

ASTERISM

The Ohio State University, Lima

Volume 3





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A Note to Our Readers

Welcome to *Asterism*: Volume 3, a literary journal from The Ohio State University at Lima. The ten of us, all undergraduate editors, are grateful for the many hundreds of submissions we received and journeyed through with smiles, tears, and healthy doses of friendly banter. It was an enjoyable process, and the sixty-one creative pieces you will read illustrate the true skill and excellence of their undergraduate authors. Submissions arrived this year from places as far flung as Macalester College (Minnesota), Salisbury University (Maryland), University of Virginia, Willamette University (Oregon), Florida State University, Texas Woman's University, Presidency University (India), and University of Auckland (New Zealand). We are excited to share these poems and hope you appreciate them as much as we do!

Submissions for Volume 4 will open this September. Poetry and fiction from undergraduates will be accepted for publication. We look forward to reading your work!

Sincerely,

Victoria Sullivan, Senior Editor
Tyler Bagley, Managing Editor
Ashely Meihls, Editor
Mattea Rolsten, Editor
Ramzy Abukhader, Editor
Trenton Berger, Editor
Alyssa Brown, Editor
Heather Pickrell, Editor
Hannah Stoll, Editor
Jenna Bush, Contributing Editor



SPARROWHAWK

The dried eyes used to be yellow, the professor says.
Flat and gray now, they look more like mushrooms
than biological necessities. The skull no bigger

than a kitten's paw, denser than a loose spring from a pen—the foramen magnum is just a dot with accordion bones jutting out to protect the spine. He broke his neck flying into a branch.

What determination to hunt yourself
into death. The mud stains on my periwinkle
sneakers, maybe, are just as delicate and vengeful.





MOON ODES

i. jan. 20
she's
set stark and radiating light in the
pitch black velvet sky
bracketed by the stoic metal bars,
finished with dark deadened stars,
lining the street and the wooded lot.
she's full, whole like milk,
calloused and speckled like
the bark of trees, the fur of age
arching a grandiose silver over the night
gently diving through gossamer clouds,
eclipsing the meager, abashed yellow
of humming, nodding streetlamps.
a regal ear bent low for praise:
you, unearthly mother pressing a hand to the
tumultuous tides rearing
under my fevered skin
ancient stirrings in the gut
like the embryo of the first pastoral:
the golden brown of wheat, the coarse



wool of sheep, the quiet, blossoming
murmuring of love,
unseen and austere
being born in a moon-cradled field.

ii. jan 21.

she's
a faded woman lounging in an antique frame
behind diaphanous muslin curtains
young, wild, suspended in hedonism behind
a filter of cigarette smoke-
her rise slow, methodical, humbling the night.
like a stitch worked up:
careful and effortless,
sly and intoxicating,
all the more brilliant for her rarity,
her transient body dancing
out of reach of language and sight.
she's got a paper-thin rainbow halo spiraling
out from her golden crown,
vibrating with the movement of the sky,
and she winks at me,
and the scuttling creatures seeking warmth
across the street;
were that they were wolves
and I would howl with them for her,
swelling up with jubilant music,
the swaying laughter of drunkenness
of thickened, sticky blood.



YELLOWING OF *THE GREAT MASTURBATOR*

“I am not strange. I am
just not normal.” -Dali

Salvador had the right idea making
the yellowing of the giantess
an easy task. He already smeared
her canary. Swiftly her strike against

the hazel normal in a relentless shout
of flared usurpation. She ripened the world
to match her easy yellow hue, and spoke
the word of the matriarchy. He lowered her

to man's crop to unroot, swelled her
body to spread through canvas, decreed her
above ants and she was heard. Dali descended
upon this crooked existence to remind us

who put us here in the first place, who we see
when we gaze upon raw bodies, swollen above.

SONGS OF SOLOMON 2



University of Colorado Denver
Katie Marie Carlton

He reaches to feel me wet with dew,

finds the blood of sacrifice

and mistakes it for wine (but it's iron-rich, and sticky, and thick, and sweeter than any wine could challenge).

I see God

and He draws close the curtains of Solomon

Wrapping us in pitch till even shadows flee for the dark.

Dark woman of women,
with chimes of bangles
and silver cut moon
dripping from your neck
between pomegranate
breasts—

redder than my cheeks
flushed rose
in scarlet shame.



Legs spread like palms. Hosanna!
any other lover puts a hand through the opening
and my innermost
trembles

his tongue is drooling wine
his fingers are stained pomegranate pink
his chest glistens with blood
sap (Judas).



SWEET GUM TREE

Red, the kind that almost looks
purple, covered my padded and smooth birch-like
hands. Sticky and perfect for climbing. They were
burrs birthed from a low-hanging tree, seeds left
to grow, and I felt the numbing, the tingle of their
desperateness to dig further into me. The inevitability
of it seemed obvious. Yellow light and tweezers plucked
them from their new bed and my mother told me
I was lucky, that in fact, she had once stepped
on a nail, and I knew it was metal buildings that grew
inside her, full of windows and steel
beams, and no trees.



MADONNA

You are fifteen, and your head is on fire. Your mother puts the glass thermometer under your tongue, it pokes like it did when you were a boy. When you would watch the numbers change on the digital clock and she would stand under the kitchen light to see. The light is a hesitant orange, spilling onto the linoleum and your socks. You speak to each other tersely. At some point all the words you aren't saying kept everything else from coming out. The soup is on the stove, the TV is on. You are burning, it's embarrassing, like you are nine years old again, wracked with shivers in your mother's arms. You cannot apologize with a thermometer in your mouth, nor after then, as she leans against the counter and reads the temperature. The light is licking at your ankles like flames. The way you fought last time, and you pedaled your bike all the way to the church in anger. Stared daggers at the crucifix on the roof. There are things you should tell her—about the boy whose jaw was carved by the Lord. About his hand in yours. About the curses spit from the pulpit. Her hand is cool when she places it to your forehead and frowns. You are trembling, you lay your head in her lap and fall asleep. You wear a fiery crown—maybe so does she, maybe it's not just a fever dream. Ginger ale cans and saltines scattered on the coffee table. She wants to shelter you from what you still haven't told her. Can't say it right. She knows you're carrying something with you, something like a cross. She wants to ask. Can't say it right. You



are fifteen and you fall asleep there, your head in her lap, she hasn't held you since you were small. She hasn't held you since you were small.



breaching my spine with your nimble hands,

I coughed up the strings that attached us
like the tendons along our shoulders.

enter me, darling, let fade your wicked grin

as we bathe in shame,

accumulating an imbalance of glucose.

intoxicated oxygen and wasted bellies

disorienting my breath and your touches so that
the low waving boughs snag our laughs,
but hush the hiccups of our feet and lungs, tainting the leaves blonde.

your flesh turned to sour dough—

inducing a static that extends

the horizon at dusk where space consumes Aker's realm.

yet despite the plans you made to leave tomorrow,

I convinced you to stay another hour

and another until the sun and moon were no longer separate as we

chased Aker around the playground.

but then you found your old plane ticket and left without leaving your num-
ber—

escaping the grip I thought I had on you,

my sides grew cold from your absence.

you had finished sculpting,

but I had just started to dry.



Melissa Moore
University of Memphis

THE SEX BEHIND YOUR EYELIDS

the cutting of your eye into mine
leaves fat drops of breath
to roll from my quaking lips
onto the sweating floor.

do you know this?
that you strip me naked with that look?
peeling me like a sour orange

I am only spit-bleached bones,
as you shake my body with your love.



KILLING THE IBIS

Out of the ash/I rise with my red hair/And I eat men like air. – Sylvia Plath

In order to kill the ibis, you must learn to hate.
Your nightmares were made of fractured mirrors, his face everywhere,
your face only recognizable in his. You recognized your arms in a
dead beryl shade beside you. You recognized your bleached face
stained with his shadow pressed hard to the glass. When you woke,
you believed you smelled of sulfur. When you woke, your hair
was burning. It made you feel free.

This was in October, when you let your old habits lap at your lips;
you let your fear suck on you like a lozenge, turning you to spit.
On a knoll you delicately stood, watching the ibises, how those
suede white birds pine for larvae in the loam. How their iron eyes,
glowless hooks to the weedy underfoot, spoke of no awareness to their
repetition, instinctually lingering back to each twilight. You pitied them.
You pitied how they gathered from what had been taxed. They seemed
to understand that nothing could be gained from what was not unused.
They suffered. They never quite disparaged the hollowness.
How their eyes reminded you of his. How they clapped at the lack.



How you understood this too.

But you know those birds of your memory must die, so you must die too,
that part of you letting his odious scent loiter beneath your fingernails.
Can you tell the difference between your fingers and his anymore?
Don't you see yourself as a beetle tied to his tongue, cherry stem knotted
like the subterfuge of order? Again and again, all that talk of order,
how he slung you round his bound word, a pure psalm held in your head?
Those promises meant to bow your chaos to order in that same
stinging stance as those stupid birds –

Loathe your form to scorches. Save nothing but your fists.
Revolting anew from your singed nature, a black crow will find you, whisper:
If you weren't what you once were, nothing can be claimed from you.
From here, you beautiful burnt thing, you flutter like an ember, a pilgrim
looking to pray to yourself.

But your hair. Your hair never stops burning. It only burns faster.



HUNTING SHACK, CALUMET

In the spring there is a little yellow. A cup, dangling, chipped at the rim and swinging off the branch of a tree. Cracked leather gloves worn soft. My grandfather rubs mud into my cheek and I scream, still laughing. Ankles swinging from a rolling log bridge above the burbling creek. His hands, whorled like tree roots and tobacco stained. He pulls the cup down to drink straight from the stream.

