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American Sissy: Original Poetry

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Departmental Honors Thesis
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
English

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Introduction

The art of poetry is itself a complex artform. One definition of what makes a poem inherently “good” is subjective and oftentimes impossible to answer. I believe Romantic poet William Wordsworth said it best stating that “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” The emotional transmission using poetic images is the center of poetry. The spontaneity of poetry is rooted in the poet's emotions through one defining characteristic: experience. Poetry in and of itself is an experience that the reader melds with a powerful overflow of images, metaphors, and feeling. To justify the power of the poetic experience, a poet must evoke themselves unapologetically through their art. A successful poem sets its roots through the poet's successful transmission of their experience to a reader. At its root, a poem is a spot in time, an image which calls out to the poet to be written. These images, however, need to be rooted with some subliminal feeling that comes from experience. To successfully establish this experience, a poet must write in spots of time, implementing images that take control of the poet's emotional state. The root of all emotional imagery, for me, comes from the physical world-an explanation of the concrete explained through emotional language. Poets who have successfully accomplished this primary form of poetry can be found in Romanticism.

The beauty of the natural, and paradoxically, the man-made world, was of the utmost importance to Romantic poets such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Wordsworth, William Blake, and Lord Byron. These American and British poets seem to meld the natural world with personal experience. For the reader, an understanding of the natural world connected to a poet's thoughts allow for a melding between the concrete and the abstract; the mental and the physical. Ralph Waldo Emerson has been an inspiration for my poetry in his successful transmission of the

concrete, natural world with his internal condition. In Emerson's "The Rhodora," he follows the image of the rhodora, speaking eloquently in conjunction with the flower. Near the end of the poem, Emerson states that "The self-same Power that brought me there brought/ you." Emerson employs the narrative of fate as a power which is out of his control: that all things are joined in a beautiful symphony.

Transcendentalism is at the root of Romantic poetry, and I find this philosophy of Romanticism to be the root of contemporary portrayals of a poet's experience in relation to the outside world. This notion of the self in conjunction with the outside world, which Romantic poets successfully create, influenced future movements in the poetic process. Poetry for Emerson was a celebration of internal emotion through images of the world around him. Looking at contemporary poetry, poets began to increasingly serve the self, yet represented a complex implementation of poetry to share experience of oppression rather than simply emotion.

I find this same conjunction in my own poetry. The world we see around us is unapologetically a part of our past and present, and therefore of ourselves. Poetry curated by Queer poets and poets of color in the contemporary twenty-first century are exemplary accounts of poetry made for the sole purpose of representation and acceptance. These forms of poetry attempt to paint marginalized demographics in a humanist light. They employ themselves through the oppression they face in the real world, using harsh language and images as a means of self-empowerment. Poets who unapologetically serve themselves through poetry are the epitome of the emotional work in relaying experience. In this, marginalized poets use the artform of the poem to point out systematic oppression. Poetry is not simply an act of explaining spots in time but also a pivotal tool for political discussion and the humanization of those who have been silenced. Portraying one's own experiences of oppression based on gender, race, sexuality,

ethnicity, and religion can create greater discussion of human difference. Personally, I work to employ my experiences as a Queer man through the hypersexual body, the natural world, and surrealism as a means of redefining how the world sees me.

Danez Smith's poetry epitomizes these same tactics. Smith, a Black Queer poet, using their platform to express their anger and to showcase the injustice toward Black Queer people in the United States. In Smith's moving collection *Don't Call Us Dead*, their poem "every day is a funeral & a miracle" begins with the lines, "on the bad nights, i wake to my mother/shoveling dirt down my throat/i scream mom! i'm alive! i'm alive!/but it just sounds like dirt." The inherent lamenting of a living speaker seems to break the fourth wall of the poem, speaking directly to the reader. Smith has inspired my work exponentially. I find myself attempting to speak directly to my audience, as opposed to simply a description of my view of the world. I attempt to showcase my oppression, and conversely, my privilege as a white Queer man. In "every day is a funeral & a miracle," Smith's portrayal of the speaker as an innocent child facing what seems to the reader to be an imminent image of death creates an empathetic response from the reader. The reader can view, ever so slightly, the Black experience from the perspective of a poet who has experienced it firsthand. Smith's uses of their own experiences as a Queer Black person creates an emotional response from their readers. The root of Smith's success as a poet is in the deep psychological and emotional depth of his poetry. Smith's poetry then is acting in conversation with the reader: a conversation centered around their knowledge of and fear of a harsh death.

Like Smith, Natasha Trethewey relays her experience as a mixed-race woman growing up in the South through her poetry. In her poem "South" from her collection *Native Guard*, Trethewey states, "I return/to Mississippi, state that made a crime/of me - mulatto, half-breed -

native/in my native land, this place they'll bury me." The emphasis on the South, as well as how those from her home view her, melds geographic location with racism and a mixed view on Trethewey's personal relationship with her origins. Trethewey additionally ends her collection on the note of eerie death: to be buried in a place in which she was made a crime. Trethewey's poetry experiments with marginalization in a place that is supposed to be inherently safe: the home. Yet, because of her racial status, this safety is questioned. The reader then begins to understand Trethewey's experience through the historical emphasis on racial difference.

