cast me as anything  
but out & God  
has finally stopped trying  
to come back from the dead  
to grind up our golden  
idol, a lumberjack who’s high-  
climbed the old capital  
building as if it were  
Oregon’s last standing  
spar. We’d gladly cheers & drink  
him down at a local bar  
if it meant being spared,  
as in flying from this “Cherry  
City of the World” for real.  
But for reals, isn’t life just  
a bowl full of  
gently down the stream?



Today's Special: Buttery Nipple

Today's Special: Oxblood

Today's Special: Mind Eraser

.

Sure, the only profits to be made  
here are pretty  
false & in government & service  
industries & I use service  
in the most inclusive  
sense possible: we take a moment  
to thank you  
for your -vice...  
military-customer-sexual.  
& speaking of surfaces,  
as I wipe down the counter at last  
call, Lena spills all  
the rules of anal coin toss,  
which she plays  
with a dancer at Stars! when she's not  
bussing tables in this basement  
bar & refusing  
whatever chemo cocktail  
the doctors have dreamt up for her  
or getting blue  
feathers carved  
into her shoulder blades  
during protracted sessions  
at Ink Underground. I keep wanting  
to 86 the man who snapped  
at her for not clearing  
away his empty the second he was

done. As if we weren't  
the only damned  
people in charge of his happy  
hours. As if this weren't  
her living.

I'm ashamed  
to admit the thing I like best  
about *Aida* is its end,  
how the stars get swallowed  
by stone & know  
all the living they have left  
to do will be done  
underground & their voices play  
their burial place,  
nonetheless, like a child plays  
a kazoo or the candlelight  
plays over these worn faces lining  
my bar, which seems  
so low & to me the kind  
of makeshift under-  
world that can't stay  
in business  
indefinitely. I don't want to keep you,  
but I keep thinking  
someone needs to put me  
in my place  
because I'm probably dead  
on & wrong  
about that guy Cain—  
the skinny one

who tries eternally to score  
free advice & booze  
wherever he goes. He must be lying  
about the railroad tracks  
& the stones stained  
with his sister's last choice,  
the weight of them gathering  
in his pockets, but who isn't  
a sucker for a good lie,  
a good lay? A regular treats him to  
a shot of Crystal Head  
with a chaser of his  
choice. "She isn't that  
kind," he says, "of sister  
you can miss  
too much. In fact, she was pretty  
mean." Then he downs his soda  
& bitters, like he's taking in  
his medicine, his sin.

Please don't ask  
me what I mean  
when I say, "cast  
in stone" or "rest  
on your oars" or "hell  
to pay." Don't pose  
questions or nude  
on my account  
or chase me down  
in *la calle* just to call  
my attention to what's good

in "So Lame,"  
like The Mill  
with its lately renewed  
paint or the one-ways  
with names  
like Liberty or State  
that happen  
to be lined  
with cherry trees  
or the stately  
herons with their stilt-legs  
that never give in  
to the Willamette's  
crazed currents or the fact  
that, despite our cough  
syrups being held  
behind counters, cherry  
flavoring's still suggestive  
of an attempt to get over  
being sick or my friend  
Mr. Bethel who,  
though the vividness  
of life is being lost  
on his brown eyes, still paints  
our local characters  
& dives or the faithful  
who auto-populate  
our not-yet-dying  
diners on Sundays  
or the Bush  
House in which a piano is said  
to play itself  
& wreathes of human hair

hang from the walls & you  
can stand dum-  
founded before wax  
fruit shaped by the hands  
of a daughter who lost  
her Victorian mind  
on the east coast  
& never found it  
or the patients  
at Salem Health who trust  
volunteers with their socials  
& their bare  
heads & chests & who  
sometimes ask where  
you think their parts,  
the carved-away ones, ended  
up or the tree  
roots quietly breaking  
the news of their strength  
to the sidewalks on Center  
Street, where Jerry Brudos  
no longer lives & dreams  
of ladies' severed feet, or maybe  
the tiny scythes of light  
shivering on the asphalt  
thanks to a colander cradled  
beneath the moon's expanding  
shadow as we sigh  
our awe or the fact  
that "volunteer" can mean  
a weed we'd rather not be  
rid of or the wind-  
animated hawk