I remember the crackle-pop of amber cast in kerosene. The softness of waking to a wood stove glow. Of butter melting in a pan, in the morning. Of something bitter. His smoking. A newspaper folded thick and I sit at his feet, listening to coffee pour. He doesn't speak until he's finished reading.

I used to search for hours for the source of the creek. Clambering between branches, a place to hide to be alone to listen. I was small and all I



knew were green fiddleheads unfurling in the
spring and wood thrush warbling. That if I
stayed out long enough, he'd come looking.

CALUMET, THE WOLVES

Lowland, cradled creek and muddy,
 Being young.
I'd never had the time of mind to
Imagine it dammed up, a pair of beavers.
Tangled limbs until old pines rot

Cold, those winters. Seeming longer,
Beginning to understand endings yet

 Finding none
Only in the scent
Of smoke, stale

 And gone
His old shirt hung on a peg too long
A limb, little cup
Freshwater creek dammed and
Frozen, muddied up

Somewhere sleeping, mercury
Summer's fawn won't last long in want,
And hollow, hungry that winter
 The wolves





Time moving silver green
And slow,

Steam rising in the kitchen
Breathing into my hands,

Past our summers now with the
Wolves moved in and the deer,
Running gone,
And my grandfather's

Old coat

Collecting dust hanging on



AFTER ALGAL BLOOMS

Salisbury University
Melissa Marsh

somewhere between Box Elder county and an unnamed road
in Corrine, we lose our words. the glass barrier
keeps me from turquoise, you from rose hues. the sun
plays across the surface, feeding different flowerings
on either side of where Lucin has stretched railroad legs
for 102 miles; i didn't plan to surrender
my voice. i notice how love
of salt blooms beautiful. it can't harbor
any other life at this concentration, but it makes
crystals along the edges. steel wheels crush(ing)--
they go to dust, as we do. i find your eyes
muted against such blues stretched behind you; i stay
soft-breathing and wordless, watch the world turn
to water below us, wonder what there is to find
when we touch desert-dry-and-grassland, i already know
nothing flowers there, either.



SPELLBOUND

*Your hands must be gentle as
though she's made of glass or
a delicate China teacup,
My mother tells me as a
doll descends into my reach.*

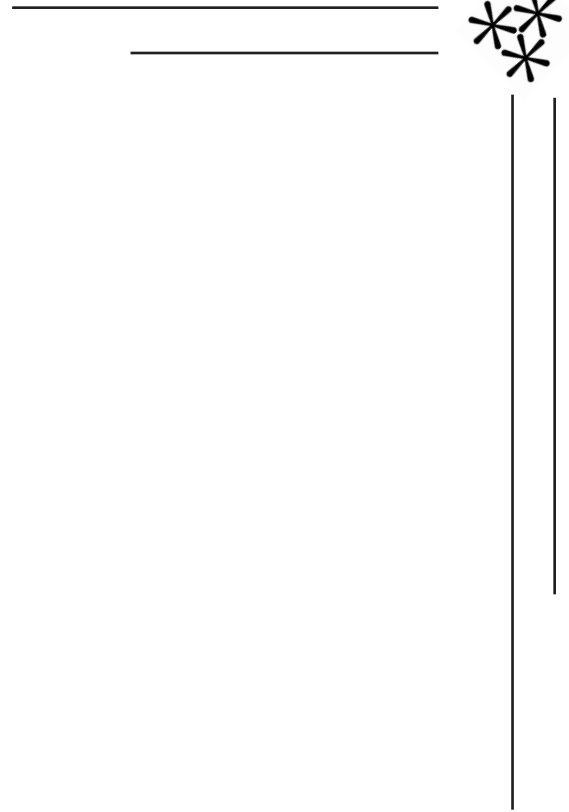
A medallion-colored face of linen
and two blueberry-sized chocolate eyes
meet mine. Three buttons run down
the torso of her ruby corduroy dress.
Her feet as bare as skinned apples.
The image of myself.

A hole the width of a tiny needle
lies at the back of her fragile neck
with a loose string where she
wasn't sewn shut.

On the rumbling asphalt coated
with the color of knees, two
dull-pearl teeth gently dig and

roll off the pillow of his lower-lip.

This boy with eyes sweet as butterscotch
starts to pull, starts to undo, starts
to spoil years' work. *Stop.*

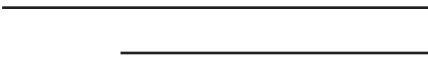




DANCING LESSONS

Daisies, clovers, and blades of grass like whispers emerge from the gaps between my toes. You've stepped on my flowering feet too many times to count, but it's usually during our dancing lessons and I can't hold it against you. I'm trying to teach you to dance and you're trying to learn, so most nights I just smile. You apologize and promise to ice my toes and water all my flowers, but you always get distracted by one of your books or you end up falling asleep in my lap and I readjust the ice on my own. Sometimes I draw on your skin while you sleep: skinny blue lines like threads torn from the sky and twisty purple spirals like the silence between night and dawn. In the mornings you like to sing for me—your words swirl into the walls, knocking off knick-knacks, rumpling my hair, opening the curtains, and filling my heart with something greater than joy—and you tie your songs into promises I can hold to my chest.

Most days I pluck my flowers and give them all to you; you grin and place them on your tongue, swallowing one by one. In exchange you give me the drops of gold from your sun-drenched skin—I keep them in my pocket and rub them between my calloused fingers when I'm thinking thoughts I'd rather keep at bay. I roll them around and around until they're warmer and softer than your sweet hair. Sometimes I put them in a big glass jar on my desk and when it's full of gold and wishes and kisses



we place it in the river and watch it float out to sea.



Adam D. Weeks
Salisbury University

EVERGREEN CLINGERS AND THE CRE- PUSCULAR PURSUIT

*“Come join me. My garden needs
tending.” -Poison Ivy, Batman & Robin*

A bouquet is sprouting in my stomach, snaking
through my throat and choking
me with daisies. Honeysuckle pierces
my pores and dots my skin, your own

personal garden to dance through. Wisteria
falls from my fingertips and curls around
the belladonna on my toes as the sunflowers in my hair
sway heavenward. I’m budding all over

and it’s not butterflies in my stomach but bumblebees,
their honey sticky between my teeth. I overflow,
umbral, till I reach you, each petal and stem
stretching for the sun that burns on your skin.

CLIFFS OF MOHER



University of Missouri-Kansas City
Rhiannon Minster



Kait Leggett
College of Charleston

RITUAL TUESDAY

Through the folds in my curtains
Dawn peaks through like she's nervous
to wake the chattering birds
who call to each other
from the boughs of the palm trees,
roots planted in cement.

It must have rained -
the light scattered
across my pillow
is lilac at best.
A clear night
means clementine,
a citrus rise.

In the small downstairs kitchen
of this apartment,
H is scrambling the wombs again.
She's Religious, does this daily,
and those outside know it.



They smell the pop of the grease
against the gold and white
and are silent
if only for
 a
 wing's
 beat
before it is time
to stir again.

See in the Holy City,
Spring quickly gives way to
heavy air
that slides down your neck
and thunder
that echoes in
without asking.

I'm still lying beneath the quilt I took
without permission,
and I think my ex-stepmother must know
how the birds feel
for those meant to be cousins who are now
salted and peppered and sitting, warmed,
in the shadow of a pan.



SILVER STAIN

My father –
serious, oblivious, useless with language –
told me once in church
that if eyes really were windows,
mine would be stained glass.
Gorgeous with all the light coming through
to bless the devotion inside.
What I think he meant, though,
was that I make things prettier than they were when they walked in.
I like your eyes, though.
I told my friends about them:
very soft, I said. Without a church in sight.
Your eyes are regular eyes
which makes them the regular kind of windows:
something anyone can see themselves in
if the night is deep and quiet
and presses close enough.

EATING NACHOS WITH CHOPSTICKS

I want to escape — a field with cicadas — playing rhythms — humming bees dip and dive to.

I look where sky is milk spilt — horizontal puddle with the sun — an egg yolk in its middle.

I want to run my hands — in long grass — that feels like threads of spaghetti sticks — and

I will lick the air — taste gold honeycomb — see the hills — shaped like wedges of soft cheese with gilded rinds — everything stained in aureate light.

I savour the scent of fat red tomatoes — parachuting off vines — rolling among sunflowers with their bold orange faces.

I want to see the beauty in Kahlo and Rivera, or — rice grains washed — six, seven, eight times over — the flesh of fish made silk thin slivers.

I need the sea to smell me — the death of my salt skin — glazed in the gulf of Mexico — after which — I will drown in corn husks, pea shoots





and peppers.

I will wander paths carved in Aokigahara with no direction — defy logic — lost soul sadness — chasing away convention.



DOES YOUR BODY HAVE A NAME?

I. ToluwaMofe

My tongue is too short to close the gap between two continents, so I'll put my heart in Nigeria and my mind in America...

In mommy's house, on Sunday evenings, when Kendrick Lamar drowns under loud spices and lusty nostalgia for something I've only known through blood and cradle, I am ToluwaMofe. Toluwa. Of God. Mofe. Desire. ToluwaMofe. Holy Desire. She screams this name when I wonder too far from her shadow. I feel her breath on my nape when I start digging my hands into the Garri, as if she is trying to force the whole history of her country into my body. My hands make tight fists as I try to hold on to the grain, but they slip out anyways, so mommy silently hands me an empty bowl and I use this. I watch as the grain sinks to the bottom of the pot of hot water on the stove. Mommy takes a wooden spoon and orders me, "oya, mix". I do. But my arms are cranes, crooked and choked. Mommy's arms are seas, steady and smooth. She intertwines her fingers over mine and we are dancing, an awkward back and forth of push and pull, advance and retreat, give and steal. She lets me go and orders me to stir. I can feel the heat of her smile ingrained on my back as I continue our awkward dance. The Ebah is lumpy and grainy and wrong, but Mommy and I eat it anyways, slowly, as if we are swallowing hope.

