
Senior Projects Spring 2017

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

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g:

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Senior Project in Written Arts/Poetry submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature

of Bard College

by

Taylor Lafe Cantrall

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With a thousand thanks to Ann

And with many thanks to Michael, Celia, Susan, Wyatt and Marina

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*For Kaylee—
a piece of my soul*

And for my mother—

Table of Contents

Prologue	1 - 4
I. Zircons assemble	5
II. Refracted beams form a roof	6 - 7
III. Under the dome	8
IV. (Miscarriages)	9
V. I thought it hurt	10
VI. A new cell	11
VII. Did the arc of Saturn	12
VIII. The ocean: the first uterus	13
IX. (Smell is the Root of All Memory)	14
X. What is my name?	15
XI. Are we alone in this place?	16
XII. Am I what you expected?	17
XIII. Will you have more children?	18
XIV. A body	19 - 20
XV. (Biophilia)	21
XVI. It's as if I'm not even here	22
XVII. (Cambria)	23
XVIII. (There's Nothing Lonelier Than Not Changing)	24 - 25
XIX. Everything is in adolescence	26 - 27
XX. (Permian Mass Extinction)	28
XXI. I knew that what we had lost would return to us	29 - 30
XXII. I collect these	31
XXIII. (Mitochondrial Eve)	32
XXIV. Time is speeding up now	33
XXV. (Pan)	34
XXVI. We need a Homer	35 - 36

XXVII. (Source)	37
XXVIII. (Hymn 1)	38
XXIX. We enter a land of waste	39 - 40
XXX. You're shivering	41
XXXI. (Prognosis)	42
XXXII. When the daughter is lost	43
XXXIII. Lately	44
XXXIV. The common ancestor of yeast	45 - 46
XXXV. I thought we were going to be friends	47
XXXVI. mildew and ash	48 - 49
XXXVII. (The Present State is the Basis of All Change)	50
XXXVIII. If I had the choice	51
XXXIX. (Sequence)	52
XXXX. (Moon:)	53
Afterword	55 - 56

Who am I? There is nothing that doesn't bring you to this edge.

Where is my love? Your love is underneath the sun.

Where is my food? It is in your tongue.

-*Bhanu Kapil Rider*, "The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers"

Prologue

This is a story that has been told many times before.

The spirit of the earth is a changing but consistent figure in mythology. She appears again and again her names ranging from Gaia to Mother Nature. Here, she is re-imagined as Gallilea—young, often lonely, and overwhelmed by her unexpected motherhood. Not to mention burdened by her task to oversee the evolution of life. Despite often taking the form of a vaguely feminine mist, here she is more humanized than her earlier renditions: she is anxious, annoyed by her never not-pregnant belly, and trying to navigate the inextricable pain and beauty of life even at its earliest stages.

Part way through the narrative, a dialogue begins between Gallilea and her child, Luca. Luca is the personification of the single-celled organism from which all life is theorized to have descended. A sort of teenage Prometheus, he is excited by the new world and its development of life but burdened by the knowledge that his mother is in pain, conflicted by his desires to take care of her and be taken care of by her.

This is the story of a mother and a child, growing up together. Part myth, part evolutionary map, it occurs in the space between science and mythology, layering the lenses of these two ways of seeing.

I. Gallilea

She did not need to have a name.
She could have been kept as a pure
entity of the abstract feminine—
a nameless mist drifting across
a volatile landscape.
She has been called so many names
that to choose one at first felt
like a means of fracturing the body
of her mythology. Each name
a thread woven together
bringing a new texture and strength
to the final shape. At first
I thought to call her
Young Mother—
after all, motherhood is
in some ways
the act of replacing all other names.
Then I realized that this is
the story of how she becomes
a mother, so it would not be fitting
to insinuate that her task was already
complete or that
this was the whole of her identity.
I needed to amalgamate
the rich tapestry of her mythology
rather than substitute.
The name Gallilea came to me
in a fever dream. It is a deviant
diminutive of an original name—

Gaia—laced forward, also
to Galileo,
a man who could not separate
science from religion,
as I cannot,
and instead found awe through empiricism.
This myth is grounded
in a body of science
as was the original intent
of myth. Because we do not remember
what happened
or what led up to this moment,
but we can imagine all that
the Earth has felt and seen.

II. Luca

An acronym ascribed by science,
he was determined by researchers to be
the Last Universal Common Ancestor.
This tale recalls him as
the first child of the earth.
Prometheus reimagined
as a single-celled organism.
The god who brought fire
down from the mountain
to animate mankind.
A god-child,
who passed his DNA
from water to land.
Proteus is the name of a single-celled

amoeba that causes infection
and also the son of a sea god
who can change his shape.
So you see,
names can surpass the limits
of size and form,
and perhaps even reason.
Luca is a hypothesis
of how life began; a character,
who shapes our knowledge of ourselves.

I.

