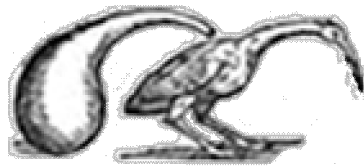


# Segue

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## ALLAN PETERSON



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## Think Of It This Way

The scar that lacks sweat finds its philosophers,  
    our faces that wad in crying and in time.  
Ribbons that remember us: thymine adenine  
cytosine guanine  
whose celebratory novels are sometimes misspelled  
though all that is water  
and a few poor adjectives poorly understood.

Or I should remind you, I could enumerate my scars:  
    twenty five from the sun and one  
on my chin from a bicycle, one on my nose  
from a thrown rock. The incidents speak out  
sweating without remembrance  
with three times the snowfall of Buffalo.

Think of it this way. The weather has twisted west,  
the man is teaching the boy  
to fish with a spinning reel while the astronauts  
stick wrenches to the deck  
with Silly Putty while circling the earth.

The physics of written has gravity,  
    the cohesive weight of lines  
that leave marks on memory.  
It is like after a paint job, drying to a sheen,  
how the windows glisten but stick shut.

## Their Known Haunts

Afraid of forgetting because we do  
    as soon as they happen they fray  
the facts  
the unsupportable suppositions we thrive on  
    the ones we believe to be the world  
wholesale  
such as how the dead cannot be kept deep enough  
they escape to fly about the house  
    drifting up and out of sight  
like an attic of scarves

We will worsen unless we remember  
all the small tools of spring that make it move  
    moths adjusting slightly the lights  
extra weight in the oaks from starlings  
    infinite water wrenches  
allowing sparkles to change hands  
near the far shore hornets  
draining soft apples of their broth

Afraid of the unforgettable  
    since their known haunts  
work against them the useful instances  
    the book the room  
in which the contents recur at night  
in particular order  
    armed by alarmed by longing  
unrepressed somewhere  
between the heat of the covers  
    and convergent disappointments  
the silhouette's answer to shadow  
recalling the solid illustrations of the body

# Whistling at Sea

Whistling at sea is the algebra of grief.  
Its proof is a storm wind coming when called,  
and then disaster.  
Drawing blood requires a red crayon and a boat  
coming open at the seams,  
brass nails, fox eyes, bodies blown away.  
Parenthesis is a tempest  
confined between its doors,  
period the rock against them, opposing ruin,  
coming from nowhere with its small chapped face.

Had he just been singing  
nothing vaporous would have overrun the empire.  
Breath just didn't understand the words about regret,  
the one that defines sheen on the waxed Pontiac,  
only the curse for selling water whose punishment  
is drought and dry tears.

Talking back to improbable atmospheres  
is like asking Australia to count rabbits, then their fleas,  
as if that figure was predictive.  
Everyone was nervous. The age of the earth had just doubled  
on finding that skull with the impression of pursed lips  
and a copy of the Olduvai Times.  
Moreover, an orchid had been shown  
to be comprised of twilight and wishful thinking,  
the green satin stem like a ribbon in a Bible to save its place.

## About the Work

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I began writing poetry in art school when it became clear that working with ideas through words was the intuitive corollary to my painting and drawing, and that the processes had a similar origin, only the materials differed. A word, an image, a thought, suggested others, just as a drawn or painted mark suggested possible next steps. I trust in that process, in the intrinsic connectedness of those spontaneous ideas, words, directions, and the mediation of inner prompting. It helps to make work unpredictable, ideas inexhaustible, and above all, revelatory.

I see that my poems in *Segue* all happen to begin with a short proposition: “Whistling at sea is the algebra of grief,” “The scar that lacks sweat finds its philosophers,” and “Afraid of forgetting because we do.” Those were just things I had been thinking about and those phrases just came to me like an indication that there was more within them. I know that whistling at sea was once considered bad luck; I know that scars do not sweat, and I know that we are heir to forgetting and since earliest times have devised techniques to improve memory, but beyond those initial thoughts on the days those poems began, their development was intuitive, a give and take with thinking.

Writing is full of epiphanies which are intuition manifest. There are unexpected insights and connections, subjects appear and reappear to amplify meaning without drawing tidy conclusions. It’s like seeing thinking, a trip with the destination unknown. Punctuation is sometimes useful, frequently unnecessary. Rhyming seems childish for adults, and using “received” forms seems like technical writing, making the obligations of form, if not primary, an artificial intrusion.

Creative work is necessarily a solitary practice. It is not a hardship, but an exhilarating and desirable condition for concentration. I start by handwriting in notebooks. Maybe a few notes on a perceptual observation, a phrase, some inklings with potential. I go back later to develop those starts, and if something looks promising I move to the computer. Its ability to make revisions easily dramatically lessens the distance between thinking and the page.

I have had no poetry classes or workshops and so I am my own critic. I also do not have fellow writers with whom I share developing work. A poem for me is not a story in little short lines, narrative has better outlets. What happens in a poem happens uniquely on the page. And a poem is not a problem solved. The only “problems” in poetry are what to say and how to say it, but between that “what” and “how” is the whole world.

## About the Author

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Allan Peterson is the author of two books, *All the Lavish in Common* (2005 Juniper Prize) and *Anonymous Or* (Defined Providence Press), and four chapbooks. Recent print and online appearances include *Blackbird*, *Perihelion*, *Northwest Review*, *Marlboro Review*, and *Massachusetts Review*. Peterson has work forthcoming in *Boston Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, and *Swink*.

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[www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v4n2/poetry/peterson\\_a/index.htm](http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v4n2/poetry/peterson_a/index.htm)

[www.storysouth.com/spring2004/peterson.html](http://www.storysouth.com/spring2004/peterson.html)

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