Although I come from a degree of privilege as a white Queer man from middle-class status, I find Trethewey's mixed view on her origins to be crucial to what makes the essence of experience in a poet's story. Like Trethewey, I attempt to showcase my origin story through my poetry. A poet's amorous display of their origins can aid the reader in connecting to the poetry that they create. Whether this stems from a negative experience a poet had as a child, or simply a positive relationship between a loved one during a crucial time of development, the origin story is itself imperative to experience. I grew up in various locations as a child. At three months old I was stripped of my extended family in our home in Indiana when we first moved to Colorado, then West Virginia, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Texas. Although my childhood was inherently good in that I came from a white, middle-class framework, the impact of the conservative environments I grew up in still torment me. How am I to let out this discomfort, this aggression, if not through my art? How am I to detail the systematic oppression that Queer people feel in rural America if not through my art? Inherently, like Trethewey, I have a deep love for my origins, yet I see its limitations and expect to portray this as Trethewey does in *Native Guard*.

The various locations that I grew up in have also shaped how I view the world around me. The snow-capped Rocky Mountains of western Colorado; the rhododendron forests of West

Virginia with winding rivers of roaring rapids; the endless cornfields of rural Indiana, the desolated pine forests of northern Mississippi; the Smoky mountains of northeastern Tennessee; the flat, dry plains of Texas all seem to live unequivocally in my mind. Like the Romantic poets who have inspired me, I write of the natural world that I have experience to relay my own emotional state. This natural scenery of my youth speaks volumes into how I view scenes that are inherently subliminal. As I grew into adulthood, I began to travel to locations outside of the United States. I have seen the Alps of Austria in the spring with endless valleys of wildflowers and tall grass. I have seen the rocky, volcanic terrain of Iceland. I have picked sea glass on a cold, desolated beach full of lava rock and metal molded together in harmony. With these places I have visited, I have also met people from all walks of life. I have talked to people from around the world about oppression in its varying forms. I have educated as well as been educated. Without these moments, these beautiful moments of human and natural diversity, I would not be the writer that I am.

The modernist movement of poetry is another movement which has influenced how I view poetry. In modernism, the focus seems to move from naturalism to an understanding of the human experience. Two poets in this period have influenced my writing greatly: T.S. Eliot and William Carlos Williams. T.S. Eliot's lamenting of age in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "Gerontion" are the epitome of the aging body, and the place that we take up as our physical selves begin to deteriorate. In "Gerontion," Eliot begins the poem with "Here I am, an old man in a dry month,/Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain./I was neither at the hot gates/Nor fought in the warm rain." The abject terror of the first three words "here I am" is, to me, the most important aspect of the poem. The speaker seems defeated, understanding that their current state inside their "decayed house" is something out of their control. The speaker lacks inherent

autonomy, being told what to do and how to live in the final stages of their life. I find this depression to be an important narrative to discuss in poetry. Personally, I have experienced this form of aging firsthand. At an early age, my grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and I find myself writing about the growing helplessness I saw in her in my writing. I believe that writing about sickness, and conversely, health is a crucial part of the human experience.

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Eliot again takes on this narrative of the aging body, with Prufrock lamenting how he no longer fits the mold of youthful beauty. I find Eliot's repetition in this poem to be of the utmost interest. The repetition of "In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo" has a sexual connotation of loneliness. Although Prufrock is stating that he does in fact encounter sexual or romantic interactions, he is inherently alone. The repetition of this couplet makes Prufrock's loneliness evermore explicit. Eliot successfully displays the pain of Prufrock through this repetition. I find Eliot's ability to create an emotional connection to a fictional character to be of great interest. Eliot's work around fictional characters, seen again in his collection *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, influences the way in which I write perspective in my poetry. By creating a fictional speaker, Eliot creates tension, and can conversely not take his poetry too seriously. The poems in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* are witty and have a playful tone. I believe that this playfulness is the reason for this collection's success. Often, a reader wants to enjoy a poem that is not stereotypical. Although most of my poetry focuses on my own experiences, I find using those experiences through the lens of a person or character whose voice is not mine to be a way for me to find myself in my poetry.

Writing about the human experience is equally as important as writing from an individualistic experience. William Carlos Williams creates empathy toward disproportionate

people which he encountered in his life. He writes on race, gender, and socioeconomic status in the majority of his work. In “The Young Housewife” Williams writes of a young housewife in the late morning, stating how she “moves about in negligee behind/the wooden walls of her husband’s house.” The fact that the woman does not own her home but lives in her husband’s is a statement about gender-power relations. The most crucial element of Williams’ work is the subtlety of his language. Most of his poetry works in intricate brevity. Like Williams, I usually keep my poems at a short length. I do not trust that the average reader sees the value in long poetry. I believe that brevity can help keep a reader engaged with a collection. Although as a poet I see the value in poems that are longer in length, the same qualities of a longer poem can be attributed in a much shorter span with smaller poems. Williams’ work is a prime example of this feat. His work seems to represent spots in time; moments in which he seems moved to write. While doing this, he does so explicitly and concisely. Isn’t this the way the human mind is supposed to work? Do we not recollect memories as fragments of a story instead of our entire past collectively gathered? I believe that the former is truer.

