

# HORSE COUNTRY



**GARIN CYCHOLL**

# Horse Country

Garin Cycholl

Chicago

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*you are here*.

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*for Chris Glomski  
and Ryan Kenealy*



the stretch

out of Carson City  
by Reno

*(to reimagine the nation by horse*

the made-up cities  
of America are  
legend—their waters  
back up and percolate  
against sandstone and  
concrete

the nation's  
oblivion measured by the  
bugler, bending revelry  
and retreat to his own breath

*the watch writ large*

“continual drifting—  
not just time but speeded-up time...  
the acceleration inherent in falling  
bodies” & a gunfighter's wisdom:  
“get yourself  
killed some-  
where else”

play the horn again for this  
big empty, taps for





## Illinois Derby

out of Dancehall Floozy  
by Silver Deputy

you can say it: “things  
have weakened” there’s  
no distant mountain and we  
don’t know the source of the  
river’s foam, still

some-  
times the horse appears  
in pieces in a dream still,  
we believe in movement  
“THEY’RE OFF!” the bell  
sounds and you begin to  
notice that all isn’t right—  
glass flies from their hooves,  
the ten bettors around you  
streak for WIN BETS ONLY &  
your jockey’s in a “decent  
cloak to mark his gentle  
citizenship”—money down  
on that horse with “unfinished  
business,” modernity kept  
in your hip pocket or

out of Green Bonfire  
by Gray Loafers

there should be a song that  
describes this—the oblivion

of horses' movement, three-  
wide in the stretch, *in dif-*  
*ferent lands their names were*  
*diverse*—and what's gone  
*here*: cooked greens and a  
grade two

O, lazy horse-  
men of Stickney, early on  
I'd decided not to become  
a goatman under the Citgo  
sun, tracking idlers; men  
loosed and drifting, the  
Cicero bus arrives like a  
wave passing through ice—  
“time deep in the wilderness  
of elsewhere”—we dead  
under so many green things

poem for Roberto Harrison

betting Oakwood,  
winter's afternoon

out of Boa  
by Midas Eyes

I'm  
left at the rail's insistence—  
the same serpent crawling  
your mirrored torso

or against memory, "the  
other color by which I mean  
green"—the reptile's eye hooked  
in your eye, the orchard on fire—

always the scene in the end:  
reptile poised beneath the bucking  
horse, frail hoof hung over air and  
ominous rattling; the hero's pistol  
aimed at its metal wart, then sand  
kicked against a Hollywood backlot—  
the saddle horn, the shot's true center

"that kind of song, the kind you'll have  
heard before" plucked on a Tennessee  
jukebox—a measure of guitar, of  
the quality of the snake's  
skin—that's some kind  
of lonesome, you say

to yourself—high prairie  
tuned to drifting

*why the flag still flies over Taos by nightfall;  
why the starter always thumbs the bell in restless  
sleep*

Hot Springs locked in January, 4 P.M.—  
every dry fly, every shout called  
and turned by flat metal handstands

## Iron Horse

*for Chris Jennison*

“men are only known  
in memory”

the house  
that Ruth built but not  
his team, instead

at Commerce or Columbia,  
the horse as quiet current  
running under the field  
or “death come riding”

first grass stain of spring;  
the eventual callous along  
palm and thumb, the slip  
rounding first base or  
barnstorm concussions—

not the new chivalry,  
or dollar on the muscle;  
but to look into the  
past’s eyes

captain,  
pinstripes, a butcher’s  
hands, some moon metal  
in his wrists

*came out*  
*willingly*  
*no avail*

## American Necropolis #7

*after Jorma Elo*

This is not one city, but ten—"gemmed" as its residents say it. Sometimes you will feel like you are walking on the inside edges of this gem. Here, the dead dance in remembered movements—hailing a cab, signaling an ex-lover across a bar. Things ended badly, but the hands' confined gesture forgets all that. The dead have no recollection of breath, gulped side-stage and without music. To a set of greasy bulbs, a diagonal sun, they unwind sad torsos, unstring every Soviet adagio. The dead laugh, knots tying their ankles and shoulders. Vague urgencies frame their movements between hand and eye. Children here make their pen pals in the mechanized infantry; perhaps you'll be lucky enough to receive a letter from them after your visit. On stage, the dead smoke tree roots and oak leaf clusters—they have little regard for fire safety laws. Turn your face from them as they bank their sod against hundred-year floods. No house along the Levee has forgotten its hammer in the attic. Turn your face from them; let the curtain come down on their movements, sucking your breath.



## The Golden Shaheen

out of Horsafire  
by Buddha

(at Meydan in Dubai)

Carl O'Callaghan  
in sunglasses and a  
gray suit raising his  
arms over orange-  
silked & driving  
Garrett Gomez a-  
board Kinsale King

closer  
to home, Ralph Stanley  
howls, *O death*

that armadillo  
dancing in the air, 6 mi.  
outside Luckenbach

## Andrew Jackson on Horseback

as if he'd seen  
the nation thru a  
Tennessee mist or  
a Florida swamp,  
that war without  
end—he'd have shot  
that son of a bitch  
himself if he could  
from horseback; then

taken to

the Indian Treaty Room,  
the thankless task of  
hunting the savage—  
he sd to the Creek, “we  
bleed our enemies  
in such cases to give  
them their senses” land  
in America is tilted  
business—even the horse  
lopsided, ridden past

every dead Creek  
every Knoxville whorehouse  
every soldier who cheered him

bookended with my own  
time, hickory's an invasive  
species; it pervades the

map, no democracy it  
won't bleed  
                  never just  
passing through Phoenix  
or an afternoon fright—  
my horse eats at the  
boundaries between me  
& America

## Nag's Head

the horse seen thru  
a hurricane's eye—

“such a horse laughs  
without  
    cause”

eating light, the  
horse emerges  
from the wave  
like most things  
arrive in America,  
through water

thru Mississippi  
thru Arizona  
thru every City of  
Brotherly Love  
thru Cahokia and  
every place that  
“has no name”

*all this rendered unto Caesar*

(how the  
human voice  
complicates  
things here—

the California  
horse, the frog  
of the hoof—  
what mythy  
rumor, what  
horse rising  
along this hollow  
point in the surf?  
the equine eye  
rising above  
black water

(then seen again  
in Goldie's eye  
in the stretch  
at Churchill)

every passing squall  
every Impala bound for Duck  
every half-assed lawyer leaving Raleigh  
every blue-eyed fishmonger

*no bottom to the ground there*

“True Grit”

*I got spurs  
that*

*jingle*

*jangle*

*jingle,*

*motherfucker*

behind that rock, there's  
a man with a loaded gun;  
beneath the rock,  
Orpheus in Arkansas:

the public gallows and  
*lighting out for the territory*

pigtailed Eurydice he pulls  
from the snake's mouth;  
he even shoots his horse on  
way to a dead end frontier

