

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

The following material has been published and copyrighted by The University of Akron Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

For course pack and other permissions or for more information, send e-mail to apeters@uakron.edu.

Cage of Water

Akron Series in Poetry

Also by Author

Message to Be Spoken into the Left Ear of God

Detail from The Garden of Earthly Delights

The Rain That Falls This Far

The Attraction of Heavenly Bodies

Akron Series in Poetry

Elton Glaser, Editor

Barry Seiler, *The Waters of Forgetting*

Raeburn Miller, *The Comma After Love: Selected Poems of Raeburn Miller*

William Greenway, *How the Dead Bury the Dead*

Jon Davis, *Scrimmage of Appetite*

Anita Feng, *Internal Strategies*

Susan Yuzna, *Her Slender Dress*

Raeburn Miller, *The Collected Poems of Raeburn Miller*

Clare Rossini, *Winter Morning with Crow*

Barry Seiler, *Black Leaf*

William Greenway, *Simmer Dim*

Jeanne E. Clark, *Ohio Blue Tips*

Beckian Fritz Goldberg, *Never Be the Horse*

Marlys West, *Notes for a Late-Blooming Martyr*

Dennis Hinrichsen, *Detail from The Garden of Earthly Delights*

Susan Yuzna, *Pale Bird, Spouting Fire*

John Minczeski, *Circle Routes*

Barry Seiler, *Frozen Falls*

Melody Lacina, *Private Hunger*

George Bilgere, *The Good Kiss*

William Greenway, *Ascending Order*

Roger Mitchell, *Delicate Bait*

Lynn Powell, *The Zones of Paradise*

Dennis Hinrichsen, *Cage of Water*

Cage of Water

Dennis Hinrichsen



The University of Akron Press
Akron, Ohio

Copyright © 2004 Dennis Hinrichsen
All rights reserved.

Grateful acknowledgment to the editors of the magazines in which the following poems first appeared:

AGNI: "Childhood's Face"; *Alaska Quarterly Review*: "Muse Theory"; *Barrow Street*: "Periodicity."; *Controlled Burn*: "God's Chromosomes" and "Lead Part & Chlorine."; *Crab Orchard Review*: "Translations from the Natural World"; *Current*: "Rapture"; *Field*: "Partial Glimpses of the Face of Jesus"; *Notre Dame Review*: "Blue Racer" and "Detail from *The Garden of Delights*"; *Paradidomi Review*: "A Night and a Day of Fever," "Aside," and "Zen Noise, Zen"; *Passages North*: "Song"; *Poetry Northwest*: "At This Moment and at This Moment and at This," "Childhood," "Horse Standing in Sunlight," "Power Surge," "The Wave (Dissected)," and "Working at Children's"; and *Way Station Magazine*: "My Mother Watching My Father Shave," "On a Gift of Flowers Thrown by the Wind or a Young Girl," "What the Shroud Holds," and "Zen Noise, Zen" (reprint).

"Horse Standing in Sunlight" and "The Wave (Dissected)" received the Theodore Roethke Prize from *Poetry Northwest*.

"Partial Glimpses of the Face of Jesus" was reprinted on *Poetry Daily* (<http://www.poems.com>).

08 07 06 05 04 5 4 3 2 1

All inquiries and permissions requests should be addressed to the publisher,
The University of Akron Press, Akron, OH 44325-1703

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hinrichsen, Dennis.

Cage of water / Dennis Hinrichsen.-- 1st ed.

p. cm. -- (Akron series in poetry)

ISBN 1-931968-16-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

I. Title. II. Series.

PS3558.I546C34 2004

811'.54--dc22

2004021379

Manufactured in the United States of America.
First Edition 2004.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984. ∞

Cover painting: *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, Katsushika Hokusai. From the series "Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji." Used by permission of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929. (JP 1847) Photograph © 1994 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Contents

Part I

- Childhood's Face 5
- God's Chromosomes 8
- Lead Part & Chlorine, 10
- What the Shroud Holds 11
- At This Moment and at This Moment and at This 15
- Childhood 18

Part II

- The Wave (Dissected) 23
- Zen Noise, Zen 26
- Horse Standing in Sunlight 27
- Blue Racer 30
- Rapture 32
- Periodicity: 36

Part III

- Song 41
- Power Surge 44
- Working at Children's 45
- A Night and a Day of Fever 49
- My Mother Watching My Father Shave 50
- Muse Theory 52

Part IV

Translations from the Natural World 57

On a Gift of Flowers Thrown by the Wind or a Young Girl 60

Aside 64

Partial Glimpses of the Face of Jesus 65

Sequence: Turbine 69

Detail from *The Garden of Delights* 70

Notes 74

for Teresa

stand tiptoe on the tip of a needle
like a grain of sand flashing in sunlight

—Ikkyū

(translated by Stephen Berg)

