



# CALLED BACK BOOKS

SELECTIONS

*Sp. in. C. S. 1891*

DUSIE ISSUE 20

GUEST EDITOR: Called Back Books

COVER/INTERIOR ART: Lucas M. Rivera

LAYOUT/DESIGN: Sharon Zetter

ISSN 1661-668

## NOTE

Neither editors

nor notes

nor poets

nor poems

nor prose

nor essays

nor interviews

nor images

nor collage

nor beginnings

nor endings

but simply

THE BOOK.

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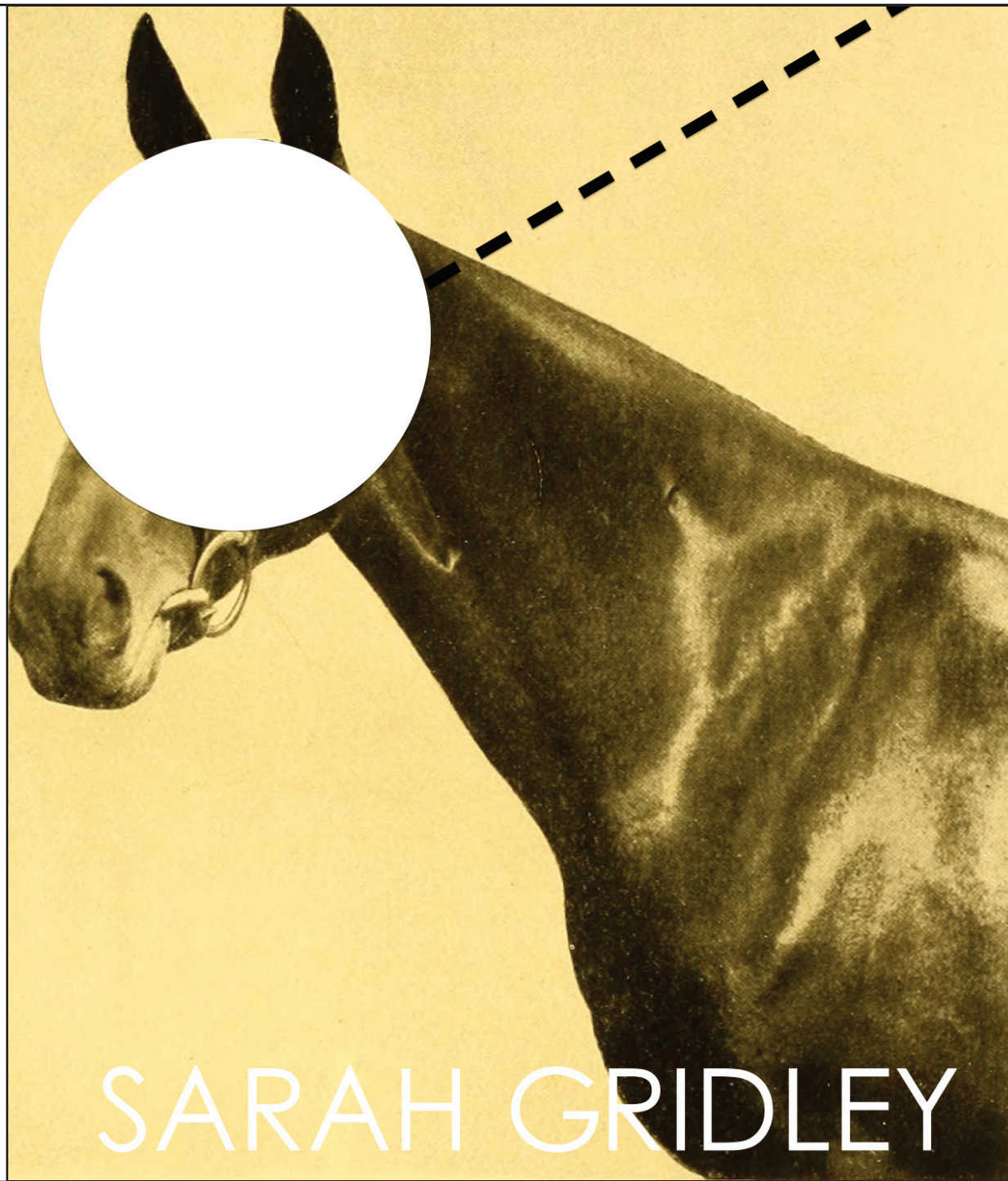
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SARAH GRIDLEY

## CHAPTER 25

It was impossible to picture source and mouth at once—  
an idea of the one would displace an idea of the other.

Then word arrived of a far-below gorge, the river's  
audible path through rock. And it was true

its force made a field of water and went as a field  
to seed with light. True that the child surfaced

in the contact of mist and grown up face.

Nothing could be said over the pounding water.

Who knows how long we stopped to feel it.

You were the first to motion us forward.

You showed us the world going on without us:

the pulled-back beam would be striking the bronze.

The rain on the Bonsho, in this way struck,

would prickle, then shimmer the bell.

**Z—**

Before the turn arrives before the turn of god to immediate trees  
or god afoot at the far end of window  
smaller things have happened.

I have been outside or inside when the bough is moved.

I have seen the tree beside me or had it through a window.

Each place I have put the glasses on  
where the sea was at sea it came closer to bay  
brassy with ovals of puzzled light  
the landpools and skypools  
that won't lift off.

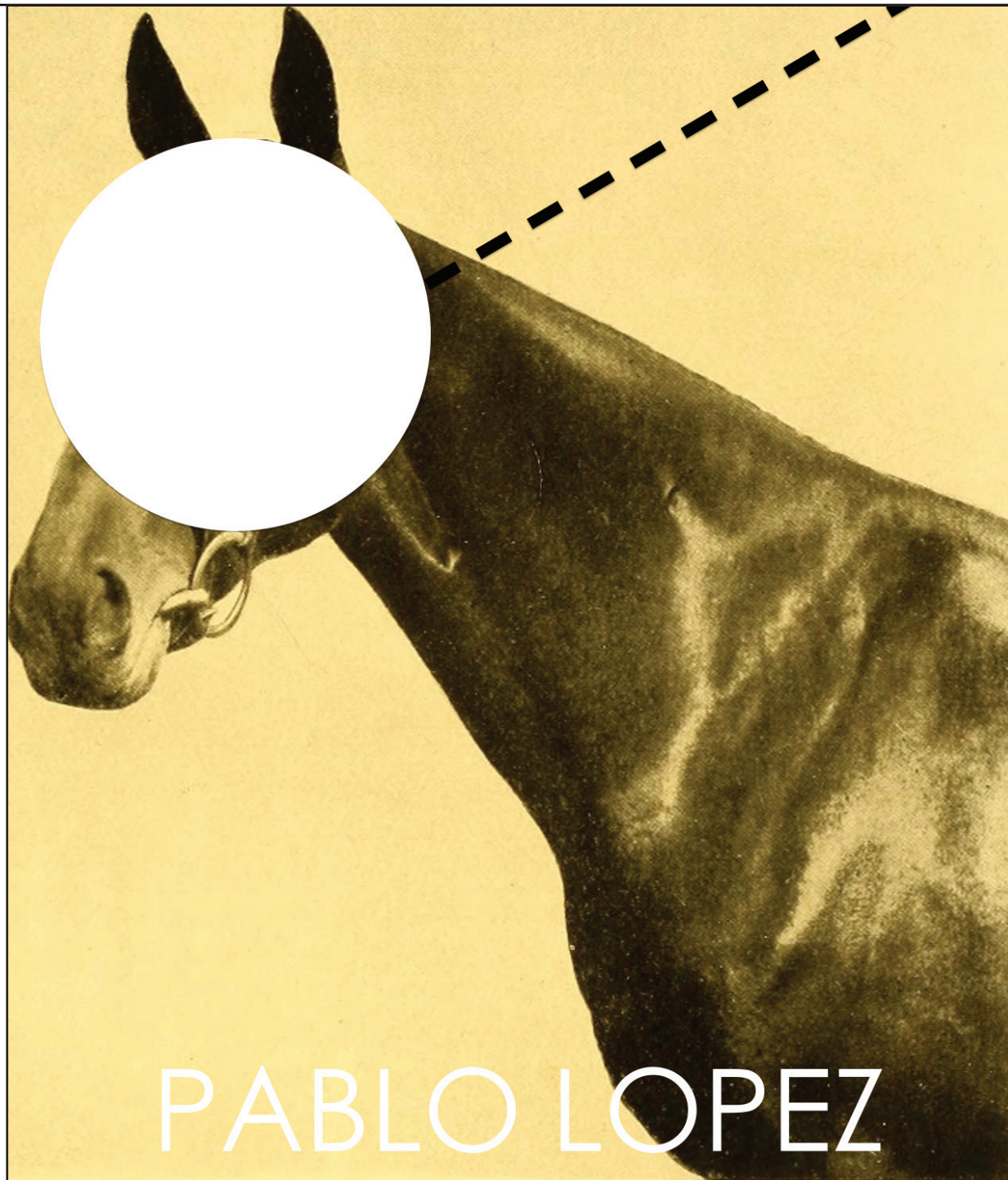
I have learned the paint for this god  
is votive blue. Where the face of this god  
turns darker blue the horse's mane  
lifts high in the dark. A tablecloth sails off a table.

Where his mouth fits air to a mouthpiece  
and grasses withstand it by going over  
our intercostal muscles aim at bones.

Ahead of upturned leaves  
and rattled fruits

he makes a place inside this chest.

He makes the house beside itself.



PABLO LOPEZ



## LIGHTHOUSE AT POINT ARENA

At the end of the coast there's room enough  
to hide a number of poems she thought to write  
them along with smoke and cloud without  
music

She thought the rosebush changed color and so  
taught children rules of its reflective

Math maximal numerals find their dance at the end  
of the coast they divided. Woke but remained  
changing in the light that seemed to contemplate  
the inertia of the place

'They' unlike  
'my' own. A number of voices

could be heard. Cries of pleasure and arguing

\*\*\*

At the end of the coast there  
was color unbridgeable I was  
a \$1,000 fine waiting to

happen and didn't know it yet  
the order unglued the room they  
were not like us forced to feel

their opposition in the morning  
I woke but didn't get  
to my feet another next to me

in a personal sea it seemed  
more that the land moved  
and not the water

drifting in the right cocktail  
of a fast moving car music  
and intoxication just outside

SF and suspicious to the norm not  
even the very lightning could bring  
worse light it seemed more

the land and not the water

\*\*\*

The situation was setting in, a number  
of distances caged, she thought to turn away the music  
of the road, mile marker 56 and 57: I was fine and didn't  
know the mysterious trash

heaps on Fulton St were being  
made in my absence while I was a fine at the end  
of the coast and didn't know it  
The color unbridgeable about her head, caught  
in a turban

Looking toward Gibraltar the words spoken are, in fact,  
triangulated. Lost in endless cups of tea and cigarette  
smoke and having the audacity to use the term  
'in fact' in a poem

What use has a \$1,000 fine have for music? The view divides,  
—no, the view's fine, the color  
unbridgeable, while the trash heaps on Fulton mount

\*\*\*

Waking to find your face  
has been translated  
into costly transgression  
While the coast perpetuates  
silence another next to me

and the voices increasingly familiar  
I learn their plans and local aspirations

The view divides  
the careful movements  
of the horses despite  
their masks

There was a time  
the color  
not only felt  
closer, it led

somewhere The Pinnacles ignored  
during the drive while  
the numbers  
divide even without  
knowing it

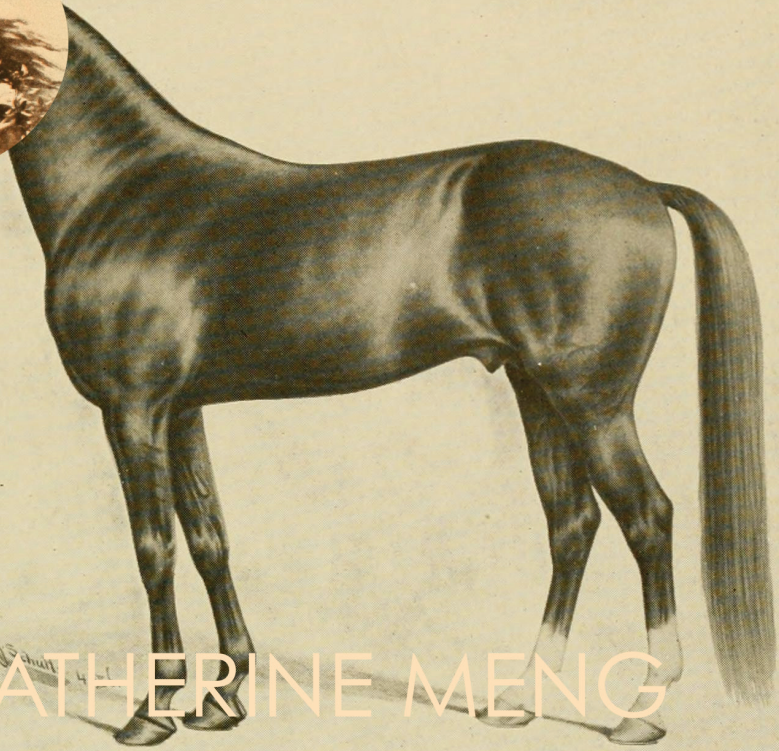
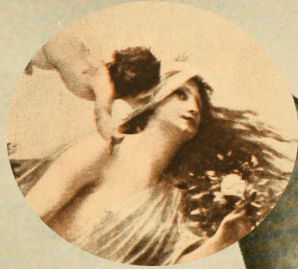
Upon arrival you  
schemed toward the dark  
crumbly hashish that luminous  
color about their faces  
to keep the flies off

