

PORTFOLIO OF RYAN HENRY COX

With this portfolio, I hope to demonstrate my diverse storytelling via a variety of approaches, styles, formats, disciplines, and media, but always with a distinctively unique and characteristic mix of personal themes. I excitedly submit all of this for your approval, highly appreciative of your genuine consideration, regardless.

PROSE SELECTIONS — Pages 1 – 5

“Rabid” — From a collection of interconnected short stories called *Jehovah’s Witnesses & Other Friendly Strangers*

“Tar Black” — True-ish story

“Caesar & Clemene” — 1st Place, *Phillip Lawson Hatch, Jr Memorial Award In Fiction* (2013)

POETRY SELECTIONS — Pages 6 – 9

“A Cockroach Poem” — 1st Place, *Phillip Lawson Hatch, Jr Memorial Award In Poetry* (2013)

“Fore Morn” — * † # **“She Lights in the Harbor”** — †

“I Am the Dragon” **“Hatchet”** **“My Kingdom”** **“Up in Here”**

“She Wore a Crown Upon Her Head” — * † #

* Part of Collection awarded 2nd Place, *Phillip Lawson Hatch, Jr Memorial Award in Poetry* (2014)

† Part of Collection awarded 2nd Place, *Tompkins Award in Poetry* (2014)

Part of Collection awarded Honorable Mention, *John Clare Prize in Poetry* (2014)

MIXED MEDIA SELECTIONS — Pages 10 – 15

I’ve made a webpage for this portfolio and additional content for the mixed media projects: www.RyanHenryCox.com/EMU

“Mr. President”

Components: Short story with an audio recording of stylized reading and score/soundscape.

Reason for Inclusion: I would like to work toward a collection of these stylized readings with soundscapes.

Defeats the Porpoise; or, The Legend of Johnny and the Indomitable Sea Monster

Components: Album of 25+ songs, novelette, collection of Sharpie & watercolor images (images not available)

Overview: A bizarre spaghetti-western Quixotic-Melvillian island-folk fantasy musical storybook—a novelette tells the story like a fantastical old legend while the songs sing the story in the words of the hero in-action. It is intended to be read first to produce the world and characters in the mind of the audience so the musical portion can be listened to with eyes closed, acting as a score and narration of a movie in their heads, the necessary abstractions of the world and people having already been established by the novelette.

Honors: This massive project was originated at Wayne State and awarded/supported by the English Department with the *Albert Feigenson Scholarship for Music and English*.

Reason for Inclusion: One of three *in-production* projects—hoping this mixed-media work will be something I can engage with/complete during my time at EMU (if you would be so kind as to invite me!).

Portfolio Inclusion: I have selected [a portion of the novelette](#) and two songs ([lyrics](#) and music files).

Lyrical Selections: [“I’d Rather Just Die”](#), [“Run Away”](#) (Mixed-media project *Defeats the Porpoise*)

The Life & Times of Peter

Components: 4 music albums, 4 written journals; a four-act play

Overview: A trans-dimensional time-traveling musical odyssey in which a reclusive musician and part-time quantum mechanic from the future becomes lost in alternate timelines of our own universe’s history. He leaps from one period to the next, escaping each by distilling the “sound of the times” to activate his finicky machine.

Reason for Inclusion: Being a newer project, the written portions have not been developed far enough to include in this portfolio. However, it is one of three *in-production* projects—hoping this mixed-media work will be something I can engage with/complete during my time at EMU (if you would be so kind as to invite me!).

Portfolio Inclusion: I have selected [two songs](#) from the first Act, taking place in 1987 (lyrics and music files).

Lyrical Selections: [“She’s Got Fingers”](#), [“We Are the Ones”](#) (Mixed-media project *The Life & Times of Peter*)

PROSE SELECTIONS

“**Rabid**” is from a collection of interconnected short stories called *Jehovah’s Witnesses & Other Friendly Strangers* for which Wayne State awarded a scholarship to support my work. I hope to have the chance to complete the project at EMU.

RABID

Mako was a neighbor of mine.

He became rabid.

Bit by a raccoon under his porch. He was supposed to die quick, but he didn’t, went on for years.

Sure, he was more irritable after, had to quit smoking on account of the foam dripping out his mouth much as always. Sometimes he’d cough and a flick of foam might hit your arm or jacket and you’d know he knew it but he wouldn’t say sorry. Other than that, he was still a pretty nice guy.

But rabies makes your brain swell. Nice guy or not, the effects set in.

First, we found him with the dead squirrel.

Mako was sitting Natives-to-the-Continent-Now-Known-As-America-Though-Once-Mistakenly-Called-Indians-style in the middle of the road with a stethoscope pressed to the rodent’s tire-tracked chest demanding defibrillator paddles and a shot of epinephrine with a whiskey back. A shock, sure, but, good neighbors that we were, we obliged.

My son found him rolled up in a burrito of sod late one night during a thunderstorm. He yelled not to worry, that he was *perennial*, would *grow back next year!*

He only responded to Cowboy whenever he saddled the peak of his roof on clear days, swinging his imaginary hat at the high noon sun.

We worried most the week he became a samurai. Everywhere he went, he carried a katana, five butter knives-long, wrapped at their ends with shiny silver duct tape. But he mostly just sliced at the dent-covered aluminum drain on the side of his house when he wasn’t giving thoughtful advice to dog-walkers, speaking entirely in eloquent, cryptic haikus. Really, just beautiful stuff. Changed my life.

