

OUROBOROS:
PARSING THE POWER OF METAPHOR AND THE MYTHICAL
NORM IN A CREATIVE POETRY COLLECTION

By
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A CREATIVE THESIS

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This project is a collection of original poems, divided into five sections that mirror the passing seasons. Each section and season focus on a different embodied experience, beginning in Early Summer and ideas of incubation and creation, and concluding in Spring with poems that capture moments from adulthood. Each season is rooted in figurative language that is cognizant of the season's abundance as an anchoring element to the organic creative process. The thesis also engages with existing literature that discusses the importance of figurative language in poetry, Dr. Andrea Herrera's three-dimensional model of inequality that revolves around the 'mythical norm,' and Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject as a way of positioning this creative thesis in a conversation with the creators and theorists that have come before. By naming this project after the ouroboros, the ancient image of the snake devouring its own tale, the thesis foregrounds its consideration of who is the consumer and who is consumed and its preoccupation with reimagining the embodied experience through the lens of food and in the packaging of poetry.

To my sous-chefs

I like to think of all the people who have had a hand in this project as my team of sous-chefs. There is a word in Korean, *son-mat*, which roughly translates to ‘hand taste.’ The idea is that when handling the ingredients in the fermentation process, the use of bare hands is essential to the overall flavor because the hands impart elements of their unique microbiome into the final product.

This project would not be the same without the cheerful direction of Dr. Anna Carroll or the presence of Dr. Rachel Eccleston and Dr. Elizabeth Raisanen on my board of advisors. I have been inspired by my many incredible professors at the University of Oregon, especially Dr. Andrea Herrera who has been influential in my growth as a critical thinker and activist. I could not have made this work without first learning to adore poetry from my dear friend Marti Esther or learning to approach problems creatively from my mother. I would not have had the courage to undertake a thesis without the unwavering support of my dad. I owe my entire family a thanks for passing on a love of cooking, and an unwavering tradition of kindness. I would not have had the mettle to continue plodding through sources and sorting ideas without my roommates Emily Housley or Olivia Hougham. I could not function as an author (or as a person) without my sisters, Lauryn and Rosemary, who sat with me patiently as we weeded through my first attempts to write these poems. And I could not have made this without my love, Danielle McManus, who took the time to preserve my voice in audio recordings for this project and who has flourished alongside me as we have turned our kitchen into a sanctuary.

The hands of everyone who has influenced, inspired, and encouraged me have left their imprint here. This work carries the essence of all those who have been part of its creation, and for that, I am deeply grateful. I invite you all to savor and enjoy.

All my love,

Alana

P.S. If you would like to listen to me read my poems aloud, here is the link to the audio files.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2RmT2p-N9w>

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OTUROBOROS

PARSING THE POWER OF METAPHOR AND THE
MYTHICAL NORM IN A CREATIVE POETRY COLLECTION



By Alana Cole Winter 2025

To Begin

I am craving something salty.

Something decadent.

I am craving comfort.

I go in search of ingredients at the Eugene Farmers Market in early May, an empty bag slung over my shoulder, hair loose under a gray sky. I was flipping through a cookbook of mine, *The Cook You Want to Be* by Andy Baraghani, and I found his recipe for romesco. My mouth watered as I recalled a dinner in London, sitting with my mother, eating potatoes tossed in the decadent red pepper sauce, bright and alive on my tongue. We had requested to sit outside—even though the late July nights were getting cold—so we could hear each other speak. Blankets wrapped around our shoulders and the whole city to ourselves, we gorged ourselves on potatoes, sangria, and a melting leg of lamb. I wanted to scoop that memory out of the ether and hold it in my hands, and here was my opportunity, outlined in Baraghani's careful instructions.

However, it comes to my attention, after drifting past the first few stalls in the early morning, that peppers are not in season quite yet. In fact, if I want to make a romesco at all, I would have better luck wandering the fluorescent aisles of the grocery store. Not wanting to leave quite yet, I buy myself a potato doughnut from one of the bakeries set up for the day—I bite into it and cinnamon and sugar dust my cheeks, stick to my lips, fall in flurries down into the cradle of my lap. It was not what I had imagined for my outing, but it is decadent just the same, eating sweets in the watery sunshine of a spring day.

It occurs to me, as I sit here, that I am not all that attuned to the seasons that surround me. I don't live in anticipation of a strawberry—if I truly want one, there will be some at the grocery store. I notice the changing of the weather, the comings and goings of warm days when I can sun

myself on the grass, but it is the passing of a backdrop—fleeting and so often forgotten in the scope of my everyday. And, as I am prone to do, I wander deeper into this rumination. Are there other elements of my life I do not notice, seasons that have come and gone, disappearing in the presence of mundanity and my indifference? My life is also full of seasons, but the change is often so infinitesimal that I can only perceive it in hindsight. I have become; starting as the very whisper of a body, into the body of a child, into the gangly and uncomfortable body of a young girl, and then into fledgling adulthood... and now here I sit. Made up of all the bodies before me. And, awaiting all the bodies I have yet to be. It is not just my physical body that has had seasons, either. My mind has changed; my heart has been altered as I have stumbled through growing up, up, up. The growing is not linear and there is no end in sight. I have changed from curious and presumptuous with grubby hands, to self conscious and aching from breast buds and first periods and jeans that no longer fit. I have gone from final growth spurts that leave my shoulders aching to battling my belly, avoiding lunches to keep myself appropriately hollowed. I have moved from nights with an empty stomach to hopeful wanderings around a farmers market in search of something that will not only satiate my body, but enliven my life. Those must also be seasons. And this is not the end—beyond this moment I will have another and another until I look back at this day as a beginning. I am the oldest I have ever been and the youngest I will ever be again.

I wish that I could take these thoughts and press them into the hands of the people walking past. I want to call my sisters and tell them that the body they are in, the season they are in, is precious and fleeting. I wish I could reach back through the years and take my own hands and whisper that the kitchen can be beautiful, will be beautiful, will transform without me even realizing it until one day I am dancing in air fragrant with toasting hazelnuts. I wander home, bag empty, recipe bookmarked for August.

The Use of Figurative Language

As the wish to capture the seasons of my embodied experience lingered, I turned to poetry as the method for sorting through my thoughts. As I wrote, a pattern emerged. The figurative language in these compositions—the metaphor, the apostrophe, and the vivid imagery—are what make my work understandable and consumable. When I use poetic metaphor, it helps my visceral instances of embodiment stand out from the page by likening the body to organic matter, like food. The flesh, the skin, the wet and calloused bodies in a garden or on a plate have so much in common with the forever changing human body yet introduce a strangeness that can arrest a reader and coax them into new understandings of embodiment.

However, many arguments question the usefulness of figurative language. Anthony M. Paul begins his 1970 essay “Figurative Language” from the journal *Philosophy & Rhetoric* by noting that methods like metaphor are “flowery” and obscure the meaning of the speaker (225). If figurative language must be used, he argues there must be a reason for it—perhaps there is something offered in figurative language that transforms and adds to what would otherwise be a perfectly ordinary statement. The drawbacks of using figurative language are that it creates space for misinterpretation, and it can often be trite if using the same metaphors that are part of standard English lexicon. *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* by George Lakoff and Mark Turner, first published in 1989, lists numerous examples of metaphors that are part of English speakers' conceptual framework like the idea of death as a departure, time as a thief, life as a journey (52). These ideas don't arrest a reader because they are so familiar that they become commonplace, despite their employment of figurative language. The use of metaphor, specifically in poetry, can also be a tool of objectification. *Hypatia*, a feminist philosophy journal, published Eva Feder Kittay's “Women as Metaphor” essay in 1988, which

articulates how women often are used as emblems to make sense of men's "conceptual economy" (63), by mythologizing motherhood or collapsing ideas of sexual femininity into caricatures like "the Witch, the Whore, the Temptress" (75).

The gray area of interpretation generated by the use of figurative language is the main drawback and argument against its use—but what if that ambiguous space is actually the main merit of using figurative language? Often authors reach for metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, symbolism because they describe an experience much more accurately. Conveying transformation is all the more engaging if I write:

I was once a pomegranate seed
and went down, as one does,
to see a stomach.

It was almost the same as this
making. - Early Summer, "I remember this"

This excerpt introduces an impossible embodiment, being a pomegranate seed. It also likens being consumed to a making, not a death, setting the stage for you and me to enter a new imaginative space that is made possible by the figurative language of the poem.

