

Dan Rosenberg Poetry Reading

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>> KIKI: Good evening, welcome to the William and Anne Axton Reading series. The William and Ann Axton Reading Series was established in 1999 through the generosity of the late William Axton, former University of Louisville Professor of English and his wife, the late Ann Axton. The series brings emerging and distinguished writers from across the country to the University of Louisville for two-day visits to read from their work and to share their knowledge and expertise with the university and community.

Writers give a public reading and Q and A on the first day, and on the following morning, they are invited to conduct a master class where select student work is critiqued. All events are free and the public is encouraged to

attend.

Today we have do have captioning available, so if there's anyone here that would like to follow the reading as a written transcript on a hand-held device, simply see Jana up here in the front.

Okay. This reading is also being audio recorded, so there will be a written transcript and audio online very soon. I want to give you a reminder that Dan Rosenberg will be giving his master class tomorrow from 10:00 a.m. until 12 noon, across the quad in the humanities building room number 300, and copies of the selected poems that going to be talked about during that master class are available tonight at the reading, so our assistant director of creative writing, Jon, has copies of those to distribute if anyone would like to have copies of the poems prior to tomorrow's class.

Okay. The next Axton event will be on November the 14th, a Saturday, at 5:00 p.m. That is the Writer's Block Festival keynote reading by Pulitzer winner, Adam Johnson. He's going to be reading fiction as a keynoter for the festival.

That reading will happen at The Tim Faulkner Gallery, over in the Portland neighborhood, 1512 Portland Avenue, in Louisville.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: What's the date of that again?

>> KIKI: The 14th of November, Saturday.

Poet, Dan Rosenberg, holds a master of Fine Arts Degree from the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop and a Ph.D. from the University of Georgia. His poems have appeared in Beloit Poetry Journal, jubilat, Salt Hill, Conjunctions, and many other venues.

He currently teaches at Wells College in Aurora, New York, and co-edits, along with me as the other co-editor, an independent on-line poetry journal called Transom which publishes new poems and translations. His co-translation of Miklavz Komelj's Hippodrome is forthcoming from Zephyr Press, which, for those of you who may not be aware, Zephyr is a premier small press publisher of modern and contemporary translations in English, particularly from Eastern European languages.

Dan Rosenberg's first book, The Crushing Organ, won the 2011 American Poetry Journal Book Prize and was released in 2012 by Dream Horse Press.

Cole Swensen has called the poems "quick, immediate, and deeply compassionate," praising them for how they "cover

the vast range of the immanent quotidian through all their impossible turnings, we're nonetheless convinced that we're in the presence of the concrete, even the documentary. And while they recognize pressing catastrophe when they see it, yet they also see a way out- in a burst of flame, in storms with eyes, in a wire hanger bent to the shape of a human heart."

In a review on *Drunken Boat*, Michael McLane observes that the book deliberately leaves mysterious which part of the body might be the "crushing organ," but notes that many of the poems explore the "small claustrophobias" of the jaw, heart, and brain. He notes, "The mouth and its many sharp and moving pieces are ever-present in the poems. Rosenberg allows no respite from the need of food."

If the lyric consciousness behind *The Crushing Organ* is a rapacious and devouring maw, then the speaking subjectivity of Rosenberg's latest book, *Cadabra*, is more like an ear, perfectly sculpted to receive news of miniature wonders. The poet Zach Savich has called the poems "swift, judicious, and alert," while Graham Foust remarks on their "just enough-ness" on the page.

In examining these poems in my *Intermediate Poetry Workshop*, my students and I noted the minimalist grace of Rosenberg's line, how the everyday things: "socks coiled in a doorway,"

or the neighborhood dog "marking a perimeter for the mailman," are etched with deliberateness into the white space of the stanza. These poems take up the delights of settled domestic co-habitation, but the laser beam of the speaker's attention makes these worlds feel new and not-quite-defined after all. A gray fish in a pond has "lidless eyes, like balls of yogurt." In the "Social Networking," the beloved of the poem has "far too many fingers" moving in the "primitive light" of the computer screen. It is this suggestion that life resists singular definitions or that objects enjoy a secret vibrancy that has nothing to do with us, that makes each poem a kind of "un-still life," carefully drawn, luminously limned.

I'm proud to introduce to you my friend, Dan Rosenberg.

[Applause]

>> DAN ROSENBERG: Thanks so much. Thank you all for coming. Come on in! I did that. I'm sorry. Don't all turn around now. It's cool, it's cool. Thank you all for coming. Thank you, Kiki and Jon for organizing this and putting it together. I'm thrilled to be here. I actually have come to Louisville a couple of times in the past, and I remember being

deeply jealous of this room, of the wealth of poetry here and this space, and at Wells College, Wells, the entire college could fit in this room, more or less. And we have a version of this room, but it is very obviously a converted closet, so not quite so comfy. So I'm glad you're all here, and all I am going to read from a couple of different projects, actually. Kiki mentioned this is my new book, Cadabra, but brand newer is this chat book Thigh's Hollow, which just came out from Omnidawn. The launch readings were last week? Was I - - I don't know, I woke up at 5:00 this morning and this is going to be a hallucinatory event for me, if not for you. But this is brand- new and exciting, and so I am going to read some things from Cadabra, some things from Thigh's Hollow, and a few things that are newer. And I guess I will start with Cadabra.