When he came to the conclusion that preteens were time-traveling Soviet midgets conspiring to steal the clouds, it felt like his story’s end was near.

A vigilante sniper seemed like, and was, the inevitable role his last few days on the cul de sac would have him lead.

Shooting middle-schoolers in cargo shorts with foam darts between the slats of his white picket fence from a trench he dug behind the hydrangeas, he single-handedly took on the daily threat from the *Lil’ Reds* infiltrating the suburbs one yellow bus at a time.

Mako was *attended to* by some men in a white van with a police escort after a couple of days of his guerilla strikes against the local schoolchildren.

All of us neighbors came outside, gawking from our porches; some journeyed to the sidewalk with hands over lips, whispers and nods and not a dry eye.

We all knew it was time for Mako to be *attended to*, but no one had it in them to speak up, make the call. How could we send him away? It was Mako for Christ’s sake. He never hurt anybody.

Hell, we still talk about how he brought that squirrel back to life.

TAR BLACK

My son is dying! I screamed at the nurses’ station. Might have been no one, might have been a full crew. I don’t remember plenty. But I remember my voice broke when I yelled.

I was sixteen and standing over a doughy, pink-skinned *mammalien*. My son lay on a blue pad in a clear plastic hospital cradle and stared all around all at once. My breathing, shallow; it was hard to stand.

The nurse left our private room. His mother was in a deep sleep of epidural aftershocks and twelve hours of labor just twelve hours prior. For all intents, I was alone for the first time with my first child.

And it was hard to stand.

He watched everything. I tried to watch with him, but he jerked around so fast. I just watched him watch everything all at once.

His eyes squinted. Not bringing a smile. His lips curled down and the skin of his face tightened. I settled my hand on his chest. He was warm.

His lungs quaked. Whole body, a hard jerk. Then another.

With shallow breaths, I placed both hands on my son, stroking the bushy brown hair already shaggy and tangled on his tiny head, promising *you'll be fine* in a language as foreign to him as any other. He opened his mouth, face reddening, like he could respond, like he wanted to. Another lung-quake. He couldn't talk. He couldn't cry or ask me for help or to save him. He couldn't even cough. He just quaked.

My son was dying. I knew my son was dying.

Sliding my fingers between his back and that blue pad, I wrapped him in my arms. So small, my embrace was awkward, all forearms like a praying mantis caressing its first cricket. Rubbing his back was all I knew, all I had taken from my mother to rely on. My fingertips crossed over his spine and ribs, tiny bones—like a gecko, like a delicate model, not of bone but rubber.

I swiveled to run him out of the room and chase down a doctor. His chest was against my chest and I felt his quakes stop with a gush.

Something came out of him. He cried; opened his mouth and nothing was going to hold back that wail.

I laid him down onto the blue pad in the plastic hospital cradle. His sounds horrified me. I looked at his mother, calm as coma.

I tore away the tabs on what I was terrified would be his last disposable diaper. He wailed. I opened it. Black tar. The diaper was full of black tar. Black tar stuck to his pink skin and it was hard to stand.

I opened my mouth to scream. Nothing. I couldn't even cough. I had no language, only shallow breaths and hardly clung to those.

My son wailed. My son was dying. I knew my son was dying.

He wailed and more black tar oozed out of him, spilling from the open diaper and inking the blue pad of his plastic hospital coffin.

I felt vomit. Not from disgust, born of anxiety and fear and helplessness. I wanted to vomit from failure. I was failing my son to death.

He wailed and more black tar came with it.

I left my son. Alone. Black tar clinging to his puffy legs, staining his pink skin, pooling around him, closer to drowning with every wail.

My son is dying! Yelling through the halls, I ran a jagged path from a sudden blindness. *My son is dying and I know it!*

I stopped unintentionally at an immovable chest-high counter with a hard smack to my sternum.

My son is dying! I screamed at the nurses' station. Might have been no one, might have been a full crew. I don't remember plenty. But I remember my voice broke when I yelled like you might expect from a sixteen-year-old father.

What room? One faceless nurse jumped up first.

Another, Name?

The third, *What's your matter?*

I wailed like my son. *I know he's dying! He needs... There's tar. He's screaming and this horrible black...he's dying! Please!*

Meconium. Nurse three. She had a deep and calm voice. *First few baby shits comes out black and green and all tarry. Nothing but just the stuff of you baby's last meal before his birthday. Look, here's a pamphlet bout things to expect these first couple weeks.*

Nurse Three handed me a glossy tri-fold. It shook in my hand. She pointed to a section labeled "Meconium" that explained that *the tar-like excrement is composed of digested skin cells, amniotic fluid, bile, water, mucus, and whatever else made it into the fetus's colon.*

Meconium Nurse Three reaffirmed. *Let's get you baby cleaned up.*

Nurse Three and I walked back to the room my son was not dying in. I smiled while I watched him struggle in his plastic cradle on a smeared tarry mess of meconium with only glimpses of the blue pad it once was.

We wiped him down with special moist towelettes. We threw out the black tar that was not killing him. My son was not dying. I sat down and cried. Then I stood. I stood there and smiled while he wailed with big, deep breaths.

I had to stand.

Inspired by Aphra Behn's novella *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave*, "Caesar & Clemene" was honored by WSU's Hatch Award.

CAESAR & CLEMENE

I will begin with the world I began with, where rape and loss were things we all knew and we all expected. Still, the sun shined over us. And it warmed me—a beautiful place to be young.

