

and Melancholia

Wes Jamison



# AND MELANCHOLIA

Wes Jamison

a winner of the 2015 Essay Press  
Digital Chapbook Contest  
selected by Julie Carr



#69

## ESSAY PRESS CONTEST SERIES

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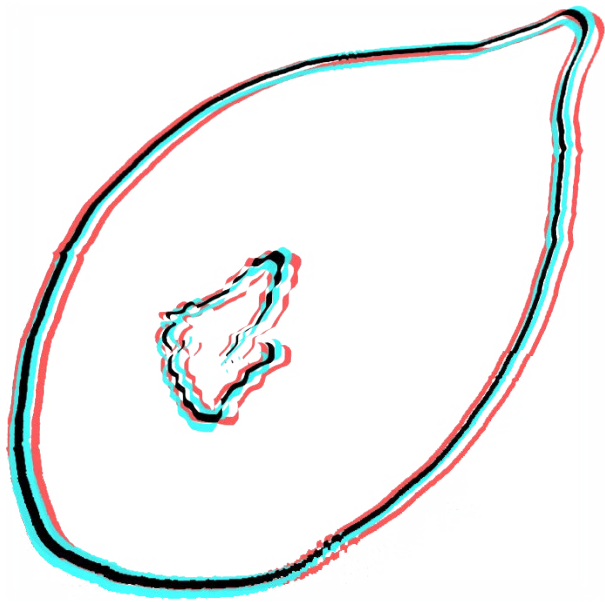
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## INTRODUCTION

—JULIE CARR

A long time ago someone invented inwardness and formed it in a letter. It might have been Sappho. It might have been St. Augustine. It might have been Rousseau, or it might have been Austen. It depends on who you ask. But one thing all the historians of inwardness agree on is that inwardness needed to be invented with language as its laboratory. It's not that language presses inwardness out. It's rather that we were outward until syntax forced us in, found us in, discovered us as hidden.

Wes Jamison's epistle is thus at least in part the story of how words, especially the detailed and measured words of poetry, forge a psyche to forage within. More specifically *and Melancholia* shows us the alchemical process whereby language, beaten to a shine, begets desire and its partner: remorse.

The excesses, both emotional and lingual, of this essay/poem/letter feel both Elizabethan and Victorian—and *Melancholia* is shadowed by queens, one who refuses love and another who mourns it. And speakers from both eras could have been tapped for epigraphs for how they re-commend the inventive power of the word.

Shakespeare's Romeo:

I take thee at thy word:  
Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized;  
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

Wilde's Vivian:

Literature always anticipates life. It does not  
copy it, but moulds it to its purpose.

So now in the age when literary self-invention is everybody's  
game, we have Jamison:

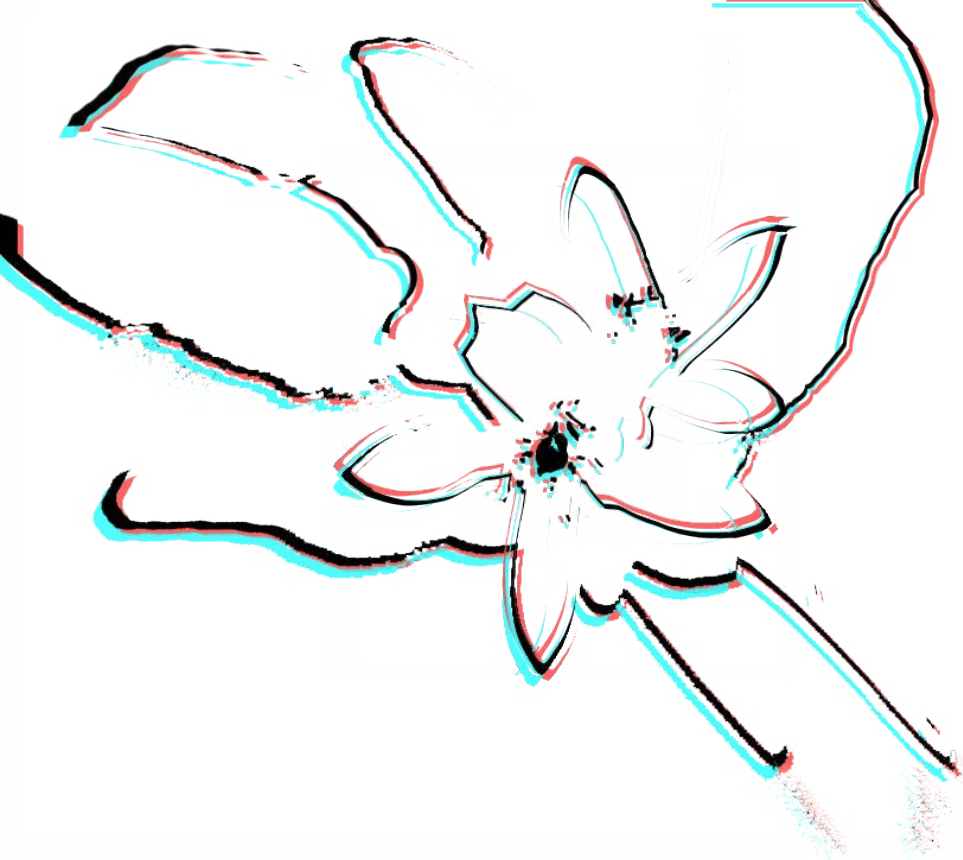
Here, the phrase *forest chest* is appropriated without wanting  
to draw any attention to her beyond the fact that she influences  
me and provides me with a language to describe these  
things that I want to say are my life but are obviously not my  
life at all.

