Derivatives

Mikayla Goodkin et al

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Derivatives

Mikayla Goodkin et al.
for the unnamed poetry group:

you are the space in which me and my words are nurtured & sustained.

for S:

in a bead from the summer-string, the house i walk by is yours.
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(lov)e+------- of un-closure

Notes

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“...[R]e-reading...I mis-recognize sections as my own. ‘People all around me / wondering what it is I write.’ What day do we enter, together? Emerson says that the poet ‘will tell us how it was with him and all men will be the richer in his fortune.’ I wonder and wonder how this actually works.”

-Stefania Heim, from The Midwinter Constellation-

Introduction

I imagined that this introduction would be in the epistolary form, a letter that intimately opens the world of this yearlong Honors Capstone Project. If you know me, this is not surprising—when I address another entity with “dear,” I feel I can put my care and love in the space between us for all the implications of thought and feeling that will become there. Yet, sitting down to write, I find I am unsure of whom I should address this to; “But what reader?” I blurted out to Stefania (my advisor) at our last meeting. Stefania’s amused and earnest reply: “Mikayla, you have been flirting with the idea of a reader throughout your entire project.”

In preparation for writing this, I go in search of sample introductions. Often, this is a move I make to familiarize myself with a genre, noticing how writers might write into and how words live within its terrain, before launching into it myself. “But what is a lyric poem?” I ask, reading elegies by Ocean Vuong and Danez Smith, and suddenly the project begins. Of course, there is the knowing that whichever model introductions I pore over, it will as Fanny Howe says, “always be only [me] with whatever [I] am doing,” but I draw near to the shapes and movements created by other words as guidance and inspiration (Howe 133).

I remember that Stefania wrote an introduction for her recently published article about Susan Howe and her poetics of relation, so I decide I might start there, but instead I gravitate towards another one of her articles, titled “Undone by One Another” which, most reductively summarized, examines the intersection of professorship and motherhood. I walk while scrolling, reaching the paragraph where Stefania explains that the first time she was pregnant, “[r]esponding to some deep sense of the imperative of female endurance, or maybe just prideful and with something to prove, [she] did not acknowledge [her] pregnancy to [her] students” (Heim, “Undone,” 2).

I chuckle, so many years later, thinking of the difference—how a casual comment regarding her second daughter’s argument for vegetarianism is the reason I just celebrated a year meatless. But then, my laughter cuts abruptly, my feet pause on the sidewalk as I become implicated in this general movement: even as my project’s pieces amassed over the year, I did not conceptualize, and refused to recognize it as a whole. When anyone inquired about what my project was, I would briefly elaborate on Modern Elegy and Rhetorical Practices as fields I am investigating or allude to poems about the moon—but I left it nebulous, uninterested in defining how it would exist in the world as a project. (Perhaps to resist confining it too soon).

Much of what shows up here is something that I stumbled into, organically and unintentionally— I knew it was becoming, but I never pinned down what it must become. Rather, I let my intentions surface through the process of the work itself, (although, really, I did not know that until this moment, identifying those instances when pieces fell into place retrospectively). For example, my title Derivatives arrived in the least conspicuous way—after reading and vigorously annotating Layli Long Soldier’s Whereas, I showed Stefania my hand-drawn derivative graph, positing this as one of the moves Long Soldier makes in her work. When Stefania plucked this word from my otherwise windy dialogue, it just felt right.
Even our first central inquiry— what shapes and movements the language of each text might generate— emerged with ease, as we listened to each work, allowing them to pull us in whatever direction they offered up. We explored another essay by Emerson because we became intoxicated by the thrill of these shapes and movements coming to life in form and content, lingering. When Modern Elegy declares that words cannot hold its grief, when it foregrounds its resistance to language, the shape and movement its words wrench us through seems to be what remains as its methodology of thought and feeling. Taking the derivative of these shapes and movements means that my work is contingent upon the texts that I engaged with, but it additionally signifies that my own work has accumulated to have a shape and movement, a slope of its own.

What I publicly and otherwise pretended had no body, at this moment, rests and rocks in my arms with tangible and flippable pages. This week, I was house-sitting, arranging the order of my project on the wood floor at dusk: a three-hour Monday endeavor with cats sprawling over the whatever semblance of order there might be, ants that escaped from the fireplace cracks crawling over each poem, melted ice cream, favorite playlists, and my friend gracefully rewording my babble so I could hear my thoughts anew. When I take in what has settled into place, it feels exactly the way it is meant to be, yet I also understand that this composition is dependent on the place-space-time, the ecology, in which it was shaped. In this way, my project is ever-shifting, a temporary constellation, because it believes it would appear differently if each part was developed in another context, strung together in another context.

So much of the experience of this project was about exploring what it means to think, feel, be, and create in various ecologies— with who and what constitutes my community, and therefore who I am and how the world shows up to me. I have always been, and my work has always been, inextricably entangled with who and what surrounds me, and so this project seeks to reflect its (my) enmeshment, to depict the process as capillary, as fascial, not muscular. In community with my friends, with my professors and mentors, with the moon, with the texts I read, each collaborative effort attended to the needs and wants that emanated in and from that particular place-space-time.

Each collaboration sought after the inquiry and process that only had the capacity to occur with whoever and whatever was in the room, preoccupations and stories becoming shared, visible. Sometimes we hunkered down in a coffee shop, painstakingly choosing every word for poem together; sometimes we had a conversation, writing fragments afterwards on our own, and coming together to assemble them; sometimes those conversations were about what illustrations could augment, could add to the experience of the language; sometimes we gave each other fragments to write from and with; sometimes we wrote prose that explored a theme, then fractured our own work to arrange something new together; sometimes we never made something new, but kept our own work intact; sometimes I did activities with others in other contexts that seemed unrelated, and realized later that they were what was missing altogether from this collection; and sometimes, it was an amalgam of these things, messy and beautiful occasions that became part of our lives.

As a genre and field, Modern Elegy is not only concerned with how we grieve, but relentlessly considers how we live and how we want to live. Similarly, Rhetorical Practices takes inventory of our interdependence, of the relationships that structure our realities, and invents new ways in which we can live. This project was just as much about the work you will encounter here as it is about the practices that move with and within me from each collaboration, that continue to change my ontological existence and deeply inform how I live.
To read a book aloud in the ice cream isle of a grocery store with a friend; to trade the pencil and paper back and forth for collective annotations; to collect sentence fragments and words for poems on my notes app; to giggle on a picnic blanket, to roll around on the grass in glee; to fix a schedule to meet, the mundane necessities; to gently shake the hand of a branch, to inquire about a flower’s day with a smile; to walk religiously in the early morning with a book in hand or in ear; to recognize the desire to write; to prioritize space to wait for the words, pausing enough for them to arrive;

to ask others to do this with me; to still dance while writing this introduction three hours past my bedtime; to let the earth hold me, to let an armchair conform to my shape; to reckon with my positionality; to feel utter relief when the moon reappears; to write in couplets for the first time because why not; to admit that I do not know what a text means, and even then, to form an interpretation; and say it; to relinquish whatever imagined restrictions I unknowingly imposed upon myself and my work; to incorporate math, science, into my poems; to cry at a word’s invitation;

to wander; to take intellectual and creative risks even when laden with terror; to know when it is time to take a break from the full-speed throttle, to digest and choke on what is there; to just write; to pick it back up again because this project is a vast unraveling, one which begins as it ends.