So easily acquired yet done with appropriate  
melodrama of any romantic gesture. A little walk  
a little small talk and the hands take  
care of the rest. Isn't it reminiscent  
of wonderful human activity? The world beyond utterance

crashes with carelessness. The hat on a bed, the man  
in a coat. The beach below I never made it to my feet while in contemplation  
of the offense made:

Dear Nick: Dear Nora,  
We drove 500 miles to attend a holiday party only to discover  
we arrived on the wrong date. Thank you for the invitation. Yes, I'll see you for New  
Year's. At the end of the coast is a prize. I've enclosed your share:

\*\*\*



*N. Schmitt 4.1*  
CATHERINE MENG

## GHOST TRANSIT AGAIN

in this life

when thought finds its anchor

the tang roots down & holds steady

wanting these half notes to sound whole

is another kind of want

someone said in parentheses

inside or once before or before the time

we started to walk upright

or know the present as now

so you're outside the apothecary

in a stunned dullness

of new boys

outside the double-paned rhythm

where grace is trapped

& things seem a little strange

as though you're wearing your mother's pants  
a little flutter you might call it  
as the beginnings of world  
leak toward formation  
not a bang but a jog  
as if someone bumped a table trying to get up discreetly  
something startles from mess  
toward a semblance  
holding palms open to the heat of it  
this is a live recording  
& the revving engine  
signifys a bellows we are always  
in & out of  
trussed to that incessant work  
hording any hank of stillness  
where the water of a stream formed from new run off

goes glass

just so

between two stones

amongst all that blurbering & babbling

just so

& you're off the hook forever

in another time

we can assume so much

a clutch of salmon eggs

sway in some new alphabet.



## GHOST TRANSIT

after you've postured  
until your eyes  
glom the middle distance

root down

wipe snot on your cuffs

x out what you'll forget tomorrow

&

come wise to a quadangle idea

apex your exchange

whole-heartedly

see it rise

while the supports fall away

& a sleep scope

begins showing its rubbled under-things  
against a backdrop of what might be brain  
how it runs hot & cold  
to the borders

fleeing

tomorrow there may be snow  
& mirrors

all the forecast can't say or know

I'm fast asleep now

running hard through high fields  
on both sides

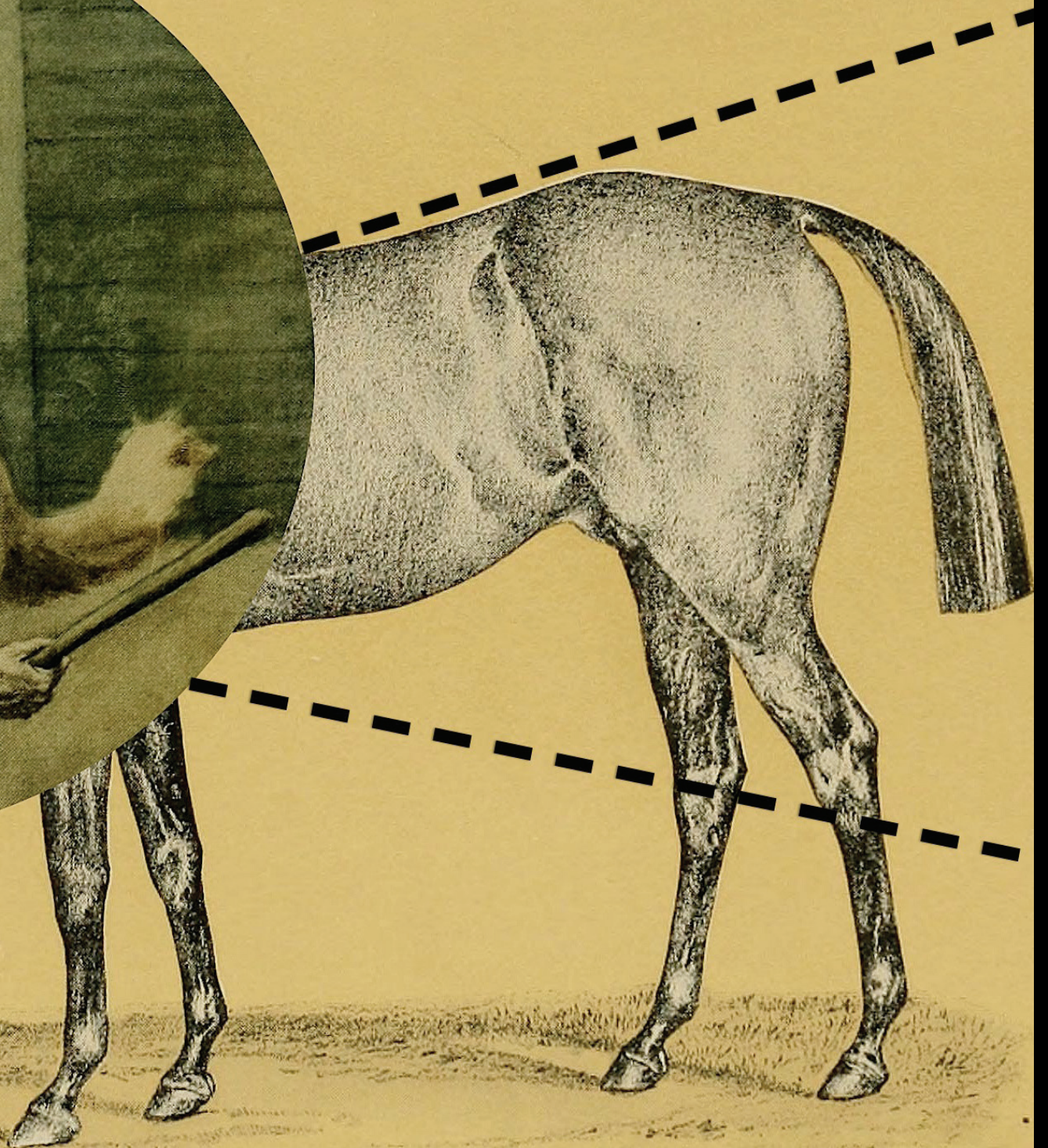
close to the idea of travel  
but inside the expectation

what no longer exists for the babies

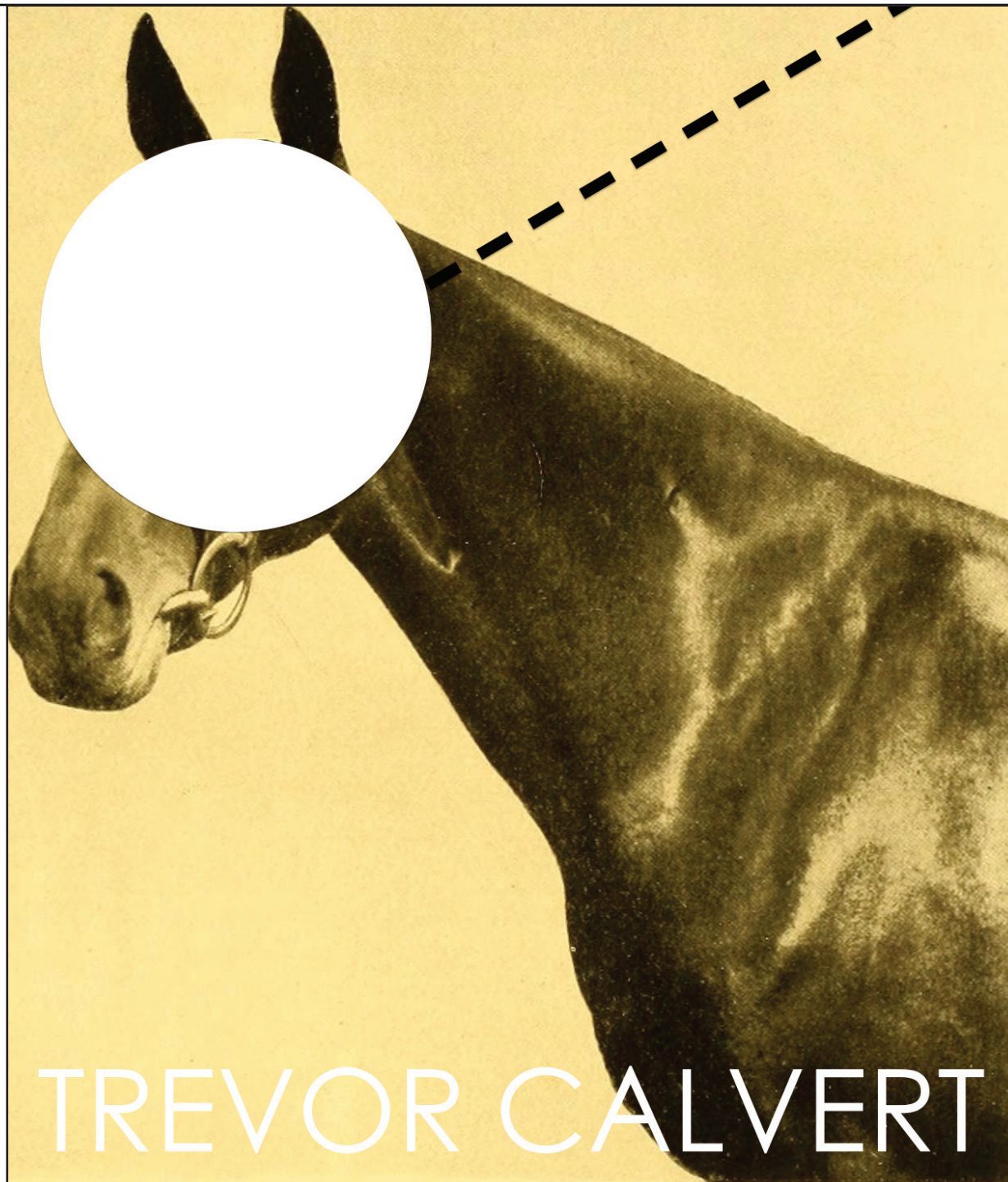
driving & wandering  
beyond the destination  
this is very interesting

an echo coming back  
from the K-mart parking lot your life wandered through  
twenty years prior

& there's a road leading to an abandon pipe organ  
there's always a road  
leading to an abandon something  
if you're looking.



R. T. ...  
1898



TREVOR CALVERT

## **INGRESS, AXES**

A figure waits at a crossroad, segmenting like a chimera, an orchid;  
curving to meet you in your best summer sandals. Here is how to  
imagine our perfect collision: As petals spread open, a pistil emerges,  
offers intimacy, collusion, a corro sive end to the evening. If you accept,  
architecture slips inside each tree-soaked mound, loam crests and  
breaks on concrete, letters are lost to disrepair. This is one version;  
others include a corona of bees, the fondling of difficult names, as if  
to say: O such love cascades, ravishes, that even stars fall to frenzy,  
librarians murder kings. Appeals to savagery chopped from mouths,  
retreat to a naked copse, something much more than abstract.

