

CONNOR FISHER  
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# *THE HINGE*

Connor Fisher

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## *THE HINGE*

And while walking home  
I saw that the book I held  
displayed four objects on  
its cover: the skull of  
a horse, a tree with its  
roots intact, a flying song-  
bird, and a woman  
in outline—all placed  
in these exact positions  
on the book-front  
with intent, an intentional  
arrangement, which tipped  
the hand of an unknown  
artist who hoped  
the selection and shape  
of objects would give  
the book something similar  
to “meaning,” or perhaps in  
a moment of sentiment the  
pattern of four objects  
was intended to have  
reached out, to caress my  
face or tousle my hair  
like a new, young, overeager  
lover whose affections I  
could learn to return—  
but this is the hinge  
the poem swings on, and

the trick of objects  
in space; I trip over myself  
to find a sequence of events  
which we would term  
“experience”—but what if  
the sequence had not been  
arranged or planned; it  
came together by pure chance,  
and so I mistrust objects,  
whose lives (yes, lives) are  
arranged by chance and  
seem to cry out a mantra:  
*I'm not nostalgic for a world  
of continuities, but I'm  
not afraid of it either—  
it's the supreme fatalism  
to take one's chance, the  
book and the imaginary  
lover whisper in tandem;  
the truth is that I suspect  
objects arrange themselves,  
even the images of objects—  
objects on the book cover, in art,  
in real lives are free to  
quiver as birds in the  
hollow of a rock and sink  
into the soil, and to choose  
their position and angle  
on a canvas—imagine a farmer  
who picks and hoes her  
field all spring, who plants*

seeds or potatoes in April,  
waters and weeds the rows  
only to find come autumn  
the plants and dormant mounds  
of soil have rearranged themselves  
(as if by strange, earthly magic)  
and now lie in positions that  
surprise her, perhaps on the  
roof of a shed, or moved  
to smooth over a nearby  
creek bed, not out of  
malice or mischief but of an  
object's desire to change  
places with another solid  
entity regardless of the  
practical need for a harvest—  
if this were a narrative,  
*one anecdotal fact would*  
*be followed by another,*  
*and many together would*  
*make a story*—yet  
looking back to the haphazard  
cover of my own imaginary  
book, I have never found  
facts to be orderly (least  
of all the unsettling pairing  
of horse-skull and bird,  
which co-exist neither as  
symbols nor as signs, but  
only as if each were a  
rare metal mined for

an alchemical ritual) and  
I read as if any narrative  
were composed by a roll  
of dice as a nod to  
chance, as if in their  
deliberate bouncing each die  
taps out a message:  
“What you call experience  
is as likely a sequence of  
happenings whose order discomforts  
you” and even the metaphor  
of rolling dice seems too  
small or too predictable;  
we should speak of 1,000  
dice tumbling down onto  
a tabletop, an avalanche  
in miniature, rolled, if it  
seems possible, by pairs upon  
pairs of hands until the  
torrent has ended, each die  
has chosen a number; then  
someone, a narrator, could step  
in to order and explain the  
fullness of the mess—  
although “fullness” is not the  
right word, it has too rich  
of a texture; the plastic  
click of imaginary dice on  
an imaginary table could  
only make a thin sound, reedy  
even, jarring as the hollow



click on tile or wooden floors  
of a white-tail buck who has  
wandered into your house right  
now, in this real world, tonight,  
and stands confused in  
your kitchen or your un-  
cleaned bedroom, wondering  
what need exists for  
this much privacy, for this  
much individual room in  
a space formerly known  
only as “nature”—imagine the buck treads  
from room to room, pokes  
his muzzle in a pile of  
laundry, and so leaves your house;  
the individual room, he has  
realized, resembles the individual  
line in a poem: a way to preserve privacy,  
a way to channel energy  
from private to private  
space until some dynamic part  
runs over; *when the  
individual line ceases to  
have energy for me, I  
usually break the line there*  
while at other points in  
the poem lines seem to  
break themselves, as if  
under the building pressure of  
their own great weight ...  
which can only be the