Zircons assemble under the cleft of the Acasta Gneiss,
across the breadth of the greenstone belt.
Above the surface hovers an immense vapor.
In her vapor form, Gallilea watches the shifting planes of the surface world.
She forgets her new planet's rotation and her molecules begin
to split under ultra-violet exposure.
Gallilea shivers and, losing her reverie,
condenses towards this surface world
where her volcanic garden glows.
She alights on a bed of tephra run against a river in peak pulse
that she had been admiring from above.
She begins to inhale, then, realizing her mistake,
she instead shifts a plate to watch the flow rush, sparking, into a new crag.
It's too early for that habit.
Another shift, this time a contraction she didn't see coming, collapses the source.
Magma spits into the air with a hiss of brilliance. She gazes at the river of lava
as it pulses warmth. It will all too soon be a cold, igneous bank.
She would sigh if she could. Gallilea compares the tender heaviness
of her new body to her original shape: the disk.
As a disk, her body communed with other like bodies,
the light of sibling stars refracted from circular torso, arm, thigh.
The light from her body had been an answer to their bright call.
She flicks her wrist: a volcanic bloom illuminates her perch
in a blaze that would have killed all nearby life had there been any.
The blaze is still too small to be seen from outer space.
Time moves in decimals; she can hear the dome forming.

II.

Refracted beams form a roof;
a sky that is also a vertebral column:
This will be the first temple.

I can see other
temples, their sanctuaries
scattered with flowers,
with blood.

In one:
A bird is caught
in the vaulted ceiling.
The light falls
on brocade divans, languor, betrayal.

In others:
The constellations are formed from a mosaic
that curves into the night,
a night that retreats into the catacombs.
A night lit again by pagan dance.

Cedar wood pulpits smell of
Himalayan moss which carpets the stairs
spiraling upwards towards fragmented runes.

Marble columns quiver
under the force of Ohms,
of call to prayer.

Blue agate floor
mirrors the blue
of worship in its first form.

I know of first forms.
I am swelling,
and the temples are falling.

III.

Under the dome, in my garden, I explore myself. What causes this frantic desire to become acquainted with a shape? To run your finger along the inside edge?

Dust, as in amber, is caught in the thick wax of my ears: that's fine.

A pale discharge between my thighs smells of damp and tempered salt: also fine.

My arms: fusion of iron and animal fat.

The seasons will take some getting used to, although I'm comforted by their rotation. It reminds me of when I was a disk, spinning on its axis. Once, I could glimpse through the keyhole of time.

I have already noticed that the wallpaper changes according to season. When the air thins, the color pales. The cold draws out a twisting floral pattern. When it is warm the color turns soft and uneven; a nursery that no one ever finished painting.

I shift one hip under the weight of my stomach.

Perpetual motion, like always falling forward.

IV.

Miscarriages

Gallilea ignites her garden. She runs lava parallel to the core then through the core then parallel again. Like ozone she is volatile. She departs from her garden before it becomes submerged.

My chest split open and noxious smoke rose from the abrasion summoning pneumatic arrival of water to my basal clade. These pelagic vents are the source of the first machines, carved from carbon and boiling. Here, a pulse desert. As each new cell emerges I ride through a spasm in time. I am suspended in tender pain without warm release, the pressure always mounting.

The cell develops, and in a short time, dies.

I am gripped by panic as I watch these cells collapse. Collapse is eerily familiar. I once watched joyously as novas collapsed and released their brilliance. The light felt good. In this new form I can't touch light can't grab it. My belly grows slick with fear at the sight of burst membranes, of stillness.

And each time she empties herself in shudders, in clots.

I'll never get to meet them.

Pain shoots through the tender curve of her navel.

This is supposed to work. I am always emptying but never empty instead I am adrift in this endless seam of water. Have I given up my beloved form for a failed planet?

V.

I thought it hurt when my pieces collided and I became a life bearing whole but there is no forward momentum no spool unraveling only tide pulse forward and back again I can still feel them drifting I can still feel their membranes collapse the door never not slamming migraine like mom joking about how she is getting older I don't have a mom if a child dies before you can meet them are you still a mother no one asked me I miss my garden I don't even like to swim

VI.

A new cell
in the shape of a ring, or perhaps carrying a ring,
emerges from the vents at another wet sundown.

Gallilea lies, a mist collapsed on the surface of the water.
She feels the shift of life beginning again: cracked pelvis, dilated pupils, insatiable
hemorrhage.
She closes her eyes to endure the formation and failure of a new cell.

Then: *something's different.*

A coil of nucleotides begins to swim, then aggregate.
This cell seems rounder, almost disk-like.

VII.

Moon:

Did the arc of Saturn,
or the spiral of the conch
eclipse you?

Spheres that we do not see
but feel their proximity,
like a spoon
held under the tongue
to observe a cankerous mound;
a hill
under your ripe, red meadow.

They are afraid
because our bodies
operate in circles,
and circles
are infinite. As seamless
as an iris
bordering a pupil:
self-contained,
endless color.

The rise and fall
of bodies,
of oceans,
and oceans eat everything.

*

VIII.

The ocean: the first uterus, a vault under the press of heaven.

Void precedes absence of void.

Gallilea grows cold, shrouded in empty waters.

Birth seems always to entail sacrifice:

the webbed, blood-sac corded around a blue ankle.

Thetis, accursed Titan,

was forced to couple with Peleus, a man, so that her children would be mortal.