And a few of these, I asked Kiki if her students had any poems in particular that they would want to hear and so those are littered throughout with some others that you didn't ask for but I'm giving you anyway.

This first one is called Duplex.

When the downstairs neighbor's TV calls up and anchors rusty chain, you rattle in it all night, a sad little ghost when you think yourself awake.

So Kiki mentioned that these are small or compressed, short. I feel bad calling them small, but they are pretty tiny, and domestic in a way that may be my first book wasn't, but thinking about the trajectory of these projects, the first book feels like that sort of a single guy bouncing around. Cadabra feels to me much more like oh, hey, why don't we live together. And then like oh fuck, we had a baby!

[Laughter]

So Finger and Nail.

Pinstriped in flesh tones, the lines collect light to a zero-point purpose. A claw circumscribed. As if a pretense, but every mask wears its own removal. I'm incapable of smooth clipping: Wherever I cut, I'm left a phantom length.

This next one is called Truth or Beauty, and as I was picking the poems to read for you guys today, I realized that it's part of an accidental sequence of poems in which I stand in front of a fridge, that happens only briefly in here, the second one, which I'll read later on is a much more extended space in front of the fridge,

but here we go.

Truth or Beauty.

Left to itself, your garden of three pepper plants stays planted, expands. The line between warming and burning flickers. Your guilty pleasures, Law and Order, nude hesitation before the open fridge run on without you, but not without people like you.

The Magician's Technician

With staples I mated my torso to my hips: Unsawn. I struck doves from her top hat, scrubbed their shit into the lining. I'm the hinge you know nothing about. The secret gears. Cadabra, she says. When I'm on fire, no one puts me out. She pulls a rabbit from my throat, swaps out my ribs for a bouquet of rebars. Her teeth are sparks. She drowns me nightly between two goldfish, my stomach full of handcuff keys.

This one's called The Apple.

Actually, I assigned my students for this past week a poem to proceed through via negativa through tell - - tell me what the thing is, describe the thing by telling me all the things it isn't. And that is basically a riff on a - - for me, this

assignment was a riff on a Peter Richard's poem called *The Moon is a Moon*, which I think is a beautiful poem. And this poem, *The Apple*, is operating in that theme as well.

The Apple.

It is not a set of red curves, married to each other's strong forces or an old maid's tear growing thick with polish or a nest for embryonic stars or a rotund devil with hair like gelatin, his eyes unshod. The apple does not embrace itself or the fallen earth rising up to meet it.

Beached. Like the whale. Beached.

What perfect and speckled battlements, a thumbprint is a window to the child, a dapple. What potential just lift this overturned pail thick with sand, boring like to make a hole in the sun and hiding from it, these glasses darken my vision in pursuit of paradise. I'm still.

And this one is called *Blink*. It's very much what happens when you discover the person you are going to live with doesn't sleep in the same conditions that you sleep in.

Blink.

The window slats flutter against a pissy bank of moonlight, but you need absolute black to sleep. Here at rest it falls to me the darkening work.

So this one is the first of a series that operates within this book. There are a series of Wyatt poems, they're after Sir Thomas Wyatt who is one of the poets that brought the sonnet into the English tradition. And he did that by translating Petrarch, but his translations are pretty grotesque bastardizations of the Petrarch poems, and wonderful in their own right. He felt no need to be loyal to anything, in particular, in the Petrarch, he wanted to make English poems out of the raw material, and so these three poems that after Wyatt sort of take his liberties as a kind of permission, and so I took the Wyatt poems and I took some much more faithful and reasonable translations of the Petrarch and I jammed them together, and I shook them around and I pressed them through a sieve of my own obsessions, with what I think is like the beating heart of these poems, and then I tried to find my own way into that space that's shared by all of these other related poems.

My galley charged under two wet stars
in the daggered sea, bucks a winter drear between
the rock and the whirlpool. Then a vessel dead
still in waves, I had a lover and a lord, a craft
and some ribbed enemy. Inside I'm brained by oars
and sails in a wake of reason. I trail a hindrance,
wept a rope to ballast dragging a shackle. Oh,
vigilant harbormaster, I'm missing my error
wreathes the bow. I remain the port.

What's Made

Socks coiled in the doorway. Soup
can a bristle empty of health. Floor lamp with its
back turned. What do you want? My pruned hands
cup their creases. The potter's favorite pot,
misthrown.

And this next one is called Epi
Thalamion, which is a wedding poem. And Kiki told
me that part of her experience of talking to her
students about this book involved this poem and the
one that follows it, Coupling, and announcing with
a great deal of authority, like it's not - - it's
no accident that these poems are side by side, which
is completely true, it's not an accident. I don't
know why they're side by side, but it's not an

accident.

Epi Thalamion

Rings spark in the high- five of
love. The slap and sting. Here's a deal: I'll be
here, heart beating and after.

Coupling

The lawn mower rears back blades a
fake circle. Damp grasses launch a halo. The
white dog marks a perimeter for the mailman sailing
about with shades like gold coins. Two spiders in
a wind- tossed web hold on.

They needed to be back- to- back,
it's obvious, obvious.

Fade, full of true facts about scuba
diving. You're welcome.

