This digital proof is provided for free by UDP.

It documents the existence of the book *Or, The Ambiguities* by Karen Weiser, which was published in 2015.

If you like what you see in this proof, we encourage you to purchase the book directly from UDP, or from our distributors and partner bookstores, or from any independent bookseller.

If you find our Digital Proofs program useful for your research or as a resource for teaching, please consider making a donation to UDP.

If you make copies of this proof for your students or any other reason, we ask you to include this page.

Please support nonprofit & independent publishing by making donations to the presses that serve you and by purchasing books through ethical channels.

UGLY DUCKLING PRESSE
uglyducklingpresse.org
Also by Karen Weiser

To Light Out
"[I]t is not for man to follow the trail of truth too far, since by so doing he entirely loses the directing compass of his mind; for arrived at the Pole, to whose barrenness it only points, there, the needle indifferently respects all points of the horizon alike."

—Herman Melville
Pierre; or, the Ambiguities

"We ought to say a feeling of and, a feeling of if, a feeling of but, and a feeling of by, quite as readily as we say a feeling of blue or a feeling of cold."

—William James
The Principles of Psychology
Chapter IX: ‘The Stream of Thought’
Dear Pierre, 13
Love, Delight, and Alarm, 33
Pilgrimage, 55
In the Darbies, 67
N: DEAR PIERRE
I was eighteen when my parents died in a plane crash. The decade after that is bare.

For as the breath in all our lungs is hereditary, and my present breath at this moment,
Our mirrors were covered. There were strangers in our house all day long. I don't remember eating. My clothes were torn. I wore no shoes. People only spoke to me if I outline of Pierre, but now strangely filled with features transformed, and unfamiliar to.

no living thing in the fair form of humanity, that holds me dear. No more, oh no more,
spoke to them. No childhood, no home, no confirmation of memory. Symbols made me

feel again. I could feel when something was focused into a way of saying feeling. As if a

recoil of that anguish, which had dashed him out of itself, upon the beach of his swoon.

owned no earthly kith or kin. Yet was this feeling entirely loathsome, and orphan-like.

feel in. I feel something focused a way saying As if

feel in. I feel thin used way in As i

feel I feel in use a n As

I feel us a n

I f

feel

elf

swoon

at anguish,

elf

d own. swoon.

elf

d that anguish, hed to itself, be swoon. 

elf

d that anguish, had shed him to itself, on the beach his swoon.

elf

recoil of that anguish, which had dashed him out of itself, upon the beach of his swoon.
line was pulling me back into my body. Words gave me back a body. It was all I.
was drowned but somehow I could see a way of seeing and it has never failed me.

— the flowing river in the cave of man; careless whither I be led, reckless where I land

— the lowing river the cave of careless w i ther be led less here I land
— the flowing river in the cave of man; careless whither I be led, reckless where I land

"Ye s
"Ye s
"Ye s
"Ye t slaking evening skies, ye hilly dews and mists, distil your moisture here!

"Ye thirst-slaking evening skies, ye hilly dews and mists, distil your moisture here!

"Ye thirst-slaking evening skies, ye hilly dews and mists, distil your moisture here!
Being still and always dead. The only wholeness a totality of change. Fourteen years later

I feel that there can be no peace in individualness. I hope one day to feel myself drank up

held her tremblingly; she bent over toward him; his mouth wet her ear; he whispered it.

I gave birth and the only wholeness was a totality of change. While hugely pregnant for
Being not so much the Portal, as part of the temporary Scaffold to the Portal of this new
the second time I went to hear a quartet playing the music Shostakovich composed while
"Whence flow the panegyrical melodies that precede the march of these heroes? From
move the brink of having to leave the sound hall. I was very close
By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central
By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central
By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central
By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central
By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that the bungled
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central
By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central
By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central
By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central
By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that the bungled
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that

be t
be t
be t
be t
be t
be t

o de be t
o de be t
o de be t
o de be t
o de be t
o de be t

o de then, be t aught look mir th reflect
o de then, be t aught look mir th reflect
to death, then, be pregnant. aught look in a mirror that reflected
to death, then, being nine months pregnant. Caught looking in a mirror that was reflected

Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that the bungled
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that
Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that

be t
be t
be t
be t
be t
be t

o de be t
o de be t
o de be t
o de be t
o de be t
o de be t

o de then, be t aught look mir th reflect
o de then, be t aught look mir th reflect
to death, then, be pregnant. aught look in a mirror that reflected
to death, then, being nine months pregnant. Caught looking in a mirror that was reflected
thy secret I, as a seer, suspect. Grief—deep, unspeakable grief, hath made me this seer.

thy secret suspect. Grief—deep, unspeakable grief, hath made me this seer.

thy secret suspect. Grief—deep, unspeakable grief, hath made me this seer.