The man and the embryo are aligned against the mother. They seek to propagate an army and dominate the gene pool.

But Thetis plotted to bear only the strongest. Armed with her endometrium, with a dagger at the fringe of her groin.

Name begets name. She holds each of her sons by the heel, dips them in fire.

IX.

Smell is the root of all memory

Contraction: not abnormal.

Like remembering a dream where
in the middle of the day, just as you lift the tea to drink,
the tea disappears and your mouth fills with the taste of metal.

Gallilea holds herself tense with listening. Her mist grows taut and heavy
to merge with the water.

She descends to the sunken remains of her garden
where volcanoes have transformed into hydrothermal vents.
Her contractions run closer together. A sound like cymbals
crashes through her and threatens
to tear her apart.

She is erupting, until she is distracted from her pain
by the acrid smell of sulfur.

At first blinded by new sight, her linear time erodes,
replaced by a rushing continuum of scent:

Castor oil dissolves her into smoky yurts,
antiseptic into fluorescent corridors,
balsa wood into a hotel tearoom.

She screams for every birth that will ever be.

The cymbals fade, and she looks again.

He is so small.

She smiles, her mind navigating the spiral of time now running through her.

There is so much to show him.

*I will christen you with lavender, with opium, with lemon, with the plasma of stems. I will take you dancing
through the forest's black under-bellied litter. We will name things together. I will show you fresh snow, red
deserts, embroidered linen, Klimt.*

X.

What is my name?

G: You will have many names, because you came from me. Nothing ever only has one name.

Then what will you call me?

G: They will call you Proteus, Single Cell, Bacteria, LUCA, Prometheus, Spirit, Fawn—

Yes, but what will you call me?

G: It doesn't matter what I call you, it matters what you call yourself.

Luca is fine.

XI.

L: Are we alone in this place?

G: Except for the moon, yes.

L: But the moon is so far away.

G: Yes.

L: Will we always be alone?

G: No, not for long.

L: How do you know?

G: Since you were born I can see everything that will happen.

L: Like a super-power?

G: I guess you could call it that.

L: Do you like what you see?

G: I see beauty and destruction inseparable and increasing as time moves forward.

L: You didn't answer my question.

G: That's because I don't know how.

XII.

L: Am I what you expected?

G: No.

L: What did you expect?

G: A daughter.

L: And I'm not?

G: Not what?

L: A daughter?

G: You are the beginning of life here and I thought all creation was feminine.

L: I see.

G: What do you see?

L: You thought I'd be more like you.

G: Yes.

L: Are you happy that I'm here?

G: Very.

XIII.

L: Will you have more children?

G: Yes, but they'll be descended from you.

L: Are you jealous?

G: No.

L: I don't believe you.

G: Ok.

XIV.

Moon:

A body,
stretched along the frost bank
before the thaw of Avalon.

Ligaments emerge as
fronds unfurl from the center.
At night, it appears as a dark hump.

A common theme of mythology
is dismemberment.
The world is formed always from pieces.

The shards are gathered into the wicker basket.
Members of the family assembled
from their slain fathers.

A body of detritus
and soot. I was so afraid to approach—
now I grasp blindly at dried moss and Ediacaran dust.

Where did my night terror go?
Where might the hero fall
to wet the tips of the world ash?

A body,
a shadow,
rolls forward to meet the dusk.

As an archaeologist,
as a soothe-sayer,
I begin the long trek back.

*

XV.

Biophilia

In the scientific realm a hypothesis exists that all of life has the urge to interact with other life. Does urge have a universal source? Can *to sex, to swim, to repent, to hunt* all be traced back to a common ancestor? Or did they evolve separately, these urges finding themselves housed suddenly, in conflict, in the same soft body? And if these urges did evolve from the same source, what would they reveal of this being?

Could we deduce a name?

After the birth of her first born, time exists for Gallilea in a continuum. On a different plane, Luca sees the consecutive lurch of each time phrase. He swims under the distracted watch of his mother as she assesses the task in front of her, learning the breadth of her new vision. She is still young and does not know where to look.

Motherhood brings with it the desire for shared sight.

Algae explodes on the surface of the deep, of Luca's childhood home. Their blades intertwine. Vines overcome the sagging porch you return to at fifteen, twenty-one, thirty. Photosynthesis engages like a piston, like the first axon to fire in a newly formed brain.

Now things are under way.

Granted with a vision of what is to happen, Gallilea tends once again to her garden. Sulfuric islands break the water in vertebral columns and are explored by the silent pilgrims of plant life. Lichen constellates the rock and algae grows waxy under UV exposure.

Volcanoes blossom under her care into land in its first stage of succession, that is—bare.

XVI.

L: It's as if I'm not even here. I admire these plants but they're not exactly good conversationalists. They're too busy trying not to dry out. You are the only one I can talk to.

G: That's not so bad, is it?

L: I guess we're just different. You like being alone. Plus, I'm new to this world.

G: I'm sure there must be something you're excited about.

L: Well, yesterday I saw something with a tail—

G: Look, Luca! Wings!

XVII.