The Aristides, 5/3/75

*1st – 4 1/2 furlongs JOACHIM, Garth Patterson pd. \$5.00*

*3rd – 7 furlongs KING'S CURE, Bryan Fann pd. \$3.60*

*4th – 6 furlongs MR. LUCKY PHOENIX, Bill Shoemaker pd.  
\$4.00*

*6th – 5 furlongs PINK JADE, Eddie Delahoussaye pd. \$2.40*

*7th – 1 1/16 miles ROYAL LEGACY, Bill Shoemaker pd.  
\$4.20*

*8th – 1 1/4 miles PRINCE THOU ART, Braulio Baeza pd.  
\$0.00*

all I'd known of horses  
before then was Jay  
Randolph calling the  
early double from  
Fairmount Park on the  
ten o'clock news  
    these horses, gone  
now with whatever  
Kentucky we inhabited  
that afternoon—things  
still in mind, the un-  
painted bleachers & "My  
Old Kentucky Home"  
sung by the couple,  
paper beer cup rim  
between the man's teeth,  
the crowd's scraggly up-  
roar as the Derby field  
turned for home

*The Rodeo*

acc. to George  
Zoritch, "as long  
as you are not bed-  
ridden, you  
can  
    dance  
the Rodeo"

*lugged in*  
*tracking idlers or*  
*under the whip*

the horse has few  
surfaces, nature writ  
large as the Iron Horse  
or "mock cavalry charge  
at Fort Bliss," pharaoh  
    in his chariot

*and Roosevelt scandalized his*  
*political adversaries by inviting*  
*Geronimo, Red Cloud, and*  
*Quanah Parker to ride in*  
*his inaugural*

    continual drifting—  
each of these things  
truly cosmic



(untitled)

*for Lartava*

The horse is a bubble  
running through me—  
an early, unseasonable heat  
outside

inside,  
an old man reading  
about white birds  
under a single  
light why do I feel so  
closed?

Silk Mobius or  
Cryptoclearance, whether  
I'm out or stay inside  
myself, I am measured  
by the hoof's stride or  
the lie of the bucket of  
clear water moving  
as we close first one  
eye, then the other

## “Teddy Roosevelt on Horseback”

*for Peter O’Leary*

*I*

Driven snow dust burned our faces; models or copies of the other guided the trail cattle or the beef herds. The cat “plays” the baboon. We form walks and minutes or hours teeming with viruses that cause us to form stampedes or swim the herds across it, transfers of genetic material brimmed with running ice. We knew fusions of cells originating in thirst and we saw men die violently, those of the “abominable couplings and cattle” who fought in evil feuds. Communication between the hardy life in our veins. Ours was the genealogical tree. Drivers told us, “Always look for the living.” It was right and necessary particles with which we are allied. We of the country lie in its being, made by the polymorphous flus that unfenced the great ranches. In our day, diseases have their own line and represent a temporary stage in our genealogy. Wonderful things from sheep, each guarded by the hired royal falcon, first enemies of the cattlemen and our own permanent settlers, the men who took little of permanent good to the country. Loftus lived and brought up his family, becoming a piece in the horsetail’s standpoint, the most desirable of all. Posts territorialize the orchid by transporting soil. Their advent meant the breaking elements that form a national gain, although some imitate the wasp, reproducing Muhubah by Fair Play. The real mimicry, lure, etc. But this is true only for the race. Back in the early century,

parallels between two such strata would form a starting line where the horses imitate animal organization on the “have it.” Man O’War still circling or else entirely going on; no imitation, even facing the track. Man O’War had to value the code, an increase in valence that let the fiend run away from him, his wasp of the orchid and becoming. But it was only a six furlong race. A great becoming brings the swimming Loftus and figures the shortest distance. In a circulation of intensities, there’s neither imitation nor resemblance.

2

In Cowboy Land it was still horsetail or the wild common rhizome, west of stories and subjugated by the Indian and the buffalo-hunter. Evolution of two beings, the land of the West gone now, gone into each other. More generally, an isle of ghosts and strange dead who abandon the old model of the tree. Space of lonely rivers and plains, a virus can connect to germ cells and passing horsemen. It was a land of complex species; it can horn cattle and reckless riders of entirely different species, but not of our deaths. In that land we led a free nation from the first host for the rifle. We worked under the scorching rent of virus research, shimmering and wavering in the heat; the DNA of certain domestic riding night guards ‘round the cattle. In longer models of arborescent springtime, the stars were glorious and steep. In the winter, we rode through and held them up again. There’s a parallel. It’s obvious they are not as they would have it. Upset surged on in the old polytheism, out

of track with a half-length to go. Pharaoh restored the dust of the six-furlong race. Man O'War spent his life making images of that one instance. Upset had libations and offerings every day. Ice was blamed for the stretched-out jockey's deity astride a folding camp stool. Associated with the fix, the subterranean Grand Union Hotel Stakes spanned twelve days. Among the most splendid of the hopeful were twelve vehicles of Pharaoh's lavish ceremony. He won royal processions among the great filly. In serpent form, he moved among the great processes of territory, symbolically depicting the wasp and his Asian adventures. Not even a chance to ride Rachel Alexandra.

3

Monotonous days, as we no longer attributed our hours to the slowest excitement. We would have absolutely nothing to do with treacherous quicksands or evolutionary schema that forced hardship and hunger and descent. Under certain conditions, they worked as the horse transmitted itself as the cellular gene of another; but we felt the beat take flight and move into the cells of an eerie glory, the joy that this life should pass without bringing genetic information. Free grass and necessary cats. Evolutionary schema were no history. The large migratory flocks of descent went from the least to the most absentee owners. Rhizomes operated immediately in the way they ate up grass. The roving sheep bands represented evolution. The golden broom began to break in the cat, maybe an unfair start to our viruses. Man O'War was still praised through other

procedures. The fate of the rear was sent to antiquity and the Middle Ages. The next year, different lines scrambled the license—most speculate because the same molecule evolved and died in the week after that. Man O'War held up hereditary diseases. Horsetail is an anti-minute, maybe to remind people that Pharaoh's tomb still plays its games with the sun god. But at last the nation had a president who could review the troops on horseback.