feather in the fairground field  
that puts the day down  
in invisible words or the kids  
who play jokes on gravity  
in the skate park  
or that we aren't named  
Boring, Echo, Milton, Riddle,  
or Gates, which might  
make us feel  
as though we lived  
in a poem we couldn't leave or how  
we all ripen towards what isn't  
real & won't ever be, while a certain  
barista's loveliness spreads  
like a rumor through our streets  
that somehow stay lined  
with homeless men who hold  
corpse pose all winter long.

Did you know cremation  
services can be discounted  
in "So Lame" if you drop enough  
on the vessel? But it's hard  
to drop anything here  
but pounds, subjects, acid, & one  
dollar bills. &, in that vein,  
does my thinking compliment  
my black velvet dress? (I took it in  
at the waist line & the bust  
for a recent celebration  
of life.) & did you know

you can buy a vessel with lighthouses  
carved into its corners  
& lined with silk & you  
can even get the lid engraved  
with lines lifted from *The Waste-*  
*land* or *Emma* or even Habakkuk? Picture  
the lighthouses & the word  
“disturbed” descending  
into the disturbed earth, the light  
these objects lack  
received by soil. As usual, I am  
speaking of pitted things.  
& while we’re chatting  
of cherries, what about  
immortality? Because  
who wouldn’t like to remain  
bright & sweet  
even after the seas  
& the seasons & the sun  
have betrayed them  
& beauty has played  
its only hand? Yes, a man  
in this same state perfected  
the art of preserving  
cherries two turns  
of the screw & a century  
ago & wouldn’t you know  
he was an academic?  
Steve, who’s no  
academic but claims to be  
a cartoonist, drinks a can  
of Olympia at my bar & brags  
he used to be employed

at the local cherry  
cannery until he decided to be  
a full-time artist  
& wouldn't I like to star  
in today's strip?  
which he draws  
on cocktail napkins  
I've told him to quit  
stealing & leaving  
in lieu of a tip. Today, I'm a stick  
figure stroking  
the two blue strings of my harp  
while taking it from behind  
from a cowboy  
whose text bubble reads,  
"Thank heaven, I've got nothing  
to harp about today!"

“Even in Salem—  
hearing the cuckoo's cry—  
I long to be in Salem,”  
is something even the most gone  
of us will never say, not  
even at the height  
of the cherry blossoms'  
best efforts. Think of Salem  
as a storm, the kind  
that doesn't end  
until it undresses  
every branch, makes  
each ditch a pink bouquet.



“Tell us how long we have  
been dead,” I scribble on a Guest  
Check, hoping that in spite  
of all my best shots  
at forgetting this last year  
& the image of my mother’s lips  
glued to her teeth, I might still preserve  
a line of poetry, might trouble  
to recite a stranger’s sadness  
to a fellow stranger at my bar,  
some slow night, like when  
those twins came in  
close to closing, hoping  
to get so trashed they’d miss  
their morning appointment  
with their father & his dignity—  
you know, the kind you can receive  
through a vein, in Oregon,  
just once. & only once,  
I attended a pro-life conference  
in “So Lame” to watch  
my older sister deliver  
a brief speech  
about all the voices  
that fail to occur  
because of choice. She placed  
Second to a teenage boy  
who chose to mime  
an abortion, inserting his  
scissors into the air as he paced

back & forth, reciting  
lifeless facts about lives  
we don't want  
& that don't really want  
us either. One room over,  
fetuses sat suspended  
in briny mocktails  
& if you looked at them  
closely enough you'd see  
they resembled pears  
bruised from their fall  
to earth. During the speeches,  
those in attendance fed  
on steaks so rare  
red pooled at the lip  
of each white plate.  
It was the kind of red  
that makes you think  
of all the female scale  
insects slaughtered  
just to make  
sacrifice take place  
in the present tense, as in,  
imagine kneeling  
before *The Incredulity*  
*of Saint Thomas* & getting right  
with something other  
than the lord. The party favors  
at that supper were pink  
plastic babies that fit  
in the palm of your hand.  
I didn't keep mine.

