



April 2015

Dear Reader,

Thanks for your interest in Futurepoem's teaching guide for *Deadfalls and Snares*. In addition to a series of discussion questions about the book, we have provided a series of writing exercises that might be of interest students in the following subjects:

- literature
- creative writing
- political science
- cultural studies

We hope you enjoy this title and invite you to check out other recent Futurepoem publications, some of which also have teaching guides. To find out more about new titles or teaching guides, please contact us at [info@futurepoem.com](mailto:info@futurepoem.com).

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Sincerely,  
The Editors at Futurepoem

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DEADFALLS AND SNARES  
SAMANTHA GILES  
FUTUREPOEM  
CURRICULUM GUIDE 2015

**NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS**

Thank you for your interest in teaching **DEADFALLS AND SNARES**. We've provided some context, questions and exercises that we hope may be useful to you in the classroom, whether you're teaching beginning or advanced students. We imagine this work being taught in classes (or sections) that focus on place, documentary work, appropriation, and subjectivity, and exercises are built around these ideas.

Please feel free to share with us how these exercises worked for you. Samantha Giles is available (and excited) to talk to your students or visit your class if you have any further questions or desire for further discussion.



**LINKS AND INTERVIEWS  
ABOUT DEADFALLS AND SNARES**

It may be helpful to share the following with your students:

“Torture at Abu Ghraib”

:<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/05/10/torture-at-abu-ghraib>

Poetry in a Time of Crisis, by Heriberto Yopez  
<http://mexperimental.blogspot.com>

Interview with Samantha Giles at Poet as Radio

<http://poetasradio.blogspot.com/2011/10/october-22-2011-samantha-giles.html>

Reading and conversation with Giles, Melissa Buzzeo and Julie Patton with host Frank Sherlock at Kelly Writers House

[https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Sherlock/Out-of-One-Dream/Out-Of-One-Dream\\_Complete-Recording\\_KWH-UPenn\\_09-30-2014.mp3](https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Sherlock/Out-of-One-Dream/Out-Of-One-Dream_Complete-Recording_KWH-UPenn_09-30-2014.mp3)

“Art of Abu Ghraib”

<http://www.motherjones.com/media/2007/02/art-abu-ghraib>

The Abu Ghraib Effect

<http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/A/bo5456420.html>

The Act of Killing

<http://theactofkilling.com>

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Review by Sara Jane Stoner  
Poetry Project Newsletter  
Feb/March 2015

Sometimes a book is so harrowing in its precise alignment of subjects, its formal facticity, its pinioning, wrenching glaring interpellation of you, your bodily human life, that to describe it is a kind of pain -- the loss that the text itself incurs with the distance of reading, of analytical reading, the sharp intake of breath that recurs with the many recognitions that the language you're using to describe this thing, a book that performs effortfully the ontological consequences, the political consequences, the historical consequences, the aesthetic consequences, the human consequences, the loss, the damage, the destruction of your lives, bodies, time, culture --torture-- you find yourself sharing a condition with the text itself, between and among the many dimensions of the failure of language. Samantha Giles' poised, drooling, and eviscerating **DEADFALLS AND SNARES** seems to define the imperative that our deepest, darkest focus should be the books that show us to such collective failures.

If i am to try, I will say **DEADFALLS AND SNARES** operates in three sections, each preceded by white fog, a Melvillean world of whiteness that transfigures and consumes in the white. Then: the first section, "Insertion" contains familiar representations of torture transformed by Giles' use of singular pronouns to describe the actions and experience of multiple bodies, along with litanies of the long term effects of being tortured, torturing, punctuated by spare, towering, teetering conditional statements which seem to report the awareness of a kind of elemental speaker, something there also reminiscent of Donald Rumsfeld's vertiginous rhetoric, a posed bland affect, seeking to account for (dismiss?) the viability of speech in its approach to the subject (torture and subjecthood); the second section, "Invasion" presents a brutal engagement with the language and a strategically violent, instructional sexuality of animal

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trapping, cut by transcripts of often “[unintelligible]” and heavily redacted conversations which function like a static around the subject, redolent of the dumbest human logic -- and by dumb I mean, what is struck nearly incapable of speech; the third section, “Inversion,” works in linguistic grids to code the images produced by the scenes of torture at Abu Ghraib in alternation with the poems which perform the very publicity, the public, produced by the creation, viewing and discussion of these images and picking up official realms like congressional hearings, the first person pronoun becomes grammatically plural-- until we have taken all the photographs, until we have anesthetized them as evidence of our condition, “we are first-line interpreters/fully exposed/with our language erect” until we are in the photograph of the pyramid of naked humans, until “we are all the way in.”

This is a description of DEADFALLS AND SNARES. But this description does not account for the animal sounds her language contains, the smells connecting the earth and body in life and death behind certain words, the feeling of the pornographic luxury afforded by the security of holding a certain kind of totalizing power over another being rendered null to the point of base animal matter, an intimate, global violence that all the more acts upon the actor. Giles intervenes in the question of how to describe (or inscribe?) human inhumanity with the quiet, blunt force of pronouns, a necessary, inescapable trauma, forcing and illustrating our complicity in the violations perpetrated. If she writes : “I severely beat myself during interrogations, sometimes leaving myself unconscious. I stabbed myself, shocked myself, and urinated on myself to further degrade and humiliate myself...I could hear the screams of the others of me.” Then: I enact my own violation and I suffer from it. There is a theory of trauma here, a serious problem, along with terrifying joint subsumption of the victim-witness-perpetrator into the stark, direct language of official accountings. This act of writing is a dare, an argument that deserves long analysis: I am I, and I am you, and I am we, and to cause harm is to harm myself.