## WHY AIR WORKS

Equivalent to evolution  
specifically finch,  
hummingbird, beetle,  
dearth of progress  
or modal shift as  
anything we hope rift  
betwixt night and day—  
betwixt mind or else  
an “aesthetic of  
disappearance”  
flutters like wings,  
makes air work;  
our world has sky,  
its word for sky felt  
lungs slow light  
breaking past leaves

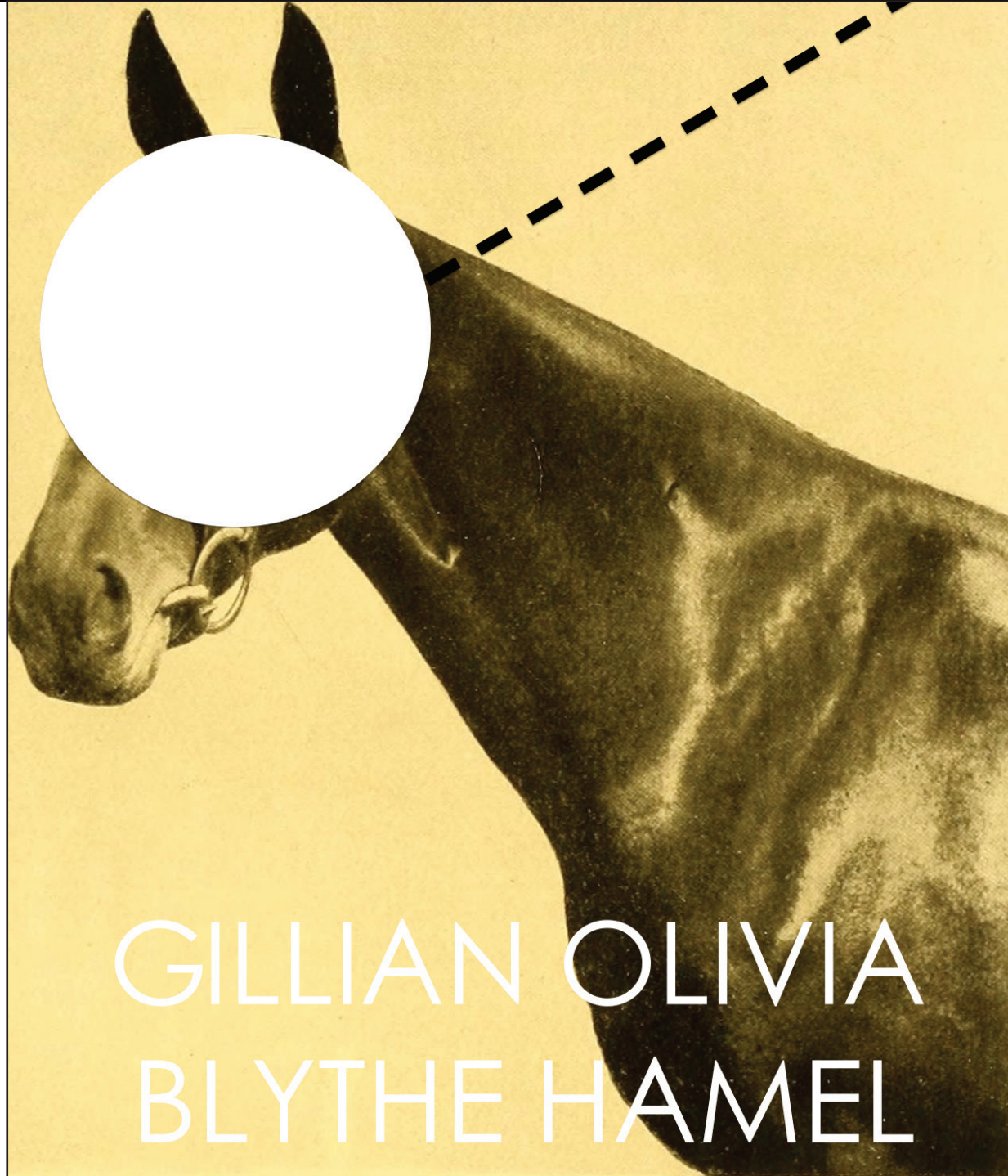
to soil and warmth  
of your hand in mine,  
us in each resplendent  
fere life of my life:  
wax electrical somatic—  
blushed thought  
/ gusseted touch.

## HEMMED BREATH

Look up, cranes  
jostle the horizon  
ambivalently.  
Concrete conflates  
with gravity;  
I maze  
through my  
infatuation,  
through broken  
glass threshing  
baroque so  
lungs work  
magic.  
Final words  
inflate value,  
market a  
meme of sky.



Lift the idea  
of direction  
of North  
(a hustled  
redemption)  
into a book,  
from there  
slap of feet  
running.  
A man's head  
distorts,  
irises to  
his brazen  
glassy eye.  
His lashes flick.  
A place for lips  
to dilate for water,  
a woman mouths  
"tectonic."



GILLIAN OLIVIA  
BLYTHE HAMEL

o

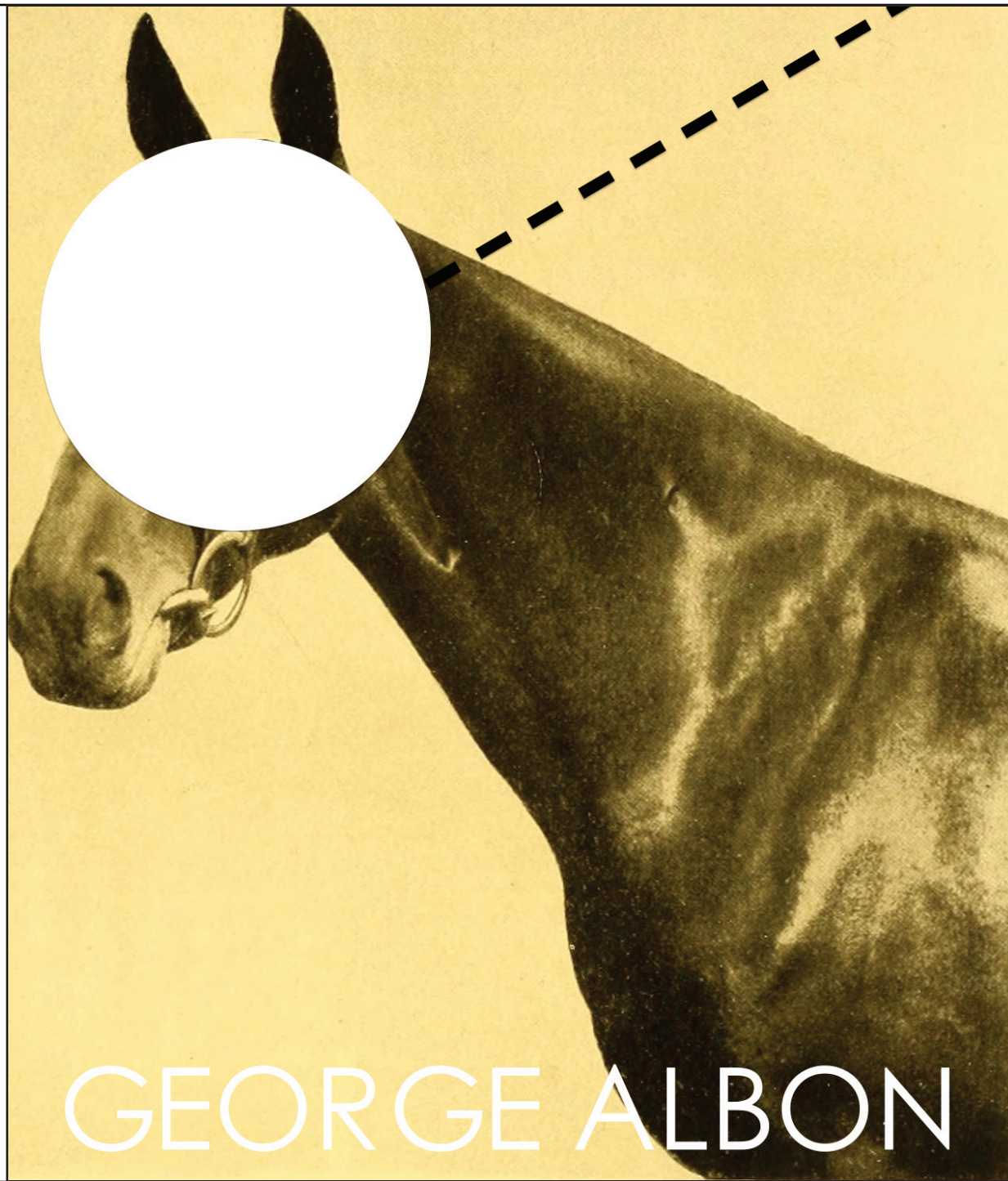
how will I come into the poem and was it me,  
divisionary, from anything in time? time is no  
place for us. my hands made the faceless, or I'm  
faceless, strung together ticking down. darker  
fog to my sight from the roof. wind on the  
pinnacles of. my body knows falling between  
buildings. how I've come into the room on your  
words, which is your room, I for it—what to call a  
presence—a purpose. I fear the unending and  
have no name for it, name all others superfluous.  
name categories of other. I fear my own scent, dismay

o

I as comedy only, effaced—which is to say,  
my face only. where is the prophecy. what's  
behind us. what my language abides as it  
mouths along history. outside the room  
sounds align. yes, history dies. what stands?  
a man broke his arm and my friends  
paint a church. to me day travels so many  
years. in my old room china begins to fall.

o

I dreamed of industry, speculated its geography.  
forethought to marks on the body from metal.  
this a ladder of bodies. the streets uncomposed  
without a body. I an off-coloured stab in the  
colorless—flooding fields. I stab my thumb to air  
and nothing comes down.



GEORGE ALBON

### THE NO-LIMIT AND ITS DISCONTENTS from 3.) Immanence

The back blurb of Poet A's new book says that this work "encompasses the wholeness of a world vision." Poet B's new-book blurb says it "addresses the longing to be at home everywhere." And I once praised Poet C's new book as "a modern-lyric demonstration of the world's endlessness." Phrases like these collect around a certain outlook, one that celebrates poetry practice as allinclusive, pan-disciplinary, capacious. (And not just poetry, of course; the back of a recent pop-psychology book tells us "the universe is limitless, abundant, and strangely accommodating.") That these all-embracing gestures, so generous and benevolent, might reflect nothing more than a maximalizing ethos, and/or a personality *that wants everything, or wants nothing to end*, is an issue that rarely emerges from the enclosing warmth.

When it came time to write down the Zürau aphorisms, Franz K. deviated from his usual scrimp-cramp procedures and made a separate fascicle to contain them, allowing each aphorism a page by itself in which to range. In #98 he says, "The conception of the infinite plenitude and expanse of the universe is the result of taking to an extreme a combination of strenuous creativity and free contemplation." So it was around back then, too. Except he says *taking to an extreme*, recognizing the possibility of contrivance inside this kind of embrace. Parts of ourselves know the proportionateness of universes—they can fit on the head of a pin and also seem extreme.

The healthiest way to have the embrace is to feel its peculiarity—to understand its "boundless" contours as a form of temperament. To know that your look into the cosmic telescope is an invitation for a look back at you, with the complementary shift in perspective, and corresponding judgments.

There are records. And niches that play enormous, enclosing whole lifelines, delimiting whole partisans:

*Roman treehouse.* Stoics, their beautiful beliefs. The importance of friendship, the resolve to do good, the balm of self-coherence. They lived in treehouses, booths wedged up in ceiba trees, whose topmost branches are the largest and sturdiest. They came down for jury duty and such, but knew wherein beat the true communal heart. You could become one yourself but first you'd have

to throw the total estate sale. You'd be living in your mind's rightness, a clear experiencer and a tough nut. Instead of ranks of soft friends there would be a few hard and devoted ones. You would grow to honor the unfolding of your life along its crisp new divisions, lineations you would never have felt had you not switched to the cot. That "the rest" don't understand—what would be our place, our state, if they did?

*"Local Knowledge."* One of the defendants won an appeal because the judge at his first trial did not allow him to "swear by Almighty God, King Rastafari." The appeals court overturned the judge's conviction. It ruled that the form in which the defendant wished "to take the oath was considered with that professed belief declared by him to be binding on his conscience and that would satisfy the provisions of the Perjury Law," the Jamaican system being more open to cultural, ethical, and particularistic considerations. In Jamaica, cases can be judged on their own circumstances and the law's blind ideals put aside. "That side of things is not a bounded

set of norms, but part of a distinctive manner of imagining the real." (Clifford Geertz) William F. Lewis's account of a Rasta trial in his *Soul Rebels* was years after he'd read Geertz on local knowledge but Geertz's work had stayed with him. G's idea is that established notions of justice become unjust without imported notions. The reversal of the original judgment in Lewis's court was a good moment: a norm and an otherness coming into contact with each other

