
Senior Projects Spring 2024

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2024

Mother

Zeke Morgan
Bard College

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Recommended Citation

Morgan, Zeke, "Mother" (2024). *Senior Projects Spring 2024*. 194.
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Mother

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
Zeke Morgan

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2024

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank the entire written arts department for fostering in me a desire to write, and allowing me the creative freedom and space to learn for myself what I wanted to write about. Big thanks to Jenny Xie for providing important insight about where my poetry should go during the two classes I took with her.

Most of all; thank you to Michael Ives, who has not only been my senior project adviser, but introduced me to the act of writing poetry during my second semester at Bard.

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Introduction

“Mother” reimagines the human perception of the state as a mother wolf and explores the development of state structure through a lens of history and myth. The collection traverses the space from the conception of the state to its inevitable death. There are poems directly addressing the Mother figure, along with pieces that break down other aspects of the state, which can be viewed as individual expressions of humanity under a state system. With this work, I explore what the modern state is inside of the human psyche, while looking deeper into what makes state structure so attractive to us; while also emphasizing how destructive the state is and has been, even as we remain convinced of its necessity.

The singular detail that the state is characterized as being female and not masculine is especially important, as the collection also seeks to draw special attention to the underlying matriarchy existing within a traditional patriarchal structure— a twist on the traditional “Great Mother” figure, who is present in countless religious traditions. The entire collection binds her very being to state structure, and operates with the assumption that she *is* the state. This all culminates into the misperception that the state is a tool of humanity, when it is we who are the tools.

I. FEN

*“How can I live without thee, how forego
Thy sweet converse, and love so dearly joined,
To live again in these wild woods forlorn?
Should God create another Eve, and I
Another rib afford, yet loss of thee
Would never from my heart; no, no, I feel
The link of nature draw me: flesh of flesh,
Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe.*

*However, I with thee have fixed my lot,
Certain to undergo like doom; if death
Consort with thee, death is to me as life;
So forcible within my heart I feel
The bond of nature draw me to my own,
My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;
Our state cannot be severed, we are one,
One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself.”*

– John Milton, Paradise Lost

Warmth

oddly, was a door, i chose	not after so many	when	there
of looking would be i refused that could and made it look it's	and hoping a path of turned the have led me u-pon eyes	to stride through circles gold, thing to an my back. burned stung me. ash.	it. that there my shoulder antlered god me.
i'm			

Rain

During the fall of the world,
There was a moment when the ground appeared soft—

cushiony in the same way that fallen trees
lose their bark.

Hazy—
supernova squished between
two sticky sheets of cork
with the give of an apple that
congeals into grey ashes around your teeth.

This raindrop
has never touched the ground.

and even if vessels all around seem to be bursting into discord,
in shimmers of life—

this chaos is too spectacular to come to dust—
so awfully adjacent.
Far too self-amused to come apart.
Stretch into a rubbery sheen
and lose any coils—

the unseen green boundary.
The door that's not a door—
gazing up from below but not moving.

Only the world moves into its own peril.

The untapped life within not comprehending reality like you can,
but still knows what is waiting— everyone does.

A shudder. A blur. There is no more dirt.

Now, flesh fogs
the chimes of love—

the skimming of fate
purity caught in the way of the unspoken valley.
The promised end.

It hangs in one spot forever, which is so often the case.

Not lively clover, but
a flesh-colored wall of death
now closer than ever.

Amnesia

Who knows what I want
when doves part
when starlings
when seagulls fly after broken calliopes.

My arms know their trouble,
but I refuse to remember.

Just a moment ago, we all knew it perfectly,
the moon pulling on the tide—

but times change.
Especially when they're tall and blonde
with whirlpools for eyes...

So don't blame me
for forgetting to step around the bushes,
the hounds,
the pure orange of traffic cordons

when an ocean stretches to the horizon
in each direction.

Interior, after Dinner (1868–1869)
Claude Monet

I have a frame that seems to move when I stare. Even when I stand still, it shifts painfully. It knows when my feathered eyes brush it. When swirls careen through the air as we go about our day, his eyes peer into mine, as if capable of contemplation. The fire in their fireplace burns as if these framed beings can make a flame from wood. His flames don't burn the air like mine do and sing with the wind. They only flicker, uninspired and cold. His curtains have no bursting pink flowers, and his friends? They sometimes stare at our dark stagnant frames as if we were animals in a zoo. They laugh and drink in their strange room with a black screen sucking in all light. I would never want to know them. And yet, their eyes fish starlight out of the ocean. My whole world is spent looking at galaxies within a single pupil. A thousand tea cups on a saucer. Terrible beauty.



Splitting hairs

Creased.
Purple brow kisses my hair.
Fence-lined. Choppy.
Tangled in snakes.

I tell you I'm hot. You're

or maybe you aren't.
You're crushing my arm

anyhow.

I think you smile.
Your mouth moves

but I only hear a woodpecker
plying a tree into a door.

Somehow, it's open, and
a suited man with funny hair
stands

says I have to write a opera
and catch some butterflies.
Turn them into bees.
Turn bees into

I roll over and tell him to fuck off.
He insists.
Threatens my nose.

Can't have that.
Naked,
I am through the door and once I am
he offers a coat.
I refuse.
I walk.

The trees guide me.
I.

Don't see them.
Don't see
Swirling plaits of hair,
threads of honey
and sinew
attaching the ground to the sky
as I blink.
as I

cross a mountain or two and

the butterflies
are already bees.

Fantastic.

I hand the man
a bit of fleshy skin
from my elbow.

He nods.
Tosses it.
It turns into a bird and dies.

Now tell me where you got that.

Ceiling beams shatter.
Air vibrates into ply.
I try to know,
I've quite forgotten.

So he stretches his arm
To vast thousands of football fans
whooping.
Yelling around a pyre.

