

*6<sup>th</sup> Floor Davis Library*

On the title page of flaking collected translations  
kept in nondescript boxes tied with ribbon,  
the ones which would be dust  
in the shadows of the stacks if not  
for the advances of library sciences:  
*Exegi monumentum aere perennius.*

No time to get to the cellar,  
let's hide in the bathroom.

Storms this quick to come  
are quick to pass.

I think we're still safe in the kitchen  
as long as we keep from the windows.

When else can we see oaks flowing  
soft as seaweed? Elms seething?

Not quite gusts. Gusts push, these scythe  
thick turpented telephone poles.

No AC, no flashlights, no candles,  
nowhere to charge our dead phones,

but I think we're safe to leave.  
I'll wait out the power at Linda's.

On Franklin Street another tree fallen,  
the old wall outside Chi O broken

into its component stones, its mortar  
crushed back into sand. Another tree

uprooted, its scale so much clearer  
on the sidewalk. Oak, urgent

despite the sense that this June  
is the time to finally catch a breath.

Oak, somehow losing normalcy  
in this storm-a-day summer.

Oak, offering no second chances, no warning,  
fell. Later, home again, the power is still out,

but could come back any minute now:  
let's kill the milk before it curdles.

Earlier, when I walked past,  
the oak was in manageable pieces

on the lawn, and there was no way to know  
what happened just by being there.

*Davie Poplar*

*So long as this tree stands, so too shall this seat of learning.  
When this tree falls, this institution too shall crumble.*

If I was George Washington,  
I'd probably have said the same thing,  
knowing by then, as he knew,  
how much would come to hang  
on every syllable; how,  
living in the legend's exposition,  
it was his job to make this sort of claim.

There've been more than a few  
reactions. First—over a hundred  
years ago—they planted a new one  
near where Hinton James is now.  
Later Davie Poplar III. Now there's  
a son of the tree planted  
in every NC county.

Then, after Hurricane Fran swung  
through, they strung it to a neighboring tree  
with wires and stuffed it  
with concrete, but it's still flowering  
every Spring. All these taking for granted  
he was right, or at least making a sort of Pascal's wager.

This institution of science  
playing it safe with superstition,  
trying for something against its nature,  
against nature itself, ignoring  
what Washington may have been trying  
to warn us about, while he still could.

TA KAAA ΔΙΩΚΩΜΕΝ

*Let us strive for what is good.*

The joke is that we both  
learned Greek in college,  
just different kinds: optatives  
and chapter meetings,  
middle voice and rush

both equally strange  
to our parents in Raleigh,  
the children of lithographers  
and real estate agents,  
smaller town bank-tellers,  
lunch ladies; farther back:  
coal miners and potato  
farmers, test drivers  
and tool-and-die men.  
A great-grandmother  
who came from some  
money, too, I'm told.

I stood on the top step of Wilson,  
waiting to watch the public  
initiation ritual on Polk Place—  
bid day—where the crowd,  
divided in their matching  
outfits, gathered suddenly  
despite the fact that I could hear them  
coming from their houses,  
deliberate in their frenzy, straining  
their voices and to hear instructions.

Elise, officially in KD now, walked  
as other girls ran by with fluttering  
envelopes, into the center  
of the mob that swirled around  
the lampposts that cut the quad  
in half, and now I know her path  
was only up the stairs from Fetzer,

but at the time I half-  
jokingly wondered  
if they had her waiting  
in the Dean Dome,  
or outside it, where we  
waited before games,

then she walked  
to her new sisters  
—though she swears she  
doesn't call them that—  
along the line that goes  
from there through Kenan,  
the Belltower, which we  
haven't climbed yet,  
through the back door  
of Wilson, past me and  
arriving at the group gathered  
and scattering about, then past them,  
through South Building,  
the Old Well, Silent Sam,  
the Speaker Ban commemoration,  
and then a right along Franklin Street  
into her open, new, and  
empty house, the other  
women coming half-an-hour  
later. I wished I could have  
walked it with her, though  
that isn't where she went.

*P2P*

The Point to Point  
bus is only The P2P  
part of the time.