In the accumulation of these practices, there is an undeniable consistency embedded in this project, which as Stefania describes, operates as a sort of through line, a steady persistence across the year’s mercuriality. Each text exists as a sort of offshoot from this through line, and in this place-space-time, we dropped down, rose up, stretched in various directions to take its derivative. Mulling this over on my walk, I finally realized what I feel is the shape of this work (courtesy of the vocabulary of my “ENG 418: Water in Black Literature” seminar): Rhizophora.

While I am sure there are many details of this species that pertain to or align with my work, I mean this in the most linguistic sense. The Latin name for mangrove, Rhizophora, is derived from the Greek words for ‘root’ /rhiza/ and ‘to carry’ /phoros/, translated as ‘carrying roots,’ roots that are constantly (re)generating themselves (Deumert 2-3). A transferable and transformative set of practices, my project is about what roots, what derivatives, will be carried with me into my future as a teacher, poet, scholar, friend, and more. Transitioning from movement to movement was like shedding a cocoon-skin anew, each time a (re)generation.

In “movement one: a room full of mirrors” I am trying to find my feet, and around every turn I am poked by another question: What can poetry (Modern Elegy) do for us here? How am I paying attention to my own mind and self? How am I attuning to and communicating with who and what is around me? In searching, there is an intoxicating self-permission that grows in me. “[M]ovement two: my name is a hanging from” is shaky— it has lost the momentum of movement one and it doesn’t know what to do with that. There is judgment and outrage that it can’t recover its previous state, but it still commits (and so do I) to the work anyway. When “movement three: eating ice cream with a fork” starts to form, it accepts being in the muck and looks to unearth what we can do when it feels like we have nothing left to give, when the grief and pain are too much. Strangely (or not so strangely), it seems to give more, branching out into more ways of knowing and doing and being.

As dynamically rooted as I am in my community, in my place-space-time with humans and nonhumans alike, there was one singular page I questioned before putting it in the final product: the dedication page. I could not understand why this was so bothersome to me, but it had
something to do with a dedication being too specific. I did not know what that meant, then. As I circled the neighborhoods, oscillating between having the dedication page and not, I remembered Eve Tuck and C. Ree’s assertion in “Glossary of Haunting,” that we must have both the particular and the general, otherwise we reproduce terms of settler colonial knowledge (Tuck and Ree 2). Given this, my project desires to be fractal, to collapse the separation between private and public, the hosted from the host; so, the dedication page stays (Tuck and Ree 2).

And then, it dawned on me: I was worried about the dedication page, too particular in name, dismissing or negating others who this project is for. Stefania was right— I have been thinking about the reader throughout this entire project. In doing this work, I thought I was learning to actively consider myself as a writer, a poet, but I forgot that in self-identifying this way, I have already passively assumed responsibility for the reader; I have welcomed them into this text. Perhaps, this is overdue:

Dear Reader,

It is a strange and beautiful thing to write this letter to you, to know that you are reading this in your own place-space-time. The work of this project “[made] me as [it unmade me]... [re-drew] my boundaries with the world...[re-imagined] my world,” and I have told you of this above (Heim, “Undone,” 4). Of course, given you inhabit an alternate ecology from me, the shape it takes, the movement it makes, the way in which my project shows up will be different for you, but my hope is that it does much of the same for you as it did me, that it “make[s] noise” in your world (Heim, “Undone,” 4). For as Judith Butler writes in their essay “Violence, Mourning, Politics,” “Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something” (Butler 23).

With warmth,
Mikayla
movement one:

a room full of mirrors
of me, she does not ask anything— her poems are speech overheard, the ultimate claim to existence, possibly worthiness itself. but where do i find myself here? stumbling into the grammatical quandary of possession, taking pencil to page, to each enjambment. poem, here is your hourglass frame (as if i could tell you where a body stop-starts). but closure isn’t closure but openings. what lies in this space between each verse to fold in and with, suspended. we give it a name to watch it fall, a poetics of mercy. her reflect statement: how we cut through the shape of the bird-bullet blue thing we cannot measure without our words, and pull it forward.
MOON SERIES:

String of Beads in Fall
MOONBODY

lamppost moon and wonder
if it is innocent hand
view its sprig of lavender and flirt
with whether it is mine for the taking

shadow-sun must
rise but i have never seen it
move before i am
driving roller blade bliss
disco discs holding up spine:
a ceremony

we notice when the moon disappears with no body to call out to in the night

but still
we await its return
each morning i give
you a kiss
without fish-puckered lips just
a palm-up offering

as if trying
to lift a seething
righteousness with self
a still
unmoving globe
back
and failing
EERIE MOON-WOMB rub
and ruminate on
body think if i can re-
member the voice that lies in
the lurching waves of blackberry thorns
in the nothing-nest of the sky
when i forget i am
, i am not writing the poem

for milk
stains are not milk
to suckle to feed on but you
are a demanding i but
i am willing to mother how is
foreign to me

so there is nothing more
for you to do but steal steel over
my eyes so that i
startle afraid
in this symphony of illusion
MUFFLED MOON

pink spritz blitz across
crater face globe careening
down a tipped teacup side

each robotic plunge into an untethered empty:
does it matter
if i am lying to myself? the niggling
distasteful question to the rosy lens

there must be a limit to the rising
warmth without warrant the linguistic
intervention a humbling
kind of terror a canon
to swat a fly

to cradle a baby when it cries
MOON BLANKETING

nimble leaf tumble to beget
stomach gurgle the oscillation in and out
of clouds let me sleep here and wake

the fuzzing bee from its slopped honey stupor not pathological but adaptive orbit: if i snap a picture you are gone and i locate hand on a mid-body bulge

if only i could lift the veil and witness this jointly organized miracle
MOON SHELLING

moon-egg shambles stack,
cracking the horizontal center of excess
parable: meaning, a) paradoxed partial

dull corporate lie the beaked seagull in suburbia
on a planked night and you don’t have to
believe me, but

story is a safe
emergency a ratified fact my love
a recuperation project so

thank you for your robust concern.
WARRING MOON

moon parchment: papering, curved around
the bend a light puff of dust
to mug

the princess mattress-pea found
underneath the baked tint of pit
and pedestal but please
vanish & leave your shape
for the writing: a vignetting of the wicked
coat button pull and tuck and

the bird-surge from banked trees
a notification: i misjudged why
i remain and you retreat you are not avoiding[

and yet why,
my solipsistic pleasure.
MANUFACTURED MOON

intrude and retract of take care
full macchiatoed drip drip the revolving sound of centripetal force: tire to curb the space marble—sit with me,

we are waiting for the bus to come.
MOON VANTAGE

almost palindromed zero-sum to ponder:
proximity as a lack of
imagination? wait, i’ll be
right back
for directions to the sandwiched bead
seeming impossible
ability for the peak-end
rule to pickle the scene

of the naked tree i didn’t
know the tree i didn’t know
had a body

like that
flaked edge of ice cream scooped
crescent, the whack of a slip
drop to candied-hail leaves the leftovers—

what i wear at 32°

about now, how
useful would be the cut
of a principled razor
Y=MX + MOON

a lack of friction to climb
y=2x but love
can’t look away
from the archive
of future attention so now
i’m walking horizon the semipermeable
cache, y=2 the ground of categorical pause oh my
remixed twin: an autobiography

what i would do
for the wink of a soft funneled    hello,
but you were just there, keeping the past round so don’t throw me for a loop when you go that would be an audible ow

oh, i’m sorry, my character is warmly nuanced, too concentrated to determine the length of our day—how was i asleep

this morning, say goodbye to waking up.
parahuman
letter to the practice of horizontal reading: walking landscape

i want to take a walk with this book, but it won’t let me. “too much movement,” it asserts, convincing me to read body to blanket, head to pillow. i never read like this.