*Tell them. Tell them
why.*

I stare a sigh,
drink a gaze,
plow a storm.

The crowd
chants for my words

*Tell them why
tulips never grow in your garden.
Tell them what hands make yours tremble.*

I lord my silence,
then scream a hyena.
I'm beheaded

cheers

My body is thrown
not onto the fire.

But back through the door
where I see
your face

still tangled,
folded now along your creases
carrying rain.
Carrying
poised reflections

of impassioned dying.
No other bird can match it.

Fog

There's a storm in the clouds,
above the greengage trees,
splitting wreck into ruin,
and my wonder into rain.

Your hand touches my hair,
but it's not your hand.

It's not even a hand.

Mother

“Man is an animal that makes bargains: no other animal does this - no dog exchanges bones with another.”

—Adam Smith

Plainly, the saying goes, that wolves are better
at raising children than elephants—
a wise man might say that kindness
breeds better sons, but men aren't wise.
It's a misnomer that we need love at all.

Our chubby little faces might draw conclusions in the sands of Carthage,
but nothing makes us feel more at home,
than suckling at a strange breast,
having our neck crushed by swift sweet jaws,
and our asses sniffed in a way that seems familiar somehow.

That's all we thought of, even when stumbling around,
constantly falling into warrens,
only having Gaea for sustenance.
But she was a lousy matriarch—
Cared more about clovers than beating hearts.

Clay skin was not her medium, but she at least tried to cover it in worms.
In dirt. In dust.
We took a liking to dust, but it was nothing compared to a black maw
salivating with motor oil and piety.
Nothing compared to Her.

The first thing She taught them, was to never roll down the Palatine or the Capitoline,
as children are want to do.
Instead, they learned to enjoy growling curses while trudging heavy loads for Faustulus;
Their spindly legs often scraped, tripped; over cypress roots and sycamores.
But never strayed.

Never went searching for Artemis.
Or Troy.

Never wandered into the dark birch forests, where even now,
Daphne and Chloe mumble declarations of love into the wind.
Where Hera still weeps for them.

Instead, they attack one another with sticks while She watches.
 tormented by specters of Machiavelli and Hobbes,
 their swords occasionally becoming lightning rods.
 And each time they clash,
 a Boeing 747 lifts off into the sun.

These are not the mewling cubs She might have had.
 These are gods,
 trapped in the bodies of children;
 tasked with a dream no wolf or man could have ever known,
 their hands only hold what is in front of them.

The second thing She taught them was that brothers are born
 to tear each other's bleeding hearts out.
 The loser's eyes are fated by the Parcae to be displayed on a bed of lettuce and thyme;
 outside a holy city bearing the victor's name—
 it's walls gleaming with the spittle of stretched and betrothed women.

Covered in ghastly amounts of frogs. Large ones.
 All being payed to croak.

Gates agape, sheep pouring out of the inner walls, tagged and weeping.
 The stars get closer every day.

Through the main street, a marching band struts.
 Screaming into their instruments to the tune of the Stars and Stripes.
 Not playing them.
 Their howls are valuable, the only thing keeping them moving.

Swords, helmets, and shovels tied around their ankles with twine;
 clattering behind them so loudly that even Athens and Cincinnati can hear.
 And where the basilica stands, she too, stands tall
 atop a pedestal of vinyl, scripture, ivory, and ground beef.

Her eyes know, or they do not.
 Her gaze folds all sight into speech.,
 Her back invites conflict—
 Something we would never try,
 even as she goads us on.
 Her jaws taking speech by the throat
 And holding it against the sunset.

Words are not the language of man,
 Words are for goldfish and wishes.
 The last utterance of dying cacti.
 She taught us not to need them.

With one eye still on her brood,
her snout carefully points to the sky at the gods She killed for us.
Not for food, not for freedom.
Just her tail, threading a careful arc
across the curve of the world.

Her paws crush our chest, but we like it.
Eyes not blinking,
Canines covered in banknotes.
Her legs stand as skyscrapers—
The true God of Rome.

Prescience

I bring flowers
to string along the clothesline
singing alone, clutching

the string.
Mimicking the tide
till I see her striding,
tales waving

towards my guise.
Toward the hiss of
waves, against blight-less
shores. Mouth wide,

to spout a quaint axiom,
but the blood staining
her lips hums

with too much aplomb
for any thoughts to sire
words. Spilling out over
plum lips, fouling

up the air with future
decay. Wishing she could
ask why there is a blade,
stuck; suspended,

between her mind and
heart. Of course,
she knows already:

better to kill for love
than to forget a word.

Pores

A chair moves.
Now you can't see the hairs on his head
but none of that matters—

not when your skull is riddled with cobwebs
and your groans won't tell you where the light went.

Maybe you'll die here.

Still, the griddle is heating up
and soon, your scars will cook away.

Cascade

now?			
i gaze		i	
drift closer		to	
their thoughts,		my	
eyes enflamed by		in-trusion	
golden reflections	of	<i>hexagenia</i>	<i>limbata</i>
gripping my ankles	to keep	from drowning in	moldy dust,
that drags my body	by threads.	it appears to die	turning, scraping
facing it's fate	it was not it's	destiny to arrive so soon	without flesh
without fear.	pure ashes	white with	soft tears
catching	where	the seams lie	there is
nothing	left	no life	union
lamp	i	still	can
not		see.	

II: STONE

The problem is therefore moved from political philosophy to first philosophy (or, if one likes, politics is returned to its ontological position). Only an entirely new conjunction of possibility and reality, contingency and necessity, and the other pathē tou ontos, will make it possible to cut the knot that binds sovereignty to constituting power. And only if it is possible to think the relation between potentiality and actuality differently-and even to think beyond this relation-will it be possible to think a constituting power wholly released from the sovereign ban.