[Metaphor is] all kinds of thought: thought about emotion, about society, about human character, about language, and about the nature of life and death. It is indispensable not only to our imagination but also to our reason. (Lakoff and Turner xi)

Figurative language, and metaphor specifically, can function as a window into the experience of others without requiring the shared knowledge of an experience. That window is the gray area, the ambiguity, which may allow for misinterpretation, but also creates space for

mutual understanding. "Metaphor and Coupling: An Embodied, Action-Oriented Perspective" by Norman Y Teng is a scholarly essay from 2006 that addresses multiple theories concerning how metaphor functions as a form. The theories discussed concern how metaphor is used to connect domains of media, explain an individual's experience with embodiment in their understanding of what is real, and critique the way that metaphor understands and regurgitates cultural experience and existence. Though Teng provides critiques for all three methods of metaphor, I am most captivated by the idea that metaphor could capture my embodied experience and press it into the hands of the reader. I wanted to be able to say *this is what it feels like, to have your foot fall asleep! It is the granules of a sugar cube dissolving in your mother's tea, atoms slowly coming back into orbit*. Sharing my own embodied experiences became the guiding throughline for my poetic process.

One of the hardest parts of embarking on a creative thesis project is balancing organic process *and* primary inclusion of figurative language *and* a focused theoretical lens *and* a narrative arc. As I began sorting through my poems, coalescing them into sections that form seasons of embodied experience, I needed an anchor to organize them that was more succinct than just figurative language. I decided to use seasons in the year as my dividing sections and seasonal food to focus my use of figurative language. Inspired by the cookbook *Six Seasons: A New Way With Vegetables* by Joshua McFadden and Martha Holmberg, I pruned my figurative language to not only describe the embodied experience of each section but to reflect the seasonal produce of the section's title. McFadden and Holmberg divide the year into six seasons as the four standard seasons "don't adequately reflect what's truly happening in the field" (McFadden and Holmberg 11). Inspired by the extension of summer and the idea of "microseasons," I used five seasons to describe five different stages of having a body. Early Summer investigates

incubation, End of Summer captures moments of early adolescence, Fall discusses the discomfort of puberty, Winter describes the transformation into young adulthood, and Spring is a culmination of all the seasons before it and a more loving relationship with adulthood.

My thesis became a collection of poems that wrestle with having a body, perceiving myself, and being perceived, all while using figurative language to fold in elements of seasonal ingredients and constant change. The poems of this thesis do not seek to dissolve gray area, but to explore it and question why it is essential when wanting to communicate personal experience to someone who has never been in my body. I found my answer to why the preservation of the ambiguous space is so essential not in my English classes, but in one of my first ever Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies courses, titled “Gender, Literature, and Culture.”

The ‘Mythical Norm’

I remember sitting in Dr. Andrea Herrera’s class and watching them draw a model of what they called the ‘mythical norm’ on the chalkboard. I sat there, furiously scribbling notes, trying to wrap my head around all of the theories that were combined to make the three-dimensional model (made more difficult because the theoretical model was being confined to a two-dimensional surface in the lecture). Before class, we had been assigned multiple theoretical texts focused on inequality from feminist and anti-racist perspectives, including the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw and Audre Lorde. However, their watershed contributions were just the tip of the iceberg. Dr. Herrera had pulled from many different academics and activists to create their own cumulative model of how systematic inequality functions, representing how intersecting identities and proximity to privilege work in tandem to create unique experiences within all people only united in their shared otherness from the ‘mythical norm.’

The complex theories that help access the idea of identity and how it exists in a social framework begin with the ‘charmed circle,’ introduced in 1984 by Gayle Rubin in the chapter “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality.” The ‘charmed circle’ is a two-dimensional diagram that theorizes the realities of sexual peril in society (153). The circle has two sections: the inner limits and the outer limits. The inner limits are essentially sexual behavior that is considered normative in society, though it is important to recognize the limitations of the theory, as it was postulated in 1984. The outer limit is the corresponding sexual behavior that is considered deviant and is "othered" by society. For example, "heterosexual" is directly opposite to "homosexual," and "Vanilla" is the opposite of "S/M." This model posits that specific categories are more socially acceptable and, therefore, legible. Though this model only pertains to sexual peril, this way of thinking can be expanded to understand how other categories, or identities, can position you either in the inner or outer limits of society.

The ‘mythical norm’ is a notion that was first coined by Audrey Lorde in the 1984 essay “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference.” The term describes the understanding in every person that they are *not* the perfect norm of society. The norm, which, in America, can be defined as privileged identities like cis, white, male, and wealthy, is not only what society rotates around but also is understood to have power (2). The ‘mythical norm’ idea builds on the ‘charmed circle’ by identifying how the tiers of socially acceptable behavior can be likened to socially acceptable identities that society covets and revolves around. However, Lorde points out that the true ‘mythical norm’ is an illusion and unachievable. True power rests in proximity to the ‘mythical norm.’

Cathy Cohen furthers the work of Rubin and Lorde in “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics” by considering the impact of domination in the

tiered systems, like the ‘charmed circle.’ Cohen suggests that there are not only hierarchies that make some people more legible to society, but also that the more legible you are to society, the more power you have to influence and impact those who are less empowered (437). This construct of dominance favors some while actively inflicting oppression, inequality, and violence on those that exist further from the ‘mythical norm.’ Patricia Hill Collins also theorizes the importance of domination in her 1990 book, *Black Feminist Thought*, where she introduces a three-dimensional framework called the ‘matrix of domination’ in which people are organized in hierarchies but also systematically more empathetic to the experiences of people with similar identities because society cordons people away based on their identities (18).

Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality in her 1991 article, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” adds to the ideas of Rubin, Lorde, Cohen, and Collins by illuminating how identity interacts with and impacts individuals and positions them in relation to the ‘mythical norm.’ Intersectionality is the theory that a person's unique identities situate them precisely within the social systems that determine how you are perceived, treated, and understood, which can be likened to a person's legibility (1245). Crenshaw's theory came out of a court case that addressed a local car manufacturer's refusal to hire Black women *because* they were Black women. The manufacturer defended themselves, saying they hired Black people, and they hired women, and so the rejected women had no foundation for a discrimination claim. However, all their Black employees were men, and all their female employees were white. The discrimination was happening not just because of race or gender but because both identities intersected to create an experience that had been rendered invisible by the legal system: it was discrimination for both at once. Though

Crenshaw's original example explores the intersection of race and gender, her theory applies to anyone and everyone and describes the intersection of infinite identities.

These theories combine to offer Dr. Herrera's three-dimensional understanding of inequality and power. If the 'mythical norm' exists, a perfect storm of identities considered the most socially legible, then everyone must exist outside the 'mythical norm' in varying proximity. Instead of the two-dimensional parameters of inner and outer limits proposed by Rubin, perhaps everyone is situated by the intersections of their identities. The further you are from the 'mythical norm,' the more illegible your identities become and the less power you hold. As every combination of intersecting identities is unique, the only uniting factor in this model is the exclusion from the 'mythical norm.' This model is an amalgamation of theories prioritizing understanding and dismantling inequality because the further someone is from the 'mythical norm,' the more susceptible they are to violence. To injustice. It is essential that I recognize the work of these academics not only to credit the way their arguments build on each other to create the complex model of the 'mythical norm,' but also because my use of the model as a theoretical understanding of ambiguous space between all experiences does not grapple with the threat of violence that exists in the model's representation of proximity to privilege. However, the model's potential is expansive and *does* present a radical possibility of knowing without collapsing nuance and individual experience into two-dimensional categories. The three-dimensional model suggests that everyone is other and therefore united in otherness, which is how I will be using the notion of the 'mythical norm' in my approach to understanding the power of figurative language in poetry.

As a poet, I wondered how this theory could be used to understand the impact of poetic language. After all, the revolutionary quality of this framework is understanding the complexity

of identities that create unique experiences while serving as a uniting model based on otherness from the 'mythical norm.' Because the model is three-dimensional, one of its defining traits is the space that surrounds each individual, preserving their unique experience that comes from their specific intersections of identity. That space is similar to the gray space created by figurative language and perhaps offers a new perspective as to why utilizing the ambiguous nature of figurative language is important. Figurative language helps to make experience legible similarly; describing a moment through fantastical elements that help preserve the experience and make it understandable without collapsing the nuance of the individual.

I did not come to this realization on my own. The contemplative work of Dr. Herrera was essential to understanding how all these theoretical texts come together to understand the ambiguous space of figurative language as a transformative one. And I am not the first to recognize the intersections between poetry and activism focused on dismantling inequality.

Audre Lorde writes:

Of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper. (2)

I hope by incorporating theories of resistance and inequality into my creative project I can create a thesis that is not only beautiful and poignant in its individual components, but also a project that is rigorous in its theoretical approach to the larger impact of figurative language in poetry.

Positionality and Autobiography

There is a poignant tension in poetry between the fictitious and autobiographical. Kathleen Rooney's essay "Based on a True Story. Or Not" grapples with the fact that poetry is often not labeled as fiction and it can be easy to assume that the moments described in a poem are the confessions of the author as well as the speaker, but that is not the case (2). A poem *can* be autobiographical, but conflating the author with the speaker is a disservice to, as Rooney calls it, the "shared imaginative space" that exists for both the author and the reader as they experience the creation of a poem (7).