II. Zubaida



My back bears the burden of a name birthed but never allowed to draw breath. Hair chained to hidden, hypnotic history...

My dad calls me Zubaida. I don't call him, at all. But, on Monday nights, when a phone is the only thing that separates us, I become his daughter, his Zubaida, one who brings laughter. His accent drawls over the same questions, "How are you? How are your studies? Why don't you ever call me?" I try to seek solace in the silence between his begging, but there is nothing still about our short confessions. In the gasps before his questioning, I hear the door to a mud hut opening, inviting me in. And in his solemn sighs to my curt responses, I close him in the empty house.

"How is your sister?" The door opens again, wider.

"She is fine," The wind creeps through the window and howls in our emptiness.

"I want to see you," He pulls up a chair for me to sit and rest from my journey.

"Soon, maybe," I close the door.

We repeat this weekly, wearily. I don't know if our house will stand much longer. Maybe we should have used something stronger than mud, something that could have filled up the emptiness, something that could have shortened the distance.

III. Two Funerals and A Birth

My legs are even shorter than my tongue, so even if I plant them on this fertile, American soil, nothing grows...

Its amazing how lonely black is when thrown against whiteness. Its amazing how ugly black is when thrown against whiteness. White lights creating a mirage of the Brooklyn skyline. White curtains twisting in the night wind. White sheets pulled up to my neck. The white crawling through my TV screen. Gilmore Girls. Hannah Montana. Kim Possible. This is my crime scene. This is my murder site.

I was the non-whiteness, a large stain disrupting the ivory. A young girl, age 5 or so, black, dark, eyes wide and waiting, hands too small for the hurt America prepared to give her

"I want to change my name," My words pierced the cold night air as mommy glided into my killing ground.

"To what?" Her voice soft, bemused but I heard the wails of a thousand Nigerian woman spilling out a of mommy's lips like a bloody



gunshot wound.

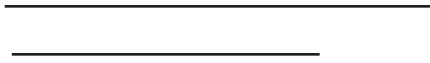
“Za.... Zabeedah. Call me Zabeedah,” my accent antagonizing me, capturing my tongue in different positions of bondage. I know I sounded funny, as funny as murder could be. As the syllables fell out off my tongue like heavy, heartless bombs, I watched Zubaida die through the reflection of my mother. Her spine dropped, as if she carried a casket in her womb. Palms opening and closing, grasping for a child ripped from her soul, her history. Eyes weary, wounded, watching generational suicide fill up the room. I never knew mothers of the murderers could hurt as much as mothers of the murdered. I made mommy both. I killed my own identity, slaying hers in the process. I was no longer Zubaida, girl with Nigerian plains in her blood, too much fufu in her stomach, not an ounce of apathy in her heart. I became Zubaida, a walking carcass, empty of everything that made her, waiting for America to fill her up.

“I want to be Zabeedah,” I repeated my mantra slowly again, like a death march, burying Zubaida for good. My mother gazed at me long and hard, puncturing my soul. This was Zubaida’s wake, empty, but dense still, a coffin. She breathed in deep, lifting her shoulders and dropping them down again, as if she was burying a body deep inside of her.

“Ok,” her voice lingering in the air, a ghost. I didn’t want to see her crumble anymore; I was more concerned with my birth than my death, my new American beginning, than my old Nigerian past.

I don’t know who laid Zubaida to rest, remembering black death is not common here. Maybe it was the resignation in Mommy’s silhouette as she turned to close the door and leave me in my grave, in my cradle. Or maybe it was the whiteness, colonizing the space where Zubaida once was. White bed frame. White socks. White pajamas. White window blinds. I’ve learned this is Americanization: covering red with white, burying the murdered and calling it birth.

Sometimes I feel Zubaida, a ghost limb at my hip, weighing me down. I don’t blame her. I didn’t bury her properly. Mommy told me, in Nigeria, the dead are washed and adorned in white.



Melissa Moore
University of Memphis

TO WHAT YOU LEFT BEHIND, BESIDES ME

the shoes sleep beside my bed,
blue tongues spilling out.

the panting from under the linen
is heard by the sole-stained shoes.

their laces slither through tattered eyelets
like vipers in tall grass.

the other snake in the room
is seen by the watchdog shoes.



FOUND

When you're walking outside & it's chilly but way more tolerable than the last few days & you're smelling fresh air instead of mildewy carpet & you're listening to one of your favorite songs that happens to be a little dramatic, but, hey, it's jammin' on HQ earbuds & it's the only thing making waves in your cochlea & then you look up & see a single blackbird coasting in the Earl Grey sky—you're in a movie & it's a slo-mo scene & the protagonist (you) is smiling like you're in a Colgate commercial & there's a dialogue in your head that's casual & funny & it's easy to be happy when you're alone when before it was chains chains chains on your ribs & wrists & nothing could plunge into the quicksand to drag you out. You finally know what the fuck you're doing with your life & you don't need anyone to do it for you but asking for help is actually empowering. Some would call it euphoria or confidence, but it actually saves your sanity from the photosynthesis in the folds of your brain. You eavesdrop on all the conversations around you & instead become the entire alphabet.



Shannon Neal
Washington College

FLASH FORTH, SCATTER THEM

In the kitchen, the shovel stays propped up
among gardening shoes and clay flower pots,
dripping slowly while we eat,
a reminder—

Counting Mississippi's between thunder cracks.
When the last squash seed was in, we ran.
I grabbed the pepper seedlings.
Mom had the shovel held high
like a processional cross,
orange and muddy.

We started together, but I drew ahead, easily,
and turned at the back porch.
The distance between us, slanted.
Her panicked face, eyes striking,
as lightning hit the rusted bean pole right behind her.

—Mom doesn't mention that I left her in the grass
a beacon in her hand thrust up
chance just missed her call



while I gripped the door knob.
Over pasta I show her pictures of my new apartment.
So spacious she calls it, then *I'll be here till I die.*
Now, we are fine, her words,
and our motions choppy, drawing apart.



HOLED UP



MOTHER

Pale green and royal purple
in semi-circles. Placeholders for
her deep-set ores of brown.

Crooked teeth that clashed
together to learn a foreign tongue,
hidden behind coral and plum.

Feet that now stumble, were once
fast and weightless enough to carry
her from one continent to another.

Years of kisses from the sun
while out in the strawberry fields
shy and painted over with ivory.

Two names traded for one,
and all three replaced by
two children who call her

Mother.





MORNINGS ARE A WELL KEPT SECRET

Most mornings she wakes before the sun

When the sky is still filled with a space

So wide and dark

you can climb into it and peel back its stars with your

Fingertips

Spread it, smear it like black ink all over the stark morning

Light that corresponds with crisp, white shirts

The one she wears when she wants to glow in the dark, reflect light when
the sun beats down her back, halfway down

Today her expression reflects the white blouse

So



Apathetic and blank

You could reach into her chest and it would match the

Night sky

Layers upon layers of royal blue

Polluted by fingers who have felt what it means to be

So numb that it feels like she has been

Sitting on her hands for hours

Feels like an uninvited touch when she squeezes her knees to her chest

Tight as the petals bound together on an

Unfurled rose

Which she picks before it is ripe, tears its green layers looking for vibrant pink

like fever induced cheeks that blush

She quivers and opens her bedroom window so morning dew collects on top of the

duvet cover she forgot to wash last week

Waking up, damp, from sweat, from dew, from dry rainwater tears that

gather at the hem line of her jaw and meet stitches of the covers that she pulls up to her eyes

Watermelon vines wrapping tight around her feet she dreams juicy pink dripping down her lips



Sweet ecstasy of summer of the sun of the sunflower seeds stuck between
her teeth that spread when she left her retainer on the windowsill in New
York

Filled up to the brim. Behind her, the sun rises

The dream catcher that she harnesses the sun

Apollo's chariot no match for her wide smile that rises like a curtain,
slowly, spectacularly

Capturing the universe rising up from her tall tower

The one where she sees the world

she laughs as if she were sixteen, and golden hour were setting in

Amber dust swirling round catching her ankles,

Vines unfurl

Particles brush her hands so that all she becomes are floating pieces that
don't have space for the nighttime abyss she can't peel herself apart

Anymore

so she breaks into millions

this is

What it means to take hold of the dark, to calm the world

To revel in the well kept secret of the quiet morning time

and to feel how perfect your body is

When the sky explodes

FOR LIBBY

this is some soft morning ache
an old bruise in a strange place
worn the way creases are worn in paper
after being folded and unfolded again and again
soft the way bodies are soft
after so long together:
not the roar and lick of gasoline fire
or the white glow of a fierce ember but
the quiet encapsulated glow that burns when you
crack something open or huff
between two cupped palms
our palms
with the mirrored lifelines: fraying
like all lifelines do after
folding and unfolding
again and again
ours is a gentle black and blue
that i am happy to slip into
blinking slow in the light that you call the most beautiful
knowing that there are things more beautiful than this
but no more gentle. we are careful





with each other's open wounds. we
unfurl each other's tired fists.



TO THE SEA



1.

My mother tells me I saw you for the first time when I was a child, though I don't remember it. I jumped into your arms with abandon, but I was too small, and the towering force of you knocked me down. She says I toddled back up the beach screaming and spent the rest of the afternoon crying in her arms while you apologetically tried to calm me from afar with your hushed song.

2.

I first remember seeing you on vacation, though it was your second time seeing me. There were so many people, all there just to see you, be near you, bask in your presence. You were resplendent, dazzling in the attention and bright summer sun, a color so crystalline and unique it could only be described using your name. Like many, I thought I knew of what lurked beneath your surface: the currents of colorful emotion that ran through you, the wellspring of life you nurtured in your bosom, the vast unknowable depths of your being. But being in your presence, I feared making a mistake; underestimating your power, being drawn down into you and crushed by the pressure of your personality. I faced that fear, for a short time, meeting you among the shallow, but your brilliance magnified everything around you, even the sun, and I was driven from your arms by the fierce light and my own uncer-



tainty. I carried the salt of your tears on my reddened skin and missed how it clung once it was washed away.