On the other hand, a poem of great length can change the framework of a poem to a spot in time to novel-type artform. In Walt Whitman’s *Song of Myself*, Whitman is portraying his truest self, using natural imagery to tell the story of his past and present self. This poem is Whitman in his truest form. It is full of human complexities that are often hard to discuss. In the body of this poem, Whitman states, “I think I will do nothing for a long time but listen,/And accrue what I hear into myself...and let/sounds contribute toward me.” There is a confidence in this moment that is sincere. Whitman is saying that he will let the world move him. He is begging for inspiration while understanding that he has already been moved by the world in the past. He is stating that he will refuse to not be his best self, to not try to “encompass worlds” that

do not encompass him. Whitman is chanting pride of the self, the body, the mind, and the world in which he sees. *Song of Myself* is at its root an unapologetic declaration of the self. I find myself wanting to accomplish this same feat in my poetry. My poetry works as a declaration: a pointed finger. It is saying “this is me. This is who I am. Read this and you will understand my past, my future, my experiences, my personality, and my desires.”

A poet which I delightfully find myself imitating is Sam Sax. Sax’s poetry is unapologetically Queer: a conversely celebrating and lamenting account of what it means to be Queer. One important quality of Sax is not only his written poetry but also his readings of his poetry. In a 2018 reading of his poem “Lisp,” Sax phonetically, and consciously, repeats the “s” sound. Sax uses the very definition of the poem in complete harmony with his reading, showing off the stereotypical lisp attributed to Queer men. The poem itself seems to travel along his journey to suppress his lisp, beginning with his parents taking the speaker of the poem to speech therapy. Now, according to Sax, when he “asks, can i suck your cock” he sounds straight. In this poem, Sax is celebrating non-normative sexuality and attributing the speaker’s “straight” qualities with a hypersexual act of Queer sexuality. I find myself inspired by Sax’s use of a hypersexual Queer body. In many of the poems I create, I attempt to discuss sexual acts and sexual spots in time that are purely a representation of my sexual experiences.

In his collection of poetry, *bury it*, Sax furthermore explores the hypersexual body of gay men, surprising the reader with inherently sexualized portrayals of Queerness. In his poem, “Butthole,” Sax explores the beauty of sex between men. He writes, “o putrid rose, o floral gift from some dead god.” Sax is employing the anus as a gift from a divine being. The reclamation seen in the starting line of the poem is crucial in understanding Sax’s poetry. This reclaiming is something that draws me to Sax as a poet. I strive to find poetry that breaks down walls; poetry

that is blatantly an unapologetic display of the self. For Sax, this display is in his deep love of his Queerness as well as how others are attempting to compartmentalize his Queerness. As a Queer man, I, as well as those in my community, being seen by the heteronormative framework of society to feel like a sexual object. We are labeled as pedophiles or sexual deviants attempting to coerce others into a demonized “lifestyle”. Yet, conversely, Queer people are also labeled apart from sex. We have been reduced to a misguided, sexless caricature of a stereotype. Thus, like Sax, I am reclaiming my sexuality through explicit sexual material, I am rewriting how I want my sexuality to be portrayed in art.

Like Sax, Ocean Vuong is another Queer poet who serves his experience as both a Queer man and a Queer man of color in his poetry. He additionally states his origin story directly through his poetry, discussing issues of immigration and marginalization through representations of his family. In his poem “Headfirst” in his collection of poetry, *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*, he writes from the perspective of his mother, stating, “When they ask you/where you’re from,/tell them your name/was fleshed from the toothless mouth/of a war-woman.” Vuong is speaking from a strict objective that is not his own yet is relaying his own relationship with his mother by doing this. It seems to the reader that the speaker’s relationship with their mother is of the utmost importance to the speaker. Additionally, the mother is asking her child to celebrate their heritage. Not only in terms of race but also in socioeconomic status. In these five lines, the reader gets a sense of the speaker from an intersectional point of view. I find Vuong’s ability to pack multiple variables into a short span of lines to be extremely impressive. This brevity is important in the exchange of personal experience. Throughout the entire poem, Vuong uses this tactic several times, building upon the speaker’s experience and relationship with their mother as the poem progresses.

