

# American Cliché

His body skinny but for the horns  
of cancer bulging from his chest  
like thorns jutting from the trunk  
of this older man, a lifelong rose-  
lover. So he waters and whispers to them  
each morning, his broken body  
bent to the earth, joyful duty, as it blooms  
into pink white red fireworks.  
After cooing to them, he jumps  
into his golden cage, motors to work,  
beep-beep!, a two-hour commute  
he keeps to religiously. He has to  
or he'll forfeit: the job,  
health insurance, chemotherapy,  
yet he leaves for work happy,  
sun-lit from within, the silent prayer  
of roses lingering on his lips,  
a sweet perfume, smear of nectar  
on the hummingbird's miraculous beak-tip.  
Like this he smiles, stuck  
in traffic, engines and neighbors overheating,  
while he hopes, quietly, for his roses  
to be consumed: for a deer or three  
to descend the hills, drift  
into his backyard, trampling  
its false limits with soft hooves  
as, noses down, they collect fallen petals,  
each a miniature silken feast, communion  
wafers on famished tongues: a god  
dissolving into mouths hungry to taste and see that the earth is good,  
even strewn as it is with shards, with  
shattered beauty everywhere.



Seth Michelson's most recent books of poetry are *Eyes Like Broken Windows* (Press 53, 2012) and *The Ghetto* (Point of Contact, 2011), which is a translation of *El Ghetto*, by the internationally acclaimed Argentine poet Tamara Kamenszain. His poetry chapbooks include *House in a Hurricane* (Big Table Publishing, 2010), *Kaddish for My Unborn Son* (Pudding House Publications, 2009), and *Maestro of Brutal Splendor* (Jeanne Duval Editions, 2005), and his essays on poetry appear widely in popular, literary, and academic venues. He welcomes contact via his website, [sethmichelson.com](http://sethmichelson.com).

## Seth Michelson