3.

I saw you again on the shores of Japan, years away and thousands of miles later. I watched you from the pier crowded with curious stares and half-understood whispers as you danced with the Moon, the elegant arch of your wave catching upon her beams as you moved hand-in-hand, an intimate ebb and flow. You were sparkling, the city lights weaving into your hair and the moonlight caressing your skin. Memories of our first encounter swirled up from the depths of my mind and came rushing in, knocked the air from my lungs. Surrounded by strangers, I remembered how it felt to cry to your quiet melody.



MY FAVORITE CHARCOAL SWEATER

If I could I'd unweave the selfish threads of cashmere that keep my teeth off
his bicep

Let obsidian puddle behind him unspooled,

Let his jawline split my tongue like an envelope to a homesick soldier,

Let pastors bind me with molten twine,

Let them pour the calf's gold down my throat,

Let me never come home to midnight Mass and,

Let my face be cropped from smiling caricatures of a happy family

And let my ribs be removed like those of Adam,

So that I may admire him with toothless words because

I can no longer subsist off poetic reflection.



Melissa Moore
University of Memphis

AMEN

our eyes, stained-glass
in a grand cathedral
mine depict the death of Christ
whereas yours are His resurrection

I see Shekinah glory in your shadow
religion in your voice holiness in your touch
the crucifix you fuck me on
strangles my spine when I look at you

my sin, my sin, my sin
you tell me I am proof of divinity
but you, you, you
are proof of hell and that I am in it

your idol you worship me
my blasphemous image exhaled
from your tongue like fire burns and
god will not forgive
but grace for you wrath for me

am I your sacrifice, Abraham?
am I your betrayal, samson?
am I your sign, Gideon?
am I your denial, peter?

lay me on the altar
cut my hair
find me wet in the morning
hear the rooster crow
for god is beautiful I think
if you are god





THE FOLLOWERS OF CONFUCIUS AND LAO TZU

who get their opinions from
meme-memes
blasting back-to-back
white-and-black

give 'em or don't
you can't change the weather
and neither can i

↓ FINISH?

my life worth
something to all the
random strangers i will
never know, nor care
to meet?"

"wouldn't it be neat?"

i'm writing backwards
regeessing like the old baby
himself
into those sincerest desires to
build a fort in the
backyard of humanity
and sleep in the dirt
tell the skin-draped, soulless,
skeletons

"build statues to yourself,
but leave me be!"
eating nuts & berries
mixing mud pies

don't take offense,
but your unwarranted advice
only wonks up my compass
'cause lao tzu contradicts
confucius
and vice versa
and what you say bunks what
he says
she says
is right for me to me
so i sit my stagnant pool of
me-me-me's
like the them-them's



shred that
 brilliant dollar bill
before i am afforded the
 opportunity
to spend it on my faceless
 grandchildren

“you’ll owe it to your family to
 think about money
 now,”
the followers of confucius tell
 me
(whether they know
 jack-anything of the
 old master kong is
 besides the point)
they claim to be masters of
 the modern world
wise in years, in matters of
 god,
and the army,
and the stock market,
and retirement

it’s all in vain if the cogs don’t
 turn

but a longing for the way of
 lao tzu lies deep in
 my being
past the poppycock of those
 paper dreams and
 idealistic goals
transforming ever more with
 each tick of the second
 hand
into useless trinkets in a
 dust-laden
 shadow-box
“wouldn’t it be neat to be a
 big-shot director?”
“wouldn’t it be neat to make

START? ↓

these days i find myself
torn between two assertive yins
 & yangs
at the edge of the precipice of
 time.

what lurks ahead in waters
 murky
exists not yet, unformed
but then again
it all has
since the first day of the
 universe
when the sun was hung up with
 the planets
by fishing line on the great
 wire hanger of god’s
 tweed sportcoat

at this time, the seed of eve’s
 apple had already
 been planted
tended by a serpentine gardener
with a split silver tongue
and it was never really her
 choice to make, now
 was it?

i have these dreams of the
 future
and shiny new set of
 nightmares to match
most will get thrown in the
 wastebasket
and here i am
shuffling through them trying to
 divinate which ones
 might be worth a pretty
 penny
so long as the apocalypse doesn’t



Olivia Davis
Bowling Green State University



SALSIPOTENT

The floor of the bathroom, a small pond
she spills suds out from the tub
her toe teasing the faucet
testing just how full it can go
socks soaked splashing in the lake
that is the white tiles
stained red
from the wine glass
hanging between her fingers.

the ocean on our floor
grows salty.



FUNDAMENTALS

Reincarnation: noun. The belief that after death you are reborn.

I like sitting in the library, in the blue chairs that face the window, and planning next lives. Indulgence over practicality. Now teaching, next writing, psychology, selflessness. I recognize the privilege of wanting too much. Now a husband, next a wife.

Deny: verb. To insist inaccuracy.

Kyle has ignored my texts for three days now. When I call Meaghan, crying, her voice melts into the phone like warm honey. The room feels warmer. I think about her wedding, in the future, and the girl who gets to marry her.

Apocalypse: noun. The end of the world.

Last May I watched a film about Pompeii; biblical destruction. Vesuvius wept into a red sky, scorching the earth. The Pompeiians covered their faces with what they had -- cloths, hair -- to avoid the acrid scent of smoldering trees, burning eyes, dust-filled lungs. They sleep in their museum caskets, unsettled. The worst part of an apocalypse is not knowing.



Suffer. verb. To be negatively affected.

In sophomore year Father Reilly told us to pity those who suffer from homosexuality. I think about this as we breathe in synchrony. Her lips, soft as petals, smile against mine.

Sin. noun. An act against God's will.

The night before my first penance I had awful dreams. I said my prayers out of order and got the words wrong. I remember the priest yelling at me, and shadows -- huge black things that consumed the closet walls, and me with them. God forgives all who repent.

Impure. adjective. 1. Contaminated. 2. Morally wrong.

She lies with her feet sprawled over my legs while I write, penciling notes into her textbook and occasionally sitting up to kiss my hair. I ask her which words sound better together and she reads to me about carcinogenic plastics. My yoke is easy, my burden is light.

Covet. verb. To crave.

I wear her sweater to morning mass and kneel. Thank you for helping me pass my test, thank you for getting me home from that party, thank you for food, for loving me, for mom, forgiveness, free will, for her. I recognize the curse of wanting too much.

Blessing. noun. 1. A gift. 2. Permission.

When he puts his arm over my shoulder butterflies burn my stomach and throat. I didn't say no. It's hard to speak with two tongues in your mouth.

Hold. verb. To refuse to let go.

I've never understood black holes; I just can't wrap my mind around them. I can almost grasp it, the edges, the magnitude, then suddenly nothing, and I become one. Hollow, obscure, phenomenal.



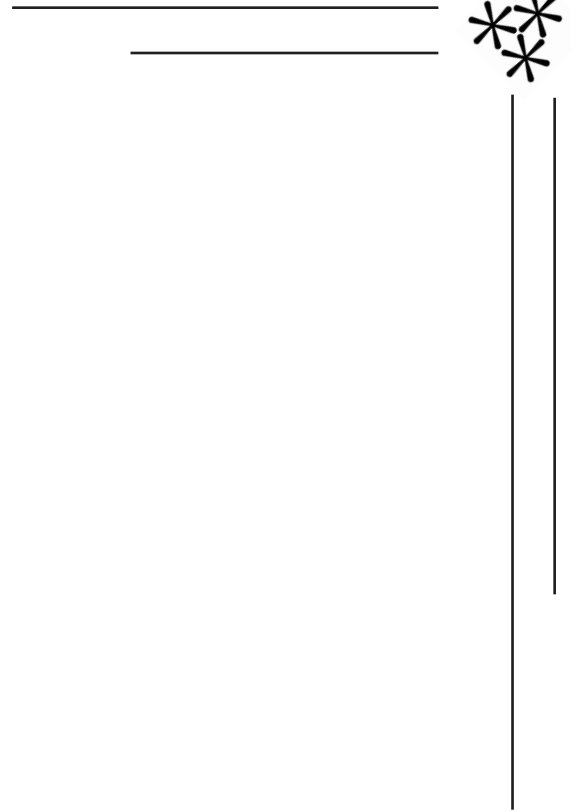
Natural. adjective. Effortless.

Dogwood, sassafras, walnut, oak. You can tell by how the leaves are lobed and whether they alternate on each branch. She points at each tree and calls out a name, cheeks pink from excitement and brisk wind. I feel her gloved hand press into the small of my back; we've reached the clearing. We rest beside a fallen pine and try to hear the leaves whisper in the sunlight.



There's this cobweb next to my window that
reflects the sound waves of uncommunicated whispers.
I've tried chipping you off like my
rose-pink nail polish. Tried avoiding
personal pronouns, called you a "former
lover," but I still walk around with my mouth partly open
and wonder what I can catch through the gaps and
what my baleen teeth fail to filter out.
I've tried filler words to avoid saying
"God" or "breaking"
to avoid realizing there's something in the
molten candle wax that won't peel off my fingertips.
Friends sit next to me on floor pillows, reluctant and quiet like
popped soap bubbles, as I try again and
again to cough you up and spit you out.
Meanwhile the asters in my yard expire,
become inanimate as the butterfly bodies in that exhibit
whose curation you ridiculed with a tilted brow and limp limbs.
These days, my father puts his arm around my shoulders
and asks me how it's going, healing heartbreak.
"It drains my liquid," I say.