Today's Special: Slutty Temple  
Today's Special: Lava Flow

Soon, we'll be able to see  
the Volcanoes again, who strike  
out & a lot & whose logo  
looks like what  
our mothers keep telling us  
will strike  
if only we can keep  
waiting, keep fighting  
Spokane like we have something  
to lose for real & ever, like jobs  
& two-stories, street cred & credit  
history. In 1956,  
one out of every ten  
doctors smoked Salem  
Cigarettes because  
the ads were so stellar  
they reminded everybody  
immortality has everything to do  
with music & its way of finding  
its way under your skin...

*You can take Salem out of the Country, but  
you can't take the country out of Salem.*

*You can take Salem out of the Country, but  
you can't take the country out of Salem.*

*You can take Salem out of the Country, but—*

That's a lie about the doctors. Still,  
you'll never hear the end of it,  
the lie that history keeps repeating  
to itself, in its sleep,  
the refrain the refrain the re-  
furbishment of your life, as your lips  
fasten to what makes this country  
inhabit you, as you inhabit nightly  
your perfectly unmade bed. In 1975,  
when stars & stragglers alike  
chain-smoked & ran marathons  
& sipped rye  
on the rocks while watching the sky  
electrified with Technicolor, *One Flew  
Over the Cuckoo's Nest*  
was shot at our local mental  
hospital for 4.4 million,  
which is roughly the current  
population of LA, where people  
from Salem go to make it  
in cosmetology, mixology, & hair  
design. Sure, I've got designs,  
as in my broke heart set,  
on being cast in *One Flew*—the version  
the Pentacle Theatre's putting on for  
next to nothing. Our ancient hospital  
even donated an original  
window, meaning, no,  
you can't break it,  
nor can Chief, nor can I,

who will never be  
cast, not even as an under-  
study because I can't adopt  
the demeanor of a nurse or a prostitute  
& these are the only choices  
a girl in this story's got.

I want to turn for a moment  
to the place where I am miraculously  
employed, where line cooks  
drain kegs & grease  
traps & the boss  
used to answer the phone  
just so he could say, "yes,  
this is the stoner, yes, you are speaking  
with the stoner." Cherries  
have stones, speaking of which,  
my father has cracked his tooth  
on one & collected one  
thousand dollars for it,  
though the tooth remains  
cracked & the crown  
un-cast. The stoner's wife,  
I should mention,  
is one of the Cherry  
City Derby Girls  
who're skating laps  
around exactly no one  
this season. Even still,  
her fishnets give us hope  
we'll catch something

more than swine  
flu or our shortened breath  
or sight of the sun  
that will soon  
cast us & every stone  
we can touch in the shadow of our moon.

.

Am I allowed to say I feel  
for the cloaked people  
huddled in the rain  
outside Planned  
Parenthood, holding vigil  
& their tongues rather  
than signs filled up  
with verses about being  
knitted together  
in a mother's womb? I am not here,  
at this moment, to end  
anything, only to begin  
averting the beating  
my life plan would take  
from the emergence  
of a second pulse. So I cross  
the barrier of people.  
So I get a cross-  
shaped object inserted  
in my cervix, a coppery  
crucifix that'll fix  
nothing in particular & which  
my uterus will attempt to express  
with such ferocity I'll give up

many shades of red  
for five months straight. Call me  
Padre Pio. Call me hormonally  
imbalanced. They must be hot  
or cold, in their private  
lives & parts, standing out  
on the curb, hoping  
someone, maybe even a god  
with a stunning personality  
disorder might notice they care  
about what they conceive of  
as begun. Yes, I want to begin  
this life over  
in some city where my face might turn  
into a pink petal  
& it wouldn't even mean  
I had to be long gone.