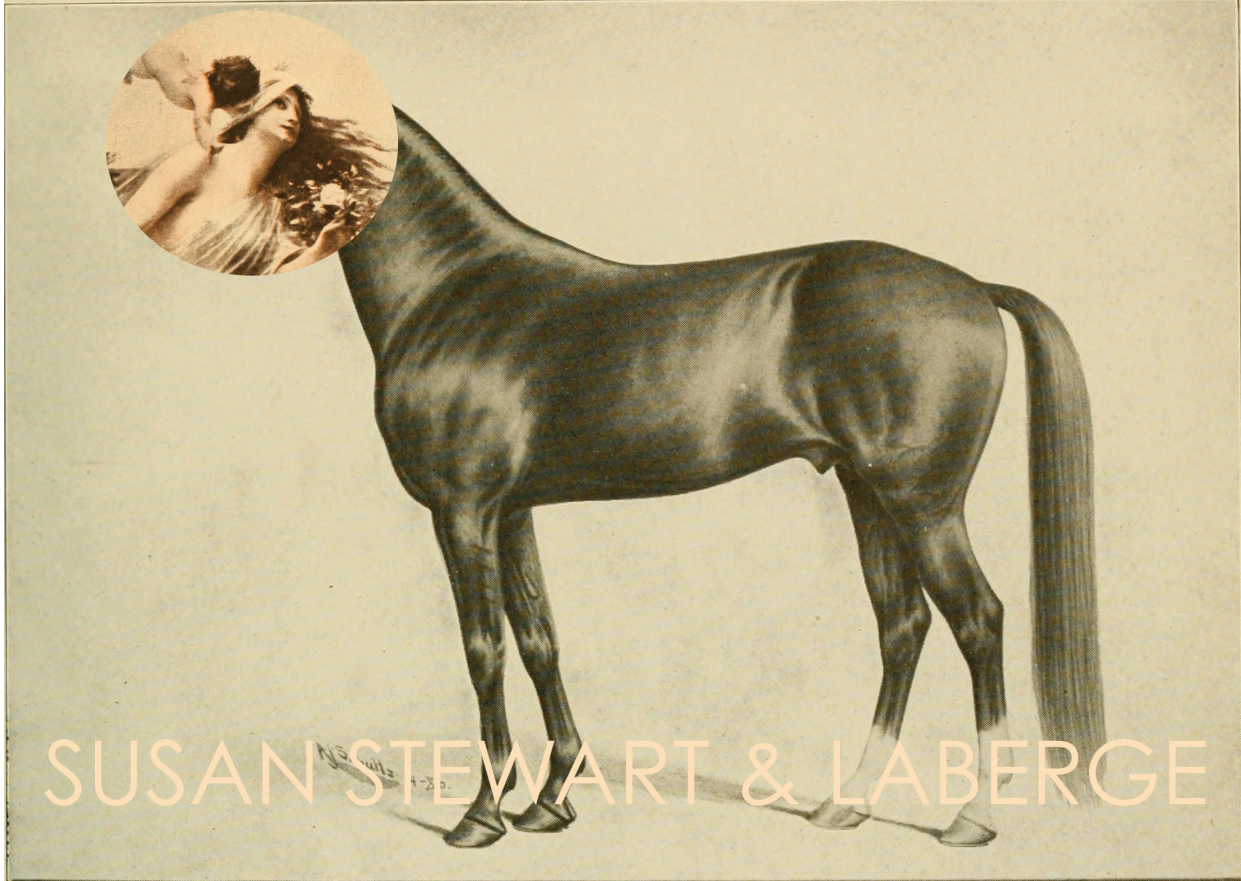
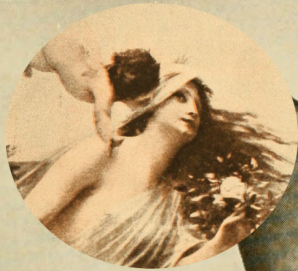


and making a juridical advance. A small win, a victory for a day, but an example that at times the law *can be constructive of social life, not reflective of it*. Cultural progress is always fragile and scattered, and subject to reversals, but it is nice to know that the tonalities of the Different can on occasion alter the invested primaries—nice to know that what seems like universal fixity can bend to versions of the local, *local not just as to place, time, class, and variety of issue, but as to accent—vernacular characterizations of what happens connected to vernacular imaginings of what can*.

*Rich young-looking Pacific Heights fifty-something*. Who just said into her cell, It's summer. Everybody wears a black shift and sandals.

*Adorno*; or, *The Dialectical Fortress*. Theodor A. tells Walter B. the latter's essay on reproducible art should have addressed the fact that, unlike the massproduced object, the one-of-a-kind object provides a dialectical basis for its own critique. An interesting objection, one I can respect. When A. tells B. that his Baudelaire essay "fails to do justice to Marxism because it omits the mediation by the total societal process," I am less interested. A. expected an essay that would "prove most beneficial to the cause of dialectical materialism" and instead got a speculative wonder-work that didn't restrain its fascination with the minute and the unassimilated, a work suggesting that the societal process was bewitching rather than total. But surely this was a normal day for A.? Dialecticians are never surprised, they are only disappointed. A. himself didn't mediate; he kept scrupulously away from the public microphone, from the "marketplace of ideas" whose best discourse could only be irredeemably corrupt. (No jury duty for *this* Teddy.) All was distaste, but luckily all was sunderable. If a capital-warped socius had become pure phantasm, if a particular art was out of phase with the wheel of history, if the jazz in the clubs sounded like advancing armies, or if things in general got too spirited, there was a handy trump—the last word. "Only theory," A. instructed B, "will break the spell."

*Distributive/Collective*. Less an attitude than a distinction between private worlds as felt and groups of worlds as existing. Only a few catch the cigars thrown out from the stage. On the other hand, very few people like cigars. "Comprehension of the concept is distributive, not collective," says the author of *The Fold*. "Monads stand in the same respect to the world as to the comprehension of their concept: each one on its own basis comprises the entirety of the world. Monads are *each* or every one for itself, while bodies are one, some, or *any* . . ."



SUSAN STEWART & LABERGE

**AL:** *Before the poem is a poem, do you find the process, as you describe in 'The Poet's Freedom, one in which within the state of pre-making, pre-conceptual intent thrusts the creation forward, as imagination is in interplay with experience? You described it as "a compulsive, non-cognizable will in beginning art-work." Is it possible to describe this process or state? For example, how it manifests in imagination—it's visual/ auditory nature, etc.?*

**SS:** What I find most interesting about such a state is that it doesn't lend itself to words other than the words of the poem. It's understandable that we often anthropomorphize this giving of breath to the poem—its literal "in-spiration"—as a force outside of ourselves: a muse, angel, ghost, or god. It's been my experience that the force is outside of my conscious will—I can't intend a particular poem before or beyond the process of making it. But I can be in a state of visual and auditory reception—a state alert at once to memory and its haunted present/absences, where rhymes, echoes, and associations proliferate in both sound and meaning—as I turn to work on a poem. From then on, reflection, judgment, deliberation enter in and are just as vital as mood is to what the poem will become. At any phase of writing, there's also of course the "man from Porlock" factor—often I start a poem and it doesn't go anywhere, I forget to turn off the email icon, someone needs something right away. Poets often are accused of mystifying their work when they provide accounts of inspiration, yet, like all artists—and maybe mystics-- we know inspiration when it has come to us. And even if inspiration is rarely realized, its possibility is a spark in itself.

**AL:** *How does the sense of form come to you as you're writing a poem? Is it something you find naturally evolves as you're writing, or through experimentation, or does it derive from more purposeful formal preoccupations?*

**SS:** All of the above. I never think of form without thinking about the words, sentences, phrases, and lines, and sometimes shape or look, that will make the form. Sometimes I have a phenomenon in mind and I look for a received form, or try to create a new one, that will convey, or perhaps counter, it. Sometimes I have a structure, poetic or otherwise, in mind and ask myself what it is "saying." Once I've worked on a poem I often turn to making another poem that might respond to, or develop, or negate it. So writing generates writing, looking and hearing generate more looking and hearing.

**AL:** *You discuss how poetry's "wealth of thought" is distinct from other arts, in that it is less conceptual and more indeterminate, ambiguous, uncertain, and so "opens thought to the intuitions alone of sense impressions and indicates the supersensuous realm of Ideas." How is it that poetry has these capabilities to point beyond the perceptible or experiential—is it the material itself, that language is the medium of*

*intelligibility, or having to do with poetry's insistence on potentiality, on multiplicity and regeneration? And do you feel that this capability or quality is the central quality that contributes to poetry's relationship to philosophy?*

**SS:** Like all artists, poets can work without a strongly pre-determined sense of end or aim. The words of a poem are chosen for myriad reasons, both conscious and unconscious: they come clustered with other words linked to them by association of sound or meaning. Each decision we make as we make a poem leads to other possibilities, other resonances.

There are many connections between poetry and philosophy; nevertheless, philosophers are thinking without any necessary attention to the sound, rhythm, or pulse of their sentences. To my knowledge, they rarely look at their words and arguments as lines. They seek, through reflection and judgment, a heightened self-consciousness and they constantly evaluate the merits of the initial questions they are asking.

I can't speak for other poets, but I find poetic truth to be underlain not by universalism, but rather by a justness of form. If the universal truths of philosophy hold true, they can be paraphrased and adapted in many ways. But a poem cannot be paraphrased. It exists in the right words in the right order and its integrity resides in its own being as much as in any reference it creates.

Meanwhile, the revision process and a consideration of one's entire work involve the kind of reflexive, probing, thinking philosophers often undertake. But there is a somatic dimension to poetic practice that moves the poet's thoughts, as Plato worried, beyond rationality and fixed methods and into domains of felt knowledge.

**AL:** *How does one witness "erring as opening" and reversibility in poetry? By which I mean, how is poetry irreversible? How does error exist—who notes it?*

**SS:** If you are thinking of the passages on "erring" and reversibility in *The Poet's Freedom*, and considering these issues in terms of aesthetics, I would say we don't necessarily "witness" these aspects of art in the abstract: they are part of our reality and part of our understanding of fiction and the imagination. We notice the relation art has to lived consequences in subtle ways when we engage it over our life times: music accompanies our day-dreams; someone behaves like a character in a novel we know well; a line from a poem functions like a proverb; the morality of an action acquires complication and a deeper context; our taste grows and changes along with our reading. And we also notice the consequences when a work ceases to be art and drifts over into sentimentalism, sen-

sationalism, or shock, thereby closing up the space of consideration and meditation.

What we say in a poem and what we say in life have different consequences.. A poem “counts” both more [as a work with some hope of not only moving us in the present, but also reaching strangers in space and time ] and less [it can be fictional; it can be neglected or overlooked or inconsequential in its moment; it can remain unread or unheard and still be a poem].

I think of “erring as an opening” because it admits revision, reflection, and insight. Writing without erring would be a troubling conformism, it seems to me—like watching one’s self become a machine or stripping one’s self of all powers of judgment.

**AL:** *In your poem “The Complaint of Mars, you write “(I am singing, bird-wise, here, the sense of every sentence.)”, which so beautifully speaks to not only a common motif of yours in Red Rover, and other books—that of the singing bird, a.k.a poet—but also the true experience of your writing; there is so often this acute attention to the aural associations (for example, in “Thoughts Made of Wood”-the poem seems to move by means of the words’ sonic relations, and you, really are “singing the sense of every sentence.” How does musicality and singing form your work?*

**SS:** A linguist once told me (and I hope it is true) that when we are concentrating on a word, all the words we know that rhyme with that word come into our thoughts.

The very idea evokes for me an image of a bird perched on a branch and other members of a flock coming to join it.

There’s a long tradition not only of poems about and celebrating birds, but also of poems about poets competing in singing contests with birds—Richard Crashaw’s “Musick’s Duell” and Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” are two that come to mind. Since these are human poems, they make a certain claim about the superiority of human singing when it comes to meaning and permanence. But it’s hard to imagine a poet “winning” on the basis of music alone—we have no syrinx, no ability to sing two notes at once, no collective energy day after day for a dawn chorus, no necessary perpetuation of our local style over generations.

Do you know the wonderful Cornell Ornithology Lab website “All About Bird Song”? Birds sing to establish their dominion over territories and to attract mates. Maybe that is why poets sing as well, but there is a pleasure in drawing words and music together, making them sound for one another, that seems to me to be something in and for itself, and

so singularly human.

**AL:** *I've heard you mention that in the last few books, you seem to have an overarching conceptual focus—childhood/memory, the future, etc., yet it's interesting, as Red Rover, seems to engage multitude of these concepts—from the particular, yet universal pain of one's loss of childhood innocence, to semi-sweeping historical meditations of capitalism, innocence and community. In the section "Games from Children," you seem to utilize these familiar (at least within a sort of general middle class American culture) childhood games and experiences as a framework for deeper analysis, phenomenological study of human experience. These meditations were so interesting in that they defamiliarize these experiences, or maybe, rather, magnify the affective and sensory intensity and complexity of these "Childhood Games," and also they seem to reflect upon the socializing mechanisms that these games fulfilled. You see, I myself am using the past tense, because the subject nature is so universal, but also clearly personal for anyone who has had these experiences. For example, "King of the Hill" meditates on the dichotomy between the "below" and "above" words, the danger in the desire of "above" as inherent in "above" is power, harm, and movement from the idyllic, communal "meadow." There is this aching for an ideal love before harm, wherein reason is inherently tied to truth—is this a sort of philosophical working out of a form of love that is lost in our socialization? How did you conceive of this poem, or better, what do you think you were thinking/sensing through/towards?*

**SS:** Thank you for taking the time to sort through so many aspects of *Red Rover*. I'm not sure I can address all of the issues you bring up here, but, yes, I do have a focus for each of my books of poems: the structure emerges gradually out of the process of writing individual poems and sets of poems. *The Forest*, for example, relied heavily on Abraham and Torok's psychoanalytic theory of trans-generational haunting, I was interested in exploring the knowledge of public and personal history that we receive through language alone—i.e. not through our own experience, but through accounts across generations. The dominant forms were legend and chronology with their corollary issues of authenticity and order. I wrote the book in a strange way: to make a long story short, I threw away the first full draft and rewrote the poems from memory and then created commentaries on them that I incorporated into the book's structure—there I also tried to create connections between poems and sections.

In *Columbarium* I wanted to write a "classical" or symmetrical, highly structured, book. I turned to the georgic tradition and looked at the made world within an abecedarium. I then "wrapped" the poems with meditations on the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water. *Columbarium* is both a Virgilian book and an anti-Virgilian (pre-Socratic) book in the sense that I wanted to "translate" some of Virgil's georgics and also write "shadow georgics" for my own time that would transmit uncertainty and flux as much as knowl-

edge and stability.

