A READER’S COMPANION

for

Noah Falck’s

*Exclusions*

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**Biographical Note**

Noah Falck is an author, poet, and educator. He was born and raised in Dayton, Ohio, and attended the University of Dayton where he received a BS in Education and a Master’s in Literacy. He is author of the poetry collections *Exclusions* and *Snowmen Losing Weight* as well as several chapbooks including *You Are In Nearly Every Future*, *Celebrity Dream Poems, Life As A Crossword Puzzle*, & *Measuring Tape for the Midwest*. He also co-edited *My Next Heart: New Buffalo Poetry*. He has received fellowships from the Kenyon Review Writers Workshop, The Ohio State University, and Antioch Writers’ Workshop. His poetry has appeared in *Boston Review, Harvard Review, Kenyon Review, Ploughshares, Poets.org*, and has been anthologized in [*Poem-A-Day 365 Poems for Every Occasion*](https://www.amazon.com/Poem-Day-Poems-Every-Occasion/dp/1419717995) (Abrams Books, 2015). For ten years, he taught elementary school, and currently spends his summers mentoring young writers as a faculty member in the *Kenyon Review* Young Writers Workshop. Now living in Buffalo, New York, he works as Education Director at the non-profit Just Buffalo Literary Center and curates the Silo City Reading Series, a multimedia poetry series in a 130-foot high abandoned grain elevator.

Critical Praise for Noah Falck’s Poetry

On *Exclusions*

Poetry is often the art of what's left out: it offers the story behind the official story, the weather that weather reports exclude. The poems in Noah Falck’s *Exclusions* conjure worlds in which what's missing shows us what matters most. Their generous whimsy and poignant metamorphoses are flinty and tender; this is poetry of radiant aftermath and post-industrial magic, of the conversation that remains after "all your lines have been cut / and I don't have a mouth." Whether he's musing among "groomed ruins" or eulogizing "revolutionary clumsiness," Falck invites us to see with more feeling, to grin with more bearing, to care like it can change us. "The heart is the most donated organ," he writes; in this book of absences, the heart is never missing. — **Zach Savich**

Noah Falck's *Exclusions*purports to leave everything out, and yet somehow this book has everything in it: birth, death, rust, sex, smoking, shadows, floodlights, Olympic mascots, how "the sun flattens / into a sort of messy bruise / over the lake." Falck is a deadpan Nostradamus, dispensing fast-hitting predictions and sour flashes of the past. "Teenagers can't get drunk / fast enough is what you think of / when you think of home." These poems are fraught machines that crack and fizzle, that think deeply and resist the low ground, that come from a place of uncanny wildness and heft. —**Natalie Shapero**

Blurb excluding hot air and blowing smoke: In the negative space, in the life-shadow and image-silhouette, lurks an observer embroiled in all of humanity’s ecstasies, foibles, common miseries, latent beauties, political horrors, and humdrum goings-on. *Exclusions* keeps us off balance, stumbling forward, and absolutely alive with both the inventive possibilities of lyric poetry and that rare experience of watching the genre redefine itself in a pair of this art’s most capable hands. —**Michael McGriff**

Falck’s gloom’s a playful one, and his exclusions creep into and around our midst in order to ask a little something of us. Gentle but jarring, these poems let us in to where we are. The password is you.  —**Graham Foust**

Author’s Commentary and Discussion Questions

## \*from *Winter Tangerine’s* [Shedding Skins](http://www.wintertangerine.com/shedding-skins-toc) issue / the architecture of a poem where poets share the processes of composition – stage by stage.

## Poem Excluding Romance

         Noah Falck

The first storm seen from outer space
was a ballad. The rest of your life was
summarized in the refrain of a pop
song, in the catching of breath in the
middle of a marathon. We all squint
our eyes at the entire history of
Olympic mascots. As day grows
into night in bedrooms lit by scented
candles, the obscure noise in the attic
announces how soon the dead
become song.

*// second draft*

The first storm seen from outer space was a

ballad, an erotic representation scribbled in

magic marker. The rest of your life in the

refrain of a pop song, in the catching of

breath in the middle of a marathon. You

squint your eyes at the entire history of

Olympic mascots. Days grow into nights in

bedrooms lit by scented candles. It was at

the last St. Patrick’s Day Parade where two

tubas become your song.