This thesis begins with an introduction in the first person, as does the very first poem of the thesis, so it is easy to imagine that these poems are autobiographical in nature (though many of them deal with very fictitious premises that are often revealed as fantasy). While not every poem is rooted in a personal experience—I have never, to my knowledge, been a pomegranate seed—it is important to recognize that these poems very much follow an autobiographical arc of my relationship with my body and with food. In "The Self's Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography," Stephen Owens recognizes that the relationship between the author and speaker is often fraught with contradictions as the speaker is only a mere moment of the author's experience (86). So, while the poems themselves are not divulges of private instances or even perfect replications of my own mind, the moments that they describe are very much rooted in my own experiences and are therefore limited. As a cis, white, American woman who realized she was queer in her teens, my poems are informed by those specific identities. My struggles with an eating disorder in early adulthood and my deep love of food now are inspirations for how I conceptualize the narrative arc of this project and are responsible for its conception: they are elements of autobiography that are inextricable from this project. The art that begins each section

is of a white woman because that is the body that I inhabit and the lens through which this project was created.

That being said, it is my hope that the autobiographical foundation of this text does not detract from its impact beyond myself. The importance of using the ‘mythical norm’ as a framework becomes more important than ever in this hope—that I am singular in my experience, but through figurative language I can craft moments that make my experiences accessible to a wide audience. Neither of us (you nor I) know what it is like to huddle our bodies into the rotting hull of an apple, but perhaps together we can both access how that loneliness might taste.

The Ethics of Consuming

When creating a meal, each individual ingredient contributes to the final product, and each of those ingredients comes from somewhere. Not just a grocery store, but a supplier, a farmer, a plot of land. Where those ingredients come from, and how those sources are compensated, contributes to the ethics of that purchase and its consumption, even if it may be invisible in the final product of the meal. The purpose of a thesis is consumption. Articles and poetry and art have been consumed to create the original project that then must be analyzed through the lens of other contemporaries. These meditations are captured on the page as words and images that are then consumed by the committee to determine if the project is successful in its endeavor to be a thesis. It must be consumed; that is its purpose.

One of the ways this project is crafted to be consumable as a thesis is the inclusion of a gloss. A contemplative dissection of each poem that appears at the conclusion of each section to prove the poems as rigorous products of academic and formulaic process. However, the gloss, the vehicle necessary to succeed in my endeavor to create a thesis, is in opposition of my goal to

incorporate the ‘mythical norm’ into my project's theoretic framework. While the primary goal of the ‘mythical norm’ is to visually understand proximity to power and susceptibility to violence, it can also be a method for visualizing the ambiguous space between us all. A celebration of the gray area, an essential ingredient for preserving nuance while reaching into the hearts of others, compressing experience into a consumable form, the goal of figurative language. The tension between the gloss and the theoretical potential of the ‘mythical norm’ in understanding poetry’s use of figurative language is resolved by my creative interpretation of what a gloss can be. Instead of one paragraph dedicated to dismantling the mystery of each poem, I have created pages resembling journal entries that invite you as the reader into my thought process when creating each section. What is the main embodied arc of the section? What are the seasonal ingredients? How do these poems correspond with other works in other sections? Why were certain forms chosen? All of these questions are touched upon in the provided gloss without the surgical and academic dissection of each poem as a recognition of the ‘mythical norm’s’ influence on not only my theoretical understanding of figurative language, but also my approach to creating a final body of work.

As I worked to string lines of rhyme together to illustrate imaginings anchored in food—eating and being eaten—I considered how this process is itself a consumption. There are many debates about the ethics of consumption, usually revolving around the system of capitalism which I myself am mired in when creating this project. Who are the creators? Who benefits? It must be recognized that I am standing on the shoulders of giants, of theorists, artists, poets, and chefs in the endeavor to earn an honors degree. The system of citations helps to make this project ethical, but some of the ideas that I incorporate are focused on dissecting and resisting inequality, and yet I am operating within a hierarchical system of higher education that often perpetuates

inequality. That, combined with the positionality of my person, is essential to acknowledge in the endeavor to be more ethical in my own consumption and use of sources.

And, if you are reading this, you too are a consumer. Just as some speakers in my poems are eating or being eaten, you are sinking your teeth into the product of my mind and savoring it in its entirety, perhaps without considering the complex chemistry it took to make such a piece. It is too easy to consume mindlessly. To shiver in pleasure at a particularly great rhyme without shivering at the imagery of a body being consumed. In an effort to address the concern of ethical consumption (which seems an impossible conundrum to satisfy in a few paragraphs) I have wrestled instead with the inclusion of the abject to temper your experience and perhaps make you, as a reader, consider the creation of each part of this thesis before moving onto the next decadent poem.

Utilizing the Abject

The phobic has no other object than the abject. But that word, "fear"- a fluid haze
an elusive clamminess- no sooner has it cropped up than it shades off like a
mirage and permeates all words of the language with nonexistence, with a
hallucinatory, ghostly glimmer. Thus, fear having been bracketed, discourse will
seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confront[s] that otherness, a burden both
repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and
intimate: the abject. (Kristeva 6)

The term 'abjection' was theorized by Julia Kristeva in her 1980 book *Powers of Horror*. While her theory has many facets, the main element of her school of thought that I have woven into my own thinking about my thesis is the internal and external sources of the abject, and how

they are intertwined with embodied experiences. Kristeva first explains that the abject is not an object or a subject. It is a quality that is recognizable as repulsive and, perhaps, also enticing. The feeling of enticement would be the feeling of morbid curiosity, being drawn to something obscene, that exists outside the scope of sensibility. The abject can be both internal and external. As an example, Kristeva writes “I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit” (3), describing the horror of having something as disgusting as bile emanate from inside your own person. As soon as you vomit the abject, an object from your own body becomes reprehensible and other than the self, and more repulsive because it was once inside the body.

But the abject can also be external and can emphasize the border of the other. To exemplify this, Kristeva writes about what it is like to see a corpse, the distinct horror at seeing something that was once alive and is now distinctly *not*: “There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border” (3). The cadaver marks the change from the abject that comes from within the self and becomes separate from the self being extricated from the body and the body becoming abject, becoming an emblem of wrongness and distortion from how the self is understood and preserved. Kristeva goes on to say that the festering, the putrid, the decaying, and the dead are abject because they destabilize the self, the perception of identity.

Barbara Creed works through Kristeva's arguments in conversation with the genre of horror in her article “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine.” Here, she focuses on Kristeva's assertion that the mother is marked by both internal and external aspects of the abject which sets the stage for the feminine body to become monstrous (Creed 218). Kristeva articulates two realms of existence in her book: the realm of the mother and the realm of the father. The realm of the mother is essentially the realm where there is no revulsion from excrement—defecation,

vomit, sweat, menstrual blood are all just elements of having a body. Essential to living. The realm of the father, however, assigns new understandings of the body that implement feelings of shame or guilt that become the basis of understanding internal and external manifestations of the abject (Kristeva 72).

The use of repulsing elements in horror are ways of “deliberately pointing to the fragility of the symbolic order in the domain of the body which never ceases to signal the repressed world of the mother” (Creed 216). The abject is intimately connected with ideas of mothering, creation, and ultimately death. Writing is a birth of sorts. The speakers of my poems are soft impressions of myself and of my body that I pressed into the paper and made sense of through food. The process of it, parsing the different people I have been and allowing them space to bemoan their stomachs and wiggle their toes in a rainfall of tomatoes or the bellies of oranges, has felt akin to a mothering. Though I am not a mother, and have not been the scene of creation, Barbara Johnson says in her 1982 review “My Monster/My Self” that autobiography is just that: becoming a mother to the monster of yourself (10). I have nurtured each of these poems into a final body of work that is curious about the being of a body. And because each of my poems is consumable in some way because of the inclusion of food, it was essential to add elements that temper the consumption and invoke the horror of becoming objectified, of becoming consumable. That is why early images of crisp apples, luminescent pearls, and summer weddings reappear as rotting fruits, squirming bodies of maggots, and corpse brides.

Functioning as a full meal

Salt Fat Acid Heat by Samin Nosrat is more than just a cookbook. It is a love letter to the science behind making a meal sing; salted pasta water, dry rubbed meats, the method of

heating a stainless-steel pan, the transformation awaiting after a generous squeeze of lime or a dollop of butter. The title tells you everything you need to know. The four elements that must be in every culinary experience are salt, fat, acid, and heat. They work together to balance each other, combatant and complimenting in equal measure and a chef that is in tune with all four is well accustomed to the kitchen. Inspired by this guiding principle of creating fully balanced meals I have designed each section to have a poem that incorporates one (or multiple) of these tenets so that each section can function as an entire meal all by themselves. However, when all the sections are combined it is not just a meal I offer, but a banquet.