4

Each of us on his own farm in those days in the Far West. They represented national drawings, the western users of and dwellers on the soldier and the cow-puncher. That of the big ranches, the change gone with the lost Man O'War, gone to the use of an individual loss. Out of memory. It was a land of vast, silent controversy that came when they went to post amid the staring wild game. These were tattered ranches, of herds of long circle and lineup. As fate would be unmoved, the horse looked into his eyes when the flag went down. Kentucky, then the Sierras, the horses packed with three days provisions, bacon and beans. It wasn't a hardy life, animals awfully confused in the midsummer sun. With the wide plains jockeyed, Loftus righted his horse and we knew the freezing misery of disadvantage. "Away," he sang, starting the late fall round-up. In the soft solstice, the red jockey eyes each night before we fall, shooting for the rail and the head. Blinding blizzards, when the apparatus cult was abandoned by the father and his pollen. The wasp and orchid of Upper

Egypt—all that could be said of the horsetail gods, who now give him incense in a signifying fashion. Mimesis of an ebony stool, an imitation of the territory, a jaguar skin seat presented to the plant organized on one mysterious minor mother. At the same time, something with Pharaoh's nightly journey, all but captured. A code, a surplus world in the state chariot—a veritable becoming become sophisticated. Examples of an even more ancient wasp. Each of these ceremonial chariots paraded in the realization of one term and the latest treasures of the artful tomb. The territory descended even further, exploding in two, his chariot and a vanishing African.

“a stable city”

*after Clay McShane and Joel Tarr*

never bundled horses  
but the horsetrader:

sold as “sound” or  
“at halter” or “a  
little bluish in one  
eye”

in the Chicago Stockyards  
60 horses/hr sold in the 1890’s—  
1896 as tipping point—more  
horses exported to Europe’s  
cavalries and battlefields

or the horse become a com-  
modity in its shit and death—  
1100 carts of manure/day in  
New York alone “while the  
Chicago horse is being re-  
conciled to the new order  
of things”

## American Necropolis #14

*after Mark Morris*

The cowboy necropolis is floodless; it extends night in long-dead, swing bands over an AM radio seeping deep into west Texas. A series of calls from payphones, blowjobs behind horse trailers. Quick! How many motel chains can you name in one breath? Count them out like playing cards. It's a tired movie—strung on past four o'clock, the test patterns whistling you to sleep in a half-empty motel along a county highway. Your body whistles, too—but for corn chips and the channel that tunes in halfway through the dial, some documentary of cemeteries beaded along the highway you'll travel the day after tomorrow. The list of payphone numbers buzzes in your shirt pocket. That buzz ignores every lick of jazz that's ever been blown in the Territory. It trumpets a dead man's breath. A dirge blown to revelry. You take off the carnation red shirt that a real cowboy wouldn't be caught dead in. The apocalyptic numbers. You call them one by one—bars, whorehouses, broken phones outside 7-11's. The inevitable answer, the man's voice in love with the distance on the other end of the line. Dead buttons. A voice that says it knows you. There's snow in the panhandle—at least, so you've heard—and a dead man was buried in your best chaps. Wish him, "Good luck!" No empire has ended any other way.



## Churchill

There's a derby in your mind—horses spill  
from the gate, “spectacle of excess” and hard  
to tell the one from the many. “Fast like that,  
all sweating horses with wild eyes.” You lose  
track of the horse in its fractions, rating against  
May. No way to pick it from the field's dishonest  
pace. In the catbird's seat, but kickless against its  
line. You draw a line with your toe, invisible in  
a rank spring. Uncashed ticket. The morning line.

The rakish steeples. Dream tucked into a gambler's  
cap, fighting to tell the “horse” from “the horse.”  
Brereton Jones the governor, or Brereton Jones the  
breeder—you shake his hand and dream of a horse  
or a number. The sire replicated endlessly in his  
progeny. You could buy a horse. See a man about  
a rumor. Options. The equine dream. Moonshine.  
No brood mare slot machine or gelding philosophy. Yr  
horse emerges from a stretch of nowhere. Don't think  
beyond the geography, the horses cut out of the land.  
And who's your Bobo?

Bluegrass and bourbon.

Calcium and hard water. Irish and aching for history,  
the breeder appears in horseface; the witness is your  
uncle. “Confidence,” he says. That word sidles into  
every recent conversation, every horse stitched with  
silk and insinuation. And you've bought that horse  
before. Dead presidents sob in your palm, no care  
for how much you love that animal, how many springs.

on “West”

the end of the west is in a Wal-  
Mart parking lot in Shangri-la

drinking orange sodas, Mike and  
Sterling and I stand, under nameless  
mtns, sunset in the terrain—chewing gum  
stuck to my boot heel, handful of cars  
in a parking lot in west China; Sterling  
hums Bird, and the man Robert Kroetsch  
met in the Vancouver airport comes to  
my mind—born in Korea to a Japanese  
father, he’d moved to Canada but never  
learned French or English—“a man  
without language”

or roads on the  
edge of town—not modernism, but a  
westernism, like that backhoe furiously  
working the soil on a late Saturday  
afternoon west and north of Whitehorse

Yukon

Siberia

Xinjiang

some other west, leftover from Oak Ridge  
or Pine Bluff; locomotive running night—  
so much curious metal, so much human  
gone to ground

Poem for Juan Manual Sanchez

there are things in the ocean  
not classed as plant or  
animal—they grow in the  
tundra, swim in the desert—  
leafy virus, fennel root, or  
tumbleweed carried on a  
Siberian boot heel

*what shall  
become of us, in the middle  
of so many worlds? things  
turned not in on themselves or  
placed, but in constant motion  
towards non-*

piss on the fire  
and bend black granite down to  
the river's funnel, so that all's  
between funk's holiest gutter and  
tendons splayed against light

tack

out of Moscow Ballet  
by High Cotton

after a summer of false  
pace, between lather, tongue  
& muscle, the champion's  
heart roughly displayed  
to her

loose slinging  
of words and the things  
between them; the world  
dissolved in a handful of  
clockings and intricate  
hooves

the atomic door  
the restless gait  
the reptilian  
the blank form  
the morning line

*bet hard against the horse and  
watch it spring from the gate*

—not some Green Monkey but  
errand boys and more errand  
boys, Tom Paine's bones, and  
the blood in Antietam Creek;

*these four cold warriors in a  
bold initiative consistent with  
the country's moral heritage*

never a private life but that  
lived amid tack—drugs in  
the barns among trainers,  
stable boys & hot walkers—  
pills and “always the  
booze”—anonymous  
and crouched in a corn-  
field, the nameless shout

moving thru air,  
the horse's head  
is never a  
blunt  
object

## Crossing Naptown

“the return” vs. ADVENT  
and “I’ll be home for” and  
crossing the land at strange  
hrs. INDIANA was all  
flight—the mercury booms  
of the northeast side, then  
airport lights hugging four  
o’clock ground on the road  
to Churchill

(Naptown was  
always exotic to me, like the  
Detroit Grand Prix, the bypass,  
and Dan Lee Honda—the Red  
Wings over A.M. and ordinary  
desire

you’d  
seen a series of lightning  
strikes along the fencerows,  
fire in the tops of hickories—  
you saw no sign in them, like a  
Buick parked along your front  
curb and idling—the acumen  
in the smoke and concrete;  
“Nero must mean Nero  
or the game is up”