not many pages in, it rocks me to sleep, exhaustion bricking me to the bed, “half-awake and half-possessed” (Chang 14). i had forgotten how delicious it is to fall asleep with a book as my ribcage. i think it an odd kindness, at first: the allowance of fortification. at the same time, there is a realization that this dozing is oozing from these wind pipes, gut-wrenched, the mandated repose before the weary assemblage of organs. i try to stave off the shame of time passing without my participation, but it encroaches lustily.

last week, i asked my advisor, Stefania, to do an experiment with me, one that emerged from her poem, “11:05 PM,” and an interview with Dear Memory’s creator. to read for what bump-bumped into us, like how Chang was “always bumping into [the furniture of silence],” seemed, then, what might deliver us to its address (Chang 12). for her, it might have (i don’t know yet, i will tomorrow). for me, my thinking might have been too cosine, starting at one instead of zero; Chang spoke of herself writing towards silence, and in this way, bumps were the language she had learned already—the mortar making up your body. the knowing, all ready, that while silence may be defined as having no sound, it does have a landscape. is this perhaps why it has stillled me to peer from the window sill, house planted?

i could theorize that it was held in terror of me bumping into life as i crossed the threshold. i went, on Friday, to an epistolary event at the Mount Baker Theatre called, “Letters Aloud: Private Letters Read in Public” in which actors alived these various epistles, and this house became a body. there is nothing that doesn’t belong in a letter, i find—there might be a slight shock, but it files under resonance quickly. fuck the world: perhaps not a sentiment expected, but accepted. or a bottle of glitter-water for a giant, one being that becomes too many for an editor, a lip-kiss in three sentences, signed, march on the capital, knocking, knocking. my friend, Rose, later writes of this Friday night, and denounces the doing; she describes a membrane she’s afraid to poke too hard. for these letters have their own personhood, are about the [being].

i intend to make this being my conclusion, setting an arbitrary deadline for when this letter must be sent: before my meeting tomorrow—how i reintroduce “reading work that expands while it contracts” as a choking, again, the immobilization of my restless wing-flaps (Chang 78). my supervisor, Eric, inquires why i cannot wait for the excavation, this privilege and right. a surrender i cannot offer, for i would be vulnerable to my unknowing, half-baked and porous. much easier to pretend i have not received its consent, that this book has not asked for the intimacy of time, than to be undeliverable, than to “bump into people... caught alive” (Chang 36). is this what happens when your clay for sculpting is suppression, nimble spectrality, blood stopped-resurfacing? the “aftermath of shame,” the cloudy water for scoring; the desire to mark the landscape, only to find your fingerprints have been burnt off (Chang 44).

Stefania asks me if i believe these are letters to begin with. the dears are where they should be, so i’m tempted to say “yes,” but each does not make its own entity—unless, unless taken collectively. so i’m walking, but without the book, and with poetry unbound podcasting in my ears Jason Allen-Paisant’s “Right now I’m Standing.” he drums “Right now I’m standing/ beneath what used to be/ I imagine an impressive tree” in memory (Allen-Paisant, lls. 1-3). it is here, whether among the roots or branches, i am not sure. both, i believe—not just a part of the world, but the world in each part of its whole. i want to fast-forward to the end, when we reclaim time “thinking about [our] body/ standing in the middle of this woodland/ and/ doing
nothing nothing” (Allen-Paisant, lls. 28-32). but skip the torso, and you will wonder how wondering can induce this sea-sickening nausea. lucille clifton once said, that when trying to write nature poems, there is involuntarily another poem left present: that of race. she, and Chang, had to write more than just to when I dismiss the poem beneath the poem, i become complicit in silencing. i’m sorry for, sometimes, wanting to do so.

recently, a quick write in one of my education classes meant a letter to my inner critic. in it, i placed the practice of dying in front of her, not entirely, but enough. i wanted her to recognize my nowness, but analyzing these letters is an act of grief— reading here asks me to die, to become the rock sitting on my grandfather’s tombstone in the Bellevue cemetery. i have not been there since a year after his death in 2012, and i keep meaning to. dying “always seems to involve moving furniture” to another formation, “involve” being the obligation, the choice (Chang 101). but what of the after. if i do not just write to, but write around, through, with, so what—what is the shape of this shaping?

i become the watcher of a multi-genre film called Who Will Write Our History? about the Warsaw Ghetto before and during the Holocaust. it documents the story of and the materials preserved in, what is known today, as the Ringelblum archive— collected and protected by a group with the codename Oyneg Shabes. once the sound of Shabbat music and prayer is a celebration forced to starve itself, turned meager. as the viewer, i wonder how many of these tears are my own. i am a young Jewish woman and i do not know my history, have not been taught, have not learned, my history. i know snow to be snow, not the feathers let loose from the bed quilts of my murdered people, this bifurcated memory culture.

will these Play-Doh Stars of David we make together be enough? i don’t know if i want to “[forgive] the birds that flew me to door and left,” me to trip over an empty-crop body with newspaper to cover the eyes-up (Chang 32). and yet, i find myself hoping, these little details, palpable dignities, that show the world we are not invisible: here, pleading with the written word to be our most believable witness.

in memory, i’ve been walking with this book from the beginning, “as if I had known this my whole life” (Chang 32). the sending of my fractals to meet its pages, that of the tree, the moon as a redeemable origin story or future destination, the “trying to attach words to things that are moving, that we cannot see, and that we can never fully understand” (Chang 106). and i’m moving, too. we are. not just the fight or flight, to mirror migration, but the bird and the beak, the nourishment of a history unfolding in the sky with what has been left behind. staying long enough for the accumulation of the repetition “nothing nothing” to make something, to mean doing, to mean being. a swarm of starlings to announce the birth of this new bird: an elegy (Chang 134).

so, let’s take a walk together, shall we, and “listen [for] there is nothing as exhilarating/ as the feeling of life coming into you” (Allen-Paisant, lls. 17-18). shhhhh. mmmmmm. aaaaaahhhh. the breaths in between that build this word are nothing if not beautiful. sh’ma yisrael adonai eloheinu adonai echad. nothing more painful, too. shhhhh-mmmmmm-aaaaaaaahhhh: please, can this, let this be our becoming.

with warmth,
Mikayla
nondominant
moonlight: available as another possibility to the mirror sidewalk following, whether its judgment be gentle or unforgiving, the distance beyond reach, the relief of sighing into a balmy smudging of ointment to the blood vining our knees: to carry an orchard, not only a body and its accompanying grief.
movement two:
my name is a hanging from
viewing water static from the dental chair while glistening traffic goes by unannounced, therein spies the wild gossip. habia una vez in not only this moment

when the cochlea speaks as the head valleys from side to side, toppling hair strands never seem even so scissors snip snip, another caustic scaler this

moth wing-skin only peels, even the most brittle swill whips like new wiper blades. so grief could spot me here here, hips a swiveling s’vivon rocking the obliques

of this funerary box, one clogged moon coming up the trachea to bounce into the lake, far-off only by means of a window. i heap goey premises into poems which want to be warm and fed and rested, but the yield is only the memory of a flickering porch light, the actual fact that fish do not exist so there

is everything else to anthropomorphize here, and i wish that i didn’t know this because every time i mourn a little and hope this is genuine good,

my jaw gaping torn from its clench, releasing bees dripping from hibernation to become intolerably available,

a congregation slathered under my gross name: i wonder what they think about themselves.
Autobiografía de un pájaro
por Lily Asmar

A Luis Cernuda

Mi cuerpo de pájaro flor
de puñal
de cinta de agua

entrando en las ruinas
de piedra
de quemadura de otro cuerpo borrada

buscando esa voz
de fuego
de entrega.