Until a new and coherent ontology of potentiality (beyond the steps that have been made in this direction by Spinoza, Schelling, Nietzsche, and Heidegger) has replaced the ontology founded on the primacy of actuality and its relation to potentiality, a political theory freed from the aporias of sovereignty remains unthinkable.

— Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*

Artemis, Going for a Hunt

I must be sleeping in a new way.
Peeling out of a daze,
she kneels before the perfect moon.

Drenched socks and crimson sun hold me
not against her breast, not even knowing the name
of the silent spring running,
rippling from her carcanet.

She can't know my eyes are so pure
my heart so strong.
The leaves would dry and yellow if she did—

what I hold sticks in the ground, my one substratum,
the bark beneath my cuticle begging for freedom—

bound in lichen, wolveren like her hair,
short and wet, her arteries must howl,
her feet hooved with horns.

*Pluck your eyes out, and maybe then,
she'll pine for you through the greying fog—
teal lines proving new lines along the dirt,
proving new miracles are impossible.*

*The shadow of a parable sticks out of stiff marble
dripping with sap and veiled in pine needles,
all being caught by the red coloratura
Stretching from her armpits,
as if war horns had words to say.*

*This is anointment—
Not an answer.*

A stare is not enough.
My eyes only needed to know her
but my skin ferments in a way unbecoming a body
and it isn't enough to read about it.

Tongue pickles into jelly, and it is still not enough.
She could stare into my collarbones.
Know my mortality.
Cartilage shuddering, I take one step.
And bark. No longer divides us.
My heel flutters the gentle soil—

a leaf crunches.
Her heads turn and I'm in her mind.
Twin polarities—
floodlights, crowing with a howl unbecoming a lady
but twisting or not,
she knows that my glance bounces off her neck.

At any moment, she'll dash away like the stories say—
should have done it already,
my spear arm is tired of waiting,
this is what I've been hunting all along.

Bone breaks bone before I can release—
linen and string, her flesh poring over my entrails—
horns folding red-knotted skin
that was made to be torn away.

My breath flies shallow as it trickles into her stream, and
she smiles up at me, even if she hasn't got a mouth.
Stomach lining and clover click between her teeth—
mane billows out behind her doe's body.

Her claws close around my heart
and silk fills my ears.
my eyes are stone.
There is already a coin under my tongue.

Cancer

and when the moon is
growing

along the fence
and pines the bark so it can tapestry

my roof
and all my teeth,
(which know only what i tell them)

my god wraps these hands in splinters,

splinters in grape leaves

don't make things easier
but aren't particularly bad—

the turning isn't so terrible,

at least when my jaw isn't clenched

i almost can't feel the the wind against my tulips
contorting up lilacs of arthropodal memory

the strain is nearly too much
but it turns out we can all bear it
just barely

and just enough so atlas does not drop the sky
and all the stars shatter against the ground

kicking up coral, dirt
the names of my children.

their shells of blood and invisible hair
fated the day of doom

when peonies leave my garden and reticula fades away

my claws are theirs
for all time.

Crane Wife

Even if you spent the night
weaving yourself
into this beautiful contortion;
seduced into me with a sad smile
only moments
after I released a crane
with an arrow through its wing—

Even if I only find you at daybreak,
and always with shadows
under your eyes—

Even if your feathers
pool about your ankles,
smattered with the crimson
that drips from your tattered plumage—

Even if this is all for love—
you never blink,
so we must part

Mother II

long ago,
 the boy adorned with linen and cinnamon holds a staff
 etched with his Mother's tears in his right hand.

his left is still open,
 he knows the pines see it differently.
 shivering through summer's heat—

the leaves twitch,

in circles.
 a sundew trickle of fen that pools into canyon—
 he can't help but want to call out to it.

but,
 his father always takes his shoulder
 in a plow-formed hand
 eyes saying
 that time is not a luxury.
 that their kind shuns annan streams
 covered in the dew of far-off places.

the boy laughs at them.

shoes leave gouges in the mud as
 he walks past the smithy's fire
 taverner's heart of hearts
 the goat crying
 to an ancient riverbed.

and just above the hum,
 there's a howl only he can hear—
 moving between bark and fog,
 drowning in cacophony,
 but his ears catch it in a vice
 just as wind and shout brought it forth

carried it
 and his feet outside the village walls
 cocooned by shoes his Mother made him.

his frame bends in half,
 and half again to sneak by the watchers
 each of his little footprints whispering the sands
 only hidden by the wild rushes.

where howl becomes voice,
 three tones from dog's wail
 humming a soundless song
 he understands better than his own heart—

better than piles of yard
 hanging out in the open.
 better than the scent of pine
 and his own name

he takes it by it's throat
 and his eyes roll back to a secret place

skipping carelessly
 into the breeze
 past bush and steer

caressing a sweeter touch
 on his shoulder.

over the moor, the boy can hear his father's call
 but froth drowns his rage

and only a dog's whine remains
 nearly invisible, an octave above the wind

a tremble in the side of his mouth

divesting him of difference
 except for a name and a sycophant's dream,
 spilling bodies into cities
 building eyes and frames
 screws,
 knives,
 jam,
 cork.

over the moor, the boy can hear his father's call

but he finds his Mother's voice instead
 tickling his trembling nose wet
 with a new sensation he doesn't know,
 slipping into a sighing pang.

it was always her voice that called the tide.

a twig snaps
 ankle sweeps ankle

and the boy's face swells into father's naked foot
 plowing straight across his cheek, crushing his nose.
 ligament breaking into pieces of ice
 legs
 ribs

a whimper escapes his mouth, mind blurring,
 planting ferns where his blood touches earth—
 his eyes nearly black.