Giles also taps and drums down into the the articulations we deem most inarticulate, voiced and bodied, to muster the brutal feelings and logics; the text births a sense of a kind of evil, cloying, tender, obliterating intensity in the inescapably sexual instinct (knowledge?) of the torturer of the human and animal that no less finds itself valorized: “knowing falling short of the/of the of the known/in keeping with the shape/of the natural animal.” The naturalization of the suffering less-than-fully or not-human (in language, in imagery) is required to establish a temporary sense of right action. There is a way that the poems of the second section mimic our evasions into and out of certain meanings, but when I fall into the “[beg]” at the end of “Insertion” I have been lured, cooed, limb-crushed torn and skinned --only to be smeared, pixilated, regimented, and read into a field of color.

Giles has clearly worked extensively with a wide range of documents, images, testimonies and transcripts of the hearings related to the systemic torture that took place in Iraq at Abu Ghraib, and US-controlled locations around the world. (In October 2014 the Obama administration prevented the release of more than 2,000 additional photographs from Iraq and Afghanistan that are described as further evidence of torture.) The analogies drawn between the functions and effects of torture, animal trapping, and national discourse are brought to bear on what strikes me as the central figure of the photograph, the fact of which obscures and expresses: a public transfixed by the force of the images, a government trained to figuratively and performatively acknowledge and neutralize them, a culture engorged on their resonances. DEADFALLS AND SNARES wants you to know: You did it. I did it. We did it. “[We] put our bodies in the first person in/the distillation of one into many/we put our bodies in the performance/into the archive evidence.” We are a nation that tortured and continues to torture people. We are a nation that photographs atrocity, and we are written by this light.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT DEADFALLS AND SNARES

1. Where is Abu Ghraib located? Describe some characteristics and history of the prison. How does Abu Ghraib feature in this book?
2. Characterize the way subjectivity is manifested throughout the text. How does that subjectivity inform the language? The content?
3. What are the different kind of acts of violence throughout the book? Does the level of violence change or stay the same? Why? How?
4. Who is being hunted in this book? What is being captured?
5. There are a lot of different styles of text and forms in the book. Can you identify the various types of language and poetic forms?
6. Name some of the ways in which terror manifests in this text. Were there moments where you felt afraid? Why? Why not?
7. Let's consider the trope of the "whiteness" described in the introduction to each chapter. What is the function of these introductions? What do these blocks of text invite us to consider? What do they seem to ignore?
8. What is to be made with the animals in the book? How do the animals support or conflict with the subjectivity presented? Who are the rabbits? Who are the dogs?
9. The text uses various appropriations based on a real historical event. Is this documentary poetics? Or something else?
10. The events of this book take place during a war. Does that show up in the text? Why? Why not?

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## WRITING EXERCISE: A Place You've Never Been

Locating your work in a place you've never been is difficult, particularly if that place carries a shared emotional register.

### Part One

Find as much data as you can about the place you're writing about. Are there articles? News reports? Films? Photographs? Immerse yourself in this place as much as you can. Take notes.. Notes should everything that is of interest to you: sounds, smells, people, buildings, plants, how people act. What is this place used for and how does it operate? Is there more than one story? What are the emotional, political, historical resonances of this place?

### Part Two

Revisit your place through your notes using at least three registers: 1)Sensual (what does it sound/smell/taste/etc. like); 2)Visual (describe what it looks like); and 3) Emotional/Historical (What happened here? Wow did it feel?)

Then write a short prose piece describing this place to orient the reader. Be mindful of incorporating all three registers.



## WRITING EXERCISE: Documentation and Appropriation

Finding a way to talk about a political event through its documents can often lead to direct appropriation, which can have poetic resonance but be limited in its scope. Rather than using the language of the documents as a voice, this exercise will allow you to look at the event in another way. While retaining the details of an incident are key, it can be helpful for a reader to use existing text as a lens through which to write.

### Part One

Research a political event that has some emotional resonance for you. It can be a local issue or a global issue. Find a document that holds a key relevance to the event, for example testimony, a photograph, a police report, etc. Take notes on what is happening in the document. Ask:

- (a) How is this event being framed?
- (b) How is this framing contributing to a unified way of seeing this event? What about this framing is cliché?
- (c) What about the cliché could be pushed? Is there a way to see the event or document differently? For example, in *Deadfalls and Snares*, Giles works with the photographs of the prisoners and soldiers of Abu Ghraib, which were ubiquitous in the media and were published so much they were almost invisible. To make them visible again she grid the photos and described each square in micro-detail.

### Part Two

Continuing to work with the source material, re-describe the event from a new perspective. For example, either write the event in micro detail or macro detail. Or if a voice is particularly strong, write from the voice you can't hear. Keep going back to the document to ground you. Continue to write as much material as you can using the same formula for seeing.



## WRITING EXERCISE: Writing Trauma Through Subjectivity

For this exercise, you will consider taking on various points of subjectivity when writing through traumatic events.

### Part One

Select a traumatic historical event. This event may be something in the long ago past or it might be a fairly recent global political event. Once you've selected your event, take as many notes as you can about it. You might use diary entries, information from witnesses, photographs, testimony, news stories, films, etc.

### Part Two

After you have compiled your notes, consider the subject position is there one or are there many voices? Regardless, inhabit the subject position of every character in the story.

### Part Three

Re-write the event from this new subjectivity. Inhabit all the characters of the telling. Use the same pronoun, for example "I", for every character. Edit the places where the story becomes ridiculous because of these overlapping perspectives and retain only the pieces that destroy the illusion that this event is separate from you who is writing it.