

A Catalogue of Light:

A Collection of Poems

BY

MATTHEW REED COREY

B. A., Florida State University, 2002

M. A., Florida State University, 2005

DISSERTATION

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:

Christina Pugh, Chair and Advisor

Jennifer Ashton

Mark Canuel

Christopher Grimes

Margaret Miner, French and Francophone Studies

*For Kim and Kathleen Corey, George and Madeleine Macauley, Joseph and Eileen Corey,
& Ephrem and Dorothy Messier—with love.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the chair of my dissertation committee, Professor Christina Pugh, for her very generous support and guidance, as well as the members of my dissertation committee, Professors Jennifer Ashton, Mark Canuel, Christopher Grimes, and Margaret Miner.

Thanks, as well, to the editors and staff of the following journals in which poems from *A Catalogue of Light* have appeared or will soon appear:

Artifice Magazine: "What Remains of the Sun on Bedsheets," "What the Ebb-tide Says in Apology to the High-tide," "Ocular Poem in a Rainstorm with a Pickle," and "Transcription of an Anxious Season"

At Length: "Lines Written On the Brink of the Lower East Side," "Poem Like an Instamatic Camera," "To Persevere is to Draw Breath After Breath After Breath," "My Wife as One of Many Mammals," "Twenty-Eighth Street, Kindly Allow Me to Fish God & the Virgin from Your Depths," "Lipping Chocolate Cigarettes, the Mathematician Shakes a Fist," "Navigating by Echocardiogram, 1968," "Birdcall, I First Hear Birdcall from the Fragrant Magnolias," "Madsong Concerto for String Duet," "How Loquacious the Quiet Can Be, How Endless," and "Ars Poetica in Bottle Glass and Seawater"

Crazyhorse: "Waiting for White is the Same as Waiting for Grey"

DIAGRAM: "An Appetite in Winter Thrums"

GRIST: the Journal for Writers: "If He Once Dreamt of Furniture and If Her Mouth Were Then a Voiceless Corner Cabinet"

The Massachusetts Review: "As the Fool"

I am also grateful to Jennifer Moore for her years-long readership of these poems; to Molly-Rose Arnstein for her endless encouragement; to Anne Winters, Roger Reeves, Roxanne Pilat, Elizabeth McDermott, Jenny Morse, Virginia Konchan, Garrett Brown, Chad Heltzel, Adam D. Jameson, Candace Crawford, Marla Weeg, and Frederick Von Drasek for their interest in Fish; and to my poetry students.

MRC

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Migration of Light to the Horizon, 1956-1960

Were the Night-Sky as Silent as an Apron of Eyelets.....	2
Oh, I Hope He'll Be Brave—	
One: Proletarian.....	3
Oh, I Hope He'll Be Brave—	
Two: His Chorus Blathers, Each Singer Paid with A Pocketful of Saltines.....	5
An Appetite in Winter Thrums.....	7
Waiting for White Is the Same as Waiting for Grey.....	8
To Persevere is to Draw Breath After Breath After Breath.....	9
Lines Written On the Brink of the Lower East Side.....	10
Twenty-Eighth Street, Kindly Allow Me to Fish God and the Virgin from Your Depths.....	11
Index of Precious Objects Locked within the Temple of the Sun.....	12

Out of Light that Begins a Year, 1961-1977

I, Hornswoggler.....	14
Timid, Becoming Breathless.....	16
My Wife as One of Many Mammals.....	17
Mercy Be.....	18
Transcription of an Anxious Season.....	19
There is Now a Shiver Under the Syllable on His Tongue.....	20
Ocular Poem in a Rainstorm with a Pickle.....	21
If He Once Dreamt of Furniture and If Her Mouth Were Then a Voiceless Corner Cabinet.....	23
Poem Like an Instamatic Camera.....	24
Oh, I Hope He'll Be Brave—	
Three: Employed By Pinkerton, Mister Fish Follows Home an Acoustics Expert.....	25
Oh, I Hope He'll Be Brave—	
Four: Rare and Peculiar.....	26

What Turns Inside a Lighted Knot, 1978-1997

How Loquacious the Quiet Can Be, How Endless.....	29
What Remains of the Sun on Bedsheets.....	30
Navigating by Echocardiogram.....	31
Birdcall, I Hear Birdcall from the Fragrant Magnolias.....	33
An Opal Diffracting the Visible Spectrum of Dimness.....	34
Complications Arise and the Transplanted Heart is Rejected.....	35
As the Fool.....	36
Ars Poetica in Bottle Glass and Seawater.....	37
Entombed in the Company of Echoes.....	39
He Would Leave to Her a Closet Full of Suits and a Deer Staring from the Lawn.....	40
What the Ebb-tide Says in Apology to the High-tide.....	41
Madsong Concerto for String Duet.....	42

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Light at the Edge of a Page, 1998-2005

The Origins of Bellmaking in the First Hour of a Day.....	44
Half-Way Dismantled in the Wake of Thousands of Hours.....	45
Lipping Chocolate Cigarettes, the Mathematician Shakes a Fist.....	46
Self-Portrait of L. M. Motioning for the Family Doctor.....	47
Into the Order of Sundowning.....	48
Epilogue: <i>Ex-libris Lieber Mahoney Fish</i>	50
Vita.....	52

Who are you in love with?
me?
Straight against the light I cross.

—Frank O'Hara, "Walking to Work"

We send the Wave to find the Wave—

—Emily Dickinson, [P1604]

The Migration of Light to the Horizon

Following his birth at Charity Hospital in 1929, Lieber M. Fish's parents took him home to 24 Price Street, a two-story bungalow flanked by magnolia trees near the Savannah River. In boyhood, he would watch passersby from the living-room window, waiting for them to walk out of sight. Without any prospects for a local job out of high school, Fish took a Greyhound Lines bus to Eugene, Oregon. There, he gained temporary employment as a nighttime pump-house hand, and later fell into an apprenticeship as a logger. Fish walked away from his apprenticeship after six weeks, choosing in mid-August, 1947 to travel to San Francisco and enlist in the United States Army.

At the end of his second tour of duty, Fish returned home to Savannah, and found that his father was very ill, but rather than staying to help, he decided late one night to pack his duffle bag, and hitchhiked from one south Georgia town to the next. L. M. Fish spent the period between 1954 and 1956 as a migrant worker in the onion and cotton fields around Vidalia. Purchasing a bus ticket to New York City, Fish arrived at the Port Authority Bus Terminal on April 27th, 1956, and moved into the Niagara Hotel for Men, located at 241 Bowery.

He would remain jobless until November of 1956, when Lieber found steady employment as a vacuum-cleaner repairman at the AAA Vacuum Repair on the Lower East Side. When his father passed away on January 1st, 1960, L. M. came to believe that he would soon lose his mother; Fish returned home, for the first time in six years, to attend the funeral of his father. On a visit to the Museum of Modern Art in the fall of 1960, Fish met Janine Lesser, who woke him after he'd fallen asleep waiting for a call in one of the museum's public telephone booths.

Were the Night-Sky as Silent as an Apron of Eyelets

L. M. Fish at the Port Authority Bus Terminal and in Times Square, Spring, 1956

The city I reveal, in séance with my reflexive breath,
is named Metropolis and levitates through the headlamps
fanned from a bus that began in Savannah—I've arrived

with the question, *Where does an unwelcome wind blow last?*,
and with the low-tide—please take half my heart, its time, its space.
The remainder is genesis. I'll have what stillness loves

but concedes to the night-lit crosswalk at Forty-Second
and Ninth—within the middle of that quiet, find a white
marble dining-hall where a table will be set for me,

then unset as I toast a long life—and if I cannot hear
the hour at rest, then give me an alphabet wet with neon,
or dream that in my body lives the sound of descending

a spiral-staircase. The wind brushes my cheek and the marquee
for The Lyric movie palace. I know nothing is as colorless
as the curtain I've drawn to uncouple myself from becoming

too close with every person—so that shouldering my duffel bag,
I step over the rubber end of a blind woman's white
cane, and I step down, divided, into the subway station.