reason for roots and  
branches on the cover of  
the book in my arms: each  
growth of the illustrated tree  
forms its own lines, arguably  
parallel in structure, gesture,  
direction, and made of similar  
wood, but differing somehow  
in intent: some rise  
while the rest sink under  
soil—but surely the  
intent of objects lies out-  
side of my understanding,  
and trees have unknown  
contingencies I would lack  
the grounding to imagine:  
the amount and directional flow  
of groundwater, levels of  
decayed organic matter in  
soil, saturation of earth  
and the depth of bedrock far  
beneath the topsoil; the  
prevalent winds and their  
average speed in all four  
seasons; on top of this you  
have the whims of trees  
themselves, their own acts  
and foibles: the preference of  
one for nutrients in foliage while another  
prefers to press its roots  
through decaying animal

bodies—I'm not asking  
if we can mimic or  
become trees; not asking  
“Is the man a bird?”  
“Is the man a tree?”  
but hoping to make space  
in the poem not for  
ambiguity—which always  
finds a way in through the  
cracks—but for these  
words and letters, dots  
of ink and reams of  
paper, to bring all  
their own knowing to bear,  
while I sit on the side-  
line, having a beer or a  
sandwich and watching as  
whatever we call “know-  
ledge” is created on the  
page—think of an  
orator who clears her throat  
to speak, to say, “Only listen  
to the cracks and texture of  
my voice, coming from these  
specific lungs, and the air  
which my tongue, cheeks, and  
lips shape”: she begins, and  
her address has an improvisatory  
note as if it were  
beautifully cobbled together  
by dozens of actors—the

woman and the parts  
of her body—and so it  
is her silhouette that rests  
on the book cover, the  
fourth peculiar image, her  
hands held high in a  
persuasive pose—and I  
feel no surprise at this  
discovery although, if truth  
be told, I have known the  
silhouette's origin all along—  
but *the irrevocable just  
happens* whether or not it's  
known in advance, and then  
there's the separate question of  
whether not-knowing or know-  
ing would change the outcome  
of a set sequence of  
events (say, the specific  
form of an outlined body  
on the cover of an imaginary  
book)—so I picture  
myself returning home, setting  
the book on its shelf,  
taking off my shoes and  
jacket and relaxing, pouring  
a drink or making a cup  
of tea; the evening *is strangely  
relaxing like a woodcutter  
eating bread in a solitary  
wood*: an image designed

to calm one's mind or  
excite a humble passion  
for the domestic and the  
private—appropriate, then,  
that it's the woodcutter who  
eats alone, a solitary  
reject from the poem's so-  
called cast of characters,  
perhaps even the sinister  
(though introverted) villain of  
the poem or the dismal  
figure at its not-quite-  
center; you feel your stomach  
tighten and your throat con-  
strict; he both compels and  
frightens you with his violence  
to trees—trees, which have  
been made into books for  
decades and are now found in  
dwindling supply, so our wood-  
cutter sits as both savior  
and scourge in the world  
of books ... but isn't the  
axe itself also deserving  
of blame or praise? as  
the agent who bites into  
the tree and begins to render  
paper—maybe the  
woodcutter only approached this  
forest to hear *the song*  
*of the woodcutter women*

and the axe began to chop  
on its own—unlikely,  
I'll admit, but otherwise  
what roles are left to  
play by axe and book  
alike, other than those of  
false passivity—  
and these objects pass through  
time and remember, too; how  
else could we invoke  
*rock memory, water memory*  
with a straight face?—  
and I see no contradiction  
between praising the memory  
of objects and mistrusting  
their contingencies, like some  
medieval fear that suspicious  
persons turn into animals at  
midnight; the fear that the  
boundary between man and  
beast is thin and perm-  
eable by unknown agents:  
perhaps a specific alignment  
of planets and moons, or  
a change in the spiritual  
breeze, a dancing ring of  
fairies deep in the forest—  
and if none of this happens  
I can at least admit  
that *things aren't supposed*  
*to happen according to plan*

*and thus when they do  
it's a small dislocation  
in the universe—*

on the shelf, the book has  
shifted its spine and so  
I straighten it: the object  
will be stable for a moment,  
but beyond that another  
willful tremor could topple  
both shelf and book, kitchen  
table, chairs, sofa and desk,  
a cacophony of glass and  
silverware tumbling from  
ceiling to floor ...