but warmth pinches his face before it turns to shadow,
 and his Mother's claw peels across forehead,
 slicing ribbons of fleshy wood from his skull
 forming a hand around his staff
 her croons thread his ribs into pillars

his eyes into river stones
 his arms into legs
 his feet into paws

into sorrow;
 and beneath his chin
 above the roaring
 his father cowers pleading with tears in his eyes...

the boy stares, pupils pit-less
 places a foot on the edge and pushes, cracking ribs—
 his father falls

falls
 and splashes.

now, the boy stands on two legs,
 the river in his heart and body.
 his ears shoot out of the top of his head,
 teeth lengthen and sharpen.

his staff is changing into an M5, a broadsword.
 helicopters roar and scalp his starry mind,
 erupting into so many birds.

they flurry back to his village
 to all the villages
 every midwife, tribal chief, warlord
 is called to his side,
 bringing with them their livestock,
 grain, picked men.

the boy's eyes only stare at the water ahead,
 snapping a twig under his paws—
 they're Her paws now,

every whim and fancy held in her mouth
 all sprawled under whirlpool eyes
 peering back at him across the roaring
 ears encircled by his own ravens.

he smirks, raises his staff-hand,
 (her hand)
 howls a crying lilt
 in her voice

humanity sees Her mouth and shudders.

and all is still.

until you howl.
followed by a cavalry man,
the washerwoman's daughter.

you're all howling

Golden Shovel

*“I went there with my PIAT.
I fired a PIAT projectile in there.”*

Peace is a fire I
put out when we went
to the desert and all that was there
were people with
hearts, beating. Beating into my
mouth, peeling back that slop
of scum that is left in my teeth. I
can't see any of them, except a
trail of berries. It's so hot.

So very hot that I
can't even see your fired
skin crack in the wind, a
single line tearing. Won't stop
spreading down your arm. I
hold the one thing I can see, a
hollow sunrise, that
only breaks you apart, spewing projectile
shards, leaving my mind in
shambles, knowing you're still there.

The Desperate Man (1843–45)
Gustave Courbet

It isn't enough to have eyes... my thoughts are so limp in my arms. Sea kelp. And my hands, they are forever in my hair. They never used to do that, and my mother always says it's a wonder I haven't gone bald. But I'm only a kook in my own home, there are important things to be done, like clear the table, tidy up the desk, sweep the front step. I will never not be important, but only because I have to be doing something. Like everyone, I have to keep busy; so busy. Otherwise I could think of her. Her raven-headed tempest, paled by wolves milk. A liminal moon. A caring swan— no, because then, I might remember the way they took her from me, even if it is a false thought. Even if I've never moved from this spot.

How she clung to my arm as she went down, blood arraying her countenance with ivory and gold, lined with lead and skater's cramps. Creases pouring from her wound, knowing it will never close. Their dead faces staring up at me, my gun smoking ruin. Bayonet dripping rose petals. Some think I went raving. No. I just had to see if she was still more beautiful than all the others once her soul was in the other world. I understand, of course— it seems like a perfectly mad thing to do if you don't know a person. Maybe that's why the faces in this picture they hung up for me are so lost. They're always moving, but always the same expression. Like they've never seen a face that looks like mine in their life.



Pleasure

"The right of nature is the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say, of his own life."

—Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

As the crowds draw near,
screaming about taxes, dead babies, spire,
the secretary general is eating an orange.
the minister of state, a piece of chocolate.
chewing through monotone boasts.

The mother-servant is crooning
a soft song to the president's child.

I focus on her voice.

The dog is whining for food—
and she rests her chin on my lap;
disdained eyebrows.
my tongue is covered in chives

and the roof of my mouth
with the backing of my throat
is fueling a freight train of livestock
to Brandenburg and Braunschweig
but it will only make it to Chicago,

maybe not even to Jerusalem—

my hands twist knots in the rail line
and the chief of staff raises an eye.

I can't feel my own veins
his mouth may move
but I can't hear anything over the roar
my eye escapes out the window where

white crane holding white rose
flies above the downtown.

Her eyes promise fear.
Her feathers spread over the sea of viscosity
eyeing nothing in particular. Eyeing me.
She looks like someone I used to know.

The president's son is asleep now.
and we are all muted,
drinking a soul every second.
Staring. Taking in what we've done.

I set my champagne down,
sink into the banana-plum cushions,
and catch the eye of the vice president.
I wink.

He's dust before the second shell hits.

Come Apart

I think I am ready for the head of a screw
to become embedded in my skin—
maybe even turn a little,
forcing the crowds to
throw down their shovels—
pick up their guns and axes.

I'm ready for the granite of my monuments
to turn to sand at the touch of silk.

at the the moment of wanting.

Scent of pine needles shrugs the ice from my fingertips,
and I have to wonder if I am the same—
if my gates would open,
and I would dissolve into a porridge of memory.

There would be nothing for me to do
but sit in one place

waiting to be eaten,

swallowed.

No one would ever come.

Son of Venus

I. Canary

Bloom.
 Call out.
 Neither here. Nor there.
 My mother was a dog.

Says a man in the airport.
 His name is Ulysses.
 Hers is.

Or perhaps it isn't.
 Who knows anything anymore.

The world is exploding.
 We are all exploding.

II. Squall

A lair of starlings
 Their eyes so perfect,
 so pitiless.

Can you blame them, son?
 Venus is a heartless place.

III. Fire

Torrential blooms tear through the starlings' lair.
 Neither here nor there, a steed runs bleeding
 from ghosts.

Their eyes covered beneath a sheen of fear;
 so perfect and pitiless. Pits that are ten years deep.

*Call out, dog. Her throat will pour
 a thousand savage curses. Once spoken,
 she'll wish she'd never heard of Greece
 of Helen, Ares, or Ulysses.*

Heroes melt into memory instead of exploding
into empire.

Jailed by divine fear. Haunted by cowardice,
Forced to live long past worldly due.