Oh, I Hope He'll Be Brave—

In which he Imagines Old New York by Gaslight

The Crystal Palace is fast apprching to completion [sic]. Already the curved lines that indicate the dome are springing into the clear air. [Yet it] is wasting time to paint a magnificent Greek or Roman landscape, with temples and altars, and then put a Broadway store in the foreground.—New York Daily Times, May 7th, 1853

ONE: PROLETARIAN

I'm here and I am Pisces in triplicate, treading my way
down Surf Avenue,
one eye cocked to greet my fabricator, one eye on my afterthought,
and another has shut—Herakles,
I feel as Herakles must've when he strangled those two vipers,
as a boy not-yet-divine: unawares, my family would say.
I would correct them: un-aware.
But wary.

All the while, dear Brooklyn leans in, as if to say:
*O! Mister Fish, young bedlamite, young rascal
spilled into New York Harbor holding nothing more than
a pocket square. He is flophouse-bound, and it's so pitiful,
the way his trouser pants have lost their little hem.
That he is one of many and that he fawns at the City
is enough to send his darling mother to fits,
and Fish will find no home 'neath the skirts of Brooklyn.*

Loose boot-nails and a beard nearly Hasidic, touring Old
New York by what I
imagine to be gaslight, a carbon-paper map
of Brooklyn penciled
over a map seeking to represent Manhattan: how Trinity
Church is overwritten for the sake of noting the singular
gentility of Prospect Park.
And I am,

it bears repeating, indistinct in a woolen suit, lost
perhaps for a moment,
near The Seven Seas Oyster Bar, Coney Island,
my way lit by whale-fin
oil—what a ridiculous thing to believe beneath
the spin of electric lampposts, my bishops' crooks

amid the distant downtown
repertoire.

+

While Fish crosses the East River, Manhattan bristles
at his ear, nestling Lieber
inside the F train: *It is so good to see him, she remarks, and good that he sleeps
and forgets home. In my charge,
with his twin shadows pitched across the aisle, Fish is simpler,
and supple enough to think his recollection of Manhattan begins
in 1858, with the burning
of The Crystal Palace.*

Oh, I Hope He'll Be Brave—

In which he Imagines Old New York by Gaslight

TWO: HIS CHORUS BLATHERS, EACH SINGER PAID WITH A POCKETFUL OF SALTINES

You see, there was the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations,
but Fish was not there in 1853. No, not even his great-grandfather
Selig had the chance to admire its steam elevator, and so Lieber was not yet born
when its iron-and-glass Crystal Palace went up in a blaze. But that does not
make a flyspeck of difference to L. M., late on a Sunday, reading a broadside
exhibited in the Museum of the City of N-Y: *A Mrs. Richardson*

*of New York (who was one of the unfortunate persons burnt out by the fire
that destroyed the Crystal Palace), by permission of the MAYOR
OF NEW YORK, notes Mister Fish, obtained a number of curiosities very valuable
for a cabinet, produced by the melting of the Building, and Fish thinks
of the fire-escape outside his bedroom window, which could, in dim light
and at a glance, be the remains of such a catastrophe. He could not*

have been there. Yet the frame of his bed seems to be, in the corner
of this late hour, a beam recovered from the Palace's absent dome.
We have come to understand, by the way he checks below the foot
of this bed for ash, that he could imagine everything at once
by what it suggests: the night-blue hesitance of a gaslight, as a prairie-fire
no-one will ever see to extinguish, or as the luminous dome of a palace

dedicated to the Industry of All Nations. Speaking from the curtain at his side,
we suspect he will someday be irretrievable within his own outgoing
tide. Now look: standing deep within the Museum of the City, he twists the bulb
of a doorknob and is concerned whether it, too, was recovered
from the blaze that felled the glass-and-iron arcades of the Palace and its rotunda
that quoted the sky. Yes, all the same, the frame of his bed *was* taken

from the Crystal Palace, just as every reliquary is filled with the milk-teeth
of saints. Fish thinks, as he steps away from the poster promoting
Misses Richardson's ballyhoo, that there isn't any reason his fire-escape
was not once, in another time, reclaimed from an ash heap and melted
down for the betterment of the working class. Which is one way of saying
that L. M. takes a moment to grapple with this, and that stepping into

a collection of feather fans, a rookery, he imagines the ruined Palace
to have been re-distributed among the laborers as cast-iron pans
and hammerheads; as a horseshoe, the blade of a hand-plane. Mister Fish
peers into the habitat of feathers, the display taken from many colonies

of peafowl and ostrich, observing in their weightless color and false eyelets
the innermost panic that would startle a bird to flight. Fish looks just

too closely, and elbows a case of ivory fans belonging to Her Majesty Queen
Elizabeth I. We regret (one among us should say so) to mention
that he does not compensate his chorus sufficiently. On his way out
and past the Toy Collection, behind a sheet of glass, he sees a cast-iron
sleeping-car that he would take from the Museum, for Janine, if it were
not already part of some greater quarry, and of a grander exhibition.

An Appetite in Winter Thrums

L. M. Fish at the Niagara Hotel for Men, the Bowery—October 15th, 1956

Gratified

by the fragrance of rainsoaked cedar,
I cultivate, I host, the unquiet

hum of waiting for
more—the skins of my sweet-orange,

long since peeled, adjoin the hot-water
baseboards.

I rest and I subsist—

underfloor,
the vapor barriers sibilate
a coarse *Ess*. Hungry enough to sense

the radiator's night-
crawling heat square the bedroom, I suckle

at my blushing cheeks—I've become so simple,
measured.

One senses warmth by its degree—

emptiness
has no end in mind, and my living breath
passes uncreated away.

Numbering the turns
of my stomach, the hard-water pipes

knock and I hear moments inch by on stilts.
Now and then,
my wait is endless—

Waiting for White Is the Same as Waiting for Grey

Mister L. M. Fish in Need of Anyone's Company, Autumn, 1958

As if my sentence were hinged
on a minute, six o'clock
hesitates, and hesitates
to designate its ending
and the ways I should commence

conversation. Does a lemon dote
on its pith? Is October thirty lashes
with one pupil at the peephole? Whose
nautilus-shell has trapped its oceans?
I would rather say nothing

but that I hear rising the pine
forests of New York City,
and by the bristling loblolly
crosstalk, I listen as I
imagine them visible

and imagine telling someone
time is always short. Days level us,
the steps that convey us from sleeping
are numberless glass, and the rest shows
on us as parentheses

show us the way to what nests. As if,
as if—as if someone were awake
and this were a day, with the light
bill to trouble us, and *Look*
magazine steadying a foot

of my blanket-chest. What I think
of you, think also of me, marking
time where the clock's black hands cross
and eclipse: if you mistake
its iris for mine, we've diminished.

To Persevere is to Draw Breath After Breath After Breath

L. M. Fish Frets for Three Blocks, Thompson Street, NYC: June 12th, 1959

Within the cavity of my chest is a little pith,
a cystic bundle woven airtight and tucked
under the base of my windpipe, nestling amid two
lobes of lung—
it seems to be a knot, a gradual aggregation
of worry and bother: the burl teased from a bolt of tweed
in my mother's lap, its weft and warp disarranged.
Under the breastbone, benign, this curious innermost
heirloom—
a lump, a deep-sewn attaché that I will always carry
on my stroll from the free-lunch counters of Bleecker Street
up to Washington Square, just as I do
now. I take to my feet, which measure my tempo against
the city—
like two metronomes tolling my time-signature to all
of Greenwich Village and to its galleries of watchmakers
and clock-masters. From here, I can nearly see
the Village Gate and its understratum of busted-up
double reeds—
under its floorboards, I would imagine, there is stored a tone
of such intimate length and depth, almost like a bass trombone,
or like hearing your mother cough from one end
of the house to the other. I hadn't the patience to listen
any longer—
but I recall that she snapped my rucksack shut, and I locked
my suitcases, packed for New York. She masked under her palm
the fatty knot lodged in her throat; I can remember
that as she paused, I felt for the underside of my fatigued
diaphragm—
she holds my hand, I hold my chest and we suffer.