Fade

Diving so deeply the sun can't carry
its colors. You shine a flashlight and the gray
fish flares red. It doesn't notice, though, its
lidless eyes like balls of yogurt. You can stay
at certain depths only briefly; there is no getting
used to it.

Here's part 2 of the Wyatt trilogy in
here. This one is Whoso List To Hunt, which might

be my favorite of his sonnets. I love it. In terms of the degradation that Wyatt sort of imposes on these poems. The Petrarch poem that he's riffing on in Whoso List To Hunt, and I'll paraphrase it grotesquely now, he's wandering through the woods, he sees this beautiful snow-white deer in an emerald glade, and he's memorized by her and he's punning on the name of Laura, his beloved for a while. He's very excited about this deer, and it seems to symbolize beauty and perfection and it's almost ghostly in its wonder. And he chases after it, because it's so magical, and then he trips and falls in the river, and he looks up and it's gone, and he's like a schmuck. And Wyatt takes this poem and decides that he's going to mutate it into a poem that could be paraphrased as I really wanted to have sex with Anne Boleyn, but it's a bad idea to try to have sex with the woman that the king is trying to have sex with, because kings are not famous for sharing, so I give up. It's his like famous "give up" poem, and I think the space between those two is so wonderful and so strange that I had to enter into it as well.

Whoso List To Hunt

I am of them that farthest fall from
the shade of her name. In the unripe season I leave
no woman, no white streak on a green field, no soul
apparition. She has hair and hands I've held and
fled. The slapstick tumble inevitable when she
seems tame and gone. The curtsy calls from my
collar bound to bone. Since in a net I seek no
breeze, no breath, breaking mine.

This one's called Home Movies.

Did any of you watch that Cartoon
Network adult swim show? There's like a small core
like group of people that are like yes, that was
a great cartoon. It is a great cartoon, you should
all go watch it. But there's this episode - - I'm
going to tell you this story, and it's not going
to like illuminate this poem in any meaningful way,
but there's this - - there are three kids with a
protagonist, and this - - like the young
responsible girl and two screw- up boys basically,
and the young responsible girl comes in with a cast
one day and gets all this attention and one of the
boys is like I want attention, too. So he like
fakes an injury and puts on a cast. And everyone's
like you're faking, you're full of baloney. Louis

is like you're lying. He was like I was kidding. I fooled you. And he was like you didn't fool any of us. End of the episode, the girl takes off the cast and was like I was screwing around to. Everyone was like why, what are you doing? And she goes, I just wanted to shake it up. Loved it. It was so great. It makes at best a tangential appearance in this poem, but that's my plug for going to watch an old TV show.

Home Movies

In the old- house cold still pumping breath, the cat toy's ear loved off with a fang, I'm ready for the government, my forehead staining the picture window, is what I see some kind of ricochet, stay out of the living room in its whiteness, glass of damp cranberries, from the frontispiece we hang unlikely, from the backyard he retained the wall, the railroad ties, what ties, from inside the medicine cabinet, everyone's cast looks fake.

I think I just like telling that story because most of my poems involve some allusion to something that I don't expect anyone else to get, but it's just like the thing that was

on my mind that helped me leap from this image to that or like leap from this scene to that. And every now and then, I just want to be like here, come along in the process with me for a bit. No reason why anyone would ever think of that show when reading that poem, but now you all will, as do I.

America. America.

The passive entrance to the body politic collapsed. A door knocked from its hinges. Oh they were rotten, we say, and past the threshold a carpet lolls in spittle. Past the threshold, we step into the muck: newborns backing up.

It's the grossest endings of any of my poems. This next course is the next poem, and it is - - don't tell my grandma, but - - she is a lovely woman, she's warm and kind, and she can't cook. And it's just - - it's a nightmare. It's the worst. Sorry, grandma. She doesn't know how to use the computer. She'll never hear this.

Next Course.

Grandma breaks her way about the kitchen, but who could stomach such piles of meat? I eat without wanting a creamy fruit salad. My

breastbone is a wishbone grown stable.

So I sent this manuscript to a friend, Zach Savage, for comments, and he's a tremendous reader, he's an incredible poet, and a generous reader. And he sent it back with all of this amazing feedback, really insightful thoughts on all of the poems and on this one, Clasp, he just wrote one word: Perv.

Clasp.

What a confused trickle of wire straps your back, curl of white plastic, hidden thread, to grope, to try for perspective. This hair seems lost. I tug a seeking tug. I'm a soft kind of hero.

Zach has a very strange idea of what's perverted.

Solo Cup.

She skulks and sniffles, fingers spider onto the popcorn. Dancing gets butchered elsewhere in the small room. She blinks in clear Jell-O, a tiny bark reach into a face, a stable face. There is no worm that blooms. Inside her eyelids party streamers spell something.

Oprah.

I'm vomiting glory and hope all over the studio audience. Empowered, the wife becomes a hairdo. Because I wear blue scrubs, I'm a doctor. Watch with your big eye, my nightly vivisection, who can tell me is this a prop or blood? Who else offers such hunger, oh, you've won something, you've won something special.

This is the last Wyatt poem. It's called The Long Love. And the ending, the ending of this poem is spaced between the two endings was so fascinating to me and so the ending to mine becomes this sort of constant effort in reframing and reformulation. I think because the ends - - the ends seem particularly modular to me, you could rearrange it in all these interesting ways, so The Long Love. The long love that starts in thinking, mines the heart it harbors in, no soldier but the one learning me to love and suffer reins displeasure from her eye and I'm left this field, this harbor to love and die in, for a good ending is the life faithful of love. For good is the faithful ending life of love, the good life ended faithfully.