Only some of the drivers  
will play Top 40 loud enough  
so I can't hear

the person next to me.  
It's a (dry) party on wheels  
with most people already

drunk enough to enjoy it  
only infrequently.  
The rest of the time

it makes the same blocky  
circle around campus,  
but people ride it

because it's raining or  
it's too late to climb  
down the hill alone.

The people-watching isn't  
pole dances and beatboxing  
but someone looking at the window

sad or tired, headphones in,  
the back and front page of a DTH,  
the calm conversation

with friends on the way  
home from dinner, from studying, from  
visiting their lovers' dorms.

I have never taken it to the end  
of the circle, when the bus pulls into the lot  
where I see them parked in the daylight

down near Morrison, to get out  
and walk to wherever I was going,  
which had been walkable from all the stops.

*Manning Drive*

*or “On a Poem by David Ferry”*

*On the way back from the hospital we saw  
A message on the license plate of a car.*

*It said GOD HAS. Has what?  
Decided finally what to do about it?*

*The answer to the question that you asked?  
The whole world in His Hands? Fucked up? Again?*

*Apologized? Failed to apologize?  
The car went on its way ahead of us.*

On the way back from the hospital I read  
your poem. I couldn't understand your speaker.

He's making so much out of something so simple.  
What has happened now has always happened,

especially in its never having happened before.  
God has decided the answer to the question you asked.

Has the whole world in His Hands. Has fucked up. Again.  
Now and forever. Apologized and failed to apologize.

The car goes on its way away from us. I hold your book.  
I don't want to understand any of it.



*Queen Bed*

Only a little part of me  
misses the lofted, double beds  
you and I shared the first  
two years of college,  
of dating—the kink  
in my neck, getting back rubs  
because I needed back rubs,  
waking up with you beside me  
and grabbing you desperately:  
on the edge of rolling off.

Now, in our off-campus  
houses, we each have our  
own personal space—  
when we're ready  
for sleeping—to roll to  
and lay on our faces  
or sides, facing apart,  
or on our backs,  
a leg reaching over  
until under the covers  
our toes are barely  
touching.

*Lock Screen*

It's not raining hard  
enough to wet the path  
beneath the trees,  
I stand there and wait  
for word from you.

This morning, the drops  
were hitting my window-unit  
like a wintry drum.  
While you were asleep,  
I lost a minute looking

at our picture on the lock screen  
of my phone, dreaming a newest  
worst thing I could think of:  
you, old and teary, holding  
a picture of me. That's what Poppy

was doing on Mimi's birthday—  
the first without her—while I was  
sitting with him at their  
kitchen table, setting up the pieces  
of the chess set he had had

since he was a boy, since  
before he knew her.  
He was promising them to me.  
I couldn't think of what  
to do, except for setting  
pawn by pawn by pawn.

It's letting up, but  
my phone says it'll  
rain again, and soon.  
Let's just meet there.  
I can't wait to see you.

*St. Raphael's Fair*

It's another one of these nights  
where I'm always an hour behind  
where I should be. I can't quite  
get up for the party, then decide to go  
and get there for the cleanup.

Back home, another beer  
and closed eyes on the couch,  
and I'm on The Scat again:  
the standing, spinning ride, that was  
my favorite at the parish fair.

Spinning on that same edge  
of possibilities, same terrified  
serenity of middle school,  
the parking lot, cars

driving down Falls of Neuse,  
the middle school, the crowd  
under the Christmas lights,  
headlights, all blocked out

by eyelids, so I could be  
anywhere: a couch in my house,  
nine years in the future,  
a little drunk and thinking  
of the multi-purpose field,

where the Poythress Amusement  
employees' trailer crushed the grass  
the first week of every September,  
and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls  
were playing with The Scat operator's

litter of puppies during her  
pack-of-cigarettes break.  
Kelsi in love with the runt,  
and, though she had more than enough  
ride money and her mother was busy at bingo,

she did nothing more than hold it  
and say: I want him. I want him.

*Bald Head Island*

Facing backwards in the back seat  
of the golf cart the arch of the sea-  
bent trees seemed to grow

instead of shrink. I need a French  
word for nostalgia for the present  
or a German one for self envying self.