Pájaro asesinado por el tiempo
que se come a sus hijos.
Pájaro asesinado por el tiempo
que me repite “no esperes nada”.

Amor
fuego
buscando

en este cuerpo de quemadura agrandada
de ser
entre las ruinas

de cinta de agua
de puñal
mi cuerpo de pájaro flor.

Reef, marzo (1:00pm)
what is this:
place called where the shoe dips,
no story to be told, but recalled one side
of the moon resounding, the imaginary
garden for my poem poem, i guess

i’m a pretty selfish poet
once buoyed by this, photographed
three times over a vessel for articulation

but now tapped
by the slightest sneeze; pneumatized. perhaps i am not the moon’s
only friend, but it still follows
and tells me where to go.
and there is privilege coupled with the mere finding of space, rather than the must of creation. the river sick of remembering, the reluctant morning sun baking the shore-dead fish. un(real), having blubbed the bones of the (un)dead still cycling the currents. is it supposed to be pensive: how elegy materializes and grieves its own body. instead of the expected pause, the freight training towards the parched rocking chair of beget and forget. maybe the danger is who is chosen for the how—this holding of when. when the end is the beginning, we are left with the now.
el sueño del retorno
An Outrageous Thing

by Jannah Hinthorne and Mikayla Goodkin

we are (but) agents

in this forest,

yet fighting for

this sense of be-ing a whole

-istic entity a gold

en meaning without compromising

a strike of lighting de-
void of intention, just another over

ton-weighing window hinging

on rejection:

why the bionic detaching of leaf from tree

body?

these spl/iced fractiles

burn cold, spl/itting hairs from

our scalps, mangling us, tearing

limbs from

skin from

spleen from

spinal cord.

what to do with this constant mis-

understanding

the difference of causation, it was over

there when it was here

but i guess you can switch /here

and t/here easily can be a relationship to force upon

over, but we are not

flames/ consuming/ their/ natural/ food/

the black-box event.
and in the last five minutes, we’ve fused
our fragments of circle
taut then
flung
pristine life
rings in-
to the contaminated water toward the swirling haste
bits that we forgot, gritty

nonchalant; we cannot stop moving.

but this slashing is serving: follow the shrill scream of agony

a dissecting of u/s
blinking oscillation coming back to
our spl/itting selves
waking in morning the moment
the words hide i cannot
see the horizon and i am afraid: this two
solitudes assumption.

It seek my dear, assumption.

s string of beads lexiconed

after this, this string of beads lexiconed

plural of sticky fingerprints after this, nourishing.

d flexible hour i can stretch like silly
this realization that, give me one,
s to our pockets; where words

find their slanted centers.

-M

imbrication
Considering the various technologies by which a violence might enter each window. While the shutters bump bump. They so gently bump.

...
A Joy Impending

by Mikayla Goodkin and Rose Huentelman

a sight so esoteric—a knit-worn scarf christening the oak tree, and me breakfasting on hairbrush tunes before entering the uncut world, shaking the bedroom door frame, feet grabbing at carpet threads. a tender reminder that you miss half of this because its network of roots interlocks below ground. i read an article that hiccups are just our fish selves willing to emerge and now, i have the guaranteed cure for these gilled amputations. as a dendrologist, i prescribe a small harvest in preparation, mashed cherry blossoms flayed from walking shoes: the egg yolk, reaped and binding. a good answer must be reinvented from scratch, laughter like a yawn-catch, modeled and unstuffing itself, a tweed jacket in jest, this pure unraveling.

***

I was sitting in my driveway this morning, hugging my knees, squinting into the sun. My neighbor—a girl who told me her age by holding up six fingers—ran across the lawn to sit with me. She asked what I was doing.

*Trying to figure out how to write about joy,* I said.

*Like... happy?* She asked.

*Yeah. Except I don’t feel very happy.*

How do I write about joy when I don’t feel happy? She gave me some suggestions involving planting flowers and playing board games, and then she asked if I wanted to see something.

She ran back across the lawn, bent over her coat, and came back with the ‘something’ tucked in her palm.

*It shines in the sun,* she explained.

It was a tiny rock, which she found at the bottom of the slide this morning. Soon all of her friends were collecting rocks.

*Be sure to thank the earth for it,* I said.

*Okay,* she said.

Just like that. Okay. What’s it like to be so open? To spend an afternoon sitting in the sunshine talking about your mom’s daffodils. To strip your boots and give a detailed explanation of your favorite unicorn socks. To offer a sparkling rock you found on the ground that day to a woman who says she isn’t happy. Okay.

That’s something I can do.

***

there is a bird pecking at the glass, camber head at the car window, trying to decide how much its beak should buy into the spindly jigsaw. after a minute or two, it instead chooses the tipsy
geometry of its wings, shrugging off emptiness by way of grazing the pronged bud tridents sticking into sidewalk paths, rousing itself. Yes! Yes, we are again going on a trip in our favorite rocket ship. Today, I rewind the video to the split-second smile to confirm that I have respun the axis that bumbles towards the breakfast tree, remembering.

***

Meet me on the boardwalk.

The Neutral Zone. The edge of a coin—the coil of a spring—the string of an unhemmed sleeve—the highway between my house and hers. Hovering above the marshes, slatted and slanted with boards we’ve traipsed since the day they were laid.

Here I go, feet slapping wood, waiting, waiting. Twirling behind bushes so the cars won’t see.

Every bend in the path makes a new red carpet. Grand entrances to buildings with no doors. We make entrances that never have to exit.

A wave, a pause. Earbuds pulled out and wound up, our hands given something to do while our brains stutter. Will she recognize me? What if we have nothing to talk about?

That moment of suspension when our bodies—posed in opposite directions—turn parallel. Frozen on a bridge made of boardwalk. Shoulder to shoulder.

***

I vowed that if I was to have a daughter, her middle name would be Joy. This one time when I feel my story ahead of time, this relief from terror that results from picturing oneself having spiraled to the core. A sweet little secret. Spores on the wind, of course birds coast when they can, certifiably unemployable, oh so grateful, shocked that the winter doesn’t kill them, that it doesn’t end here—that this is. Yes, that this is. Yes, this this.

***

You follow your aunt through the cabin, from back porch to living room to bathroom. She has something you don’t, and you want it.

She opens a wooden cabinet next to the shower. You didn’t notice this cabinet before, but if you had, you wouldn’t have been allowed to open it. She is setting up her sleeping bag on the back porch, where the adults sleep head-to-foot like sausages in links. You’re vegetarian, so you find this entire situation disturbing.

Your aunt, though. She’s looking for something—you don’t know what—but you want her to find it. Because she has something you don’t and this is part of it. You know this.

