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Please Mind The Gap (Poems)

Louis David Benedetto III

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Please Mind The Gap (Poems)

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana

PLEASE
MIND THE
GAP
(Poems)

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PROLOGUE:

*The future stands still, dear Mr. Kappus,
but we move in infinite space.*

--Rainer Maria Rilke



My father
speaks
in
jazz;
Listen, he says.
We do.

my brother and I, tiny arms rooted
to the fuzzy carpet.
Our legs are folded Indian style
and mouths hungry,
craving syllables,
consonants,
clauses.

Listen now, boys,
pulling the lever of his armchair and
springing forward.

Listen,
he says, *Your great-grandfather*
pushing his glasses up, *lived*
and try to understand. died in
Salaparuta,
Sicily
nested in the
center of the island,
ancient fathers and their
sons—

They were gelatai,
gelato-men,
the greatest south of Napoli and
kept their secrets close, handing them down
generation
after generation.
now all gone and
buried deep,
Our fathers' Sicily with it.

Stealing snow and ice
from Etna's jagged heights
packing
deep in earth
below their homes,
awaiting
hotter,
drier months
and
dreaming fortunes
from
the
north,

*an
island
of
sun-bitten
backs,
learned
in crowded dockyards
and
open
fishing boats,
tilted farms,
midland
hills
and
pebbled beaches;
faces set
cragged like
beaten leather
molded
and cast
through centuries*

*My brother jabs me
hard in the side
and my father stops,
slaps him on the hand
and smacks his lips*

*Here your grandfather Salvatore was born and
at fifteen left on a boat to Marseilles
to begin his life
before the fascists could
mark and sink him with the rest.
1921.
That, boys, is where we begin.*

My father scratches his olive skin
with his large hands,
he takes a sip of water.

Part I:

*I am a tiny jelly cake
and today is to be my greatest adventure*

-- S.E. Smith



blithe
children chasing
seagulls,
nightrailing
back to homeland
(but not
to mine)

[illegible]

Train frozen in midnight black
I hear the waves beating
a south Italian shore.
I think of
all the pictures I've
ever seen and
try to scribble in
the censored horizon.

too expensive

says the *(I'm) gone.*
smarmy man sleepily
in the bunk under
my own,
and the windows
are too dark
to see the ocean.
I keep trying
CLUCK! anyway.

my own

to—

He says,

you do.

ITALIAN TRAIN STRIKES

(FROM NICE)

I saw a box of matches
strewn across the river walk
I saw a black paint handprint
on the off-white wall,
the train station
in early morning fog
on the three days
this year
clouds covered
the sun
Dirty city
claimed clean
made for
wide walking
fast and straight
boots avoiding grime
and sleeping bag
citizens on my
way to missing the bus
There was a single glove
lying outside the trash bin
when they told us waiting
that the train would be late
and then not
depart
at all.

There is panic on the platform
and screaming from a man waving
tickets at the conductor
the good that will do

January freeze
and
Nice's avenues,
dead silent
til'
the stroke of
5 am when workers
hose the shit off sidewalks
getting ready for
the next day's
shit.

THE MAN FROM GENOA

(THE ROAD TO CINQUE TERRE)

Because that would be a pity

It was cold that day

with late trains missed
In a grey Genoa station,
as the country rained and blanded
itself for everyone's
viewing
pleasure.

My hands were
in my pockets cause'
I couldn't reach my
gloves
covered up by
everything heavy
in the bloated
backpack
at my feet

I hated those gloves
the only ones
I owned;
bulky,
impersonal things
that insulated but
couldn't pick up cups.

I was running late
I think
all of us were, judging
from
the scattered-about-the
platform
keeping eyes forward
and
mouths clenched shut
The day
was freezing.

Then a man
darted
over the turnstile
past every
ticket counters
briefly
slipping on
striped
barriers,

his green-striped
scarf
trailing
on the speckled-
wet cement
when

He leapt onto
the tracks

face painted
like a mad dog's
tongue sweeping
up his
thin mustache
breath ice-tinged

The man kept on running down
the lines of steel
Like a horse in slow motion
I could see
the propulsion action and
cogs twirling about to
catapult him
upward
And, and
anddddddd

my train finally pulled up
I got on, as did the
man in the bowler hat
and the lady
clutching the painting and
the mother clutching the child
with the chocolate-smeared face.