Cambria

In the fetal stage, dismembered words bear no fruit. The lawn is littered with glyphic shards, as if a mind-tree had shook and the petioles cracked. The words—overripe, underripe—split themselves and take seed. An infestation, now—we stack them into a mosaic womb. We can hear them, in the yard, singing broken quatrains into the night.

XVIII.

There is nothing lonelier than not changing

L:

I watch from the garden
as life arches and descends.
From the water
new cells add to the number
of life forms. The jasmine
creeps overhead, oranges
fall from the tree and rot at my feet.

In the garden
heat thins the skin
and it loses its opacity.
Now skin and sky
wave as one flag. How
can you scrape light
from a surface? You
can't. Each new species
ends in either obsidian
or ivory fate.

They rot, these orange skins,
as I shall never rot.
First, the flies
form a carpet, writhing. Then—
as if remembering the crush of
their mother petioles—
the rind folds, curls
turns to green mold,
then white powder.

I watch blue-green algae
change the air around me,
making it inhospitable
to carbon cycling plants.
I remain unchanged.

I am in the foot of the garden,
in the green; split tissue
like an anxious lip.
Also, in its hair,
in the eager vines
that poison the backs upon which they rest.

I see cells divide and they are mine.
Tails form as an aggregate of my body.
Fish lay on their bellies
under the cypress
awaiting the end of poke-cherry season.
When the swollen orbs
hit the water,
are consumed or float
downstream to an embankment
where young trees
twist round one another,
searching for light.

I watch from the garden
as life leaves me behind.
From the water
fish crawl onto the sand. The air
smells like sunburnt oranges,
the crack of ozone, wet moss.

XIX.

Everything is in adolescence: shockwaves of growth. Remember when you went to Florida with your family and didn't go swimming because the gnawing in your knees was unbearable and the chlorine made your acne flare?

Luca sits on a black sand beach and watches the march of an orange beetle the size of a kneecap. Everything is stretched out—the dark curve of sand set between an apocalypse of ferns. Endless water seems to run over and up into the sky. Through the still-thin atmosphere Luca watches red stars drift behind the sun.

The beetle doesn't realize that Luca has hedged it in with shiny salt rocks. The only way is forward. The beetle cannot see that its path dips just ahead into a hole dug into the sand. The beetle discovers the lip but is unbalanced by its large, horned head and tumbles forward—

G: Making friends?

Gallilea alights on the other side of the trap. She scoops the beetle out and places it gently on the sand.

G: You know, these plants will never be this big again. She gazes at the layer of dense green. Why don't you go take a look? It all changes so fast.

Luca collapses the beetle wall into the sandy culvert.

L: My legs hurt.

Gallilea shifts her gaze to his downturned cheek.

G: Luca, you're able to change your shape—you can change into something that doesn't even have legs.

Luca sighs. The wall is completely collapsed and the hole is no longer visible.

L: I feel this pain whether I have roots, or legs, or flagellum.

Gallilea looks away from Luca towards the water. She plays with the amplitude of the waves. Luca turns to his mother. She seems completely absorbed by her game, but he knows that she is distracted, burdened by the weight of every eon. His pain will never compare to hers.

L: Why will the plants never be this big again?

G: Well—and this is fascinating—but it has to do with the carbon composition in the upper stratosphere—

XX.

Permian Mass Extinction

L&G:

In triplets—

following the heel of life—

triple pulse—

a Great Dying—

sky above the Siberian Traps—

turns white hot by methanogens—

Trojan armor, blinding—

I watch my brothers fall—

consumed by ocean—

their bodies turned to peat—

blood replaced with oil—

do you know why monsters come in threes—

All death is fertile, Luca—

crescent of scythe and crowning head—

But—

yearning—

did you know—

with more to come—

knowing is crime—

What is falling? Snow or ash—

How can you remain so calm—

—an unbearable quiet

XXI.

I knew that what we had lost would return to us.

Luca, have faith.

Everything that you have lost will return to you,
often in another shape.

In avian flight I see the resonance of dactylic wings. Reprise
of the Firebird Suite.

There is no escaping shape.

I feel constantly the tight skin, tender press
of my pregnancy
reminding me of what I have lost
and what has yet to be endured.

A kite unwound on a thread must be tethered somewhere.

I hold the threads behind my back,
unwinding them slowly,
while Luca watches the sky.

He reclines in the fork of a tree that will later
be struck by lightning, the nitrogen
released from the fibers of the trees
unwinding another spool of life. One mushroom variety
will mimic the craters of the moon.

Below Luca, the tops of trees sway with life.

His attention turns downward: *What is that?*

It's good to see him interested in more than just the sky.

We descend to the motion below. The first monkeys,
saber toothed and chestnut,

swing with bodies fully extended, as if
they are an extension of the tree itself. Luca grins,
his shape morphing in excitement. He collapses

into his comfortable bacterial form, then arches into the air as a vine following the monkeys' motion, then reptilian, then with wings he glides downward to land as a monkey. He is the largest and smells wrong. They howl and chatter down the trunk, Luca chases after them, laughing like a wild dog—a shape he has not yet discovered.