The grandson of a king whose sons were weak or dead and all wrong for the job—I was an African prince.

I lived well and our land had never fallen—not to the mongrels, not ourselves. But others were coming. Lighter and stronger and devious like rabbits. They would come for us. They would come for keeps. More every time. Again. And again. But not me. Not yet.

I made it to seventeen, made strong. A French tutor put me together and moved me up, filled my head—could have been English if I wanted it.

Two years in battle and I learned how to win. I was the right hand. My General, he mentored me. Showed me how and we killed together—killed well. He once came for me when I was really in it, and an arrow went through his eye. His blood warmed me—I was a General.

I went back to our home and met the dead man's daughter. *Imoinda*—a trick on the eye nor a sight in the sand could ever produce such a vision—a goddess. And she saw me back.

We married. But that claim was not enough to keep her.

My king had a hundred years, maybe more. Surely, no less. Time enfeebled him, made him useless with his harem. But when his eye caught *Imoinda*—quite like my own—he was stirred, filled with devils.

His prince! My love, disregarded. My vision! My life! He sent for *Imoinda* with the monster's sacred veil. It was black—or that's all she saw as it covered her eyes—and it took her away.



I dropped down to the dirt and lived on the floor as long as it would have me. I had little use for anything, hardly myself. When I could no longer cry, I coughed. When I could no longer cough, I shook. And I shriveled.

But that old monster—*my king!*—was feeble.

I was not—I was a General.

My king was proud and had me to his home. I came with a friend and we sat in the *Otan* where the old devil beds his wives. Where he lays with them, I should say, slinking naked beneath the crook of his crown.

Imoinda danced for us with the others, faces veiled in familiar black. My king, my friend, and my self watched *Imoinda* dance and none could to blink if we'd wanted.

She saw me back.

That night I stayed in my king's home and had no heart left to sleep. I listened to the walls for the rhythm I was sure could not be. Not with that feeble old devil. Not with my goddess.

My king's *Otan* had a run of women, conquered and claimed. Generations worth. That old devil would tire with some. These *mothers* readied the next generation of concubines, taught them how to love a hundred-year-old man.

My friend had a plan. Said the mothers in the harem were sad, broken. Some had known no love but what that monster took from them. And when he had his fill, they were empty. My friend found one of these sad—beautiful and sad—wives of the past, and he bedded her.

The second night the king had us in his *Otan*, *Imoinda* slipped when she danced and I caught her before

the floor could and I held her once again. My king was enraged. By the flash of his eyes, he put me out to the street.

We snuck into the Otan when the old devil was asleep. My friend found his girl—the mother, the passed-over—he kissed her and he meant it and they went off for a time.

And there she was. My Imoinda, my wife, back in my arms. Our eyes spoke and we collapsed upon each other. Our first time. Her first—clothing stained with honesty.

...feeble old man.

The guards came charging. My friend, my herald: *Get out! The hundred-year-old man is coming this way. He is coming for you.* I left her. My friend and I ran through the night. Freed into the blackness of night over my kingdom—I was an African prince.



We rejoined my loyal forces, camped in the shadows for some time now. A day passed and the king sent me a message: he had killed Imoinda and the passed-over wife. I dropped to my knees and stayed there.

A war was on again. A war was usually on, but I had nothing left to give. I was done. I lived on the floor and I shriveled a familiar shrivel. Growing old. Growing feeble.

We were losing. My men were falling hard. I could not stay myself any longer—I was a General.

I went to battle seeking death, but could only seem to deal it. I splayed their division and most of their best and I was warmed with blood.

The war was over and I took the remains as slaves.

And when the *slavers* came to my shore, I sold the remains as slaves. All but their General. He stayed with me—I was a friend.

I invited the pale Captain of the slavers to my home and charmed him as I had plenty before. Returning the favor, my closest and I went aboard his ship for a feast. We drank magnificent wine. Such wine! So much wine.

That's when he had us. Held up and tied down, down with the remains, sailing off for markets in another world.

We may not have been free, but we weren't owned yet. We starved ourselves, a plan the Captain had not considered. He made us a deal. Said he'd free us all when we reached land. Said he was wrong, what he had done. *You must eat. Save your strength.* He apologized and unchained me—for trust. Only me.

But Captain was a liar and he stuck me in shackles before dirt was beneath my feet. I was sold with the remains—I was a slave.

The buyers that took me in treated me well. They handled me fair and spoke to me as they spoke to each other. One man was in charge of the plantation, cared for it *on behalf of the Lord Governor* he said, which I knew was a powerful office. The other was a woman whose eyes were always on me.

I told them my story and they believed it. *A tragedy*, they agreed. The Lord Governor would be sure to fix it though. They said he was *a good man. A just man.* They said I would be *free.* They asked my name. I said *Oroonoko is what I am called.* But they laughed and called me *Caesar* and always would—I was a slave.



I was set apart from the workers in the canes. Back home, I had conquered most of them and sold most as slaves. But they bowed at my feet when I visited each day—I was a prince.

One of the slavers who spoke well to me took me around the land to meet the most beautiful woman. Said she was bought, but no man could own her. None dared. *A goddess* he said.

When we reached the door of her shack, he called her *Clemene*, but what I saw must have been a trick on the eye; an impossible vision. And she saw me back.



We had each other again and soon she was carrying one of our own. That weighed on my mind. My prince would not be born in shackles.