I will always wonder
if he made it,
that
daring
to dart
man.

**"I didn't know
you could do that,"**

the man in the bowler
hat said standing
next to me
his head cocked to the
confused angle

And the platform
guards,
they just watched.
We all just watched
this quick matter of
seconds

Checking our watches
to
make sure we
hadn't missed
our own
separate
trains

THE WORLD WAS MELTING

(AFTER ROME'S FIRST SNOW IN 30 YEARS)

I saw it.

We all saw it.

Walking out the metro stop,
all two-hundred early morning pilgrims
smiled

The museums were still closed and
the men took their worn boots off
and felt sunlight on their toes.
And back at the hostel
the Brazilian cured his hangover
with a bottle of champagne and
made a trashcan for a new friend
and women slid on the pavement
cursing torrents in Italian.

Nuns threw snowballs outside St. Peters
and a little girl drew a heart
on a snow-drenched car and
tugged on her daddy's pant legs
to let him see,
to let him know.

THE SISTINE CHAPEL

(VC)

Later,
when the trees were pelting us
and army of Vespas had
taken back the streets
battalions of them revving
at every stoplight
and all that remained
were the shadowy pockets
hidden in the underground
parts of the Coliseum.
So it was

I have never seen
so many people
looking up.

or
so I think—
I don't quite remember;
the world was melting,
you see.

PAY NO ATTENTION TO THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

(ROMA, AFTER THE JEWISH GHETTO)

1

they are singing
in silent film;
they are screaming.
the men (slumped) against
brick walls in tattered jackets,
the woman with her
eyes closed
brandished naked
on the crowded streets
marching,
marching,
marching away.
they are singing,
they are screaming.

2

at
the exhibit
I watch,
the same song plays
over and over
I do not understand the words
I do not know Italian
I remember the song, though
bringing past to
present
repeating
over and over

APPLES

(STREETS OF PALERMO)

I carried an apple with me
walking
past the bored jugglers,
and man with face
painted white
handing out flyers and
half-smiles
Past the wild dogs resting in
the shadows of a looming
Teatro Massimo
past the rooted traffic
and
armies of umbrella sellers
and
stacks of discount sunglasses
I carried an apple
with me to the station,
took a sour bite
and then
threw it away

ORANGES

(CEFELU TRAIN STATION)

I stood at the yellow
do not cross line and ate an
orange, spitting seeds across
the divide and watching them
skip across the stones and tracks
and wood.
It was dark. The old men in
their dark coats and cupolas and
gravely, smoke filled, booming, roaring
voices all laugh and joke or just walk
and stare,
stare out at the tracks
the orange was from the fresh market, not
quite ripened, but on the cusp.
These are the best.
The man smiled when I said
cinque, per favor.
He smiled real wide.
He said
si, grazie.
The old men all argue now, pacing back and
forth
in their impatience for the
train, and a woman with a white hat stares at
them. She has dark hair, dark skin
from a summer sun year after
year after
year.
We're all here waiting.
All stuck until then.
All waiting for that
train to take us on
our ways

I
SAW
YOU
STANDING
in
the
ruins...



1922,
 the letters come
 from home.
 They have
 marched on Rome.
 He is having
 a hard time
 with French,
 the nasal sounds,
 and relishes
 his father's
 every word.
 He misses
 the language
 and feels so alone.
 He wonders if
 in that crowd of
 30,000, he would
 have felt at home.

*a
 boy alone
 in a city
 by the seaside
 Marseille
 he was
 a
 boy alone
 arms stretched out
 over railing
 aching from the
 numbing wind
 they call
 Le Mistral
 It could push a man sideways
 It could push a man over
 they say
 from the deck
 he holds fast to the letter
 from his father
 reading over the address
 where he will meet his cousins
 make his new home
 He sees the Church
 at the top
 of the rocks
 high above the waves
 He sees the rolling hills
 of Provence surrounding
 a sorry excuse
 for
 home
 he thinks*

*Now boys, my father says,
 what happens when a s
 sadist goes to a party through
 one set of doors and
 a masochist comes in through another?*

1923,
 he hears it
 on the radio,
 from the trials.
 His French much
 better now, he listens
 intently as he waits
 for customers
 in his uncle's
 gelateria.
 They say
 he turned
 the crowd
 inside out.
 19 dead
 in the
 streets
 of Munich.