My stomach lurches forward,
as if anxious to get on with it. The air smells like burnt hair—
if only I could vomit. My synapses burn with the pre-memory
of pain. I think of sending a rockslide, a flood;
of breaking all those monkeys' necks. I could stop
evolution in its tracks, before their jaws recede and
they lose their fur. Before humanity is even a thought,
before fate is a spoken word. I could shift the course,
like rudder pulling. But then I would be steering into the dark.
Medea, cutting open her own womb.

What would become of Luca? I clench my jaw, the spools.
Think of tying a knot in time. Luca returns as a butterfly,
alights on my shoulder. I soften my hands in acceptance.
What will they call me? She who will receive your pain.

XXII.

Soul

I collect these bundled dendrites
and cleave the point
that connects one axon
to another, carefully laying these transects of thought.

To whom do we belong?

Orum

I crawled to the edge of the sand
and lay where the water could not touch me.

Bile

This is the first axiom:
Dissection is an act of love.

Blood

A lung, filled with luminous cilia
shines off of the lake
in the base of the cavern.

Everything in repetition

The trickle down effect:
Is there enough milk for everyone?

XXIII.

Mitochondrial Eve

In 1996, Pope John Paul II embraced evolution as a legitimate hypothesis, and not in contradiction with the Catholic Church. He did, however, pose one caveat. That, “If the human body has its origin in living material which pre-exists it, the spiritual soul is immediately created by God.”

Nearly two million years ago, during the mass die-out of the last early hominid line known as *Homo erectus*, arose the origin of modern DNA. This shift in the human genome has been traced back to one African woman who likely bore the first modern human. Scientists have named this woman the Mitochondrial Eve.

Mitochondrial DNA is a matrilineal genetic line that can only be passed from mother to child. We may think, then, of the Mitochondrial Eve also as an event. It was the moment in time when this new essence of life was received in utero and carried full term. A moment that is considered by some divine, and by others, as stochastic a change as a storm that forever alters the landscape.

XXIV.

Time is speeding up now a whole species outside the window dying, she is squatting covered in sweat and blood and her hair full of smoke. There are always so many that do not survive but Luca, Luca survived and so maybe this one will, too. Life expanding as threads connect from chest to chest. Life always pressing on but how it hurts to keep going. Something is different with this pregnancy. Folded inside of Luca's genes that this Eve carries there is a misplaced methyl group. No not misplaced newly placed this is her first birth.

When she screams I see those broken cells, my almost-children, floating in the water, corroded by salt and seared in the place inside of me where pain lives. The pain of motherhood is part animal, part divine, fearful hope flowing as freely as the blood now pooling in the dirt now I see a matted head emerging will the umbilical cord be wrapped will the lungs be filled with fluid will the heart have a hole or the spine crushed—first breath erupts into a wail I can feel the shock of new life any light is too bright she expels the afterbirth and presses her child to her slick breast.

This girl-child is the first of her kind. I saw this coming when Luca was chasing the monkeys in the forest. Humanity has bloomed, pushing its head through like helleborus out of the snow. From now on the wild will recede, the evolution of new species slowing to a near halt and another great extinction will cause us fresh pain. But even as they scar me and threaten to tear me apart I will love them. This is what all the myths predict. We love most the child that causes our destruction. Kronos killed his father at the bequest of his mother and from the broken pieces that fell into the sea were born a new pantheon.

XXV.

Pan

Luca sits in the soft reeds beside the river and admires the sun glinting off the bright-headed yellow flowers. Gallilea hovers above the water, thinking of how brilliant her volcanic rivers once shown. Beyond a short forest of gnarled olive trees, a few humans live in cow-skin yurts. They come to this river for water and fish. When they visit the riverside Luca hides among the tall grasses and distracts the children by whistling a melody through a reed pipe only they can hear.

L: I like this place much better with the humans in it.

G: I find them a little overwhelming at times. I miss the early quiet.

L: I think this is what we were meant for. Humans were destined for this place.

G: All life is precious, Luca. You should know that.

L: Yes, but they're special.

A mother and toddler emerge from the grove. The child stumbles on a rock and is scooped up by her mother before she can cry out.

L: Sometimes I wish you were a little more human.

G: Why don't you show me the new song you made up?

XXVI.

G: *We need a Homer, or an Ovid. Someone to speak in a way we cannot speak.*

L: *I hate it when you talk about things that haven't happened yet.*

G: *Right, sorry. You'll understand in a minute.*

L: *Oh, I see now. Someone to author our shapeless dialogue.*

G: *Yes, exactly.*

L: *Shall we have the spirit of Delphi descend on this chosen one?*

G: *Don't mock me, please.*

L: *Sorry. It just seems silly—making ourselves into a myth.*

G: *What's wrong with myth?*

L: *Because they won't get anything right. And because they will eventually stop believing in us.*

G: *The point isn't for them to get it all right. But it's important that they a story of where they came from.*

L: *Where did you come from?*

Gallilea was silent for three years.

Their time kept speeding up—to Luca it only felt like a few minutes before she responded.

