

# Joseph P. Wood

## A Slender Epoch

Under the El', where storefronts are chained  
& every other building graffiti, they have a name,  
"Tai-Wal hookers," a cleaning agent, inhaled  
then brain mush: *Tai Wal* transforms

to *Thailand*: O the honeymoons, the surf,  
save those skyscraper waves, fishing boat  
flotsam, wing-snapped gulls, a *woosh*...  
Flood recedes: wish it hadn't: bloated tourist

passports float the South Pacific. The salt,  
day by day, bleaches the face, erases  
pinpoint eyes, & say you found, on gutted  
shoreline, this strange negative space, a name

without an owner. The sunset goes  
metallic. Someone's scrawled an epithet  
in the sand, whose syllables sound  
like flies, the underworld's flaring.

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**Joseph P. Wood** is the author of the forthcoming collection of poems *I & We* (CustomWords Editions) and the chapbook *In What I Have Done & What I Have Failed to Do*, Winner of the Elixir Press Chapbook Prize. He lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, with his wife Amy and daughter Daisy, who now asks permission before biting you. He's a runner when not laid up with some overuse injury and an avid chowhound when there's extra money bouncing around.

"I grew up in a working-class area of Philadelphia and my grandmother lived in a rowhome. She had a front porch that faced a major city thoroughfare, Ridge Ave., which was across the street from a large field and parking lot that, one summer, became a makeshift dump during a garbage worker's strike. It was here I encountered my first rat, my first opossum, and first unidentified snake. During this strike, the whole neighborhood was blanketed in a stink that no one could get off their hair and clothes. Some evenings, I simply sat on the porch in a plastic chair and watched other kids poke sticks at the rotting garbage and get bit by feral cats and rats. They'd come up to the porch and show me their bite marks. I never got bit and felt left out. By September, the strike had ended and I returned to St. Mary's of the Assumption for what turned out to be my worst year in grade school."