A deictic missive organized around the anaphoric repetition of  
"This is" cannot help but point simultaneously away from and  
towards itself, such that we can never know to what extent we are  
meant to believe in a real-life history outside of this literary drama:

This is when I see myself from somewhere outside of my self  
This is how I stare at a brick wall lit strongly by a wheat street  
lamp from between dumpsters  
This, here, is where I am most Victorian, most melodramatic  
This is your silence. This is mine in response

As Paul de Man wrote, "It is not...*a priori* certain that literature is a  
reliable source of information about anything but its own language."  
This instability has been called by de Man and everyone else "irony,"  
and it might be that Jamison is reminding us just how sincere real  
irony has always been.

In the ironic gesture, the author interrupts his own voice. He marks  
irony by shifting rhetoric, tossing it around, showing off. But here  
"the demonstrated convenience of formulated phrases," whether  
borrowed or purchased wholesale, does not make the language  
any less powerful, the emotions it produces any less gripping, or  
the narrative that unfolds any less seductive. The moments of ironic  
detachment that run through this text invent not a false self, but a  
split one, a painfully vertiginous self we can all recognize as nothing  
short of real life.



## AND MELANCHOLIA

These are the mornings in which poplar seeds hang like ash, slowly drifting down and in vortices and spirals before ascending again and finally collecting like debris behind the sink; mornings where the air is still though not necessarily stagnant; mornings where the poplar reminds me that the city is not burning, not this morning. This is when a poplar becomes a sign of something prodigious—wretchedness I never thought I would find in any tree but a willow, because, because of my family and where we grew up and the kinds of trees with which my siblings and I grew, I have an obsession with the weeping willow. I watch these ashes hang, still, as if in a photo with its focus set near, and it all seems so similar to those branches distorting our vision and auto-focusing our cameras—seems connected to the willow tree whose roots are feeding on how much sustenance (and how much, after all these years) from how much feces, how many rotting leaves and animals buried there.

So these are my eyelashes, singed from staring so intently at this conflagration.

And this is my mouth, agape from considering the phlogiston.

These are all the ways I feel stuck here, and these, my voiceless resignations to the passive-aggressive comments and *fucks* and almost-tears (all glassy sclera) of frustration, all those fake sounds of weeping, like this.

This is the book written just as I wake, the paralyzed book that knows sleep is over but dreams regardless—which is the same, of course (and you have written this same book too), as the one forgotten by morning.

This is the book that begins with *This is the book that begins with*. This is the poem, too long to fit in any journal, which begins *I have been exiled*, and, by way of line breaks, alliteration, slant rhyme, places emphasis on the words *sebaceous*, *pustule*, *blister*, *rupture*, *pus*, and *cutaneous*, in that order, as if the medical speaks toward desire.

And this is that putrefied bird in all its headlessness and thermoregulation, disinterred from snow by heat or vibration or depression—our steps around it, neither of us saying anything to the other about it lest we draw attention to the fact that that divulged marrow was for neither of us. I think that you think that it was for you, because you are animal, and you are body; and I think that I think that it was for me, because I am avian, and I am decay.

This is how our complements foster ego.

That second line of this poem ends with *As if a leper*, allowing it to stand alone on two legs of stone at a precipice of water and bark: written to remind us of the crumbling of our Ozymandian bodies, the way our lives seem measured by exhaustion, viruses, rashes, and

cuts, bruises, illnesses, and all injuries and all terminology—always that, neither of us having studied, but, nonetheless.

This is the serpentine pattern of the migratory birds seen in silhouette above the bare trees of our rural scattered lands in between when you asked me, *What are you doing*, and I said, *I am thinking*. I was crying, like this, because, and because. This is the ability to pursue this. This is having a quarry.

And this is the knowledge that it is placeholder.

This is the act of excising the fragment *First line, eight words*, because I know you know that I know how to count, and I know you know how to count too—the way one counts syllables and pages, counting out pauses and punctuations, waiting on letters and applications.

This is having said *The letter i appears six times in these first two lines, only once alone, only half as many times as e* knowing that it is inaccurate now, after revision, and leaving it anyway, because, even though you don't, I like inaccuracies and having to count again. I like the unrelentingly unreliable and a creatively corrupt ethos—the way that you like the surety of certain things made certain, even though that is never what I have provided. But moreover I like to manufacture indices of *has been*, of *once was*, and of the ever-changing.

Saying this is a test of your commitment to this.

This is a test of your commitment to me.

Here, *crack* and *rupture* insist upon the mineral, the rocky, oread, Echo—a pantomime of myself as a duplicate of an other. I think we each only have one thing to say and write it and then write it again

and then write it again because we fail in some way each time, and we want to tell it again but differently and (hopefully) right. This is the deformity language provides, that inability to accurately portray anything—but how we *can* portray the corporeal as super- and meta-. How we use our enfeeblements to formulate *jouissance* and the uncanny.

This is when I open the container and, holding my breath still, investigate the mold (for it is something at which I do not often look: its existence is usually such that we throw it out immediately, disgusted and betrayed by the tomatoes or facial scrub). This is the desire for sight to fall on something noncelebrity. As if I am the champion of this.

Rewrite *Writing myself as the same character as I did before—having grown attached and unable to let go. That character not having been created by me at all. Refurbished, polished and cut differently. This time, less beautifully* so that I may not have to be responsible for drowning my babies.

I am asking you, here, to drown my book: throw it into the lake and tell me I am fraudulent, that each sentence lacks that narrative or explorative quality you want. I am asking you to tear the pages and give them to the water, let the ink bleed through and slowly, longingly permeate it all, eventually reaching all shores. I am asking, because I am torn.

Rewrite it to include the story of the farmers, how they tore her to Pisces.