“the world is not ours,”  
says the woman outside my  
window—and I nod, and  
I nod, and feel as if  
the ground begins to lift.

# NARRATIVE

You awoke, dressed and confused,  
of course, on the beach while above  
you a single bird sang from  
the branch of an evergreen—a sound  
which, to your ringing ears, seemed  
out of place; perhaps the bird had  
known you would wake here and  
came purposefully to find you, or  
else the bird could have been  
blown off course by a storm and arrived  
in this tree on this beach purely  
by coincidence——so you sat up,  
brushed sand from your hair, and  
searched towards the trees for a lost pair of  
sunglasses, only to remember that you  
*exist in a space, hemmed in by other  
trees that are called “real trees”* and  
whatever experience you had passed  
through or were about to pass  
through could likewise be called  
a “real” event, although taking  
a moment to reflect before forcing  
yourself to stand up and walk  
forward, along from the sandy dunes,  
you recalled a thin memory  
near another tree *planted with roots  
in the ground, perhaps a nearby  
trowel and a parent or child*



*further off to the left*———  
as if you had spent your life  
wandering confused among forests,  
some murky, half-lived dream  
in which you played every role:  
parent, child, perhaps tree, maybe even  
the trowel that the child used to dig holes  
in damp, loose gravel, or the half-smoked  
cigarette the bored parent puffed  
at before tossing it away, out of  
the child's line of sight———  
and this wispy character you dream,  
remember, or imagine, but whose  
inner thoughts become more real to  
you every second, wishes that the  
vacation they have taken the child  
on could have gone otherwise, that  
the two of them could have seen  
the southwestern deserts—but here  
they are, stuck in a foggy forest near  
a playground, as the child asks to hear  
a certain narrative and the parent replies,  
*"I have told you before, the story: How  
a bag of oranges has dried up  
and the fruit is now as husks..."*  
or is it you who has told this  
story before, or who has been  
told it enough times that the  
space between telling and hearing  
loses its shape; these two ways  
of grasping at narrative conjoin

in your mind as you press  
forward along the beach, noting  
with disinterest, as if your body  
were not your own, the pleasure of  
sand grains between your toes and  
rhythmic slaps of waves coming in—  
but nature is a distraction;  
you thought you saw a familiar face  
in a crowd four hundred yards  
away and you press towards this  
hint of familiarity with a single-  
minded focus, although the beach seems  
to lengthen with each half-stumbled  
step you take, and the face you  
once hoped would be familiar is now  
farther away and more alien than  
before ... you would not be  
surprised to find that you've been  
walking, in fact, on a treadmill with  
sporadic handfuls of sand tossed  
on the track by the hands of un-  
seen tricksters; perhaps even the sea-  
gulls and crabs are in on the  
prank—and the waves may not  
be real waves at all, but a few  
shallow inches of water rolled  
towards you again and again, like  
the water in a kiddie wave pool  
that a machine crests shore-ward  
until it is turned off, drained, and left for  
the night—or, worse, the waves you see