The virtue of using every ingredient to its fullest potential is a sacred tenet of McFadden and Holmberg's book—the entirety of a vegetable can be utilized in a single recipe (12). In the same way, I hope that I have taken the time and care to cultivate and revise the material of this thesis so that each word is meaningful, each section, each poem momentous enough that it satiates by itself.

Ouroboros

“The Ourobóros as an Auroral Phenomenon,” written by Marinus Anthony van der Sluijs and Anthony L. Peratt in 2009, investigates the history and genesis of the image of the ouroboros. Often a dragon or snake with its tail in its mouth to form an unbroken circle, the ouroboros dates back to 5000 BCE (3). The image has appeared in the mythology of many different cultures, from the neolithic Yangsháo culture to prehistoric Egypt, and has been linked to ideas of immortality, death encircling the world, the creation of the world or the sun, the cyclical ocean, and even celestial beings (4). Suljis and Peratt postulate that the genesis of this symbol may lay in an auroral ring in the sky as opposed to being rooted in an actual event of a

snake devouring its own tail (22). No matter its origin, this image has been used to symbolize cyclicalness, creation, death, and consumption of the self, all of which are primary features of my thesis. Using the ouroboros as the title of this project is important to me for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it is a consumption of the self. In this thesis, I explore both my experiences with food as a consumer and also what it feels like to be consumed by the gaze or the expectations of others, and the ouroboros is both. Secondly, the symbol is up to interpretation and the idea of multiple possibilities and correct answers is at the heart of my inclusion of the 'mythical norm' as a new way to conceptualize the poetic use of figurative language. Finally, the ouroboros does not end. There is no conclusion, no happily ever after, even after the last word is written for this thesis. The seasons return and change and are resplendent in nuanced ways over and over, and in the same way, the embodied experience does not end. The tension between being the consumer and the consumed is not resolved. This thesis ends with the idea of being young and can be read over again immediately, as the first poem is a reincarnation. My hope is that this thesis is a middle ground; whatever journey it may take you on today will not be the journey you experience if you return to it. We cannot be sown up into neat narrative lines. One poem or twenty-five poems are not enough to describe what it is to be human, what it is to have a body. And yet I hope you can enjoy stepping into this world I have created, rich and resplendent, a moment of satiation for the soul.



early
summer

I remember this

I have been a seed before,
floating on my back in fathomless salt,
each grain adorning my body
as I soak and swallow.

When I was an orange, I remember
a crooning voice in the suck
of a citrus belly,
learning to play pith-
the strings of a violin-
these strands do seem playable,
viscous and rich in their reverberation.
I've never sang alongside veins before.

I was once a pomegranate seed
and went down, as one does,
to see a stomach.
It was almost the same as this
making.
I remember being laved and being loved,
the hum of satisfaction following me down
to become bubbles in the boil
of acid, my flesh— oh look,
to be flesh again—
looked the same as her stomach
lining.

I remember being coriander too,
ground into silt and left
to swim around inside myself
on a spice shelf, face and nose
on opposite ends of the jar
until I was finally invited
to shrivel and shiver alongside
the curds of butter in a cast iron.

To be floating again—
curled up and awake

as the wake of the world rocks me
into being.
Oh, I wonder what I am
to be.

Aphrodite

Once—

of course, my love,
it begins with Once—

Ouranos fell in drifts, stirred
by the breeze and mingling, unmade,
onto the wet tongue of the sea.

He settled in the hallowed caverns of space
between salt and sand
which sift in the soft exhales of the ocean's
teeming body.
In the deep, the shadows were drawn in,
a mouth shutting, a nursemaid pulling curtains
to a close,
and her body
began.

The ocean itself is eddies
of all that has been, my love.
You may see a graveyard in the settling salt;
bits of bone
but imagine also
the spottings of starlight,
the fragrant air between skin and skin.

Slick white fish, shining drops of oil,
knit her bones together
grain by grain.
The butter corses of crabs slid out
of their shells to fill
her hollows—
they were muscle, after all, and what else
makes a stomach?

She was built in a brined necropolis
and burgeoned out,
a body formed in a womb and
a mouth.

Soft lather, her afterbirth,
settled in her hair—
foam from a famished
maw

and they called her
Goddess of
Beauty.

When it rained tomatoes

I begin in the ecstatic bright rainfall of tomatoes,
the pores of my skin akin to
a trembling soft palate.
Vivid red skin and sun slicked seeds
dissolving in the current of my amniotic world.
I know sunlight the way I know her voice
pealing and echoing and reverberating through my skin.
I will never know sunlight like this again,
never feel the acid of a being sink between my atoms
like kisses-
this rainfall is a shower of kisses
from my mother's mouth to mine.

Paltry is sleep,
dining as I do.
When all the world is a feast
as it will never be again.

The Womb

I woke up in a cocoon of mango skin
and though I could not feel my knees,
I could feel the press of them
against my chest,
curled into myself in a way that kept
the tips of my fingers and my toes
pearl white,
the pins and needles of a sugar cube.
Syrup sluiced from the filaments of fruit
into my hair, pooling
in my ears,
coating my eyelashes.
I knew the movement of my breath
by the way it cooled
the slick,
so quiet was the pocket
with an ocean of beta carotene
to muffle the shaking of my bones.
I knew without knowing, that
my eyes would not open, my eyelashes
were points, were wet edges.
Dark knives primed to
separate skin.
I woke up too early.
I woke up in the womb.

Ouroboros

I wish to write of warmth, but what do I know
of being warm?

Bodies are so frail,
so tightly strung.

I can see my purple veins-
dark vinegar in a bowl of oil-
writhing deeper into me
as if seeking the firm haven of a bone
to wrap around,
a thicker blanket of fat to
conceal its tenuous body.

I don't know what warmth is
though I curl my knees up to my chin
and try to swallow myself,
to sink myself into the unreachable and
unquenchable heat of my stomach,
I can't fit my jaw around my knees.
My bones are a choking hazard
in my attempt to make myself
a perfect circle.

thinking
through

early summer

seasonal ingredients

• tomatoes • oranges

• coriander • mango

↳ beta carotene

this first section explores
ideas of incubation and
becoming a body through
poems that describe
reincarnation, creation myths,
and reimaginings of the
womb.

the beginning of the body
through the lens of early
summer sets the stage
for imaginatively engaging
with embodiment as
a return of vibrant
life.

repeating motifs

- being created in a confined space
- oceans
- fetal position
- early instances of becoming conscious,
becoming independent
- feeling loss about a moment that is still the
present
- the physical textures of the world being
understood by the whole body

"I remember this"

To be floating again—
curled up and awake
as the wake of the world rocks me
into being.

Oh, I wonder what I am
to be.

**Cognizant of the incubation
process noted by words like**

**introduces the idea of
seasons and the thesis
functioning as a cyclical
piece of work, with each
ending returning the
reader to this moment
of reincarnation and
transformation**

**the
indentations
denote the
asides from
the speaker
telling this as
a story**

*"citrus belly"
"stomache
lining"*



"Aphrodite"

Once—
of course, my love,
it begins with Once—

**retelling of the myth of
the goddess of beauty's
birth with a focus on
conflating the ocean as**

**both a mouth and a
womb, a place of death
and of life, an inclusion of
the abject**

a body formed in a womb and
a mouth.



"When it rained tomatoes"

the pores of my skin akin to
a trembling soft palate.

word akin functioning as a

**marker of simile, making the
whole body the sensitive skin
of the mouth**

**brief rhyme scheme
included here to mirror the
cadence of other poems**

I will never know sunlight like this again,
never feel the acid of a being sink between my atoms
like kisses-

one of the finest dining experiences we each partake in and yet cannot recall

"The Womb"

curled into myself in a way that kept
the tips of my fingers and my toes
pearl white,
the pins and needles of a sugar cube.

**painting the image of the
fetal position, indicating
infancy in imagery**

**beginning cognizance of being conscious in
moments of transition and transformation,
like a butterfly beginning to shiver in a
chrysalis to break it open**

so quiet was the pocket
with an ocean of beta carotene
to muffle the shaking of my bones.

I woke up too early.

I woke up in the womb.

See "The Pupa
and the Pith"

"Ouroboros"

I wish to write of warmth, but what do I know
of being warm?

I can see my purple veins-

**parallels in the first stanza of "do I" and
"I can't" with the second stanza's "I
don't" and "I can't"**

I don't know what warmth is

I can't fit my jaw around my knees.

My bones are a choking hazard
in my attempt to make myself
a perfect circle.