This is taken from Danielewski's *House of Leaves* and *The Whalstoe Letters*, this easily missed, auto-corrected turn of letters. And these

are the online forum discussions of it, of the connections between characters. And this is the lack of resolution.

This is all patchwork and remix. (Rewrite it.)

This is how we lay under that tall tree and watched each other smoke (how I watched you smoke), the way just a wisp would climb out from your extended lower mandible, out from between your lips, barely a moment before you would suck it all in with a grin—and not yet realizing that this is a moment so full of being, so full of joy that I will remember and long for for at least five more years as I anticipate grass and blue skies and spring and you.

This is how I miss you. (Here is missing you.) (Rewrite this.)

Here, the phrase *forest chest* is appropriated without wanting to draw any attention to her beyond the fact that she influences me and provides me with a language to describe these things that I want to say are my life but are obviously not my life at all.

This is the demonstrated convenience of formulated phrases. And this, the recognition that to say *formulated phrases* is to use a formulated phrase.

This is ending a line in a modifier, dangling, as it were (here, we revisit the precipice), so that you are asked to read on, a way of keeping you (here) with me, because I know I have to try to keep you with me, because sometimes you look, and sometimes you say *Just seeing what's out there*, as if I would never know, as if I am submissive and stupid and blind. (This is where you underestimate me, for I am neither as trusting nor as complacent as you would like to think.)



Now: I submissively, stupidly, blindly allow you to do this openly.

And this is a coded phrase, composed in the simplest of codes (acrostic) so that I can rest knowing I did what I could to tell you without overtly telling you that I know the secrets you have kept since the 29<sup>th</sup>.

This is the diagram: present-perfect tense, two participles and an appositive.

Now, perhaps, you may understand the difference between being honest and being forthright.

This is the anguish of the marrow—the latent virus’s eruption from the spine and tunnel-travel along the only available corridor; its escape through the skin and its eruption again and its eruption’s eruption; the math behind it, percentages skipped, and the pattern so closely fit; its quantification despite pain that collapses. The anguish: knowing that that pain can never be captured in my language but is measurable, predictable, quantifiable, and expressed, otherwise, in mathematics.

These are the rocks on which we sat facing the waves of the lake when we came to our new home, against that lake—how it felt cinematic and novel, surreal and abrasive, and how you said *We can come here whenever we want*, and how we never did, and how now that possibility does not exist. These are both my regret and my frequent imagined trips there alone to be alone with my regret at having to be there alone in my regret without you (how I would come back with seagull feathers, shells, and sand in my shoes).

(This may not be rewritten.)

Across from the cemetery and the field, the horses on the east side of the road: we walked past and spoke to them. And here are others, more frightening, discovered in land on which I trespassed, when I had energy and warmth generating inside of me—the way I was scared and hurried to the pond beyond that cemetery.

That was when my body was self-sustaining, when my living body lived to produce itself, molten emotions only occasionally seeping, but mostly shifting shoulder blades.

That is where you said that I have a greater chance with you than anyone else—as if I knew what that meant, but understood that I should be upset by it, so I made myself, and I made you see that I was (and isn’t it strange how, while it was important to me then, it is not anymore, and I doubt it ever was for you, so, if it decreases in importance, it would have gone from little to none for you).

And here are the associative synaptic leaps over fires burning for a decade. Above my left shoulder is Freud’s voice saying that even the most trivial of memories, specifically the seemingly trivial, are remembered as an index of trauma. Wondering if association is justification enough.

This is the painful hollow manifesting in your stomach which indicates that the painful hollow will never change, never subside, and can never be curbed; this is the pain that makes you acutely aware that no one has ever described exactly this, proof that no one has ever felt this until right now, in your torso, somewhere under your breakable ribs, knowing that to get to it, one would have to break your ribs.

The sixty-foot statue of Jesus exploded in fire. This is when it was struck by lightning. This is the impulse to tell everyone they were lied to: it

was not solid stone; it was fiberglass and Styrofoam. Something large and solid becoming rotting scaffolding against the water, unsubmerged and spring. Something iconographic becoming rudimentary, geometric, and benign.

This is the twenty-seventh time I have thought the phrase *scraping by*, particularly *barely*, during the past week, and only about the second time that I have thought the phrase *barely scraping by* to be the product of cornfields and motherly wisdom.

Here, a copy of the handwritten letter to a friend that is not typed for fear of being discovered by my husband, the letter, handwritten, so that it may not be duplicated or copied—so that it cannot exist anywhere else but in your hands. (Rewrite it.)

And this is the fear that having written the text unwritten will leave me drained—Dorically.

This is when I see myself from somewhere outside of my self and imagine it as a photograph of my looking at a brick wall lit strongly by a wheat street lamp, every other light too dim or too far away to create a glow or shadow on the wall outside of the lamp's round glare. And this is how I stare at a brick wall lit strongly by a wheat street lamp from between dumpsters and consider this: there are books that are right in the right moment and wrong in other moments—how sometimes a life and the life of a text cohabit with each other in meaningful ways.

This, here, is where I am most Victorian, most melodramatic, in my profession of love and adoration of her: each letter (this is where there are letters, adding to the Victorian) beginning or ending with yet another description of the emotions I feel toward her.

This is the anthology of writers' writing on writing, formed not by treatises and hardly any nonfiction, but passages on the creative, sleeping inside novels and poems, the accidental and honest ones—the proof that when we write about writing, we are lying, because we are not upper-class, we are not disciplined, we are not regimented and educated and honest, nor are we so optimistic.

Here, the hesitation to begin again, after having had it all swept away in that current.

This is Frankenstein's madness, which is only melancholy, and the connection between the hysteric and insanity: his femininity.

This is the binary body: rewritable.