.

In the Salem Center,  
I am conveyed  
to a second story,  
where garlands announce  
Christmas is now in July  
& why not? & Orange  
Julius is in season  
without cease. I am circulating  
in my red sundress among people  
I wish were more  
unfamiliar than they can ever be,  
as my thoughts on the season's  
trends are conveyed

to a stylist at Nordstrom,  
the one who flirts  
with my lonely father  
who wanders into her section  
looking for signs  
of my mother  
& who doesn't read much  
Nostradamus, so doesn't know  
this store with its stunning sky  
bridge & sales  
associates will close  
its doors & life  
will never be the same, though  
who will notice?  
"Your father says you love  
plaid," the doomed stylist says,  
then offers to start me  
a changing room. "Oh, yes,"  
I say, knowing I'll try nothing on  
but can't resist looking  
in those mirrors, the infinite  
string of naked bodies,  
their faces like beads,  
in this abysmal *mise en abyme*.

A father walks into a bar  
with his son  
whom he hopes to cure  
of an excess of innocence,  
whispering none too quietly  
to the barely legal boy



he should let the bar wench know  
she's got nice stems  
& eyes & hands. In a sense,  
this scenario is complimentary to her  
sense of being-in-the-world,  
wherein to be desired is somehow  
evidence of existence.  
In a sense, though, the evidence  
is inadequate & she remains  
convinced only their drinks are being  
poured by someone else's hands &, God,  
who would want hands like that?  
So incapable of stillness, scripted  
to spill every drop.

My "moon," as the local earth  
children call it, has stopped occurring  
to me like the thought  
of a sun that doesn't know  
its disappearance terrifies.  
The people at Life Source say,  
"we never see your face  
around here anymore"  
& I conveniently forget  
to tell them I've been off  
solids for a solid three months  
& so have no need  
of their foods natural or un-  
until this phase is over,  
so just say, "we just keep  
missing each other, I guess."

There is no earth felt to pass  
beneath my feet as I walk  
anymore, floating, forgetting  
what ichor looks like,  
its strange orange & blue  
notes now lost on me. Irregular  
now as never  
before, I know rage  
is all the rage, that I could make  
a status of what's left me  
high & dry, little blood-cloud,  
little clot deliquescing, as a book  
of the ancient dead sings  
in my ear, warning  
me never to pluck  
red flowers as I sleep, as I seep  
too soundly, unless I seek death  
as a follower. Don't you know?  
It's the trying  
not to die that takes your life  
into no one's hands.  
Today's Special: Laughing Buddha

To lift one's spirits, not  
spirit. Sometimes,  
the singular fails  
to sing even the individual's  
perplexing statelessness. Also,  
the reverse of this. Take  
Spirit Mountain Casino,  
which has mountains (plural)

as its logo, which lives  
amid mountains (plural). Take *logos*.  
No. Take American Spirit  
cigarettes, known now as American  
Spirits. Take spirits, which though  
swallowed sometimes in a single  
gulp, may harbor behind  
that gesture (singular) many  
attempts at oblivion, many  
tiny glasses tilted  
in unison, for a common  
grievance or good. We call this  
the toast. We call this the shot.  
Think gun. Think who calls the—. Think  
insulin, your shoes, your life.  
The spirits might mingle  
within your blood to create  
the sense of something significant  
being—for a few, slow & soon-to-be-  
muddled hours—possible.

If you really have to know,  
“So Lame” is what you’re likely  
to hear anyone from anywhere  
north of here call this state  
capital no one minds  
fucking up—even if they are  
sober & have half  
a mind to win this round of Trivial  
Pursuit (because who’d vote for us  
over Portland, city of roses & view

corridors, of vegan  
strip clubs & more trust  
funders than you can shake  
a rainstick at?). “Don’t call it that,”  
my co-worker tells a woman  
upon whose shoulder  
the image of our planet fades.  
The woman laughs, as if she knows  
a teaspoon of honey  
is the life work of a bee.