## Glimpsed from a billboard, I-57 at Rend Lake

learn the culinary arts  
learn to name your blades, their gentle serrations  
learn the cut of a white coat, a red kerchief knotted against  
    skin  
learn to parse the cabinet's cold victuals  
learn the steakhouse translation, the hard lean  
learn to talk the food you don't know  
learn to cook the land's leftovers, the pokeweed, the  
    muskrat, the last of the hardtack  
learn the brazier's sensitivities, its cold and burn spots  
learn to gather ground nuts and love roots, then simmer  
    their intense metals  
learn to simmer scallops with poppy seed and bacon fat, the  
    global flavors of democracy  
learn the gradations of "broil"  
learn the turtle's fifteen meats, the anatomy of the  
    underbelly and leg joints  
learn to dress pork belly, to stuff improbable skyline with  
    tobacco notes and ripe citrus  
learn to covet chutney, to dice and talk your way through  
    unknown fruits  
learn your knife skills, the advanced mumbly peg played on  
    linens and old fuel  
learn the plain's hydrology, migrancy's terrain  
learn to distinguish the edible mussels and fungus from  
    those that've sucked too long on the river's slow  
    decay  
learn to cook every goddamned thing the empire hands you

(untitled)

in some Kentucky,  
virgin daughters of  
Baptist preachers  
stomp the sour mash  
into being;

                  departing  
the rickhouse of love

                                  I  
chase white dog and  
dead money on a cold-  
backed horse



on “West” (2)

*“I am now convinced there are indeed only three American stories”*  
—Charles Olson

mud on the horse’s flank  
coffee in the cowboy’s gut  
and saddled in the middle  
of the night—“a much larger  
story than would appear”

he is gone to see  
a man about a horse, about a  
car, about a piece of Nevada

*(how the land runs north, not west*

coming to sightlines: all that  
goddamned SPACE crossed  
by horse—eastern Oklahoma  
or the Boot Heel (now become  
“Boot Hill”)

coming back to the shithouse  
of history, I write to you from the Ameri-  
plex—the chicken coop now become the  
killing shed—shaking hands with  
“the bookkeeper of Yale County,”  
that horse you’d wanted out back

*oil sand and  
labor and the*

*end of the world  
bent north and  
glimpsed from a  
Chi. river bridge*

mumbling their Russian, the saints  
on horseback descend the Yukon  
cloud, war birds in November air  
zoom to Dakota—men gone into the  
ground there to escape it; the poets  
politely spit their oblivion sun-

light cuts chrome from that air;  
not scattered fiefdoms, but “eventual”—  
Chicago as “western city,” its hinter-  
lands gone to history, panic and Will  
County real estate & “the war out back”

*(how the map lacks water*

time spasms in an apocalyptic mouth;  
there is no other America than the teeth  
of the cave—there, I am looking for words  
that sound me, my history told from  
the front room of a Natchez whorehouse

“none of Vulcan’s inventions are anything  
but machines” dusk housecall and  
the screaming child stands above her bed,  
the doctor attending the injection, his Intl  
Scout parked outside; wait for him there,

radio tuned low to sounds across the river—  
he is the great doctor coming down from  
the north with his narcotic bullets

where “the horse is a territory”  
*cold coffee and barbed wire*  
*and barbed wire and Jefferson*  
*patiently collecting native debts*

“no money for you to squeeze around here,  
Little Maddie”            only we, making war  
on the horsy-hearted gods            we,  
who have devised other ways to get out the  
wolves and the animal “come out of its  
anesthesia, running”

(untitled)

*(at Ashland)*

not the territory's last Gnostic,  
slinging his breakfast plate against  
dawn, but America seen by cigarette  
light, a ten-minute piss break in the  
vicinity of Nashville

a rumored  
surrender along the Western front,  
then a Coke machine explodes in  
Atlanta—red metal underworld you  
are coming up out of the land when  
a piece of citrus rolls across the dash—  
your eyes adjust to the light

running low through Shiloh's woods,  
the uncooked in America is a series of  
crooners and disco's ruthless limousine—  
whatever happened to that mapmaking?  
those dirty words? you knew them as a  
seven-year old

ten-cent gin and  
relentless fucking in the land; I'd like  
to club the Elder Statesman, tiptoe  
past the Sleeping Dog into the tombs  
of Gary, ashweed in pocket

the early double at Hawthorne

*for Peter Galassi*

in green spaces,  
wide confusion—  
the horse and its  
rider, the horse and  
its rider, the horse  
and its rider—a turf  
stride, a high action

poly won't pay and  
soil is just a dream  
leftover from a  
high-banked mid-  
continent, "flying  
turns" as nostalgic  
as moon rocks and  
a Flagstaff barbarism,

a turf paradise: "the  
numbers of today's  
closing double are  
four and

## Little Apocalypses

*"it hadn't got darker exactly, the twilight had just thickened"*

"we made the Country,  
tossed for choice, and  
then drew curtains across  
the middle of the field"

what's colder in war  
than the horse's panicked  
eye? the air cavalry staged  
and deployed (*on a yellow  
triangular Norman shield,  
a black diagonal stripe  
extending from upper left,  
and a black horse head  
couped in sinister chief*)

the Secretary of Defense,  
in the form of a cloud,  
stands at his forge over  
an oil lake—his deputies  
safely buried in the sand,  
his warhorse bolted north,  
its hooves skimming the  
waves; some Sikorsky  
light flares it all

*the cavalry in repose  
the cavalry in mock charge*

*the cavalry at Peterloo*

“Hello, John Keats!” the e-  
vangelist cries “Put her  
there, Friend! Never  
mind the cough!” who  
are these arrayed in white?  
wanna bet on it? our loose  
slots of justice, we will  
never forget “I took a  
liking to bones” the  
Preacher said and rode  
a fast horse from Salem  
to Waco, pumping his  
boiling metal into the  
bled green Atlantic

Pat Robertson  
dreams of America—  
cracked stele and law  
engraved in dust, pocket  
of Ambien, blank map—  
horses hoofdeep in ash

four  
horsemen—no, five!  
a journalist of dubious  
qualities embedded for  
the ride; this prophet has  
often staked death to a  
cheeseburger at a Wal-

green's lunch counter,  
but in this uncertain  
terrain?

                  a red hurricane lamp  
hung in the horse's mind—  
the prophet has a doubt:  
who are these travelers?  
do horses have minds?  
what red light? does  
this god speak English?

starved for oxygen, the  
land in its slow burn or  
a Rhode Island-sized  
apocalypse, a dead zone  
in the Gulf

                  write this  
to the saints at Trinity,  
Times Beach, St. George  
or Ponchartrain: *the  
flags that have flown  
over New Orleans:*