One night, when the slavers were heavy on drink, I gathered the workers who bow at my feet. I goaded them and I rallied them. I told them *we can leave this land.* We outnumbered the bastards and they were sloppy and slow.

We ran through the night, but the pale mob soon came hunting. They closed the gap and had us against our backs. I dived in and others did too. I killed two dozen and more before the bastards called it off and promised a truce—I was a General.

They commended our bravery and agreed to our terms. *Freedom*. I took it in writing.

We returned to the canes and my people were quiet. They went to their shacks and closed their doors.

That's when I was had. To the ground and bound. I was lied to. I was tied to a stake—I was a slave.

They drained me. I sunk by degrees, lash by lash. I squeezed my eyes and clenched my teeth, harder than the cracks they put in my hide.

And oh, did those whips come down.

I survived. Had to. Couldn't let them have my goddess. Couldn't let them have our own. I was a slave; my child was not.

Imoinda was ready. I held up my blade. I stared at my goddess. And she saw me back.

Then I tore out her neck and she dropped to her knees and she stayed there. Her blood warmed me.

I lost all I had left. I had no revenge in me. No hope. I fell beside Imoinda and lay there for days, unmoved and unmoving. I emptied my eyes. And when I could no longer cry, I coughed. When I could no longer cough, I shook. And I shriveled.



In a week, men followed the rot in the wind and found where I was and found what I had done. They picked me up and took me back to put me down for good.

After they set me tight on a stake for all to see, they asked me what I would like before they finished me. *Any request will be fine*. I realized I had never smoked a pipe. Thought it would be a shame to go on without.

That slaver that always spoke well to me was mostly tears now. He packed a pipe and stuck it between my teeth. I pulled on it and saw the glow. It was fine. Maybe one of the finest things I ever knew.

Then they came at me. My nose and ears went first with a couple of tugs and slices—trophies. A thin, warm stream dribbled over my lips, down my chin, down my neck. The pipe's smoke stung my eyes, but I kept pulling at it.

They carved off my arm. They carved and they cut and the smoke became sweeter and the sun shined over me.

Again and again, they came at me, cutting and hacking, jerking and pulling. Again. They took my other arm. Again. Again! Then my head dropped down to the dirt where it stayed. My pipe went out. And so did I.

POETRY SELECTIONS

A COCKROACH POEM

there is a cockroach
he used to be a boy—
loved and thought about loving and wiped the sun
from his eyes when he smiled; danced and spoke
Spanish that wasn't Spanish or anything at all, but
he worked at it and understood everything

he only comes out in the night now—
clinging to the endless cold concrete and blistering
stares of the insects and shoelaces and the bat
who won't eat him but still watches just the same

he can't dance no more and i'm sure he can't wait
much longer—
this cockroach,
this blind,
broken-eyed
boy

he hangs low in the lights and avoids the fire
not because it's hot
because it's bright and it's big and it taunts him
like some deranged wizard poking its cane at the
prodigally demented—
the spook in the wheelchair,
the nigger in the cotton
who haunts the cracks in the sidewalk
and the holes in the dirt
who clasps his bottle
and wipes his eyes in the rain
who lies his head low
and then lower
and then lower
and is watched just the same

FORE MORN

the spooks came out in white-face
like clowns who'd never known love
their eyes were uneven
like the rhythm of their song
which they spread like a fever
so long

the wizards mixed fire with magic
and burned down the sticks they had raised
they circled the horses
and dangled their ropes
ain't no one never be saved

the lawns were painted with insides
the sidewalks all charred with ash
my brothers just sat
with hands in their laps
their lashes locking their eyes
while lashes cracked-up the sky
while lamps burned out
and died

SHE LIGHTS IN THE HARBOR

drop shoes, in-step
hittin mud—slow
like she draggin some load
bout she don't know
she big storm, pullin me
got looks for when
she twist like a dancer

she push on
&
i be too,
droppin shoes,
waitin fo
da flash!
&
da boom!
always still
fore she storm

and when she twist—
eyes give me sun

and when she cry—
lights in the harbor

I AM THE DRAGON

I breathe smoke
A nature I've made my own
Escaping for a moment
In an unknowable swirl
And gone

From a traveling ember
The slithering fingers
Indiscriminate as the wind

I dream of that perfection
To be burned alive
So purposed
So singular
Yet never exacted the same

But I am the dragon
Not the smoke
A nature that is my own

HATCHET

Pops was a real bad, you know. Didn't squint in the sun. Smoked his cigarettes to the last ash. Never wore boots cuz his skin was leather. A real bad.

I thought nobody could down him. And nothing. He used to sleep standing up.

As it all went on, his statue sagged.
And folded.
With work.
With time.
With people.
With all.
And down, down he sunk.

A bullet in the spine will do that. Take you away from yourself. But he had no bullet. Not a spine even to take one in.

Statues don't have spines
but brittle lines.

He lost what he had.
Maybe a virus.
Maybe in the genes.
Maybe he just gave it up.

No different—it's gone. It's gone and he ain't worth wasting no words more than this to be remembered by:

He could have been the greatest story.
The man used to shave with a hatchet.

MY KINGDOM

I came into the trades for my father; his tooling and fooling and mechanical guilt busted my guts until I bought my own overalls with a matching red hat so he could give me his wrenches and too much to carry.

He said he'd *show me in the morning* but he never did that, he just found an old recliner where his corpse could collapse.