The ziploc bag over my phone adds  
another filter to the pictures of the beach.  
My little cousins blur around the edges

like golden-age close-ups, so I choose  
*Inkwell*. I try to tweet, "Cold corona first  
sip makes me melancholy, knowing

its coming conclusion." But I have  
no service, and that's not quite what  
I mean. I didn't want to build

a sandcastle, so the kids are digging  
holes they are calling their creations.  
The tide will fill those, too.

*Chess at Union Square*

Frankly, I'm not good enough  
for Washington Square Park:  
idiot savants yelling and smacking  
the clock, little cups of coffee and  
hustlers scolding themselves  
for moves they should have made.

It's not worth walking  
the seven-odd blocks from Astor Place  
to sit in a built-in chair at an inscribed  
stone table and get my ass  
handed to me playing on some guy's  
hand-carved Civil War themed set.

Instead I'll sit on a milk crate  
with the board on another  
and try to impress the hacky-sack  
circles and month-pass L-riders  
untucking their sweat stained  
button-downs and coming up  
for some air on their way to Brooklyn.

The windows are pried up in hopes  
of a cross breeze. It comes occasionally:  
snakeless pages flop onto each other,  
away from mine, back to it, two away again.  
It's summer in a city built for winter.

No AC flowing through the vaulted ceiling,  
no screens on the windows, a bee  
with no tact smacks against  
the hardcovers, the lampshades, the busts,  
somewhere a mower is mowing.

The sprinklers are going twice  
every day on every lawn, jerking through  
their wide circles, wetting the gravel  
of the walk while trying to green the grass.  
A tour group walks crunching through

the path that splits the quad below  
and laughs about the bus ride up  
from London. The tour guide  
is sweating through her sweater.  
No heat like this in years, not here at least.

Each college is on its own schedule  
and time itself is slightly different,  
Keble's bells calling over the walls  
clanging off-time with St. John's chapel's—  
distinct but close enough to confuse.

No clock on this creaking floor,  
no computer (by choice), and  
no song before the count starts,  
so it's impossible to know  
whether it's only ten or if I've missed a toll.

*Toward the end of the party*

I became fixated on the fire  
making sure every log burned  
down to ash because I believed  
the embers were hot enough to do it

and I hadn't ever seen it done before.  
When I poked the last log apart no more  
flames whispered from the corners  
instead the sound of thin glass breaking

and black red and dark blew  
through the cinders left behind  
inspired and flickering  
unintelligible patterns

as hot as the fire had been  
breathtaking and I didn't care  
that it looked a little  
like a screensaver.

*Cobb Fire*

The other bystanders' assurance  
that everyone evacuated safely  
was enough to justify a rainy  
concert feeling in the crowd—  
the kind where the best fans  
(or most resilient) are proud  
to laugh at their condition.

Or maybe it was the cell-phone-out  
situation of something we can't quite  
capture but try anyway because we  
hope this is our only chance to:

a building on fire.  
Not flaming but smoking.  
Some residents or passersby  
had stopped before the firetruck  
arrived because they saw the chimneys  
smoking—and even though that's  
what they're for, they knew  
they'd stopped that years ago.

*Daily Tar Heel* photographers  
with no better angle than the kids  
with nice cameras are scanning  
the crowd (in vain) for someone who lives  
on the fourth floor, someone who's

realizing the firemen are bashing in  
her window and everything  
will be dusty and wet  
and ruined, if left at all. Reporters  
with their backpack at their  
feet argue with an RA who's  
been deputized as a marshal  
about access to the chief.  
One steps to me, "Do you live here?"

"Not now. But I used to."  
Not good enough, he steps  
away and identifies himself  
to the student to my left as  
so-and-so from the Carolina Review.

A crowd outside Cobb,



where famously reclusive  
residents came together  
once a year, smoked out  
and gathered with the opportunists,  
just like now, but for the cookout.

August of my freshman year,  
Madhu a hall beneath me,  
I picked Cobb cause  
she picked Cobb and  
the bathrooms were clean  
and the halls were quiet.

She hated it: no suitemates,  
no first-name basis,  
doors that slam and lock  
without intention,  
her shyish roommate.  
She went south for  
Sophomore year.  
I stayed put  
and learned the quickest  
routes to Morrison.