I shake my head dumbly
Well, he smiles, I'll tell you. At midnight, they kiss.
 Our faces scrunch
 frog noises hop from our mouths.
 Our father booms in laughter, and my mother stops
 her piano playing in the room across the hall.

He smirks,
But that's a story for another day.

Part II:

...yearning so often ends in vagueness

-- Rainer Maria Rilke



ANGELS ON THE MOLDAU (PRAGUE PT.1)

I am lurching towards drunk, woozy as hell and leaning against a wall for support, watching as the enormous crowd of Czech football fans explode in shrieks and laughter and hugs and all the what-have-you's to be imagined from a raging local crowd in the middle of Old Town Square. They move as one in a blurred wave of arms and begin to shake their fists and chant at the projection of the game on the stage's screen. Everyone joins in, except for me.

I do not give two living shits that the Czechs have just tied the game with Portugal and will be going into overtime, and maybe to the semi-finals; I am lurching towards drunk, woozy as hell, leaning against a smudgy, black wall and signing accords with the uneven cobble stones that, despite the abundance of Australian people and Irish pubs in every goddamned fucking city, they are not for me. Good impressions I make on my fourth day in the city of Prague, releasing my guts on a stone wall. I wipe my mouth and lose my balance and just sit there. I watch the peaking sun over the top of the medieval clock tower and see the sky turn shade of lavender that reminds me of home.

He has given me his number, this one-armed poet from Los Angeles. He has shaken hands with me in a bookstore but has never seen or known my face before. He has done this all in Prague, in the cellar near the poetry section where he is placing his new collection for those admirers of the English language to purchase.

He is making conversation with my friend Mimi, who intentionally makes tiny laughter and flirts her feet around his. He is short and stout with long, dark dreadlocks spread across his upper back like a possessed spider or a character from an old-school Nickelodeon cartoon. He speaks of Rilke and tells my friend Mimi that her name is but an exercise in Zen. Em-I, he chants with eyes closed, Am I?

The game ends in an expected upset and, feeling less queasy, I stumble off towards the Astrological Clock-side of the building. A trumpeter extends himself out of the open window above and plays the same tune he does at the strike of every hour. Out of seemingly thin air, every amateur photographer in a mile radius appears. They take their expensive cameras out and set flash on high, taking the exact same shot that could be bought behind them for less than a Euro. They are smiling and their children are making duck faces and peace signs.

*Oh, you're from New Orleans, he says to me.
I'm writing a book on New Orleans, well no, not on it, but set there.
That's great. How long did you live there?
Well, no, I've never actually made it there, he says. But I've always wanted to.*

I wind through the narrow streets of the gothic old town filled with gift shops and restaurants proclaiming in English to be a "true cultural experience". I notice a man off to the side on hands and knees. He is balding on top and wearing frayed pants and a shirt almost engulfs his thin frame. He is bowing before the street and says nothing as shoppers continue to walk in and out stores carrying bags full of shot glasses and t-shirts bearing the *I <3 Prague* banner.

I take out a few coins from my pocket and place them on the ground in front of the man. He looks up slightly and smiles. His eyes are golden and sharp like a fox. He presses his face to the street again as I glance back, walking away from the flurry of consumers. I am heading for the Charles Bridge, hoping I will be sober enough to meet Lucien, or if not, that he will not care.

And goddamn if I couldn't stop myself from listening whenever he opened his mouth, not because I believed a word that he was saying but because he was so goddamn endearing and thriving in each syllable. He came here for the first time at twenty-two and has three daughters. Each is in a different country. He has lived in this city for seventeen years.

Brother, he says putting his good arm on my shoulder, here is my number. Call me if you by chance find yourself free.