She gasps theatrically and reaches into the mystery cupboard with her palms wide and unabashed. She pulls out a pillow, perfect as a marshmallow. She hugs it to her chest and peeks at you from above.

You have a picture of this very moment buried somewhere in a digital photo album. Probably marked with “Pinecrest” 2005 or 2006. She’s wearing a yellow striped shirt and her hair is short this year. It’ll grow back out to a bob but right now it looks like grandma’s. You’re convinced this picture exists, except it can’t, because you are alone.
She looks down at you because she is tall and you are not. She is still holding her marshmallow pillow and a great grin that you don’t understand but you want to.

“The little things!” She says fiercely. She is relishing the thing she has that you do not. “It’s the little things in life.”

You have no memory of following her back to the porch to tuck her pillow in with the other sleeping sausages. You have no memory of what you wanted or how you know your aunt had it.

You have no memory because you are still in this moment, busy taking a photo that does not exist.

***

Joyful things:
1. Puppies in a park
2. Rainbow boots
3. A pharmacist telling you to hang in there as you navigate the numbered windows of insurance policies
4. Birdcalls
5. Old friends met again
6. you ask me to write an ode to the waffle house but i can’t because i don’t just feel this here and that surprises me. on the drive home, the moon arrives in my periphery and my mouth shout-pours “poem!” for this is its name now. first there was nothing and then there was everything, gasping and reviving; yes, i have rewritten memory with an awe-wrapped face, lapsing into metaphor.
7. Lapsing into list
8. Falling into name
9. Steam that reaches for a vent
10.
dear,
to be warm and full of everything is the baby’s
neck-nestle against mine, almost breathless. what & how
much is obscured from view when it only seems we look
through the rearview mirror. i dwell in the childhood
shrine; it is time to go home. fasten baby to car seat.
(don’t) be surprised, crying is the congruous response to
the bitter watering of bitten cheek-blood, choking on the
moon spit up: the unpleasant discovery is fossil poetry,
this shrapnel embedded in the brain, learning, yet didn’t
i tell you: to retrospect ecology is a volatile art form,
hanging from the monkey bars on that chilled afternoon.
but resist ni modo— behind throat-clenching nostalgia
hides “I am you/and/you are me/and that is
why I still”
love, return.
Por Lily Asmar

Para el regreso:

Si pudiera vivir una vez más ese momento, te pediría regresar y hacer todo desde el principio. Desde el día en que nosotros todavía no éramos, para organizar las cosas de manera diferente. Te explicaría, por ejemplo, la importancia de adelantar nuestro encuentro; de hacer que supiéramos el uno del otro antes de que la vida nos ponga retos imposibles.

Si pudiera vivir una vez más ese momento, te pediría que hicieras de él un niño feliz, lleno de vida. Que le evitarás tener que ser hombre muy temprano. Que hicieras de mí una niña menos sola, más paciente con el paso del tiempo.

Si ese momento regresara en esas circunstancias, hoy no sería. Nuestros tiempos hubieran coincidido y no tendría que pedirte nada. No hubiera buscado la forma de encontrarte, ni invertido todas las horas del día, después del desencuentro, a rehacer la carta que hoy te escribo.

Pero las cosas son lo que son y el tiempo no sabe del regreso, ni le importa encontrarlo para entregarle una carta. Y entonces... Si pudiera vivir una vez más ese momento, te pediría una señal que detuviera esto que algunos llaman casualidad pero parece destino.
rhetoricity
movement three:
eating ice cream with a fork
“to be warm & full of nothing oh”
- Ocean Vuong, “Skinny Dipping”-

by Fiona Martinez and Mikayla Goodkin

in these fruit hands
   even
parasites out to die

rotting out today
   jarred apple core
rushed to cadaver

I’m corpsing
   nothing left
for crunching

leaves for sponging
   ah, ugly, ew too
“let us

become too
   much for you”
become my

corpus still against
   my shoe
going too far ah

unsquelched mashed of too
   much munching
we moreso from nothing

to stomach outliving
   rich-lipped wind-rattled sound

“which is more
   so” I want
a song to die

to & beg
   for it to end
& ah then again

get outside to feel
   the traipsing side
walk
too sand too sure
the shore
lolls for the ocean’s heaving

ah, madlinger
    why am I
there?

my feet are cold to warm.
Return as creation of a landing

fridge poetry on the world
Dear Stefania,

One of the sole purposes of this letter is to announce that over break, you broke my brain. Of course, this is mostly a joke (except when it isn’t) but I’m not kidding when I claim I did some serious thinking on vacation, and it is your fault. You asked a question during our last meeting that haunted my waking moments—I would think about it the moment my eyes peeled open, and I would fall asleep thinking to the clank and clatter of my shattered mind-gears as the moon hung onto the night. Oh, and I would not stop talking about it either, so much so that Jannah and I wrote a poem together (titled “An Outrageous Thing”) that is crafted from its core, or at least, the root I have identified as such. I would say thank you, except it was a particular kind of agony (and yes, thrill), which I am more-or-less-certain is an experience you and I currently share regarding this question, the question of this: Thoreau burned down over 300 acres of forest and did not give a shit, just had no remorse, so what the hell do we do with that?

Shortly after I left your office, I scoured the internet for an intact excerpt of the tree burning, and when I read it, I seethed in anger and incredulity. To declare that since he is, well, essentially a part of nature, it is acceptable to shirk responsibility for those tree remains is harmful. So, I did what you taught me to do—I demanded a response from his language, how he justifies it, rather than what he is saying.

In doing this, I gravitated towards two phrases with repetition (surely not surprising), the repetition of the word “settled.” As he convinces himself of the event’s inevitability, he “settle[s] the matter with [himself] shortly... so shortly [he] settle[s] it with [himself] and [stands] to watch the approaching flames” (Thoreau 36, 37). As for “shortly,” I am interpreting this as swiftness, an accelerated conclusion, one that actually exudes doubt. But why does “settle” appear twice? Now, Stefania, is where we turn to one of your (and my) favorite moments in Emerson’s “Circles”—“People wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them” (Emerson 413). Clearly, Thoreau seems to have not gotten the memo, as he snuffs out any mind-rattling from the incident.

You also brought Emerson’s diction “volatile” to our conversation on Thoreau’s tree burning, and this word seems to tease us in one way or another, nagging us with its relevance (Emerson, “Circles,” 403). Rose and I discussed what volatile feels like to us, and Rose almost immediately led with the word “charged,” volatile is charged. My first point of identification with this was oddly the use of the word “whereas” in Layli Long Soldier’s Whereas, which then I had yet to have read again, so I was somewhat throwing a dart at its tree-sliced-and-ringed board without knowing how. The use of this word is charged, in more ways than one.