In “Because It’s Summer” found in the same collection as “Headfirst,” Vuong builds the speaker’s experience as the poem progresses yet again. The poem begins with the speaker riding a bike while bruised, lying about seeing a woman and going to meet a boy who is “waiting/with sticky palms & mint/on his breath a cheap haircut/& his sister’s levis/stench of piss rising from wet grass.” Vuong paints this situation as uncanny, and the reader feels a sense of discomfort. The action of the speaker is written in language that signifies that the speaker does not wish to be in the situation with which they find themselves. Yet, this discomfort gives the reader insight into the speaker’s internal turmoil in coming to terms with their sexuality. As the poem progresses, I find myself feeling sympathy for the speaker, who speaks through a soft scream as he undoes the zipper of a boy's pants. The speaker is distracted by the sounds of birds chirping. The absolute pain in giving into lust is the epitome of a specific form of the Queer experience. Like Vuong, I attempt to portray my coming of age with my sexuality through my poetry. These instances of discomfort and secrecy are important aspects that need to be portrayed in all forms of art to relay Queer sensuality. Although Vuong is not glorifying this moment of Queer experience, he is displaying the discomfort of coming to terms with sexuality. In a world where Queer people have to find comfort in moments that are in fact the opposite, these moments are necessary to what it means to be unapologetically Queer. I am astounded by Vuong’s work and find myself discussing moments in which I have felt discomfort. Yet, these instances are imperative to the art of experience. Moments of stressful vulnerability make up what it means to be human. We are not concrete and unmoving; we are fallible and wavelike in our degree of comfort.

Morgan Parker’s collection of poetry, *There are More Beautiful Things Than Beyonce*, adds to my inspiration as a poet who can truly encompass her lived experiences of marginalization and empowerment. Many of Parker’s poems focus on the expected beauty

standards that Black women have to adhere to in order to be considered beautiful. The title itself is striking, stating that Beyonce, a pinnacle of beauty in popular culture, is in fact not the most beautiful form of Black womanhood. Parker's title sets the reader up to understand what the meaning behind her poems represents. Parker's ability to mesh anger and earnestness into the poetic form is a prevalent inspiration for me, and she does it beautifully. In "13 Ways of Looking at a Black Girl," Parker lists famous Black women such as Queen Latifah, Nina Simone, NeNe Leakes, Wanda Sykes, and Michelle Obama meshed with derogatory and micro aggressive phrases objectifying and othering Black women's appearance. The famous women she lists in this poem are, to me, a representation of Black excellence and beauty. All the women Parker lists are seen by popular culture to be inherently brilliant, yet this image in the media drowns out and ignores the very real racism that Black women specifically have to experience based on their physical appearance. Parker, in the concise listing, creates an intense emotional response from the reader. She is sharing her experience of oppression and racism objectively and unapologetically. She is speaking herself through her poetry. I find myself drawn to Parker as a poet because of the seamless ways in which she created an emotional response from me. I found myself tearing up in response to many of her poems, and I want to achieve this same response in my own poetry.

Parker's allusions to popular culture are also of importance to me. In the literary world, we as students are taught that only highbrow, intellectually stimulating allusions are allowed in "good" poetry. However, Parker is the prime example of a counter to this narrative. Her use of popular culture references counteracts the idea that poetry is strictly a representation of high-class respectability. In her poem "Real Housewife Defends Herself in Front of a Live Studio Audience," from her collection *Other People's Comfort Keeps Me Up At Night*, Parker

alludes to a *Real Housewives* reunion. She begins the poem with a question from a fan of the show, instantly refuting the question with a description of how women are portrayed in reality television. This poem is both witty and heart wrenching. Parker seems to be discussing greater stereotypes surrounding how women are represented in the media. She ends the poem by stating that happiness for the housewife is “a cul-de-sac without drama, a weekend away,” after stating the dramatic ways in which the women act on-screen. I find myself emulating this type of allusion in my poetry. Who is to tell us what is or is not acceptable to write about? Isn't the culture that we surround ourselves with a representation of our experience? Conversely, Vuong does a wonderful job of using high-brow, intellectual allusion in scenarios that are inherently sexual and crude. I find myself balancing the way that these two poets use allusion. In my poetry, I find historical, literary, and pop-cultural references to be a collection of who I am. The idea that I can alter an allusion to match my experience is something that I find to be absolutely imperative and beautiful about the art of poetry.

For all the poets that I have discussed, I want to make clear one defining characteristic. The crucial characteristic that draws me to poetry and other forms of writing in general is discomfort. In order to make clear changes in the world surrounding social acceptance, writers have a need to use their own experiences of discomfort to show that the world that we live in is not perfect. This can be an educational agent for the reader to understand oppression and experience. Education, however, can be extremely uncomfortable if a reader has never experienced the oppression a writer is attempting to convey. However, without these conversions, how are we as humans supposed to move forward? How are we to discuss race without systematic racism? How are we to humanize Queer identified people without discussions of transphobia, homophobia, and erasure? How are we to discuss gender without toxic

masculinity and body image? All these characteristics are crucial to create unity among people, and poetry is an artform that can alter perspective. Discussing these elements is inherently disheartening and oftentimes uncomfortable yet are essential for education.