may be something like a projection  
splayed out on your retinas and cast from  
an unseen light, so what you take to be  
real, tangible, empirical is more like  
hallucination than perception ...  
perhaps your trust in nature has  
been misplaced, you realize, and the  
system you called “natural” is more like  
a network of connecting functions;  
you glance back to the trees and see  
*vivid green sunlight that was  
profundity is now invested with linkage,  
the grass, invested with linkage,  
the whole sky, a tainted link—*  
not that discrete nodes and linkages  
can't be profound, but still, it's un-  
nerveing to discover pseudo-technological  
connection where you expected to  
find ... nothing, only the slow processes  
that you believed had shaped the physical  
world but now came to doubt,  
unless at the bottom, some rhizome  
structure forms the very linkages which  
connect the forces and workings of  
nature——by now, you are far across  
the beach from where you began, and  
the face you thought you would  
recognize turned out to be the face  
of a stranger, although one uncannily  
similar to a man you met many years  
ago: brown hair, blue eyes, glasses,

the sort of face that could belong  
to any number of acquaintances;  
exhaustion had caught up with you, so  
you angled your path inland, back  
towards the trees and looked for  
a patch of color, but from *something*  
*longer than flowers, something purple*—  
*but the earth is tired of comparisons*  
and now no colors quite look alike, each  
tree shows a different tone of green, or  
yellow, red, orange, and you spy  
fine differences between the most  
similar shades; grains of sand  
possess subtly different hues from  
one another, as do flying water drop-  
lets splashed up by successive waves—  
you look and realize you are  
surrounded by differences; nothing is the  
same and even similarity seems like  
a fleeting concept ... of course the  
earth dislikes comparison when to compare  
has become impossible, when  
a category like 'color' is too naïve,  
too optimistic or normative; there is  
no more 'color,' only crimson, rose,  
lavender, periwinkle , and you look to the  
trees which again surround you to  
see that their up-thrust shapes resist  
categorization; no two tree trunks follow  
the same almost-straight line; pairs  
of needles or leaves seem similar at

first but you soon spot the overwhelming differences and realize that no leaf can convey the intricacies of any other, which, as cliché as that statement may sound, is another way of saying that the small engine which chugs along to create the natural world has never made two of the same object——you sink down to recline with your back against the trunk of another evergreen, close your eyes, and breathe slowly to calm your pounding heart and enjoy the breeze ... so you look at the swerving coastline and think “*I should find pleasure only in the straight line. I should cut out all curves and melodies. I should think of the effect and should find pleasure...*”—and you do feel pleased, or at least something like it, although the shoreline does not straighten but, through your closing eyes, looks more rounded and contoured than before; the sounds from birds and the tide change too, both are leaving you now, and even the trees may vanish, the sand on the shore itself start to flow out to sea, you believe.

# *LANDSCAPES*

Think about it, imagine  
it, let your mind  
displace itself to any land-  
scape of your choosing:  
the sight is not one  
you have seen arranged in  
this order before; it's what  
you cobble together from  
dozens of weekend trips  
to the country, visits  
to an uncle's or great-  
aunt's backwoods cabin  
somewhere between Gunnison  
and Georgetown;  
perhaps the view borrows from  
fields and gullies you  
walked through years ago, the  
river winding through  
foothills down to the  
mellow woodland lake, the  
crests of a dozen snow-  
capped mountains sus-  
pended at the far side  
of your private horizon ...  
*the place hasn't vanished,*  
*but the angle of*  
*time that became what*  
*you laughingly called your*

*“experience” is gone—*  
so you misremember the  
places you have never been,  
violently tear at the thought until  
you’re left with a bleeding collage  
of memory ... or is the  
situation more complex?  
think of a cartographer  
at her wooden table, who  
must make a map to  
mimic landscapes she has  
never seen—she picks  
up pens, she shades the oceans  
blue; land, green, *topo-*  
*graphy displays no favorites*  
although whatever doubtful  
“integrity” nature itself  
possesses is surely altered  
by its transition to the flat  
space of maps: *the names*  
*of seashore towns run out*  
*to sea*, or maybe towns  
and names are, alike, invented—  
and our cartographer is  
a genius at mimicry and  
subversion, at making images  
that resemble but do not  
represent genuine geography—  
a misplaced mountain  
here, an altered river to its  
east, a fabricated town north

