

PARADISE OF PERVERSIVE COMPUTING

In bandage light and leafy swaying of wires,
In gradations unbelievable, professionally
Fertilized eggs break apart like reentry
Vehicles put to the test in an atmospheric swelter
Of ever more sterile fields. The destiny chip
On the edge of my cup is a pre-Christ Magdalene
Face saying come on baby (she called me Zygote Boy
For I was just a silhouette-free for-profit
Facility among the nation's many) your room is called
The nursery, listen. And I heard dogs barking
Their hearts out in a locked station wagon
In Disney World's parking lot. Open up
Buttercup, she said. And there were white turbines:
Time was passing, or had passed at too many speeds to count.

LAZY GIRL CHAIR

Mother's chair reclines but worries too much, is scarred, rocking at the center of her duplex, before ten thousand spilt high balls, frozen dinners, a television that glows in size but loses its faux wood paneling, Zenith logo, tubular depth, her Cronkite, her Rather, but it keeps playing episodes of *M*A*S*H* or *Cheers* or bad news. What is the world coming to? Her chair smears bulk Sam's Club lotion on her tissue paper hands. Her chair's sick sister had her drip-drip again, her chemo but is too sick to answer the phone and won't get any better. But she's hanging in there. Her chair wrecked three cars in five years gets rides with Go Go Grandmother that lets her keep her Jitterbug to get an Uber, calls it a dating service for old broads. Our mother's chair waits in the rain at church, at Yoga, library, the store, as Go Go Grandmother draws money from her account for rides that never come, oh chair who once took cats and dogs to get put down while we were at school, can shield us from death no more. Her chair searches for her friends in obituaries, makes the most see-through weak-ass coffee in the world. Her chair's sons keep her up all night, one boy is in remission somewhere in Pocatello and pitching empty airline vodkas into the trees. Her ex-seminarian child in perpetual corduroy is still a bachelor but may manage the Shoneys soon. The baby lives vampirically in our mother's chair's back bedroom, will turn 50 this year, can you believe that? and is

printing another of his little books,
needs to get a job, bless his bones, but
he's writing a poem about her singing
bicycle built for two to each of us
as babies. Our mother's chair doesn't know
what went wrong, but says she just can't
quit bragging about us at mahjong and church.

IDEO LOCATOR

I'm right here, locus of borderless barking with no map
To find me and my gnomie riddler she-beast sphynx
Who sings out from her wind-eaten face three hard-as-hell questions,
her voice a car alarm rattling un-shatterable glass
Between me and pavement, the bulletproof eyes of power
Meters. Heat assumes a forever effect. If there could only be
Happy hour when my bones weren't floating
In lighter fluid, where a boy in red t-shirt and dress shoes
Too big for him weren't running with offertory basket
Between row after row of metal chairs as grandma starts
The day's meeting. Ask me: how many days
Has it been, how many fingers am I holding, got a match?

THE GOOD LIFE

Is a small bird flecked with mustard or
Centerline paint from a highway
By a wire fence and grass
And a building where
Carey Dean Moore was executed
In Nebraska this morning.
The bird is growing smaller and
Smaller as the highway stretches and swells
In the heat. The governor called
Today's procedure an important tool
As he turned his shaven head to the mirror,
As Moore turned his head to the mirror
Side of the window to say I love you
To no one he really knew, a doctor,
Officials, and a reporter, who wrote
Before turning blue, his face
Changed, realizing the magnitude of what
Was happening to him. The sensation
Of knee jerk belief takes longer
And longer to become disbelief
As a sparrow flicks feathers pasted together.
Did he know his family wasn't
Behind the mirror? This morning,
There was a man strapped
To a cross-shaped bed saying
I love you to his own face.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

A student a thousand years ago wrote
About getting a tattoo when I told him not to
Then I told him focus
On an object that says something about you
I told him come on think of something you
Can turn over in your hand
And if there's not...
I didn't finish my sentence then but I made him read
About Pablo Neruda's socks
Which he hated
Do you have an object in your mind he said you bet
And I remember his precise block script
About the smell of his hand gun
How the wound was a city that light
Went inside and how his lover's inked face
Was still on his back when he
Drove his truck into a uniform supply store
And who had given him gonorrhea
Before he redeployed
Want to share this with the class?
I wasn't nearly as bad a teacher as I am now
But I told him to give his work a name
Took It Like a Valentine
He wrote at the top of the page
Clarkesville Bellevue Yuma
I don't remember which base town I was in
Or his name just his face
In the newspaper his handwriting
On ruled paper torn from a notebook
He'd be much older
Than the man standing over him telling him
What he couldn't write about
Not listening to his story until now