Cobb had worked for me  
for that first year—  
just sixty steps from her door  
to mine: one flight of stairs  
to hurry down on Valentine's Day,  
when she texted that she'd skipped  
the meeting that had blocked  
our date because her fever  
had hit 104.9 and that's  
so close to death,  
but nothing that some advil  
and some fluids wouldn't fix.

Not to make light  
of a serious situation,  
but that's what we did, joking  
while waiting for the P2P van  
to pick us up, and in the van  
riding south to the hospital complex,  
and in the ER, too. And look at us now,  
even now, still laughing.

*Helen*

In my dream last night  
you wanted to love the art so bad  
you climbed up an installation  
I think a pile of chairs  
to grab it I'm pretty sure  
it was a painting and it may  
have been of us then I was  
the painting you  
held then me  
again I climbed up too  
and wrenched you down  
to save what I could save.  
When you got up I knew  
I hurt you and ran  
to a ladder I guess I was going  
to climb it out of the museum  
but that doesn't seem right  
but you were there  
already standing underneath  
it and whispered through  
the rungs to me:  
"Write a poem about Helen."

Why write about her, nothing but a vision  
in some versions of her story—a phantom  
sent to Troy by Zeus to solve an overpopulation  
problem, who—safe in Egypt—heard none  
of the derision nor the praise?

Why write about the one who, twenty  
years older and calm in Menelaos' court, recognized  
the patient sailor's son and put a drug  
in all their drinks, telling stories  
of his clever father as they drifted off to sleep?

Why write about her face  
I've never seen and do not  
need to; not when, even  
in my dream, I have this  
dream-you here with me?

## *Halloween*

Franklin Street's like a block-and-a-half long parade  
going in every direction: all marchers but also all onlookers,  
all the marshals either drunk or missing.

Not to say there's not a police presence:  
these four years the Halloweens have all been  
"Homegrown." Chapel Hill parking somehow made harder:

meant to discourage the Kenan-sized crowds,  
the unplanned run-ins with friends from Elon,  
Boone, or Greenville under the awning of Pita Pit.

At Gimghoul, we live inside the police's perimeter  
and put our water bill in the glovebox (our only way  
to prove we belong in the rented home too good for us)

on our trip see the jack o' lanterns lined up along  
Bynum Bridge, like Franklin Street closed down  
for cars, but much longer ago.

Halloween on Franklin Street,  
one of our first lasts as seniors.  
We'll get there when we get there,

make a lap and head back home,  
the bars are crowded, it's starting to get cold.  
We still have beer in the fridge and leftover chili.

*Carter-Finley*

After showing we could take some shit  
for wearing the wrong color shirts,  
we became begrudgingly respected  
in the Wolfpack season-ticket holders' section,  
new impartial audiences for old rivalries:

the late twenties alumnae sick  
of being crawled over by their  
older cousins' little kids; the drunk  
dads and yellow-shirted ushers;  
the man with the bucket hat, spitting

mad about the older gentleman  
in front of him, who's always standing up  
to take pictures with his fancy camera  
during the commercial breaks  
and aiming at the visiting team cheerleaders.

I'd gone for the whole "State" experience,  
even within the constraints of a noon game:  
Bojangles and beer before the sun came up,  
getting slurred at by the frat boys in their party  
tents, being half-nervous someone would tip

over the port-a-potty after all that time  
waiting for it, but good times too:  
old friends from high school  
I'd never made the trip to see,  
the maybe-it's-the-High-Lives

maybe it's the high life and it just takes  
some booze to take a morning  
just for itself, to see how good  
I've got it, not quite getting teary  
but close feeling.

The game turns the Tar Heels' way  
and the man in the hat's getting  
even more angry—still not at us—  
at that perverted fucking camera man.  
Says he would pick up the creep himself

and toss him down onto the field,  
if that didn't mean they'd kick him out  
for good, already got his second strike,

can't afford a third,  
can't afford to not be allowed

to come back to this place, where he's watched  
the section's kids grow old enough  
to learn the players' names, to understand  
how close they were to winning, to have their own kids;  
remembers when there was still just wet grass

behind the endzone, where the students sat  
before he graduated, the girls in their sundresses,  
the boys in their red dress pants and bow ties,  
sneaking beers rolled up in picnic blankets  
and—when they won—summersaulting down the hill.