On the bridge, I walk past a five-piece jazz band blaring Dixieland loud. They're trying too hard, I think, but really I'm still getting used to the rest of the world's interpretation of what this music is I grew up with. They've drawn quite crowd for themselves, stopping the flow of pedestrian traffic. I stay and watch and even I have to admit it's pretty entertaining. The front man, a portly fellow with dimples for days, moves and shakes with a banjo and the rest follow him wildly. The embellishment is fun, sure, but I can't help but wondering if I should be enjoying or sneering. The problem is: I miss home. A lot.

I feel my phone vibrate in my pocket and I answer.

The basement of the bookstore was playing a Dave Brubeck track the entire time I was down there, a cover of a Sound Of Music track. It's stuck in my head for the rest of the trip. That and the sounds the damn trumpet from the tower. The ascending notes and what they call "cultural experience" but seems like tourist fodder. Where is the heart of these places?

I'm thinking all this as I walk alone along the edge of the Moldau in the afternoon. The road above is much higher and there are several sets of stone steps along the length of the river that Mimi's gone off to get ready for a booze cruise with some other acquaintances from the hostel where we're staying. I stop at one of the little counter bars under the shade of a bridge. It's a nice, breezy afternoon that reeks of almost-spring. Not quite there yet.

I order a pilsner, cause 'that's what you do in Prague, and sit at one of the tables facing the water. There are swans perched on the bank and they look somewhat pleasant. I remember a man from Luzern had told me to watch them carefully, they'll bite your fingers off.

The bar's name is *The Napa* and I enter cautiously. It's placed on very tiny side street on the west bank of the river that I've never been to and got lost four times trying to find. When I open the door, the before silent street explodes in music, chatter and clinking of glass. Walking in I see a great set of tables and over forty people sitting there. A band heads to front, two guitarists, a saxophone, violin and viola. They are the most joyful people I have ever seen and right in the middle of the table is none other than Lucien.

Brother, he says. Please have a seat! Let me get you a drink.

I take the seat next to his and find myself across from the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, Dominique her name. Her boyfriend, a Jude Law looking character with tiny-framed glasses is a writer and musician.

When I was young, I had all the melodies and songs in my head, but terrible words, he says. But now, older and full of verse, the songs are gone. This is what you call in your country bull shit.

The door opens and another viola rushes through door, greeted with a great cheer from the crowd. They play on and on and suggestions from the audience keep coming, mostly traditional Czech folk songs. Everyone sings and mostly in gorgeous three-part harmony, spilling beer and smiles about the tiny room.

Do you understand any of what they're singing, says Lucien sitting down next me with two pints in his hand.

I shake my head no.

Neither do I, he says. And It doesn't really matter does it?

That's when I see the angel. He is wearing a black suit, white starch shirt and some patterned tie. He is walking with another suited man across the cobbled stonework, headed towards the stairs that will lead him to the road. No one else seems to notice him, so I pick up my camera and aim a shot. He looks back at me, stops and keeps on walking up.

It's right after this that I get the phone call I knew would be coming. I answer it and hear my brother's solemn voice on the line.

And let us end tonight how we should end every night, Lucien exclaims. With a slice of pizza.

We are standing on the opposite side of town having shared a cab with the Jude Law songwriter and Dominique. Our place of destination: Twenty-Four Hour Pizzeria.

Tell me, Brother, Lucien says, where are you right now?

In Prague, I say.

No, but where are you?

I guess I'm in the here and now, I say rolling my eyes. I consider Lucien enough of an acquaintance to introduce sarcasm.

Well, you're never now for more than you need to be, Lucien says. And I think you needed this night.

What makes you say that?

Brother, I can tell.

I hang up the phone, stare at the empty glass in front of me and quietly ask a passing waitress for another beer.

I'm thinking about stories and my father's arm chair.

I'm thinking about his calls to me during my lunch hour to talk about the birds he sees outside his window. How he would chase the squirrels away with a garden hose and refill the feeders every week. Of how we'd known this was going to happen for months, but still can't believe.

I'm thinking of—

The waitress comes with a new beer. I sip it quietly.

He sets me off at the trolley and we part ways drunkenly vowing to meet again if I'm ever in Prague. I wish him best luck on his book. The trolley sets me off in front of Charles Bridge at nearly dawn. I'm walking past by myself and tearing up a bit. I stop and watch the sun rise over the ancient statues. On the opposite side of the bridge walking my way, I see the suited angel. His head is down and hands in his pockets. He doesn't even notice me when he passes, keeping on in straight line towards horizon, disappearing with the day.