LETTER LEFT IN ITS ENVELOPE

Gall my marble soldier
Lifts to his savior's lips
Spills over into this quiet
Night, filling the hollow
Letters of my name
Printed in ballpoint
On the unposted letter,
The king's portrait on
The stamps, a stranger's hand
Rising up in the deep earth
Smell of the monastery
That afternoon
Once claimed, smoky
Wake of buses behind
Black metal doors, drooling
Stench of the Guadalquivir
Not far, poor frogs
Killed by liter bottles
Along the river's concrete
Banks, café tables
Where young men
And women skinned
Sausage made from
The blood of an animal
Whose screams
Are the first of many
Stages in a long process,
A method and recipe
With rice and onions,
Resulting in a delicacy
Paired with a small
Cold glass of pilsner
In the sun on Contesa
Street, where Lorca
Was jailed- Salúd.
You are the only

Person with whom
I can be most
Alone, my cursive script
Said to a woman I
Loved then, whom I
Was trying too hard
To impress, whose
Photograph's appearance
On my timeline means
She has passed
This week, to whom
This unsent envelope
From twenty years ago
Is addressed, whose
Letter ends—as I
Walk this city alone I
Am either talking
To you or myself
And no one else.

ADRIFT

Bullied and bruised the boy was told again
To fight back each week, but came home bloodied,
This time with his worksheets and books
Thrown from the window as the bus pulled away.
Because his clothes were torn, he couldn't board
So went home, where the school day burned
Yellow through kitchen curtains like a fuse.
His aged father didn't know what to do
When he found him sitting there. Failing
Another grade, he couldn't keep repeating them.
But the man, over sixty, couldn't keep
Telling him to throw punches, so he called
His child in sick, loaded his truck, and drove him
All day and into the night on one-lane,
Un-crowned roads across the border through
Sonora to take him sailing on a boat
He left down there, sun-cracked in an oily
Slip beside jaundiced pilothouses. He
Didn't know what to say to his son
So they drove. They stopped to piss in chalk fields
Glowing by moonlight. Later they ate grilled quail
In a tavern carved into Nogales hills,
Where mariachis inside rock walls played
"Perfidia" so loud all they could do was smile
At each other. When they arrived at dawn
The boat was draped in dust, her sails torn or
Missing. Blue smoke encircled them when he
Turned the key, then her motor stopped. Strands of
Thin white hair rose from the sunburnt dome of
His father's head as he labored over
The engine, killing any day they had left.
He kept telling him, boy go on below,
Get some sleep, but his son liked watching his
Father work until it started. They let it run
A while before they found an old hotel
Cafe, where they ate clams, dipping Bimbo

Bread in the broth. Let's not stay here, he said,
So they motored the sloop out into Mexican
Dusk, stone islands like faces reflected in
The placid bay, their sailboat without sails,
Under power, a father living the
Last months of his life with his nine-year-old
Son, steering them into a rocky cove,
Then dropping an anchor that might drag.
What if the motor didn't start again?
Would they fall asleep to find themselves on
The rocks? But the boy remembered he was
With his father, who had the power to
Pull him out of school and start a motor
In the sun. This same man in a hospital
Bed, his body shrouded in a thin blue
Gown, hand shaking as he offered his son
A plastic cup of water from the nightstand,
As if the Sea of Cortez might never stop
Lapping against the hull, halyard chiming
The mast, his father still beside him breathing.

MILES WAGGENER

Miles Waggener is the author of four volumes of poetry: *Phoenix Suites*, *Sky Harbor*, *Desert Center*, and most recently *Superstition Freeway*, published last year by The Word Works of Washington DC. He has been the recipient of The Washington Prize as well as individual grants from the Arizona Commission on the Arts and the Nebraska Arts Council. His poems have appeared widely in such journals as *The Antioch Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *North American Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Cutbank*, *Gulfcoast*, and *Hayden's Ferry Review*. He heads the creative writing program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where he has been a faculty member since 2006.