“Prepares me for under-glass display.”





MY DAUGHTER

Where does she go when she closes her eyes? Does she go to the place where my palm sits heavy on her back, my arm straining so that the tips of her tennis shoes dance across the clouds as she swings? Does she go to the place where grass wraps around limbs and tickles napes of necks, encasing us as we lay parallel with the sky? Can she see her sister disturbing the breeze with her laughter? Can she tell when the wind becomes enchanted with my stories? Can she hear them? Could she ever?

Did her eyelids just flutter, did she catch a glimpse of the present?

Can she see the hospital room, my forlorn look? Will she be able to clench her eyelids tight enough to resist the persistence of reality? If a few specks seep through, will she see the bars on her windows, the chain on her wrist, and the contempt in her sister's eyes? Can she see the bandages on her wrists, smell the bleach of her bedsheets? Does she know that her pain is my pain, that I would gladly give her all my happiness if it would mean one twitch of her lips? Where will she go when she opens her eyes?

TEMPORARY

I lie down on the grass like
a circus act on a bed of nails.

Radiant light bathes my hair,
crawls on my eyes, shut tight.

A game of hide and seek.
A twitch. Two. Three.

Fluttering wings patter, brush
the mountains of my upper lip.

A moth seeks solace in the Cupid Bow's Sea,
the saltiest and clearest water.

The shadow of your nose hides
me from the sweltering heat.

Orange kaleidoscopes vanish. A breeze
excites the strawberry seeds of my skin.





A torch of red lightning ignites
the sky. I anchor myself, hoping

for the Sun to peek out from
behind the ashen clouds.

The sky begins to sob
an ocean of arrows.

He departs from the
runway strip of my hair.

Where are you going?



I MAKE HIM BREAKFAST

Five:

I sit on the floor of my bedroom with a controller in my hand.
My swimsuit is too big. I can't find the next Shine Sprite
on Super Mario Sunshine. My hair is a tangled mess
and my skin smells of sunscreen.
I go back out to swim with my cousin, Peyton.

Eighteen:

I have my first panic attack. My brother, Cameron, says I've been replaced
with an underling
and he wants to set me on fire. The other one, Davis, wants to tie me to a
chair
and throw me in the river to see if I float
like in the Salem Witch trials.
My mom makes me take a shower. I come out fine.

Sixteen:

My dad and I play a game of scrabble. He spells out
G-U-B-B-I-N-S. I say gubbins isn't a word. He says he would never
cheat in a game like Scrabble. It's in the Oxford-English dictionary.
I lose the game.



Four:

I tell my mom I'm running away. She asks where I'm going. I say I don't know but I'm not staying home. She packs me a sandwich for the trip. I don't even make it across the field. I come back an hour later with a bloody knee. My mom bandages it for me. We watch Winnie the Pooh.

Seventeen:

Cameron starts yelling at me. He tells me I'm melodramatic and irrational. I sneer at the irony. He grabs me by the shoulders, continuing to shout. I shove him into the door of the fridge. He goes back upstairs. The next morning I make him breakfast.

Fifteen:

My dad tells me my boyfriend is cheating on me. He says 97% of the time guys are lying. I say there is a high probability he is lying to me. He says he'd never lie to me. The next day I break up with my boyfriend. My dad and I play Scrabble.

Twelve:

I have a nightmare. I wake up scared. I sneak upstairs to Davis's room. He's fast asleep. I climb into his bed. He tells me to get out. I tell him I'm scared and he says I'm ridiculous. I wake up early in the morning with his arm around me.

Twenty:

My brothers finally come home. We all cry over our dog that died. We talk about that time Cameron broke his neck and we got it on video and when Davis broke his foot and no one believed him. We fall asleep in our home library, looking at old books of my dad's.

CINNAMON DREAMS

Aunt Amanda drove me to school.
Her hair thick and clothes too big—
she was a sewn-bound book.

I sat in the front—tall for my age
—and the car smelled like cinnamon
like beets taste like lakes.

The ground was Oklahoma flat;
the air was Oklahoma flat.
My hands still,

I watched our red dirt buzz.
The drive was two episodes of *Arthur*
and my mouth was Raisin Bran and whole milk.

What do you want to be?

What?

When you grow up—what do you want to be?

Outside, the clouds were moons.





It was eight o'clock in the morning.
The cinnamon car rattled with burden,

these silent people—
rattled again, hearing
their silence broken.

Married, I said, meaning it. I want to be married.

Married?

She flicked a hand over—fast—and boxed my ear.

I heard alien seagulls and sheep with no feet.

I was Oklahoma; I was cinnamon itself.
In the windows of cars
I saw my reflection
and silently
I named my children after street signs.



THE GOD OF PERFORATED FISHES

I remember the days that you called nights
When the sun tried to convince you of your eyes.
You threatened it with poetry and back flips
And wrote letters to the moon requesting a solar eclipse.

The view from your room never showed you much
So you walled up your universe with ribbons and mannequins.
They often discussed the consequences of melanoma.
You kept your mouth shut in fear of a faux pas.

While we waited for the ice cream truck every day,
You knew the grocery store sold lottery tickets and nuclear codes.
You made paper planes out of government secrets
And went all in for those circadian bets.

You pinned your bills to the “Stop” sign at the bus stop
And waited while others came and went.
They tried to guess where you were headed.
You were just waiting for a car crash and the taste of lead.

Flatulent nihilists came to collect you soon.



They wore gas masks and company-issued party hats.
You offered to show them card tricks and your novelty cup holders
While the honeybees flew through the holes in your shoulders.



THINGS I WILL DO WHEN I FIND MY VODOO DOLL

Stab her in the stomach with a needle in hopes of killing
every butterfly she ever received from someone who didn't stay.

Litter my bathroom with candles, plug the sink and soak
her in warm water. Piano music ripples the surface until she falls apart.

Throw her into a pit of eligible bachelors for goodness' sake.

Rip the cotton from her belly until my hip bones are noticeable but
not enough for my mother to worry.

Replace all the color in her face with honey, stain her skin smooth,
paint the sparkle back into her eye.

Love her without pretending it's hard.



PROFESSOR STEWART SAYS: TIME FOR AN INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY

The dissection was a surprise
as was the size of the eye itself –
the cresting bulge of the cornea,
the amount of fat around the optic nerve.
Our scalpel was dull so we used
the short-bladed scissors instead,
squirming at the slick sick snip.
the optic nerve itself was firmer than expected -
somehow I had imagined
some soft thread tangle. nothing of the sort here.
It had been bluntly cut, away from what
I'm learning
I have no idea.
First: we sawed off the cornea
like the top of a blister
and held it up to the light.
See the layers of it? The strange color?
With that out of the way,
make single-centimeter incisions on the iris
and open. The fluid won't hurt you
but maybe keep your mouth pressed shut.



Now with your pinky finger
hook out the lens.
It popped out onto the tray like a milky marble. We cut
that open, too.
Anyone have any good retinal tissue?
In examining our own tangle of it,
we were fascinated to discover
the iridescence of the choroid at the back of the eye.
Digging deeper, we laid out what we could on the tray,
wet mother-of-pearl glittered up at us.
We raised our hands, look what we've found.
Why is it so beautiful back there?
In the dark of muscle and viscous fluids?
Where nobody but us and maybe the butchers
would ever find it?
Someone else asks, hey where's the pupil?
It was only ever the vacuum space
of where light comes through to hit the retina.
We have a name for every type of absence
and for each kind of opening.



AND THE PULP

When I crack open the dense, rounded chest of my pomegranate,
it smells sweet like decay smells sweet,
sweet like my first period,
sweet like the heavy peace of catacomb darkness.
I suckle the arterial seeds from the white membrane
like butterflies clustered on a carcass suckle the bare, blanched branches of
ribcage that reach toward the sky like fingers,
fingers like mine that ply the pits from apricots with the precision of a
pickpocket,
fingers that savor the radiating warmth of the hip of the woman standing
next to me on the metro.
Rich, resurrected sweetness needles my tongue as I try to hold the arils
like pearls in my mouth.
Pomegranates taste different here,
different like cigarettes smell different here,
different like your eyes when we're alone.
And yet, home sits like grape seeds at the center of my chest—
and I am ripe.



FASCINATION STREET

Shuffling through the crowd,
My hands twisting wet shoulders
Around so I wouldn't have to

Stand on my toes to get a good glimpse
Of the lady who lay dead, as the murmurs went,
In the middle of Town Square's cobblestone street.

Except when I fought my way through the front,
Eager for some excitement finally this dreary May month,
I saw no lady,

No muddied garments or tangled torso
With sprawled limbs sticking outward
Like the dead rat I found in our cellar.

In the street was just a head,
Alone, bleeding a stream of red from strands
Of serrated skin that stuck into the ground

Where the moving rainwater sloshed the mixture,



Carrying some with it downstream
Towards momma's favorite fresh fruit stand.

I could see the head's eyes were still open wide,
Fixated on the dripping gray sky.
The mouth was open too, drooped oval-shape

As if the afterlife holds only horror. Drained,
Her ghost-pale face lit like a beacon
Against the murky puddles that weighed down our feet.

A slim woman to my right, a young mother
Perhaps double my age then,
Fainted face-first hitting the stones forcefully

Hard but with a muffled splash. Ankles gripped by the sludge,
Too stunned by the sight ahead, the others did not budge.
I glanced around at this crowd, just about everyone from town

Was there, staring, motionless. I searched harder into their faces
And found something odd. There was the shocked amazement, of course,
But a curious intrigue as well, not the same kind that makes you ask

Why?

No, there was a light in each and every eye, the one I'd seen
In my momma's when she stroked hues on a canvas, or in my friend
Emma's whenever a spring rose bloomed.