TWENTY-THREE YEARS GONE

(BERLIN IN APRIL)

Mein Herz ist

Mein Herz ist

swerving
stood aside at the crosswalk
watched the autos pass
afraid for the *Apfelman*
taking sides
in red
the people all stare
and walk solidly
straight
set to wander
methodically,
tell the world their news:
VESTIGIAL!
DO NOT FORGET!
the roaring Octobers gone by
silent Novembers
tearing up walled
fractures in
time

slushy spring Aprils
where the snow rises over vestigial
concrete sets and barbed wire fence
and maybe forgotten
but not now

Now

Mein Herz ist

twenty-three years gone,
set on what remains
and floating towards
what doesn't

Mein Herz is east and west

atrium and ventricles
red and velvet blue
pumping past the Reichstag building
and statues blown to smithereens
my heart is—

to which side do you stand?

DODGER'S ALLEY

(MUNICH REMEMBERS)

small
memorials
spread and
centered
trickling
down the alley
out of sight
gold is
the color
of the disappeared
STOP
dive
under
cover
before the plaque
sees all
what they pried off
the wall
from 1923
stuck in mind's pocket
for those who took passage here
kept moving
heads held
hands held
before they—

STOP

STOP

STOP

STOP

STOP

STOP

STOP

STOP

STOP

STOP

[illegible]

LILACS AND SANDSTONE **(DRESDEN BY MIDNIGHT)**

There's a light here.
Shining under stone bridges just barely,
illuminating drunken screams,
clinking glasses,
time passing like Monet
riding the current with blue
and white amber haze.
A flow and a current stream,
with lovers left littered on banks,
and half-moons cutting the dark blue
from the reigns of stars and satellites.
Blinking on and off.
Let laughter curtail the dark,
the open windows,
the lingering bells from
the bomb lost voices.
Here is a city and here am I,
lifted past recollections of song
to something entirely new.
Let the cars drive by,
the lovers sleep,
August's gold shine sharp
from his golden horse
riding away from Elbe's shore
and explosions of the past.

WHERE EAST MEETS WEST

(GRENZLAND)

the grass is green
on the other
side too
you know.
In fact
I could say it looks
just the same
maybe
even when they
crossed the borders
by foot
by car
by bundle
in their mother's arms

when they saw it then
they didn't think
of barbed fences,
turnstiles,
passports,
or Stasi
but soft breathing
like ocean swells
tugging with the moon-bright heavens
not wrestling with cigar smoked
back rooms
or dotted lines
smeared black
on a new world's map

he tells us
at the top of the guard tower
above the no-man's land
where
stories and structures
are all that remain

Later,

I heard
they caught him
digging holes
under barbs and shot him
through the chest

I heard
he charmed the dogs
with a side of beef and
they never
saw him again

I heard
he flew the roost
in a balloon inflated with
all the pretty colors

even red
up over the heights
and five-year planned
Döner stands
bustling, feeding
the grey capitol
sides east
and west

***FOR THE MAN WHOSE FACE I NEVER
SAW RIDING ON U-BAHN 3 (VIENNA)***

Asleep
tightly pressed
against
a window and knee
torn dark fabric blue
and shoes worn out and
off like a pile of
wrapping paper at Christmas

toes bloodied black
and swollen feet
do testify
some truth
that the business suits'
stares condemn
If there is one thing
I know
(and I know I know)

it's the soothing pace
of a subway car,
and the want of sleep
in-transit

SOUVENIRS FOR

(MARSEILLE)

I picked up two pebbles
that reminded me of—

One green,
 and
 one blue.

On a beach
I found them lying,
lonely stones
 beneath
 my boots

 while
winter clouds swarmed
dusty greys
like
sunlit
empty
 rooms.

the dirty sea had spat
 them
 out
 stark naked
on the shore,
 and piled on millions
others
willful brothers
 huddled mothers,
 century's worth
 of
 bitter hues,
with each wave's passing crash,
 My thoughts
 all turn to—

I tossed two pebbles
 to
 the sea
One for me
 and
 one
 for—

*They met at a party in Paris,
they fell in love
opposites
attracting
She was quite the looker
and he quite the catch
married in 1929
in Notre Dame
before all of Europe
turned to hell again.*

*Boys, my father says, Grab me a
cup of water.
The story only
gets better from here.*

Part III:

... who can describe what happened to us?