I got my hands on some fungi from the garden. Terrible things, they were, but they put marbles in my bag and hair above my lip.

My theme started-in and I woke up in bits, more shallow than I'd ever been

The world was all new and I was as small as I felt, until I found some more of that fungus and I ate and I grew, so tall I could walk all over those street-walking shits that litter the land, I could smash them with the heels of my shoes and I did it and did it and did it again.

Then I came to a cliff that wasn't so big and I thought I could make it but I didn't and I dropped off the end! I went out like that!

So much for my dad and my brothers and tools! So much for the stars and those spotted mushrooms! So much for my love at the end of the road!

I refuse to go down or so I supposed. Then I found myself in bits, flat and forward, smaller or more as I had been before.

UP IN HERE

The dome is big where they keep the virgins; not that they're crammed in there, prizes in a quarter machine. You'll find showers inside and a university full of kama sutra doctoral candidates and castrated yoga professors and meadows and gardens and costume contests and everybody wins.

In the one percent, I am, but don't advertise it much since the riots. These younger men coming in, twirling their dicks, they die for this muck, so hymens reign as currency and the banks inflate what they can and the boys mow the trim until they've lost it all and yuck-yuck about Socialism and the roads.

He hates being called She and blames one of the wars. He's depressed; you'd never guess, always booming around, loud as ever. But I've known since the clouds turned grey.

We can't go outside anymore; it's hell out there.

Everyone ignores Him here. A big *hoo-ha!* when you step through the gates, but we all just do meth after that, or heroin, or masturbate and eat cheesecake or some other dark corners you've been waiting for with flashlights and guilt. But no one bows or says they're sorry anymore; they don't write books about him and they don't have him over and the clouds are always grey now.

SHE WORE A CROWN UPON HER HEAD

I know this lady with matted hair—strings blacked-up by time and the stains of sleeping on the kind of mattress I wouldn't risk touching; it was roughed up and drawn out, baked like she was on a fucking island.

This rug is how I know her in my head. I'm no good without pictures, small things, to know who's what; usually I look at teeth, sometimes eyelids, earlobes, or I zodiac freckles; but this hair she had—the particulars that lurked below weren't so much in order—crusty tendrils of nappy fur, jutting up to the clouds like she wore a crown upon her head.

Walked like a queen. We saw her in traffic once, allowing us a path around her.

Saw her by a hotel stoop, watching over us—the whole city sometimes

I woke her up once. She was laid out in a bookstore; we all just meant to let her sleep, whispering and avoiding that aisle like there was a homeless woman sleeping in it. Her eyes went wide like she smelled me like I smelled her.

She stood up and told me how to be happy; how it's like nothin, like when the president made the thunder; she said we already know it all, just gotta keep the sun shinin; like the bees, gotta share some honey or we all gonna get it; I'm makin stars now she said, with my hands; it's like nothin.

Everyone raised their eyebrows and picked up their books to their faces and no one whispered or crept and no one listened, but they all'll say they did when asked by the news—*her friends*.

My heaven would be the world that she saw; I'd make stars with my hands cuz it's nothin.

MIXED-MEDIA SELECTIONS

I have also made a page on my website that includes this portfolio, the related sound files, and additional content for the mixed-media projects *Defeats the Porpoise* and *The Life & Times of Peter*: www.RyanHenryCox.com/EMU

NOTE

Please listen to the included audio recording of a stylized reading and original score/soundscape for “Mr. President.”

MR. PRESIDENT

My life as a tick began as any other’s might—poor health, no kids, wife left—a man, depressed. The doctor gave me some pills, suggested I change my diet, change my direction.

The next morning, a morning as much as any other has ever been, running behind—no time—missing my daily feeding of pan-fried chicken menstruation, I chased down the small bottle of pills with a chug from glass jug of hand-expressed bovine colostrum—the premium stuff—and I was out the door, south to the city.

The rest of that morning-like-any-other-morning remained unchanged, save this: the moment I’d normally enter my place of employ, I instead sunk a sort of tube with a syringe-like tip that seemed to be growing from my face into a young woman I met at the bus station. I landed this proboscis somewhere near her femur.

My first blood meal complete, I began to travel north. A barren landscape, this desert of flaking squamous cells and sticky residues of dollar store shave gel, smelling like dying lilacs and rubbing alcohol. But she was fertile, well exhibited by my regular dips into the warm streams below her skin.

I came upon an area of dense foliage toward which I proceeded warily. Careful not to disturb any indigenous populations, I stepped into the deep dark wood.

Within moments, a platoon of scuttling crabs swarmed me, backing me out of their pubic oasis. They angrily snapped their claws in a chorus of backhanded compliments and anti-*semenic* sentiments in a language I recognized as Morse Code. Fearful, they were, of the penetrating nature of man and its wanton ways, a squanderer of resources before guiltless abandonment.

But I was only once a man.

By this point, my face had mostly fallen off, my last five-o’clock shadow like a latex mask lying in a pile. This seemed to momentarily pacify the lot. Only able to produce slurps and sputters to voice my intentions, I excused my trespassing and introduced myself.

A writer for a pre-packaged dessert manufacturer I told them I had been. Whispered clicks gently spread through the crowd—a collective hesitance. Determined to win over the constituency, I placated them with popsicle stick punchlines and facts from the backs of cereal boxes, memorized and cataloged years before by a six-year-old boy who dreamed many dreams but never dreamed he’d grow up to be a tick.