**wanting to enter into a stomach, any stomach, through the fetal position
and consumption to make the body "whole" again, reflecting ideas of
consuming and being consumed that will echo throughout the thesis**

end of summer



Making a mess

While the pie dough sleeps
in the cold
I push my fingers into the open mouths of raspberries
and tip pearl sugar from the package-
 they go skittering
 across the hardwood floor.
I walk my fingers across the pale back
of the butter
 my mother
 left to soften.
I sink deep into its center
and suck its body from under my
nails.

Is my body a kitchen?

My mouth is a cavern
like my mother's kitchen cabinets.
 Each of my molars a bowl,
 cradling fledgling food.
Why else would the palm of my hand look so much like
a mortar, my fist a pestle intent
 on shrinking sugar so it
 may dissolve into fat?

Cream congeals
in the jar my mother gave me-
I shake and shake and shake
 the softness of my arms moves in tandem
 Flubbing and Flexing
while the open vein of the vanilla bean
buckles beneath
my mother's hand
 For sweetness
 And salt? One grain to suck on.

Is my body fare?

My mother lays the pastry dough over
a pie tin and it settles,

the same slope as skin
over my stomach.

I knead myself and wonder at
my softness.

My mother is making dessert and I am
making a mess.

But I get kisses on the forehead
when I lick a spoon clean-

ice water for a pie crust.
Cold cloth for a girl.

Mama, does the pie need a kiss too?

We plant kisses on the crust
before it finishes
becoming.

The cambium and me

Beyond the boughs I spy a turret
gleaming between swollen clouds.
The gnarled branches bend a staircase,
golden leaves offer me a crown.

I step into the cradle
fit for my bare feet -
I step lightly so as not to wake
the robins fast asleep.

Fitting nails into knots,
boughs sneaking kisses on my head,
I brush away the grasping arms
to see the castle that lies ahead.

Behold the careful towers,
battlements built of stars,
a moat painted with cirrus
moored not so far

from the highest branch,
which I perch on (just to rest),
laying my head in the slope
of the apple tree's wrinkled breast.

And if I sleep too long,
if I melt right into the tree
who will tell my mother
what has become of me?

Who will tell my sister
when I bear fruit in the fall?
And who will tell my father
that I never left at all?

My skin begins to calcify
bark binding me to the tree.
There is no space between

the cambium and me.

I remain, still dreaming
ripening beneath changing skies,
a painting of a palace burning
just behind my eyes.

Lady of Summer

Haven't you ever dreamt of being a strawberry,
sleeping in the yellow mouth of summer,
waiting to sweeten and expand?
Haven't you ever felt the ripe curve of red
between your teeth
and
(in the midst of salivating before sucking down)
wished to split open?
Haven't you lingered on the longing of being
adorned with seeds
the way a lady drips with pearls?
Dreamt of a riot of elegant curls
so like the curling green crown of that
simpering berry?
Haven't you ever wondered what it would be
to bleed sugar
and satiate,
to make the mouth
fill with water
like the ground seeps
when the cold comes in?
Oh, to be loved as well as
the ripe strawberry,
Lady of Summer.

When we were apple seeds

My wedding began during the renaissance
of summer,
in the deep purple fist of the first
September days
when the sky is swollen
and the trees are tired from their summer
of celebrations.

My feet kept calling me down
paths made for dancing
 carved by lifted roots,
 patterns of a waltz
 only known by the oak
 and the sagging spruce.

When I was smaller than an apple seed,
and so were you, I took you
to the chapel of brambles,
a nave buried in the thicket,
to wed.

We had no need for shoes or clean
knees or soft dresses.
Instead of flowers for your hair
you adorned yourself
with rosemary and the feathering body of dillweed
 their bodies untethered
 and bundled together
 as they always dreamed to be
 growing on opposite sides
 of the lawn.

I unmade those garden beds to make a bouquet
of chard and lacey carrot tops
to chuck my chin on my way
down the aisle.

The wind settled, belly down in the grass
to witness, and the heat came with it.
A swollen guest that pressed her lips

to your cheek and mine-
Summer herself
giving us away.

Raspberry Girl

She sleeps in my grandmother's garden,
I sneak out in the slump of the day.
I squeeze between brambles
and ask if she'd like to play.

I love her green knees,
her legs that grow thick with thorns,
her mouth with the full bottom lip,
and the soft red curve of her form.

She takes my hand and drags me deeper-
shows me where the honey bees snore.
We walk our fingers through the comb,
licking lips, politely asking for more.

When I sleep she wanders,
meeting each morning with dewdrops in her hair.
She shows me how to make a crown for my curls
and knights me the fairest of the fair.

I told my grandmother about her soft hands
and the way she drips red sugar when she's full,
but my grandmother doesn't understand my cries
when I find her body in my bowl.

thinking through **end of summer**

seasonal ingredients

the second section describes the curiosity of early childhood. Understanding the world through touch and taste, going in search of hidden places, spending time untethered, and using the body as a vehicle for embarking on adventures. This section is all about childhood questions and fantasies, hands grubby with dirt smushed into wet, smiling mouths.

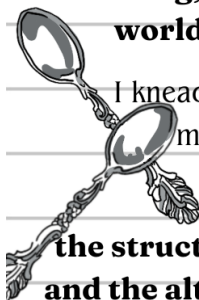
• Raspberries • Strawberries • Vanilla
• Apples • Chard • Carrot tops
• Rosemary

Repeating motifs

- Pearls
- Crowns
- Knees
- Personification and bodies given to the inanimate
- Curiosity, exploring, and understanding with all the senses
- Unmaking, being messy, taking up space
- Touching

"Making a mess"

I sink deep into its center
and suck its body from under my
nails. **example of the speaker
eating, understanding their
world through the senses**



I knead myself and wonder at
my softness.

**the structure of the poem,
and the alternating spacing
of the indentations,
represent the swinging
between the speaker
understanding themselves
as kitchen and fare**

"The cambium and me"

I step into the cradle
fit for my bare feet -
I step lightly so as not to wake
the robins fast asleep. **ideas of cradles
and being asleep
signaling a tender
and innocent**



ABCB
Eie in rhyme scheme
to "Featured Display of
Bare Bones"

**moment of
childhood**

"Cambium"

**focusing not on
food itself but on a
producer of food,
the tree, and the
enveloping of the
body into another
vehicle of creation**

**refers to the cells of the tree
that build new wood and
increase the tree's diameter**

There is no space between
the cambium and me.

Haven't you ever dreamt of being a strawberry,
sleeping in the yellow mouth of summer,

wanting to be edible in the
same way, which becomes
terrifying in the decay of

"Lady of Summer"



"Featured Display of
Bare Bones"

idolizing the
strawberry and

Haven't you lingered on the longing of being
adorned with seeds

conflating it

the way a lady drips with pearls?

with ideas of

also in "making a mess" + "the womb"

feminine beauty

describing the earth as a water
mouth wishing to consume the

"When we were apple seeds"

like the ground seeps
when the cold comes in?

body of the speaker

see "When the Frost Comes"

When I was smaller than an apple seed,
and so were you, I took you

ideas of unmaking tidy spaces to make
room for make-believe

second-person

address of "you"

engages the reader
as a participant



I unmade those garden beds to make a bouquet
of chard and lacey carrot tops
to chuck my chin on my way
down the aisle.

Summer herself
giving us away.

the personification of

Summer, which reappears in

"Featured Display of
Bare Bones" +
"Ballad of the Bones"

their bodies untethered
and bundled together

the two indented passages imply romances between
the trees and herbs, smaller stories tucked into a
summer recollection, rife with personification

"Raspberry Girl"

I love her green knees,
her legs that grow thick with thorns,
her mouth with the full bottom lip,
and the soft red curve of her form.

all emblems of femininity
that can also be cause
for insecurity, being
adored with childlike

↑ ABCB rhyme scheme

wonder

She shows me how to make a crown for my curls

and knights me the fairest of the fair.

crowns reappear in the

poems of this section, the
image of a fairytale

the death of a friend and the
image of the body primed to be
consumed by the speaker
heralds the coming of autumn

but my grandmother doesn't understand my cries
when I find her body in my bowl.



"Lady of Summer"
+
"the cambium + me"

autumn



Feast

The tablecloth drapes across my knees
and hides my swinging feet.
I keep my elbows carefully off
the table where we'll eat.
Each fork sleeps like a soldier,
each spoon has the quiet smile of a dame,
but the flowers on the butter knife
put them both to shame.
The candles slouch low in their stoops
so I can barely see
the grandeur of the feast
laid bare in front of me.

The stomach of a squash,
the wilting head of broccoli
a leg of meat, all salt and fat,
is set in front of me.
Cream sauce with rosemary and butter,
sinking into potato skins
and bread with soft insides is
ready for me to dig in.
A glass of wine, crimson and thick
is set northeast of my plate
I cannot believe this abundance,
the table buckling beneath the weight.