As a writer of all forms of writing, I find myself drawn to forms of writing that breaks down walls of genre. For me, the prose poem is of the utmost importance in accomplishing this goal. In *The Shape of Light*, a collection of prose poems by James Wright, Wright employs the natural surroundings in his poems in the same way as the Romantic poets before him. Yet, because Wright decides to use prose as the main mode of his poetry, his poetry seems to take on a more pragmatic explanation of his surroundings. This objectivity is something that is essential to the art of poetry. Poetry is centered around one crucial element: the image. However, the structure and form of a poem can alter the reader's experience. In his poem "Flowering Olives," Wright begins the poem by stating, "it is futile to pretend I am looking at something else. In fact, I am doing my best to gaze as deeply as I can into the crevice of a single olive blossom." Wright's lack of line breaks and the objective statement "in fact" allows the reader to see the objectivity of Wright's point of view. It is as if the reader is experiencing beauty through a different lens.

In Romantic poetry, the form of many poems is in the realm of an ode using elevated language to address a particular subject or image. Wright pushes against this. He is celebrating the blooming olive blossom yet is doing so in a way that is not completely celebrating the flower. His tone makes it seem as if what he is seeing is a stream of consciousness through the prose form. I find myself attempting to alter my poetic form because of poets like Wright. As a writer of fiction and Creative Nonfiction as well as Poetry, I believe that the best way to improve writing skills is by melding genres in ways that express the advantages of both elements of

writing. The prose poem form allows me to look at my own writing objectively and to express different tones of experience.

My inspiration and love for writing poetry are not only seen in the poetic form. I find myself seeing images and poetic language in all forms of writing. In his essay entitled “The American Scholar,” Ralph Waldo Emerson states the following powerful message: “This is my music; this is myself.” Since reading this short sentence in a somewhat pragmatic and objective essay on intellectual discussion, I find myself resonating greatly with this doctrine. Poetry is in and of itself a composition of rhythm, rhyme, and form the same way in which music is composed. In this essay, however, Emerson is stating that the music he speaks of is actually an intellectual representation of a scholar's ideologies and personal experiences. Emerson is asking the scholar to unapologetically speak out about what they believe in when faced with points of view that differ from their own. To me, this is the essential element of poetry. Poetry is a representation of a specific poet's selfhood, their past, and their diversified experiences. No poet is the same and thus no poem is the same. Humans are essentially a diverse population of various forms of experience. The beautiful thing about poetry, and the reason why I write poetry, is to represent myself to my readers. I want them to understand that my experiences have made me who I am. My Queerness, my family, the spots in time I lived through, my privilege, and my view of the world all make art that I can unapologetically call mine. They are a reclamation of myself; they are a vast collection of my experiences. They are my music and, therefore, myself.

Collection

Grandfather

While I sit, in the dirt, lost
in the sharp cutting of corn husks
over a flat expanse from a
dead man's house, he
wakes in the morning,
drinks some black coffee, turns
on the television for an afternoon special, and
eats again, longing for a phone to ring,
a voice from another time or place.

He hangs up the phone, then, makes
toast with clumpy butter and moldy bread,
sits at his kitchen table, next to the picture
of his wife, years ago past, and takes a bite.
The food sits in his mouth, and he, like a dog who
cannot taste that they are eating garbage,
yet it was maybe his last meal, insistently
waiting on the time that he, too, is a photograph
on my dining room table.

Starry Day

In my earliest time,
all I needed was a naked Barbie,
to gaze out into the daylight with,
and feel the sun on my similarly naked chest.

Because the stars in the early day,
seemed to gaze into my eyes,
hazel diamonds in the rising sun,
I chose to instead stare at the depleting moon.

Oh moon,
weren't you a half-assed version of yourself
in the growing daylight?
Why not rise again, give me
a ride on your hidden waters.

Come back, so I can again
feel your dark comfort,
let the wet sheets envelop me.
There are tiny secrets in the way
you allow me to lie, again, with
sinful thoughts.

Country Roads

Two cliffs diverge into a peninsula of rock, a stage overlooking an audience of greenery, trees, birds, bears, and the occasional deer not lying dead on the side of the road. Ferns with morning dew drip into the colorful abyss, an endless pit of living corpses, natural selection, hunting; bloody, beautiful. The ledge overlooks the forest like the Tower of Babel looked over war, or like the wall surrounding Jerusalem gazes over passive-aggressive conflict and preconceived ideas of character. God built a second Holy land in the forests of West Virginia to remind us that we are too small, too insignificant, to understand that the birds in the sky tell us to soak everything in; The New River Gorge River a holy cross bleeding through the mountains, trees atop a giant cathedral, my body the wind flying freely through the cotton candy skies. Yet, my father pulls me back from the ledge. No instruction; only reaction. I fall back, lie below the rhododendron that block the sun from scaring my eyes closed. I walk back on the beaten path, dirt clinging to the back of my hair.