of them both ... but if  
tonight you were to drive  
to where you thought these  
parts of landscape did  
not exist, you might find  
them, in fact, present and  
having been in their place  
for decades, leading you to  
wonder if the map or the  
landscape were wrong, or how one  
can exert a potent coercion  
over the other ... while  
truly neither can be “wrong,”  
as if her maps deliberately  
lied or the physical world  
set out to disfigure it-  
self by building degrees of  
difference between landscape and  
map—but we are  
not idiots; *we have been  
to school, and the world  
is many, we have learnt—*  
so from the many-world  
we draw or build our own  
images of mountains and  
grasslands, and happily agree  
that every possible map  
describes in exact detail  
some possible configuration  
of landscape, just perhaps  
one that hasn’t been discovered



or viewed from the precise,  
correct angle yet: the clouds  
look fresh today, to the  
south a field of pineapple  
grows, rows of imagined  
trees line a real high-  
way; everywhere you look,  
the earth makes its maximal  
effort to ... what, exactly?  
to produce forms, to evolve slightly  
shorter beaks on slightly  
larger birds, is this all?  
I suppose. But how many  
small changes in a landscape  
are needed to justify a  
new map, a new paper or  
digital projection, set to  
mimic an arrangement that  
may only last a few short  
years?—as if any  
change were in itself an  
aesthetic betrayal, to turn  
away from a close friend,  
the friend who best mimics  
your own idiosyncrasies, who  
can present your succinct  
portrait to a curious and  
admiring public, while you  
portray hidden depths of  
their so-called person-  
ality ... ; and this is why,

when you and I finally look  
away from the landscape or  
map that has held our  
attention and look back  
towards the cities,  
we whisper of our shared  
dislike of mirrors, and the  
backwards men and women  
inside the glass who are only  
one false step away from  
leaping out towards our  
unprotected eyes and throat;  
of course we want our  
reflection *to be clean as  
wood as it issues from  
the hand of nature*, but  
even a single mirror will  
double the number of people  
in this room, will render  
them perfect but inverse,  
the tricks of multiples and  
geometry that nature has  
aimed to master for centuries—  
but nature's one mistake  
has been to add new materials,  
to add complexity to  
its equations and algorithms,  
then turn against its  
own products when they  
are not as proportionate  
and exact of a replica as

an undressed man before a  
mirror ... new biology has  
clogged the system, nature  
thinks to itself, and votes in  
a draconian approach: to  
kill its own imperfections;  
so the small creatures who dwell  
between blades of grass or  
at the bottom of the ocean  
live their days in a land-  
scape of terror, in which any  
creature could destroy, kill,  
harm, or maim them like a  
poet smudging out a  
poorly shaped letter or parenthesis—  
think of a cave diver,  
crouched in the dank belly  
of some claustrophobic cavern  
who thinks to herself, *having  
been brought this far by  
nature, I have been brought  
out of nature, and nothing  
here shows me the image  
of myself*, nor is she  
shown alien or ancient  
images; the submerged cavern  
hosts no cave paintings or  
irreverent graffiti drawn by  
bored teenagers in a moment  
of lust or anger (and who,  
being 15, could easily discern the

two?)—so the diver realizes that being outside of nature means being outside of the rightful realm of images; watery walls shift and swim in the beams of her headlamp but never resolve, never cement enough to suggest a human or animal form—which is the great pleasure drawn from viewing clouds as they drift between shape and shapelessness—but the cave is utterly inhuman, and the diver cannot bring herself to imagine that its wet walls and floor have any qualities other than their sodden reality; pretending that she lays on her back beneath a canopy of palm leaves and swaying coconuts would be impossible; pretending that a hammock swings lightly from between two up-thrust stalagmites is laughably naïve: the place resists images—soon all sense of reality outside the cavern fades and both nature and image seem inconsequential; this place