Ad Hominem

This house is always losing to the lawn. Grass watches me be foolish with garden shears and foolish upon a trowel. Mostly I'm present as periphery. But sometimes the network slips. A stumble the producer overlooks, and I fail to perform my skin, a bodily laughter never quite breaching from a subject to a person.

This is the shortest poem in the book, Disaster Relief.

Shine your glorious teeth for the victims, I'll send my use in a text.

We talked about Wallace Stephens a little bit earlier tonight. This is And the Something that Is, which is about as related to Wallace Stephens as my poem Home Movies is related to the show Home Movies, but here we are.

And the Something That Is

The mosquito frozen to my window in a splay of not falling. White landscape pops his tan stripes, wings arched, spectacles.

And this is the last poem I'll read from Cadabra, and then I'll shift gears pretty dramatically to a very different kind of, poem but this one is called A Photographer's Hair, and it's

the last poem in the book.

What's beautiful in a trundle bed is ugly in absentia. My brother opened the door like an aorta. Touch can make a thing suddenly cheap, and I, at least, have stayed that way.

So I don't - - I really enjoy and appreciate poets who reinvent what they're doing. I think of the modernist, of the American modernist, I'm like a Williams guy all the way because there isn't really a Williams poem, he never sort of devolves into a kind of self parity, if you think you know what William, Carlos Williams' writing is like, it's because you've read very little of it. Because he's a crazy person. And he tried all sorts of things and he like failed a lot, and he didn't seem to give a shit, and he was just like I'll do this now. And it's amazing. And so I think of these books as very different from each other, and Thigh's Hollow, this collection is all written in a very strict syllabic form. Each line is 9 syllables, each poem is 23 lines so each poem takes exactly the same amount of time to read. And part of the pleasure of writing in that space was having my impulses constantly short-circuited

by the constraints I'd imposed on myself and it forced me to approach a poem very differently. And it was tremendous fun to do so, and this voice sort of rose out of it, and as I kept writing more and more of these poems, the persona that was the voice of these poems starting bleeding more and more into my life. So later poems get more - - get close to confessional in a weird way, but that leads to an interesting manuscript where it's like that's me, that's the same voice, and it looks like basically the same exact poem, but it's very much not me. It's me.

This one is called It Called Me a Hunger I believed.

But in the dream my wings tear wildly from shoulder sockets like plumes, a pair of smoke machines or ghost mouths whitened by flirtation with death, they pummel the air in their unruly horse it takes the beatings with a kind of slow whimpered silence. It holds me above the people buying, selling, fucking the night, a holy commerce orgy. But it must be a holiday fire sale of the city to pure wanting from up here. My vision is reddened. I can see only the contrails left by

human bustle. Each body just the tip of a worm,
white with purpose from up here, the slither
visible as I tear higher, I find myself some
creature of prey in the updraft. Tearing upward
my gaze, I see more creatures like me, the wings,
the talons dripping, and upon us dripping some
greater hunger, we are swirling toward the still
dark center of the heavens.

So this one is called My Beloved is
Mine and I am.

My beloved is mine and I am still
circling the airport like a moth pivoting toward
a false moon. I am unsure of my car, my route,
these roads knotted like a disease, I follow
faithfully the signs. They say to yield. It's
what I'm made of, yielding and light with powdered
wings always beyond, my eyes' tangents, while
above, the hole has grown ragged with light. Is
it dawn or a birth more monstrous still. The
pilots all taut and crisp-eyed circle far more
cleanly than my misguided, blindly misguided but
not without a guide route, I am following the hole
in the heavens have ordered a leaking upon my
upturned face. This sharp rain filling my

convertible while I twitch, lifting toward what
drips its lifeblood into my shoulders I see two
planes mate among the stars, one fuselage
constricts inside the other's claw one red beak
strikes down at the beloved mouth open not to speak,
to swallow.

This one is my Superbowl party poem.
I'm super fun at Superbowl parties, you guys!

The House Braced for a Bowl Its
People.

All day have gone hungry, some men
are girding themselves to our eye sockets where
hunger has launched forth in a rage during the
neighborhood guac party where I ended up somehow
with blood sausages and brittle flecks of chips
ground down in the bag like clipped pinions. The
neighbors so graceful shoveling my slight gifts
inside themselves during each breath of televised
slaughter. Men disguised as golems striving to
crush or be crushed while a small pig skitters among
them stepping from hand to hand as the glut shifts
up and down the field. Leaning toward
comprehension, I join my neighbors in their red
murder howls, only once calling for the severed

hands of one the rest wanted kept whole in a distinction I once would have understood but in these latter days, I see man for the flesh sack he is, flightless and brutish and short he will reach for the pig, he will fall again.

I don't get invited to a lot of Superbowl parties!

Up Here We Breathe Air, But Not the Sky.