On living a lonely life ending in

an elongated death, I will be intricately placed
in a tombstone miles away from
my mother, miles away from civil-
ization next to a cliff infested by dark,
black crows and dead trees, oozing black
tears, the lost souls of children past. I will be
buried next to an unmarked grave, and after
twenty years, replaced by a Walmart parking lot where
teenage boys will throw footballs to each other
after school while objectifying women's bodies.
I will hear the balls falling out of their
sweat-dripped hands onto the cold, wet
concrete, and the balls in their shorts
bouncing the sweet music of my deadly sin.

Boy

He crawls into my broken soul, takes a whiff,
 Pukes in my desolated body, eats up the remains.
He's one of the men, I think: the boy with the beard, or the
 Beer belly, or two sons, a lonely wife?
No, maybe I don't know anyone; nobody knows me
 Because all of the shit in my body; gone,
Every single vessel, every socket growing
 Back in saturated chunks of meat.
He cuts off my hands so I remain under layers of pollution
 That sting the torn muscles of everything forgotten.
The man knows that I'm lonely, sends fuck tons of salutations
 That snap my esophagus into two,
Tugs at my yellow nails, tearing them from their base,
 Knowing I'll keep his secrets.
I am a deserted corpse, always gazing back again, he's always
 Here, grinning, fucking my future dead.

Family Portrait

The piano stands upright, dust collecting on the old family photo of my brother and I, smiling in a kayak which I was too scared to sit in alone. I sit down at the piano, the dust on the ripped cushion flying up into the air. I cough, resting my fingers on the keys. *A minor*, I think, *or maybe F major*. Why do my fingers slip, playing decrepit, disgusting tones? A low hum comes from my throat. I slam down on the keys. I slam down the photo of me smiling in a lake, wearing a life jacket two sizes too large for my body. I stand up, leaving the dust to collect on the piano.

Nature of Dance

To My Mother

Walking through mountains of maple and poplar
I came across a woman who sang of solitude. Dewy
Lilies rested softly where her brows should have been;
Thorny, rotten vines of days past traveling down her stomach and hips,
Which caused her to bleed green, steaming blood from freckled skin.

“Come dance with me,” she gestured forward with arms
Made of dirty tree roots. I grabbed her mangled hands
With my hands, which, seemed like an infants
Soft skin after a bath in a sink. We danced the foxtrot,
Her strong rooted arms picking up my light body.

We danced grapevines and cherry bombs to the music
Of cicadas and falling autumn leaves, her flowing hair,
With locks of Ming ferns flowing in the cold mountain
Air, and my hair, ravaged into pieces by rusty scissors,
Was stagnant with the changing mountain wind.

As the bright sun set over the valleys and mountains
Our dancing slowed. She pulled me into her thorny
And bloody figure, softly kissing my smooth forehead,
her lips Rose petals and soft pollen.

And as the moon shone through a nearby oak, she fell further and further into the dirt, the
memory of her keeping my mind at ease, till again, we meet in the forest of our equal solitude.

Gemini

Staring at a faceless man, with my uneven hair,
veiny, red, and racy hands like my own, I outwardly
walk toward that faceless man. I try to embrace him,
yet my arms rush through his chest, a deep cold
rushing through my flesh. He keeps walking through me,
his long basketball shorts and mismatched tank top glistening
in the moonlit sky in dark contrast to my crop top, and high waisted shorts.
He turns back for one last glimpse over
his shoulder, his eyeless, mouthless face void of emotion until
I realize we are not the same, simply mirror image mirages
of what I was never meant to become.

Weeping Willow

Chamomile and Leather, I am, with scar tissue
tied together with licorice stitches, a body torn
apart with satin lavender knives made hard by the growing
heat jasmine fire of the sun. The carrots of the earth call to me,
their plump ripe orange seeping into my own fertilized orifices.
For I drink the nectar of flowers, salty on my swollen tongue,
too overused to taste the stingers of bees and bitter pounding
of pollen. Cum in me nature, grow fully to a grateful orgasm
between the mountains and cloud atlas sky! I sleep
naked below the weeping willow, which cries seeds into the
charred dimples of my lower sun-burnt rose back,
a warm kiss in the snow.

Fern Poem

I rest next to a fern,
hanging in red macrame
next to my bed, her leaves
brown and dry, shriveling
like a millipede slowly rolling.
Every day I spray her with water,
yet she remains.
I have repotted her, changed
her soil, ensured her medium to low light sun,
yet still, she remains,
dead,
as if my aggressive sleeping causes her to wilt.

Beachfront Property

Smoking a blunt, soft herbal air
Shining glitter, (or was it the stars?),
Dark sand creeps along my legs, clinging
To wet leg hair and the smell of sweat. I
Look out onto the celestial ocean, white-
Capped waves seeming to crawl forward
And closer to the grassy beach, and the moon,
Oh! That moon which was shining behind
The cloud of smoke made by that nearby man
Smoking a cigarette. I breathe in
And I breathe out, sand again clinging to the tip of
My toenails, like cliffs before the soft beach.