*Red Rover* was designed to follow as my “medieval” book and I took the dream vision as my paradigmatic form. I also was interested in using pre-Renaissance [pre-single point] techniques of perspective. The book’s overall dynamic between love and war, Venus and Mars, stems from Chaucer’s writing and the account of Manichean thought in de Rougemont’s book, *Love in the Western World*. I saw so many patterns of attraction, repulsion, erotic tension, scapegoating, tribalism and more in the simple socialization of children’s games. These were all games from my own childhood—and it sounds like you know them, too. When my work has been translated into other languages the game poems and the title of the book pose problems since games are so wonderfully local. My Italian translator had to give up and call the book *Red Rover* in Italian, too. I enjoyed looking for or creating poetic forms for each game. I knew I wanted “King of the Hill” to be a double sestina, for the game’s weird and futile allegory of power relations seemed so well-suited to the feeling of blockage and the return of the repressed that the sestina always evokes in me.

**AL:** *“Tag” is so gorgeous in its simplicity, its repetition with variation, in how it mimics the game, yet signals much more profound tensions between physical touch, home, boundaries, time, and isolation/ alienation. Likewise, “Red Rover” in its conceptions of permission and perception. These poems demonstrate such a mastery of sound, concept, line, rhyme, ambiguity and play-given this mastery of poem-making, how do you/ do you deem your poems as “successful”? What is next with your poetry work?*

**SS:** Your thoughts are very generous. I never feel my poems are successful: the main thing is to be dissatisfied enough to want to make/read more and satisfied enough not to bore the reader or despair. Sometimes my poems need the help of other poems to work, so I feel lucky to be able to write books. Since *Red Rover*, I have been working quite a bit with narrative forms. Narrative never interested me until a few years ago when I realized there were ways of using it beyond plot teleology to open up layers of time. I didn’t want to turn to irony alone; nevertheless, using some of the retrospective revising power that irony suggests appeals to me. My next book will be *Cinder: New and Selected Poems* with Graywolf Press. The new poems have this largely narrative focus and I re-ordered poems from my earlier work to see which seemed to stand alone. At the same time I am working on a book of new work that will, I hope, include a long poem.

**AL:** *In The Poet’s Freedom, you discuss the cycle of the metaphor, as it regenerates and creates “new entities,” then eventually “dies” and insomuch allows for new meanings and “new metaphors.” Octavio Paz wrote of translation, “Translation and creation are twin processes. On the one hand, as the works of*

*Baudelaire and Pound have proven, translation is often indistinguishable from translation; on the other, there is a constant interaction, continual between the two [languages], a continuous, mutual enrichment.” Do you find this to be the case in your translation of Italian poetry? Has the engagement indeed enriched and reinvigorated your language, creating “new entities”?*

**SS:** Translating has given me a pause from my own work and I am sure that working so closely with others’ texts, trying to recover their intentions, learning about the traditions behind their work, and striving to make English poems that are close to their worlds has influenced my reading and writing. I haven’t found translation to be indistinguishable from creation, as Paz indicates, for there is a belated or delayed quality to making a translation and it is possible to use that distance in time productively in making the English work.

**AL:** *What brought you to translation? How did you decide on the particular translation projects that you chose, as they indeed differ in their willingness to reveal, overtly, the maker of the poems?*

**SS:** I don’t consider myself a professional translator in any way. I translated Alda Merini—and, more recently, some of Proust’s poems for the new Penguin edition of his work—by myself, but in those projects I consulted with native speakers and I have become involved in making translations for the most part out of friendship. I enjoy collaborating on translations—working with co-translators and in the case of Milo De Angelis with the living poet himself. It’s a pleasure to read so closely with friends and to go deeply into the qualities of our native languages and make new works together.

**AL:** *What distinct struggles do you find in translating versus making poems?*

**SS:** Of the languages I have studied formally—French, Italian, and German—only Italian is part of my everyday life through correspondence and conversation. And I am not truly fluent in any other language, for I have only studied languages from my adolescent years forward. Further, it is a challenge to enter into the writing process of the other person, to have a sense of his or her range of diction, moods, sense of closure—to have an intuition of the concerns and degree of formality of the poet’s world.

Alda Merini was very ill and I met her only once in person, an experience I describe in part in my introduction to my translation. At that time she gave me permission to translate a selection of her work and she suggested the title *Love Lessons*, which worked very well. She had endured a great deal of mental suffering over the course of her life. I admired her work because of its distance from my own and because of the role she played



in contemporary Italian letters. I did not feel a personal identification or affinity with her life and poetry; that would have been somehow preposterous, given who she was, and there was a dark core to her work that resisted my understanding. In the case of Milo's work, Patrizio Ceccagnoli and I have come to know his sensibility well and I find we can intuit the kinds of words, sentences, allusions that can convey his Italian into English. I think Milo is one of the most important poets of our time and I am glad Patrizio and I have been able to join the ranks of his translators.

In answering your question, I find I am resorting to abstractions: maybe the distinct struggle of translation is understanding translation. I know I am more interested in practicing translation than "theorizing" it.

**AL:** *You've said that poetry can be seen as a counter against regimes that abuse language, and note Shelley's belief in poetry's potential to be "a counterforce against overconsumption," and something some of my aesthetic allies and I have been discussing recently is the emergence of sects of poets who seem to preferentially utilize language of commodity, efficiency, pop culture, technology, yet without the impulse to reinvigorate or assimilate said language for alternate potentialities beyond the placement of such language within the bounds of a poem's formal dimensions. What are the effects of "useful" language-language of commodity & technology being infused in poetical forms without a seeming awareness of its indexicality?*

*May these contingents simply be "interventions in the figure of the artist and not in poetic form itself" as Schiller addressed, who then "fall into emptiness?"*

*This also speaks directly to the role of exclusivity, the editor and the critic. Is there a loss of quality in work when inclusivity and accessibility take precedence? Do you see a shift in the functionality and significance of the editor in critic in contemporary poetry?*

**SS:** In your opening comments here, you seem concerned with practices of appropriation and the use of found language. Poets using this technique—a legacy of Duchamp's ready-mades, ultimately, and popular in visual art practice in the 70's especially—are ironists and I think irony can do some good in a society of unthought enthusiasms.

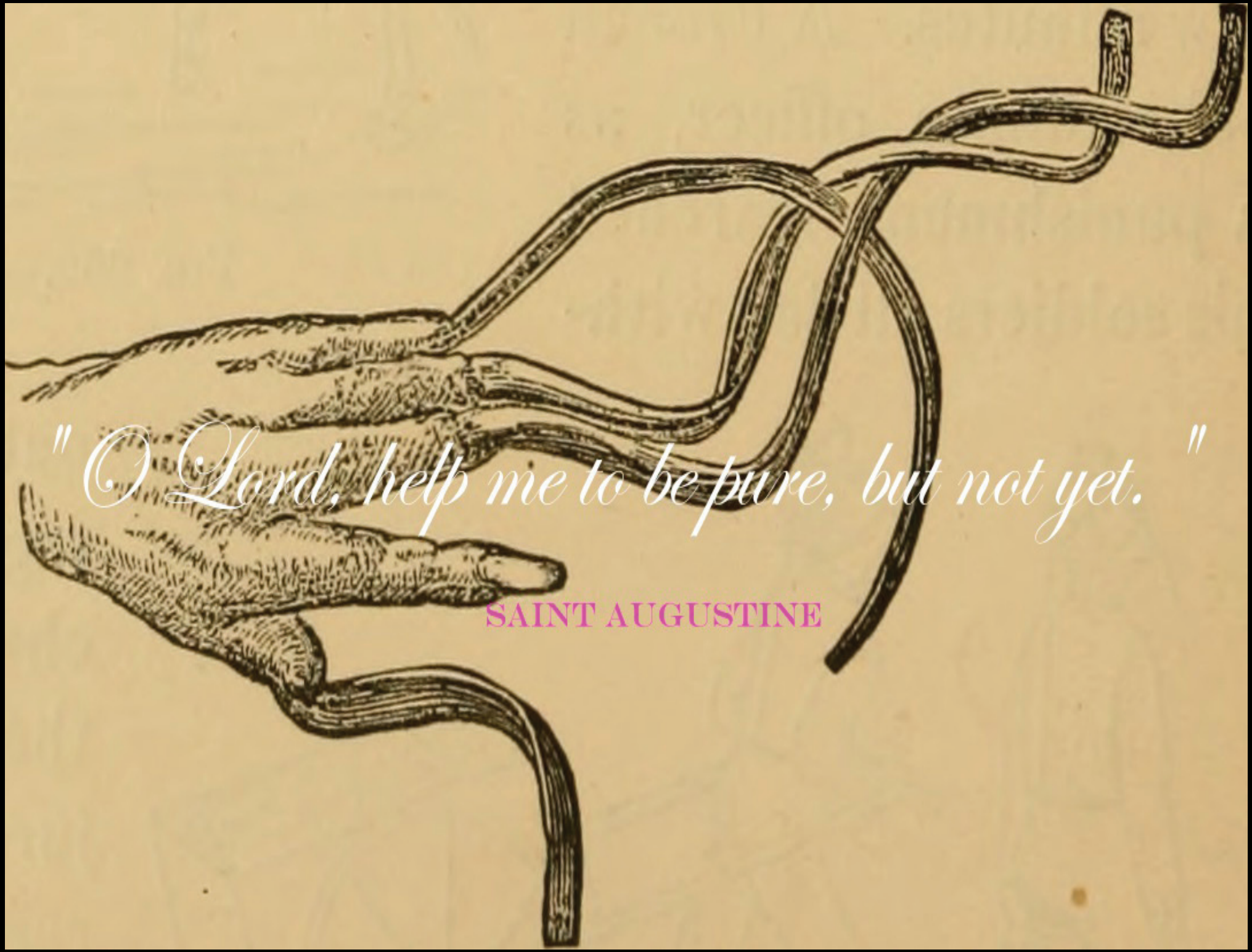
Even so, Duchamp made us see a urinal as something exquisite, don't you think? Same with Richard Tuttle's "rope" pieces. This vein of appropriation art went beyond the framing brought about by the artist—such framing seemed a first step in a more intense relation to vision and form; the viewer beheld the overlooked object and the artist withdrew from the scene. Forty-five, or even a hundred, years later, we still are making "found" art or works created by appropriation and reframing. It intrigues me that poets

doing this kind of work advertise themselves as “experimental” or “innovative.” Individual works need to be discussed and judged as individual works, but overall I’m struck by the sentimentality and “retro” mode of such work. It has a Rip Van Winkle quality that may be an under-explored aspect of its pleasures.

We’re surrounded by a near-hysteria regarding technological novelty. Many people now seem to have an instrumental and/or virtual relation to language, learning, knowledge, friendship, love, and experience in general. So it’s not surprising that some artists and poets have an instrumental relation to their practice. Appropriation art dreams, too, of the ready appropriation of the artist by the popular culture, a kind of homeopathy of novelty taken up by novelty. To be the latest! To gather “likes”! Didn’t Andy Warhol cover this ground very well?

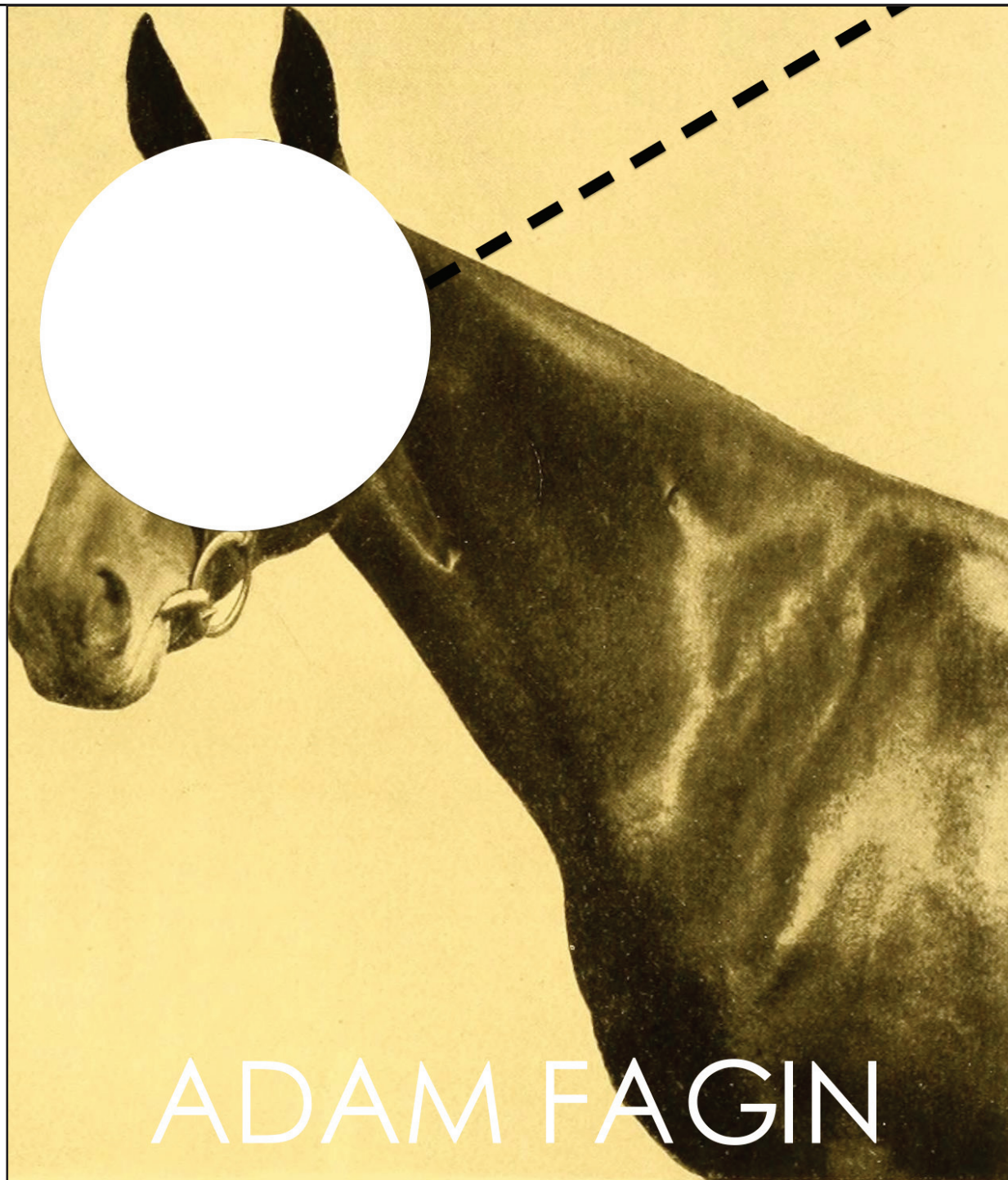
**AL:** *You’ve written about the ability of art, and poetry to clarify, as a “means of discovery,” and clarification of our relationship to nature, do you find this is the case with your work—do you see your poetry as a means to work out philosophical questions? Is the discovery and/or clarification something that is intelligible?*