Lines Written On the Brink of the Lower East Side

L. M. Fish at the Edge of a Thundershower, February, 1960

Gone is the cascading light of day
that echoed hours ago
from windowpane to windowpane

in the long downtown afternoon,
displaced by the thunderhead angling

overhead, with its broad beclouded
crown—it encloses those of us
who lean from our brownstone

flats to meet 14th Street in honest
leisure. I think to tap my meerschaum

pipe over the sidewalk below,
the street clock nodding off at half-past
five—then there is an arc of light

in the distant clarity at the storm's edge,
perhaps two hundred feet as the crow flies,

no more: I ought to photograph
the skyscrapers in these final moments
of June daylight, catching the farthest

margins of the fleeting sunshower
in sepia tone. I am forever free

to stand at the window, as I please,
with my arms folded—the cityscape slight
and isolated at the brink of rainfall:

it is more near to me than my signed name.
At the first mumbling of thunder,

I throw a leg over my window ledge
and edge slowly closer—far below, the City
darkens—and at street-level, an abbess

in dusky habit strolls past, as thunderstuck
Manhattan bristles at my cheekbones.

Twenty-Eighth Street, Kindly Allow Me to Fish God and the Virgin from Your Depths

Lieber Mahoney Fish Rethinks Who He is and What He Means, Manhattan, June of 1960

from a line in "The Work" by Dana Levin

You can feel it, the city, constant around you: my cufflinks have become skittery from more than a half-block of jackhammering. It must be said, I must say out of honesty, that while my initials are not immediately apparent on these fine monogrammed cufflinks—oh, Twenty-Eighth Street is crumbling—I have been solicited on linen writing-paper to join

the Order of Carmelites. When out of anxiousness my fingertips follow the window on the vibrating envelope in my coat-pocket, I feel guilty—like being the one left holding a pistol after a fist-fight—guilty for half-a-mile's walk from the bus to Our Lady of the Scapular. *You can feel it, the Holy and Apostolic See, constant around you;* and yet the Church seems

preoccupied. Even in Midtown, they sometimes bow in prayer, Gloria Patri, where my finger-bones are half a tick behind the springs of a street-clock near the Congregation Adereth El. Someone must mention, in whispers, to the Reverend Father that I am at least half-Jewish—*You can feel it, they might say after showing me out—and that is what I mean*

by guilt, never knowing how. Never feeling that I know enough to help, though kindness need be everywhere: *the city, constant around you—*hear me when I speak directly to you—in this parish of chantry-chapels. The breath of a young lily settles near the church-gate: Our Lady travels on the unforgotten air-current from rooftop to rooftop, blanketing

the cityscape, knowing the way that pollen finds one's lungs. *You can feel it,* I imagine the very poor would insist, but not at all like our city. The especially hungry should, instead, say that they can know God without the names and roses of his grace. I hope that it would be like smelling perfume—Shalimar, let's say, or black pepper with tomato—while waiting

alone in a bus-shelter at lunchtime. But I cannot know. I'm left standing at the church-door, my envelope folded in two, a pocket in my pocket: I commit to memory the shape of my embossed name and the grain of the letterhead, propping their invitation against the doorstep, remembering not the cloven hooves of the gargoyle that mounts the rainspout but what scarcity it takes to fill a dome.

Index of Precious Objects Locked within the Temple of the Sun

The End of an Afternoon at the Museum of Modern Art—Sunday, September 25th, 1960

Here, Janine's cheeks cross a pyramid of fallen window-light at the sentence-thin close of the day, and here atop an escalator she thinks of the gravity

of repeating one's first name. This bank of phone booths is occupied: in one, a man has fallen asleep waiting for his call, and for dark. In alchemy breathes gold-leaf.

+

Tick, tick, tick, tick: she clinks a scrimshaw button against the booth's pane-door, while Lieber dreams a rhinoceros scratching its toenail into an ice-floe,

and while a docent notices Janine in profile leaning with her thighbone against the handle. A hall of Spanish paintings makes no sound but sailing.

+

We know a lamp by its lamplight, the piano by its bench, and that chance lies on its side. She'll tell her mother that they met inside the compartment

of a revolving door, and that the fourth time around, he asked her name again; in truth, before the close of every night, something round as a bell tolls twice.

Out of Light that Begins a Year

The couple dated for a year before Fish proposed, and they were married in a Jewish ceremony on September 16th, 1962; Janine presumed she would never leave New York City. In late September of 1964, the young couple rented a Lower East Side apartment to which they would take their newborn baby, but the family's fortune later changed when L. M. Fish lost his job at the Vacuum Repair Shop.

Throughout 1965, Fish rarely left the bedroom of their apartment above the Silver Monument Works at 125 Stanton Street, and would spend his time making a written record of the weather, or collaging, until Janine returned from work each evening. By December of that year, Lieber Fish found employment with the New York City Transit Authority, first working as a station attendant, then taking the Conductor's Examination, taking instruction to be a train operator on the Brooklyn Mass Transit Brighton Line.

I, Hornswoggler

On the Aeronautics of a Wedding Ceremony, September 16th, 1962

As Mister Fish tries on seersucker slacks, he notices that his feet
resemble those of an alligator:

watching the nails curl over his toes, he doesn't think
of his fiancée pacing a bridal
suite at the Hotel Cannonade, or of the radio's

chimes that lend definition to the passing
of hours. Waiting, Janine dabs her thumb into a pot
of Rosebud salve, smearing it onto the patches

of psoriatic eruption that make a duotone map of her
hands. Janine hides her hands; L. M.,
with his hard stare launched at the tailor's assistant, coos

in the girl's ear as she measures the breadth
of his arms. He promises her satsuma tea and dancing
at the Five Spot, or Chateaubriand and Le Gourmet

for quiet and bourbon, and coaxes her with his Southland
drawl and overgenerous chinwag. As Janine
Lesser sits astride the windowsill, a small pile

of her gown wafting toward Brooklyn, she waits for him,
for L. M., *Lieber Mahoney*,

in his belatedly fitted duds. The suite's transistor radio
dislodges president Kennedy's address
from its germanium diodes: *the exploration of space will go*

ahead, whether we join in it or not, and her marriage,
she thinks, is just the same; the ceremony merely launches
them into parliament with a caboodle

of catholic *innamorati*, past loves, those entangled
in the orbit of each. Janine daydreams that she and Lieber
hover near the ceiling as Sputnik and Vostok, a pair

of steely globes circumnavigating the suite's cracked plaster ceiling;
they thrust inch by inch

toward each other in concentric paths, nudging and pulsing
as they pass. As Sputnik withdraws from orbit, Janine
watches her fiancée pull himself up

the front stoop and into the hotel, standing as to receive
the groom in her wedding dress; its sunbursts
of lace liling across her chest. She's unready for him.

For moments, Janine places the cuticle of her thumbnail
to the peak of her bottom lip, realizing that she must now squint
to see a crown of Canada geese; they're migrating too soon.

In the hallway, Misses Lesser insists and insists again
to Lieber that it's dangerous to see the bride early, and is left
no choice but to yank at the sleeve of his jacket.

The president asserts to the room: *well, space is there, and we're
going to climb it*, and the sound of the groom's protest
precedes his entry. Mister Fish

is deployed into the gravitational pull of his wife's freckled forearms,
and as bride and bridegroom are sent

aloft by the pull of one another, they splinter the roots
that have held them terrestrial. Both notice the invasive
aroma of satsuma stewing amidst lace and sugared

velvet; that it tempts him isn't significant—not now. Were they
to ascend, ringlets of clouds would form below the couple,

obscuring their view; above them would wait the operatic
bellow of open space. The president rises: *as we
set sail we ask God's blessing*: kisses, kisses.