G: *I began as a disk. A series of parts spiraling within a solar nebula. And I was not alone. There were many other such bodies. I could feel the constant pulse of their potential. Then I began to condense quickly towards the middle. I fractured into many planetesimals, some of which were lost to the sun, and the cord was broken with those who were like me. My spirit remained within this piece of my former self.*

L: *Why don't you ever take the shape of a woman?*

G: *Woman is a new word.*

L: *Well, then why do you hover so often as a vapor? I can barely even feel you beside me. I know you can change shape just like I can. Don't you want to be free?*

G: *The abstraction of this shape; the free movement of particles reminds me of who I used to be.*

Luca had begun more and more to retain the shape of a human.

L: But don't you want to be like me?

G: Every shape you take is made out of pieces of me. Nothing can separate us. Nothing can make us dissimilar. I promise, Luca, I promise.

XXVII.

Source

The moon illumines
Enheduanna, High Priestess
of Ur, sharply etching her back
over the body of her consort.
This refraction forms a bridge
that links day and night.
This night is the vernal equinox.
Equinox is the moment when night
and day approximate equal.
Enheduanna, one of the first
known poets, wrote hymns
(now accessible through the electronic text corpus of Sumerian literature)
dedicated to Inanna, mother goddess.
The temple filled with
hermaphroditic worship;
the temple built on the corpus of her many names:
Hannahannah,
Demeter,
Mom.
Inanna's daughter inherits the temple,
she is the potnia theron:
she who runs with the back of an animal.
Can you see her racing under the swollen light?

XXVIII.

Hymn 1

```
Inanna = open("SumerianLitCorpus.html", "w")
webpage = "<!DOCTYPE html>"
webpage = webpage + "<html><body>"
+ "</ Departed from her own
in the temple of Fatima she lies />" +
"</ above the silt and holy sand she lies />"
+ "</ cradling her own head />"
+ "</ a mother to herself, />"
+ "</ the temple is damp
with incense, />" +
"</ the attendants unwind />" +
"</ hair from listless hands, />" +
"</ the gods
acting in reverse />" +
"</ what charms are woven in />"
+ "</ what osmotic collapse
could grab the light from />" + "</ her divine eyes
and wither those full cheeks />"
+ "</ the apparition of frost in summer />"
+ "</ the attendants bathe her in cardamom milk />"
+ "</ they caress her fullness. />"
Inanna.write(webpage)
Inanna.close()
```

XXIX.

Moon:

We enter the land of waste,
always single-file.
Of course this happens yearly.

We carry with us white paper boxes
pressed against our sternums,
shielded from the acrid wind.

Inside, are the things we must forget.
Often precious,
always selected while the gray under-belly of day
lolls against the roof of the sky.

A lizard that keeps the warmth
to himself.

In mine:
a broken piece of shale,
my mother's engagement ring,
two string crosses,
a white rook.

In front of me
a girl bends her head to the wind.
Her braid reminds me of the wasps
that drown in our hibiscus tea
seeking nectar.

The wind presses the sweater
against her spine
remolding the fibers into a drab landscape.

I'm stalling, I know.

We walk until the light has honeyed.
A shot goes off,
and we have until complete darkness
to abandon our boxes

Then we must stay where we are
until we are recovered.

*

XXX.

L: You're shivering. Are you really that cold?

G: Low oxygen.

G: Some days I know there is a sickness inside of me. I can't look away from it.

L: Do you mean like the part of your brain that is always rebelling?

G: No, not like that. Like sneaking through the corridor holding hands with your bunk buddy before the counselor can catch you, the cold seeping into your socks and enticing you to trip. I don't remember what it's like to not be cold. Un-cold. I run a fever in my eyes only. I can't sleep through the night—always waking at 4 a.m. in a pool of my own saliva to pee without flushing so I don't wake anyone else up—especially that part of my brain—then I rush back to bed and shiver until morning.

XXXI.

Prognosis

The technician applies jelly to Gallilea's stomach where the skin has given way almost entirely to a system of stretch marks. It is an indecipherable map of pearly streets that glisten under the petroleum sheen.

Luca sits beside her on a short laminated stool, holding her hand. The smell of sweat mixes sourly with antiseptic. Gallilea had introduced Luca to the technician as her son. The technician's only response to this mother and son only a few years apart and both appearing in their late teens was to shift the clasp on her necklace and proceed with the ultrasound.

The application of the monitor to the curve of her belly causes a familiar, tender pain to rise inside of Gallilea. She lets go of Luca's hand to prop herself up so she can see the screen. On it appears a black cavern hedged with a pixelated forest of pale green and gray. The forest glitches and changes shape as if Gallilea was watching the rapid succession of a landscape. Inside of the cavern is a glowing mass. When the technician goes to wipe off the smeared and quickly crystalizing jelly, Gallilea catches sight of what is written on the chart: *Sacred Heart Hospital, Sept. 27th 1962—Embryonic growth turned tumorous. Biopsy required to determine malignancy.* She glances to make sure Luca can't also read the chart. He is looking expectantly at the technician's face.

"Will she be ok?"

"She needs a follow up appointment to determine the extent of the damage." The technician's smile pulls almost as tightly as the skin on Gallilea's belly. "I'm sure your mother will be fine."