Yet as our flight is terrestrial in its faith in plastics to keep us in our natural shapes, this mortal sin turned common as clay, we circle the bright tower of our own demise, not yet they crackle to our pilot, their voices drugged, their eyeballs reddened in the tower, their screens have gone red with faith they never expected and the very clouds below us are red dots banking on their screens. They cannot explain the sky anymore, these tired gods of everything not crashing, these false watchers watching the sky betray their reason. We join the clouds, the four other planes, the dissonant geese, some true beings. I watch from my plastic window more vessel than observers, we are the fat top of a gyre, I

think, until a shadow clips our wings, it looks
divine about the shoulders. It passes briefly up
my eyes, oh, the sky above all wracked with angels.

Ah, here's my second fridge poem,
Sight Cracks Open My Shell Tight Flesh Sloughs Off.

Overripe I'm a white peach placed
next to the refrigerator humming unkind odes to
splitting open. I have felt this rippling in the
colors inside me, have bled hot through the
breached walls helplessly into white this mixed
bulb by my heart fails into fuller violence I feel
an end itching toward me in your form. In my eyes
full dark or swallowing the halogens or my eyes just
roll dimmer in my head, regardless one fist against
the fridge you stand a stopped fall, your split
- seam mouth expels Twenty- three violences against
my head. I feel their light wings flapping off my
flesh. You must ask me again if I'm okay. Comes
slowly to my clarity a white wire seam to my body.
Ask again and then the touch, your hands burst me
open, my body in radiant white alone with you, I'm
bearing out your all in my becoming the thing that
reaches slender when you pray into your throat
shining like my hand for your sake forcing a

swallow.

A Blade Between Lips Opens the
Throat.

Though once I was full as an oyster
with clear purpose, now my inmost slime but
lubricates my own consumption. This reason I was
not built to bare my mind to what it cannot
withstand. The world has left its grit inside me.
I find the irritation rubbing rawly and my very
defenses grow in me the pearl. Though it is, yes,
of my making of me it is not Apiece with suffering.
Myself I find the pearl a gentle nucleus, its pulse
breaks slow against my guts are marinating in its
holy scent. Infused as with a flavor packet, I
find that my very heart is bent to singing what
songs the pearl desires. The songs of hatchet
blood, unfiltered light, the spool of keeping time
wound tight around my will to serve the singer I
feel fluttering in my innards, his song a broken
path inside the destination is my destiny.

And this next one is one of I think
two poems that I wrote when my wife was pregnant.
She's not a fan of either of them. This one is
Suffused With What Grows Within Her.

Akimbo beneath careful blankets I
nested her in my hearth a stone cradle for the
raising of what else but love and the sickness she's
leaking. The plague head has descended upon my
beloved in a cowl of snot, I can hear its uvula
ringing about her like a meat bell. It slops but
she bears all smiles and arm flaps shifting the
blankets like tattered wings some feeble bat
complaining yes, she wants burnt water steeped with
vegetables, four silver fish split lengthwise and
soaked in blood orange pulp and olive sweat. When
I bring her food she grows a beak from the still
puddle her face has made, the beak has only the
language of consumption dripping from it. My love
calls for my offerings says what grows within her
is holy hunger says there is no future but feeding
and being fed. Inside her beak I see a small boy.
He cries he doesn't stop.

All true. This one is called
Unworthy You Find Me and Awake. And it's what
happens when I stay up too late watching TV.

You burn before me in miniature
color. You hold in your hands a bird heart. It
seems unnecessarily lifelike in its red and its

ending. You seem to want me to buy it, but you are caught light on the TV screen, only a womb for wanting a bird heart you drape me with discounts offered in blood color blinking against my eyes. I want to synchronize but you are now a dirty truck pillaging two breasts you teeter between.

Sovereign of only beer, while the voiceover calls its vulture call for my heart flesh and I am half above the couch when the signal snaps into static or you cease addressing me and turn to snowfall poorly represent. Your face a half pattern my eyes water to find. I am standing right here, my Lord, I will buy my heart from your hands if you but show a part of your face to this mud clutching mud before you.

So there's this band called Frightened Rabbit, and I went to one of their concerts in Athens. And then I came home and decided that this speaker would go to that very concert because it was a fascinating experience and there's a couple of their lyrics in here as well.

There is a venue where you feel unreasonably close to the people who are performing, like they do their whole thing and the

whole crowd is like oh, you're amazing, and then like it's over and they just sort of step off of this very small platform and just walk out among you. And you're like what happened? You're shifted like ontological categories, Angel of the Smoke Machine Angel.

In the crush and mosh of it the spill of human frail arrhythmic bouncing of one fragile blonde beside me her hands like French doors in a hurricane all together we have summoned this plinth angles against our chests it's perched on the laser lights the pinions of some immaterial man preaching through a microphone of Jesus a bit but mostly himself says you won't find love in a hole his wings bleed white from the twenty- seven incandescents it takes more than fucking someone you don't know to keep warm he announces to one hundred fifty- six devout monogamists our tongues are slave flesh hitched to his song in the afterburn of not touching each other we are all fully present in orbits here beneath the stage his throat unfurls a scripture above our dampened heads he tests his reach the angel christens us animal animal animal.

This one is called Where Light Falls

Less From Reflected Eyes.