Part I

Childhood's Face

*When the world comes down to this one dark wood
Before our four astonished eyes . . .
To a beach for two faithful children . . .
To a house of music, for our clear accord . . .
I will find you
—Arthur Rimbaud, “Lines”*

1. Incantation

Already nostalgia quickens me.
My mother in sunlight as in a yellow rain—
a soft, cotton burnishing—
her forearms, the unblemished silk of catfish hauled from the Cedar.
Loose string in the cables. Loose voltage.
How far fire has to leap along the delicate arc of gasoline before it ignites
 the arm.
The sky, a river.
The streets, rivers.
Called out of the creek beds by acres of rust.
I enter by way of my tongue.
Upstream, upwind, splitting grape skins with teeth.
Downstream, the face of the Lord immaculately etched on a crayfish—
a serenity poised between its pin-legged shadow
and on the underside of the water's surface (if this is possible) its mirrored
 back.
The third presence calmly siphoning in the heated shallows of a boy's cheek.
Now is windstruck, startled (*the surface ripples*)—gone.
Twigs flensed of their own woven sheathing.
Pollen and paraffin, candle wax.
Dirt under a fingernail as clean as a blade.
A black parenthesis, white parenthesis
(The days, pink grains . . .

2. Memory and Collapse

I can still see her tanned arms turning over and over again to gauge the
tooth-marks,
the impressions (because she beat me), my gift of stones.
Some like rings done laterally to the fingers;
some full strokes, parallel, to the ridge of bone, cut with pressure enough and
kissing, sucking,
to speckle the flesh with blood.

And then a feather, a blue jay's, like a banded flame,
wind high up
in the locusts, the alley
where we wandered, the alley's hedges,
swagged with key rings, shoelace, bracelets of grass . . .

How many nights my name called out from the other side of fences,
how much birdcall in elm,
sunlight bearing down so hard on the pitched roofs it blinded me
as if with broken glass,
its high gloss merging with the glare of the sky—
a connective tissue, an interpretive tissue—
leaf flecks, eye grit—what translates.
So say it again . . .

3. Coda

The boy's face on the water like diaphanous foil or sheeting.
His shadow on the sun-sifted, water-sifted mud, the true measure of daylight's
weight and density.
A bias the birds enter, blackness for blackness

(or mercury for chrome, silver for chrome).

Minnows blistering what is veil-like, curtain, with quick cuts, incessant
fracturing.

How his mind can hold these things separate:

in the shadow of his face, the shadow of a stone; three grains;

strands of liquid like cool flame sifting from what is permeable, underground.

God's Chromosomes

What can a child know of the skin of daylight, its cell-work
as fragrant
as lilac, warped pliant and soft

in his hands' aimless twisting, the shape of the minutes,
the body's progressions,
drifting, leaf bud and pollen, from the then-thriving
canopy of elm and willow? He is everywhere in daylight
a child of God. God's
chromosomes in starlight: dug-up

worm lengths, bobs and lures, the four-pronged hooks
his father gummed
with catfish paste above the unchained river;

the sound of his voice and his voice's echo
the male part and
the female part; his looking tugged thirty feet up

from a whirlpool . . . To quell this vertigo: the bows
of his muddied shoelaces
slung from their knots. Later, in a night's waking dream

of heaven—a dancer bent in a deliberate calisthenics—
the arms, scarves;
the legs, scarves; everywhere the unimpeachable music

humming its low fire governance. A tattooing
that made him rise
squinting late Iowa mornings, his mother's

younger brother beside him on the cool steps, flesh
of his flesh, his own
skin beside him, feral, electric. What could a child know

of such division and grace? To be crucified in the genes,
to hang there—a boy
in a man's body—*hrsh lght, Gds lght, faltring*

ner th crwn of the skul, as if some fissure had been pinched,
had been welded closed.
Still, their voices threaded. His uncle's,

idiot savant, above his own, detailing by grillwork, by shape
of the hood, con-
figuration of tail lamp, all of creation, God's work,

either (man/child) could be prepared to know: the *whir*
of traffic down 22nd Street:
his uncle separating the Dodges from Chrys-

lers, Chryslers, irrefutably, from late model Pontiacs.

Lead Part & Chlorine,

copper, iron—
tap water I was blessed in—

I do a simple thing
and sluice its

mineral guttings—
my thirst

slaked, my
throat stung

with such
inelegant fiber

and its poor
Jerusalem of fact.

What the Shroud Holds

(*Good Friday, 1990*)

1.

Pollen of all kinds. Fakery and pigment. Jeweler's
rouge.

