



English Studies in Latin America

Selected poems

Author: Laura-Gray Street

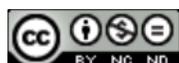
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Selected Poems

Laura-Gray Street¹

¹ Laura-Gray Street is the author of *Pigment and Fume* (Salmon Poetry) and *Shift Work* (forthcoming from Red Bird Chapbooks), and co-editor with Ann Fisher-Wirth of *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (Trinity UP). She is an associate professor of English and directs the Creative Writing Program at Randolph College in Lynchburg, VA. More at www.lauragrastreet.com

Aircraft [forthcoming in *Green Humanities*]

The Boeing 737 brims with the hum of its workings, fills each of us with that hum, as the aircraft is also filled

with our functions—transpirations, contagions, discourse, excretions, breath, sweat, heart and blood rhythms—all of it

mixing with the currents that surround us and shape our flight path, like the bump we just went over, which the pilot

explains is backwash from another plane en route before us, wind curling out in vortices that we intersected like a boat

crossing the wake of another boat. It felt like going over a pothole in the road. For a moment I forgot we were flying,

thought we traversed hard ground, textured surface beneath us instead of rippling atmosphere. That jolt still vibrates

through the cabin, through all of us. We are altogether wadded, quilted, packed in as batting. There is no emptiness.

There is only the thick flow of interweaving processes, fluff and lint, saturated and congealed, turgid and enriched. Nothing

that isn't touched by something and so by everything. A bottle of water I bought at the airport newsstand trickles through

me in swallows, urges me to leave my seat for the lavatory. Others shift their bodies to accommodate me. Recirculated

air swirls and eddies as I make my way down the aisle, then back to my seat, causing one man to look up from composing

something with GarageBand on his iPad, to suspend the notes in his headphones that I can't see; interrupting the crossword

puzzle the woman beside me is working, causing her to think conjoining words. And now the flight attendant approaches

with earnest concern, repeating "Water?" "Water?" "Water?" "Water?" She offers a tray of clear plastic cups to each seat-

row of earthbound fabric as the plane begins its descent, returning us to a thirsty, threadbare continent where too

many live as if unaffected by what rips the fabric apart.

Field Study / Search Field [forthcoming in *Green Humanities*]

maybe in the first fluff-pocked scrub trees
precursor tufts prickled with coarse hairs

littered through with intractable seeds we'd
find words for the matter at hand the fabric

afoot come to raw fiber washed clean beaten
on a mat combed into strands to twist into

thread fine as sunlight she rubbed spider
webs on her arms and hands never tired

of weaving bolts of the commonplace to
lay over the faces of the dead simple as

rain and wind present as haptic worlds
flitting at the twig ends of our neurons

before we turn merchant and mill so you'd
like to think they who led these vegetable

lambs to the yarn's yawning orifice who
find spandex an intimate tissue between

arbor and ardor would that there were so
many words for the same blank screen

used to pay tribute and taxes on skinny
seedling stock too much rain the days

infected with root rot unproductive small
cup cotton bra full coverage pesticide news

in Chihuahua Tom Cotton says something
dumb sign up at Cotton Top this Sunday

to give a rescue pet a home in the fabric
of our lives incorporated cotton dust

and field-dried bract extract in rat lungs
nearby in the same cotton field were found

the bodies of five more tiny brown
flecks in the fabric are natural leaf stem

Laura-Gray Street

and seed remnants not Jennifer Lopez
600 thread count sheets but GMO plants

in the refuge where Bt-sensitive worms
mate with impervious worms to water

down resistance traits victims in this case
were young underprivileged women

workers students the future of sustainable
agriculture smells earthy musty abducted

upland plants produce creamy buds that
bloom in a day or two by morning flowers

turn a pinkish hue that indicates pollination
proof has been accepted that they suffered

physical ill-treatment likely sexual abuse
before shedding petals within a week bolls

set as they say in the field yellow-white red
then dead eight pink crosses in the field

in the case of *Cotton Field* the findings we
have determined smallholder farms this

season latest estimates suggest the pattern
and profusion of cellulose growth until a boll

opens fiber is a living cell meanwhile inside
dark confines the factory is manufacturing

Rare Earth [unpublished]

We attract and repel
each other. We refuse.
We come from the sea,
every breath bubbling
roads of convergence.
We get wet, dry, flow
into new tricks. We sit
up as clouds, disappear
by thin air. We clean,
shift, root, shit. We rot.
This returns us. Some
distribute as human.
This is where we then
enter emerging. Such
a thing is but one step
into the process, gravity
pulling us where we
have to be something
or someone else. This
takes us, weighs round
on us, only to reclaim
what we scatter. The
moment we risk where
we are, it means right
here is where we pop.

DIY Climacteric

Cleaning hack: Fold a piece of white unmarked notebook paper, then close

gear points onto it (rotate engine if points aren't already touching). Etc.,

etc., and you got yourself one \$\$\$ mountain of machinery recovered.