-- Rainer Maria Rilke



FIVE MORE MINUTES, PLEASE? (PRAGUE PT.2)

There was no answer.
Not from anyone I had met that night
and all the emails and texts sent to Lucien
seemed wasted as I wandered down the
streets of Prague again
a little more lonely
than I was.
I stopped at the Modern Art gallery
uptown
almost all day
Going through the Cubist section, I
stumbled on a
Picasso print ,
one of his later prints of
Jacqueline ,
that was on tour.
A man came and stood next to me
scraggly and in his mid-fifties
snowy hair combed over
He didn't say anything
but I saw he had a picture in his hand
of a woman
 with smiling eyes

I left him there after a moment
to sift through other sections, but later
when the gallery was closing
I heard a the older man say in
trying English

*Please,
just five more minutes.*

The curator told him he had to leave
and the guard stepped closer

*It's all I ask, please. Just give me
a little more time .*

The security guard shook
his head sideways and took the man by the arm.
I watched the snow haired man
looking back at the painting with
the saddest eyes I've ever seen

He held that photo close
He held it. He held that photo in his hands
 He held it to his beating chest.

ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES (ISTANBUL)

always nod politely
when they say
those three questions
in English to you
move your head
intently forward
a sign of respect
as you sit on
the couch you slept on
last night,
alone
like the last marshmallow
in a mug of steaming hot chocolate
thank god for
grape leaves
and R. Kelly's "Remix to Ignition" being on
your playlist
What do you do?
What do you want to do with that?
Why?
They will nod
translate for those who do not quite understand
let some *Ohhhhh*'s out
and then
begin to speak in Turkish
for another two hours
at 4AM
the cats run
rampant
pawed conquerors
newest in a long line
and the windows are open
ghostly curtains hover
when you wake up
before sunrise
mistaking the
call to prayer
for a freight train
on its way
towards north.
you will be homesick until
you wake up in the morning
to your host screaming
foreign obscenities
and realize the sink has
somehow flooded
the bathroom
and only you
can stop it
Coincidence?
i think not.

***IS IT RUDE TO STARE? (ON EVERY METRO,
OR U-BAHN, OR SUBWAY, OR ETC.)***

Survey says:

Yes.

PLEASE MIND THE GAP DOWN AND OUT IN LONDON

1.

I always have
ink on my hands
busted caps on planes
trying to capture every moment
writing down
accurate as fuck
 maybe
letting the pen bleed dry
there are more adverts
per square escalator step
then there are people
 here
including the man singin'
James Taylor's Carolina
 on the London waterfront
 as people shuffle exorbitant
 amount of cash to ride the
 giant Ferris wheel
 thing
 and just only slightly
uncomfortable themselves
to the accent of
the man behind the ticket counter
Welcome to London: just outside uncanny

3.

At the British Museum
thoughts:
 Oh hey,
look at all the shit
Britain's stolen
from every other country
in the world
over the past thousand years!

note to self:
don't mention thoughts
to fellow British people

2.

What if
 (what)
we, ourselves
 (we)
were packed
 into
tight suitcases
size too small
limbs hanging
 out
and shards that glisten
 (like) glass
(because they are glass)
and you passby
looking in outside
the pub-scape
and fast paced elevators
and always faint scent of garbage
Would you buy a drink in Camden to
take with on the Tube?
Cause you're feeling real sick
 always
and what you're looking for (at) is something
that you can't (will not) take back
Lying with limbs out
on a corner of the
 street
They're playing 80's music
in the jazz cafe
and blues in the
 Green Note
Color tragedies
are all but a part of life

4.

I slept on the floor
of an airport in London,
imagining
the faint glow above
to be stars.