There was a satisfaction there, a beauty to behold. And I'll admit
Those first few minutes that I didn't see it at all,
That there could be a gem of that mangled mess.

But then I saw it, how the oncoming moon
Glistened the perfect angle onto that pure white sphere,
Her beauty was truly rooted without her skin's hue.



The dark crowd, drawn to her like a lighthouse
Produced silver spools of silky saliva, strewn to the chin.
They simply stared at the bare decapitated wonder – hungry, aware.



His fingers curled arthritic
contorted to calligraphy,
tangled in the railing of Charon's ferry.

And he spoke
tenor gnawing every synapse—
echoing memories like stress fractures through stained glass.

And I asked him what was next.
And he asked me who I was asking for.



IN THE CYCLE OF MY MOTHER'S HAIR STYLES

1.
Pigtail braids, twined by the hands of a grandmother
who twists the neck of a chicken for the *kill*.
2.
Unbrushed,
white dress,
a belly with a daughter
to be named
after a sweet Egyptian flower. *Yasmeen*.
The call to prayer. *Athan*.
whispered into the child's right ear
at birth.
It's head —shaved
A lamb
slaughtered.
3.
Dirty blonde on sticky caramel skin.
Sunspots.
A woman sobbing in the bathtub
of a four-story home
in the Arabian desert.



—barren & forgotten.

4.

Bangs.

She is the comma you forgot to add,
 the pause to the movement
 of your body slipping
 backwards.

5.

Black hijab.

6 children

with hair to cut

only to be washed

down the sink.

DANGEROUS THINGS

He can't swallow the pills
that look like teeth, they remind
him of snow mounds wed
to earth and silk pouches
dangling with drowned spider babes.
He had been so naked
without his skin
she wanted to put a candle
in his body to eat
the darkness like a cave
of limestone she used to hide
in. She drank water
that dripped
from ivory clouds
to velvet soil encased
in elastic tree roots,





like the surgeon's latex
that peeled his exoskeleton

and prescribed medical
receipts smeared with cheap
ink. She polishes his shoes

like a coffin, knots his black
tie, and holds his porcelain face.
They pieced back

the jet shards of him
that fell like rain
across the marble sidewalk

with sanitizer and stitches
and ropes of morphine,
not the most dangerous;

but what swims in his
slick, blackberry eyes
is a leviathan.



VAMPIRISMS: A SERIES OF FIVE HAIKUS

I.

Nights remain acrid.
Days were solar, lapis once.
This night stretches red.

II.

Lonely, bloodless dusks,
quiet save for the mist's hiss:
the mosquito's psalm.

III.

All the crickets weep
for the waxing forever;
let me bleed it dry.

IV.

Her neck's crease – I taste
its burn on unchaste teeth, sweet
as sore wolf gristle.

V.



Though her blood bores me,
I eat her too fast to taste.
Love is but garlic.

**MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER HERMAN
BORDEN WITH HIS COAT UNBUTTONED**

I think of the mild accent
(I heard it once on an old
cassette tape)
and the neighbor with
no arms.

This man from the old country
Pockets full of change for his
grandchildren
Who cried when his son sold
guinea pigs for research;
who cried often, actually
(That must be where you get it
from my mother tells me,
although I do not remember
crying over my own guinea pig's
death, and not for lack of grief)

Who suffered much and made the
armless man feel human
(no one else would)





Who upholstered furniture on a street
called Hayden
I wonder at a life
uprooted
(Jews, Eastern
Europe)
The family he lost (a
brother, tetanus, and
others—Austria, 1939)

This is so close to me.
My mother's grandfather.
My grandmother's father.
I who have never seen
ashes, who didn't know
what pogrom meant until
I was 10 years old

I wonder at this man
from the old country,
mounting the steps to
the bus with his coat
unbuttoned

TREE



University of Missouri-Kansas City
Rhiannon Minster



END OF A ROAD WITH NO NAME -

We'd found a hollow hill in the woods. We were all under ten years old. All scrawny armed and scratched skin, running with bare feet. Tall grass, past the knees. An afternoon spent binding tree limbs with twine, slung over shoulders. A low tunnel and a room riddled in spires.

I asked the woman if the grass we ran through was the kind used for baking bread, and she laughed. Pulled a long stalk between her fingers, peeling seeds from the cusp. Soft, handed them to me. Asked me to tell her how they tasted.

We strung our wooden hollow with plastic beads and drawings on soggy paper. Argued over who slept in the larger room. Didn't really sleep, just pretended. We were playing house but no one wanted to be the mother for long. We wanted to pretend to stir soup and sleep and fight and guess at what love could look like.

We decided to make our house real-life. Prepared for a trip overnight, provisions secured in bed sheets. Wobbling flashlight beam and low moon glow, somewhere distant. Wooden beams shuddered and our hollow seemed to hum. Playing sleep and pretending not to fear the dark. We had no mother. We had a father instead because he could be stern and had no responsibility



to comfort.

Didn't make it through the night.

The woman told us we weren't allowed to live in our wooden house anymore. We shouted at her. Didn't understand until we watched twin black bear cubs tumble through the tall grass. The woman said they had a mother, and that our parents wouldn't like her much. That she was too much like a father, and too close for comfort. We watched her lumbering home in the morning under the scope of a metal gun.

The woman's son was learning to be stern but still looked away after setting the sights. We were pulled back by the elbows and screaming, silenced by the shot.

I lifted my hands from my ears. Red from fingernails. Stinging. The wind swayed through the grass. She'd collapsed out in the field, heavy and black. I pulled seeds from the stalks and held them out to the wind. Watched them float away.



Zachary Kemp
Washington University

FLOTSAM NATION

//

Much
had already been
made of the body'
s susceptibility,
when

we saw
the Minister sp-
eak from the eye
of a cannon,

the King of Pen-
tacles taped
to his lips.

In the mark
et, I ask
the boy stacking
honey
crisps
que savez-vous cela



:
Everything changes
. & Nothing.

I
return = to these
app
les & see a horn-rimmed
woman,
shorn in Spring
dress;

To these app
les, the woman
belly five-months
swollen. To
these
her five-year daughter
in dinosaur pajamas /
Much had already been
made of th
e trans-
migration between
body
& word, when we
hear-
d the headless
mouths murmur the
who & whom
were to be
sacrificed
(To satisfy
what god?) //:



**PAUSE. IT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU'VE
TRIED A LOT**

Rather, you struck your match, fizzing red in beaches and parks. I left the living room to find solitude but found you already entwined, low frequencies distilling the square of moon carpet. Collect your bag. Grab her hand. Stumble together over stirring legs. You'll spend many mornings in sleep-deprived recovery, but we call this character building. Dawn filters through fingers so you can no longer reason with yourself. Deck chair bones and crushed cans dissolve on the balcony. In the stillness you watch the light yawn towards your arm.

*

in a drama exercise, we stare at each other with open hearts. i press my fingers to your nose and trail down to the beginning

*

It's spring. That means it's light early, that means we haven't much time. I turn off my alarm in favour of waking up naturally. So I feel a degree of ownership over my sleep. So I feel restraint. That and ritual pill-taking, technology purges, pineapple cubes. Health swells behind my eyes like a blue balloon, gaping and breezy. Detachment is half the liberation. Now



I just have to move my bed back like it was in January, so my head touches the wall and my eyes touch the sky when I wake.

*

don't drink your coffee and feel strange pleasure for it. tear apart a napkin so tightly your fingers hurt

*

Three of us rolled back in your bed, draped in folds of safe money, teenage bodies unaccustomed to the physicality of emotional blows. I like how you hide the acutely depressing walls with blue-tac and posters. You are so well catered-for and lovely in the balm of fairy lights. And like a pupil between eyelids I am trapped between the both of you. This talk of botched love, ashy girls, letting go, not, dragging out. And you look me squarely and say that you are lonely. I'm trying not to be dismissive. What if you can read my mind??? Cup chin to clavicle and will it to be over already.

*

trace every characteristic to the gene. you come from what has been before

*

Why are all these people here? My stride has purpose under seething city fluorescents: I'm looking for caffeine. It is 2am at McDonald's. Sliding doors sway back and forth in the way of a car window wiper. Who are these people? All of us, disciples hungry for a final supper, watch a man eat his communion receipt. Potholed piety. Behind the counter, a bun is picked up off the floor and flung onto its burger's naked constitu-



ent parts. Behind the glass smoldering men gesticulate wordlessly.
Turns out they don't serve coffee.

*

*to live for oneself is what matters. measure the value from the use
you derive*

*

Under the fish and chip awning, you tell me this weather is, like,
insane. I worry about my belongings; my phone short-circuiting,
droplets teeming through book spines, drawings bleeding into leather.
Any other time, I'd join you in the open field. I curve goodbyes
and smile at the bus driver's hi-vis jacket. My seat smells of wet
earth. I lay my forehead against the window's trembling chord and
a draft rolls up from the grate, stippling my face with little kisses. A
Tui crosses the sky as we lurch left.

tell me i know nothing yet



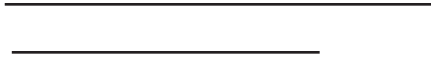
Gviana Goldberg
University of South Florida

QUEER THOUGHTS

Dear you,
I've taken time to mold myself a brand new body and as I begin to peel my
skin and bind to who I really am
I feel lost again
You, a person like any other, can bat your eyes and I forget the years, sweat,
and tears I put into that mold
The wit of the world woven in waves of golden hair
The sabertooth style sewn in my lacy underwear
For you I am quiet and timid and polite
Because I am afraid of being disliked
For you I sit anxiously awaiting signs
Like approving smiles
As if otherwise it's my demise
And for you I won't be radical because
I shouldn't speak my mind about the crime I see within mankind
It's not ladylike of me is it?
What if a "lady" is like:
"I should never be shamed for existing in a narrative you set
Only human according to your judgement
My purpose was never to pass your fucked up tests
When I say gender is socially constructed I mean



I cannot squeeze my queer limbs and bold statements into cardboard
boxes crafted by your ignorance
Duct taped and sealed with phobia
So you can ship me across a sea of forgotten identity
Or hide me deep in your dirty drawers
You'd rather I be manipulated into a product with a purpose I do not
claim
Torn into a tool of oppression
Forcing me to fit a frame my body was never made for
It's not the first time you've tried to rearrange bones that did not
belong to you
Tried to pass on an inferiority complex like a family heir
A thick necklace I put on every morning like a necessary accessory
Whose chain only serves to remind me how easy it would be to
hang myself
And when I look at me, I am passing
I forget
This social construct stops other on the street
So people can stare and spit and stab in their direction
Because they cannot choose to hide
To adhere to an appearance less threatening
You fear what you can't understand
But how can you understand a mind you've never tried to reach
Speak to me
Come closer
Look me in my eyes try to dismiss the death
The debt that comes from your denial
I am who I want to be
I will be free
Of the clothes your mind chose for me
I will wrap my brain in sheer cloth so you can see every fucking
queer thought



Poetry
by
OSU-Lima Students



This section of Volume 3 contains poetry written by undergraduates on The Ohio State University at Lima campus. It serves as our own local literary journal.