.

The funeral director asks me  
if I want my mother  
to be made a diamond necklace,  
perhaps a ring. He shows  
me a display  
case & I ask, “are these human or just  
stand-ins?” In any case, I can tell you  
diamonds are not  
a girl’s best friend  
in “So Lane,” where dancers get off  
work at Sugar Shack & have  
them inscribed on their thighs  
& heels, thanks to uniforms they slip  
(the day long)  
in & out of the way  
air slips in  
& out of me—don’t ask me how  
I know, but I know  
the same way I know  
the best scene

in *Three Tall Women* occurs  
when the diamond bracelet slips  
from the husband's erect penis  
into the lap of Woman C,  
or B or A. The miraculous refusal—  
or is it the tragic decline?  
glimmering between her thighs.

Salemites still think  
a visit to the mountains does one good—  
as in a world of. As in, there we feel  
free when we swallow  
the thin, thin air that stunts  
the growth of any tree that tries  
to live beyond the line, beyond the lodge  
that's the actual Over-  
look Hotel. But I'd be putting on airs  
if I didn't confess  
only the exterior was  
used in *The Shining*. & while we are  
on the topic of horror, my husband-  
not-to-be claims the perfect weapon  
for the approaching zombie  
apocalypse is a light  
saber, because when you get bitten  
you can cut your ruined  
limbs away & not  
bleed out & lose for good  
your not-quite-dying breath. Cut to  
Chris, our head cook, who  
ever since he flat-lined is a scholar

on nothingness. He assures me  
no heaven waits  
patiently on the other side  
of “So Lane,” as he touches  
his left earlobe, blue  
from his wife having taken it  
between her perfect teeth. We pass  
a stale smoke back & forth,  
not because we want it  
but because all the side work’s done  
& we’re dutifully dressed  
in company tee-shirts that boast,  
“I ♥” above the silhouette  
of a rooster.

“We could get out of here,  
if you wanted,” he says,  
but I can’t believe him.

Recently, a truck failed  
to make the turn  
onto Commercial  
& spilled five hundred  
hens, so fatted  
for slaughter they couldn’t stand,  
their immense breasts glued  
to the pavement as cops  
ran around, blowing  
whistles, waving illuminated  
batons, & gathering up  
the meat whose wings stormed  
as if toward somewhere

far from Salem & the crime  
of its appetites. From a distance,  
the officers appeared  
to be holding laundry. The news  
the next day made light  
of the ruffled feathers & declared  
no one hurt.

Cheers to health & hell & halls  
of fame Salemites don't have  
occasion to haunt.  
& cheers to the Florentine  
who believed our suffering  
might one day make us clean.  
& cheers to the regular  
who once said "cheer"  
arose from the Old  
French word for "face." Cheers!  
Cheers! & chin chin!  
I drain the glass & find myself  
relating to its state, its status  
as a reflective object  
that fogs too easily  
over when close to one's lips.  
I tell myself the stunning lie  
that there are people in this world  
who live without feeling  
agony, without failing  
to fret over how  
forgettable each face  
& plan & planet

really is, as if to be free  
of such terror weren't a form  
of terror itself on par  
with sleep. It disturbs  
me, sure, how grief has become  
so important  
to my days, like it's the only thing  
that keeps me  
from being so dazed I'd forget  
I was once real  
to someone other than myself.

“Why can't she walk?”  
asked my mother.  
“She must be lying,”  
Dr. White said. From time  
to time, I want to tell him  
how silence lies  
all around us  
all the time. Or tell him  
where to go, as in that place  
where distance is just  
a metaphor  
for what is  
good & gone.  
Good god.  
Good heavens.  
Goodness  
gracious. It was good.  
I'm good.  
*Si tu me molestas*