*France 1718 - 1762*  
*Spain 1763 - 1795*  
*United States 1803 -*

(the etchings incomplete)  
“in the west he saw a cup  
of water and a bow” & a man



in a tall hat forced a coin into  
his palm, “a dead buffalo on  
one side and a discouraged  
Indian on the other” *there*,  
“unconventional means”  
—speckled cattle and a  
festive cowboy, “second  
forerunner of an advanced  
civilization”

hedgehogs  
come shining over bleached  
mountains in their bright  
raiment and the inevitable  
“dead horse come shining  
like a fish up to feed” the  
prophet gone to infantry

“American Special Forces on Horseback in  
Afghanistan”

*out of Chiquita  
by Sea of Secrets*

the photo handed us a  
war we’d wanted

a field phone  
cranked up again-  
st America and  
cold coffee and  
colder coffee and  
goat’s milk and  
endless click of  
the binoculars

*If we’d just committed our-  
selves to the war, its savageries,  
if a man held Mazar-i-Sharif, then  
he could hold the north and if he  
held the north, he could capture  
Kabul. From there he could—*

imagine another life—not private,  
but one of high action—a horse  
over the shoulder; blue racers and  
amphetamines in the barns and shit  
washed down with more shit

the horse squares us to the terrain,  
affixes our eyes to the 2 A.M. sage-  
brush glimpsed on channel 30—  
*the desert wastes in the south and  
highways stretching from Kandahar*

a horse glanced over your  
shoulder, the liquidity there;  
and the Pasco Stakes raced  
in your absence

## George W. Bush on Horseback

so what if a man says to you,  
*I will tell you the history of America in a horse;*  
you're going to tell me you don't believe *my* story?

Lancelot has joined the tedium of the west,  
sequestered in a Dallas metro Holiday Inn—  
we'll saddle our horses against him;

to keep the zippers up along my flight suit—  
*that* is America,

that and, from her fainting couch,  
my mother rising to play Ann Savage—  
“We'll be discussing politics next,” she sd  
to my old man as he staked her to his memory

I am the King of Nowhere on my charger;  
the savage was inevitable, as was that horse—  
geography, a mere detour; my cupbearer offers  
the lure of oblivion

included with my confession,  
my Hill Country pastoral—“my god is for real  
and can't be stabled”; the west gone into those  
places where, acc. to a radioed John Horton,  
“a rabbit wouldn't go”

hear me, you makers of  
tomorrow, you apothecaries of cheap tobacco and

gently fingered chocolate bars; I rode the horse  
recklessly through the Capital's 3 A.M. streets  
to address that hasty joint session of the Congress

in my rifle, every lifeless metal  
in my thumb and toes, panhandle thunder  
in my squint, every western sunset  
in my oxygen mask, the whiff of frontier  
in my mother's eye, every savage ink  
in my banter with the tower, a Kabul arithmetic  
in my boots, the shavings of every virginal flight deck  
in my hat, the last of my old man's memory  
in my saddlebags, the dreams of all good children  
in my aviator shades' red glare, the national tannenbaum

## American Necropolis #21

*after Marie Chouinard*

There are those who don't give a fiddler's fuck for the underworld. Sing, "descent!" and your own voice will greet you, wrapped in a yellow megaphone. It's your voice in the center of running, the sirens strung like a child's hair. You thought you were running, but a man explains that you were just dancing to the *Greatest Hits of the American Century*. With scorched mouths and frozen tongues, hawkers trill headlines, sell the armored cavalry upriver. You hustle for the train leaving the station, but realize that it's just another burning car. It makes for awkward passage with your lover, green and silent, returning to a city you know far better than he does, its waterless canal and quick smirkers, its looping back alleys and nonsense transit fares. Exact change will help, as will a penlight and your mother's passport. Anything that pulls the dead's eyes away from you. That puts the matter back where it belongs, on their tongues. Not a word. The final movement is against the ground.

## Dead Animals #79

*after Richard Misrach*

the animal is a holy book,  
an eyeless horse in a pyre;  
the dead mark their own  
boundaries— the open  
mouth, the pitted tongue,  
hoof turned and folded—

what's been foaled here  
along the Bravo 20 range—  
atomic grit or Nevada fish  
slung across a desert floor,  
sheep “potbellied and hard-

hooved” against black water,  
chemical and plastic drums  
bleaching some new evolutionary  
machine—the west ends here in  
the new American soil

the earth too hot  
the air too late

## Belle Glade

*a sugar georgic*

trucks of men arriving in the six  
o'clock light the crop duster passes  
overhead while toxic algae blooms in  
ditches at Canal Point, in Big Water,  
trace of the Seminole muttering *fuck  
you, Andy Jackson, like what's ever  
been named after you but a \$20 bill?*  
and the soil electric with atrazine and  
metal Zora's voice in the humus muck

wind rises from the rat's mouth men  
boil over Air Tractors, they ask *How  
many gallons of fuel can the planes  
hold? How many gallons of chemicals?  
How fast are they? Are they difficult to  
fly?* black ditches seep and bees stream  
from the canal in Belle Glade, the kids  
wave bicycle parts, their eyes trickling  
*Her soil is Her fortune*

talk to a dead  
ditch or dial the number on the screen—  
your lawyer says *if the swarm is aimless,  
gadding about in the air, take their kings  
and tear their wings off* but if you can't  
find a Seminole, talk to a cane toad, their  
Bidder's organs intersexed and clenched—



500 gallons of chemicals and 200 gallons  
of fuel—*that's a bomb right there!* mercury  
patterns left by the high priest not even free  
legal advice can save a dead ditch the men  
put knives to cane; their pay comes in water  
and yellow manila sagging in the branches

(untitled)

out of Sack Cloth  
by Ashes

new American  
geography, a  
Pinkerton's ter-  
ritory, unmeasured  
by horse

gate wisdom,  
    numbers  
grasped only  
in the rung bell

“sometimes, I'd  
just go into  
a cornfield and  
howl”

    crowns  
of hills and  
crowns of hills  
and the “unyielding  
terrain of spring” and  
men poured over  
crowns of hills and  
east and east

or the devil's  
music—the trill  
running just under

the horse's panic—  
trying to outrun  
the weather “nothing  
but the coherence of  
hoofbeats”

## Officer, standing horse, saber on shoulder

The toy soldiers arrived in clear plastic bags. On Christmases, birthdays, trips down from Springfield. Bought at K-Mart and Meyers Brothers, or central Illinois hardware stores. Of course, Americans (olive green) and Germans (flat gray). But also British commandos (royal blue), Japanese (yellow orange), and Russians (steel blue). Their poses as familiar as the names of old baseball players. No French, Chinese, or Italians. Later, Australian “bushmen,” mounted on metal bases, with drab yellow-green uniforms, stalks of foliage protruding from flattened helmets. Among the British, desert fighters with short pants and bayonets. Also Indians pressed into British uniforms, shouldering long rifles. Vehicles. Tanks, jeeps, and half-tracks. Black plastic wheels with teeth that snapped into the undercarriage, but never on caterpillar treads. Artillery was never a problem. Field guns, howitzers that hooked to the backs of jeeps, .88 cannons. Neon-cast missile launchers and buzz bombs. Seabees. Bulldozers and a crane. A soldier with mine-detecting equipment strapped to his back. The plastic mud-brown pontoon bridge which the dog stepped on and broke.