When I was at my grandmother’s house for dinner, and reading Whereas, she bluntly inquired “what’s that about?” I found myself unable to answer adequately—perhaps rather aptly—because how do you respond to a woman who cannot fathom anything that Long Soldier is writing about, writing from...a woman who does not know what colonialism is. The historical, linguistic, cultural, collective, personal erasure, legalized displacement of Long Soldier’s community: the weight that the word “whereas” bears, and will continue to wear forever—it is non-negotiable. Even reclamation of this word only does so much because there is something in the makeup of this word that is now tainted, fossil poetry irrecoverable in this context. “Whereas” is charged, “all the interests are vested,” as Morrison might say, and part of this means, there is no settling possible (Morrison 8). So, we come back to this—why Thoreau’s insistence on feeling settled even though, really, he is not?
Over break, I also borrowed a book from my neighbors called— and I promise this is a joke— *How to Be Perfect: The Correct Answer to Every Moral Question*, by Michael Schur, the creator of the TV show, *The Good Place*. Generally speaking, it is a book on modern philosophy, although it intersects with plenty of Rhetorical Practices, and is quite a funny read. Early on, Schur describes the concept of integrity, the preservation of integrity, as not simply the upholding of moral uprightness, but wholeness, undividedness of personhood (Schur 56). As Thoreau struts around asserting his innocence, he cites the unintentionality of his violence, as “if the lightning had done it,” and here, there is a sense of anxiety, a fumbling for moral perfection (which is, at some level, a desire each of us must actively dismantle in ourselves) (Thoreau 37).

This kind of movement echoes Emerson in “Experience” when he— whether deliberately to fuck with us or unconsciously revealing his psyche— parades around statements like “The only thing grief has taught me is to know how shallow it is” (Emerson 472) or “Well, souls never touch their objects” (Emerson 473), false absolutions as glaring as “I was but [God’s] agent” (Thoreau 40). I mean, scholars even state that the guilt catches up to Thoreau and this is partly why *Walden* is written. I feel that this preconceived notion of “wholeness” is what both of these men are attempting to maintain because grieving for the relationships that are seemingly outside oneself but actually constitute your identity means a more conscious cracking open, a gash that won’t ever seal (even though one is already perpetually open, response-able, and responsible for these relationships). [Edit: And right now, (the next day), I am listening to *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie, and she describes grief as a “volatile state of being,” so this feels like somewhat of a fated affirmation (Adichie 370)].

Because what Thoreau is attempting to reject, ontologically, cannot be rejected without tangible and horrific consequences— your perception can be that you accomplish a “settling,” but the universe seems to know that “only as far as [we] are unsettled is there any hope for [us]” (Emerson, “Circles,” 413). In Rhetorical Practices, this is what Diane Davis (and Jeremy by extension) calls inessential solidarity (a sort of prior-ness to human relationships and experience). Rejection is a secondary response because the self is always and already a self-in-relation, that the self is not the name of an isolated individual but the name for a kind of participatory activity. We are splitting selves, our wholeness is fragmentary: I am because we are and since we are therefore I am. All interests are vested, and this is not a joke— as Butler movingly recognizes, “we’re undone by each other,” and if we are not feeling so, then we are missing something, namely everything (Butler 23).

So, we again return to your question: what do we do? I am tempted to say not what Thoreau does, but the truth is, I do it often, and so do all of us. Maybe one move to make is to do what you reminded me, I believe, when we described the relief, perhaps settling, we feel when reading Emerson— to hold the contradictions, to pull an Anzaldúa. He is a brilliant thinker, and he didn’t do his own laundry. The use of “whereas” is a charged reclaiming, and a charged reminder of violence. Thoreau wrote *Walden* and the dude also was a woods burner.

Last meeting, I told you I chose to create a circle object as an alternative to a circle object I did not align with (even though it follows my circle object around). However, what I should have said is that I believe that the creation of a circle object means taking responsibility for accounting for those possible relationships, the ones that you are linking and stacking, and the ones that you are “ignoring,” to never allow the circle to exist without the baggage, without the nuance— to unsettle.
The best way I have found to do that is to be around people who lovingly torture us into knowing better so that we can do better, those volatile sites of change. Thank you for being one of those relationships for me. I am forever grateful for you posing questions that render me motionless, all the while I am doing nothing but floundering. Stefania, it is now your turn for the thinking or the asking of a question anew—maybe in a second though, I feel a brief settling on a rung of the laddered circle stack would be okay, but only for a moment can my toes touch the ground.

With warmth,
Mikayla
where I read *Mourning Diary* by Roland Barthes:

- in a Bellevue hotel (the Westin) on a stiff, yet bouncy couch, a guest’s guest, in room 628.
- on the steps of the bima, my body accordioned by the stairs. crying. hoping would do something about this suffering? a CPR training in the adjacent room separated only by a massive blue curtain. oh, irony.
- on a walk (x2), stilted. crying.

often relying on chronology to tell how it was with me. the faith in the linearity of hypothesis. 

the pathologies of time. when, then, if there is no furniture to shift.

i keep waiting for my professor to give me permission to read a poem. never do i think to do it by and for myself.

surgery for ear tubes in and adenoids out, age 4. shucked from a metal shelf, shimmied onto a conveyor belt— must reassure myself that this is memory, not just a dream.

the organic shell game of figures of speech; how much to risk if it may mean desire for replacement.

expect café nights every tuesday and thursday. this quarter, only one. and the terror.

please i would love that.

for the moment: kayak paddles pulling until the metal punches through the opening, clicking into place.

the traditional period for reciting the Kaddish is 30 days, but i keep standing with her name.

she mentions the incredulity of what becomes unspeakable just before my maw memorializes silence.

the embodiment of simultaneous transitions. the hotel linens reused, she fears they are unrefreshed.

i am unrelieved.

the rapid visualization: paper cut and scrunched into mountainous plains.

i become most inscrutable to myself in these times, in latent potency.

the laid waste of self-referentiality, stationed awareness. oh how awkwardly numb,

strangely, where i feel a blurring of poem and person.

the doctor orders me to spend time underwater, preferably swimming; apparently, it aids in healing the microfractures.
so many firsts. so liminal.

when you can feel the food go down, this quasi-concrete slip. humbling, when the knife catches, when tumbleweed is unsuccessful at traveling, yes, there is something in this word: lapse.

the babbling monkey speech while hurling, heaving into the shiny bathroom garbage bag, this time no ambulance called when a panic attack piles on bile.

a poker game in the casino, cards remain in shuffle.

“It occurs in the words (words of love) that come to mind...—Less and less to write, to say, except this (which I can tell no one).”

talked to my supervisor, Eric, today, and asked him how to dig deep when i have nothing left. he responds: love, particularly his cat. so perhaps this is why we might desire nullification, vacuity, un-being.

“But all my life haven’t I been just that: moved?”

that we can announce when we have picked up the thread again, or put it down. overheard my friend shrug to my boss: “sometimes we just have to vent to our friends.”

-1 head count.

ha. laughter a glottal stop now.

how are we not talking about this.

the unclenched fists, bloodied, no longer having to fight.

my dear, when syntax stabs, caverns are indeed formed.

how are we not talking about this.

no longer. no longer; no longer... no longer?

no longer! no... longer,

no longer:

what a disarming image— that mourning might clothe itself in our sobs.

finding “I cannot manage to save myself by my attachment to writing” for it does not have her sourdough bread stomach, nor her shoulders, although, really, i am unwitting of their terrain.

frantic back-scramble through pages: i don’t know what’s happening to me either.

so possessive over my grief, one mourning i inked it on my wrist.
1. a woman hospitalized tells stories of her life, with pets, a house, friends coming over for the weekends. set in the future, but told in the present tense. a new momentum, with essential protagonists.

1. tired.

1. painful availability, that’s all.

1. “Everything pains me. The merest trifle rouses a sense of abandonment.”

1. fluid= no boundaries. echo?

1. this fucking repetition: indisposition. the mildness.

1. staccatoed sentences. that’s all you’re getting.

