

I

BLUES HAIKU

I want to blur from a tupelo stump, like a crawfish
in an endangered swamp, a purple blur from a tupelo stump, then that crawfish
pinching moss off a cypress knee—so standoffish!

~

Ground fog swirling, smelling fresh as death
when the wind disturbs it; ground fog swelling, ammonia smell fresh as death—
somebody mopping the kitchen, or baking meth.

~

What moving violation, unpaid citation, peccadillo,
drove you, bandido, from what Amarillo, what crime against nature, peccadillo,
so far to the north, oh nine-banded tire tread, armadillo?

~

The pileated drummer's *wawk*—it was unignorable
that that was *my* song, the drummer's low *wawk wawk wawk*, it was unignorable,
and not the sweet sweet sweet prothonotary's warble.

~

Its tassels writhing, rearing up identically ripe
before a cobra moon, its tassels writhing, rearing up identically ripe,
the corn drinks in the monotone of an enormous polypipe.

~

Most like a June bug pointing today out with a splatter
on a Honda windshield, dragonfly or a June bug pointing its last day with a splatter—
first drop of a downpour about to pound this flat world flatter.

~

I wonder if the rice will rise with a nicer luster
from this flooded field, if its thin green blades will rise with a finer luster,
now it falls with a cymbalic hiss from that souped-up crop duster?

~

I might just walk barefoot down to that moody Mississippi,
like a Sadhu to the Ganges, might work my feet into the mud of that mighty Mississippi,
in the name of no power in the mud but the muddy Mississippi's.

~

The towpath to the Deep South, it don't feel too well,
and it makes me woozy, towpath to the river mouth, no, it don't feel too well,
laid up with a laughing gull and a brown pelican shell.

~

The mounds of Towasaghy, shadowed from the pounding sun,
I found their replicas in the soggy clouds towing shadows in the pounding sun
and in the ant-hill complex on the mound I sat cross-legged on.

~

Upon a mounded sand boil stared the witness tree
since before the quake; on the sand boil glared the red oak hanging tree
till a mercy bolt cut it down, out of its misery.

~

That lopsided frame house, where my mother was born,
I would pull it on down, that lopsided house frame, where my mom was born,
but it'd only be back up early the following morn.

~

Couple of geezers, hobbling down Cahokia Mounds
Interpretive Walk, pass a crumpled grasshopper cooking by Cahokia Mounds,
then another—no, crawfish!—a great egret must of found.

~

Down an imitative river road in the warbler-inflected breeze.
“Inythin else?” The old channel’s tree line in the warbler-inflected breeze.
“Lemon?” “Limmen?” “Limmen.” Catfish and hush puppies.

~

Nnnh, from a shallow bullfrog, before the oriole
had entirely finished; then *mmnh*, from a deeper bullfrog, as if for the oriole
or the frogs in the shallows, began the night’s tutorial.

~

Gone Mud, my compatriot’s pickup, flies two big flags
on Decoration Day, his supersized pickup, an American and a Confederate flag,
and a note I left on his wiper: *War was no friend to the Brobdingnags*.

~

The Company took the mill train, and they took her track—
the Cairo & Fulton—took off with the mill train trailing her sweet peavine track.
Flounce as they will by the roadbed, the mimosas won’t bring her back.

~

The man with the left-handed cane that had a rearview mirror,
who was pushing ninety, cane with a black-bulb horn and a rearview mirror,
keeps an eye out for an unseen gumball, wailing nearer.

~

From this scenic outlook you can see the limestone bluff,
and across the river, from this Trail-of-Tears outlook, the buzzards' limestone bluff.
Draft mule for dinner—the Cherokee had seen enough.

~

This pink nail polish will drown the chigger in the itch,
or petroleum jelly, a little polish on the privates will drown the chigger in the itch.
Traveling bug or bug bite? I don't care which is which.

~

This Too Shall Pass, out by the CITY LIMIT sign,
with a cross glued to it, post-deep in backwater out by the CITY LIMIT sign—
don't know who put it there or what all *This* might mean.

~

Bobcats, swamp rabbits, high on Towasaghy ground—
no sign of Noah—deer, coyote, high-ribbed on the foggy ground,
gaze on as another crawfish heaps another Ararat mound.

LITTLE RIVER COILS

I hear that now,
that it was you all along—
in the blood-starved wail
of mosquito dusks
that slithered above you; in
the wild hush from a ripple
raised like a welt.
And among the cattails
that sleepy exhalation,
that was you
lulling us into damming you
into a tense green millpond
where you could *clonk whew clonk*
from that windowless brick
pumphouse nobody ever
paddled over to or back from;
and could pipe gurgling
into Himmelberger Lumber
where, brung to a boil,
you blew off a shrill steam
we no longer heard
at six, seven, noon,
one, four, nine,
but woke, worked, broke,
worked, walked, woke,
and dozed to as night
and day changed shifts.

I hear you all right,
even your muffled escape
in the cast-iron steam pipe
sheathed in asbestos
that slid up the back wall
of the millhouse where we lived
and slipped into the corner
of the kitchen where I slept.
Curled in silver
painted over hopefully
in beige, you never hissed
but hammered out
a drumroll hammering
I used to fret was somebody
wanting out. But you weren't
in the coils; you were the coils.
And so I ask you,
Little River, old way
of the Mississippi, if you might
give me to understand
how can I back away from you,
what can I do or make for you
for you not to strike?

WAHITE

*We do step twice into the identical river
and we don't.
Yes we are from here, and then again,
we're not.*

—Heraclitus

TWO-STEP

Twisting south into Swampeast Missouri,
walloped by the Headwater Diversion Channel,
Castor River, dizzy to death, its beaver
fantail jangling left and right, its castor glands

oozed of their sweet brown curvature, is born again
as Wahite, a one-hundred-mile floodway ruled parallel
to the Stoddard County line, a galvanized nail
drove plumb through Missouri's Bootheel.

If Wahite Ditch is Castor River in its next life,
does it recollect, does it even believe in, the life
it outlived? And what about me, looking down on my old haunts
like a guardian angel with six wings and cold feet?

Do I believe in John, the teen picking his way
down Wahite's rocky bank; Sherry Kay
and the congregation singing him on—
Just as I am, without one plea—

Lionel not singing, watching; Brother Pascal
in his short-sleeved translucent shirt,
his black tie ironed shiny,
chest-deep, waiting? What was I—

what was John—thinking? Stepping
his left hightop into Wahite's clayey
ditchwater, sucking it out, and then
stepping it in again?

WHEREABOUTS

Nothing happens around here without us
knowing about it, though we never do know
what hit us. The setting's so uneventful, we just
hang around it, doing nothing—we're where it

takes place. It's been going around
and we catch it, the swampeast misery,
an undeserving condition, a feeling poorly,
a sweetness preserved, plum cheeks

flat against the jar. Was it somewhere
we pulled down over our heads, up
over our privates, caressed our thighs with,
then couldn't hardly peel off

to lay back on muggy sheets
our worn souls? Very deeply
stained within. It must of took aholt
of our tongues, wrung them

into an acceyent nobody fails to place
in a soggy paperback of commonplaces
whose fused pages we can't read anymore
but believe we know, a historical present

we've come to expect like the weather.
It works in construction of that dream—me
unbelievably late, darting about like a dragonfly
to deliver a lecture I misplaced

on a topic I know nothing about, down
branching basement corridors, bald lead
pipe knees steaming, giving way
to buckling tarred roof fields,

chimney flues sticking up stumplike,
when always I smack myself
below my ear, gape at my bloodied palm—
Was that a mosquito?