\*

The terrain always required imagination. No catshit sandboxes. The indoor-outdoor carpet in the playroom worked best. Not pillows, but blankets. Trees made of fluff, wire, and pipe-cleaners. Cardboard buildings. Some

plastic battlements, redoubts. Never trenches or foxholes. D-Day beaches fronting the step to the laundry room. A river laid out with masking tape. Aluminum foil ice. Maybe some HO train track set down, disarranged in some blown-up pattern. The civilians always long gone.

\*

“if infantry find hostile cavalry within charging distance at move’s end, it will receive double losses if in extended order if charged and will have to continue to retire until their tormentors have exterminated them or been driven off by others”

\*

The first movie that I went to was *The Longest Day*. The balcony of a Springfield, Ohio theatre. The invasion of Normandy. Gold, Sword, Juno, Utah, and Omaha Beaches. The story arranged by the place and time superimposed at the beginning of each scene (i.e. GERMAN HEADQUARTERS, 0530 HRS.). An all-star cast. Robert Mitchum, Kurt Jurgens, Henry Fonda. John Wayne and a young Charles Bronson. The money shot: the German soldier at Normandy who takes his dog for a morning piss, who then goes back into his bunker and scans the Normandy fog to find the Allies’ invasion armada advancing. The crowd cheers. Before that, Red Buttons as a paratrooper who gets hung up among French church bells and dangles above the Germans all the way to intermission. No popcorn, but a box of Dots. We made it through three

hours, at least until the Germans started burning documents. Then, the seat started to seem hard.

\*

The plastic in my fingers.

\*

There were German officers, majors and colonels. Fingers sternly aimed down, making some silent point. Their chests scratched with medals. No American generals, only a man that I assumed was of captain's rank. Sidearm drawn, waving his left arm up over his head in a gesture ordering others to advance. One German officer looked like a cross between Douglas MacArthur and Lucille Ball, leaving me to wonder if plastic manufacturers had a sense of humor. "Never trust plastic," they say. Although I wondered who modeled for the soldiers' plastic faces, what were the sources of the uniforms' ruffles.

\*

When I was eleven, I bought a copy of H.G. Wells' *Little Wars*. Inside, various pictures of Wells and his friends lounged out in his backyard with iced tea and toy soldiers, usually resembling those of the Napoleonic era. All the photos vaguely resembling Victorian pornography. Old men leering with joy, hard-ons pressed into the ground. He talked and talked about the cannons they used. Metal, die-cast, and capable of firing wooden shells that could take

down the enemy. I found a couple of them, made by Grenadier. If you didn't use the pea-sized plastic shells that came with them, you could fire toothpicks, chopped-up swizzle sticks, or even cashews bit in half. They did very little damage. I was always looking for ammo among the glass jars in my grandpa's workshop.

\*

You could never find World War I soldiers though. No Huns or doughboys. You could use World War II troops and pretend that they were at the Verdun or Ypres, but the armaments would be all wrong. You couldn't imagine the first rattling tanks and biplanes, observation balloons and trenches. The chlorine gas.

\*

Strands and strands of gray plastic barbed wire fence.

\*

Along Royal Street in New Orleans, a toy soldier shop. Glass cabinets of ranks. Officers in various poses of ease. Eating breakfast at a table or mid-shave. Camp followers. Merchants in *Mother Courage* poses, holding up trinkets, clean underwear. Prostitutes. A woman in an open German officer's coat, thick muff of brown pubic hair dabbed between her legs.

\*

The book I got for my tenth birthday. Battles I'd never imagined. Thermopylae. Austerlitz. El Alamein. Intricate soldiers. At Agincourt, the terror on a downed French knight's face as he's about to be killed by two grinning, English foot soldiers.

\*

There were no chaplains, but there were medics. The American corpsmen in a slung-shouldered, running position, bearing an empty stretcher. There was even a German corpse, machine gun stretched across his abdomen and helmet over his head in a gray, lopsided halo. I never knew what to do with him. You couldn't send him into battle or have him lying Valhalla-like on a fresh battlefield. You could start the battle and then drop him down, but then the question was where in the hell did he come from? As I say, he was kind of a waste, especially as there were no German medics.

\*

Or my cousin, who always tried to sneak Batman onto the battlefield. The Werewolf. Some ghoul in a hood, knife poised overhead, hair of a severed head in the fingers of his left hand.

\*



Seeing a soldier in uniform and smoking.

\*

Another thing I couldn't imagine: that weapon designed by the boys at Honeywell that would explode overhead, sucking all the oxygen out of a battlefield.

\*

A war you could imagine was the Crimea (i.e. Florence Nightingale, Lord Raglan, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," all that bullshit). The terrain was easy to set up; I've never been to Sevastopol. You could use gray Confederate infantrymen for the Russians, their bedrolls wrapped from their left shoulders to their right hips. The blue Unioners for the French. Maybe some foreign legionnaires, the one with the pistol and trumpet. The reddened British as they were. The siege guns. Never enough cavalry. And, of course, the ongoing problem with the trenches.

\*

"in the event of supplies failing, horses may take the place of food, but not of course forage; one horse to equal one packet"

\*

Gettysburg. Antietam. New Market.  
Fort Ticonderoga. Yorktown. *the cannon and soil there*  
I'm a tourist of violence.

\*

Helicopters. Apaches and Cobras. Assembled in pieces.  
Their guns in die-cast plastic, olive and unmoving. The  
Chinook that landed in our backyard. I thought that it had  
come all the way from Vietnam with its wounded.  
Everybody in the neighborhood came off their back  
porches to watch it, even the nuns who lived across the  
street. On my fourth birthday, a friend bought me a red and  
white "moon copter" stuffed with spacemen. (Like how the  
fuck a helicopter could work on the moon anyway!?) The  
U-2 spy plane that I could never afford.

\*

The horse's anatomy never right, the legs impossibly thin.  
No horsehair or hide. Plastic saddlecloths indistinct from  
back or belly, jutting stirrups to accommodate only one  
rider's boot. Cornwallis or Grant. Lee or Lafayette.  
Plastic reins, bit and bridal. Plastic breathed and panicked.

\*

Among the Soviet soldiers, steel blue General Georgie Zhukov with binoculars. A Mongolian in a tall, fur hat, sword brandished over his head and screaming. A supine sharpshooter in a soft cap, rifle straight out, one eye shut. I could never figure out what was in the bag that was hooked to his belt.