How I used to find meaning and significance all around me, all the time: birds perched on the tree outside my window, horses and trees and fire, learning how to roll cigarettes, particular piles of rocks. All of it. Everything. And how I now struggle to see any of it, struggle to force myself to stumble upon any thing. I once fabricated the fantastic, but now—dearth.

And this is how I spend my silences: abusing myself for saying *Sorry* too often and when I am not for anything in particular.

This is when I am not for anything in particular.

Now is when I want to remain silent and solitary (fixing isolation or exile as a cure) save for when I can tolerate the discussion of drowning as being terrible, freezing preferable—how I would rather just fall asleep, knowing that I would fall asleep and my rewritable body will slow and stiffen, than to inhale that burn, see the void

around me become sun-bleached and dog-eared, still alive to feel myself die.

Now the lines about the exile, the water, the madness have new meaning; and this is when I continue to refuse to write that poem.

When my adoration is immediately subsumed by ignorance.

This is the long line, the Whitman line, and the disruption of the sharp, controlling jerks. Here is where I become oriented in a mature and meaningful way—inevitable.

I felt the desire to work with brick, because it is rough, and mortar, because it is too and ultimately binds indefinitely; this is the desire to callus my fingertips to feelinglessness before to bone; this, the yearning for work that will cripple me. This, also, the wish to produce something tangible, a product, instead of this emotional *good* or nothing at all. Now, the dream where my hand is stone and broken as if cavity.

This, the epic of my resistance.

These are the seven purple vials, scalped out of forearm, resting in my open, sweating right-hand fingers—having lost a hole-punched piece of epidermis, vein and hair and time and sinew, coffee, freckle, to a hollow needle. Nothing saving virus, blood-cell, platelet from the violent cold without me. Dying; never time for teaching how to breathe.

This is the undeniable effect of a pleasant dream and knowing the root of each image, the undesire to interpret beyond waking-translation.

Here is the unwanted face of him and the consequential uncertainty of my escape.

The wink you delivered while pulling my blood through plate-glass tubing toward that well which would determine my degree of illness, that imperceptible suction, vacuuming myself from my self—how it told me this meant nothing to you.

Here again is the anger which blisters up, a shingle-like crack, from somewhere deep and unpredictable beyond the one-in-three for firsts and one-in-three for subsequents (the one-in-nine to suffer such pain multiple times).

These are the tears fallen of frustration, fallen from repetition and repetition, fallen because it feels good to collect them in this way: a small sponge placed in the nostril and snorted into the sinus, blown from there to the tear duct then out and wrung into that rice vinegar bottle over the three rooting apple seeds; these are the tears fallen and collected to be used as the only secret ingredient I know.

When I accidentally sawed through bone and hoped that you do not taste the carbon in enchiladas.

This is the cut left thumb about which you did not care but now bleeds HIV all over your food; and this, my non-concern, because, as she told me once, leaning back in her chair across from me, *That isn't how it happens*, and how at that point I wish it did.

This is the nostalgia I feel newly each new spring in this similar city to the one before, only older. This time, colder. No time more enchanting than the first. How the sun reminds me of my mother's short-bloomed magnolia, how I long for that scent; how the wind reminds me of.

This is what happened: O'Leary barn, 1871: gamblers, trying to make just those few extra coins. 11:30 p.m., so it was dark, so they had a lantern. It was 1871, so everything was made out of wood, while now, after we rebuilt, twice, everything is brick, because we are not California. Just those few extra coins, and, knowing this city intimately, I doubt it was out of avarice; I suspect it was necessity, a desperate hope, the way we play the lottery. (The way we judge people for playing the lottery.)

This was a Sunday night, so perhaps these were not people who had to wake up the next day for their 9-5; perhaps these were someone elses. And we don't know how, but that one lantern was knocked over. Miss O'Leary suggested a cow was at fault, which suggests she had at least one cow, which would suggest there would be straw lining the floor—just enough to make the flames big enough and hot enough. Just enough to cause the wood to blacken and split. And spread. From DeKoven, where I have never been, because it is too far south, further south to Nineteenth—to Halsted and Walsh—and north to a neighborhood in which I used to live. And if you travel north, you can tell that they began rebuilding where there was the money to: the further south, the older the buildings are, but we spread like viruses to neighborhoods north, until we didn't, and there is a pocket of affluence just at the cusp of this tragedy—this tragedy that I dislike calling such: 300 lives compared to the 100,000 homeless or the 138,000 now.

There is no answer, because there is no question.

A scraped-out feeling, not hollowness, but used: an exhaustion so severe, and the avoidance of stepping on cracks in a childish, neurotic way—never superstitious.

This, this first walk without heading toward you, is unbearable, mostly because I know you do not understand how unbearable it is, because, when you make it, you have an end in view.

Now is when anger flows again from my spine in an unintelligible torrent, crippling Broca's small landscape. Now is when it becomes unmanageable, and I become intolerant and entitled—the two characteristics that anger me most. This creates positive feedback, where my anger makes me exhibit behaviors that anger me.

This is the circle of my lividity, my melancholy finally giving way to this.

This is the violent, threatening text written to efface my self, written to forget that I am housewife and baker and maid; this, the text that defines who I am at base or essentially; the physical text which tells me (more than it would tell you) that I am a writer. (Rewrite it.) This is the violence that is needed to remind me. And this is where you say this is not something I can escape, but also where you forget that one can be forced out from it.

These are the seven cockroaches uncrunched underfoot in my dream last night and the unmentioned carrion, the unseen louse, and the only slowly seen decay of something valuable underneath the couch, something once thriving and living and lost.

Here lies the unfructed dream, the mechanical hope, and the apocalyptic, suffering memories all tied together with coins.