Venus is a heartless Goddess.

Wanderer

Drip dripping out of a gutter—
hitting the dumpster
so that the residents of unnamed
apartment complex expect the clang
like they anticipate darkness.

Repetition turns into enigma.

Rhythm becomes neutrality.

An arc of water is airborne from
the impact of a boot—
and that is what they hear.

But it is only a wanderer—
sifting the grit on the streets.
Walking through time because
she can't sit still.

To stop moving would
be sacrilege. To banalize
the holy would be a sin.

Heavy rain pounds into
the asphalt, but her heart
remains metered.

She walks out onto the street
and stops, realizing she's knee-deep in
water. The jazzman under the awning
winks.

He is not a sinner either.

But even as he damns that dream,
she can't help but float in
possibility—

Droplets hovering and
coalescing around the lush swing of circumstance.

If only.

Protrusions

through	a dark	window
his	a man	sits, staring
smolder	bright	eyes
gazing	branches of	pine,
not from lack	pointedly	
	of sleep.	
his mouth	draws	a line
of ash	mixed	
with roses.		light splashes
a-cross	his arms,	
scalding hot.		he does
not	want	this taste
lingering		for days
	so he sits	and watches
the raw way	my back twists	
at his	stare	
his	eyes	never
touch		me.

Breathing Underwater

I had only ever known you in twilight,
but when we were covered in shadow,
you came as a black-and-white photograph.

Always; when we walked among broken lesions,
when clouds of fall seemed to leave the trees and cover them.

When I held you.

Especially when I held you, and looked at you.
You were so grey.

That's when the trouble began,
when I started falling and could not stop.

Your face was not dark, but illuminated
by two blazing spheres where your eyes should've been.

Where I would have met your soul,
twilight opened my chest
and I am pulled into a deep blue and raging sea,
swept in a never-ending squall.

Gasping for something, anything.
My limbs flail, but you hate that
And tell me to push them back inside of me. I do.

the darkness remains unchanged
by the ocean.
vibrant saline.

But my body—
overwhelmed by another sensation
discovers a perverse need to go deeper and deeper—

Where are your fingernails?
my vision is going blue,
as I try to reach bottom of a bottomless thing
Swimming, but not quite strong enough—

Where is your retina?
It isn't that I can't swim.
Rather, I've never tried in
an ocean so cobalt

my breath can only hold

much longer than an eyelash before I drown

in a gap of tyrannical silence,

where I find myself knocking on the door to my left—
where you stand. Not knowing what you are.
Blood spills out of your nose,

and your many-armed figure takes me
and pulls me in.

Azure water fill my lungs,
and a final secret flits past my mind.

Scrawl

Perhaps swan's necks are why I run through the streets of Amsterdam;
my heart will never know. It's filled to the brim with clovers
and guitar strings.
Nothing very useful, nothing worth keeping.

But in the night sky, a carillon flies to me on the wings of an angel,
not caring that the fire is spreading. Not worried about the sound
of hollow people struggling to get to the river and drown. Only
knowing that it's bells will never be the same once they are cracked
and rusted from plummeting down onto the township.

That's it. That's the call of the carcass. The depth of the deepest river
flowing through my eye and into my sternum. Who knows what
games his mouth is playing with me, but he is in his own
world and I am in my hammock, reading about cherry trees.

When the bells finally rest among the embers, their
wings tired and singed; the survivors might as well shout to the world
that destiny is not a name.

Sacred Man

...that is, the life of homo sacer (sacred man), who may be killed and yet not sacrificed, and whose essential function in modern politics we intend to assert.

–Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*

A fish swims through a tube. He knows why. The light blinds his sight in a way that makes breath seem pale. But it does not make him lose his sense of dread. He swims, swims, swims, swims; to a point where all light fades. And it is dark. Just the shades on the edge move now. He floats.

Cross with the way things are. He knows this is not their world. Knows they aren't meant to swim through holes. Knows men are more free. Fish aren't free. They're food. He hangs, and a fish swims to him. Swims past him. Comes back. She stares at him. His forced gaze does not change. She stays. He looks at last.

Her glance is a dead one. Like all the fish here. They have just one choice. But not a choice. Born to be chopped up and skinned, but not yet. If the fish could sigh, he would. It would feel good to sigh. His eyes twitch. Hers stare both ways.

Would look like bells if they were free. If he knew what a bell was. Now, her pearl mouth gapes (when does it not) and the small spheres come out. So round. He was once one. Born to die, born to live. He lets it out. And he knows. He

knows they will be here one day. So he floats. Floats. And floats. Looks up at the shades. The spheres hatch. Now, they swim back through the cave of light and down to the dark. Not long now. He sees a friend and speaks, but does not— he drifts. And one day, the shades take the fish with nets,

just like he knew they would. They are dragged to the edge and he wants to ask why they will not take him too. The fish thrash. But he is still. Then, a shade casts him in black. He waits for the net. But a pain shoots through him. He's in the light. "See George? That's a big one."

Close

When the reeds silk into the sunset
and lilacs wither into a slurry,
I glide along the riverbank in a ghost,
tracking dandelions and bumblebees in the mud.
their wings covered in bog lights.

Still, the lives of lilies are a mystery to me
and when I do think about them, I am a swan,
prey to my own imagination and haunting countenance.
my touch is well meaning, but clumsy.

Do they come towards me because I am pure?
is that why I can float endlessly?

Whether my wings flutter or wither,
I suppose I am here now.
spilling out of a ribbon of sun.

My paths are endless,
my points are lights of stars.

Kill the creator.

His horns are wrought of specters.