The crabs soon grew tired of my popsicle schtick and demanded to hear my platform. With nothing prepared, I kept it simple, focusing on much-needed infrastructure financing proposals for greater arterial access. I avoided taking a stance on the lice-integration debate by passing it off as, clearly, a state issue.

A democratic bunch, they retired to the bush to cast ballots.

Their return came with great commotion. Seems I’d won the popular vote, but the electoral college was not in my favor. Hostility overcame the cast of crabs, clacking their claws in dissent. The whole thing turned riotous. Pinching matches broke out. Families divided.

Madness, goddammit! Madness!

I stood stoically, smoothed out my proboscis as any gentleman should, and plunged my new face into the flesh beneath my feet.

It was no matter to what decision those crabs came. I wasn’t going anywhere.

Dug in.

Unmovable.

Drinking til she dry.

A parasite, feeding upon her graciousness.

LYRICAL SELECTIONS FROM THE MUSICAL PORTION OF THE MIXED-MEDIA PROJECT

Defeats the Porpoise; or, The Legend of Johnny & the Indomitable Sea Monster

This bizarre spaghetti-western Quixotic-Melvillian island-folk fantasy musical storybook includes the following lyrics, the audio files of these two songs (included and linked), and samples of the prose portion. ([Additional content at website.](#))

NOTE

This is available on streaming services or at www.TheseAreMyGhosts.com. Mp3 file included.

I'D RATHER JUST DIE

I am alone, just sittin by the seaside. Up comes a girl; she's lookin to see: why do I cry so? She sits at my beside, gives me a hug, and she cries with me.

"Jenny I've got something on my mind. Do you think you'd like to be mine?" She helps me up when it starts to rain. I may be just a boy, but I kiss her the same. I may be just a boy, but I love her the same.

*God damn.
God damn!*

We sit with our knees up, watch the sky burning, me and my girl on the Fourth of July. Jenny looks over; I know what she's thinking. I show her my back and wish her goodbye.

Late in the evening, I go home to my mother. Tell her, "I've found the girl of my dreams!"

She says, "My son, you ain't ready for a lover. You sure ain't no man as far as I've seen."

I run to the ocean cuz I'm starting to cry. If I can't have my love, well, I'd rather just die.

*I'd rather just die.
I'd rather just die.
I'd rather just die.
I'd rather just die!*

*God damn!
God damn.
God damn!*

NOTE

This song's recording is an unfinished demo and these lyrics are still subject to alterations. Mp3 file included.

RUN AWAY

They come knocking on the door. They say, "Turn on your radio. There's a man (there's a man); he's telling us where to go."

He says, "Don't panic, everyone. Go to your drawers and grab your guns."

But I just want to stay home. "No. I just want to stay home."

Now the tide is coming in and the mess will soon begin, and the people: they are running scared. Soon, all the streets are filling out while all the sirens scream throughout...this town has lost its head. *This town has lost its head!*

There's water running down and the children gather round. They're all watching that monster coming in. They're all screaming, "That monster will do us in! That monster will do us in!"

I can't believe what I am seeing. I know that I am surely dreaming; a forty story porpoise is coming right our way. The waves crash down on the people all around as the monster makes his way to town. Now the sun's gone down in the middle of the day.

*I just wanna run, wanna run, wanna run...
I just wanna run, wanna run, wanna run...
I just wanna run, wanna run, wanna run away.*

PROSE SELECTIONS FROM THE NOVELETTE PORTION OF THE MIXED-MEDIA PROJECT
Defeats the Porpoise; or, The Legend of Johnny & the Indomitable Sea Monster

Massive excisions have been made in order to offer a few samples that would fit alongside the rest of my portfolio selections. The complete work is 12,000+ words (plus the approx 7,000 lyrics and the recordings of 25+ songs).

FROM THE PROLOGUE

When I met him, he didn't remember much of life—s'pose that's because he slept through most of it. But what he did remember, he told me. And he told me I damn sure better tell you. So it's what I'm doing.

His name was Johnny.

He was an unconscious celebrity. Coma for twenty years. Was just a kid, living at the Bottom with the rest of them Raggars on the Island back before I was born. Barely into double digits and the kid knocks off for a couple decades. No one knows what happened. They found him half-dead, washed up on the shore with some animal parts and kelp—low tide.

Johnny needed someone looking after him. And his mother...well...that's something else. She was unavailable after the incident. So, Doctor set Johnny up with a bed right in his office—corner of the lobby.

From then on, whenever them Raggars were waiting for Doctor, they were waiting with Johnny.

Soon, them Raggars came to the office just to see the boy.

After a couple years, everybody knew Johnny. He became an attraction; a modern zombie, waiting to arise. Everyone living at the Bottom visited more days than not. Them Raggars left notes and flowers on Johnny's blankets and made bets on when his eyes would open; if they would.

They all watched him grow up on that bed in the lobby of Doctor's office—only doc on the island back then. Them Raggars were watching when fuzz turned to bristles above his lip; watching the days pass without a first kiss or a chance to smoke behind the Station. But Johnny never seemed to mind.

Like all things wanted by the People on the Hill, it didn't take long before they had him. Just like that, Johnny was gone. *Up to a better place* is what they all told themselves at the Bottom; if they said anything at all.

Them Raggars really missed Johnny. Things were never so great down at the Bottom. And most days, they only seemed to get a little worse. Even if they kept on smiling, their steps got heavier. And when Johnny disappeared behind the gates of the Hilltop, them Raggars could barely drag their feet.