These are unused tools of a former trade discovered accidentally, and the sudden urge to destroy them.

This is our second star: Miss O'Leary's lie to protect her gamblers.

This is the urge to write the body as crystalline and as canopy. The urge to say that *the best of me is not my body*. And to undo all that identity.

This is your silence. This is mine in response. These are the knots of amory, the tensions of us.

This is the daily, how we give up because we are each difficult, and we see it mount exponentially and then reunite; this is the question of possibility and sacrifice.

These are the untended and wilting bodies left untouched except in passing, where I carve apologies out of the bark of your thighs and mirror them on my torso, all your viscosity adhering to the weakest part of my self. This is the sentence which once and for all explains to you why this is all so, why you feel so weak, and why I am never as strong as you. This is that sentence in the poem I write between the visible veins on the back of my hand, that I translate into German on my inner upper arm before skinning off my leathers and making a bag for you to carry yourself into somewhere else.

This is reuniting because there is no other option: a physical coupling of solitary baths, headphones, errands run individually, hidden conversations.

These were his acres, my body, my blood.

I do not know about fire (not its adjectives, its physics) but I know that it makes an adequate metaphor for many things; I know that its words double in particular ways: combust, conflagration, fire. There is difficulty in getting past these two elements which are tangential to all this (fire and water) drowning and burning and licking, suffocating

and melting and floating, explosion and swallow and wave, engulf and subsume and rage. These are what I am trying to get past.

This is the city once on fire, baking bricks and melting metals brought from all over the world to be displayed. This is the city that burned, once, but not as dramatically as I would imagine. A single wooden house, perhaps two, and a park and a bank. If the city burnt now: what does a train look like as its blue velveteen seats erupt and the plastic, fiberglass burns and drips onto the metal before it too drips, and the whole melting train melts to the metal melting tracks. And what would that do to the electricity. And what happens when one carries the melting apparatus through the entire length of a city already burnt. Where do these fires begin to create the highest conflagration. Underground, some sort of tunnel to push the air through to form a tornado of flames. The scorched green grass turned embers and pigeons reduced to their infantile robotics. How much more impressive it'd be to actually see this city set ablaze, that plume of smoke billowing larger than our largest tower, across the lake to the city we do not know. And to arrive here, highrises falling to cinders, aluminum and wood and chain-locks and papers burnt to liquid carpet fibers, keratin and dust and carbon all falling to the dirt already submitted. To arrive here and immediately succumb to the waste that this city is becoming. To have this city become a waste, the wasted lives all up in smoke now. The crispy dreams and wishes and hopes for.

This is why everything in the city is dying. (An explanation of death, of decay, of bloating and eyeballs forced out of socket, soft genitalia eaten first—an explanation of all those flat and gumless exposed teeth, awful whether in utero or mortem.)

Imagine this splintered city and its burning population, all pustules and char.

This dead hummingbird, young and sandpaper, found by someone and placed under a bush in hopes of survival (revival)—and how I knew because of the white hand towel still lightly bunched around it.

And this, the periwinkle and white pigeon in all its recumbent eyelessness, sleeping fetus-style in the dirt.

Here is an explanation for the *déjà vu* experienced last night and the night before and the night before and the night before that and its always being felt in dreams, even though I am never sure if it existed in the dream or if I feel it because I am remembering that dream so vividly: there is not one, because it is so many things with so many nuances, though what I would like to say is this: *déjà vu* seems temporal, in that it is audible, and it is undoubtedly linked to the uncanny. The connotative has been experienced and is thus being translated into dream logic; or these are things I have seen, but not yet processed, and dreaming them helps me to.

There is city smoke rising in stacks and ash falling from this splintering of what is left here: knowing that nothing can be done to save this, watching as it all falls away and into the lake, the city drowning itself to save itself from hopelessness.

The line composed on the train to be paired with the phrase composed on the same train from the previous day and the thought that compositions written in the same location will be linked indefinitely by it.

These suburbs are being subsumed by the peripheral flames. The sky, here, is dark with debris: the 9/11 kind, business reports and

employee records and whole checkbooks—and birds, stained with that soot, and birds that plummet out of the sky toward the ground to crash in a thud of iron and purple. The ground is thus littered by these decompositions (rewritten), and we each trek through it, the soles of our shoes becoming uneven, and the paths we walk turned to walked paths, trampled by so many others, almost cleared.

When I wake and when I am particularly misanthropic, I prop my head up on the pillow and watch the trains pass almost only a block past the window; I find a comforting sorrow in the vibrations of their basses and their bodies.

This is easier to tread. I feel like my life has been spent more with many waters: I have lived now for five years within walking distance of the largest body of water I have experienced; and it was a sandy, hard, calming place to which I went every year with my father's family; and I do dishes and take baths when I am stressed so that I may recall a time before my father left and all those times, after, feeding mallards McDonald's fries on the dark, old, algae-ringed piers. Or the pond with the horses and disappointment.

Fire is more difficult, perhaps because it is more used. Perhaps because it is the creative, while the water controls creativity: and isn't that the image—the fire burning away the book or the heretic or the city, but knowing that a solid rain can stifle any of it immediately. Isn't that the story: Prometheus delivered fire.

This is the book about watching the city burn from the safety of the lake and the lake crashing torrents to burn my lungs from the inside of my lungs inside.

I have never seen uncontrolled fire—not beyond the flames I imagine gripping every brick of this city melting. Of course, none of this is really seen, but I say that I see it, because it feels very hot to me.

This is the overwhelming creativity, the one that makes me weep, like this, unable to write or speak.

This is where I locate the geography of fear.

This is about disappearing within an air of degradation and waiting.

This is about disappearance.

This is the city, humanless.

Our relationship, distanced.