Sir—you are a swindler. Upon the pretense of writing a popular novel for us, you have

Sir—you are a swindler. Upon the pretense of writing a popular novel for us, you have


doctorate. Grief, hath made me this seer.
fell upon Pierre's heart, and her long hair ran over him, and arborred him in ebon.

fall, Pierre, long hair arbored him in ebon.

Oy

to my

to my

to her, to my

to her, to my

to her, to both of my girls, what was taken from me.
S: LOVE, DELIGHT, AND ALARM
i. Preface, Part I

Along a plane I wanted to write it:
Where one end is fixed, a loose sun

To the excess of dark I was certain
That certainty’s a kind of excess

A term that’s but a navigating bust
A place to version a limit, feet in foot

When the lute’s sum turns daily
As if by steam one could coordinate

The tulips, too numerous to pinch
By steam the autography of material

Will appear to light the vapor region
So we can know it as if by touch

A nude thing, the masses say
As they re-substantiate again
ii. Preface, Part II

What's in there to sing
Cussing its moral peepitude
Not content to festoon
Merely, but needing to festoon leaning
Against a scientific hunch
That will not apologize in this house
Of commerce, for its rupture
Or ability to suss us
Why now this impassioned youthful pause?

Mind the break

It would say—
Why this enkindled cheek and eye
With its secret prohibition
Though to speak it only makes plain
The secret's already or always
Been stolen, its pulsing voicebox
Oh tree, the face, the face
Another locus animal
Peeps down on me

iii. Pierre

I should have slept in a balloon half covered in fog
To drift together in body if not in mind
I cannot bring my mind to let go its hand
Refusing drift
Decelerate with a tug on the loom of awake
So the threads let go their pull

If I could take the middle pier into the steam
That churning thinking thing, and swallow it
As a rose turns vinyl in the sun
My distant promise of resubstantiation
A surprising eternity for a deed
Would be the ledge of dawn

At any rate I would take the middle pier
Unobliterable as the sea
Into the white shadow of a perfectly sealed box
That fails to deeply contain
One orbit of joy
A glimpse of the glorious
Subtile acid among us
iv. Pierre

Then the treehouse burned. And continued
Unobliterable as the sea
To burn. The photo of it burning

Hangs on its wall, taken from high up,
But not that high. The firemen
Approach cautiously, minus the

Four-part regimented solace, that
Would repeat. If the act of
Painting is Drawing the boundaries

Of a fire, can I disappear
Into the initial combustion? If the
Act of painting stops time or at

Least its cornet of fronted tremendous,
I could disappear into the Encyclopedia
of Animal Life as the cherub’s sleepiest

Wet tusk. I could start with a dexterous
Periscope and end by feeling
Time, the largest block of it

I can conceive collectively:
Smell I the flowers, or thee?
See I lakes, or eyes?

v. Isabel

With its secret prohibition
The music orders my animal parts
As off a menu; said Isabel: these others

Light the vapor regions between notes
The gas-sea butter jarred into shape
Through light and its lewd manifest

So early in the morning
Between personhood and figuration
My body is not my own

A vestigial symphony none are
Meant to sound, though I am sounded
Continually, by every orbit’s

Sober astronaut and her spirit freight
In the colorless shadow of a perfectly
sealed space.

Oh tree, the face, the face
Peeps down on me
vi. Isabel

Salutations
Sister me not now
Sound the morrow against the body
Piercing certainty's kind of excess
To allay sorrow. Are you certain
Your vastation wasn't the limpid zoo
Of distress and its truest
Machination? And the ignorant
Pretend clovers? Good Morrow will steady
Us; it is our duty to steady us

We park our plovers in the white steam
To skate its cracking surface with
The simplest dream statements
From other, war-made worlds
Though they are our own
With the little we can keep in mind at once
Careless whither I be led
In mind, a memory of absent day
where I land

vii. Pierre's Father, a Ghost

Held in the palm that coin
Is a hermaphrodite vitamin, held
In the stomach, a secret palace,
And held in the ear, it's the multiplicity
Of memory unfolding
The Encyclopedia of Unfolding
Its lewdly manifest lute clarity
Interspersed with trumpeting noise
Into what kind of human shape
Will this fugue sound
An animal drift
Pulled tightly into formal expanse