Indentations where a man's thumb

pressed down and in to widen gaps

between

the weaving, twenty twists per inch of fiber,

my grandfather laid like soft wax inside the fabric,

his body

even then on the horizontal plane,

en pointe, as if on the plantar nerve,

about to ride

those first anguished seconds

like a bellows. A modesty of crossed hands. Axis

and pivot.

Celestial tinctures. His last

pitched curse flying over the rubber bit—

as the charge

held and the voltage

flashed—to the hovering Jesus.

2.

In Breughel's *The Expulsion
of the Rebellious*

Angels (and could they mean mere
 anger
 here?), it is a saint cauterizing

the landscape, angels violently poised above
 their victims,
 nothing scurrying away,

angling for cover, but accepting,
 actually helping,
 flying into the swords, exposing with delicate
hands their split intestines.

3.

 But never
 the iridescence I would rub from a moth.

I'd clean the powder with my tongue
 sometimes—
 he'd watch—just to taste it, or swipe it

in broad strokes on the ball of my wrist—
 he'd hone
 his jackknife to a keener smoothness,

then peer like me at the assembled
 wreckage:
 orange bands and yellows of lightning,

crushed reds, some of them marked with star
 charts and
 the shapes of planets, though now

and then a single butterfly would snap brutally
out of the domestic
ether, flutter across blades of daylight,

so slowly I couldn't help but watch—
he'd be bored
with me by then,

disgusted—a scrap of paper caught in an updraft
or ash
on which I'd seen some writing

floating back
to the barrel edged with fire.

4.

Cross his arms here

so that he might linger in soft
linens
awhile—"Can I get up now?"

"It's over. You're up"—flannel prints, vellums,
human
rapture reduced to this last

cloth touch, ecstasy to this day's end
waking.

He rocks a little in the chair, then moans,

the nurse's voice in his ear like a soreness
or intolerable
law, so he looks at me.

“Can I get dressed now?

Can I get ready
for bed?” I turn in the harsh-threaded

matrix—no vision, no memory, no

healing—

and tell him, “Yes, LeRoy, you can dress.”

At This Moment and at This Moment and at This

moment—a pink-gold light
rages at the edge of visible matter,
time spilling

in rods and segments of arcs, curved
as the snow-covered fields
are curved, unmarked

to the edge of infinity. I watch it all
behind
the pitched blade of a windshield,

whatever molecules I've inhaled
and pushed back out—
Christ's tears, ash from a fire—now

oily, smeared: the X-ray of my breathing.
How like vapor
it spikes up to improve its view,

grows six ways at once. All along
the hammered
landscape: ice whiskers and ice teeth.

The trees, too, sheathed in aluminum.
The river
purling in its liquid metal heart.

Each possible union of two things
including now
the deer I saw at dusk,

freshly dying—on its side like a horse,
its body rounded
like a horse—so that I thought it another

creature at first in my swerve
around it;
and this worker, days later,

I saw twisting on the roadside; she, too, freshly
hit, freshly
dying, one leg and part

of her back pinned to the planet,
the other
writhing because something in it had

fractured, her nerves ringing as if touched
by a wire . . .
I say this now because it matters: her

overalls were *rounded, tawny*. Someone
else was out of a car,
screaming across the freeway

to a man on a ladder, who looked away
at first,
and then, with extreme caution, released his hands

from a long parabola of voltage. Sunlight
was every-
where, and a few clouds. A jet,

high up, dropped away from us
like a needle
into a shallow bowl

of milk . . . *Drink*, the gods
instruct us—*at this*
moment—that moment—and in each narrow run of time—

Childhood

Sometimes I think I am

already there and memory
just
the crude agent used

to more reluctantly spread
this
wheat-colored shine

(and sometimes I am just downriver
dragging
a stick;

from the wires a bird crying *seek*,
hide-and-go
seek, stay hidden—

high harmonica sheen of the skyline,
a dome,
really, one swart wind leaking,

insignificant, out of a culvert).
Such fine
days, angelic memory.

Wind blurring each pane of glass
with
coagulant rain. A radio

blaring: muse of song, bitch of static.

How raw wood
pierced my tongue

once until what emerged was oak
language,
blood language. My head

in my heart most days, hands scarred
from
where bark had torn me.

I remember pissing now against
a wooden
fence and sucking nails,

rubbing the tip of a monarch's wing
to a saffron
lens, the yard bloodshot,

fractured when I coined my eye:
there,
in simmering daylight,

a child pumped a tire once
until it exploded,
then, thoughtless, idly plucked

the warped spokes until they rang;
the bird
in the apple crying *seek*,

seek, hide-and-go seek; stay

hidden

(the autobiographic:

how the child was happy then

and wasn't

wronged, and not one thing

stirred that was not complete).