I come to enlarged in some cavern the
air. I find insufficient for flexing smelt my
shoulder blades into a permanent splay for blind
years. I've been under wraps t-shirts disguises.
I felt myself a human crawler. Perched now on the
cusp of unfurling here in the descent, here in the
darkness with echoes of wings ever behind my
physical ears do press and reach. The stalactites
leak their slow hard tears. I feel a mineral
swelling in my brain, rock leaks an alternate sky.
The wet cavern wraps me, blurs the wind through my
pricking shoulders, the primal calling the ruffles
upon the stone walls studded with crystals, they
reflect my fierce entombed growth, this
sanguineous molting blinks me by slow accretion
into being the endless cavern concave as skull
innards. I'm worlded here in the cramp. I mind,
I have mined. I am mined by the dark of the world.

Okay. Four poems, these are
actually not in this book, but they are part of this
larger sequence. And this, this title is
something I just overheard a young girl say to her
mother in a coffee shop, and the poem will, I hope

make the whole situation clear.

I Don't Like Really Beautiful Things

Stage whispers the small girl beside me to her mother bandanaed and torn about the eyes with rearing long nights drained of her peace reservoirs I know and her daughter impatient to go regress to familiar hotel cave light to tug her mandible downward with passive reception of photons and shadows the cave wall narrative comfortable unlike the man-sized tulip beside them. I am blooming and caught in the girl's eye as she turns to her mother bandanaed and torn open briefly by the desire to fill her kid somehow with new light. I know this twist beneath the sternum, see her soft hand close its excess flesh briefly taut around the table edge. If we go back to the hotel it will be just a brief rest. This city has so much beauty. The girl's hair-springs dance like yes, but no, she's watching a horsefly drip down the wall.

This is A Thin Conquistador in the Weeds, and it's the poem in which I compare my allergies to my wife's pregnancy, and she is not amused.

From ragweed to ragweed have I come
blunderbussing northward on the flank of my country
like cast-iron launched in the general direction
of where I am to live and root myself and multiply
with my wife. Grown wide about her equator child
- hard and insomnolent with my eyes dripping and
coarse my head nettled by these new vegetal
overlords. They enter through I know not where my
mouth, my nose and stake their spiky claims inside
while what inner meek defenses I have left commit
themselves to making snot pour endlessly from my
face, my brain. I say to my wife I understand the
state I've moved her into, it has moved into me as
well and I am populated. She casts a wet stare in
the general direction of what lover, what source
of seed she had hitched and kindled to in her
hungry, singular days, sighs orbits away.

This one's called Up in the Hungry
Hour Not Hungry.

From deep in the sleep-sack it rises
somewhere a choking, a chime undone by such basic
biology we fracture. Frantic we are fumbling in
the dark to lay our hands upon what twisted pipe,
what red throb inside our son is breaking him to

panic song and gasping, face bright with breaking
off his breath, the torture note he hits and goes
on hitting, fists like ducklings. Against my work
shirt, it is black. I am yet unrecognizable. I
pull in what parts I can toward my core, a swaddle
man meeting pain with strength, as if that ever

in the thin night of not sleep we sleep in I
have just this gesture if fed, if clean, if warm
but not too so a simple creature, we tell ourselves,
we've made, so far our simple creature
inconsolable, by my sad velcro arms, at least, my
milkless chest. I lurch to the wall, turn, sway
back, carry him nowhere to dawn.

And this will be my last poem. Thank
you all so much for coming here, and I guess there's
like time for questions afterwards, right? But
this is it the last one. It's called Stumbled in
My Suburb Like a Thought.

Dementation the end of the mind but
not mine governed as I am by a bodily need the long
slow fuck of living here among savages, I recognize
as my own people. By thick trails of stink, I
recognize and by too slow blinking in the light and
he who shines the light also I recognize. And

carved in the sidewalk JB loves M in permanent
scrawl among the gum ground down to black dots by
my people, herd stomping it flat and permanent.
And above the finch cares nothing for which of my
people approaches. It chirps the same forlorn
thoughtless chirp to its beloved, then falls silent
staring, the human mouth fully incomprehensible.
It leaks a futile placating bird noise pitched high
and empty and inhuman though other people passing
by will understand, we all understand noise,
understand the silence that follows.

Thank you.

[Applause]

>> DAN ROSENBERG: So how you doin'?

[Laughter]

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: What do the lines look like on
that last one, Dan?

>> DAN ROSENBERG: On the last one? Well, they all -

-

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's a little longer, not much.

>> DAN ROSENBERG: Yeah, they all look more or less
the same, they're astasia era in the lines that are meant
sometimes to be a sort of semantic break because a lot of these
poems maybe you've heard, they do this sematic doubling where

one phrase completes the previous phrase and simultaneously begins the next one, which makes them awfully hard to just to listen to, which I part of why I do my little patter of like here's where we are to give you some sort grounding, because they're - - I think they're tough to wrap your head around if you're just hearing them once in my nasally Long Island Jew voice.

So I sometimes give that semantic pause of like here's an actual break in the thought, breathe for a second, and sometimes they're not that. Sometimes they're a pause for other reasons. But they all have that the simple basic look to them, so the whole collection looks like this and this is a chat book that's part of the larger series.

Yeah, I found myself thinking about the line a lot for this one because of the completely artificial ridiculous constraint I gave myself in their composition. Spillage seemed inevitable, and hard turns and heavy engoument seemed inevitable, but I found thinking about the line as a unit and composing these poems a line at a time, that being the unit of composition rather than the sentence or the phrase or something like

that was - - it felt like the most natural way to approach this kind of project. Which was not your question, but I'll just keep talking. Yeah?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: How did it alter your writing process?