Laurels

pierced the love that a-gain	by fear breathing as if in an instant and clawing	i fall we knew wearing it didn't to the moment for air by hate forgotten my neck the frost-ridden to water as i bone	living ad-monishment take me i those spired still burns breeze plummet script
back was mortal my screams; red melting turning piercing	un-burdened i've even eyes stone my bones past and drywall all my-self rocking chair by an the sun of a silent	stops sitting estate peeking through summer a pair eyes.	in awning webs
palms un-til it and i find an old covered blinded by and of black			

Spire

I. Clear

Birds chant a sultry song
to the mother of the nearest child.

Tempt her to wander away into a puddle.

Remark on memories
of a transitional cow.

Sleeping.
Heart thumping.

Her heart will sing forever.

II. Bridge

Stairs are not vertical.

Not made for young men,
they don't understand where they're going.

Assured of protrusion.

Covered in nebulous
light.

Casually trying to push each other
into the open cosmos.

Pause.

The way to Canossa is
long and cold.

III. Empire

Henry sings a sultry song to the blackbirds
but seeing that it is vertical,
Gregory will not hear it.
He might see it.

The young man holding his sigil shivers,
almost slips in a puddle of sin, memories
of protrusion transitioning into nebula.

The hens and cows won't
last the day.

Much less the dark light
gazing out from the cosmos.

The thumping from Canossa is a promise:
not war, but a death, both long and cold

Henry stops singing.

Sun comes out and a dandelion blooms.

Mother III

now,

you know her tune.

it

shears

through mind and matter

ruffles

hair under

smoke

dry hungry mouth aching

heart racing

drooling after Mother's

tongue

anxious for her

teeth buried in your neck.

her dying breath, filled

with life

,

your messiah's shoes shift

step to the river

where his ravens splinter in to a pulsating bridge

where you take a

s

t

e

p

towards field, plow, and steer—

to ceiling beam and skyscraper.

You don't notice the shrieks under your boot,

water screaming at your cape.

your trousers
are pulled thread
bare

as sole leaves soil,

milk and blood

dripping

from your fingers into the rushes—
until your feet meet faith,

though they can only make out a bed of moss.
even as ferns

clovers
thorns

try digging into your toes.
there won't be a single nude sole as you march

down

from the bank into this new land,
eyes on her
sloping

tail
scorch in your hair

and in your face

boots flattening pond, sprite, and hearts—
all against the grain
of your mind
all because her contract is eternal and free

her long dripping tongues
reach down

from the stars—

writhe and undulate in your mouth
through your body, filling every hollow—

since she made you love her,
her maw holds no insecurity

your home is anywhere you are
your mind is her fortitude

her voice is always in your ear
and you'll never be alone again

III: ASH

And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. [9] And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

—Genesis 2:8 (King James)

Arteries

It's good, don't you think, that even after the heart is gone from the body,
the rest of it remains, so long as someone looks after it.
And waters it. Speaks to her; it is a her.
The whispering of her name, shooting through
the countless hoses connecting everything.
Still living.

Yet, every day I walk down the street to visit her
the path becomes shorter. The forest lengthens.
Caverns thicken.

Some misguided archaic doctor,
I bleed her, letting it all spatter
over everything. And the trees thank me.
The bushes give me a nod.
The tulips are silent, but respectful.
She sighs.
My sigh nods back.

And then, there comes a day when I can't even see the road anymore,
though I know it is only under me.
She is my form,
and she has grown so much.
She is beautiful; a dream.
Swallowing everything,
even the old house that still must be full of cicadas and cookbooks.
It threatens to be crushed in her final embrace.
As soon as I stop coming, it will all stop,
but I can't stop.

Requiem

Right: Specter; middle-left: Daughter; middle-center: Janus; left: Mother

I.
 flame of glass,
 spool of stars,
 wrath of raven,
 plot of soy,
 pillar of rind,
 we're all afraid of rime

II.
 long ago from now, in a world where the gentle never freeze,
 your mother tells you how the ice always used to creep up the windows,
 and down into the street from some unnamed denatured place.

III.
 city steams in the rain,
 milkman prunes roses,
 father's steer wanders fallow,
 fauns play grisly;
 their pond barely liquid.

IV.
 you thought canyon would conceal you,
 obscure her dry, hungry, hands,
 even as they dripped prosody and clay,
 even as they burned.

V.
 no one knows that
 she only takes absinthe in the mornings,
 when she's quite sure the fog won't lift an arm.

VI.
 your mouth dries,
 and your eyes have whispered shut,
 but there are vague tugs of a shadow
 extending it's arm to your cheek in farewell.

VII.

mother is so kind
 mother is so cold
 mother is so privy
 mother is so joyful
 mother is so fullllllll of rhubarb
 mother is so resourceful
 mother is so pretty
 mother is so strong

VIII.

deep in your father's woodlands,
 there's a secret place
 you like to think
 is yours
 and yours alone.

IX.

why do clovers grow in your garden?
 why are the leaves painted crimson?
 is father coming home soon?

X.

when you get a break from pillaging and conquering
 come down from the hills and sit on the porch with me,
 i'll make us coffee.

XI.

we're nearly there,
 crow's hair so quick,
 the wind almost
 catches the breeze
 in it's mouth.

XII.

willows bough, river runs,
 your mother's eyes ripple red-hot,
 and your father is gone, probably working,
 but nobody will tell you who is in the shroud,
 even as it engulfs itself in flames.
 i know who.

XIII.

quick! ply away her sorrow
 before it ferments into wine,
 his specters shrieking howls into the reflection
 of it's darkening tain.

XIV.

father used to be so tall
 father used to work alllll the time.
 father used to braid my hair
 father used to get up early to bleed all the lambs
 father used to give me rooooooses
 father used to break branches of oak across his thigh
 father used to be here with me

XV.

please, oh please will you haunt me when you've
 gone to that dark frozen world?
 God knows i need a cooling breeze.

XVI.

through the wind,
 with the blessing of the hierophant
 under a flaming sky
 he rides into your moor
 on a pretty snow-tailed mare.