A Woman at Midnight

sitting atop the laundry machine
through a door that screams of ghostly images,
the whiteness showing her dark shadow in the darkness, she
raises her arm, a lamp post catching the freckles
on her wrist through the nearest window,
shadows of cobwebs make art on her skin. She
laughs in the dark, yet the silent night air washes it out.

Face Poem

Who is that spotty beard on a boyish face? That clogged pore on a pointed nose that seemed to appear just yesterday. What are those veiny arms imitating a child's forearm rough from rain, those hairy toes who have no more room to grow? Why do your teeth seem so straight, forced together by wire and metal? How will you spray water through your two front teeth now? When did your legs get so swollen with hair and your thighs so thick with fat? When did that rib cage get so wide, so full of muscle and lung? And your hair, oh! Your hair. When did it get so long?

Eunuch

I glisten in the light of LED light bulbs
which rest inside of a lamp on a black nightstand near his bed,
my prison. I keep my feet under my glutes, which he thoughtfully forced
into a heart, unmoving, too afraid to move the beautiful sparkles that flew
out of him onto my back and into my blooming flower, dripping white glitter
onto a stained, white towel, smelling of evergreen, laundry detergent, and salt. “Beautiful,”
he says as I stare at a picture of a boy and a shadowed figure, his father, over brisk salted sheets.

Jars of Herb

I took one or two sniffs, and yet I gagged,
the substance was too strong, too natural,
and when my friend took it out, rolling it
into a perfect cone, they handed it to me-
it was too early, I thought- just placing it on
my mouth made my throat swell. I know it
was good shit, grown in Colorado or maybe
southern Illinois, so tired I am of having my
mind controlled by a calming herb, a delectable
plant. Yet, I inhaled, and, to my horror, I took
the rolled greenery and threw it out into the rain
where all of my neighbors, deprived of solace,
ran into the street, rain causing their clothes to stick
to their aging bodies. I should have just given it
away- no person deserves to be seen like that- yet I,
too, was not of sound mind and eating Gluten-filled
bread which caused my stomach to turn. I ran into the
rain to offer them some dry Kush but they had already
consumed it, dancing in the street, rain falling into their
agape mouths. They praised me and I, too, danced.

The Fashion of Sex

I could wear a gown, in Rococo fashion, a headless
Antoinette bleeding pearl necklaces and pastel pink
blood on asymmetrical cement stained white by sun.

I could wear makeup in strict Elizabethan style, inch-thick
on dry skin, extenuating wrinkles parted like the Red
Sea, drop-dead gorgeous yellow ear wax rushing
out of my ears, into my rusted mouth.

I could ride into battle in full drag, padding blocking
blunted knives from grazing my skin, like Philippe I,
my King of Orléans, using acrylic nails to spill the colorless
blood of his enemies molded into lace-front glue.

I could carry a loaded pistol in diamond-encrusted sequin
gowns that shine like endless tears even in the
pitch-black darkness of the night, a pistol that fires
pseudo-mink eyelashes and neon lipstick instead of
milky-white, hard, phallic custard.

Instead, I am a trinket to be gazed at from afar, mangled chest
hair, rough touching with liquid gunpowder, dark against
pale skin, naked, face-down, on muted yellow sheets in lieu
of a wig, launching toward popcorn ceilings like The Fatal
Fire, Apollo I, reaching for the sky.

Holy Terrain

Resting on the steeple of a small, Baptist church,
A man in torn jackets plays a trumpet, smooth
Jazz resonating through a city street. The sounds
Of the instrument recede as the cold air starts to
Trickle snowflakes (which I see in the light of
A nearby stoplight). He stops, places the trumpet in a black case,
The leather torn from travel. The man turns towards the
Church yelling obscenities at the bright door, then pulls
Down his pants, and pisses on the steeple.

So, You Want a Gay Rom/Com

So, you want to see a gay Romantic Comedy? Then you have to first see a couple of feminine tops and masculine bottoms speed dating on the top of the Hollywood sign, where below, a city full of plus-sized gay men fire rifles from between their legs, erecting rubber bullets at men in tax-payer protection. If you want to see two white men kissing on your screen, you must first see a thousand genderless children march in the streets next to the headless corpses of Marsha P. Johnson and Venus Xtravaganza, along with their families who couldn't care to show up to see pink skies full of tainted blood, with clouds in the shape of shared needles and unprotected sex. You must see drag queens covered in blood in red bottoms shooting tear gas out of their false tits into the face of a dispassionate president while lesbian and bisexual women pull rainbow dildos out of their pussies, cocking them like shotguns in the House of the Representatives, the Senate, and the Oval Office. You do not want a gay Romantic Comedy; you want to see Ryan Gosling and Hugh Hefner pretending to like it.

Apostle's Reformation

There was a man poking a hanged woman
With a long, metal rood, grazing her decorated
Dress, red in the grey sky. A priest pleads to
A beggar for redemption, but he faces away.
A horse tramples over a shirtless woman in
Front of a castle.