It was a McDonald's opening
it's door and the Estonian grandmother
and her granddaughter walking in
for some coffee and breakfast

When the bus came to pick us
up
the red double decked
monstrosity
I got on fast to avoid being
left behind on Baker street
and slept the two hours
drunkenly playing situations
in my head
(the bus came at 2AM,
what else could I do but get drunk?)
so, I thought,
what if
the Jazz age never happened
and all the flappers were very
sad for a day
(but they got over it)
and St. Stephens
never struck 12,
Falstaff was really
dead and never had a chance
to change
and all of us rallied
through the night,
becoming BFF's
streaking color and blaze,
with police running behind,
catching tail-end s of drinking
songs and broken pint glasses
thrown in the air in a jiff-like-hurry
Pip pip! Said the stereotypes in my head
and the fat, drunk British man
slowly going
in, one by one, inch by
inch.
Moving
And, I ask,
what song bird
can sing bad
80's pop out of tune
for its lover proud
like I can?

I did. I will.
just watch.

WHEN GRASS PEAKS OUT FROM THE CRACKS IN THE CONCRETE

(CARNIVAL DE PARIS)

you stumble off the night train
at 7AM and
it's already raining
and you didn't sleep
You run away from the 18 year
old from Miami
heading to McDonald's to find wi-fi
cause' even though
he was good company
last night in Spain,
doesn't mean
relationships will last

hostel desk-clerk had to look up
if there were any celebrations in the city
and you're not expecting much
when you get off at Gambetta
in the 20th
but follow the costumes
and people bearing blue
bass drums

there's a stormtrooper dancing
at the metro entrance
leading a caramel
colored cow down the street
the children on parents' shoulders
reach out for the balloon men
and everyone has a shitty French beer
or loaf of French bread
in their hands

*Liberté,
égalité,
fraternité*
etched on the old
building above us

It's not home, but hey,
I'll take it.

MCDONALD'S IN STATION, 3:37AM (FRANKFURT)

Asleep on the table
with a Mcflurry
Mcmelting close by
waiting for the first train
back to Marburg
holed up in the only
place open
tired of watching
the con
sift through open
lockers for
some suckers
forgotten luggage
and having
to put on my
FUCK YOU
face every time
he comes to speak to
me in English.
There were lights
spread throughout
the city last time I was here
and OCCUPY FRANKFURT's
mysteries were revealed:
they went home every night
home
walking towards it
every day
now,
it's
what happens
when you
keep moving

3:37am,
asleep
in Frankfurt
waiting for
my train
to
arrive

into the arms of
America
they jumped,
landed in the port
of New Orleans
took a bus up to
Baton Rouge
they called us names
so we
built a church
the one in Cefelu
and you can still see
the plaque hanging under
the stained glass window
blue and red
they came in 1935
and
never
looked back

Epilogue:

... and now we move into the future!

-- Jack Pendarvis



*I took a trip back once with him,
when I was a bit older than you, boys.*

*We took a car to Salaparuta,
where the quake had leveled it in 68'
and several other towns
we found the old gelato shop
and never had I seen him do it before
but your grandpa got on one knee
held his hands to cover his face
and broke down
I stood there at his side and didn't know what to do
except say*

*I'm sorry,
I'm so so sorry*

My father leaned back into his chair
and set his glasses down on the glass table

*Boys, he said
you never
have
enough time.*

Don't ever forget that.

HOMELAND HYMN

(MONTEROSSO, ITALY)

the sun came out today

i saw it straining
against cloud cover
from the decayed turrets
lining the western cliffs
and again
from the trail
ten thousand years
steeped in hillsides
vines, people,
grapes and the land
of fathers and mothers
and

there's a bell ringing
at the
station now and
the narrow faced man
asks for change,
but boards
the train anyway
It's all alright.

the backrooms of this café
smell like blooded oranges and
cinnamon mints
the waiter takes
the tip and
never even asks
there are children
playing here with speckled-pigeons
as there are in any other place,
but here at the old wooden dock
wet with days of rain,
i see the sun pushing across
the blue
blue sea

and i'm smiling.

i hope you are too.



Artist Statement

“And also, I'd say to find and trust and embrace what art of all kinds speaks to you-- to search it out and trust it. Even if it's lowbrow, there's something there for you if you love it. Highbrow too.

All the stuff that goes in deeply will influence you in good ways.”