XVII.

your fingers tremble
 as she tries to cool the knife clenched in her hand
 by blowing an icy breeze over it.

XVIII.

old milk curdling into cheese,
 bayonet affixed to m1,
 red wine-bottle swinging in a burlap sack,
 your mother's name in tongue,
 and red-dust cloak covered in tears.

XIX.

before you close your eyes and dream of a soft midwinter,
 clasp a hand to my thigh
 and tell me why i can't feel my fingers.

XX.

outside the garden gate,
 lilies die.
 the sun glows.
 outside the garden gate,
 i see his pale dead face
 and in near-anticipation,
 my heart stops.

XX.

look not at the garden
 look not at the viney gate
 look not at the roses
 look not at the oaken glade
 look not the oaks
 look not the red cliffs
 look not at the stream
 look not at the canyon
 look—
 look not at me

XXI.

ants crawling over bark-ridge,
 water cackling into an eddy
 rotted oaks waiting for the fires to come
 red-clay banks shooting out of the water
 the blue eyed-gaze of a girl shielded by her mother's wing,
 the other tightened around a bowie knife.

XXII.

 you ask,
 does your soul sing for me?
 i say,
 souls don't sing,
 they burn.

XXIII.

your legs tangle
 as frost folds over her body,
 and the man with sweaty hands
 rides into the sun with her crowns of gold,
 looking over his shoulder to reward you with a wink and half a life

XXIV.

WHERE IS THE CLOVER BED
 WHERE IS MY BLUE-EYED DOLL
 WHERE IS THE CRAKE'S CRY
 WHERE IS MY FATHER'S MOUTH
 WHERE IS THE DOORSTEP
 WHERE IS MY DARLING'S DRESS
 WHERE IS THE WINTER WIND
 WHERE IS MY MOTHER

XXV.

her fingers are granite
 her legs are brick
 her gaze is glass
 tinged
 with a frozen morning light.

XXVI.

unwashed plates sing
 at inferno spilling through the kitchen windows
 and you hide from the stars behind a chair,
 your ears blue,
 your eyes wide,
 unable to make a sound.

Faith

The lines in my forehead may move,
but if there is no face,
then there is no river to fill.

You may jump in the harbor for my tears,
or continue to rip my pages in half
if that pleases you.
It's all the same in a body.

But I have to wonder what it would mean
for all my might and skin to fall into the sea,
for ancient riverbeds to refill themselves.
For my form to melt into my desire.

The papery roots poking out of my stomach aren't enough
to summon a storm into my valleys.
To break the dam, or even dig a well.

So in the absence of wanting,
why not make me choose between beds
of branches or of pinions.
It's been so long since anyone could make me cry.

Space

there's	no room	for spoons	i
a-mong	the millions	of thoughts	them
already	have	a-bout.	my walk
to school	spilling	in-to	the winter
maintain	my	and in	can't
are more	hatred	breath	of seagulls
after them	their feathered	preservations	me
	than e-nough	to send	of hay
	with	a needle	

This is their way—

their sweet struggle to leave me

for their phantasmal deity,

their paws floundering for control.

It will only bring them
back into my mouth.

My children are everywhere.

Martin Luther, Napoleon, Mussolini;
all bowing at my feet in the right way.

They kill the only ones who could resist me,
burn them with disease,
force them into my mouth,
where they learn to love me.

Gourds

Dandelions only know names in the den of shadows
and forget as soon as they see a spring day

My hands aren't quite what they used to be,
but they still know how to twirl

the pantomime of summer
gripping it's own throat.

It only hurts when the cherry stems
fall from your tongue,
suffocating silence into a slow drip,

piercing the veil of sky above our heads.

at one moment, the stars are clear.
the next, they are a flock of birds.

Boundless, they'll fall into immolation,
but you and I won't see it. Not as long

as we cut each other into ribbons,

curled up tree trunks, hoping for
the haze on the wind to spirit away.

Cosmic Ordinance

Sanguine fleas,
is a redundancy,

my grandmother used to say;

cleaning the hood of her convertible
with aloe and mustard gas.

Cigarette between her teeth.

Not my grandmother,
but someone's.

Opening the door.

Sitting down.
Throttling the engine.

It roars.

She continued:

did you know that cows

think tractors are distant cousins?
That ravens

can only speak

when someone in the other world

dies?

Her hand waving for me to get in.

I join her. She shouts now.

All trees

have two deaths.

It isn't polite to talk about.

Stars stand each other up
because they're afraid of intimacy

There are worlds in a raindrop.

Acropolis

Kissing stars draw crowds
 in tears with clawing gnarls of bark, collecting
 creases of unborn laws; salivating
 over free terraces—

wrought by imperial claws, anointed
 in the shadows of snakes.
 Her stone face knows it all,
 but they can't see her—

they're dancing
 adrift a galaxy and drinking with
 the sun. Nearing the star,
 peering past the

veil of fear. Forgetting it.
 And seeing the way galas wane;
 twirl into protrusions of metered
 pantomimes trying to be

waltzes. Most stop there, except
 for one. He knows there's only one
 woman worth loving. Playing
 into the fantasy of pressing

into her granite lips at midnight.
 Tying the hard knot of love
 through proxy; but knowing,
 this particular union requires

a dowry of entrails. Taking
 the step anyway, pulling himself into
 her hard mouth, which somehow
 moves against seaweed lips. Slithering

through doors that aren't
 open. No mouth, no eyelids.
 pursed teeth grinding against her
 cheeks. Skin sanding with sin.

Her gaze destroys galaxies but
 relaxes at his touch; for who can refuse love.

Cacophony

And a world stuffed with infinity
splatters over her left eyelid,
not that she would notice this premature death.

The mortal mind, bound by strict register,
only abides a single reality

especially when you've forgotten your umbrella.