[https://www.facebook.com/elise.karsten.38/media\\_set?set=a.10151263892893105.1920697.544128104&type=3](https://www.facebook.com/elise.karsten.38/media_set?set=a.10151263892893105.1920697.544128104&type=3)

or “KD Fall Cocktail ‘13”

In the pictures with their dates:  
the beer chins of former high school  
football standouts, the collars  
emerging from sweaters,  
one arm tight around  
the sisters’ shoulders,  
the other out of the frame holding

a plastic cup (as upperclassmen,  
they’re too old to care  
if it’s red or blue, or even Solo,  
or to crook their elbow  
to make sure it’s in the picture).

In the ones with their parents:  
the resemblances, same eyes  
too closed when smiling  
or too open to be smiling,  
not the same nose as her father,  
but her grandfather’s nose,  
or actually his brother’s.

In the ones taken earlier,  
at the house: cheeks red  
outside from the chill,  
inside from the heat.

In others, taken at the cocktail:  
the girls are all pointing at the camera,  
every perfect index finger  
painted well, yet somehow  
each askew from all the others.

Their poised hands  
slightly hovered in place  
as they turned their attention  
from camera to phone to  
camera like hummingbirds.

*Ginkgo Leaves*

Even these don't all arrive at once.

*Taking the GRE*

Drove back to Raleigh the night before,  
but there wasn't much parking  
or any novelty in driving  
myself to the test, so I had  
my mom drop me off.

This is not the SAT—  
one day at the kind of high school  
I didn't go to: the painted  
cinder block hallways and bathrooms,  
the classrooms with the standard  
issue posters. No posters at all.

It's not in a classroom  
with a teacher paid overtime  
to read from a script then the Saturday  
morning paper. It's Thursday,  
checking in at a front desk  
and being assigned to a computer  
in a cubicle in an office park.

No need to bring my own pencils,  
sharpened, number two: it's all computerized,  
and they supply them for the scratch work.

Everyone coming in at their own time,  
no snacks allowed in ziploc bags,  
shared standing shuffling,  
small talk: "Man, haven't  
written cursive in a long time."

Five years later, this is not  
a rite of passage into adulthood,  
like how after finishing a section  
early in the SAT I put my pencil down  
in the groove at the top of the desk

looked around and realized that everyone  
in the room would die.  
At the GRE, there's no need to repeat  
that lesson, and there is a camera  
aimed at my cubicle, and I don't want  
my eyes to raise suspicion.



*Lenoir*

They're transitioning to lunch,  
but the students still want breakfast  
and are lined up almost to the escalator  
to get it from the veggy stand: the only one  
left serving eggs, pancakes, and sausage.  
I'm sure the whole thing's timed out  
the same since when I had a meal plan.

It's the last day of exam week,  
some students drinking cranberry juice  
to themselves, reading their phones,  
others doing practice problems  
or quizzing each other with flash cards.  
I should probably go back to Raleigh.  
I'm done with exams, and they're playing

some piano music—not Christmas music—  
the kind of calming music that makes  
me anxious because someone thinks  
I need help being calmed. They are switching  
the hashbrowns out for potatoes au gratin.  
Steam rises from the empty hot wells.

*Wake Forest 27, Millbrook 24 (4OT)*

The howling from the visiting side bleachers  
travels faster through cold air. The floodlights are brighter  
at eleven in winter when the darkness  
has hours to condense. State Quarterfinals.

Third overtime, a glorified extra point  
to win it. It's in the high twenties and Wake Forest's  
coach calls a timeout to ice you.  
You'd made field goals from twice this far this season,

but never when the student section had emptied out  
and stood waiting to rush the field by the chain link gate—  
panting in little clouds that blur and rise up past the uprights—  
the same gate that in September

the elementary school kids could come and go  
through as they pleased—playing  
their own little games on the unpainted part of the field  
behind the endzone, wondering if anyone was watching.

But it's almost December, the ball is hard  
in the cold, and you can't feel the ends  
of your toes. There's a policeman at the gate.  
If you'd have made it, he'd have let them through.

## *Sorry*

My grandfather said just yesterday there had been lights  
in all the trees, oversized metal gift boxes with tinsel,  
a blow-up snowman, and mechanized reindeer,  
the kind that bend their heads to graze the grass.