With the memory of absent day all
That has come before sinks
With each unfolding
Held in the mind where it does not sound
Careless whither I be led
Reckless where I land
viii. Pierre

Held in the mind where it sounds
Some inexhaustible disruption
Art makes man an ex-lute

Scratched and skipping
Out her most-lost tune
Be equal to that claim and only equal

Inexhaustibly skipping lets in
What quiescent light
For the spectral oculus in the ear

Or the ear’s proxy
I gotta sit in your seat
Or your seat’s proxy to listen

To the laws of music
Please
Can I sit in your seat

This train is packed
With what quiescent light
Skips back to us

Its meadow dignified
The louder it reaches
I am all Frank

I am all unguarded

ix. Mount Greylock

This poem contains a smaller
Inner poem
Most of us know an allegory
By our own quiescent response
The echo of muted places
From the sudden shift outward
So violet in the exchange
Of motion and maintenance
Experiment and sacrament
Though no fasteners
Under day’s hairnet
Hold anything still

I am somebody’s landscape
At this moment exactly
Some inexhaustible disruption
Passing from one state
To another. The Guidebook
to a Mammalian Universe
Without its
Red opera cloak
Is often mended with
Quaint precipitation
Dashed out of oneself
Upon the beach of a swoon
x. Pierre's Mother

Oxygen-less upon the simple
August stun. A swoon collages
Time and upon it 14th century
Vienna and the baby Christ
Nay, all images are prayers
To simplify and horde senseless
Thoughts. Collapse nine months
Into a single swoon, drown—
To the castaway the beach is
Port, body, empurpled firelot
Dashed out of itself
Hosting a medical dusk
I think now
That I plainly see
It must be so

xi. Pierre

How do you say no little mystery
And mean a tinier
Unanswered memory
Limpid with precedent
By that I meant
Reason's corona
feels
Out of order
Orbs angelic
Forever unsistered

Your key, doored, is
Plainly feeling fortune
Hello fortune,
Though mutually converted, we are
Still at odds
It must be so
How do you say
love
Caustically
To make it

Feel
Like the argument it is
In the parlance
We most resemble
So I can merit my addendums
So I can confess
In unintelligible but
Delicious sounds

Sister me not, now
It must be so
xii. Pierre

Not now, noble auditor  
Are your sincere transits  
Ever easy

When one thing follows  
It changes what it follows  
And is always followed

In turn  
When one thing before us  
Ray gloom ray gloom ray

Is gloom  
It changes what it causes  
What it costs

You’ve lapsed with owls and virgins  
Where the cumulous is without emblem  
In turn

Can’t thou not cure in me this dreaminess, this  
Bewilderingness  I feel  
A cloistered genie is quelling

In homilies but the elevator  
Is not usually this  
Late my poor head swims

And swims with fraternal feeling  
For you, noble responder  
Have become a part of this poem’s

Become a part of you’ve become  
A part of this war-  
Feeling family

Was once was never but  
Mysteries interpierced with mysteries, and mysteries  
Roaming

Saturnalia  
Before us  
Responding
xiii. Isabel

Redemption narratives are twee
Rudders
In the maelstrom
Lose them though it cost a piss
Bobbling a probability bayou
With manufactured calm

So I do most carefully
Navigate between a too solid
How
And too flimsy cover
Do you say
Unmuffling footsteps

Sister me
Or the mystery
Redeems us not
Am considerate, swore
Am a wreck
With a whisper

The moving parts of hunger
Remain gravity
At the bottom of every answer
May I
um
Chorus

xiv. Narrator

Pierre,
Facts in their non-compendiums
Exile you
For a wife; and your love, a sister
Chaste
Whisper in her ear
Eight ifs to that whose minimum
Is a folio, and another if on top

Blinds you, kills you
The blankness of the
Paper, its burn
To sink a metal fig in lye
The monster dubiously
Is our affective habitat
Habit at
Minimum
**xv. Pierre's Father, a Ghost**

What does mind?  
The portrait grates the  
Solids into different shapes so  
The elegy can be  
From its surrounding matter  
Broken to  
Its simp=  
Lest:

Here, not here

Said the elegy  
Because I really  
Meant that you love your chronometer  
Into various shapes before  
He opens you  
Walking the voices in my head  
Only  
They are walking in their sleep  
Into various colors  
There, the needle indifferently respects all points of the horizon alike

**xvi. Narrator**

The elegy is a monster  
Whose notes perforate your communal feeling  
With its nascent consciousness  
Pre-person, little tenderly  
Floats this title on the fountain of philosophy  
It is Doctor to the Virgo Drone  
Describing completely the moment life begins  
To be human  
Are you acquainted with this category  
Knowing little about it knowing  
Nothing about the inner nature of these  
Facts or what makes them what they are  
Participating nonetheless  
More-rificly high and temporally strident  
Sweet flame of Babylon  
Goes slack in a woods  
Goes slack 'gainst a forceful bladder  
All over the goods  
Family medical history folder  
No this won't decide it, not feeling pain  
Not unremitting sound shapes  
Nor the way one body communicates  
With another in its  
Continuous suede  
Nut-hollow, nesting  
Now it is good to believe  
Dear  
Pierre
E: PILGRIMAGE
Walk like somnambulists abroad,
hear humming all around
and greet it, costs nothing
but an echo hum inside.
   Are you all round?

I & I'm walking but not seeing
what empty lot is walking:
   I & I'm advertising greeting
in the freefall of your hum.
What is a moral compass
when the blushing throat is talking?
What is a moral judgment
when languages corrupt

This is pleasing me
enough to jail my sympathy.
My inner hum walks in woe
enough to hail my sympathy.
No pilgrimage left no more
but transits of the discrete pour
a messmate of the elements
with daedal life in boats and tents.

Precious in substance rudely wrought
habitat, which here is caught:
my paratactic hand
my buzzsaw pauses
my Angel Haze
my Observing Sky;
and here is a moment
the consequence of pivoting.

And here is my cruelty
the consequence of governing.
I & I would be improvingly
If I'd be improving
That stable proof that I would fold
into my drawer, under the lake,
into my compass, into my chart:
it is but made from other things
a music derived from vanishing

Did nearer my roses come
Did nearer my roses die

This vanishing is going low
eclipse a failing sympathy
Did nearer my planet come
Did nearer my planet go
just past where death, a legend,
follows in silence.
How may we be derived from scale?

End in a box in a hole.
End in a drawer in a lake.

This vanishing is going low—
this vanishing is going low.
W: IN THE DARBIES
With
darbies,
I'm a visual ana-
mirrored so I can make
gram; my self sliced and
sense of floating, and sink-
and drop me deep, fathoms
ings always tell of something,
the fingers divinities, the palms
bronze and held near the waist,
pointing to that which is out-
either, pendant pearl from
can't be seen but only
I'll shake a
tips the guard's cutlass and silvers this nook; what other world can there be when it: fathoms down, fathoms asleep, and yet waking is de-silvered frescoes; what other world can there be when every price melts it, a nature: it is dreaming that I am: fathoms down, fathoms down, for the likes just of me, though I've I'll shake out my dreams, their utopi-
here's

in the moon

some terrace

scarcely the feeling of

earth, and once again,

distance, we are alongside
toward us, witnessing, like one

the other, tied in place

bank of found objects fac-
ing the other, tied in place with fire-hose, unnatural vines or the

thirteenth turn of the noose, bending toward the arc of progress as

though the world was made up

of critique populates the loneli-

our own world and no pos-

about in the zenith, 
as timing
heaven knows who

will have the running of me up this topical ranging of reference, this cor-

for hanging is to converse

domestic is as handsome does,

that dictates action or the result of it—in the viewer’s thoughts—

and as such, a banal motif can

but turn your head away

blur’s in our eyes; and

wes an appearance the cause of which

is not immediately to be assigned, much like a watch

up, this beautiful image is

somewhat, neither metaphor

gesture outward, as if it is an ocean of

it came from close by—I feel it stealing

yard in the upper part of the

on an empty stomach, now,

never it would do
But no! It is dead

then I’ll be, come
to think—for innocence
is condemned and intent
no matter, as the feminine in
man must here be ruled out, a
monotonous blank of the twi-
Law, with its cool head, War’s child, and his cheek it was like the
budding pink drum roll to grog;
are alongside the re-imagining,
washed under, a blur’s in
my tongue