But the worm wriggling through the weeds of the preordained depths,
trembling at the storm's might
shudders

suddenly drenched with another volume massive enough to pierce it—

it can't help not knowing how small it is

Small enough for her not to see any of it.
standing like a column, as if that changes anything.

Her feet a dangle of roots.
Her coat a school of fish.
But on her forehead:

Transparent butterflies
exploding from their liquid cocoons.
spraying fire, ice, drywall, stardust.

All at once, but none exactly the same.

It lasts forever, and for a second—
specks of moisture running down
the nesting dolls knobby in her curled hand;

breathing, dying

Circling one another.
loving the thought
of their bodies pressed against each other.

Caressing without touching.
crying at the smell of the lead crimson rouge
on each of their perfect cheeks.

It all washes down her face,
grooving canals and crevasses
flooding even the driest desert

There is no grass for this world,
no garden.
just her—
her wet face
finally inundated with life.

Death throes

please	don't play	my games	
please	don't salt	the earth	for me
please	don't build	a nest	
	don't take	my hands	for constellations
	don't wash them	with	the horned
god's tears	I can't	be un-dying	for you
please	don't bleed	for feathered.	dreams
please	don't cry	and feel	my veins
don't	grow trees	or conquer	nations
please	keep	me far	a-way
	don't climb	my cliffs	in the summer
don't kiss	my rotting	corpse	
don't name	our son	or teach him	ball
don't	wade	through streams	of mud
don't	want	for	love

Paring

Even the light of the stars is not enough
to see what lies beyond the shell
of a coconut. At least
not this coconut.

I hold it right next to the sun,
and it's sights are closed to me.

My gaze is not shattered,
only damaged.

So, still blind with grief,
my mother takes a piece of a mountain
and sharpens it

until it can cut through a tear.

At the point of incision
an eye is haloed in chrome.
a hand reaches out.

I take up my knife
and cut another strip away.

Greek Wedding

Calm waves don't fly quietly
 from blameless faces
 plumbed with circadian laws

that caterwauling into salt,
 must be held clear and just,
 even by a doom-bringer
 in the age of heroes.

This idle swan of sunlight
 constricted in serpents—
 plagued by a touch mistaken for love—
 touch pinioned to a god's shoulder—

the deities of the future,
 their celestial bodies
 held in contempt by all those who know
 the nature of their savior,
 golden apple clenched in her fist
 and crimson din stuck between her teeth.

Her name is their name now:
 call her discord
 a feathered mantra
 coiling into sand soaked rain—
 peeling away their minds but not their lies.

Screaming and clawing—
 craving their dead father's mercy,
 maybe regretting having sliced him into bits
 allowing him to drip all over everything
 in that so subliminal trickle,
 leaving a light that can't be seen
 until it has already been.

Zeus knows how natural it is to fear the sun
 and swallow your children whole
 in a slurry of hair and kidneys
 so they don't grow into starlight,
 tangling their souls in ageless inferno.

They'd only blaze eternally,
chewing at the fabric of their mother's gown,
crows protruding from every piece of her,
tearing lightning out of the sky.
Even a man greater than a man who can hold
air, fire, and beast is preferable to an heir
of ozone or sulfate—

When Peleus finally held her in his arms,
Achilles was already dangling in arabesque
drenched in fate and chthonic depths
swallowing his fortitude into his heel—
skin iron, but not steel.

Chosen for him by yet another slave.

And when Paris chose Venus,
for a bride soaked with oil and thyme—
the sun had long set on Olympus.

Their Pandoran sin, covered in discord's sweat,
gleaning off silver coins
placed on heavenly eyes by time,
who wreathed their cold arms in laurel

so that they'll burn in the yellow country of their mother,
and keep the factories warm for the winter
until their bodies are burned away.

Dog

call out	to me	the same way	you
shout	at an	ant	hill
	as	the liars	and thieves
crawl	up your	leg	
pulling at	your	tears	
not wanting	to swim	in them	vomiting
	at the	thought.	
take	my hand		i'll
give	you	destruction.	
your eyes	aren't	made	of fire
so the sun	will never	rise	on our
body.		it's not	even
our	body		you're
a	god	damned	canine.

Mother V

In another life,
her bones were shiny screws

fleshed together by
granite and metal ply,

ribs shooting into the clouds in
proud misconfiguration,

all to form a hollow womb
for our shallow little bodies

where we choked on banknotes
and wishes,
all until we consumed ourselves
in fire
at her whisper.
taking her with us.

even dead,
her maw is still black and wet,
a deep dark pool filled with green trees
and homeless old men.

dead but alive
reborn, but unchanged.
was she ever here?

once myriad, but adorned with selfsame ants
parasites
now, her skin only sheds rust and spores.

beams connect feathers to nothing.
drywall plastering into dust,
coated in amber and moss.
Vulcan is too dead to fix any of it—
none of the gods are here to kill her, sustain her.
rapture her body with light.

Among piles of shadows,
it is difficult to feel her heart.
Impossible to find it through the catacombs—

shopping cart full of broken AEDs pokes out of the rubble—
piece of a column, misanthropic paintings, Jupiter's head, so many beetles.
and a lulling howl,
making her frost-tinged fur shiver.

We would seek to resurrect her,
reconstruct her
and bow before her might as she chews us into plaster.

My fingernails struggle to tear through all of the grates and flesh,
covered in bits of meat and chunks of a lung,
a heart should be here.

But all I see is liver and a school bus,
syringes and pencils poking through me
as I rummage around in her chest, hoping for a pulse through shadow.

If the others knew what we did,
they'd remove our hands from our eyes.

But my fingers come apart in her mouth
and my love knows no surprise,
gazing down on the stumps where my palms used to be,
peeling into my shoulders, the hollow body of my stomach
folding into a paper crane, then nothing.