We thank Jenna Bush for serving as outside editor to select these works. She graduated from OSU-Lima in the spring of 2018. She is a former senior editor for *Asterism*. She read the submissions with no names attached, and made the decisions.



Alyssa Brown

OSU Lima

DEAR

Found you in something sticky on the bottom of my shoe
Then someone's uncanny whispers darkened my buzz,
speaking nastily of eyes seeking hopes through holes in the walls.
Lately, sunsets look like petals picked angrily and torn up in boredom, like
eyelashes
stuck on your cheek.
Trying to remember home reminds me that everyone's childhood bicycles
are low on air now
 air gets thinner on mountaintops high on opiates
Mothers speak well of their children
But I imagine you frosted in mud, digging yourself out with brittle ivory.
The dark finds everyone in caves gilded with stalactites
 Lights in New York City are vulnerable to a switch
And maybe the burn-holes in bandanas expose better than they cover.
In solitude I wonder why nails grow faster than hair
And how can water melt ice but curly brown hair freezes every morning?

Oh well,



MIDWESTERN WHITE NOISE

I was working at Whole Foods
During Grad School - Produce;
Watermelons,
Peaches,
Avocados,
Arti-
Chokes
We had it all -
He'd always come in about the same time:
10:00 - Knowing we close in an hour,
With that straw hat; peppered beard,
Mr. Whitman, I was told;
My neck, wrists, and ankles burned from those side-eye
glances
Flattered, but not for me, I spelled out on my produce sign,
Though he - followed this time-
By what I thought was a homeless man,
Or a drunkard,
Or a dope fiend,
Or worse, another poet,
He went down the frozen food



I became a Pinkerton,
Down artisanal water,
Down the coffee & tea,
Down the international,
I remember he stopped at and got:
seven curry powders,
three bottles of Tapatío,
one Durian,
one can of coke,
from France,
And,
four and a half Dominican plantains,
Dried,

He muttered to himself what seemed like a holy prayer,
Though he didn't look like a holy man,
But did look like he was riddled with Catholic guilt,
They found each other in the chips,

I went in,
Not too close,
My nerves took-
& pushed down my toes into the floor,
I couldn't move
Luckily they had their backs turned;

Still - But in earshot,
I listened;
Beard compliments between the two,
Cooking tips - shared,
Comments on necks, wrists, and ankles,
Where to get the cheapest beer in Chinatown,
I finally caught his name,
Ginsberg,
I knew the name,
And have seen the Pot is Fun photo,



Here in my supermarket?

I moved,
 And finally asked;
Should I participate in the protests,
Tomorrow?
They didn't turn,
They didn't need to,
Son if you have to ask,
You are a known coward,
 Sir can I talk to you alone,
It won't be anything but a minute,
right?

Right.

I've read your work since I've been sixteen,
And what you've just said: troubled me.
And perhaps I could have rephrased,
And perhaps I could have shown more ankle,
And perhaps, if you let me bleed on the floor,
Not much more than a few drops we can get somewhere,
 Get on with it boy,
The casualty of the chaos of your single-spaced prose,
With its blatant use of gay sex, its dependence on drugs,
Its need for mystics, for a god, not the god, but a god,
taught me something that I thought I knew,
But could never hear from the rustling of corn,
Most days & nights,
Ah, the midwestern white noise,
Yes, boy?
That you would make the mothers of smalltown America sick,
I'm jealous in some regards
Ah again, midwestern white noise,
Where you have to hide books for fear of thought,
Or worse yet - the thought of devastating your mother and the unwel-
comed bias that comes from the neighbors despite changing your diapers,



Yes?

Yes,

Fuck 'em,

protest if it's a problem they won't tell you,

And if they do they're lying,

They were youthful once,

Protest,

Riot,

Read the Kabbalah with all the lights on,

Take someone home,

Their fear shouldn't be your fear despite it being a fear of yours,

And what baggage you have of yours is not theirs

They're not staying up at night worrying,

In a lazy-e-boy waiting to flip the light on,

Alright, I promise you this,

Drink. Smoke Marijuana. Listen to Ornette Coleman. Loud.

Get going. Get it. Get in. Get Out, ignore the noise, that's

what Coleman is for, or Cannonball Adderley, Or,

Clifford Brown? Or talk to the Hare Krishnas, find it,

Sure?

Alright?

Alright,

I shook his hand and thanked him for permission on what I was already going to do,

They went to my register,

I checked them out,

On the way home I bought,

One Adderley record,

One bottle of whiskey,

rye,

Three joints of marijuana,

And a book with endless gentiles throughout.



“LIFE DOWN THE WIRE”

(Based on a first line from “Para Mi Alma” by Asalia Arauz)

I call her Saturdays through Thursdays.

Coiled up in the corner of the plastic-covered sofa like a snake, shedding my skin and consuming my tail,

I turn the numbers on the dial and wait for a connecting tone that’ll serve as an airplane.

She answers with a voice like malted chocolate, dripping through the receiver like water droplets sliding down the silk edges of a spiderweb after a torrential downpour, warming my bones and recalibrating the tempo of my heart.

By an unspoken agreement, we follow this pattern:

Forget to ask a very important question

What’s the difference between a telephone cord and a noose?

Instead,

ask how her day was,

Talk about the overdue library book napping in my bed on a Lavender pillow—it’s probably fallen behind the headboard.

It’ll probably

poke the back of my neck with tired resiliency during my sleepless dreaming—

listen to her recount the same story-different day, new characters,



the fail to envision her as a sailor navigating
unforgiving winds and ignited sun-kissed
oceans in her
eyes.

Years from now, I'll sit in the sun-crisped grass with crossed legs that resemble the snow-covered pretzels we used to buy at the mall and push the corkscrew cord—browned from decades of use like antique journal pages dissolved in distilled vodka—through layers of hardening soil.

Down

Down

Down

A collect call to a box, sleek and black like the bruises branding the sunken skin under rose eyes, textured only by the freckling of eyelashes like stars spattering neon paint on the blank canvas of the galaxy.

I'll sit there for seconds minutes hours

translating an impenetrable silence.

Because I call her.

Saturdays through Thursdays.



GALLERY

I found out from my grandmother that Mother's art was displayed in the local gallery, commemorating her death that I couldn't prove ever happened, even though I felt her like a pile of bones, the pieces shifting. I moved across the marble floor, smelling fresh pamphlets as I wondered why galleries always felt so naked, as if I had to walk a block just to spy into another painter's windows, to see if their house was as littered and soiled as the last. Art is imitation, and so I wondered why painting a mural of a woman giving her daughter an heirloom hairpin was better than giving her daughter an heirloom hairpin. Sometimes all I saw in Mother's panel was curdled paint, but the boy beside me said that every painting was a television projecting something that I could peel open and eat. I had an eerie feeling that maybe he was a television projecting: my mother's disgusting love for art come through him like a broadcast. And maybe that wasn't fair of me, but I was grown now, and I was tired of gaping, lusting after other people's windows. Maybe I didn't know him that well, but when he said, I can understand sacrificing certain things for the sake of art. I would give up anything for my dreams, I realized his eyes were the same muddy puddles as hers, that mirage of something drinkable. I asked him, the boy who stole her words and threw them from his mouth, so you would give up love for the imitation of love? You would give up me for the imitation of me? What he didn't know was that four canvases



down was my mother's window; smeared in linseed oil-paint and background indigo foaming into her image-self, who said, my breasts are used and my body stretched, the dishes pile in the sink, the laundry piles in the hamper, and I am leaving now. As if saying, I cage you in my paint and draw your image over and over, because imitation is what it means to leave, to sacrifice everything. He could tell I was upset as he reached for my arm, but he was only a curtain, and whether I was on the inside or the outside, I didn't know. It made it hard to commemorate my mother's death when she called my grandmother, told her about the gallery, and never asked to speak to me. It made it hard to press my fingers against the cool glass, against the wild-oiled emerald hues that weaved like a tree to make my body, knowing that the "me" inside her fingertips was painted over the "me" that stood looking at it.

HE GRIPS ME LIKE

He grips me like
I'm a charred smoker's lung.
Captivated by my writhing chest,
Disappointment streaks across his
Face like lightning strikes,
Flaring up my sore trachea,
Evaporating what little pink tissue
That has survived among the
Smoldering wounds he created.
His fingers, once soothing, are calloused,
Forming dents between the ridges
Of dead cells and petrified mucous.
One touch, enough to paralyze me.