becomes a *landscape full of an  
original chaos but not in itself  
divine*, as divinity links  
too neatly with the willingness  
to accommodate or admire a  
certain “beauty” from jumbled  
collections not considered an image ...  
think of the detritus, the  
insect swarms and shrub  
clippings outside of our own  
front door if you want a glimpse  
into the immediacy of nature; although  
you and I both know how  
easily we came to believe alluring  
fictions about the natural  
world and to leave unquestioned  
the ambiguous motives of  
animal and plant alike: the  
blandly manicured grass itself  
could hold hidden malice, a  
lust for blood or blind hatred  
of its forced uniform appear-  
ance, as grass seems obligated to  
play the part of something you’d  
call “surface,” an unwilling  
mediator between lofty trees,  
clouds, bicycles, telephone poles  
and the earthy secrets of  
rock, soil, and clay; think of landscape  
like this: *the balloons  
drift thoughtfully over the*

*land, not exactly commenting*  
*on it; this is the range*  
*of the poet's experience,*  
which means that although  
neither poet nor poem can  
trace or even reach down  
to touch the landscape, both  
author and text remind you  
of the pleasure that can be  
taken by lightly skimming  
over the tops of pine trees,  
nearly snagged but  
at last swerving away, or by  
catching your reflection—dis-  
torted as it may be—in the  
smooth surface of a rural  
lake—and so pleasure, then,  
may be the outcome of land-  
scapes, the modern pleasure  
of hovering just above that  
forever untouchable object  
whose artifice (an open  
secret which nature makes  
no effort to hide) only  
increases your joy, since touch  
would somehow prove it real,  
somehow prove the landscape  
pedestrian, so it should  
always lie directly over the  
next rise, the next mountain—  
out of habit you glance

nervously at your watch,  
while at the same moment,  
in a park across the street,  
a child lifts up his cheap  
camera to take a photo of  
a picturesque copse of trees  
and the craggy peak  
behind it—he lifts the camera  
to his eye as a pair of  
sparrows circle and play  
among the branches; he thinks  
that each bird *brushes*  
*in a fulsome way against*  
*the fulsomeness of nature*  
and snaps the photo—but  
one of the sparrows flies out  
of frame just before the shutter  
clicks, so the image is  
incomplete, only a partial rep-  
resentation (and the other bird  
that escaped the photo, does  
it still exist in a space  
devoted to the liminal,  
the not-quite-photographed,  
or has it been cut out of  
the world of images?)—  
but the boy doesn't realize  
the photo's imperfection; he  
won't develop it for several  
days and will have for-  
gotten that a second sparrow

ever flew beside the first;  
he will have forgotten that  
a landscape is not what you  
saw but what you tell your-  
self that you remember having  
seen ... a sort of binding  
up of words and impressions,  
parts of daily experience  
bundled, tidy, made singular,  
simplified and *secure in the adding*  
*up of all things into a*  
*block of hay from which*  
*no strand is permitted to*  
*extrude*—————and so the  
bird is forgotten, maybe  
to its own benefit as  
it beds down tonight  
in a bush near your  
house, outside of images,  
as if it had withdrawn itself  
from whatever pool  
of visual fragments we use  
to piece together landscapes,  
away from mirrors and  
the prying lens of the  
camera, silent and  
content with its paltry  
meal, this insect, some water.





## *NOTES:*

*In these poems, italicized lines indicate quotation. Writers quoted in each poem are:*

“The Hinge”: Lyn Hejinian, Ed Dorn, Armand Schwerner, John Ashbery, Jackson Mac Low, and Alice Notley.

“Narrative”: Barbara Guest, Diane Wakosi, Clayton Eshleman, and Robert Kelly.

“Landscapes”: Jennifer Moxley, Elizabeth Bishop, Laura Riding, Charles Olson, A.R. Ammons, Nicolas Pesqués, and John Ashbery.

Connor Fisher lives in Athens, Georgia. He has an MA in English Literature from the University of Denver, an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and is working towards a PhD in English and Creative Writing at the University of Georgia. His poetry and reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Volta*, *Rain Taxi*, *Dreginald*, *Word for / Word*, *Tarpaulin Sky*, *32 Poems*, *Typo*, *the Colorado Review*, and *7x7*.