But when we passed today, as we were going to the clubhouse,  
there was only a torn strip of cardboard on a wire stand  
stuck in the pine needles beneath an empty tree  
with “Sorry” spray painted on both sides in black.

Did the Home Owners’ tell him to take it all down?  
Or, as Poppy guessed, did something awful happen  
somewhere else, something that needed him  
(a grandson sick, a tree left on overnight—

the house burnt down, a wife who needed care she couldn’t  
find here, the list of these sorts of things goes on),  
and he realized he had to clean it all up before he went away,  
but couldn’t help but feel he let us down?

*Crate & Barrel*

The dog has set to tearing  
apart the corrugated cardboard box,  
going at the corners, the most difficult  
part. I'm sure he knows that, but  
the challenge is the whole fun of it.

He refuses to admit to having finished,  
but when he stops the structural damage  
and gets into peeling the layers away—  
the glue hissing like tires on a wet road—  
it's time to pick up the shreds and take  
the whole thing to the recycling bin.

Outside, my breath rises through the rain,  
and I understand better the appeal of smoking.  
The world is a percussive place.  
The only leaves left are the needles;  
the ones that have fallen are still  
in big fading piles on the street,  
tamped down and full of dog shit.

The reds and yellows have leached out  
in the soaking. They wind their way  
to the storm drains, to the creeks, and find  
themselves in the roots of the trees again.  
Remember; it's all too subtle to see.

*Reynolds Coliseum*

Old IBMs are still in the scorers' loft.  
We climbed there during the high school's  
graduation: the little ceiling door  
and ladder like an attic's with no padlock.

I wish I could say that I pictured  
Jordan out there on the court,  
or what the stadium looked like  
when it matched the mockups:

filled with suited men who had  
their hats on their laps and no notice of  
the lack of air conditioning,  
but instead I just pretended  
to commentate the commencement.

Even the Holiday Tournament—  
the crowd standing up to see Smith  
or Krzyzsewski come in from back halls  
and under the bleachers to sit  
in the front row to see Hardaway  
and Stackhouse get their first taste of primetime—

moved to a downtown  
high school's gym, because it's nicer  
and bigger than one of the nicest  
and biggest college gyms  
of only a few decades ago.

This December there'll be no more  
sweaters and coats stuffed  
under the seats or winter  
air so pleasant through cracked  
bathroom windows, no more  
smokers below.

The two lane track still forms  
the concourse of the upper-deck.  
Ready to host a sprint-off—  
spectators watching from concession stands,  
stairwells, the alcoves in the corners,  
the little nooks in front of bathroom doors.

There are rumors of a new stadium,  
south of town near the pet food factory,

to replace the PNC (which was  
the RBC after it was the ESA), which  
was built even in my memory,  
where State now plays its games.

The blogs seem split on if it will happen,  
and if I will live long enough to see it,  
like Reynolds, too big for its own body,  
host of high school volleyball state  
championships and one exhibition game  
a year, better suited for the era of spotlights  
reaching for a cloud to reflect from.

*L.A.*

At Geoffery's we sit out on the deck  
and try to figure out whether that's Catalina  
in the smog or just the continent wrapping  
around the bay. I decide against a drink

at lunch, a little queasy from the Pacific Coast  
Highway and trying to read my phone  
in the backseat, desperate for a sun-visor  
even in December. Where is Los Angeles, exactly?

This city built of cities. The whole thing a huge  
Little America some foreign city got right  
down to the gritty "t." Idyllic but disappointing,  
America's wet dream of an old lover.

*There are two stories of Ovid's death.*

There is the story that is probably true:  
the Great Exile, in Tomis,  
not technically alone—  
Ovid in Tomis as long as he was  
would have made friends—  
but dying alone. Changing  
his course to Plan B, which  
he surely would have acknowledged  
was hardly a substitute:  
“Take my bones to Rome.”

A poet, he had a poet's knowledge  
that his poems were his immortality,  
and a poet's knowledge of how small  
that consolation was, but good as any.