1. this: ≠

1. not a melancholia that is associated with the lost object, but with the excess that cannot be accounted as mourning occurs.

1. approaching closeness, the water’s lip.

1. while walking, my body melts away, scuttling to meet the fire hydrant at the end of the sloped hill, which is all i have desired.

1. perseverating on the potential of escaping egocentrism— certainly, the urge.

1. none of this, hysterical.

1. and here, here is the place where i admit i cannot identify your derivative, no longer dog-earing pages.

1. semantic flips; i hung on Jewish mothers all weekend hoping one would become mine.

1. the “should” of mourning, the didactic plea. emerson.

1. shame for having not visited her grave since the funeral, like a good living person.

1. the horrific— words can’t even— thought of where Eric must put his love upon the eve of his cat’s death.

1. i doubt, but still write in the email: “i hit a plateau, i won’t be here forever.” clambering from the cauldron this barely mobile sludge from the childhood movie scene, replaying.

1. St. Jude’s commercial appears on screen, and while i did not watch, i do not want to type “skip” for fear double-meanings will be procured.
curious as to what the bamboo stalk i observe laid under the wire fence is warding off, barricading against.

i wonder if i should be reading this, given my current state.

damn this enjambment.

please define intelligent for me; i’m tired.

something leaps in me when this becomes readable— spring quarter at university means i am floating, intravenous treatment tubes adhere to, puncture flesh. i have nothing to expend. the proof the uncanny is a thing when the word arrives in my mind: chemotherapy.

fuck, there’s more.

that uncertainty is what preserves living. do i sound as ridiculous as i seem to myself.

see her daughter riding bike across the street. i think i should walk somewhere else. i’m too close, uninvited.

choosing to disengage from the summer annotation, too philosophical a question for nihilism.

how much meaning is clouded by my location.

when first reading this page, my friend posts it on instagram. i repost.

just frowned at a child, and i didn’t mean to.

love when i scribble words to the side as if repetition of what is there will result in some grand conclusion.

literature’s insurance policy

beat poem “Kaddish” in seminar on modern elegy, and i can sense the innocence.

a friend randomly goes “hi hi hi” after we have been in the same space for hours. no thanks, unnerving.

elegy: when the epistemological fails. but then again,

dorm room, freshman year; broken mugs, blanket quilt tacked to the wall, and toddler tantrums.

so you knew.

the days when i scroll through over 300 contacts, finding there is no one i would call.

linguistic tension, yes, the immediate drift towards ambiguity.

“—apathy,”
and at the beginning: healing possible?  

the slamming of the sliding glass door. candy wrappers. dishes in the sink.  

sunflowers drag the gun to them, petal & seed become her personal effects.  

“I would not want a ‘monument’ for myself alone.”  

my therapist inquires why i might want to experience the world from another perspective. i can’t know, and maybe that’s just it.  

all year, i’ve been searching for this one word, for the strength it takes to put the first word down on the page.  

when forgetting has become a kind of remembering, a reminder of something else.  

so which does writing require:  

i hope i can fake these fragments enough to where no one else notices: “my heart keeps me from loving myself.”  

i still would like to pressure wash my brain.  

perhaps why i am afraid of the cemetery, that i won’t scream at the sight of her tombstone. (except in writing)— except in writing.  

“...once there i have no idea what to do.”  

all along collapse, the most natural orientation.
whereas the child’s pose of the raindrop branched and waiting, arching towards the earth as an unquestion. a fingertip drawing, dome unmoving unless tilted, now asking— but where has the stone gone rackling to, a descent to some assumed imaginary ground.

a dissent towards plunging if the intention is only to expose the leeching. to recover, you’ll find me sponging the ripples.
SELF-PORTRAIT AS MOON PHASES

by Summer Barnett and Mikayla Goodkin
SELF-PORTRAIT AS THIRD QUARTER

there are bones inside
the ear that are impossibly
small killers of rising at daybreak’s refusal, but i
think, when eating pain that
it’s Tuesday and i dream of this: manipulating

proportions and time that beckon the roiling clouds
towards the door hatch tide & screw of memory; so
open and set up your electric kettle, prepare
to slurp the wound: its spinal
spigot to meet the divine

racketing of stars whirling into your stomach
full of worms, [my] body keeps forgetting things [my] body keeps
forgetting things like the
/ego/ can be but does not have to be
a guillotine blade.
SELF-PORTRAIT AS WANING CRESCENT

knuckled half moons curl
  to save the body from starvation—
  night one of this life and already
  a cavity for philosophical questions,
  awaiting nodulation

  but too many seconds
  from being held so i collapse into distant
  throbs modulating for the host, so many
  nights of primal chattering, roving guilt tote:
  the place of her death which is dying in me.
SELF-PORTRAIT AS NEW MOON

I no longer understand
the definition of “miracle,”
a word that now feels
museumed, root-cracked, monstrous.
Imagine, knees drenched in some lonesome valley,
vacated from the praying body,
martyrdom that renders anything but stillness.
I pledge myself to you, prance robin-like
in darkness, ripple puddles with my glare,
in the cave of my mouth opening into other caves.
You, unlit, know this well,
the proprioceptive human slinking around large stones,
branches, slugs that hang from the branches
to touch, the bodily knowing, even when
I cannot see

--in all this dark--

When I cannot see I reach out
with my hands and touch.
SELF-PORTRAIT AS WAXING CRESCENT

so a fixed tusk: this wonky
tilt-gurgle between laugh and
cries engaged to the air where we find
this floating petticoat dressing
the bruised biome. this body of air is

but a husked bassinet, howling.
shhhh, shhhh, little one, you can still translate into the crease of her elbow.
SELF-PORTRAIT AS FIRST QUARTER

aerial root
SELF-PORTRAIT AS WAXING GIBBOUS

Anything that flies has [my] heart:
Bat wing, drab membrane, feathered,
    hooked or hollow-boned,
tethered gravitationally, pulling.
[I] have kissed. Oh--! Kissed! Woken each new morning
to the practice of adornment, breakfasting
with glee, lips pressed to table, the precious
    grain, living timber,
the orgasmic yes! yes, pulled tidally
from [my] mouth. Life beings us
    pains. Lick them. And Look--!
This ribboned descent given twice daily,
    the dense oil of the body lifted,
even the belly, the thighs, the crescent
roots of the teeth, rich as milk, buried hotly in the gums,
    small moons tainted human,
the kernel within oneself
    bursting open.
SELF-PORTRAIT AS FULL MOON

here flesh here here flesh look
flesh come here these feldspar billboards
are so transmissible or so it seems the lungs

are temples and this constitutes a large
percentage of the literature living:
bones reeling from the hot slosh of blood
for thawing, scything fists pleading
for expulsion enough for you, you, beauty-beauty

with a face so heliotropic
SELF-PORTRAIT AS WANING GIBBOUS

Here, this wretched crackling
on the drums of my ears, sticky crisp
bubbling in that secret canal that
drones achingly into days on days.
Here, this shameful entropy,
my body dissoluting down,
vacated by relevancy,
unspooling like yarn, like tangle.
Here, the palm of my prayers,
the barked trees peeling off,
the howl that rises in my belly
and brims over. Give me
the strong stuff. Take me away
from the world. I am wanting.
i must remind myself that tragedy is curated. that the precipiced dawn unknowing is not always a reason to permanently participate in an act of procedural decomposition;

it is not that i have simply digested experience and shot literature, although that would have been enough. poems like diner pancakes, already full before ordering, but mired you are to be concatenated, objects locked on a geologically timed landscape— this future walk unpersonifiable:

the syruped pour beneath a burnt-out lightbulb, the failed changeling. but hey, at least there is a window
Dear Adrienne Maree Brown,

On my walk this morning, (my daily movement practice), I found myself pausing by a small field of grass; it called for my attention. Mesmerized by the dandelions, their proliferative forms—those solid yellow blooms with spatula-like petals and fluffy, white seeds—they reminded me of you, or well, I guess more so your work, but given you are its “joyful conduit,” I feel like emergent strategy wouldn’t mind that I address this to you (7).