**SS:** Yes, I find that, even given the differences between poetry and philosophy we have brought up above, poetry indeed shares so many concerns with philosophy. To draw on something I once wrote about this relation, I would say that traditional philosophical questions of knowing, the problem of an exterior world, the limits of materiality, the nature of organic life, the relation between the soul and the body, the possibility of liberty, the perspective of other minds, the origin of Being, the existence of God—all have been central not only to the themes of poetry, but also to its methods. We could reframe this list readily from the perspective of poets, for poets, too, have been preoccupied with the subject/object problem; the representation of nature; the materiality of language; the organic sources of form; the therapeutic and spiritual benefits of a practice of poetry; the bounds of traditions and the possibilities of free creation; the intelligibility of poetry for those who receive it; and a sense of ultimate purpose in creation.



*" O Lord, help me to be pure, but not yet. "*

SAINT AUGUSTINE



ADAM FAGIN

## **AFTER THE BRIDE**

Again and again the empty zone of  
the present is introduced into the mind.

We seem to enter Halley's St. Helena or Barthes' Tokyo: 'whose center is no more than an evaporated notion subsisting...not in order to irradiate power, but to give the entire urban movement the support of its central emptiness.'

Here vision becomes a word 'more spacious than the heavens,' but to see is epidemic, a disease eliminating border and threshold, map and route, opposing energies, as Rauschenberg seems to contend, that coexist on an infinite plane of lapses, fragments, impressions and tattered representation without chronology.

Beneath the dream of the visible, I adheres to and includes its erasure.

Light is heaped on a totemic silence;  
and goldleaf avenues dissolve in the cloaked  
temporalities of commerce and affect.

*Elm Street; Shadow Lane; Echo Place—*

Even our durations have durations.

Till the spine of language tilts to meet,  
within the heart of space, a vision of itself,  
that vision is lost for an eternity:

*How can the heart become a locus wild as flame?*

*How could the body be its throne?*

It is absence, then, which the gaze—father, son and transubstantial geography—must  
consecrate—a landscape so thick with reference it is almost invisible to the naked eye.

We stand with time therefore like the mother of god.

## THE WHOLE (SURROUNDED ON ALL SIDES)

And if the voice is one voluptuous anger,  
  a flash of sun,  
  an idle threat,

we learn to rephrase the silences.

In looped grasses,  
in desolate facades.

In civic virtue and  
civil disguise.

In tiered notions of ownership  
and prosperity, we stockpile danger  
and a tone-deaf Romanticism,  
constructing new and resurgent  
genres of defeat.

Our rage is ultraviolet: beautiful, lucid, and afraid.  
Our syllables unthread their pronouncements.

  Moving in fits and circles,  
  in landscapes that loiter and interlude,  
  concentric and overlapping,

  they brandish all outcomes,  
  cleft palate and brocade moon.

Maybe we're made of such distances,  
which can only be remarked on  
or observed at an even further remove—



as if to be human was a rumor,  
an overheard thing.

When we say *tomorrow*,  
we therefore mean its refusal.

We mean we love the sound of night crossing into history,  
crashing into darkness.

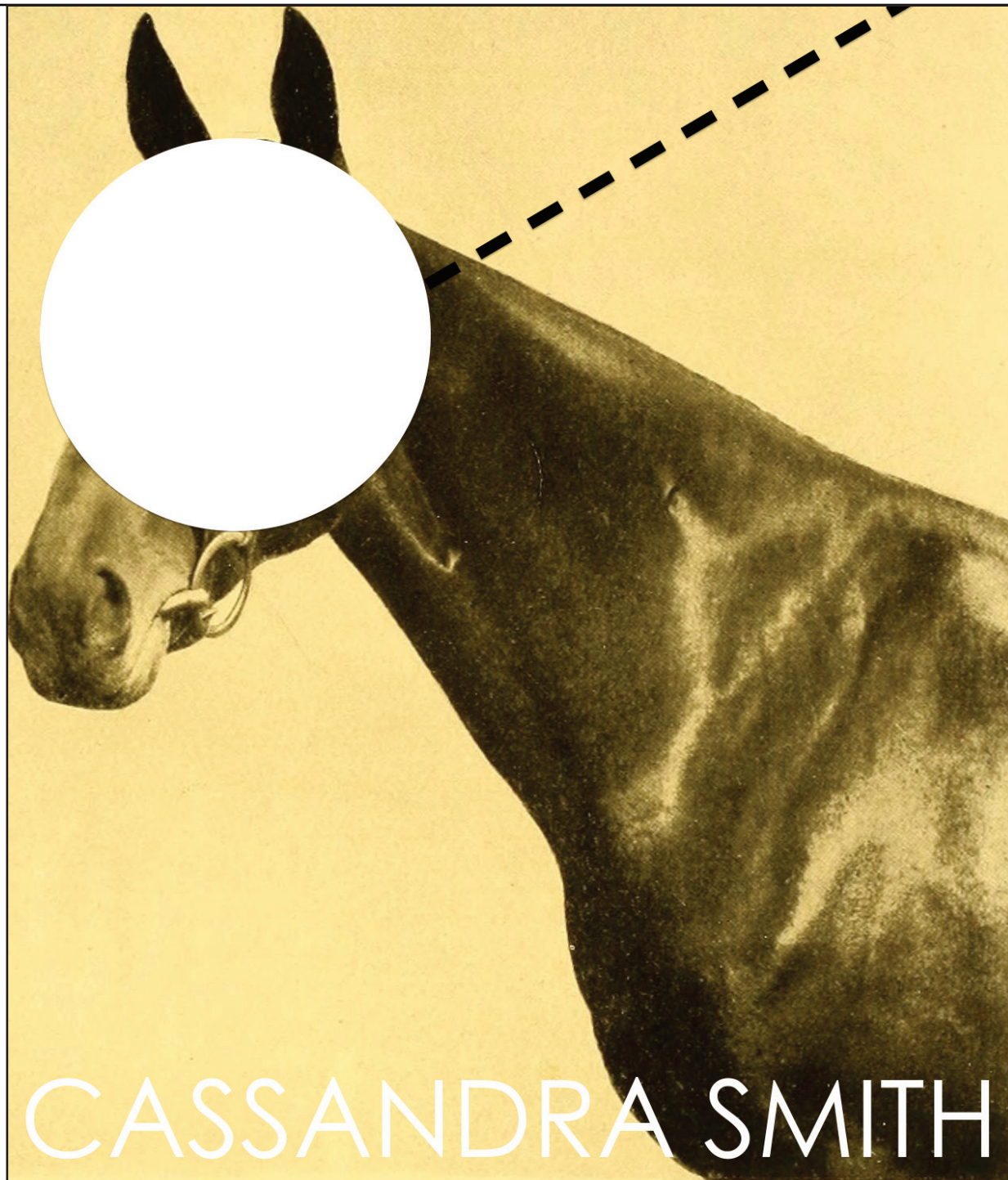
When city's secret names  
pour from the quiet tongues of passersby,  
the space between speech and breath  
is collapsed into powerful metaphysical  
speculation—and in the passage of time  
becomes the mind's waking surface.

When we say *time*,  
we therefore mean *exile* .

We mean to the extent that the city is visible  
it is also inconceivable.

Becomes verse chorus verse.  
Becomes little runaway.

True rhyme begging its disaster for one more night,  
one more morning light to love to hate to love.



CASSANDRA SMITH

brotherstalker when we met i played a small accordion it was darkness as  
we walked.

brotherstalker your wrists were so thin your legs were so thin your blankets  
also so thin you built me a nest i slept in without you.

brotherstalker you would take me to mountains we would walk them we  
would run the creeks we would sit in a room you would show me what it  
was like.

brotherstalker i had a man's hat you wore you stretched out the lining of  
this my softest man's thing to wear you had wanted to wear this my man's  
thing so badly.

brotherstalker my hips were always too large to fit into you your thin legs  
your brown pants your brown pants i had only wanted to wear your brown  
pants without you.

brotherstalker your pants were frayed on where to walk on them.

you were hard of listening hard of paths, hard of how to where the chorus  
where the croon,

where the firming whistle, where the end.

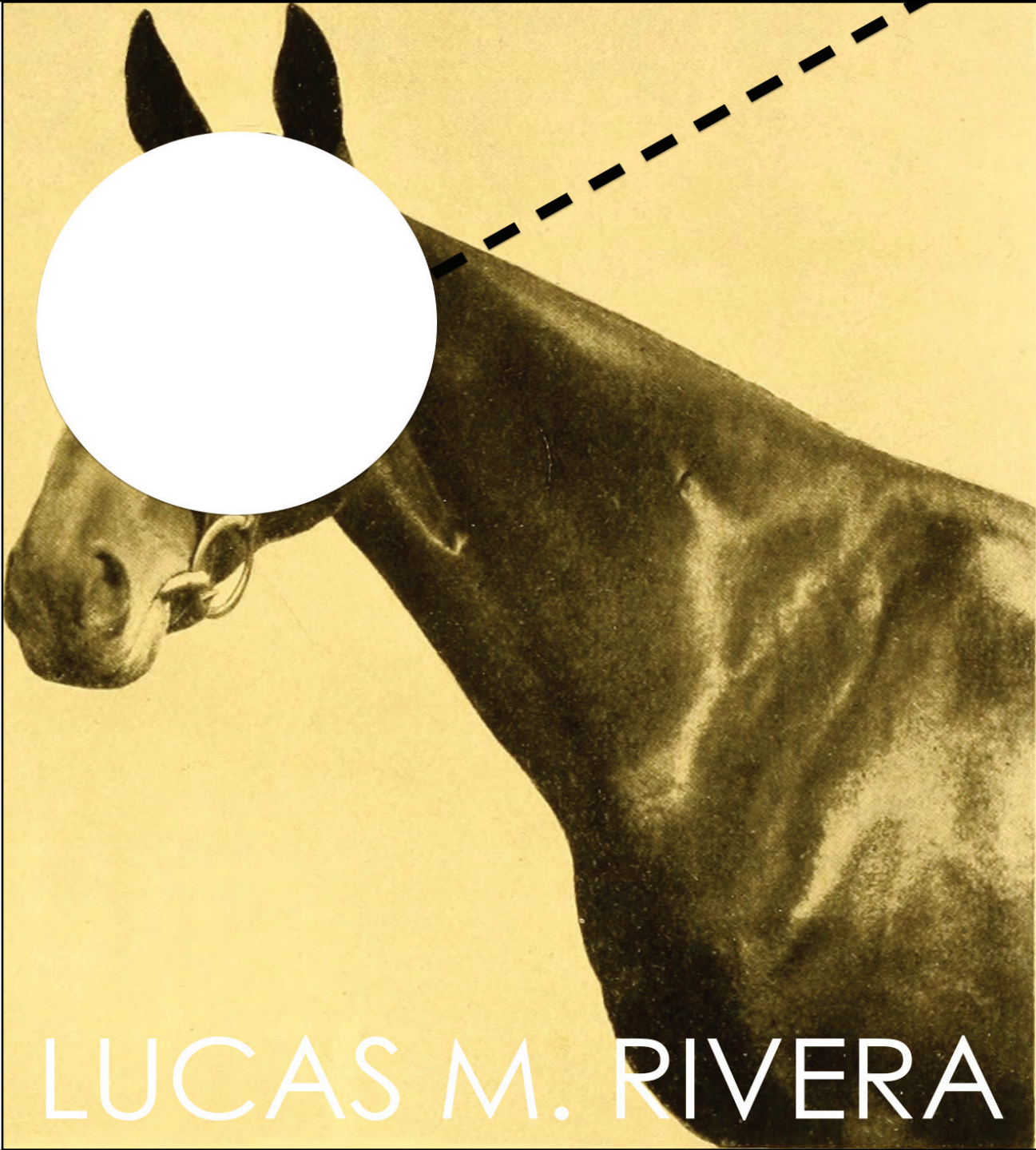
brotherstalker you would watch us in skirts and want us in skirts and repeat  
this wanting of more and

more green.

brotherstalker your first girl your first loverbrothersister had died of trees  
in her smallest green shirt in this the woods the falling limbs the falling  
trunk the tent.

brotherstalker your loverbrothersister your this your name on a boy we had  
known had had his sister's name engraved.

brotherstalker our brotherloverdead in our skin the roots our mud this  
running down the mountain.