Timid, Becoming Breathless

Uneasy, Mister Fish Peeks Out from Under the Manhattan Bridge, March of 1964

Hope against all hope: my stupid, sweet tobacco smoke
loops the crook of my elbow

and loiters by the streetcorner—which, in seconds, will be a seam-
less, clean space for the harbor

breeze to recapture. I could pace the parking meters forever,
or longer, until the tulip

trees' conical seed-pods mature; come September, they'll drop
to the bluestone sidewalk and give

of themselves quite openly. I ask: Am I rare? Am I so rare
to wear their flower in my

hair? No, I'm afraid—the tide runs to sea and abandons its
shorebirds; no, I am afraid.

My Wife as One of Many Mammals

A Sketch of Missus Fish, Spring, 1964

Hush—the play of lights, of common
daylight and early evening
owl-light, is pitched onto
her knees,

against the palm of the Empire
sofa—our windows thrown open
to Stanton Street, bamboo shades
half-drawn

to dim the avenue and dull
its hustle-bustle—*hush*. Soundless,
Janine slumbers, her child snoozing
inside.

They should be fashioned in marble,
here: her chin still and cordially
stippled from stone, a keen bright
chisel

tunneling for unborn promise.
O! what a scene to study upon
waking every day, for months—but
hush—hush.

It seems too much: the quietness
demanded by pregnancy, waiting
for soft entrance—the twilight now
a dark

gown—mother-and-child at rest,
iced-over, unmoving, breathing
like two petite beasts—one within
one more.

Mercy Be

Fish in Contemplation of A Possible Crimewave, July 5th, 1964

Every field-of-vision is porous: the afterimage of mercury catches
the corner of my eye, a Hudson Commodore, and there are *gangsters*
in profile—each window makes a chrome frame for their overcoats.

I think these men edge the early afternoon street-scene and, flushed,
our bankers snap shut their lock-boxes: a mustachioed financier
mustn't breathe until they've passed—he will stare into the clock-face,

remembering what it is to leave the house each day, to walk
with his eyes closed. A block ahead, one of the hoodlums mounts
the running-boards while another takes the sidewalk, humming knife-wise.

I believe Manhattan's peacock-plume would withdraw within
seconds, and I tend to fret for New York at moments like this,
when I cannot stand to be here at all—I am scared so still-of-foot.

There is room enough—within this island, unbreathing, and at this
instant—to wait for the porcelain city that I could walk in a moment,
my sight-line lapsing into its memories, were its dawns to coincide

like lace. This is as comforting to me as it is for the teller
to flick an alarm-switch in hope that someone listens—then and there, I watch
the getaway driver jump the gun, alone, and pull the sedan away.

Transcription of an Anxious Season

Jobless Again, Fish Hides His Head—January 2nd, 1965

In the end, one has but oneself,
 listening to the snow banks shift
and for the dogs at the chain-link.

 How safe it is to lie in wait
for a day to pass—and then
 another—remembering what

it was to rise and walk to work.
 Should the sodium-vapor lamps
of the City switch on to flood

 the ribs of the frost-bearing cloud
cover, I wouldn't know: there could be no
 outside world, and the skeleton

turns, and the skeleton turns and turns
 in bedclothes. I hold this quilt's hem
to my hairline and think of Janine

 waiting in the subway—I suppose
that she will find me as colorless
 and soundless as a drop in atmospheric

pressure and, suspended, she will sit
 at the edge of our bed and turn her eyes
to meet the line of my staring. I foretell

 a sharp and sudden end to this year;
how shameful the thought. She will ask
 whether I've spoken a word all day.

A windowpane shudders in the hard winter
 headwinds, and in our empty home,
the door-hinges and wallboard grow

 colder—I picture the snowstorm
overhead as a papery shade
 under which I dream every passageway.

There is Now a Shiver Under the Syllable on His Tongue

L. M. Fish Thinks of What He Has Lost in Marriage, East NY, 1968

The ends of every echo meet
in open air—at cornice-edge;
to calcify the hammer, clack,
and anvil overheard in bones
so old and older still. If I adapt

my memories of you to match
a pitch, just as this sandstone stoop
refracts footfall, the hook and eye
that fastens shut what I've disclosed
would find me captured—or noon-like

in acoustic shock—not cast as a shade
tree that circles through my plea
for you to warm, but stolen away
in imitation of furnace smoke
blown over the mirroring riverbeds.

Ocular Poem in a Rainstorm with a Pickle

Mr. Fish Investigates the Boathouse at Prospect Park, Mid-May, 1969

Now the firm incurve of my blind-spot dovetails
with the far sandstone ridge that runs along
Prospect Park's low meadowlark playing fields;

moments pass—and I blink the daylight at rest
among clover. Soon I'll have hold of the railing
at Lullwater Bridge, sooner yet the serpentine

watercourse sheds its greens against the boathouse
windows' elliptical arches—and then the corner
of my eye, through secret-keeping waterborne light,

captures a rower's thrown elbows, her hair
pinned back with barrettes, coiled. This afternoon
has fallen. I bite a dill pickle from a brown

sack, I hear nothing but taxicabs honking in the rain now
on Flatbush, I close both eyes—and I'm to myself
the body weathered and unbelonging. I think my

blind-spot traces an opaline ring onto so many scenes
that escape me, just as one droplet of milk clouds
a fine Dutch lens. From within the downpour,

some pigeons coo to stir the fall of two thousand raindrops,
or a lone waterbug crisply clicks its mandibles
at the summer damp—and I listen as the rowboat's

rowlock dips to dissever a family of water lilies,
and to the river's startling splash, to its longways echo. I
cannot see her socks go under, but I'm shocked,

the pickle is shocked and the whole day now slides out
of grasp—there is a human yip, the storm-front divides
into arcades, and we have her two thin-lipped gasps

for dry air. Every blind-spot mocks its eyeball, and even
as the face of the lenticular moon emerges
prematurely in daytime, my peripheral sight

occludes its pearly shape—I disregard the moon

and look across the rain-spotted glade as if I could
picture this landscape as it is, dim and unbroken.

If He Once Dreamt of Furniture and If Her Mouth Were Then a Voiceless Corner Cabinet

Janine Fish Drops Her Husband's Watch: the Lower East Side, April, 1970

Every look is a footbridge to a kiln: Janine hedges Lieber's glimpse
when his watchband slips through her fingers and into a crock of cream.

She turns toward the discipline nested in his eye-sockets, facing him
gently, just as gently as one turns to meet one's company in the mirror.

A fly idle at his ear shades the consonants that root her apology
to this accident, yet he hears only the vowel-sounds *O, I*

and *E*, excluding from *Forgive me* the pith of her given gift.

His dampish wristwatch drips from the needle of kept-time the half-
and-half that dribbles across the gilding slight at the creampot's lip.

She fiddles six, seven, eight seconds after her mistake, so long
that he is sure its ruined balance-spring unwinds milkfat for the duration

of their gazing. Janine will remember how her husband suggests
the optics of an hour tied to the hour's number, that he extends

his hand into her hand, and for sparseness brushes her temple.

Poem Like an Instamatic Camera

Mr. Fish, 42nd Street & Lexington Avenue, 1972

He would never photograph himself outside their brownstone, but how about now,
winding the spring of his pocket-camera
while curbside, sidling

through the lunchtime clamor
at The Chrysler Building:
what about here,
in all of this uncertainty?

How about, instead, walking the boulevards of the far-flung Boroughs for a picture
with the clocktower of Ozone Park, or with Staten
Island's convincing

little roadside
Revolutionary
War monuments?
No, he clicks Shutter Release.

This is for Janine, he mumbles into the lens that snaps at arm's length. This will begin
his living memory without his mistakes, and hers.
He dims the glassy

plane of The Chrysler
Building, and through
the sunlight refracted
off his flashbulb, into his lens,

and then Lieber is elsewhere: here is his face with the sunken eyes and here
are his overcoat and loose jawbone, and his lips
read *Hold the mayonnaise*.