>> DAN ROSENBERG: Oh, tremendously. My first book was this sort of luxury of time, and I fiddled endlessly with those poems, and they are varied in their form and they feel like a first book to me, they feel like someone saying like hey, look at my tricks, look at what I can do. And then Cadabra, I was working other poems when I worked on these, but I always knew when I was working a poem for this book because I had a very particular approach in mind. The first book turns dramatically, lots of turning. Like Richard Hugo has this collection that I teach my poetry writing students a lot, The Triggering Town. He talks about there's like the triggering subject and then the subject that arises from the poem. So you sit down and you think I'm going to write a poem about this tree, and then it turns out you've actually written a poem about your mother. And good for you, don't show it to your mother. And I refuse the turn in this book where the initial impulse exhausted itself is where these poems stop. I tried not pivot. Because that was my go-to move in the first book, so I was interested in rejecting that for this and seeing what would

happen. And what happened is to make poems that I was happy with involved such concentrated time and attention that is no longer available to me with a small child running around the house, so this form is much more modular. I can write it in fits and starts. And the straight jacket of the form actually allows me to be more generative quickly in like the stolen time that I have available to me. Then I fiddle endlessly and obsessively because that's fun, but the process is much more - - I feel like I'm constantly on edge when I'm writing these. I'm literally on edge most of the time, I'm like perched precariously like on the edge of the bed because I don't have an office anymore, so I'm just like writing where I can, and my laptop is sort of teetering and overheating. But I think there's a breathlessness to these poems that arises out of that space, that sort of sense that I'm half harried all the time, whereas for these there's a tremendous stillness and calmness that comes from feeling like today what I have to do is write 6 lines and like make sure I feed myself. You know, that space is not available to me anymore and so the process has changed.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: First of all, thank you so much for your reading and your time. My question is the creative writing department really pushes and encourages us to read outside of our genre, our respective field that we're studying. So my question is: Are you currently reading anything outside

of the realm of poetry? And if so, are you using any of their I guess literary techniques in your works?

>> DAN ROSENBERG: Always, I'm just like a magpie, I'm constantly grabbing at anything shiny I can see. What I'm reading now - - I just read Simone de Beauvoir's, A Very Easy Death, this sort of narrative of her mother dying, which I was reading it and I was talking to my wife, and I got through the first like half of it and I'm like Becca, you have to read this, this is amazing. I got to the last of it and I was like, Becca, don't read this. Spoiler alert, like the mom dies at the end. It's very sad. But it's like an incredibly beautiful book, and what I'm taking from these things, I don't know, I'm reading a lot of creative nonfiction actually as well, so that's sort of a nonfiction piece of writing. I am re-reading Eula Biss's Notes from No Man's Land, which I recommend to all of you. It's a collection of nonfiction that is fantastic. She's also a poet and it shows in her work.

And I think that first essay in that collection is called "Time and Distance Overcome", and it's a collage that sort of interweaves the history of the telephone pole with the history of lynching in America, and it's just a tremendously powerful and beautiful essay. And part of what makes it powerful, it's like very simple, plain

language that she - - it's the juxtaposition that creates so much of this energy, and I think that's something that I've found straightforwardly transferable to my own work.

What else? I don't know. I'm reading all sorts of things. But at this point in the semester, it's mostly things that I'm assigning, so they're a bit if a cheat because I've read them all a million times. But I think it's great. I always come back to poetry as like - - to specific poets, Tomaž Šalamun is a poet who I turn to when I need to be reminded that poetry is mysterious and magical and something that I can love while feeling like I don't understand at all what's happening. Tomaž is that gift for me.

But I find myself often reading just whatever, just a novel that a friend recommends or a collection of stories. I've been digging into Lydia Davis again recently. These are all cheats, these are like prose writers who are writing basically poetry that just doesn't use line breaks. But I think Lydia Davis is tremendous and generative in those ways as well. Hi.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: You said that if you write a poem

about your mother, you shouldn't show her, and yet you write poems about your wife.

>> DAN ROSENBERG: And I'm lying, she does enjoy those poems. It's just funnier to say that she hates them.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: And you describe her almost as like a planetary body in some cases, and both of those seem like they have a lot different flavor than some of your other work. Are you writing those like inspired just because they're kind of provocative, because you're saying that about your wife or like what other like head space are you in when you're writing stuff like that?

>> DAN ROSENBERG: Well, I think this conflict, this form and this voice that I've been working more recently, as I've spent more and more time in it - - it started out as like I was ending my doctoral studies and this is what I was doing and I had all of these highly theorized ideas about what I was doing, and it took me a little bit to get over that and shove that out of my brain because it was not helpful or constructive at all. And simultaneously with that, they got much more confessional, and so there are actually a ton of poems about our son and a ton of poems in which my wife appears, which is not a thing that I had done before. But partly, it's just I always write about the things that are my obsessions, be they obsessions for the moment or obsession sort of large scale, and

lately, raising a new human has been taking up almost the entirety of my headspace. And so partly - - but partly that, right, I'm just writing what I'm experiencing.