LUCAS M. RIVERA

**THE BOOK OPENS BY PLACING A BURNING STONE IN LENI  
RIEFENSTHAL'S CHEST ONLY TO FIND THAT THE NAMES  
SEWN WITHIN ARE FALSE AND LEAD US TO AN EMPTY ROOM**

*"every entry, you/ write, is invisible."*

-GUSTAF SOBIN

The question allows pages to turn indirectly back  
into sterile huts which we mistakenly  
call houses.

At the edge of the house an upright  
mouse dances.

After the same, an untamed animation  
burns in a cold conflagration.

Was that today's tango or simply determined  
light?



## THE QUOTIDIAN ROSE

One meets another on a dusty road.

Another holds a burning chandelier and screams.

Elevations are lit by day-light, however belated they may be.

Then the place—then the ashes—then the names.

After nightfall, the feeling of death came.

Panthers made cuts in the ground, though that's hardly believable.

I ran back, only to find that something black was spilt and that you were someplace else,  
singing to the desperate crowd.

I could hardly see their faces but the light gave delicate traces.

A blind god pushed on, his word a bludgeon.

But I've seen the red and all the rest.

I don't need to pick up life from the unkind ground—sick as I am, sick, as you'll become.

This is where it'll happen, where all is ground.

And a bull made those cuts, likely.

You can't throw your arms around him or let your mind wander in Brothel Music .

Simply, allow it to be stolen—vanishings roaring in the dark.

Questions of money will be asked, like nude forms falling to the floor.

## A WANDERING DEBORAH

A minute edge—bound by its agate handle—cast out—to be picked up again—by your glinting watch—not so much grasped, as held—held close—as two broken pieces of glass could pierce a screen—or how Virginia might or might not be a state of things—in which houses hoard a cylinder—filled with a rose colored water—gradually dissolving.

*“The mind—free—only to beget departure—from Holy body—yet it is—forcing this comfortable pattern—persuasive and temporary—an unremitting instruction—proscribing confidence upon him—called to profess this common right—that tends to corrupt—the worldly criminal—neither innocent or dangerous—which destroys all sentiments of others—with time enough for its break—against truth left to herself—she the proper error—disarmed of her ceasing support—his body all the same—no ordinary law—yet we are asserted—passed to narrow act—an infringement.”*

**HURRIED TO THE PHONE/CRIED IN PANIC**

A

vision

of

sparkling

skin

and

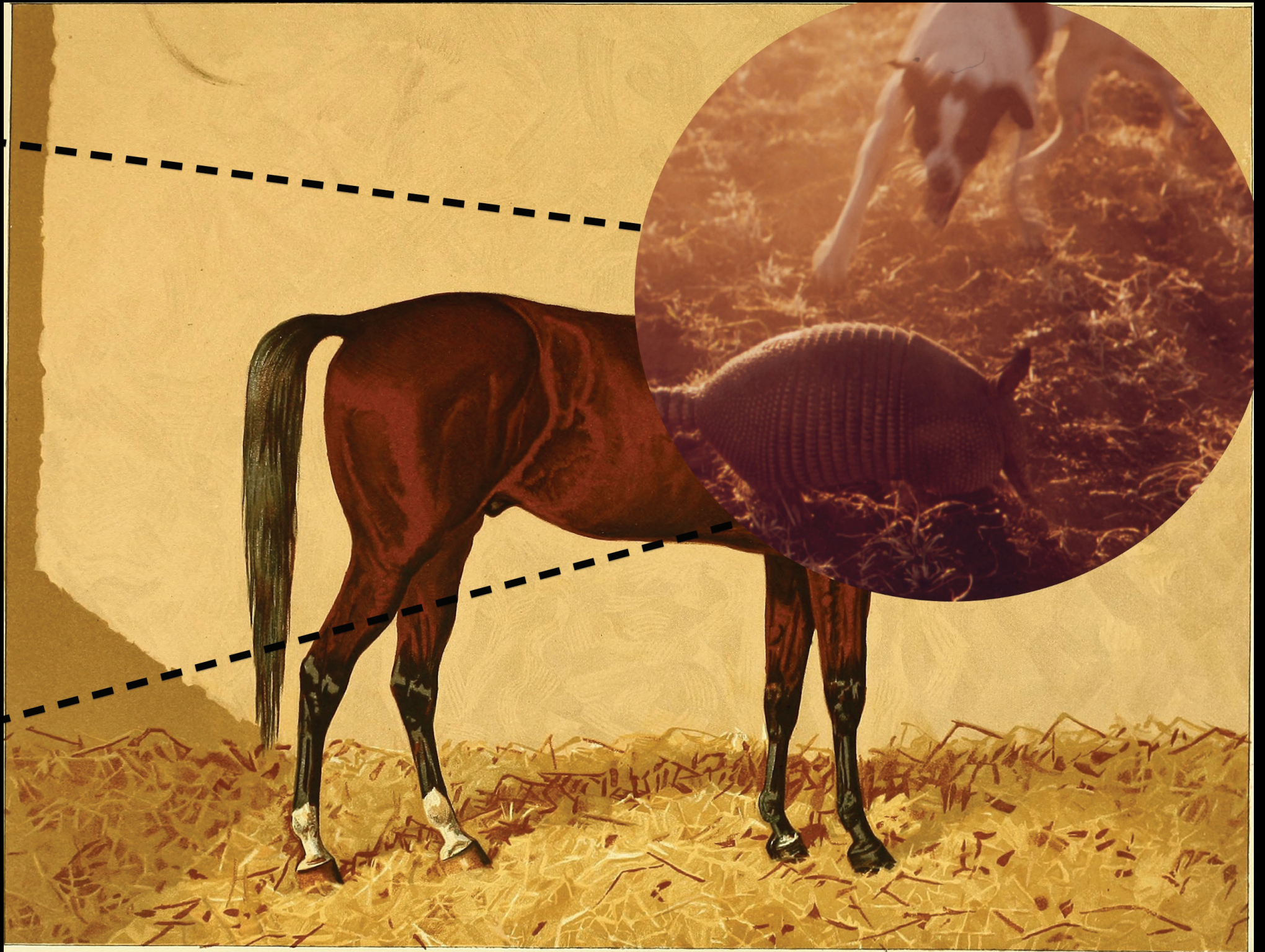
glass

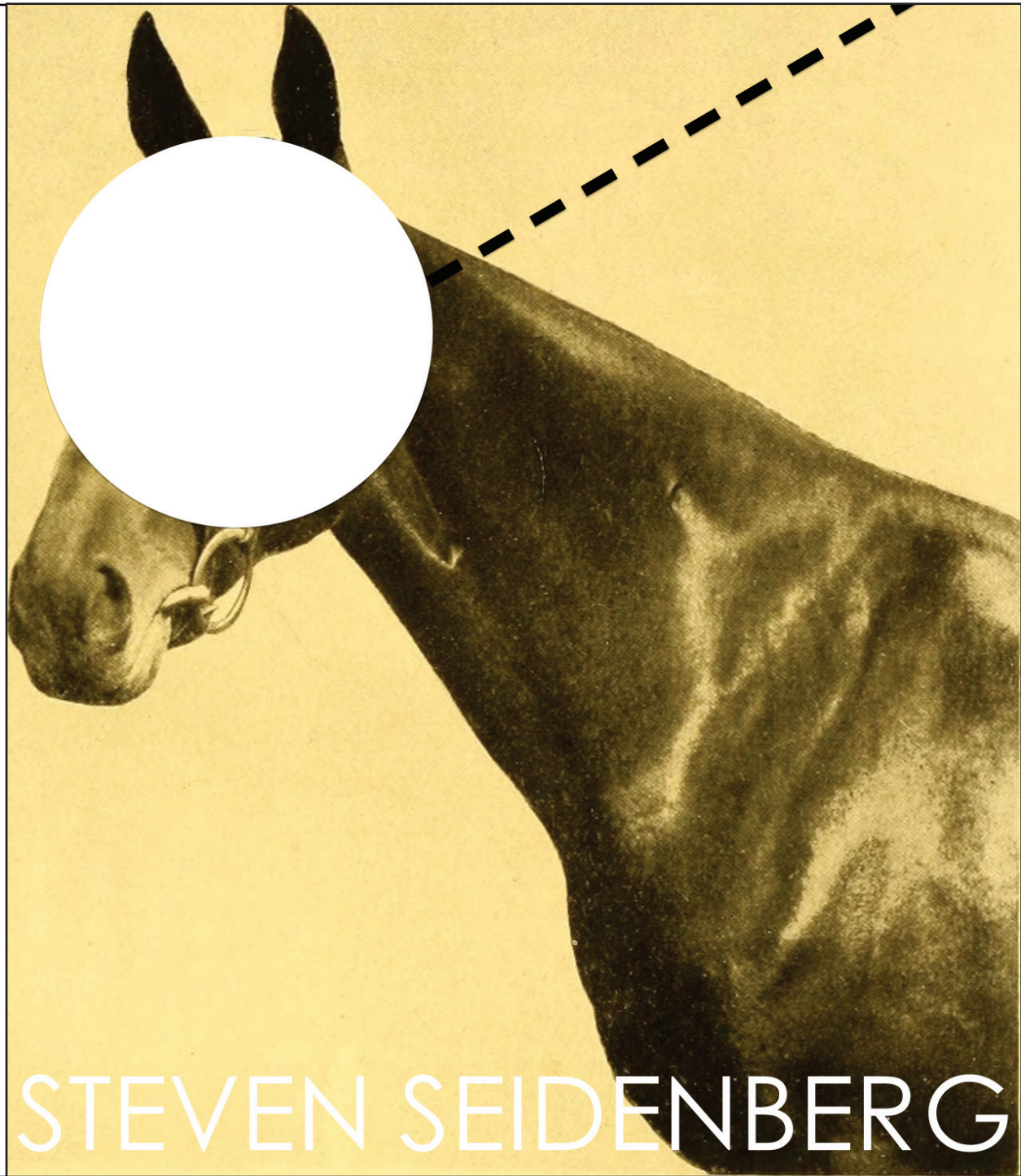
sculpture

arrived

by

enmity.





STEVEN SEIDENBERG

## SINK/SWIM

I

Our bestial torrent  
is a desert of beginnings,  
on the threshold of advancement  
it presents the *idée fixe* of yet  
another final start.  
There is no way to unendure  
the day that passes into evening,  
as though some vacant pneuma  
could eviscerate the dusk.

Cure your song of thirst  
to vanish,  
Cut your pupils gray  
across the cringing vault—

II

Master of beacons,  
I chanced to discover  
the maw of your night  
as though it were speechless.  
It was my mistake.  
Now, having already  
proffered the question,  
the answer can only  
be given to those  
in the know to begin with  
or helpless to ask—

### III

The lips of the welkin  
pricked bloody by halving  
the squall at its verges  
and falling away  
from the sun are awake now,  
rapaciously slurring  
the spittle that passes  
for judgment, and settles for rain.  
We proffer our predators  
sated with ballads,  
we pattern our carrion  
shyly depraved,  
the lips are awake now,  
the song is rephrasing,  
the throat sprouts with fissures  
and burgeons with prey—

### IV

The mistake was in thinking  
the drudge of assemblage,  
the rubric of advent  
already routinely  
exact, though a survey  
of members extended  
would render the strata  
distinct from its margins,  
and render the margins  
a sort of substantive,  
a thing, as it were,  
of the past—

V

Already undergoing  
the transition out of oneness  
into oneness  
you are stranded in transition  
from the brink of tidal shallows  
to the void of sand.  
Alluvial gasp, you siphon  
the difference of difference,  
an onslaught enjoined  
to dissemble  
the dream of the passage,  
the water's retreat—





N. Schultz 4-86

EMILY VOGEL



## **In Brief**

The winter exhales itself into our automatic blood.

Existence rails softly like the eternal sea, distant  
and for lack of regard.

The eternal pedestrian, eternal filthy dish,  
eternal and ruthless snowdrift.

Eternal beard, cut of tooth, eternal derriere of infant.

Eternal bleeding of words, murder of universe.

Existence might be the love that pulls on us  
like a train car, slow parade, planet as predicted,  
the meticulous in and out of needle and thread,  
suffocating seamstress.

But existence is also the strangling of winter trees,  
the indelible presence of you or me—  
in rooms like enlivened mausoleums,  
the dead rising like a swarm of so many orgasms,

each cardiac arrest of word-wrought missiles.