Steady, Fish looks
at the rangefinder, and exposes
the film again
to midday and to the path of the sun.

Oh, I Hope He'll Be Brave—

In which he Imagines Old New York by Gaslight

THREE: EMPLOYED BY PINKERTON, MISTER FISH FOLLOWS HOME AN ACOUSTICS EXPERT

In gaslight, in the light of a Pullman car—inside paregoric light that medicates
the owners of lost envelopes—140th Street at dusk
could be mistaken as a foggy
carriageway for Gilded Age luminaries and persons
of distinction and note.

But now—at nightfall, in monotone—I think that mid-century Harlem
looks a lot like Seoul, South Korea after
the War; a block-and-a-half away,
a piano factory dismisses its only living
instrument tuner, for whom

the evening sky is bioacoustic. The dampers, if they could, would notice he has gone.
You see, this kind of scarcity is so common to my comings
and goings—to the way the city suggests
itself day to day—its curio cabinet
open when we leave in the morning,

and closed as we return home. Between you and me, there cannot be anything
more to it than that. The piano tuner won't return—he lollygags,
dragging his feet across the hibernal
span of the 145th Street bridge,
which once carried the domed ceiling

of our Crystal Palace—and he can feel this, in the way its trusses sound when struck
with his tuning-fork: there is a sudden brightness
as the bridge sounds its shape and diocese.
From a city-block away, I listen for the piano
tuner's trusted fork to resonate and fracture.

Oh, I Hope He'll Be Brave—

In which he Imagines Old New York by Gaslight

FOUR: RARE AND PECULIAR

(CAST: JANINE LESSER FISH)

A New York City apartment.

A Davenport sofa, throw pillows.

Afternoon, or later, September.

She lights a cigarette

and wonders if Mister Fish

is ever at home in the world

that has arrived alongside him.

Over a picnic lunch,

my husband once told me

that he came to the city

with the help and blessing

of his father, who tucked four

hundred and five dollars

in his pocket square and made

Lieber promise that he would

work, and that he'd come home

once his mother asked after him.

When we met, in a bank

of public telephone booths

at the Museum of Modern

Art, Private First Class Fish

was sleeping. Just the same, I knocked

and asked if he would be a dear

and please scoot over and hand

me the receiver, which he didn't

quite cotton to. I phoned my mother

to tell her I'd just met someone.

Oh, and he was such

a hillbilly in those days,

with his checkered Mackinaw

and boots. I could tell he was out
of sorts. What I didn't know
at the time was that he'd always
wanted to be here with someone,
still, in an evening of the city.

To my rare and peculiar
husband, New York was the cat's
meow; the year we married, one
night, I saw him from down the block,

on Thirty-third, watching them demolish
Penn Station. Remember, he isn't
a man who would hold out for more time,
or for what will fall away homeward.

What Turns Inside a Lighted Knot

Following a twelve-year stint as a train operator in New York, L. M. interviewed with CSX Transportation, and was offered a position in Florida as a conductor with the Apalachicola Northern Railway. After moving to Florida in 1978, the family purchased a cinderblock home near the Gulf of Mexico, in a hamlet called Carrabelle. Lieber suffered a heart attack the next year and his recovery lasted months.

During the 1980s, in retirement, L. M. and Janine spent much of their time abroad. On a trip to China in 1992, Lieber found himself unable to remember names, faces, and his circumstances, something he'd previously experienced but had not mentioned to his wife; upon their return to the United States, Fish was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

How Loquacious the Quiet Can Be, How Endless

LMF Sitting With His Daughter Clementine, April, 1978

Each year is endured

at such a loss, is what I could respond,
but don't—you're telling me how most people
would like for the Cold War to be over,
but—I don't know. We've suffered a loss,
too, you and me.

The kitchen faucet

snarls while you wait for me to speak.
Under the sunshade of noiselessness that we've
hung here—in the middle of a day—our teatime
is interrupted in mid-sentence, at this table,
in mid-air.

I watch your jawbone

come to rest. The curtains part
for the gulf-breeze, and we think of what people
will say in days to come, about the nearly
silent day we spent together—though I
don't think long.

What Remains of the Sun on Bedsheets

The Coronary Event Between Mr. and Mrs. Fish, Carrabelle, Florida—June 30th, 1979

From the thought of palmetto fronds
 fanning the mass and lacquer
of water-vapor, she wakes
 to her husband as he clutches
the drawn bow of his shoulder,

and overhears in Lieber's speech
 the acute coronary that soon
would salt her sleep white and pale
 its attic rafters with what now
lashes his breath to the question.

Perhaps what rises to Fish
 as air-hunger, perhaps what refines
in him this unquiet mineral,
 and perhaps what catches him, after
a time, is the concern she keeps

undersewn and in the confidence
 of the encyclopedia
set. There was nothing before her
 and him, and when Lieber stiffens
his spine to spite the grace and bridge

of fingers locked across this chest,
 she catches sight of the chalk-line
dividing daybreak. Her answer frays
 the knots of light at dawn, and is
his little months, hitching one to one.

Navigating by Echocardiogram

July 8th, 1979

*Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are / The eastern riches?—John Donne,
“Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness”*

L.M. Fish lies anaesthetized,
 the skin of his chest peeled
back to permit entry
to the crestfallen monarchy
of his cardiac organ: stretched

across an operating table, and stiff
 as a saint’s finger-bone, his body
is bedeviled by the assembly
of surgeons that carve from his fractured
ribs a seascape of curling, red-tipped

whitecaps. This fleshy tide rises
 and falls with each kick
of his mule-legged heart, its outer
walls swabbed sinless, continents of fat
bathed with antiseptic; the muscular

Sergeant-at-Arms laid-out, guileless,
 simple, a waxing gibbous
moon. Roundabout, the operating
theater is unable to contain Mister Fish
in his most holy of holy forms:

gentleman caller to the Lunar
 Mansion, that colossal magnet. Fish
falls away from Her, hovering
fixed above the Pacific Basin,
its ground swells soaking

the machine-sewn hem of his surgical
 drape, the sea a mimeographed portrait
of Magellan. Blustery, L.M.
is ensnared by the algal bloom
of the circumnavigator’s whiskers,

and lowered, lowered until the value

of Her coin-like face passes
into an illegible interchange of light-beams.
The patient's chest cavity fills
with brine and, immersed, floating mildly

toward Manila, farther westward
and into the path of our postwar
explanations, tumbling along the peaks
of seamounts. She, unable
to hesitate, draws a tidal current over him,

a submarine river that presses
his displacement, obliged by Her
magnetic thrust. Soon his heart
will be restarted, the sutures will keep
him whole, and Fish will be sewn

from east to west—Oriental
to Occidental—his lungs are aerated,
and blood is siphoned so that he may rise;
blood is rambling through the four
chambers of the heart—rambling when called.

An Opal Diffracting the Visible Spectrum of Dimness

L. M. and Janine at Shands Hospital, Gainesville, Florida—September 5th, 1979

You should not think of my disarmed glance
turning to the color of afternoon that declines
our staircarpet—this is the grasslands I have trespassed

on my own, in my grassy gown. No one must look with me
into that far room for the loss of half-heather
shadow to the shafts of light summerlong at the sill.

Complications Arise and the Transplanted Heart is Rejected

In which Janine Fish Leaves Her Husband's Side, October 11th, 1979

The curtains of the Spanish moss turn over and over
in the coastal nor'easter in full cry and without end.

This is how it is: I've fallen shy of Lieber and pass
from his hospital room; and when he calls, I lower my face.

I cannot return to his bedside, and as I knot a kerchief
at the soft tissue of my neck, the ceiling of his voice gives way.

This is how it soon will be: the aerial roots of the moss
will lose their soft anchor, and I must likewise cut him loose.