- response email from Aimee Bender

In 2012, I spent seven months growing and nurturing ideas in ten countries and almost forty different cities. I was equal parts enthralled and overwhelmed by exposure to things quite different than the bubble of Baton Rouge, Louisiana I have called home all my life. During my travels, I found myself fixated on certain themes I believed to be intertwining: understanding and resolution of past events; how to perceive the idea of what home is and how that changes when you're not there; how we see ourselves and, even more, how we are perceived by others; the constant uncertainty of what comes next and the nature of what it means to be in transition.

Full of concern about what I was leaving behind and excitement as to what lay ahead, I began the practice of journaling every day; from the initial landing at Charles de Gaulle Airport to the docks on the Asian-side of Istanbul to now, sitting outside of Highland Coffees, I have made this daily act of expression a means for framing how I see and experience the world and address those people in it. Through this exercise, I have developed an individualized and experimental way of writing that has greatly added to my fiction and poetry.

Heavily inspired by the composition of Cubist and Post-impressionist works by Cezanne and Picasso that I encountered, I took to composing pieces that relied just as much on format as they do content. The poetry and fragments presented in this thesis were drawn from intuitive reasoning as to where and how they should be placed in an open field. These poems serve as a documentation of my intuitive reactions when addressing an event as well as the event or place itself. These pieces are meant to avoid complacency or stasis, calling into question the passage of time and uncomfortable feelings involved with being considered foreign or an outsider. The structure of these poems only takes a solid shape during moments of unique understanding or

comprehension of what it means to belong in a specific place. The format may seem untraditional, but I believe it is an essential layer and helps to deepen how these poems are viewed, read and understood.

It has been my attempt to stray away from normal tropes when dealing with foreign travel and assert myself as an outsider looking in and attempting to grasp the context in which these people and places reside. In order to do this, I designed two narratives: the father and the son. These fluctuating series converse with one another through time and form. How the poem is laid out, as well as the visual images added, are experiments in narration through non-traditional means. The prologue and Part I establish the lineage of the story and the speaker (who is the same throughout every piece, telling the story of his grandfather through what he remembers of his father and also of his own experience traveling). Part II starts with the Prague piece, a series of prose poems combined together to make a story and provide helpful context as to why the speaker is where he is. Part II also contains several poems referring to Germany and its history. The terms and place used in these poems are not given explicit explanations in order to disorient the reader and push them intentionally to the outside; this is an experiment in asking the reader to rely without given context and to see what is gained from their initial understanding of a piece. In my opinion, the Germany poems contain more thematic interest to the overall work seeing as they delve into issues such as historical gaps, change over generations and what is lost and gained and forgotten and remembered in the going of time. Part III is a hodgepodge of places and events that expound upon the first entries and the epilogue allows the reader to come full circle.

The goal of this thesis is not to expose any supposed universal truth or gain approval for some new theory, but to document the process through which this twenty-two year old delved into his surroundings and memories and came out with a new “way of saying”. These stories and poems are a testament to that; a snapshot of this time spent abroad, now frozen on the page. This is a starting point, one on which I will continue to build.



Notes:

Images used were all taken by me during January 2012 – July 2012.

Text and Titles set in BLACKOUT, Centaur, Times New Roman, and Arno Pro Smbd.

Information on Part II's Germany series:

Dodger's Alley refers to a one of the many small monuments located in Munich. It was an alley between two major streets in the city's downtown area. Citizens against the Nazi rule took the alley to avoid saluting a plaque commemorating the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch. A Gestapo guard was placed in the alley and if a person was caught using it more than once, they would be taken away and "disappeared". A golden strip on the cobble stones was installed in remembrance to those who stood against Hitler's rule. It begins to trail off halfway through the alley before fading altogether.

23 Years Gone refers to Berlin and the number of years since the Berlin wall's fall.

Dresden is the site of the 1945 firebombing by American and British bombers that leveled the city and is the main topic of Kurt Vonnegut's novel, Slaughterhouse-Five. August's gold refers to the statue of August the Strong which consequently is made of gold and resides in the middle of the city near the Elbe river.

Grenzland (meaning borderland) refers to the strip of land dividing former East Germany from former West Germany. A museum was established along this border after the fall of the DDR.