I will likely unfriend you  
for good. But thanks for asking.  
I learned to walk again  
& to be held  
by human hands & be  
beheld. Though I am now so post-  
dramatic-structuralist-apocalyptic  
it would make your head  
spin the way children spin  
tales or beneath  
ceiling fans to make the blades  
look still. I make something  
like what they call  
a living now, a life  
in a basement bar  
I am held responsible for  
as I am held within  
its walls like a bifid tongue  
& responsible  
for balancing  
its tills & locking  
the cages that guard its spirits  
from our nightly  
thirst. Function is a form of  
recovery, I'm told;  
but there is some data  
from some chapters  
I don't really want to recover.  
Today's Special: Popped Cherry

I should probably mention that we lie

in the fast path  
of Totality, meaning we'll have more  
than cherries & Ken Kesey to be  
proud of for one minute  
& 54 seconds of orgasmic dark.  
Not that I believe  
Salem's so exciting, with its institutions  
of lower learning & its concrete  
walls that swallow up  
anyone who's been broken by laws  
no one bothers to read  
unless the loss caused  
is made to mean  
sunlight's just  
another lost cause. I recently broke  
down in my former ballet teacher's bed,  
because a local art exhibit  
was taking place, as in  
taking the place  
of his studio & I  
walked past all the god-  
awful sunflowers  
& pastel rivers & right  
through the busted door  
into his bedroom & it was just  
like before, but no clothes  
brightening the floor. The bed,  
a box, was suspended  
from the ceiling by four frayed  
ropes & I slid inside  
as a hand slides unafraid  
into an empty glass to retrieve  
the only sweet

substance left in it  
& the ceiling was heaven  
as he saw it & the bed  
was the earth & I  
wanted nothing  
more than to think  
someone else's thoughts  
as I touched his sun's face,  
which possessed  
eyes but no mouth. He'd left  
his wife for a student named  
Cherry, yes Cherry,  
who'd left him  
in the end.

Even after you give up  
your ghost in "So Lame," you can end  
up disheartened & disinterred, hiding  
in a basement no one enters  
in an asylum that used to employ  
something like half the city but also  
water torture, shackles, solitary,  
starvation, the works—for the good  
of mankind, several hundred of whom  
spent half a century dwelling  
in unlabeled, clay jars  
in a building that, unlike a mythic whale,  
never learned to disgorge itself  
of the living. I know it's pretty  
unsettling, but let's not dwell:  
Chaplain's playing at The Elsinore

& an organist's playing along.  
I blink & the audience claps,  
rising to its feet. I blink & am old  
enough to rent a car  
from Hertz. I blink & a bored boy  
on a squeaky park swing looks at me  
like I might be alive,  
while Airstream trailers flock by, so many  
holy UFOS, their veneers near  
blinding, their benevolent strangeness  
a reminder that life doesn't have to be lived  
in one lonely place. My neighbor,  
a woman whose age  
is unknowable, cooks up a new  
batch of death, her method  
perfuming the night, her daughter  
wandering down Wiggles Court, like she's fast  
asleep & maybe she is. Is it wrong to want  
to wake her for two minutes  
so she can see  
what these crazed pilgrims have  
come for? A scene the planets  
scripted, however poorly? I feel  
she'll understand the sun is being recast  
as a noose knit of light & worn  
by nothing  
save our looking & the lapsed  
afternoon. I even feel  
the rabbits reproducing  
under her mother's Civic  
will sense the sudden  
chill & dark & I hope it will happen  
just like the papers say

it will happen—that we'll all be brought  
to our feet & the dead  
to their senses  
just to bask in our moment  
in the sun, or, rather, out of it, our moment  
that will loan our borrowed times  
a new significance so we  
can finally stop asking  
how much it will cost  
to shoot this life of ours. As in,  
who will write the script?  
& who the score? & how  
much will it cost  
to add our voices back  
in the end  
in that process called voice  
over. I'm told  
where there's smoke, there's  
ire. I'm told,  
in the end, we can take Salem  
out of the country but—  
these paper glasses might fail to keep  
our vision so safe after all & after all,  
they'll only give us a timid  
sickle of flame, of fame—  
& "Don't look away,"  
someone will say, in a voice  
so close, "You'll miss it."