In our home, the hallway carries the diatonic movement
of the risen moon; its gauzy ray comes to rest on my pillow.

I do not think he will recover, and our bedside clock
lingers through the vacant night, even as he gathers my name.

As the Fool

The Florida Panhandle, November 7th, 1985

Time that thunder washed the creek beds white,
and time for the crosshatched sawgrass to crimp
askance a staircase of lightning, were Fish
to wake and make the mistake of telling time.

+

There was, withdrawing all else from yesterday,
in earshot of the forest-edge the absence
of a rattlesnake: from inside the lawn,
Fish was aware, it wrenched his vision nearer.

By twilight, one could taste the downpour past
the county-line, as one would clasp the afterlife
in hand. Fish mishears the next year, in love
with curtains of rain falling mutely into place.

+

He is foolish to think the honey of Sunday
could not be spirited away in the bee-smoke
of Monday: now in the middle of night, Fish
looks into the fumigated hive hewn sky-deep.

Ars Poetica in Bottle Glass and Seawater

Lieber Fish Wakes at Carrabelle, July 25th, 1989

Stretching his bird-thin limbs,
Fish thinks it a shame
that the pleasure of sleeping
is an unconscious joy:
 a dip of the eyebrows

beneath the nightlong sea-foam,
or like the momentary loss
of one's words, what to call this
or that. He has propped each
 window open to receive

the westbound trade winds of autumn
that sweep over the cinderblock homes
at Carrabelle, and thinks of the heavens
above the earth as a star-burnt
 cavity, of the abandoned

Mojave Desert; and that in dreaming
he could attend to the airy unstudied
spaces around his thoughts. Fish
recalls, shutting his eyelids,
 the peach-toned sea-glass shards

that his great-aunt collected in a jar
on a piano lid, remembers them
in her sun parlor, thinks of lamp light
falling across the raised letters that spell
 Amb-erg-ris or *In-dian*

Ink or *Tinct-ure*, their marks
of manufacture. In childhood, Lieber
looked through the vessel's curving surface
and into the clouded fragments arranged
 at its heart, adoring the glass

column that could become his alphabet
or his lapidary. He must know
that every serif of those four
lost words was smoothed in time
 by a groundswell pressing

upon the seafloor, and that the dreamful
heavens hung ovetop the earth draw
the tide: whispering the hours, one
comes to depend on the other,
 ink-stained and wave-worn.

Entombed in the Company of Echoes

In which Mister Fish is Lauded By a Long-Buried Titan, Summer, 1992

[I]n the wide-pathed earth, [...] the Titan gods are hidden under misty gloom,
in a dank place where are the ends of the huge earth. And they
may not go out. — Hesiod, "Theogeny"

Their courtesy heliotropic, following the westward
dawdle of the sun, a gaggle of Chinese wildflowers
gesture to the mouth of a cave and to its unhealed gash.

An aperture that parts for the exiting fruit bats, it mumbles
its salaam in undertones of numbed air while they peel
from stalactites and flowstone. The thresh of their wings

overwhelms the warble of lulling applause for Mister
L. Mahoney Fish, who collapses drowsily against
a clotting notch of calcite, a column that hoists the ceiling

skyward. Hung with limestone draperies, the ribbed
vault redoubles his ovation, *plus ultra*, a wayward
Titan venerating the coarseness of his travel-wise feet

and the way Fish pitters his fingers against the carbonate
architecture with patience; he is like an anchorite
bricked-up in the walls of a priory. From within the cavern,

there erupts a magnetic handclapping for the hours atop hours
L. M. has pursed his lips, silently truth-swollen, or belch-
swollen. The diagnosis: *senile dementia*, astray

from the tour group. His recollection is mislaid, a lonesome
mastodon tooth at the bottom of a subsurface pool, and elderly
Fish passes forth a soft-tongued burble, feeble, the unsteady
half-whispered yelp of a sleeping pup.

He Would Leave to Her a Closet Full of Suits and a Deer Staring from the Lawn

Mister Fish Cradles His Wife's Chin in the Crook of His Neck, Late in 1993

When you sleep tonight, Janine—dreaming a field of monkshood
and another tract, empty

but for a cowl of night-shade—stop to hold the pruning shears still
in your hand. Instead of stems,

sever my end from us, and watch the sun descend to circle
my collar. When you then think

of my passage, your key will not yet fit its lock, but the warmth
of the doorknob will reach you.

What the Ebb-tide Says in Apology to the High-tide

The Saint Johns River, FL, 1994

Not until this channel of tannic blackwater fractures
the reflected crescent of the moon on its winter path,
no—and not until the puzzle of your speaking reveals

that you've summoned to your side the sackcloth and ashes
I have worn in matrimony—no, only once the snowy

egret nests cold of heart in a lily of my imagining
will I return home, to find that your cheek has turned against
a thistle that's dried in my unkindness. My bride, you hitch

the wick to the candle's flame—when held to wax-light, the egg
shell of an alligator will suggest the sawtoothed shadow

of a backbone, his nested threat—and my bride, sown cotton seed,
you conceal and I conceal the injury we wake with. Yet
if the braid of our current weren't as sure as the candle

it hides, we would look within this brackish body to find the wick
just extinguished, and our silhouettes doused from the levee.

Madsong Concerto for String Duet

1997

Eyelids shutting, well-met,
 I am dead-tired of marching
inward only to overlook
myself. Of late,
 at sixty-eight, I'm starved

for song: *My dear, forget.*

Janine, let me pass for jest,
 only as *meshuggenah*,
your idling bridegroom.
In my crooked
 waistcoat, I am maddened

to sing: *My dear, forget.*

Put me aside. In repose,
 I hum to fill the margins
of your prayerbook
with boughs of oak,
 to take my place, singing:

My dear, dear, forget me.

Light at the Edge of a Page

In the middle of a night in December, 1997, Janine Fish suffered a stroke and passed away at the age of sixty-one. That summer, Lieber's daughter Clementine asked him to move from Carrabelle to live with her in Brooklyn, in an apartment between the Manhattan Bridge and Brooklyn Bridge. He lived in a back bedroom where, at the end of his life, Fish liked most of all to listen for the gulls during the day and to the sidewalk traffic at night. L. M. Fish died on October 21st, 2005, in a fifth-floor apartment on Water Street. By the new year, his daughter and her son would spread his ashes off the coast of the Sea Islands, in his native Georgia.

The Origins of Bellmaking in the First Hour of a Day

One white morning beam falls through a keyhole, ash blooms
in chimney pots, and Fish prunes the afterfeathers

from a memory of his wife's careworn palm at rest
atop his own, casting aside the truth that her slight

metacarpus once was broken and rewoven.
Often, she spoke of first-light as a bell ringing

deep in the atmosphere, and her fingers would trace
the bell-curve of his clavicle; he holds his breath.

Grieving closeness, she once said, *I'll be seeing you.*
At half-past six, Fish ignites the stove to simmer

the tea that will steep until taken by the cold.
Grieving closeness once, she said, *I'll be seeing you.*

Half-Way Dismantled in the Wake of Thousands of Hours

A Sketch of Mr. Fish in Old Age

Without anyone sending
warning from the future, I've aged:
 the sleeve of my shirt
bounds the arm, hangs hunkered—low,
inviting one to pass her eyes
 from my forearm to wrist
to metacarpals: the five columns
 of my hand are its unsteady,
colorless beginning.

Over the hardwood of months
that makes a passageway of waking
 sleepless, and at a loss,
I've grown familiar with mornings,
with the gradual and routine
 accumulation—I gather
that everyone passes through,
 and expecting a cloud-bank,
stares right at the sun.