There is also a second story:  
Ovid making it back to Rome,  
not sneaking in past the brick carts  
and the moonlit streams of aqueducts  
on the way to an old friend's apartment,  
but coming in well-announced,  
with The People around him. The People,  
so happy they lose control and it's a crush.  
He suffocates on the streets of his city,  
pulling Rome further into his ribcage,  
breaking his bones the way a pyre never could.



## *Woollen*

Coach Myles, who came here when Carter  
was flying and Jamison finding his way  
however he found it and found it so well,  
said that this was the gym where  
you had to bring it. So I stuck  
to Cobb courts when I could  
and the weather was nice enough  
for there to probably be a game going.

I didn't come to Woollen to play basketball  
until exam week Fall semester senior year  
and only then because I thought  
I should at least once. I'd come once before,  
the last semester I played handball,  
the Tar Heel Invitational pushed there when  
Fetzer's roof was leaking in the storm:  
meeting Myles in his gym at nine  
the night before, setting up chairs,  
laying down masking-tape lines  
for that foreign game  
we both had learned to love.

During pick-up games it's ten courts  
without the divider, getting slicker  
and thinner as they go back,  
jackets piled on all the sidelines,  
sweatpants—wallets with one-cards  
in each pair. Fred the security guy  
(who I knew of from handball)  
gets on a mic one Friday to tell  
everyone to get a locker,  
there's been theft already this year.  
We take it seriously,  
but the games would get all mixed up  
and we'd all lose thirty minutes.

On the right's the pool and the windows  
facing west, letting the sunset slide  
into the eyes of jump-shooters  
on the challenging teams in the pre-dinner rush;

on the left's Carmichael, sharing a wall,  
the wells for the windows filled in with brick,  
Carmichael, the gym like the Constitution,  
a replacement built with permission to only amend.

January afternoons, up the stairs  
from South Road in my sweats,  
past the old trophy cases  
(boxing, rugby, intramural dorm cup  
championships) to the window  
looking down onto the golden courts  
to see who's there: always enough—  
so far at least—sometimes too many  
really, come with their friends  
from class or their house or their dorm,  
better too many than none. Looking down  
afraid to see pennies and refs,  
meaning intramurals start today.

January marks a year since  
the hip surgery thing started:  
the proactive orthopedic visit,  
the pre-PT, the post PT, stretching,  
crutches, scars and stretch-marks,  
summer school class in Caldwell  
(the only non-ADA building on campus)  
while weaning off the pain pills,  
taking a break from the team  
until I graduate, calling it the hip,  
and mostly it is.  
But I make it to Woolen,

no more than half-a-step slower,  
sliding around on the dusty  
courts, wiping my shoe bottoms  
with my bare hands, reaching for steals,  
chasing down boards—  
cause those are the ones I can grab—  
out there fighting, which is  
what I think Coach really wants.

*Sledding next to the ROTC*

Mark was making his way  
back up the hill, sled in tow,  
when they carted someone  
out of Wilson Hall  
and into the ambulance  
across the street from us.

The ambulance had been sitting  
on Columbia for almost half an hour  
at this point, there was very little  
urgency about the situation,  
but the kid looked so bad on the stretcher  
that I had to confirm with Mark  
that they'd cover him if he was dead.

Minutes before the ambulance came,  
there was a group of kids our age  
trying to have a snowball fight—  
bobbing around each other like boxers—  
casual because it wouldn't pack.  
Then, in the time it took to trudge  
back up the hill, they'd left.  
I wondered aloud if that was related.

This was toward the end of  
the snow cycle I'm used to:  
the afternoon after night snow,  
the skies cleared and brighter  
than last night's excursion

(which had its own anxiety,  
hopeful that this would be  
enough to last—though  
the falling snow  
kept dusting Mark's hair).

The afternoon, with its now unavoidable  
idea—this is all  
that will fall this time around—  
with no way to know  
when next time will be.  
Everything much more  
constricted than in the hooded night

(when moonlight  
and the street lights  
were plenty bright  
enough in bouncing  
off the snow).

Temperatures barely  
above freezing,  
but somehow hot enough  
to clear big swaths of grass  
where we had sled too much  
to let it melt (unused) a little later.

*Too Late to the Party*

She was good at being glad to see me, though  
behind her the half-costumed guests were popping  
balloons to better fit them in the trash.