This is that single moment when my suspicions grow like cysts and remain for as long, how I hope just as much now for bursting.

Here is the crow flying between her dandelions, airborne then landbound with the one other crow flying between her trees: this is the grass-green grass between; the veil-like mist. And this is the knowledge that these two crows are crows, and these two crows are hopping around some animal, dead, and each blade of grass acts to hide it, for we are ashamed of our dead, and we have taught ourselves to cover them—that what these two crows we know to be crows are carrying in their beaks is freshly-rotted flesh.

This is that instance when you look at me in horror, your eyebrows lifted and your lips made separate lips, the noise that falls like a wasp onto your tongue and crawls out slowly and sticky, the moment

after you discovered that I took my agency and used it despite my perceived agencylessness and destroyed the world for a few million out of spite; this, the moment you learn of how much anger I shoulder, how I have made an occupation of turning the creative destructive, of my motherhood and belt of arms, my red red tongue.

This is of what we are made: our weakness.

This grey city has been hope, and it is a space for change and adaptation and conflagration; that is our false legacy. If our individuals burn, there is no recovery. If we drown, we stay submerged. We cannot rebuild, it seems, not here. Not without luck or resource—but the city is self-serving in that those resources are reserved for heirloom. Here, the individual is pinned under a burning building.

Here, the individual is rot.

This is the moment I wish to flee the city and look back at its flames rubbing its muzzle against the escapes and front doors and roof decks—the satisfaction felt as I stop to watch it spread and destroy itself, crumble over as if weeping, like this, in despair felt because I cannot flee. Wished for, but not.

This is where the fire still burns underfoot: don't you see my browning, scaling, dusty soles. Don't you see that this ground is too hot to tread, that the earth is on fire deep underneath, and we can feel it. And that is where he delivered that flame—not to humanity but under our feet—and that burning makes progress impossible, always periodically stopping to take off our shoes then our socks and twist our feet upward to check.

This is when I feel the city's thick-glassed highrise eyes bear down on me most fiercely: when I long for a house built into a hill in a forest with one road and so many deer and raccoons and that one opossum that digs through our produce and trash.

This is the statement that convinces you that I have been hurting too, the one that states a statement of injury and damage done, and it convinces you of this violence, because you have neither seen it nor believed in it. A finality you cannot deny.

Here is the fragment where everyone dies, moved from the Shakespearian final act to the frontispiece, in a French sort of way, in a way that says I have read Cixous and that I know someone must have died, somewhere, before—and those who have not must suffer such immense violence that we begin in a city where everyone is.

The city, this city, seemed easier once—before I knew millions-bodied cities at all—before I learned how people stack upwards and miles are in squares rather than stretches. And, younger, it was easier. And I cannot but think that I was lucky to have experienced it as such. Greenery and streetlamps with actual flames, leaving the rural and feeling that genuine, howling, violin-like homesickness for the first time.

This is what I want to say: that I know I am defeated here, that I feel the defeat rolling in very quickly and soon, that I have not yet been, but will be. And I want to throw my hands up. That my wanting to throw my hands up is not an immature tantrum, not *giving up*, but rather that the desire to do so is the desire to have the *option* to be weak. This is what I want: to be weak and held in arms much stronger than mine. I am tired, and I am tired of my tired arms becoming stronger, almost strong enough to hold you in that same particular way.

What I want to say: I cry, like this, to set an example.

The temporary tar placed during construction, during extended breaks from the construction, it is still hot, and my soles, once firmly planted, tear from heel to toe from heel to toe—this is the same as the still-tacky floor lacquer that, once tearing at your shoes, now tears at your flesh, your calluses, the dirt on your dirty feet. And this is how you have to traverse it: in leaps, knowing that the pressure will make the adherence stronger but also knowing that fewer steps means you are less likely to get stuck the way you fear getting stuck, the entire city turned to quicksand around you, not even forging the possibility to sink slowly or escape.

Whether this place is always already aflame or ought to be, this is the certainty that it is or will be and was, a city all before and subject to wish fulfillment and defense mechanism. The city itself has its own ghosts it grows through and lives in to, like trying to imagine the scene by feeling the writing on the opposite side of the page, like Braille, as if sentient fingertips—like the city has fingertips. And it does, doesn't it: these transport tendrils and antennae. This knowledge that Here was burning but recovered, that Here is burning and has yet to ignite, and not knowing which to emphasize.

Here is distrusting the animal and the dead, unsure whether I was cognizant of the initial spark or flame, unsure whether I needed to be here from the beginning to appreciate.

This is when our conversations turn again to the weather, not having the drive or motivation for apologies, congratulation, or anything of import—because we are tired from all the import, exhausted on it. Because I am seeing all this decay and feeling it in my fiber and carbon, seeing it written on my body in exposed abdominals and



vas deferens (all a slow wilting from all this slow heat encasing and trapping us here, now, despite how all circumstances change, or don't). This is when, when our conversations become geological, I want to erupt and say *I know* and have you hear and understand that as *I know and want you to confess and confess more*; this is how, even though I am aching, I have that desire, that scab-pick masochistic anticipation.

This is the text that I place in front of you to read. This, your lack of interest and my lack of surprise at your refusal. This is the line where I describe you in a way that you do not want to hear, and this is your response. This is the text that proves that *Everything I write is about you* is a lie. This is where I project my writing on a wall and stand in front of it, letting the pixels hemorrhage over my worn body.

I dare you to rewrite this.

I fabricated explanations for this dehydration: my body is working harder; my muscles are not used to working like this; my joints are not well-lubricated, I have never liked drinking water, I do not drink enough of anything except coffee. Coffee dehydrates a body or it is a diuretic, whichever is the cause of the other, but a body addicted to caffeine thinks it needs it, and I think I need it when I am so tired, when my muscles are so tired, from working like this. The dehydration, though, is from none of these. This city—she is dry and rasp, rivelling in on her own sustenance to survive. The city is cactuar.