Lipping Chocolate Cigarettes, the Mathematician Shakes a Fist

In which Archimedes Abandons Him

Waking to a thunderclap un-tethered over the Ionian
Sea, I button my snoring trousers, windstorms raising a caterwaul
from the east—I am navigating the Earth's equatorial

cummerbund. Inside, my porthole depicts an ocean awash
in Cinecolor: its greens dampened by the hurry-scurry of rainfall—and I,
elephantine in my cabin, imagine myself seaside

with Archimedes at Syracuse. Archimedes and I lay
in the surf—gowned and noshing Walnettos, malted milk balls,
and licorice pipes—we weigh upon the Sicilian

coast like a pair of elderly Monk seals: he, drawing a triangle
in the sand, and around that a curving parabola, an arch—and I,
tracing within his, a scalene triangle of my

own. Then he within mine, until sand and reeds seem
no longer delicate enough—inadequate for inscribing even one
granule with further figures and arcs; he, confounded

by the divisibility of sand into atoms—and further,
farther. Archimedes as a host for molecules, quarks, antiquarks
and nucleons: he gives me the eye—more-or-less John

Wayne at the corners of his mouth, snarling, the mathema-
tician divides an envelope of Sen-Sen breath powder in-two
and into fourths, and onward: his palm a boundless quarry,

each finger a jointed crane. I watch his sleight-of-hand
with care, Archimedes crafting dozens of hand-cradled piles
from the confection—breaking each mint fleck into smidgens

and smidgens into specks, specks into trifling jots
of sweet starch—his hand thrown into routine as though sliding
the beads of a school's abacus, east to west. Only

a fine dust remains, an indivisible hodge-podge: chuffed,
Archimedes turns and strolls the beach to dry his gown,
and that is the precise distance between ancient
and modern—O!, rocket-ships, O!, vulcanized rubber.

Self-Portrait of L. M. Motioning for the Family Doctor

In Carrabelle One Morning

There is a secret: I have taken something from you, a penknife
or a pot of ink, all of the cutlery—I cannot recall—

And there is Brooklyn, a little black licorice under the tongue, Avenue U
in a thunderstorm, doing the Madison, the Frug—now let's be serious,

even if I've danced my shoes to ribbons
this evening—

*L. M. Fish squints into a pair of eyeglasses, the joints
of his thumbs tucked into his fists. In bed, he lies still:
there isn't time, anymore, for the news that a hurricane
has broken over the sand dunes and flooded the light of dawn.*

You are, now and then, a little orchestration of the folk, Borough Park,
companion. All cinderblock and fly agarics: happy to be

timeliest, a hot-jazz cabaret—I mean, myself: Everyman as a sheet of carbon
paper, in triplicate—perhaps I've filched a can of Le

Sueur peas from your cabinets, holy terror,
a sharp indictment—

*Within reach, there is a snippet of Lieber Fish, where on some
hillside he would ask the names of your grandparents
just as he asks for your company. The muscles of his legs
cramp with the afterglow of so much day-to-day chitchat.*

We could go and bet on the racing horses, on a trifecta at The Meadowlands;
bring along your fine shoes and I'll step out of bed one

of these days, a Christmas miracle, clear the chiffonier and sideboard. This summer
is a wet summer, you who are *not* who I said you are—a gliding

of heartstrings: Where is Janine? In the bed
next to me, having it made—

*If Janine were downstairs on the telephone, she would
arrange his plans on paper, and sketch the triform vesica piscis
into their phonebook. Were she home, she would climb the stairs.
The doctor turns the doorknob, and Mister Fish is on his own.*

Into the Order of Sundowning

L. M. Fish in the Late Stage of Dementia

At nightfall: the foreshortened tongue of the ox; desiring to speak to you all,

he faces a city skyline, now unknowing how
to say the bone marrow inside seclusion starves
from its anemic host every final word. Behind

window-glass, the perfume of Lieber's aphonic
panic comes and goes; his deer-musk, his honeycomb,
the current tense of his ammoniac nightclothes.

Past twilight: a post office full of sand; carried in the mandible of saying nothing,

he can see neither the doorframe nor the brass knob, nor
a latch, which his caretaker conceals on the other side
of this calico curtain. If the epilogue

is that dark finds him escapeless, then the knot drowned
in his throat chokes off the first syllable, the second
belongs to the horizon, and the final is still too soft.

Near dusk: deacon and deaconess elope across a muskmelon patch; for widowing,

he strikes a match on the nightstand, holding in mind the kink
of a person's curls, and for his own end, a hurricane lamp
chugs toward lightness and wick-ash. There are footsteps inside

the next room, where his caretaker removes her coat, listening
at the wall for her father to stand and step closer.
She asks if he is there, then asks if he needs to wash.

By pitch-dark: a hand extended overreaches its name; God is good and fair,

he repeats, seeing within this sheath of fog and ice
the far end of a corridor. The flame burns to soot, and what
he once called a silhouette tapers to a point narrower

than moonbeams, resting in the wood-grain of a floorboard.
In the salt and smoke of eyesight, he almost has the color

of the coming day, almost watches its warning break below.

The small hours: how the shank of a hook terminates at its eye; even as evening thins,

he grips and shakes the doorknob, he digs at his waistband,
and from inside the stain of sleeplessness, strikes his palm against
and against a hinge. Forcing the neck of a swan,

he remembers; the table set for an absent
guest, he recalls; the brocade, he is certain, began
with the fiction of a moth's eyespot and ended with a pinprick.

Epilogue: *Ex-libris Lieber Mahoney Fish*

1.

“When I write to you, you answer me in fish.”
—William Cowper in a letter
to Mrs. Newton (June 2nd, 1780)

At the intertidal zone between the seacoast firm
and the guiding deep, Fish
lays his eyes on the horizon-line that separates
all the heavenly good
from this susurrous oceanscape, cool and useless.
In vain, one breaker spills
onto its receding antecedent, yielding
to the ceaseless charm
of the unpurposed surf.

2.

“Being a commission agent, it is all fish that comes to my net.”
—James G. Bertram,
The Harvest of the Sea (1873)

Matthew knows that Lieber’s toes graze the coquina shells
where Fish stands on the beach,
waiting for the musket-black horizon to overtake
the patch where Matthew once stood,
also piscine by the murmuring sea at sundown.
If only they could stand arm
in arm, the running tide would carry their shadows
such that Matthew begins
Lieber; and Lieber, Matthew.

3.

“The thing is utterly improbable and incredible, that a man [...] should
have existed in the inside of a fish.”
—Augustine on the story of Jonah, “Letter CII.30” (409)

Deeper than the curvature of the faraway
sea-line, my given shape
[“Epilogue: *Ex-libris...*,” stanza continues]

bends amid this leeward breeze—I think to ask if I

were meant, at all, to be.
Inside your reply, I would adapt to the ocean
currents so readily,
taking to the paltry, pretty sea—softly, a wave
crests, and then another:
I have become letters.

Matthew Reed Corey

matthewreedcorey@gmail.com Department of English University of Illinois at Chicago
773-388-2404 (home) University Hall 1815 601 South Morgan Street
904-742-3390 (cell) M/C 162 Chicago, IL, 60607-7120

EDUCATION

PhD | English *Expected*
Program for Writers, University of Illinois at Chicago [UIC] May, 2013

Dissertation: "A Catalogue of Light: a Collection of Poems"
Committee: Professors Christina Pugh (Chair), Jennifer Ashton, Mark Canuel, Christopher Grimes, and Margaret Miner

MA | English December, 2005
Creative Writing, Florida State University [FSU]

Thesis: "Along a Shoreless Motorway"
Committee: Professors James Kimbrell (Chair), Erin Belieu, and David Kirby

BA | English May, 2002
Creative Writing, Florida State University

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

History and Theories of Lyric Poetry, 20th- and 21st-Century American Poetry, American and British Modernist Poetry, Urban Poetics: *Flânerie* and Specularity