\*

How do you make those red stars stand up or that empty sleeve salute? Liquidated epaulettes. Rank indicators. Junk shop crosses, their paint scratched off. *The metal gets dead from all this ingenuity.* White letters stamped into black plastic. Five-sided deathbook. Passport unto the generalissimo.

(untitled)

along Versailles Rd,  
black barns and Camp-  
bellites; “The Red  
Mile” and the starter  
from Greenup

America, he sd,  
is a stud fee, is a  
pull-up in the back  
stretch, brutal  
speed t’  
Easter and

in the 6th at  
Keeneland, “the  
young lady” in  
something only a  
queen’d wear—  
pillow stuffing  
yanked out and  
collared; adequate  
gentry, her squire—  
thumb squared to  
forefinger in what’s  
either a ceaseless “okay”  
or a perpetually burning  
cigarette

the new

economy of horse, of  
parchmarks and the tattoo  
torqued quietly from  
your vision

## QE2 Challenge Cup

out of Jade Tree  
by Dynaformer

to see the horse-  
flesh up close, the  
crabapple in October—  
smoke and fire belong  
to autumn and Johnny  
Velazquez on Clarinet

*because tragedy is  
a goat song*

When I  
first met Greta Kunz-  
weiler, I was an honest  
man, but now I am  
waiting for the French-  
man to wield his  
magic whip to

“make a bid between  
foes” to be “lugged  
in” or “done early”—  
the rest is Nashville

## Betting the Soviets

to be Distinguished Visiting  
Scholar in Soviet Studies at  
the Heritage Foundation or to  
be vacationing in sunny  
Odessa—this is Hamlet  
without the prince

“REVOLUTION does not  
after all fret over  
appearances” not like  
some other “miserable  
product from the de-  
generate West”

past the doormen,  
the cadre of censors,  
the inevitable GLAVIT number:

*INSPECTED BY NO. 13*

the bet from *here*,  
a bag of spiders  
a box of frogs  
& mold crowning  
the champion's  
    silver cup—  
*the late money always*  
*talks:*

HF Walterhouse of India-  
lantic, FLA laid his money  
in Feb '83:

“those unchanged  
Soviet policies still call for  
communist world domination,  
while our restraint has em-  
boldened more aggressive  
Kremlin military & diplomatic  
policies 'round the globe...we  
must beef up our security ap-  
paratus and block Soviet  
expansion wherever we can”

*not one economy,  
but at least, two*

and “*here* was officially  
allowed what was forbidden  
in the rest of the country:  
making money” some under-  
ground totalisator, some old  
men drinking vodka from  
plastic cups, the nags  
brought in from the  
Ukraine—the Soviet  
Hippodrome

some Europe  
beyond my dreams, a lost  
place where Joel Craig lays  
bets on the steps of a three



A.M. Belgian velodrome—I  
am so small against them,  
their colors—the white  
horse emerging from the  
horn's bell, flags' green,  
gold and red and "every  
place was Kentucky Siberia"

## The Stables of Akron

America begins here—  
in the waste sparks,  
in the by-products gone crazy,  
in the muckety muck  
    of Akron's stables,  
in the horse's song

“Gentle your own horses,”  
the hero says, “or I'll gentle  
them for you”

Herakles shrugs,  
come to Akron to tidy derelict  
space; the nomad in America

“I am too old for this business—  
the world always beginning or  
ending in some stable,” he says,  
feeling the river's weight in his  
lungs; an old wisdom, “my horses  
are gone, but the stables still  
require mucking”

    in the days  
before the sea was organized, the  
hero worked patiently to learn  
the parts of the warhorse—not  
some *American Muck Book* or  
sugar georgic, rivers of grass

and rum and sugar cane and  
corn and “the crick moved  
through my house”

*like eating*

*Sappho's dust*

Tuesday afternoon, plain  
Philadelphia, betting the  
virtual stable gone rank I  
am that horse loose in the  
stretch, that endless run

## American Necropolis #28

*after Elizabeth Sireb*

You fall from the rafters. Memory begins with a fall from a horse. Gravity's the enemy. It always is for dead men. To keep from falling down. A rope strung across a year. Why then did you punch me in the face? Retool the story, the dead's contortions fed thru a guitar, broken bottle stroked along its neck. So much intricate metal. Not the drunk falling sideways from his nag or the mayor's whorehouse hip, but the timed, kick-shouldered tumble in syncopation. On stage, a tumbling cavity against which you tuck your arms. But to test the theory, a horse stands on your chest. Its hoof gentle on your sternum, your breath sucked deep inside. A continent's weight against your lungs. Every time, you fall into the West Side; descent is sweet, not knock-kneed. Don't move. Although the hero himself squirms, confined quickening to a glass box. His elbow passes thru all things—ten gallons, six shooters, other cowpokes, and heat—a slight draw in the saloon's close quarters. His memory here offers the clarity of falling.

(untitled)

out of Sugar Town  
by Mardi Gras

very little reminds you of home;  
*even religion and the  
internet are different out  
here—memory is every-  
where and hardship  
the norm—many say,  
so what's new?*

“I sit and I look,” she sd

you can say it:  
“passing tired rivals” &  
“others seem more likely”  
now become a fixture  
of wisdom

hellbent  
& slack-shouldered, the  
god with the strange hair  
drained his lukewarm tea,  
ate the glass and spoke  
numbly into the cracked  
leaves *they turn for  
home and*

the end of the real  
is a West Hartford paint lab

## Barack Obama on Horseback

GREETINGS FROM CHICAGO!  
where “the nation woke up  
to the news that the country  
no longer had a map”

the public  
square now empty—“exile, the territory” a  
nation long in the tooth and unrecorded  
savagery and cruelty on every street corner

they were preaching  
the gospel in the bars of Philadelphia and that’s how  
it happens: the man talking into his cell phone like he  
believes in the horse, the national election, the cigarette  
smoked like a belief in punctuation

every bridge  
holding, the nation hastily redrawn across the back  
of a cocktail napkin; then, coming down from the horse,  
riderless in the square, its belly wooden and stuffed  
with warrior

“every river moves thru Ohio”  
(even the Lethe

every U.P. and B&O line—every loose commodity, coal in  
Wyoming and cool in the City of Brotherly Love (Trane’s  
apt. still gathering its dust) or the horses at Los Alamitos,

now “a dynamic wagering product” and spring adjacent to  
the bomb’s cradle, *labor’s value being outside the equation*

how we all  
were in clandestine love with *that* horse, its endless hoof,  
sounded by the coxcomb bugler of New Orleans; “we’d  
been promised the end of the world as children, and now  
we weren’t getting it”

O Alma Mater

Virtual Athena

Enarmored Sister,

pullers of chariots

and halftracks

and cold dreams

we friends and foes  
eagerly await your return,  
all of us here,  
gently sucking  
the war machine’s  
hind tit

the late double at Arlington

out of Soignee (GER)

by Monsun (GER)