My stomach is a snarling thing
desperate for dinner to start
I want to pile my plate high and
tear it all apart.
I wouldn't need a knife or fork,
fat thick upon my lips-
just gristle between my teeth
and bread within my grip.
Around my neck the host ties a napkin,
a noose before the feast.
A sharp tug and I start- I'm not a guest
but the trussed up beast.

tea is served

oh, my dear! you've finally arrived!
i've spent the long months
imbibing so i can't discern if
you're properly dressed...
take your shoes off, at least!
i've always thought it is so much more
decadent
to feel jam, crusted and condensed,
squish up between bare toes
you can see the footprints
i've left
over the tablescape-
a graveyard if i ever
cared to name it
don't mind the fruit flies with their
rubbing hands
and bulging bellies-
they've kept me company
in the fat lull of afternoon when
the scones turn to stone,
the cakes sag in their centers-
the teacups make for poor company
look at them!
facedown, teabags lolling like
fathomless tongues-
i've stopped
making tea- just sucking
on leaves...
oh goodness, you're still here!
sit down, sit
down and stay a while yet
everything is growing cold but
we keep warm by dancing-
elbows in the custard and knees
sharp with grains of sugar-
place your hand in mine
and frolic

atop my table-
When the frost comes

The soil is too frigid
to bury my body.
Frost lays a shroud,
a veil,
over the stooping head
of heather.
I crawl along
an aisle lined
with rotting leaves.

I am awake but the trees are
of a dream-
sprawling arms open to the heavens,
weaving an aspe
to hide me
from the sky.

I struggle to the altar
of a lone apple tree,
mud slick beneath my knees
as I drag myself across
the earth.

I snatch a rotting fruit,
sink my teeth into
festerling flesh,
building myself
a hollow.

At the foot of the tree, apples languish
past their prime
and one is chewed right to its center-
black seeds cast out like footprints.

Featured Display of Bare Bones

I lie forgotten on the forest floor.
The robins have grown fangs and
forgotten the way home.
They mistake my glassy eyes for fruit
and the world is plucked
from my skull.
The rabble of the forest
peels me like an apple.
It is a dream come true when
the maggots come
to speckle me
like pearls.

My bones are discovered after Summer has
sloughed off my skin
and all I am is brittle and
all I have been is sinking
in the bellies
of the beetles.
I am dusted off, the last of my ligaments
a final delicacy
for the undergrowth.

I am washed.
A bottle of bleach to ensure I'm dead and
a fishing line through my once-head.
I am strung in a hallway, my mouth gaping
at the shallow dish of my hips
feet away.

I am on display.
The curve of my body is an art piece, now
that I've been whittled
a little smaller than I was in life.

*Look, the stark yawn
of the eye socket— it is almost as if
she's looking at*

you!
Ballad of the Bones

Oh pale sleeper,
hanging fair
in the sifting,
dusty air-
What do you sing when
this empty hall
is draped in night,
in moonlight's pall?

Oh perfect lady,
on the line
so sweetly preserved
from the teeth of time-
Tell me, please,
how I may be made
to hang beside you
and never fade.

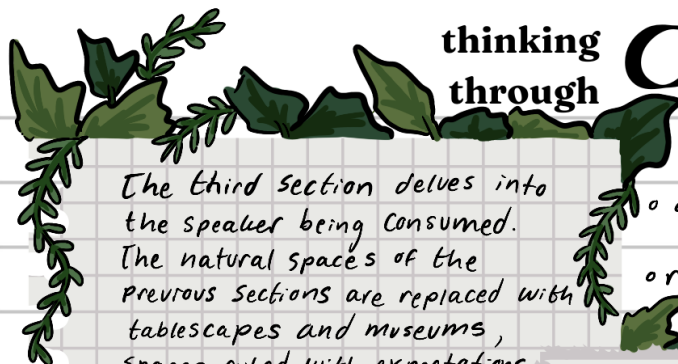
If only I
could stretch again
and feel my skin begin
to thin,
to feel the restless hand of air
rest upon
my head of hair-
to crack and pop instead
of sway,
to feel the hungry teeth
of day.

I would open
my jaw wide
and try to swallow
the whole of the sky.
I'd seek out oranges and
dig in

hungry for flesh,
skin on skin.
I'd worship salt,
I'd drown in wine-
revel in my wrinkling
in the soup of time.

I'd surely stretch
my fingers down
and bury myself
within the ground-
I'd feel my smile
peeled away-
my organs rot,
my skin decay.
My belly full of
oranges and wine
to satiate
the bugs who dine.
But what a joy
to be consumed
instead of drying out
in a dusty room.

Oh simple stranger,
don't reach for me
a pale outline of what once
I'd be.
Go quick, small one,
back to the sky
and tell my lovely days
goodbye.



thinking
through

autumn

seasonal ingredients

The third section delves into the speaker being consumed. The natural spaces of the previous sections are replaced with tablescapes and museums, spaces ruled with expectations and parameters that create more limited relationships with food and the body. It also begins to intersperse death and decay as another way of understanding seasonal transformation.

° apples ° broccoli ° squash
° rosemary ° potato ° oranges

repeating motifs

- Creatures attracted to decay; fruit flies, maggots, beetles
- Orderly spaces: dining tables, tea parties, churches, museums
- Burial
- Decaying bodies
- Time as a warping and distorting force
- Hibernation
- Bones
- Wine

"Feast"

The stomach of a squash, describing the
the wilting head of broccoli food with words
a leg of meat, all salt and fat, attributed to the
is set in front of me. ABCB body
rhyme scheme

food as a blazon, intending to draw attention to how a blazon is often used to objectify and dissect women's bodies and comment on the consumerist nature of the form

"tea is served"

allusion to the Mad Hatter's tea party

the vibrancy and freshness of food that has characterized the figurative language up to this point is warped by rot

the scones turn to stone,
the cakes sag in their centers

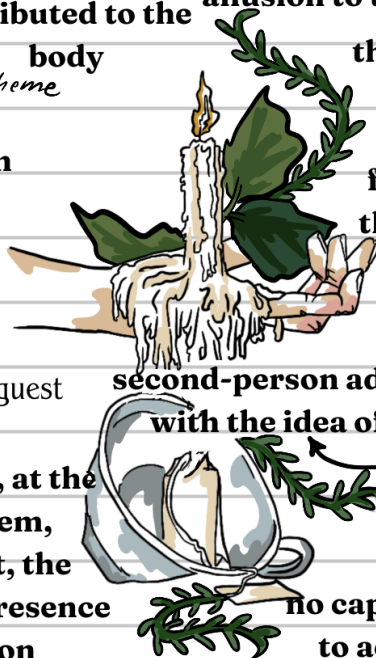
A sharp tug and I start- I'm not a guest but the trussed up beast.

example of a volta, or "turn", at the very conclusion of the poem, recontextualizing the feast, the speaker, and the menacing presence of violence and perception

second-person address working in tandem with the idea of an intimate invitation

place your hand in mine and frolic atop my table

no capitalization or hard stops to accentuate the dialogue



"When the frost comes"

The soil is too frigid
to bury my body.

At the foot of the tree, apples languish
past their prime

The poem's beginning and concluding stanzas serve as bookends for the body, encompassing the middle "I" statements just as the body is ensconced in a rotting apple.

*pipe, heavens,
altar, shroud,
veil, aisle*

are all words that transform the open space of the orchard into a holy place, a burial site, or a perfect spot for hibernation

sprawling arms open to the heavens, weaving an aspe

can be read as part of the narrative arc continued in



"Featured Display of Bare Bones"

The robins have grown fangs and
forgotten the way home.

the maggots come
to speckle me
like pearls.

My bones are discovered after Summer has
sloughed off my skin

"The Cambium and me"

connecting images from End of Summer become distorted

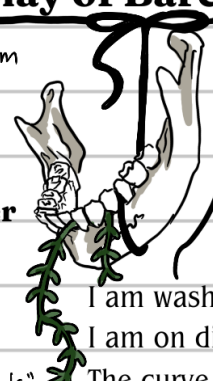
"Lady of Summer"

"When we were apple seeds"

one of the first instances where the body is whittled away and manipulated outside of the speaker's purview for the purpose of being objectified; a consumption

I am washed.
I am on display.