After the People took Johnny, the tide began to rise around the Island. Inches first. Then the beaches were covered. Within a few years, Downtown was half-flooded, twice-a-day. Hours and hours of salty-water staining buildings, rusting-out the few trucks still rolling around; them Raggars squishing along the sidewalks in mushy shoes; kids picking up fish right out the street, taking them home for dinner.

The years passed and the tide kept rising. Them Raggars started sleeping on their roofs; picnic tables were fitted with motors; zip-sealed bags of shit and garbage bobbed around aimlessly when the tide was up. Everybody was swimming in the streets.

But them Raggars went on with their days. They worked. They drank. They waterproofed their houses. They traded soccer for water polo and cars for canoes. But they carried on and on and on.

— EXCISION —

Sun was peaked in the sky the first time the monster came. Tide was moving fast, unnaturally, more so than usual.

When it reached the edge of the Island, the water didn't rise, it crashed. Waves bashed buildings and washed them Raggars through the streets—ants in a river.

Breaking the horizon, eclipsing the sky...an abomination from the edge of the world.

They say the sun went down in the middle of the day.

Them Raggars screamed and gasped for breath, swimming their damndest through the gushing streets.

Some climbed up the scattered bits of skyline still taller than the sea; some fled to the Hill, chased by forty-foot waves and a forty-story porpoise.

When the monster reached Downtown, it stopped. The waves began to settle. The whole Island was silent, Hilltop to Bottom.

No more running, no more swimming—stillness.

Shadowing the Island, the creature waited. Waited for something...someone. Rotting hide, around the sunken, black pits where its eyes hid, twisted and shifted as it scanned the Island.

Whomever it was after wasn't there to be had that day. And it left.

But it didn't leave without taking.

The Island's silence was broken by screams and whooshing seawater. The monster dropped its jaw and the ocean poured into its mouth, carrying them Raggars and homes and fish and bits of everything else with it.

That first invasion came as a shock. It was pure destruction—land and life. Hundreds were swallowed. Homes were demolished. Even the beach was a mess with the massive gulf the creature carved out of the coastline and into Downtown, even knocking down some buildings.

Once prided for its perfect, one-mile disc, the Island's shape became more and more a crescent with each gouge of the porpoise.

Them Raggars were terrified. Even the People on the Hill were spooked.

After the confusion and awe began to pass, everyone got right to picking up the pieces. Waterproofing houses had already become common since the big tides came to the Bottom. Homes began to resemble safes, complete with giant, spinning combination locks.

Every time the tide came in, them Raggars and People alike, made sure to keep at least one eye on the horizon—a nervous one.

They kept carrying on, as they do. Them Raggars began rebuilding their crippled skyline, installing alarms, and handing out guns like candy at a parade. The People even constructed a massive cannon up on the Hilltop. Everyone was scared. There were no signals, yet, no signs if or when the monster would return.

But everyone knew it would.

*You could feel its sound Johnny told me. Equal parts booming and shrill.
You knew it was coming, could feel it.*

— EXCISION —

FROM ACT I

With a *hiss* and a *clank*, the thick, plastic pane between the rest of the world and Johnny slid open. Surprisingly spry for having slept most of his life, Johnny leapt from his grave and ran across the perfectly green grass on the Hilltop...because he could. He ran until his lungs and legs burned and couldn't help but collapse in a heap.

"Johnny?" The voice came with a shadow. Johnny looked up at a man standing over him. He quickly picked himself up to find he was actually a bit taller than this stout fellow, casting his own shadow a bit longer.

To Johnny, there was something entirely familiar about this man. He was rounded, but not obese by any stretch. He wore a three-piece suit like Johnny—white linen and all. But this man had really worn his in. Worn it threadbare and yellowed like pages of an old book. Wrapped around his neck was an equally worn stethoscope that dangled and bobbed about his chest.

"Johnny!" The surprise nearly sent Doctor's eyebrows to his hairline. "Hello...again," he stammered out of his whiskey-wet grin. He grabbed Johnny by the shoulders. "Wow! *The* Johnny...woke and up!" Doctor let go of Johnny. "So..." He fished a bent cigarette out of his pants pocket. "How are you, brother? You remember ol' Doctor here?"

Having caught his breath and gathered his bearings, Johnny smiled, “Actually...I’m feeling fine.”

While dragging on his cigarette, Doctor reached into his jacket and produced a metal flask. He spun the top off and swapped the cigarette on his lips for the drink. After wiping his mouth with his arm, leaving a fresh stain on the liquor-palette of his long-worn linen sleeve, Doctor chuckled out, “Honestly...Johnny...I thought you died,” his words punctuated by small puffs of smoke.

“You know what? So did I.”

“Well, I s’pose it couldn’t hurt to double-check.” The stub of the cigarette was dangerously close to igniting Doctor’s mustache, but he kept dragging on it as he popped his stethoscope into his ears and held the chestpiece to Johnny’s heart.

Boomba da da... Boomba da da...

Doctor began tapping his feet to the beat.

Boomba da da... Boomba da da...

“Well, it’s not typical, but it’s got a pretty good rhythm to it. Bit quick, though. 120 a minute.” He pulled the flask from his jacket again and took another pull.

Just as Johnny had gathered the courage to ask—to say *her* name for the first time as a man—Doctor beat him to it, hissing out with a hot burp, “S’pose you’re looking for Jenny.”