Also, hi—my name is Mikayla. I hope this letter finds you well in whatever place-space-time you find yourself today. I’m writing this with my stomach to the rugged floor of my apartment, glancing up at the windowsill where all my houseplants remind me of what’s beyond these four walls. If you were here, which to some extent I feel you are, you would see a bingo card taped on one of these walls that my friend designed for me. It includes activities that I might not do unless given a little nudge (I definitely appreciate my woe-ships) and one of those things is to write this letter.

I’m not sure there are words adequate to express how profoundly your work has changed me, which is why I have been hesitant to write. When I read Emergent Strategy in one of my classes last Spring, it put words to feelings and energies that I have been carrying for so long yet haven’t been able to articulate. As a college student who often feels tricked away from my emergent being courtesy of how school is structured, I find myself craving to participate in (more intentionally) the kind of change and liberation work that you make visible.

This past year, your work enabled a dream of mine to become real—it became the foundation from which I leaped and created my final project for my undergraduate degree. Taking the form of collaborative poetry and visual art, my project explores how structural change and liberation work/healing are embodied in Modern Elegy (“grief is a worthwhile use of [our] time”) and Rhetorical Practices (“all that you touch/you change/all that you change/changes you”), my two fields of study (37, 110).

Early on, I realized that to do this project, I couldn’t just seek out how radical thinkers/poets like yourself view structural change and liberation work/healing, but rather, I had to practice it myself: I had to “walk my own path” by cultivating the “quality of connection between the nodes in the patterns,” strengthening the relationships of the ecologies in which I live (12, 14). How did I do this? Well, I started with love, knowing that “what we pay attention to grows” and that it “leads us to observe in a much deeper way than any other emotion” (9, 34).

I asked my advisor if our reading list could be a combination of what I love and what she loves, I asked my friends to read with me, to imagine, to love on these works with me, to love on and marvel at the world with me, to have the conversations that only we could have about that love and grief and joy and more, and finally, to write about it—we aspired to “listen with all of [our] senses as if the whole universe might exist just to teach [us] more about love” (11). And then, there was the love that was most unexpected and gifting like my relationship with the moon, an entity I invited to tell me about herself, and ultimately, to create with me. In each collaboration, I confirmed that “everyone [and everything] is my teacher” (12).

I look(ed) to your work to learn how to decentralize where thought and feeling are (were) located in my project—it is (was) about changing my “how” to be more fractal, iterative, collaborative, nonlinear, distributed, generous, full of wonder, etc, rather than cementing a “what” (which surfaced and morphed organically as we went along). Through this work, I have
“had to get intimate with what I don’t know, with my fears and doubts, with my restlessness,” but this process has nurtured in me an undeniable faith, a deep trust, that everywhere is a “complex, ancient, fertile ground full of potential” (10, 12).

Because of your work, I wake up every morn(ing) with the intention to “transform [myself] to transform the world,” to spiral my fractals outwards and upwards (53). And of course, this project is not the end, but the beginning— I am already co-writing another poetry series which thinks about and feels into parahumanity, ecocritical elegy, and what I’m calling home-spaces. It too is inspired by emergent strategy. As I enter my MA Program in English Studies next year, I am imagining that much of my work will be in conversation with your work, too. So, for all of this, and so much more, I want to say: thank you, thank you, thank you.

With warmth,
Mikayla
The following poem was created in collaboration with those in attendance at my capstone project presentation on 6/6/23. Each person wrote a fragment or two (words or drawings) up on the whiteboard that “captured” a feeling or image that came to their bodyminds during the presentation. The next day, I collaged this poem from their fragments. This poem is a continuation of the work that this project pursues (and hopes to in different forms from here on out). Photos of the whiteboards can be found below as well.

(lov)e+++++ of un-closure

let us stay stay spiralized,
(un)breathing where the static lingers

a little, a second longer. buoyed by the love in the room, [we] reach out to the geometric void,

diagonal taking of root: an offering, the tipsy opacity of soul. if your Nerve,

deny you— what do you hold? reciprocity as nourishment at our intersection

always something to tender about, tactile whispers of vulnerability a staircased landing. hello! (there is no goodbye), this circle of life its own geography, nausea of process and practice, (un)making elegy. we magnetic— iron filings—field of elements of infinite fractalizing:

a wholeness exhibit of growth, love making a friend of sorrow in a field of hemlock, their

blood-stippled stems, each umbel lit with clusters of moons. without sight we might have only noise, fire hydrants (they’re so multipurpose), which we have built for this home in mercuriality.
The staircased landing

Tactile whispers
an offering

where static stays,

a second longer
Notes

(p. 7) “...closure isn’t closure but openings” is from page 82 of Prageeta Sharma’s poetry collection *Grief Sequence*, in her poem “Glacier National Park & The Elegy.”

(p. 7) “we give it a name to watch it fall” is from page 92 of Ocean Vuong’s poetry collection *Time is a Mother*, in his poem “No One Knows the Way to Heaven.”

(p. 8) *composition* is my annotated copy of page 61 of Layli Long Soldier’s poetry collection *Whereas*, her poem “Whereas when offered an apology.”

(p. 28, 31, 40) More of Lily Asmar’s work can be accessed on her blog here: [https://www.contra-tiempo.online/](https://www.contra-tiempo.online/)

(p. 30) “and there is privilege” references page 40 of Chistina Sharpe’s theoretical work *In the Wake on Blackness and Being*, in the chapter “The Ship: The Trans*Atlantic.”

(p. 32) “An Outrageous Thing” responds to the major forest fire started by Henry David Thoreau on April 30, 1844 in the Concord Woods. The line “flames/consuming/their/natural/food” uses words from his journal entry detailing this event dated May 31, 1850, which appears on pages 36-37 of *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*.

(p. 35) *translation* is my annotated copy of page 28 in Stefania Heim’s poetry collection *Hour Book*, her poem “11:05 PM.”

(p. 39) “to be warm and full of...” is from page 12 and “shrapnel embedded in the brain which is called learning” is from page 22 of Ocean Vuong’s poetry collection *Time is a Mother*, in his poems “Skinny Dipping” and “Dear Sara.”

(p. 39) “volatile” and “fossil poetry” are from Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essays “Circles” and “The Poet” respectively.

(p. 43) “which is more so” is from page 16 of Ocean Vuong’s poetry collection *Time is a Mother*, in his poem “Beautiful Short Loser.”

(p. 49-53) “where I read *Mourning Diary* with Roland Barthes” maps my reading experience with this text—what is quoted from Barthes corresponds with the page numbers listed within my piece.

(p. 55) “whereas the child’s pose of the raindrop” pays homage to the form of Layli Long Soldier’s *Whereas*, specifically part two, the “Whereas” series.