Guy Casaceli first mapped it  
for me—"horse country" Dade-  
land townhomes cut from swamp,  
"a green dream in a green place"

and now here, "distance normal"  
pond surface full of storms and  
this horse, really less horse than  
something come above ground

black creeping mare  
*stalked rail, came thru*

my series of rolling doubles gone  
rank in a late summer stiff with  
expected rains, yielding turf and  
the green wisdom of clockers



(untitled)

it comes down to how  
seriously you take  
the world—

this broken clock  
in the center of time  
or what you say  
when you say  
“looks like a real  
horse-  
man”

coming back to the  
geography of this  
limestone and  
gleaming bone

the numbers' stink,  
the barns' stench—  
the horse runs in  
spite of them

*The Misfits*

if Reno were  
just the matter  
of a few more horses  
or Arthur Miller's  
shotgun

that high range  
framing every shot—  
the men against it,  
the bomber jacket,  
the sad cowboy,  
Gable himself  
lassos the running  
mare

          he sd, "you've  
got to find some  
other way to live"

50, the route you'd al-  
ways thought you'd  
take into the land's  
heart

          before the "wilderness of mirrors"  
          before the plutonium jukebox  
          before mythy Hollywood and  
          the endless Book of Rev-

and the wounded man

dragged by a horse

where is your America,  
Marilyn? whose wounds?

a Reno in mind,  
one cut from the map or  
sawn by the Kelley Deal's  
relentless fiddle

“you can drive 9 to—

arrive in the middle of a  
busy afternoon, all doe-  
eyed and innocent; a slot  
machine watches you  
from the bus station  
corner and the diner is  
alive with silver gossip

(no West begins elsewhere

## Ballad of the Wise Guy Horse

I'm dustin' off my rubber dress,  
my hyena's back in town

O hyena, I think of you often hang  
some words in my ear tell me  
something about myself milk bottles  
have been exploding across the Midwest  
and I'm powerless to stop them

Come back from Hawthorne,  
its horses come up from the black ground;  
Come back from Calder,  
the Bird Man's archaic pencilings in the  
margins.  
Come back from Aqueduct,  
there's a scratch in the sixth race;  
Come back from Remington,  
the speedcappers already gone deepocket.

my hyena's known bottles of bourbon  
that rise from the ground, games of  
slap that go on for weeks my hyena  
stands calmly as a grinning man,  
in dark blue suit and yellow hat,  
repacks the snake into his valise

Come back from Balmoral,  
the family photos lost to the flood;  
Come back from Keeneland,

the yearlings there breaking your spring  
heart.  
Come back from Belmont,  
its cathedral walls groaning in the stretch;  
Come back from Hollywood,  
that nice filly's gone wide in the turn.

born again or born alone, hyena, you  
know this place better than it knows  
itself the horse no longer runs like  
a machine my money's gone into  
a fistful of tri's and in his bones my  
hyena knows the soft value of a  
tipster's lean

Come back from Arlington,  
John Dooley is calling;  
Come back from the Fairgrounds,  
that long stretch eating hooves and rent.  
Come back from Saratoga,  
Nathan's blue bills tucked in his hatband;  
Come back from Del Mar,  
"too serious" for your money.

beneath the country, the hyena runs  
in perpetual motion there's a white  
Chevrolet in the corner of my eye  
and this hot, goddamned season always  
surprises me—the surface there never  
as solid as it seems; all sexed up on  
my back porch, these reptiles don't

know when to surrender

Come back from Maywood,  
    Goldie there, singing her quarantine;  
Come back from Churchill,  
    that horse already busting from the gate.  
Come back from the Mountaineer,  
    the axe already laid to the root;  
Come back from Santa Anita,  
    where silver dollars sob in the pocket.

I'm dustin' off my rubber dress,  
my hyena's back in town



## The Breeders

*after Maryjean Wall*

the country—  
not rdg sea surface  
but bloodline—  
divine your chances  
in that ink, read your  
days in a cup of burgoo;  
lay your bet against  
the ex-governor and see  
whose horse takes the late  
money

*life has but  
one true charm: that of  
gambling* wrap your  
mouth around the Indian  
names

endless Kentucky  
endless Domino  
endless Bonnie Scotland

not exact copies, but  
repetition of hoof and  
saddle and hoof and  
jockey's arm and "men  
with wild faces full of  
yelling"

ah! the blue



green grass of Kentucky!  
the gene run loose in  
a paper blizzard, the  
coin in the auctioneer's  
throat; horses slip the dream  
of it—not broodmares  
and Pulpit's but the sire  
and dam and stallion "now  
standing at Woodburn"

*well-bred young mares  
are always in demand  
in this country; here, not  
Runnymede Farm or an  
American Stud Book  
but wiry animal  
by coal money*

story of tireless underdog  
and hard closer "a spectacle  
of excess" endless whip and  
horse in profusion (and why  
does the animal run "like a  
machine?") in the stretch,  
*the wild things are all  
human*—"the colonel" &  
John Clay asleep in his  
stable

*whittling the line,  
gone to blood*

## TVG Breeders' Cup Mile

*for Shadla*

out of Born Gold  
by Anabee

behind a chain-link and  
out of the sweet shod-  
diness of a Churchill  
barn, the circling planes  
drag their grocery store  
banners across the sky;  
no Flower Bowl or  
Pleasant Colony Dis-  
staff—they are making  
plastic and nickel hearts  
down the street

*tracking*  
*idlers* and *ridden three*  
*lengths clear*, she “kept  
on”—the tip sheets seemed  
the ravings of a mad man  
in a border state

I took  
a picture of myself in  
front of a horse, not some  
Blushing Groom, but  
shadow against concrete,  
through a green rust—

Brother Mike asleep in his  
Gethsemane straw and the  
Irish will return to Kentucky

Speak to us now, Brother Tom,  
and at the hour of our deaths;  
dance for us now, Sister Zen,  
especially in your hour, while  
in the 8th, Goldikova looks  
us both in the eye, stretches  
the stretch for home and the  
sun drops night into Bardstown

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Charles Olson's admonition was that a poet should take up a single American subject and explore it thoroughly, from its obvious surfaces backward to primary sources. Garin Cycholl has now done this for us again. In *Blue Mound to 161* and *Rafetown Georgics* he explored, documented and reimagined the declining Midwest. In *Horse Country* he engages another, broader history, an America continually transformed in its equestrian past and present, from Spanish colonial horses through Native American ponies, cavalry mounts, draft animals, gaudy carnival performers and race track thoroughbreds. In a mixture of prose meditations and highly energetic, wonderfully demotic verse Cycholl gives us another, vital America, rich with its own language—heroic and mock-heroic, the languages of farrier, general, farmer, and tout. *Horse Country* is an elective course in American history no one should miss.

--Michael Anania on *Horse Country*



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