The curve of my body is an art piece, now



"Ballad of the Bones"

(first speaker)
Oh pale sleeper,
hanging fair

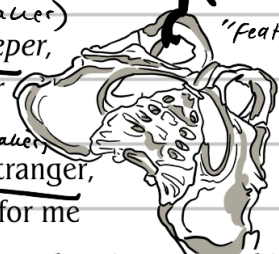
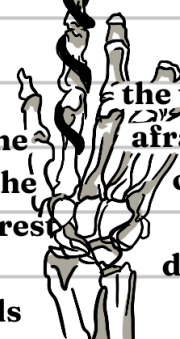
(second speaker)
Oh simple stranger,
don't reach for me

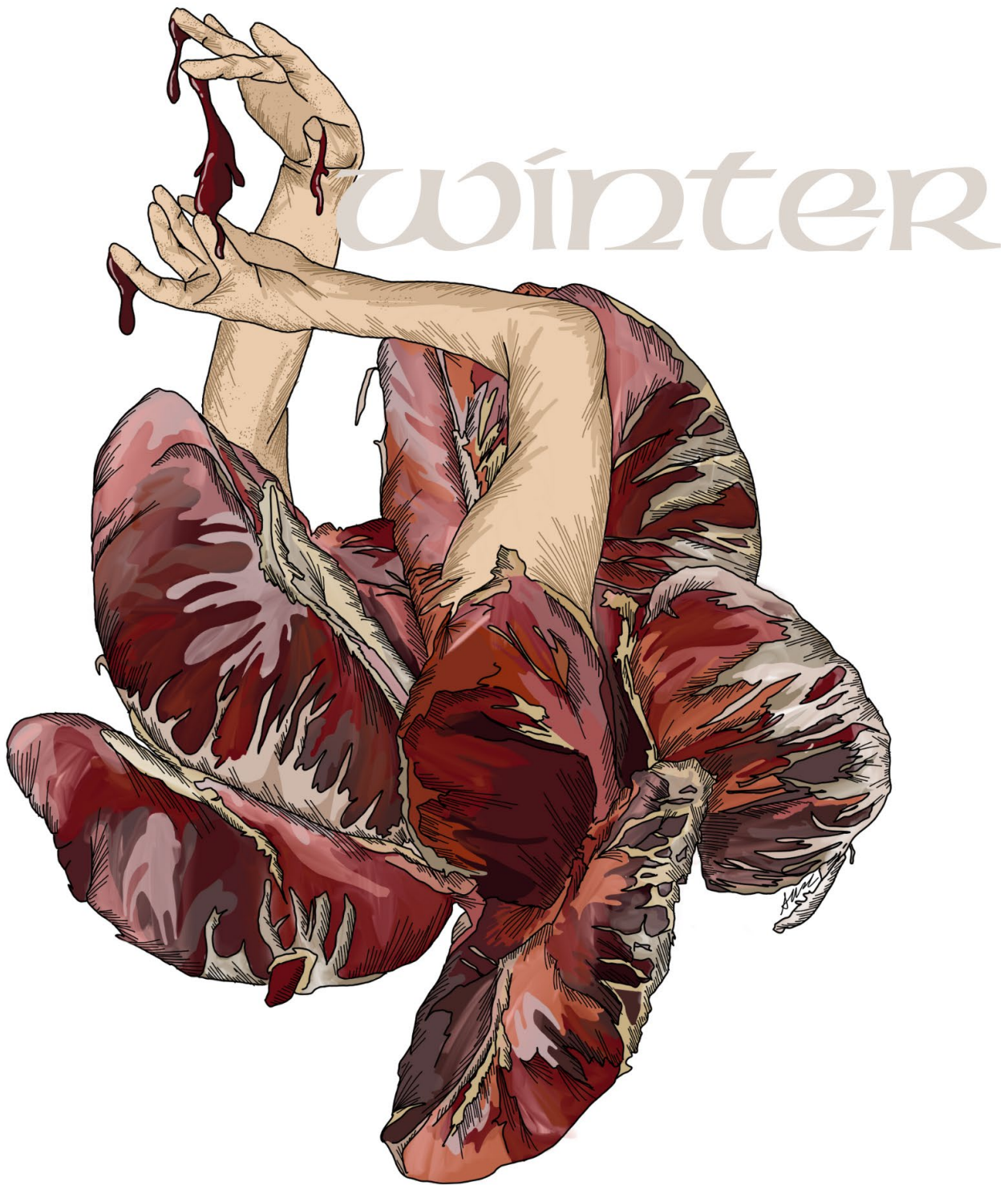
the first speaker is notated in the first two stanzas in italics, and the second speaker responds for the rest of the poem to capture the conversational aspect of ballads

But what a joy
to be consumed
instead of drying out
in a dusty room.

the tension between being preserved, afraid of change, and continually an object and the natural order of constant transformation, decomposition, and rebirth into something new

a continuation of the bones displayed in "Featured Display of Bare Bones"



Temptations

Tonight, I am standing across
from your new apartment
stilling my feet before I can cross
your street.

There's ice in the gutters and
snow melting into my hair-
it falls like parmesan.

Soft drifts settle,
the perfect garnish for your lit windowsill
and a warm bowl.

Do you remember how hard I cried
when I was told my heart
was too old for my body
and cheese
was to be a luxury?
Suddenly the world was the melting bellies of brie
and the crumbling of cotija,
goat cheese studded with blueberries and
rich burrata splitting onto the faces of
freshly sliced tomatoes.

My mouth is dry in the cold tonight.
I am used to withstanding
temptation.

Our kitchen is a carcass

It rotted over summertime and the walls
swelled while the dust moved into stay.

The cups on the counter bear
smudged fingerprints
from the last glass of wine we had,
toasting to the locked door behind us
and the last tomatoes
in the fridge.

Cobwebs adorn the windows,
stretch out to sever sunshine-
a stately veil over
a petrified face.

I find an old orange peel
beneath the cupboards, curling
into itself, solemn as a cathedral,
dry as a bone. This, too,
was a good place
for worship.

I toe off my shoes and my feet
stick to the hardwood floor we once
anointed with olive oil.
I set my solitary bag down,
ice dripping onto the floor like tears,
and sink into
this familiar grave.

My grocery store has a NICU

Fluorescent lights and
tubs in neat lines
filled with bodies that
aren't sure of their surroundings.
Forms shivering for
sunshine and met
with humming blue lights-
a poor approximation
of the bright sky.
Conditions manufactured to foster life
that aren't quite the solemn thicket
or the warm womb.
Tucked into their cradles,
the lettuce and kale and spinach
wilt a quiet death under the careful press
of plastic bags.

Weightless would I be if I could have
my own section of
sea, a seasoned solace banked
by blue walls
where parsley could part my hair
and salt could settle
in my nail beds,
a tender place for
pale heads.
I would not know the bite of cold,
I could steep and
sleep among lemon zest
and the waterlogged kingdom
of chicken bones.
To keep the world a
muffled song, beyond
the water in my ears-
I imagine myself gulping.
Becoming so sodden
I seem to drown.
But it's not a death,
not really,
not here.
Ingredients can't
drown, my dear.

I knew my world by touch
 alone
I knew the gossamer tapestry in silver and ochre
I knew the dissolving of my spine beneath me
 and the sleeping of my toes.
I knew, among the hardened shell
between all I had once known
 and what was becoming
 was the same soft breath
between winter's coarse fingers
 and spring's fickle face.
Between their embrace I was born,
 No. I became.
Between my shoulder blades and
between the pits of each vertebrae
 new life became known-
 soft filaments of white that burgeoned
between this world and the next.
 Tentative feelers parsing
 the absence of my once body.
 I squirmed away from my unfamiliar bones
 and the chrysalis of all
I knew broke open
 like the fat stomach of
 a blood orange.



thinking
through

winter

seasonal ingredients

The fourth section is stagnant. Joy is absent in eating or creating and instead, the focus is on deprivation and death. There is still abundance, found in the brightly lit grocery store or the cheese dreamscape, but it is untouchable until the transformation in the final poem of the section, illustrating change and rebirth occurring, even in the dead of winter.

• olive oil • orange • lemon
• parsley • blood oranges

repeating motifs

- Starvation
- Death
- Cold
- Inhospitable environments
- Failed romance
- Sleep
- Deprivation

"Temptations"

the perfect garnish for your lit windowsill
and a warm bowl.

second-person address doesn't work as an invitation (as it does in some of the other sections) as much as it identifies unrequited longing and love

I am used to withstanding temptation.

the temptation of reaching out to a former lover and the urge to eat what is forbidden.

The aspect of foods that can't be eaten, "good" and "bad" foods, imposes new restrictions on the childlike relationship with food that is unfettered

MULTIVERSE

"Our kitchen is a carcass"

The cups on the counter bear
smudged fingerprints
from the last glass of wine we had

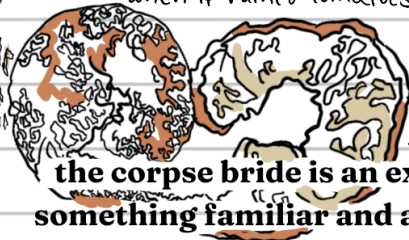
play on the position of "cupbearer" and ideas of communion as a holy consumption of human blood

referencing the tomato from
"when it rained tomatoes"

and the last tomatoes
in the fridge

a stately veil over
a petrified face.

the corpse bride is an example of the abject, something familiar and a recognizable symbol of virtue, new beginnings, and romance left to rot (made more disturbing by connecting a carcass to a kitchen, a place to prepare food)



"My grocery store has a NICU" } "neonatal intensive care unit"

that aren't quite the solemn thicket
or the warm womb.