I am Nevada, and the city is burning.

There is no relief here. Nor in wishing for disaster, because that is something for which I do actively pine: a fuselage falling through

the window while I am reading under it, a train derailment, or a stray bullet. I have not become careless, ever, though yesterday, I intentionally walked behind a semi that was trying to park: I knew it was going to go in reverse, and I knew that I was in the crosswalk, and I knew that it would be unwise for me not to wait, but I did not wait, and when I was not struck by the slow-moving semi, I glared into the mirror at the driver who said *Can't you see that I am trying to park here*, and I wanted to say *Can't you see that I am a pedestrian*, but did not, because the fact of the matter is that I was disappointed he did not bump the semi's bumper into my ribcage. No bruises, no broken bones.

Wishing for disaster is, of course, the same emotional logic as wishing for a miracle—a waiting.

This is the juncture, the cleft, and hiatus. This is where you get what you want. What I think you thought you wanted. Dark fabric. Cuffed. The forced hand, where thorny desires straighten bent knuckles and rip up cuticles, where I coagulate and describe to you all salty and ironous leaks. Bright fabric. Loose, down (but not down: cotton), description of past with others' bodies. This is where you discover that my and that previous body are similar—in that small, almost dead, less-than-forty way.

This is where I wonder if you can care about the only thing I've consistently hoped for.

Here is the forest you promised me, without words and without action, with only the movement of your mouth and feet and just after a move and after travel and before leaving. Where you do not have white-white sheets, but where you want to lie under them.

This is where I run and want to run with you but am too focused on lifting my legs and the feel of melting concrete hitting heel to make sure you are keeping up or not ahead. Of me. This is my just going, where I tell others and try to convince myself that I will enjoy just running, even though my arches are eschar. Even though I do not know geography. Even though I do not ever go far. Even though I have not seen the ocean. Even though I don't have the resources to keep me alive once I am there.

This is when I tell you I like to sprint. And this is where you begin to jog along the beach, again, alone, as attempt at not anticipating, at trying not to plan. You predict, and I predict too.

This is the refusal to tell the story, because narratives are too clean, and, if you reread the text, no one is forced to live through all of it—a continuous, self-referential series of footnotes.

This is E : S. And these are the results of your object retrieval/detour test. And this is mythology. And this is having accepted my own polytheism but never telling you. This is the breeze that rocks my door on its hinges and your radiator, turning on in the middle of the night, my legs sweating.

You tell me, *Here, whisper in my ear*—and you laugh at me—*You expect too much.*

Here is where I want perfection to be, here, where there is none, where I learn that nothing can be perfect, and my quarry is a fiction. Here, I work alongside you. Here, I watch you watch him and him, where I watch you not watching me. Where I evaluate. Where green pen. This is listening, and this is tuning in.

Here should be intercourse. And here is trying. Uncovered. A party. This is where I decide I will not cry. And this is where I know I will, like this.

These are the pliers used to grab the screw screwed into the cork pressed into the green glass bottle clutched between knobby knees, the prediction of shattering. And this is where you give your verdict.

Here is the diagram, the one showing us wake and turn our backs and pretend not to know the other is awake.

This is the first (imagined) morning I actively (because we are in such close [emotional and physical] proximity) ignore (which is to say, choose to not address or kiss) you and the solace I find in the independence and solitude.

There are times when I can feel myself break this surface, all malleable molding my hair to drips, tasting the sweat there, here, because it is new and copious. I can feel the tug of the air at my amniotic, split self, only ever half-protected and half-shielded from the blast of blaze coming at me from beyond the shore—all those tiny burning ovens, those gas-fed rooms, those faces in the heat to check the exact measurement of color of brown on each chip and each hair and each particle left from how many nights before.

This is how long I can snooze, and this is when I have to wake—that difference.

It comes as no surprise to me that I should imagine drowning, as melancholia is invariably linked to water, because it is linked to neurosis, which is linked to the amniotic. Thus, drowning ought to be a relief,

because it is so much pre-life and pre-identity, the prelapsarian. It would be comforting to find a home again in one's mother.

This is the fourth time this week I have walked in the rain umbrellaless, protectionless save for speed.

These are the fleshy mounds of mosquito bite, signs of our trespasses and our creative endeavors—for when we are most creative, we are always trespassing, always deforming and violating that which is in some place we should not be.

This is how we treat them: scratch them, hydrocortisone. How we admire them—who has more, whose are worse. To be bit where is more irritating than where else—and how we wear them as physical proof of our lives separated. Because this is when I was an actor for you, when I hoped that you would treat me differently, call me by another name, fuck that other man. I could have been anyone you wanted, you just had to tell me. (Tell me to rewrite this.)

A shot. A pill. Asleep.

These are the books through which I relive the sensation of wonder, the only wonder there is for me to have. They are the ones that were asteroidal in their impact, revisited once or twice, and, though never forgotten and often spoken of, have collected dust. Until now. Until now, so many years later, after all the new books and the other books I reread—these are the books to which I return for a sudden sense of self and youth. They make me feel uneasy on my feet, and they break my sternum to find a chasm in my breast, familiar and dislodging.

These are the days met with passivity, though never submission. These, the tasks done with only silent complaints. And these, these nights, are the ones marked by unhappiness: not contentment, not ambivalence, not happiness, but a particular stoicism that refuses to be on a spectrum—one that is its own line of to be.