But also, there is not a lot of poetry out there in which - - in which fathers, you know, are present as fathers, and aren't sucking at it. Like I'm doing a pretty good job, you guys, just so know. Like our kid's pretty great and I'm like pitching in like an adult, you know, but it's this weird space. And I became like I'm hyperconscious, like whenever I'm out with Miles and I'm in the supermarket, someone compliments me on being a great dad. It doesn't matter if he's like eating bobbie pins. I'm a great dad. Like just by being there, I'm a great dad. Becca never gets complimented for being out, she's just out with her kid, that's what she's supposed to do because she's the woman. It's fucked up. And it makes me upset and makes her upset. We don't stay up at night about it, we're just like oh, stupid people. And so I found myself really interested in writing into this space of fatherhood and, you know, the pregnancy poems are a part of that, but approaching these topics, because there are

endless anthologies of women writing about motherhood and there should be, and that's wonderful. And I am not a mother, but I am a father, and that's a huge part of my identity, and it's a thing that I haven't seen worked through in poetry as much as I think it should be.

And so that's sort of like I wanted to sort of bear witness to this space a little bit, and it's not, generalizable, it's my experience of this space. But there is a documentarian impulse behind it that is rooted in those concerns, as well. They're just slightly different from my poems, I'm just like I'm going to see where this language takes me.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: You talked a bit about how you're writing from through arbitrary constraints, I'm wondering if you write in other received forms, and if so, do you decide on a form and then try to fulfill it or does it just sort of happen?

>> DAN ROSENBERG: Very rarely do I write in received forms. This is a nons form, it's - - I don't even remember the genesis of it. I just sort of chose it to see what would happen. Received forms I think are wonderful. They come with such baggage, I've written poems that are 14 lines long by accident and had people talking to me about like the sonnet tradition,

and I'm like oh, I just - - like the poem just ended there and it happened to be 14 lines. Like I wasn't thinking about this as a sonnet, but it's inescapable. Received forms have this weight. And I think they're wonderful to grapple with and my engagement with them is almost always very loose. I've written things that when I read them out loud someone will ask me like oh, was that a villanelle because of repetition, it sounded like a villanelle. And I'm like yeah, no, but it was close. Because I find that the obsessiveness of that form was something that I wanted to bring into this poem, but I didn't feel any obligation to like satisfy the rules of the form, I just wanted to take what was most generative from that form for me for this poem and deploy it here without - - so I guess the short answer to your question would be I don't think deciding on the form first and then trying to fill it in is a particularly good approach to me. I think you have to be kind of a genius to do that, and I'm not, you know, but I think a loose enough form allows you to screw around in it enough that you can get lost and you can lose - - for me, I need to lose the part of my brain that was like an analytic philosophy major and is constantly like applying mathematical principles to things. I need to shut that off and form can be a way to do that. And so that's where it becomes most useful and generative to me. Yeah?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: What advice would you give to a

writer who is more experienced and confident writing in prose but like loves poetry and is interested in kind of entering that world? What kind of advice could you give in that area?

>> DAN ROSENBERG: Man, if you - - should we call this your friend?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah.

>> DAN ROSENBERG: If your friend loves poetry, that's like most of the battle. I would say - - I'm a big fan of imitation, actually, as a way it get into writing poetry. A lot of the assignments that I give my students are basically imitation assignments. Right now, for Halloween, my poetry students are working on a poem based on Tomaž Šalamun's poem *To Have a Friend*, in which he encounters the devil and has all of these strange interactions with like trying to know the devil, but it's not red, pitched- forked devil, it's a devil that Tomaž is sort of imagining. And so what I did is I reversed engineered the poem, and I turned every line or couple of lines into a question, the answer to which could be that line from his poem, and I gave them the sequence of questions. I said okay, here's a template, answer these questions in these lines, and then you'll have written a poem by Tomaž Šalamun. And part of why I did it is to sort of force them out of their customary modes of composition and make them approach a poem in a different way. And for a prose writer whose like I'm interested in poetry

but I don't know what that is, in my experience, most of that hesitation comes from the misapprehension that poetry has to be something specific, and forcing yourself to just like pick a poem you love, find what you think is interesting about it and see if you can do that on your own can be a great way into it. One of the first poems that I published actually, there was a poem that I loved and I didn't understand it, and because like I was fresh out of undergrad and still full of formal logic and whatnot, I wanted to understand why I loved it but didn't understand it. Because there are very few things that hit me that way, I was so rigorous or something. And I just copied the rhetorical structure of it, where the original poem had a statement, I made a statement. Where it had a question, I wrote a question. And I looked at the poem that I had written and thought that's it, like it was the rhythms of the sentences, actually, it was the ebb and flow of this rhetoric that was so pleasing to me, even though I didn't understand how all the pieces fit together.

And so I would say like if you love poetry, sit down with one of those poems and make it your own and mutate it and screw around with it until it looks nothing like the original, until no one but you would ever know it started off being a riff on this prior poem, but if it captured that

energy, that whatever it is that makes you love that thing, then you will have figured out how to do it in your own way.

>> KIKI: I want to make sure that there's time for anyone who'd like to buy one of Dan's books to be able to do that. We have a representative from the U of L bookstore in the back with copies of Cadabra, and then Dan has a few copies of Thigh's Hollow, I think he'll be happy to sign and talk another few mintues.

>> DAN ROSENBERG: I would.

>> KIKI: So let's give him a hand.

[Applause]

>> DAN ROSENBERG: Thank you. Thank you.