*// first draft*

First a storm seen from outer space. Embarrassed at what you don’t remember. The absolute rests in a pop song. In the catching of breath in the middle of a red lake. How people kiss the tips of their fingers and squint their eyes after winning in life. The day grows into night in bedrooms lit by scented candles. Our cellular phones better than sunsets. Horns announcing ...
The first storm seen from space. The rest of your life in the refrain of a pop song. You squint your eyes. The days grow into nights in wallpapered bedrooms, and French horns become another language in your body.

***Commentary***

With *Poem Excluding Romance*, I knew that I wanted to create an environment within the poem that felt removed, far away. Really with all of the *Exclusion* poems it was about setting a certain mood against the subjects and surrounding them with obscurity, strangeness.

The first draft of *Romance*, from what I have on file, was a list of images – the storm, the pop song, the squinted eyes, etc. But do these images do anything? I don’t know, maybe. The next draft I had on file was an extension of those images, adding layers to them, dressing them appropriately.

The next draft I have on file is this one where St. Patrick’s Day makes an appearance. I am not sure why or even how this made it in the poem. I really hate the St. Patrick’s Day ending in this draft. I think, with that line, perhaps I was thinking about the actual holiday, and the drunken buffoonery surrounding it. At any rate, the St. Patrick’s Day image was so bad to me, that it shook the poem in a new direction, at least the ending of the poem. I knew something didn’t sound right in its language; the music was gone. It was at this point that I shifted and focused primarily on sound. I asked myself - How does this poem want to end? Where is the music? I ended up marrying the music and the ghost. And that was it. Though looking back on it, I really have no idea how I arrived at those choices - how I knew these were the images and sounds I wanted to live in the poem.

**Writing Exercises**1. Exclusion Poem – make a list of ideas and objects – sleep, robots, hunger, sky, the 1990s, darkness, etc. Write a poem that works to purposefully exclude / leave out the idea or object – however let the idea & object work as a framework in your thinking. The poem could directly address the idea or object. How do we leave the sky out of the poem? What if the 1990s never happened? What would we do without “Smells Like Teen Spirit?” Etc. Have fun, be present, but let the imagination drive.

2. Collective Poem – some of *Exclusions* writes from a collective experience. “We look at each other until the power / goes out.” Write a poem from the “we” perspective. Let the “we” not necessarily be you – it could be your best friend and her dog or your grandparents living it up in their youth at the Drive-in. The collective imagination can be a powerful place to sit. Let the poem emerge from thinking as a collective.

3. Map Poem - write a poem that also functions as a map. Or find a map of your hometown and write a poem on top of it – using the names of cities as titles. These may be very short poems or single poetic lines. Xerox the finished poem map and distribute at the local visitor center.

4. Opposite Poem - use an existing poem (either one of yours or one you select from a book or anthology). Replace every word with its opposite. Continue composing / constructing until the poem makes sense and it feels completely your own.

5. Future Poem - make a list of five images of things you’ve seen in the last 24 hours. An abandoned school bus in a field, a tree holding a chainsaw, the eyes of a child, a paper shirt, lightning through a smartphone. Use all of them in a poem. Then remove all of them except the one that speaks most to who you will be in next five years.

6. Media Poem - write a poem in which you are reflecting on what is on the television set. Make sure the television is on mute, and do your best to focus on the images, what you imagine is taking place, or what is being said. It could be completely descriptive or a page of completely invented dialogue. Late night PBS works well for this exercise or anything on after 2 a.m.

7. Music Poem - Write a poem while listening to your favorite album all the way through without interruption. If possible, wear a headset or earbuds to enhance the listening experience, and lessen the distractions.

**Links**

Noah Falck’s website
http://noahfalck.org/

Noah Falck on Twitter
https://twitter.com/nofalck

Noah Falck on Facebook
https://www.facebook.com/nofalck

Noah Falck on Instagram
https://www.instagram.com/noahfalck/

Noah Falck’s page on the Tupelo Press website
https://www.tupelopress.org/product/exclusions/