This is a list of liquid: This is a list of fluids lost without you: This is a list of waters I have been in: These are the places where I imagine to be happy but am not (not there or not happy): This is a list of lists I will never provide you: a list of lovers:, the list of people I have loved:, the times I said *I love you* but did not mean it:, when I did:, people and things I imagine when I close my eyes:, unreciprocated loves:, your trespasses:, mine:, your flaws:, what I wish I had done instead:.

I wanted this morning to be kept sacred, but you were all upgrades and change. We were heat and complaints and two passionless kisses; we were seated and separate. We were waiting, and I can only imagine that you were, like you have been, waiting for someone else the way that I have been waiting for you to fuck up. (Submissive and stupid.) Because each morning is now met with difficulty, and you are bored. You are ready for me to be gone and the sun risen to its full height, the accompanying heat, friction, and sweat.

Underwater, I am not weightless. *Not*, but *feel*. Billions of tiny hands feeling me and judging if they can or should hold me, if they want to be on top or bottom. They are oxygen and ant, able to sustain or sink, float or decompose. Dependence. I imagine (for I do not know) the control in sliding in and letting the surface swallow me rather than breaking it. I imagine the opposite for when I surface, the hands wanting to keep me. As if desired. As I walk out, I want to feel their nails claw at my hairs, my skin my tattoos eyes lips, feel them

unable to grip for long before descending again into themselves, metonymous. This is about mastery over them and mastery over my body.

This is the sharp realization of something always known though forgotten—the familiarity of it, remembering that I wanted to remember, but did not. This: I have to slow down in order to maintain control, to stay molasses, honey sweet, strenuously seeing sentences and big picture without becoming Gertrudian. Maintain control so that my sentences go down the easy hills they have before, ascend downward through the detritus and bramble.

How those dragonflies were glorious in number.

It is from loving you so much that I dehydrate myself into disexistence: that you are always before me; that I am secondary and reverb; that my desires can only persist as iterations of yours, and yours are novel and exciting (mine hackneyed) and matter of course.

This question: *When will I have my husband back.*

This is why the book will not be dismissed so easily, despite its allegory, allusion, and symbolism, its codes and exaggeration and solipsism.

Now I gag on all these insects, retching silences from off my uvula.

The surprisingly aggressive blue against the green of the moist weeds and the fire of its viscera. This is how we live with shock, undamaged, until.

This air we breathe is so common.

I did: I pretended to be somebody else for you this morning.

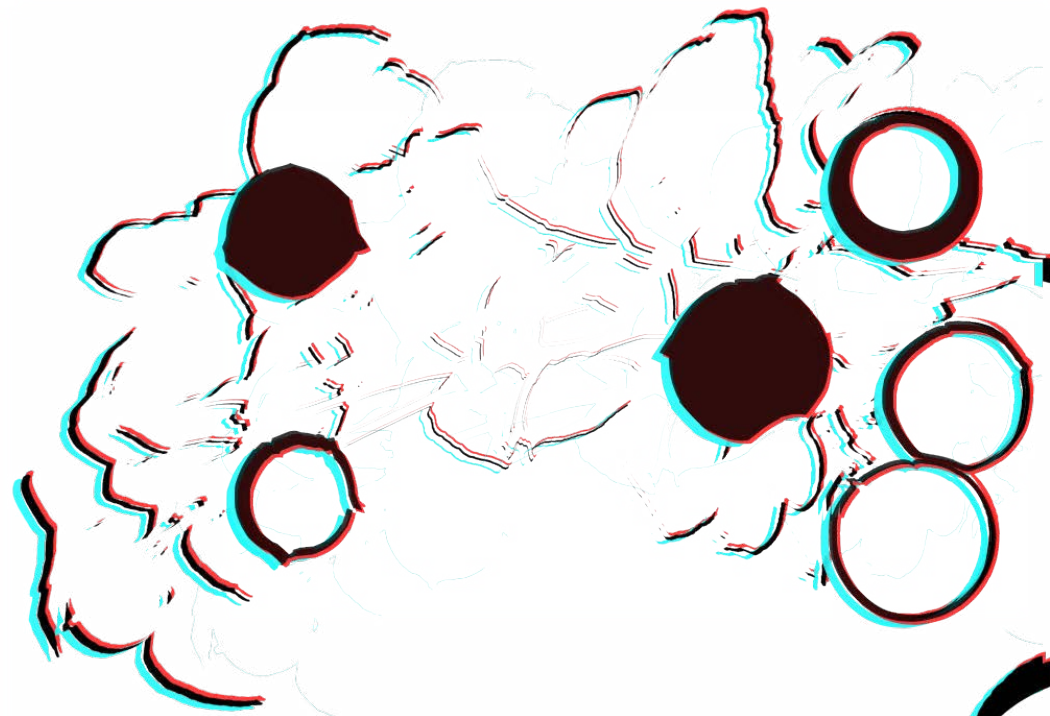
This is both fire and electricity: the radiation itch from your offering to teach me to swim and discovering that I already know how. Scratch it open with your fingernails, hope for blood; drag the fabric vigorously in prayer for another kind of burn. Then shake out the oil that is the only oil said to help this itch and pull your arm closer to the area, for we cannot reach, but we must, so we do by dislocating shoulders and popping elbows.

This is cold, and this is burn. This is tingle, and this is pinch. This is the willingness to slice open our flesh and pour if not salt then lemon in the wound to get out of it.

## AUTHOR BIO



**Wes Jamison** is a teacher in Chicago. His work appears in *1913: A Journal of Forms*, *The Boiler Journal*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *Gertrude Press*, *Gone Lawn*, and *Wilde Magazine*. His essay "The Secret Garden" (*South Loop Review* Essay Contest winner) was selected as a Notable Essay in *The Best American Essays 2013*.





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