He wasn’t wrong. Jenny was the last thing Johnny remembered thinking about and a twenty-year nap couldn’t stop her from being his first thought when he woke.

Doctor reached his arm around Johnny’s shoulders and they looked out from the edge of the Hilltop over the City at the Bottom. Doctor took a pull from the flask and pointed down toward the town with an unsteady arm and a wandering finger. He leaned in close. Johnny gagged on the breath of an old man filled with more booze than blood. His direction came slurred, “Head down that way a’ways and she’s on the right.” The good and drunken doctor’s arm was still drifting, but he seemed to be aiming his finger at what looked like a cornfield of giant metal lockers where the rowhouses Johnny grew up in used to be.

Then Doctor slumped, dropping both his pointing arm and the other from around Johnny’s shoulders. His face went solemn a few degrees as he stared out past Downtown’s skyline in the center of the City at the Bottom, out past the ocean, eyes on the slowly sinking sun. “Better hurry.”

“Why’s that?”

Doctor took another drink and swished it around his mouth, still staring out to the horizon. “It’ll be here soon.”

“What will?”

Doctor sighed; smiled. “You won’t believe till it’s in your lap. Just wait for it. You’ll see. But you’ve got a few hours. Don’t worry too hard. Everybody dies, right?” He held up the flask and gave it a shake—still about half-full. Handing it to Johnny, he assured, “For now, just down this thing a’ways and you’ll feel alright.”

Johnny rubbed his thumb across the tarnished metal cap and the worn leather casing; wiped a little rust from the spout.

Johnny never had whiskey before. And then he did. And he coughed and spit and said fuck for the first time. Then he had another.

“Ha! The drink: burns going down but settles lovely in the gut; a necessary evil around here these days, brother. Keep it. You’ll need it. Now, let me get that beat one more time.”

Doctor slid another flask out of his jacket with one hand while the other grasped the stethoscope still hanging from his ears for another quick listen to Johnny’s *boomba da da boom*.

Matching his foot taps to the rhythm of Johnny’s heart, Doctor began marching down the hillside singing, “It’s a shame that we all live here!” into the stethoscope like it was a microphone.

Johnny was left standing on the edge of the Hilltop, still holding the flask. He shrugged and had a drink. And a cough. Spit. “Fuck.”

Johnny stood at the open gate of the tall, wrought iron picket fence surrounding the Hilltop, no more on one side than the other.

Then, he descended to the Bottom.

LYRICAL SELECTIONS FROM THE MUSICAL PORTION OF THE MIXED-MEDIA PROJECT

The Life & Times of Peter

This trans-dimensional time-traveling musical odyssey has the hero, Peter, creating music in different time periods. The first act finds him in 1987. The following song lyrics (and recordings) are part of Peter's attempt to "distill the sound" of the 80s. Although the written and visual portions of the project have not yet manifested, I have chosen to include this sample as it is my youngest work that I am currently focused on (along with two others). ([Additional content at website.](#))

NOTE

These songs' recordings are unfinished demos and these lyrics are still subject to alterations. Mp3 files included.

SHE'S GOT FINGERS

She's got eyes, but are they the prettiest kind?
She's got brains, but what does she have in mind?
She's got fingers...and those eyes. She's got everything, but does it align? She's got fingers, but will they intertwine...with mine? With mine?

She's got rhythm, but does she have the time? She can smile, but oh what a smile can hide.

*Do I love her enough?
Do I love her enough?
Do I love her enough, now?
Do I love her enough, now?*

Yes, I do. And she loves me, too. We like to talk about how much we like each other cuz I really do and she does, too. In the morning, drinking coffee, I'll say "Love you." She'll say, "Hey! Hey, man! I love you, too!"

I'll say anything and she'll catch the line. I'll drop any hint and she'll read the sign. I think I love her enough. I think I love her enough, now.

We'll keep looking out, but we'll always find: I am her enough and she's so much mine.

*I know I love her enough.
I know I love her enough.
I'll always love her enough.
I know I love her enough, now.*

Life goes on and we're married now. And we're pretty happy although things get hard because this shit's for real and we've got to deal.

So, every morning, drinking coffee, I'll say "Love you." She'll say, "Hey! Hey, man! I love you, too!"

WE ARE THE ONES

In one another we both discovered: can't own nothing or you'll make it spoil. We are the ones and we are the only things that we can call our own.

Who is your mother? Who is her brother? I don't care if your blood is royal. Let's change our names then we'll run away to Mexico. We'll live and grow old where the sun is warm.

Now, tell me, do you think we can make it out alive or make it out at all? I think we're running from nothing to nothing, but I'm ok with it if you'll be along.

Oh, my darling if you can't, I will understand. You know, I'll understand it. But if you think you want to, I will go with you. You know, I'll go there with you!

We'll find some trouble, get body doubles...who needs an identity, now? We are the ones and we are the only things that we can call our own.

Why don't we rob some pawn shops and then we'll bury all the guns and golden jewelry, kidnap plastic surgeons and select each other's faces—only you and me will know who's you and me.

Now, tell me, do you think we can make it out alive or make it out at all? I think we're running from nothing to nothing, but I'm ok with it if you'll be along.

Oh, my darling if you can't, I will understand. You know, I'll understand it. But if you think you want to, I will go with you. You know, I'll go there with you!

Now, tell me, do you think we can make it out alive or make it out at all? I think we're running from nothing to nothing, but I'm ok with it if you'll be along.