For Devotion. For Christ.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

He grabs his 7” knife, too sharp for me to feel when the blade cuts off my arm, then my legs, full of potassium and Vitamin C, starfruit and strawberry juice flying sporadically, oozing around his body. “Maybe you can grab the 5” to give me a little more pleasure, lessening the pain,” but instead, He throws my discarded sugar into a tube pan already full of carbohydrates, bland yet full of perfectly placed sustenance that engulfs my nutrients.

He throws me in the oven, my sweet teeth steaming off of my body, because He told me I was “a little too colorful” throws in some football leather, some beef, some masculine protein to make me a little less sweet, a little less fruity turns the oven on high so I begin to dry up-maintaining a cloud white instead of a perfectly golden brown. When He takes me out I am unrecognizable?

“Aren’t you scared that I made you in my image?” I try to nod but am too burnt out as he reaches for His biggest treasure, the 10” knife, dull from creating four wonderfully made creations every second. He cuts me again, this time in abstract creations that inflict intense pain as my fruit pieces are cut up, cut down, cut in such a way that the pinks and reds slowly trickle outside of the pan. Perfectly and wonderfully made. A masterpiece.

Peace

There is a stillness in the midnight air, while two lovers sit in a nearby window. They watch a satanic horror film showing a crow eating the heart from a sad, lonely woman. I see the shadow of a burnt-out candelabra on the siding of the house next to the lit window as a car drifts by with music that I cannot fully make out, the sound of my breath making a music of its own with the nearby crickets. I see the lovers kiss softly, enveloping each other in each other's bodies, and the stillness envelops my shivering frame.

Sex Doll

I am a body
bound together with zip ties,
handcuffed. A body,
snapping, cracking like
frozen meat. A
body used for its
holes. I am a body
used for the pleasure of
partners who fill my mouth with
loneliness when I
try to speak, their jagged
tongues scratching the inside
of my teeth like a thousand knives. I
am a body that walks away
from motel rooms and
shitty apartments after
being tossed around dirty
sheets. I am a body
that is numb after
kissing. Nothing. My body
is nothing.

2051

A burning mustang screaming in the pitch black of the forest night, rugged coal miners coughing black bile from their chapped dust-white faces, their eyes painted red like a sunset corrupted by a sky of diseased locusts; black lungs hidden under their many layers of thick clothing, charred bodies of my children lying face up under diseased rubble and bombs, mouths agape, fear pulsing through mangled eye sockets, a masked hooker found in the dark, polluted water full of dead carcasses eaten by fish with two heads and mangled black teeth. The black sky turned grey from clouds of plastic and nail polish remover.

Oh! What a world, what world, what a world, what, a world, a world turned black

beauty black

black beauty

beauty

black.

Future Sight

Reeking of cigarette smoke, a man dressed in a leather harness smiles toward me, showing the dark gaps in his smile, his teeth like moldy poplar driftwood. Yet, his skin, his nipples get caught in a metal ring on his leathery, tangled chest filled to the brim with curly grey hair. Envisioning his eyes turning to copper and his teeth falling out of his diseased mouth, I avoid his stare, like a lily being devoured by fire.

Fem

Men

are machine guns, war, screaming
 voices, broken
 bones, blood
 on a gravel driveway, broken
 electric shocks of cut power
 cords, disease,
 shattered
 sunglasses on a hot
 summer day, bloody
 power tools, stab
 wounds, rusty
 knives, stiches in
 the kitchen sink,
 concrete barns,
 and burning forest. So,

I play with girls at school and Barbie's at home. I caress their hair, throw them into the air, chew on their plastic feet. But they know that I still love them. I wear my mother's heels while dancing in the mirror, the powerful woman who raised me. I am a boy who wears makeup with extravagant colors, snapping my fingers a little too often.

Yet, rocks grow inside of my throat. My bones have turned into glass to be broken. My eyes have started to cry sulfur instead of salt. Machine guns fire at me, shooting my body, leaving me decapitated. Power tools tear out my muscles, cutting my limbs from my torso. Knives cut off my genitals, remove my teeth, pull out my hair; scalp removed.

Because I invoke fear into those who attempt to suppress me.

One of the Boys

I want to smell like the War
Of the Roses, fighting against an enemy wearing pink
sweaters over pink button ups, pink sneakers and leather
pink pants. I want to feel
my legs go numb as I run in 10-inch
heels while being chased by the darkness of the night. I want
to rage, rage against footballs and Chevy trucks, playing sports like
softball, letting the ball break my jaw because I refuse to
wear a helmet to protect my smooth jawline.
I want to shave all of my body
hair like an Olympic swimmer, wearing a
one-piece instead of a two-piece to keep my body
modest. I want to wear wigs and makeup, inch-thick
like Elizabeth I, so scared of death that
she refused to sleep because it was too close
to oblivion. I want my
painted fingernails to grow to my waist, breaking off
only when they are stolen from me because I am a
man, who keeps what is mine while the sky turns from
blue to orange and finally to pink, just before darkness, giving
rise to a blood-colored moon?