XXXII.

When the daughter is lost her mother sends a bee as a messenger to search for her.

My backing lungs empty of greenery.

The bee travels to the underworld and finds the daughter.

My tongue dried up and my gut bloated with algae.

The mother stops time to rescue her child from the darkness that had consumed her.

My feet filled with silt.

The last time death stretched across this place I had to stay strong for Luca's sake. There was so much left to be done and his role was essential. So I filled myself with hope, choked on it in my sleep: delirious, like breathing pine-sap. For a time my name became Euxinia; the ocean turned to sulfur and emptied of air. I can hear my children gasping. The sulfur smelled of my far-away garden.

Now, I can feel myself slipping into the darkness now with no bee to find me because even they are dying. I see their fuzzy bodies crumpled in wet grass. I gave my body to bear life and now life has exhaled death: the bright, walled cities of coral reefs bleached bone-white. The children you love most must hurt you most. The violence is cyclical, an echo never unwinding itself from the ear.

XXXIII.

Lately, she had been subsisting on nothing but Advil and cigarettes. Smoke slips into the back-sided fan, disappears. A mirrored wall reflects the smoke and light from the green frosted windows. Husky-voiced light:

G: —should have gone to bed hours ago.

L: You know, it's dangerous to smoke while you're pregnant.

Leather creaks as she extends to ash. She cradles her stomach from habit of tenderness.

G: It's dangerous to be pregnant.

The ember makes contact with porcelain.

L: You've changed.

XXXIV.

Moon:

The common ancestor of yeast
traced back to the Proterozoic era

is related to you by small assemblage &
practical mutations.

Ancient, single celled
you thrive on
beer, bread, my hooded cavity.

I am sub-ancient.

I am colonized.

Here, there is landscape &
potential for infection.

The relation of one body to another
may be defined by either space or interaction.

Interactions are wrapped in cellophane,
labeled with +/- . In the factory:

You put a fish into the net,
you take a fish out of the net

and name the relationship
by the number of fish left in the net.

Idiot.

Even predators prevent mass starvation,
wasted meat out in the snow.

But sometimes there is no salmon to inspect in the light.
Vertebrate would at least be a way to climb the tree

and then I could see where we are,
how far away from the river,
how to find our way back.

Instead, there is you and me
in a room where the symbols have been deconstructed
to the spines of letters,
letters breeding constantly into words
that we refuse to say.

The tally is too high
and the water so murky I can't see the fish.

From the negation of signs forms
a broken simulacrum
tattooed onto our chests.

There is no word
for what we are to one another.

We stare at one another
as strange creatures in the dark.

XXXV.

G: I thought we were going to be friends.

L: I'm your child. I need you to be more than just my friend. I need you to be my mom.

G: But I didn't ask for you.

L: You shouldn't say shit like that.

G: I'm just trying to be honest with you. You have to be honest to have a healthy relationship.

L: I've been thinking a lot lately about how we try to make love different colors. Like, red rose for romance, yellow for friendship, all that. I don't think it actually works like that. I think love is all one color and it's the expectations that change the function of the relationship. And I think sometimes you expect more from me than I can give you. Healthily.

G: What color is your love, Luca?

L: Pale blue.

XXXVI.

It is the time of mildew and ash.
Nations await the water
that scorches the crops
and collects in tepid pools
to become larval cribs,
eventually seeping into nuclear deposits.

Water, once life giving
has turned on them,
imbibed with the spirit of Medea.

Betrayal is a dormant illness
that blooms first in the gut.

They cramp
and stare at a vacant lot—
that once was a grassland,
a village, a bed of glaciers—distracted

by dreams of Atlantis,
mute to where they are standing,
unfazed by what they see.

Water rots inside of me
and humanity leeches out of
industrial cavities.

In the back room of the think tank
the scientist,
who wanted to remove 'vector'
from the names of water,
tests the middle-class peroxide
to lighten skin, teeth, hair.

XXXVII.

The present state is the basis of all change

Moon:

We went walking
where the shale was smooth
and the path hidden
by *Rosa Rugosa*
(the perennial ache
of home).

Longing—
a frenzy induced
by the changing sky,

undiagnosed.
But then again, language
is more like lead
than shale,
or agate.

Malleable
carbon rings,
that are also circles,
that are also life-giving.

*

XXXVIII.

If I had the choice to choose this life knowing how hard it would be, I'd like to think that I would say yes. But honestly I don't know. That's the real myth. That life will always be worth it. I used to think there was this great balancing act that ensures the good will always come back. But once the stars collapse there is no promise that the light will ever return to us. Life just is and there's no guarantee that the good will outweigh the bad or even that things will ever be good again. I thought I could make this better for them but all of this came from chaos and it will end in chaos and I can't change that.

XXXIX.

Sequence

1985. Luca takes the shape of a seven-year-old in Central Park. He chases squirrels and holds broken leaves up to the sun. I watch him until a police officer realizes that there is a child, alone, and moves towards him, his eyebrows knitting together in concern. Luca dissipates as a mist.