Then the birthday girl went back to dancing,  
a friend, whose name I'd forgotten,  
was playing a song that probably played  
at the prom they double-dated to.

Some kind of shrimp was being cooked  
in the apartment's connected kitchen:  
her boyfriend acting fatherly now  
that there were enough people left  
to be the size of an extended family.

I sat on the couch, sang along  
to *Applause*, and realized  
I was an hour too late for how well  
I knew her when, even though she wasn't  
a particularly good singer, she sang *Stay*  
too well for how happy I knew her to be.

*Renovations at Sutton's*

It does make business sense—  
taking out the shelf with the yellowing books  
of cliff-notes (King Lear, Billy Budd,  
others I'm already forgetting) and replacing it  
with two more tables.

And it will directly benefit me—  
the line will be two tables shorter  
when I come for two hot dogs  
and fries on Tuesdays and Thursdays.  
I have no doubt that Sutton's will still be here

in nine years, when I come from wherever  
I am for the one-hundred year anniversary:  
I'll probably still be able to play the game  
where I find the pictures  
within the pictures, make up

new dialogue for whatever movie  
is on AMC on the TV  
(though maybe they'll have an HD  
by then) over the cash register.  
I doubt they'll be hurting.

If anything, they'll probably get more  
tables, so maybe it's less likely I get seated  
where I sat when Madhu was looking  
for me the Thursday before we started  
dating, and the waitress said to me,

"Is she looking for you? She loves you"  
and who knows how she got it so right.  
But that's low on the list of the problems  
I could have. But. Was I just being sensitive,  
or have they changed the recipe for the chili?

*Snow Day Breakfast Jam*

There was no one moment  
when the pancakes were ready,  
the bacon was hot, and no one  
was up from the table: grabbing a fork  
or refilling their hot chocolate.  
But there together in this house

made for a family: seven of us friends—  
only Peter missing (holding someone else's  
shift down at the station)—gathered  
in the dining room, kitchen chairs pulled in  
to seat us all, and through the window

the tree limbs catching snow a second day,  
which fell despite the calls for freezing rain  
we saw that sight so rare in Chapel Hill:  
yesterday's footprints filled in again.

The tornado watch turned into a warning  
the morning after the game. I found it  
oddly appropriate—that the wind might rip

the cloth roof off the Dean Dome, which just the night  
before had billowed and contorted in the heat  
and sound-made-physical of the frenzy of the crowd;

that the Old Well, which we stopped and drank  
from in the rush to Franklin street, might be picked up  
and put down in the woods somewhere miles away;

that the little fires could be surrounded by the rubble  
of Ye Olde and Sutton's instead of people preparing to jump.  
It seemed right to put me to the test, since I had said the night before

“It's true that I might never be this happy  
after this, but at least I'm this happy this time.”  
After the storm had passed, Mark said what I'd imagined

was the worst thing he could think of. Not for me.  
I'd much rather have these things dismantled against our will than  
by some humans years from now, when they somehow no longer matter.



*Iowa State 85, UNC 83*

I'm writing this to avoid thinking  
of Marcus Paige crying  
in the locker room, to convince myself  
that they'll all come back,  
and our new recruiting class  
will make us even better than before;  
or maybe now it'll be like April  
of my first year, when Barnes and Henson  
and Zeller all came back  
for one more year, and would have  
won it all, too, if not for Creighton  
breaking Kendall Marshall's wrist;  
maybe I'll get to play with this team  
on the Cobb courts, like when  
I was a first year just heading  
there to play a game, like on  
most sunny afternoons,  
and instead of guarding  
some kid from Lewis or Aycock,  
I'm lined up against Kendall Marshall  
because I knew how to navigate  
the mob and made my free throw; I can't think  
about how the last game while I am  
here on campus ended  
on a technicality, a negligent anticlimax,  
about how—like Leslie—  
I can't even come back if I want,  
but instead about when I was  
down there playing with my team  
on my home court, about how when  
Dexter jumped it looked like  
a swimmer coming back up for air.

*Hark the Sound*

Will this place become  
a long-forgotten hymn  
remembered when  
I put my arms  
around my neighbors'  
shoulders—a song,  
the last thing left  
when all the rest is past?