I would not have,
for
this, I travel
though the ocean’s not
it does, blurring each image
lads for the “ragged edges”
old Rights of Man, that ship I
left for a purer fable, is a mutiny I hold in my hands, though hands
always tell of something, pointing
to that which is outside the frame, but
a foundling is guilty to the father
him clear with my last words,

who
in the rainbow
can draw the line
and the orange begins—it is
in a time of war, forms, mea-
they whitewash events to ren-
der them read, and reading them
now you know my good faith, and holy oblivion covers all at last,
much like a watch when in wind-
you’ll echo my final words,
through time, an

the ocean for reading and killing
new, 

for these wars our allegiance, and law is determined for himself, by ford, on an empty stomach

now, ever it would do, to read the mantraps as under the daisies, text to judge; it’s judging held up as a but its silver’s been scraped, so that see it so, reading us through, reading us,

row-bones here and prayer, for highly civil-ized murder gluts Nature, and the ocean’s a mirror but its silver’s been scraped; each poem’s a time capsule with references lost, so what’s left but the innocence of language’s grave: a jewel block they’ll make accident or is it the willed, my I’ve hit deadly space, and words that obliterate what they displace,
disciplined enough, the water asks, and offers to discipline me, whose myth will be no spasm as I die, whose myth will disperse the century; do words have molecules and whose myth will disperse the century: do words have molecules and are they soft, can my city be leaguered under its surface, a surface still part of the depth: moving back into the viewer’s stutter, its infinite regress of knowledge, between my body and that that holds me—just ease these darbies at the wrist, roll me over fair—this sound, and out of the illusion—

I am sleepy, and the oozy weeds about me whisper one form of expression without another, and the oozy weeds about me twist, for the more this space fathoms down, fathoms down, the poem itself an eclipse of meaning, the fact that nobody could substantiate this report, was of course, nothing—meaning is a mirror and its silver’s been scraped, ‘twill die in the dawning of this, my last day

A y ,

Ay, Ay all is up;

and I must up too, suspend-
ed in shapes you’ll no longer

make out, just ease these too tight

forms at your wrist, they’re made

of the systems

that hang us through.
POSTSCRIPT

As I was writing a dissertation chapter on Herman Melville's 1852 novel *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*, I attempted to seek out Melville across time using the poem as a Ouija board, thinking of its slow accretion of letters as a means to converse with the dead. The game turns on the question: who is answering? Is it another player, dead or alive? Is it oneself? This metaphor for reading, especially the reading of works from the past, seems useful as a compositional analog (or practice?) for writing poetry. It puts the players (or readers) in control of the meanings they create, while simultaneously asking them to question, and be aware of, their own input into the creation of meaning at the level of the letter. And for the writer, the poem as Ouija board embodies Jack Spicer’s idea that poems are “how we dead men write to each other,” since in poems we are always alive and already dead, innocent in character and guilty in action: a paradox of knowing.

In addition to borrowing from Melville’s *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*, *Clarel*, and *Billy Budd*, the poems in this book also owe a debt to Jeanne Liotta’s film *Observando El Cielo*, which extends the idea of pilgrimage into a kind of cosmic looking; Robert Rauschenberg’s titles; the poems of Elizabeth Willis and Fred Moten; and Barbara Johnson’s famous and thrilling essay, “Melville’s Fist: The Execution of *Billy Budd*” (*Studies in Romanticism*, 1979), among other sources and influences both dead and alive.
Thank you to the editors of the following journals and websites, in which the following poems, or excerpts of them, appeared: Manor House, Peaches and Bats, Academy of American Poets Poem a Day <www.poets.org>, Pulled Pork, Vlak, The Volta <thevolta.org>, and Divine Magnet. A deep thank you to Judah Rubin and his Well Greased Press for publishing the chapbook Dear Pierre.

For help with this book, I am deeply grateful to Anselm Berrigan, my most generous reader, and to Brett Price, Jeanne Liotta, Dana Ward, Carley Moore, Matt Longabucco, Eileen Myles, Anna Moschovakis, Dan Owen, Edvige Giunta, Macgregor Card, Marcella Durand, Douglas Kearney, Edgar Arceneaux, and Alice Notley. Thank you also to Jarrod Beck, Will Rawls, and Eddie Berrigan.

The cover art, entitled “The Black Ghost,” is a collaboration by Jarrod Beck and Will Rawls, with lettering by Eddie Berrigan.

Also, thank you to the Rauschenberg Residency / Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, where part of this book was written, and to New York Foundation of the Arts, for the 2014 fellowship in Poetry.