1995. If you have ever cleaned a dead relative's house before selling it then you know why it is important to feel numb. And how much you hate the smell of Lysol. You are posthumously peeved at them for being such a fucking pack rat (scientific name: *Neotoma*. Compulsive quirk). The cat died a month before—or maybe someone adopted her, or maybe she ran away—but her food is still there, stale now. It's right there in the pantry under the unopened bottle of chocolate sauce. Chocolate sauce: keep, trash, donate?

2009. Luca is somewhere in South America trying to figure out what other species of brightly spotted tree frog can replace the community niche of one recently extinct. Gallilea is in Chelsea on a street where there is a regular interval of dead trees placed delicately and purposefully in large ceramic pots. Every other week someone comes and removes the litter inside and around the pots as gingerly as possible so as not to shake loose the dried leaves.

XXXX.

Moon:

Gallilea sits with her back to the cold fluorescence of the *HOLLYWOOD* sign. She's probably trespassing, but it's difficult to apprehend a vapor. If Luca had been there, he would look down at the city lights, possibly flying low as a screech owl. Gallilea looks up at the polluted sky radiating green. She has been hanging around cities lately, avoiding the stars. It is harder to avoid the moon. Even now, the moon shines angrily against the LED bulbs. Gallilea's cigarette smoke drifts up to form long, thin clouds that fragment the light.

Moon: You're not making my job any easier.

G: You seem to be doing just fine from down here.

Moon: Please put that thing out.

G: Fine.

Moon: If you're trying to hide it's not working. I can still see you.

G: Can I ask you something?

Moon: Sure.

G: Why did you choose to be my moon?

Moon: I wanted to be close to you.

G: But you're so far away.

Moon: Not as far as I could be.

G: Don't you miss who you used to be?

Moon: Yes, but I would have had to change shapes eventually. Not to mention it's been pretty entertaining.

G: You are kind of a celebrity down here.

Moon: Believe me, I realize. Did you see their faces that time I turned red?

G: I know, of all the signs that the world is ending, that was the one that scared them the most.

Moon: You're dying, aren't you, G?

G: Yes.

Moon: Does Luca know?

G: I haven't told him.

Moon: Are you scared?

G: Can we talk about something else, please?

Moon: What do you want to talk about?

G: Tell me a story.

Moon: Once upon a time there was you and me, and we were drifting through space.

Afterword

This project was originally what I called a “poetic cycle,” divided into four parts: Passage, Waking State, Reduction, and Nexus. My idea was that the first part, Passage, explored the evolution of the body. Waking State explored the degradation of the body in a not-so-far-away dystopian future. Reduction was meant to look at the body so closely that it ceased to be a body and became broken up further into four more parts: Soul, Ovum, Bile, Blood (this reduction is enacted once in this work by Gallilea after she decides to let humanity evolve despite what this means for her fate). Finally, Nexus, was intended to tie the cycle together through a series of subject-driven meditations (the environmental stimulus that informs the body). The cycle was complete, but I ran into the problem of character. There was a speaker in Passage and in some parts of Waking State who demanded that she be heard. This was how Gallilea came to be. I scratched the other two and a half parts, rewrote and expanded on Passage so that there was room for her voice and her story. The presence of cycles, however, was not eradicated from the work, but rather transformed and taken up as isotopes are wanted to do by Gallilea’s character. This cyclical nature—of the earth, of time, of trauma—is much of what I see as driving this work.

Names are clearly important to me. One night when I was trying to think of a name for the project I was sitting in the library as it neared closing and desperately searching for a title. The working title at the time was *The Hadean*, which is first eon that begins the formation of the earth. The Hadean comes from “Hades,” so named because from what scientists know of this time, the state of the Earth was much like the classical ideas of Hell. The Earth was in a constant process of melting and burning, or what Gallilea affectionately refers to as her “volcanic garden.” I was both drawn to and ultimately rejected this title for the same reason, which is that it sounded like the name of an epic myth much in the style of *The Aeneid* and others. I decided that this was a problem because my project is informed by a wide range of myths, and I did not want to cut off that connection by isolating it within the context of a new myth. So I found myself sitting in the library as it neared closing and free writing in order to find a title. Some of the ones I came up with were *Hidden Science; Proximal Tongue, Original Forms, Equinox, and Echo Unwound*. All of these approximated the work, but seemed reductive when placed as the title, and completely ignored the characters that populated the poetry. As I was about to give up on the library for the night, (a polite way of saying I was about to be kicked out) when I had the idea for “g:”. Throughout the project, the icon “G:” indicates the moment before Gallilea speaks. I was looking for a title that

would create a space for the body of mythology I had drawn from and for the characters I had created, and I feel like that is accomplished by making the title the moment of silence before something is said. I also like how, when it is placed on its own, the letter “g:” seems to transform, in the way words often do when we say them too many times in a row, into a potentially ancient, runic symbol congruent with the time setting that most of this work takes place in. “g:” could also be seen as a modern symbol, perhaps a result of the erosion of technology on language, or stemming from a scientific pragmatism and useful in the way the notations on the periodic table are useful. There is an elemental nature to both science and mythology, and much of the intention of this work is to explore the relationship between these two modes of discovery and perception, so it seemed necessary to provide an elemental name.