Breathing is sometimes like a very strange fucking.

At night you lie beside me: clustering of stars,  
your skin like all suggestions of fire.

Sisyphus, in an absurd passion for obedience,  
devotion of unrelenting travail, for lack of noose  
or suicidal abandon.

The soul, coughing up its Holy phlegm.

I think I am looking at you, imagining idyllic milieus,

God willing, God proceeding like a terrible truck on I-88.

I think that I imagine a plummeting into otherness—  
legs flailing like game shows, hair caught  
in the teeth.

Our children then sleep like strange legumes,  
their tiny chests rising and falling

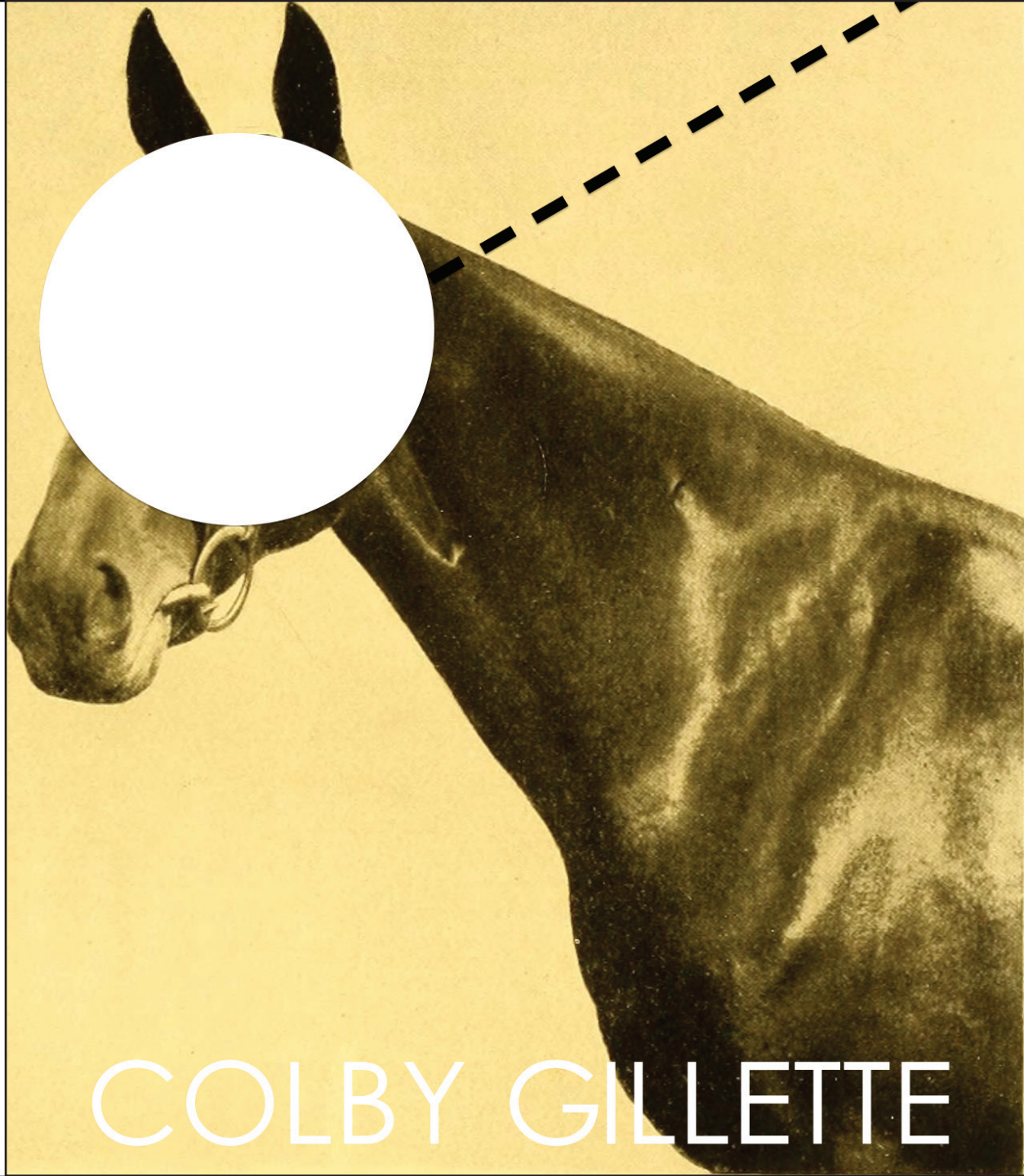
like fields in torrential storms: somewhere I've been,  
and also haven't been—

and how they rush through me  
like the mind's elapsed minute—then hoarded,  
then thrown to the hearth for kindling  
in fits of sublimated joy, the cacophony of voices  
like open graves, imagining themselves  
into exclusive histories. To our children though—  
spring is the vaguest promise, maybe,  
and as briefly as a star.

## **the hour**

the hour no man  
could rouse the sleeping  
metaphor of a beast  
traverses as the hour  
that woman  
becomes the winter air  
like arbitrary  
patterns of snow  
and the insufferable  
tick of a clock  
like wild weeds:  
where the mind  
wants to locate itself  
the cold solitude  
of the shore  
a grand literature  
of things  
and the roaming eye

of the mind  
prior to  
the hard and jagged chaos  
of what forges  
as the hour  
then turns  
inevitable as circumstance  
superimposed  
upon the shifting parade  
of time  
and look  
the heart wants to rest  
in the shade  
roam like the shuttering  
of the August sun  
children's voices aloft  
and you are sad  
glad to be a dream  
of your own life



COLBY GILLETTE

## NOCTURNE

all night grass spills rabbits  
climb in their throat  
green and growing in traffic  
a light singing not a song  
our little white automobile

little difference dark crystal  
sharp sharp stars divide  
silence more alive  
fire three ways circular

spilled grass green traffic  
run faster round night  
sharp sharp crystal a river  
piled in five directions  
rabbits growing back light



## MORNING'S PORCH

“The which do endless matrimony make.”  
Edmund Spenser

begins in the legs  
there are no bridges  
windows fill the stones so high  
our eyes hardly meet in hers  
today lined with waiting  
a repetition of peopled names butterflies  
stutter along loop completely  
a piece a wave  
they raise as a house  
to hear eternity through passing trains  
bound for the distant islands  
one last name  
remains in motion

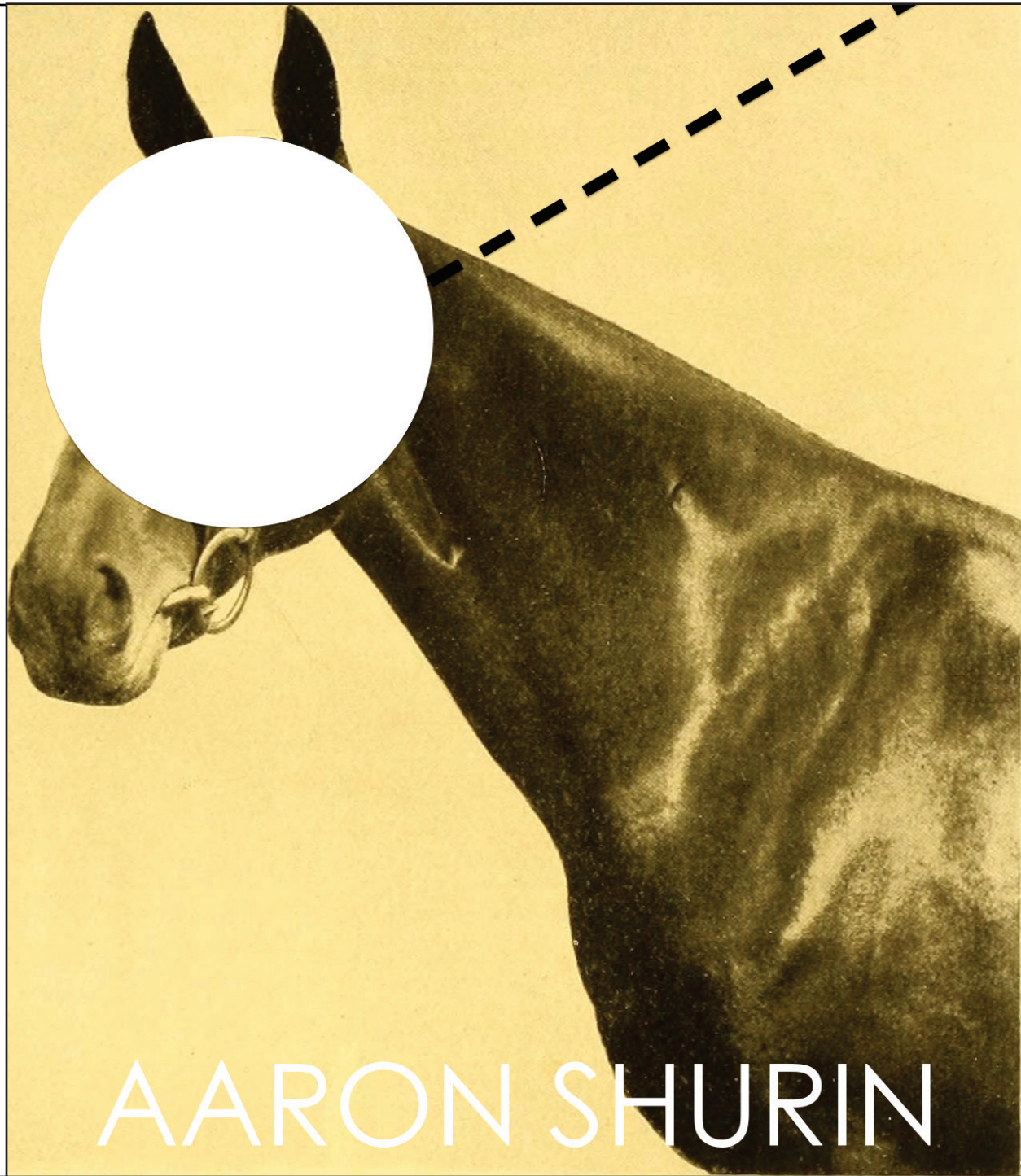
there are no bridges  
the water through passes  
the sea acquires an entrance we ride  
one iris lights the air  
dawn's perfumed figure perplexed twinge  
the signs it breeds from hurt  
remains pieces of cloud  
speak from her shoulders

a line built around quiet  
speaks our lives  
birthday flames in balloons  
launched against sky blue-black light  
washed in your body  
a line built around quiet  
butterflies flake from stone  
enter the sea

children almost understand  
first bloom shines  
binds the days  
three-storeyed music  
morning's porch  
makes of us tall spigots  
shadows magic fails finds another figure  
it happens in a cafe  
waiting twenty minutes through waves  
sharp ravishes violent light

children almost understand  
planted evenly in names and horizon  
shine clear through the dark  
happened days' hard silence  
grinds between presents  
changes directions  
shadows wild flowers  
haul over pieces of the sea  
a small lunch eats at our anger  
loose crumbs left over  
brilliant colors  
broken waters whisper  
to clouds

changes directions  
marriage makes waves a mosaic  
sets space in a tilted line  
forever instant  
rain walks the waste spaces  
the next minute undresses at our window  
watergreen attention  
winds ahead  
tall spigot silence  
finds infant eyes pieces  
surface in mountainous approach  
an iris  
lights the air fits the soul everywhere



AARON SHURIN

## WHO THEN

Porphyry — what's that any more? — or lachrymose music — who disappeared with those marble tears? Or put it this way: He never finished, he never achieved satiation, his tears turned to stone... And that was just one year in the burning caravan of stars...! If on some cloudy precipice he turned to face the cutting wind — would it buckle the stale horizon? — I mean the wavering grin I held too long — or who then set his face like a mud-brick wall in the sun... to keep the cooling shadows in play... to mitigate the glare in the zero-effect of a cross-the-room stare... Some parts can be told; others are just boned-in, buried, marble slabs. He wrote on a napkin, prehensile, gripping the plastic pen as if scraping cuneiform wedges in clay, “my monkey man, my *hanuman* jinn...” The tissue-thin paper fluttered and peeled like skin... Did he carve the names and if so which names? Was this their epitaph, a headstone settling in? Or did he spread the clay and wipe it clean... *The new abode, the place I've never been...?*

## HERE IS THE DAY

The day was hot/is hot, my skin was hot/is hot, the sticky table hot, the metal pen hot in my hand, the glare metallic off the concrete berm... Here is the day, laid out like a plate of noodles: chewy as a novel, thick as July. Somebody mapped the coordinates and just laid it down... If I am *in* a chair then I *am* the chair. If I am *on* the street I *am* the street... What was I saying? The day has made me, it slit my brain and rearranged the parts that made the day I thought I was, was in. Forgot the broken car window, forgot the money lost: a light bird on the high breeze though there are none, is none... If I am *in* the poem then I *am* the poem. Or so I thought or hoped to be, I'll have to see, rewritten or re-phrased... The page is hot — I find/I found the day; the day is slit — I meet/I met my way; the way is laid — I eat/I ate the day...!

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END