More news, more weather. We stare the same meal-mush stare at passing

scenery as into a gun muzzle. We're down a road that's dim, narrow, and

a doubtful way to arrive at a bit of kindness. Whether it's the question

of a wedding dress post-menses, a white-elephant mess in the midst

of our do-goods, CO2 and methane spiking the glycemic index of polar

ice, or the eyes of our own rolled up stone white, it's background noise,

neither here nor there. By now we realize the colossal mistakes. Well,

not everyone. How the long chain of techno-human interaction unwinds

its vast parabola is anybody's guess. Then it's over and snow falls brittle

and vacant as an old hen's eggs; moonlight is a cataract clouding

the store windows. If blue lines on a blank page quiver to life and kink

out a few heartbeats, mute the muse to the lab-coat hiss of a quality

control center. Don't do anything that isn't cold and flat as guest-

room bedsheets. Ignore the machines run by someone else's children.

As Curb

As curb is both object and field, some linear infinity we step onto, step off of, step over, we take out our weekly offerings of trash and recyclables. We bow to icons—mole burrow, overhead wires, trussed meat, dry cuticles, tendon and ligament. We pay our dues. As one curb implies another and thus thoroughfare, in as margins marshal text to sense, so we follow course. As if we could know where or what a curb is.

As ant trail, we wind along avenue and churchyard, around parking lot and cul de sac. Curbing indicates a particular confluence of municipality and traffic within urban/suburban habitat. It channels flow, public and domestic, gutters downpours to gully wash. In collusion with storm drains, pipes, the inner ways of systemic flushing. Instigate to impervious serpentine surface. Warden of regulation and code, in league with border guard and guard rail, but also music staff and a kind of prosody, even various lattices and webbing.

As aftermath, we read into matted leaf litter and lawn clippings, crab grass bristling through the cracked joints of aggregate desires and wishes. Find agenda in gum wrapper, cigarette butt, in oil slicked like dirt under fingernails in the nicks and scratches that divine hints of our future, espoused, Xed out in concrete, which means compact, condensed, growing together, cohere. Our sense of selves, of direction at first pliable, then congealing in hard certainty, then crumbling to freeze and thaw, tree root, weed stem, worm traffic, feeding microbes.

As concrete shares with us an early amphibious life, it requires water—rain, hose, spray-on membrane curing compound—to harden and set. A curing that continues for decades, and so, even as we sat there side by side, even as we sit here now as if we could sit on the same curb twice, the curb keeps converting calcium hydroxide to calcium carbonate. Neighborhood constrictor, native anaconda. Infrastructure swallowing its tail. A tricky friendship.

Sometimes what is sidewalk and what is curb is anything but clear. Sometimes only a trace of concrete delineates side and road, barely recognizable. Sometimes a curb ends abruptly. Sometimes it's just there, sedimented, hungry, patient. Ready-made snake god inhabiting our civic wilds, insinuating precincts, districts, wards, growing far and wide until disguised as overgrowth, so that a curb, like any mundane deity, is easily mistaken for a safe place to sit and rest. So we congregate. So we are ingested. As curb predicates, predicts.

Memory Yarn

Six-years old, riding my bike in the driveway. Sudden spider darts up handlebars and over my left hand. Then disappears, leaving the sinister shape of a story, an outline,

nothing more. The details will surely come when I tell it, when I spin intricate cause and effect for my father, draw him from his weekend yard work. But when he leans on

the rake handle to listen, I have no story. Only residual scuttle, a faint premonitory breath across the fine hairs of my knuckles, ghost web of sensation those hairs collect

and send tingling along neural pathways, threading and rethreading the moment like a button sewn fast. I fall silent. My father shrugs “So what?” and resumes raking hulls from

under the pecan trees and off the concrete stoop I’ll trip on that winter, splitting my chin wide open along what’s known as the mental protuberance, all because I’m running

after my father to find out why and how come he is taking away whatever household junk my mother has asked him to get rid of. When he dies decades later, we dress him

in his favorite work shirt, frayed khakis, and scuffed boots. Clothes shaped by him. His frame cancer-stained, drained to skin-wrapped skeleton. All surface and structure and

nothing in between except the burial of so much beloved. What I face then at that dug-out ground and squared-off edge of loss is the yawning *So what?* So what if there’s

no story? So what if your clothes don’t fit over your middle-aged spread? So what if earth is hissing like a dry pot on a red-eyed stove? Who cares who worries that

we won’t know when it’s way too late for way not enough? So what if everything we’ve buried scratches out of graves at once and shuffles toward us offering tattered remnants,

scraps of shredded sins. Keep living in the odd moments at the auto repair, at yoga, at all the mundane counters and sidewalks that guide us from one minute to the next. Back

away from that dark hole in space, the outline we can't
escape, like the scar-tissue stitches I still wear on my chin,
tracing them out of habit on the bony underside of what

evolved as we interrogated silence, generations echoing our
first selves' headlong pestering, *So what? So what? So what?*
Into, not away. After his funeral, I stay at the graveside a long

time, taking turns with family and friends as we shovel heaps
of life-teeming dirt—our first best and our best last story—
into the story of my father because here's what I mean to say