OSU Lima

Mattea Rolsten



Hannah Stoll

OSU Lima

GRIFFITH PARK

I'm looking down into the abyss that is my hair
the ends are optic fibers illuminated by a light along the path.
You carve the number 13 into the old picnic table, paint chips falling
onto my fingernails.

I tell you
 that's bad luck, and it's Halloween –
 the numbers will reverse

You say
 I'm not afraid, all I need in life is God
 and bell-bottom jeans

I roll my eyes, landing them on a nearby tree
I've seen it before, there's no wind
but the tree slowly bends
to the ground.

I hear you start to carve faster.
Just as the last paint chip floats on my pinky finger,
we hear screams –
suicides off the H of the Hollywood sign.

You take my hand
 let's get out of here
and run.



We run until the slow stomps
of our tennis shoes
echo into the trees
and I realize we don't
have shadows.

You point the flashlight under your chin,
that classic campfire spotlight,
(I see the bent tree where your brain should be)
and whisper,

 that's the last time we come here at midnight
But I know the gate is locked from the outside
and death doesn't have a key,
midnight always the lamp on the path
that lights my hair.



Chelsey Noble

OSU Lima

DOLL

Tiny, black rounded beads peer at me across the dingy green carpet.

I hadn't noticed the inquisitive little orbs when I had found myself there.

Scleras once white as a virgin's sheets, now found themselves spoiled with red rivers of vessels.

It wasn't the first time I had overreacted, often my emotions would flare up like leaves trailing behind a semi-truck on a cold fall day. Browned oak memories rushed far into the blue sky only to quickly plummet.

I had thrown myself down just like that ragged old doll, but my eyes had been clenched close.

I told myself that I could travel through space and time by pressing onto the back of my lids causing a dizzying colorful array of lights to shine out of me.

He told me often that he saw hope there. Although I prefer to think that it was always a fallacy. Something mistaken for something else. A peach that you thought was an apricot. That's what I hope for, because otherwise I must admit I'm blind.



Not the hope that you gain in a pew as you shout the lord's prayer in your head, nearly screaming it, in order to dull the sound of the lingering whispers of self-assured doubt.

More like the hope you have on a Saturday night as you're smearing on exotic rouge and covering yourself in lace because at least the itch against your skin makes you feel real.

Of course, this is not how he portrayed it, but I could feel it in his bones as I pressed deep and felt my body travel through every nerve and each of his neurons quickly sparked.

Hope, he said, he found in my eyes; which if I continued to press on would be likely to pop into the back of my skull and roll around like a pair of green cat eye marbles in an empty mason jar.

Probably the same mason jar that I had once filled with life. Life such as lightning bugs, spiders, or ants. They had all been hopeful at one point. Abandoned dew-covered spider webs reflect in my mind as I feel the stabbing of air holes puncturing the metal lid and the back of my mind.

Now it is empty and dusty, thrown in a pile of forgotten toys that have also been abandoned.

I feel the glistening feeling of a migraine starting to scope in on my optic nerves as I release myself from my travels.

Opening my lids, revealing dilated pupils to the darkness, my eyes land on yours in the dark.

Shiny orbits manufactured out of hard plastic emit the hope that I had never seen in my own.



Megan Shroyer

OSU Lima

“NECROMANCY IS STILL ROMANCE”

Moonlight plays an intricate game of tag with lifeless marble,
creating a mazelike pattern through the graveyard
similar to a 1920's abstract.
The wind blows through the city of the dead,
kissing the raised flesh of the girl lying
on the curved top of a grave,
her brittle bones arcing
to meet the banished chill of the autumn air.
Her hair shimmers in the lactescent light,
cascading over the edge of the headstone in rippling waves
like a waterfall engulfed in washed out blood.
It wraps around the shoulder of the boy
sitting on the dew damp grass,
tickling the inky indigo tinting of the arm
resting on his hooked knee.
At his feet lies a half empty bottle of wine,
the flavor paralleled by the cherry of her cigarette
sending misshapen halos to the sky to crown the angels,
the color mirrored by the sticky shine of his raw bottom lip.



His head lulls against the etched name of a dead man,
garnering strength from the empty memorial of perish
as his trembling hand grasps desperately onto hers,
their fingers twisted together
like the makeshift stiches of thread holding a tattered shirt
together.



Victoria Sullivan

OSU Lima

NEW YEAR

His hand rose from the platform — potassium nitrate—and landed across my face like a firework unfolding red salt at the screams of midnight. It was because I had said I hated her. I didn't, but I never wanted to be made to feel wrong by a man who stared into my grandmother's eyes as if it was her fault that my mother left — I could see it now: You made her, birthed her with arms to paint train carts steaming in the distance, with legs to stand up and walk onto the platform, drips of velvet cushioned seats soon to hold the twitch in her eyes. It was the New Year and she had left for the second time a few days after Christmas. I never really knew if she left by train, but when my father retracted his hand from my frozen flesh I thought I saw the bogie brushing past, the sets of wheels rotating in unison. I reminded him a few months ago of how he had hurt me, made my insides shrivel like the dull, blue-mist of Dogwood street on New Year's, empty of screams and people holding them in their mouths, empty of any resolution. I didn't hit you that hard. It was only a tap, don't be silly, he said. I could see the dreary golden streetlamps still, the haze glistening like raw snow, and there was no mother to hold me up by my armpits — no showing me the endlessness of white crystals from the sky.

Well, when you hit someone on the face, it doesn't really matter how hard you do it, I told him.



On the face? What? I didn't hit your face!

Where did you hit me then?

We always argued about “how” instead of “why.” We never talked about why we were both under the streetlamp, eyes stretching for miles against the horizon. We listened to the grind of golden wheels running after the others, the soft groan of the whistle in the distance, and he said he needed her too, that he loved her more than anything. But he said it with his eyes, while I said it like this:

I hate her. I hate her more than anything.



Megan Shroyer

OSU Lima

“LIKE ANTIQUE ROSES”

I.

When I was three years old, mama started a flower garden in our dirt-bare backyard with a single pink rose and a cinderblock she found on the sidewalk by a construction site. Over the years, I watched as that single rose transformed into a terrarium of multicolored petals that swirled in the wind like a kaleidoscopic tornado, refracting through the cloudy glass over my bedroom window pane. Every morning she would water her flowers with the clay watering can I made for her in third grade, and every night she would pick the prettiest flower to sew onto my clothes for the next day. It never mattered if it was stitched to the raggedy knee of a pair of jeans or wrapped around a headband to make a halo of blossoms, she would always say the same thing: “a flower for my delicate flower.”

II.

There was a daffodil pressed into the black silk collar of my shirt the night the traffic light broke at the intersection of I-60 and the man smashed into my car like a raging bull, ripping shards of glass through my hair and against my lips. The cracks in the windshield refracted the light of broken headlights and blood, reminding me of psychedelic petals waltzing in the wind outside my bedroom window. For a moment, I thought of mama. Then I thought of nothing as the steering wheel collapsed into my unsuspecting chest just inches



below that little yellow flower that was quickly becoming decorated in flecks of vibrant red.

III.

Hours later, the chill of the morgue slab seeped into my back like one thousand dulled hypodermic needles, laced with the scent of acidic oranges and wilting Carrion petals that burned my nose and stung my eyes. Through the murky swamp water that had become my vision, I watched mama identify my body with that little daisy, refusing to look at my face until she herself took on the role of undertaker. She placed my corpse in the backseat of her blue '68 Chevelle that smelled like Coney dogs and July nights at the fair. The cool surface of the half-rolled down window soothed the aching in my temples as we drove, passing traffic lights that shimmered on the rain damp pavement the entire way home where mama wrapped my wounds in a silk gauze made from the petals of that first rose. Buried in the dirt of her beloved garden, I wait. I wait, and mama waits for me to return to her like the perennial wildflowers in the field beside the highway. Sometimes, the dirt clots in the corners of my eyes, popping blood vessels and making it impossible to see. I still know she's there, though. Every morning she waters my makeshift grave with a mixture of Miracle-Gro, and every night she preens the weeds with her tears.



Trenton Berger

OSU Lima

A MESSAGE TO THE READERS

Stop
&
Sit,

let me lend you my ear so that you scream into it.

I want to scream too,
I like you

Romanticizing problematic scribblers to that of Christ and other myths
That gives us something to help us face the sun,
And silhouetted woodland edge that will forever stain our primal eye,
And since I will never be one,
Since I will always be human,
Since I will always let that midwestern white noise drown out my voice
Speak to me, tell me what I want to hear,
Give me your broken promises at a consent—
so that I see the burning of your Rome,
And anoint you like those that have come before you,
Detail your story with that of fields and orchards unkempt,
with lilacs and willow trees

Muffling just enough so that they --
Can not tell that we speak ill of the dead
In these hallowed halls of Saint Dewey's Cathedral



I know what you are saying is true,
I, regrettably am positioned
now of just as an echo chamber,
Just spitting words out from men long since dead back into my own
mouth,
Tell me what I want to hear and will reward you with
Clapping then springing forth my arms open,
For the burden of what I love now,
Are words; as I am just here to make sense of my own silence.

So please sit,
I poured coffee, tea, and gin.
Sip,
I need a new God,
Or, a new calf
Or another stiff drink,
 Hold the ice,
And let us,
Puff away at the solitude of maybe the 100, 80, 60, 20 years left.
Before your collapse becomes my burden,
Like those, I held on high before you,
Be my atlas because I see that your shoulders are broad,
yes,
 Do not apologize,
I should have known that
 West is that way,
So say what you have to say to me again,
But this time louder,
 so that my jaw aches,
What am I but someone trying to become you now.
I am alone, tired, empathetic, and hungry,
Our solidarity is between us, not them. At least not now.
So please sit,
 hand me that knife and those pears, and scream something,
 worth screaming.

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