PUBLICATIONS

Journals & Magazines A selection of five poems, *Artifice Magazine*, 5 (forthcoming, 2013): "What Remains of the Sun on Bedsheets," "How the Time Passes, and I, in My Evergreen Inversion," "What the Ebb-tide Says in Apology to the High-tide," "Ocular Poem in a Rainstorm with a Pickle," and "Transcription of an Anxious Season."
"If He Once Dreamt of Furniture and If Her Mouth Were Then a Voiceless Corner Cabinet," *GRIST: the Journal for Writers* (forthcoming, 2013).
"Above the Conifers, the Bronze Top-knot of a Great Buddha," *RHINO Poetry* (forthcoming, 2013).
"As the Fool," *The Massachusetts Review* (forthcoming, 2013).
"Waiting for White is the Same as Waiting for Grey," *Crazyhorse* (forthcoming, 2013).
"An Appetite in Winter Thrums," *DIAGRAM*, 12.5 (2012).
A selection of fourteen poems, *At Length* (June, 2009): "Seven Stanzas with the Weight of Water in Mind," "Take Care, I Want You to Take Care," "Lines Written On the Brink of the Lower East Side," "Poem Like an

Instamatic Camera,” “To Persevere is to Draw Breath After Breath After Breath,” “My Wife as One of Many Mammals,” “Twenty-Eighth Street, Kindly Allow Me to Fish God & the Virgin from Your Depths,” “Lipping Chocolate Cigarettes, the Mathematician Shakes a Fist,” “Navigating by Echocardiogram, 1968,” “Birdcall, I First Hear Birdcall from the Fragrant Magnolias,” “Madsong Concerto for String Duet,” “How Loquacious the Quiet Can Be, How Endless,” and “Ars Poetica in Bottle Glass and Seawater.”

Reviews “Robert Creeley, *If I Were Writing This*,” *The Southeast Review*, 23.2 (2004).

TEACHING & ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

Graduate Instructor, University of Illinois at Chicago	2007-present
ENGL-490: Advanced Writing of Poetry	
ENGL-210: Introduction to the Writing of Poetry	
ENGL-201: Introduction to the Writing of Nonfiction Prose	
ENGL-161: Academic Writing II: Writing for Inquiry and Research	
ENGL-160: Academic Writing I: Writing in Academic and Public Contexts	
ENGL-103: English and American Poetry	
Ravenswood Community Poetry Tutorial, Chicago, IL	2011-2012
One-on-One Poetry Tutorial (with student Candace Crawford, MA in nonfiction, UIC), Chicago, IL	2010-present
Assistant Director, First-Year Writing Program, University of Illinois at Chicago	2008-2009
Graduate Instructor, Florida State University	2003-2006
ENC-1905: Improving Writing and Reading Skills	
ENG-1142: Writing About Contemporary Poetry	
ENC-1102: Writing a Research Paper	
ENC-1101: Freshman Composition and Rhetoric	

SELECTED READINGS

UIC Program for Writers Reading Series, Chicago, IL: October, 2012.
 Myopic Poetry Series, Chicago, IL: April, 2012.
 Wit Rabbit Reading Series, Chicago, IL: March, 2012.
 UIC Program for Writers Reading Series, Chicago, IL: October, 2011.
 UIC-School of the Art Institute of Chicago Joint Reading Series, Chicago, IL: April, 2010.
 Introducing First-Year Students to Poetry (for ENGL-103), Chicago, IL: April, 2009.
 UIC Program for Writers Hull House Reading Series, Chicago, IL: September, 2008.
 Introducing First-Year Students to Poetry (for ENGL-101), Chicago, IL: March, 2008.
 UIC Writers at Work Reading Series, Chicago, IL: October, 2007.
 FSU Creative Writing Warehouse Reading Series, Tallahassee, FL: July, 2005.

FSU Creative Writing Warehouse Reading Series, Tallahassee, FL: July, 2004.

LECTURES & CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- “One-on-One Reading with Reginald Gibbons,” English Department Colloquium. UIC, Chicago, IL. April, 2011
- “Authorship and the Limits of Persona: Selected Poems,” *Poetry II Panel*, Twelfth Annual Conference of the Illinois Philological Association. Millikin University, Decatur, IL. April, 2008

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Academic

- Service** Portfolio Review Leader, First-Year Writing Program, UIC 2012
- Portfolio Review Leader, First-Year Writing Program, UIC 2011
- Portfolio Review Leader, First-Year Writing Program, UIC 2010
- Assistant Director, First-Year Writing Program, UIC 2008-2009
- Head Coordinator, Second-Year Speakers’ Committee, English Department, UIC 2007-2008
- Special Activities Committee, Program for Writers, UIC 2007-2008
- Portfolio Review Leader, First-Year Writing Program, UIC 2007
- Writing Tutor, The Writing Center, UIC 2006
- Undergraduate Reading and Writing Tutor, The Reading and Writing Center, FSU 2004

Grant-writing

- Illinois Arts Council, Project Grant for *Packingtown Review*, funded: \$500 2009

Awards & Honors

- Nomination, Best New Poets 2012, Program for Writers, UIC 2012
- Nomination, Best New Poets 2010, Program for Writers, UIC 2010
- AWP Intro Journals Project Award for “Lipping Chocolate Cigarettes, the Mathematician Shakes a Fist,” the Association of Writers and Writing Programs 2007
- Nomination, Best New Poets 2007, Program for Writers, UIC 2007
- Nomination, AWP Intro Journals Project Award, Creative Writing, FSU 2006
- Competitive Internship, Fiction Collective 2 [FC2], Line-Editor and Copywriter, Tallahassee, FL 2005-2006
- Lambda Iota Tau, English Honors Society, English Department, FSU 2001-2002

Editorial & Related Experience

- Editorial Assistant, Professor Jennifer Ashton, *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry since 1945*, Cambridge U P 2008-2011
- Art Director, *Packingtown Review*, U of Illinois P 2010-2011
- Co-Editor-in-Chief, *Packingtown Review*, U of Illinois P 2009-2010
- Fundraising Committee, *Packingtown Review*, U of Illinois P 2007-2010
- Associate Poetry Editor, *Packingtown Review*, U of Illinois P 2007-2009

Copyeditor, <i>Packington Review</i> , U of Illinois P	2007-2009
Production Committee, <i>Packington Review</i> , U of Illinois P	2007-2008
Line-Editor, <i>The Kissssssssss</i> by Steve Katz, FC2	2007
Line-Editor, <i>The Possibility of Music</i> by Stephen-Paul Martin, FC2	2007
Line-Editor, <i>The Bitter Half</i> by Toby Olson, FC2	2006
Line-Editor, <i>Hydroplane</i> by Susan Steinberg, FC2	2006
Line-Editor, <i>Nietzsche's Kisses</i> by Lance Olsen, FC2	2006

Professional

Affiliations Association of Writers and Writing Programs
 Modern Language Association
 Poetry Society of America

REFERENCES

Dr. Christina Pugh (Chair) Associate Professor of English, University of Illinois at Chicago	capugh@uic.edu University Hall 1914 601 South Morgan Street Chicago, IL 60607	(312) 413-7400
Dr. Jennifer Ashton Associate Professor of English, University of Illinois at Chicago	jashton@uic.edu University Hall 2015 601 South Morgan Street Chicago, IL 60607	(312) 413-9568
Dr. Mark Canuel Professor of English, University of Illinois at Chicago	mcanuel@uic.edu University Hall 2033 601 South Morgan Street Chicago, IL 60607	(312) 413-2203
Dr. Christopher Grimes Assistant Professor of English, University of Illinois at Chicago	cgrimes@uic.edu University Hall 1926 601 South Morgan Street Chicago, IL 60607	(312) 413-0060
Dr. Margaret Miner Associate Professor of French and Francophone Studies University of Illinois at Chicago	mminer@uic.edu University Hall 1617 601 South Morgan Street Chicago, IL 60607	(312) 996-3229

TEACHING REFERENCES

Dr. Ann Merle Feldman	feldman@uic.edu	(312) 413-2249
-----------------------	-----------------	----------------

Professor Emerita, First-Year
Writing Program
University of Illinois at Chicago

University Hall 2001
601 South Morgan
Street
Chicago, IL 60607