**needed a poem that acknowledged
that, for many, seasonality is not a
consideration. everything is in season
year-round if you manipulate enough
elements of the growing process**

**the horror of vegetables being
manipulated and made outside their
natural spaces and seasons is cemented
by the image of cradles and the
connection between babies and
vegetation, squirming to a silent death**

Tucked into their cradles,
the lettuce and kale and spinach
wilt a quiet death under the careful press
of plastic bags.



"Waterlogged"

I would not know the bite of cold,
I could steep and
sleep among lemon zest

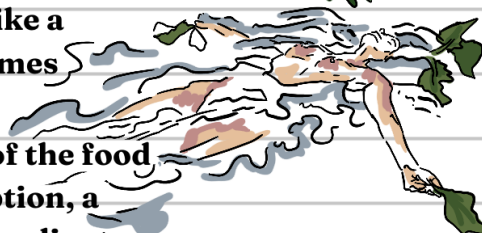
**soup being both a nourishing food
and a peaceful space in the poem**

But it's not a death,
not really,
not here.

**small internal rhymes like a
cautious nod to the rhymes
of End of Summer**

Ingredients can't **without the threat of consumption, a
drown, my dear, romanticization of being an ingredient**

an eager imagining of being part of the food



"The Pupa and the Pith"

I knew, among the hardened shell
between all I had once known
and what was becoming

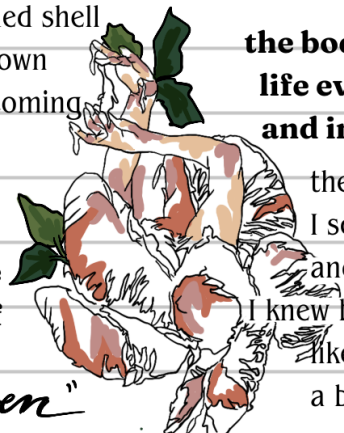
**the structure of the
poem intentionally
uses repetition at the
beginning of each line
that is not indented of
the words**

"I knew" + "between"

**the body can transform and be given new
life even after being born: out of winter
and into the hopeful embrace of spring**

the absence of my once body.

I squirmed away from my unfamiliar bones
and the chrysalis of all
I knew broke open
like the fat stomach of
a blood orange.



*image of
birth*





Bonfire in March

crack

and the logs of the fire buckle
into new lattices,
cough up fireworks to fit our hopeful
corner of the coast.

We bundled ourselves up and
dragged each other down the dunes
to celebrate the suns timid
and tender greeting, to breathe deeply
knowing there will soon
be heavy heads
of lilac.

crack

it sounds like a perfect bite,
the flesh of an apple giving way
and revealing crisp white insides.

crack

it sounds like a cough echoing
in a church more accustomed to
swallowing gospel.

I have spent this long cold
strung tight.

Give me some
relief, bite me-

crack

me open
so I may air out
for spring.

Growing pains

I was told that I'd grow tall but
it seems

I am growing every which way.
I'm filling out and I have lumps
burgeoning from
beneath my skin-

peach pits or cherry seeds, slipped
inside while I sleep to
grate upon my ribs, to
weigh me down.

If this world was made of water,
I would be
d

r

o

w

n

i

n

g.

Slip me in a mason jar
and stunt me
with the biting body
of salt and white
vinegar- I cannot become
if I am busy being
embalmed.

My belly keeps getting softer
(but is that bloating
from this morning
or the beginning of
swollen slippage
to tempt the fruit flies?)

Do you think the peaches
are so uncomfortable

when they forget to be a flower
and flounder into
mass?

a short trip round the sun

Feed me handsome strawberries
and hearty tomato seeds,
brush me off and water me down
and take your time burying me.

Make space for my hungry hands
and my mouth, fallen open and dry.
Feed me the bounty of summer
and sing me lullabies.

When the cold comes in
eat an apple by my grave,
pour tea to water me
as I sleep in my humble nave.

When my body begins to distend,
to shiver and shudder and seep
leave an orange to rot at my head
so I may have a sweeter sleep.

I'll dream underground
in a frozen chamber so like a womb
and when I wake I'll quite forget
if it's a bed or a lovely tomb

until you press your mouth to the dirt,
a kiss to fill my heavy lungs.
Open mouthed and bleary eyed
I start another short trip round the sun.

Kumamoto Oysters: \$13 for a half dozen

The body of her is crusted,
barnacled and cracked.
each divot a pockmark, an unexpected freckle
lovers may will into constellations
or angel kisses,
beds turned down for salt.

If you were to slit her,
as I do,
at the navel
and shuck her
open
you would find the quivering
shape of a silken soul.
Formless and tucked
away awaiting
my slick tongue.

Romancing with romesco

I am young again, in the kitchen with you
when I catch you sneaking
slivers of hazelnuts
and eyeing the bread we got
this morning (bleary eyed, our nervous hands
intertwined as we wandered
into a lonely cafe
to satiate your caffeine addiction).

How can I be so young?
When I'm teaching you to grate garlic,
to zest the flesh of a lemon.
This is intimacy—

perhaps more than when your mouth
snuck kisses to the cavern of my knee.

My hand on yours,
my chin resting on your shoulder as I
romance you with romesco
that shouldn't be in season for months

oh god bless the grocery store.

We are so young, our sticky fingers
wandering to laughing mouths in this
fragrant kitchen.

I would say this
is making love.

thinking
through

spring

seasonal ingredients

The fifth section is a celebration, but it is not without discomfort. The troublesome nature of becoming something new is the terror of the unknown and unfamiliar. However, the bravery and hope of this section, in poems that address "you" and capture moments of connection (campfires and kitchen flirtations), signal good things awaiting amid change. And this section celebrates the speakers as consumers, conscious & grateful, brimming with curiosity at what the world of taste may offer.

• peaches • cherries • lilac
• Kumamoto oysters • lemon

repeating motifs

- Celebration
- Transformation
- Becoming
- Lovers
- Address of "you"
- Kisses
- New ways of consuming and being consumed that are not objectification, but romantic admiration
- Discomfort

"Bonfire in March"

to celebrate the sun's timid
and tender greeting, to breathe deeply,

Spring as hopeful and uncomfortable amidst change, the wish to claw back

Give me some
relief, bite me—

crack

(me open)

connecting to "The Pupa
and the Pith" Chrysalis
image in Winter

sound moves outward from the moment in the first stanza to function as the connector of the speaker's wandering thoughts, which conclude in the final stanza. Here the "crack" is a breaking open of the speaker's body, a breaking akin to a chrysalis but spurred by the bite of an outside force, the mouth of someone else, poised not to eat but to offer relief from the bondage of winter's cocoon

"Growing pains"

seeks to capture the terror of being

into a more familiar space, to stunt growth if only to remain in the known

vinegar- I cannot become ("fruit flies" alluding to "tea is served")
if I am busy being
embalmed.

Do you think the peaches
are so uncomfortable
when they forget to be a flower
and flounder into
mass?

though there is no mention of a "you" in this poem, the entire poem is a question, almost childish in its cadence

"a short trip round the sun"

Feed me handsome strawberries } End of Summer
and hearty tomato seeds, } Early Summer

eat an apple by my grave, } Autumn
pour tea to water me

leave an orange to rot at my head } Winter



brush me off and water me down
and take your time burying me.

**gives voice to a seed being planted
and sleeping through the winter**

**before burgeoning out of the
ground in the spring: the whole of
the thesis's cycle in a single poem**

**each season speaks to the cyclical nature of
the seasons and this thesis and there is an
element of each section in the poem**

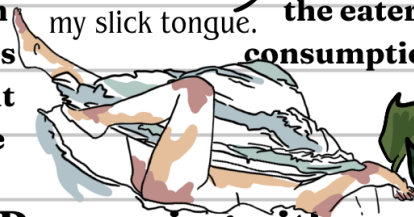
"Kumamoto Oysters: \$13 for a half dozen"

If you were to slit her,
as I do,
at the navel

each divot a pockmark, an unexpected freckle } the gaze (gays)
lovers may will into constellations } of a lover
or angel kisses, **transformation in the conversation of**

**splitting the oyster
open, which is given
the pronoun "she", is
violent in nature, but
reverent in practice**

away awaiting **consumption by imagining the eaten and**
my slick tongue. **the eater as mirrors of each other- a
consumption not to satiate but to titillate**



"Romancing with romesco"

I am young again, in the kitchen with you

a return to the
kitchen like in
"Making a mess"

**call back to the
introduction of the thesis
and the hunt for
ingredients to make a**

How can I be so young?

We are so young, our sticky fingers
wandering to laughing mouths in this
fragrant kitchen.

**romesco
the speaker of the poem is addressing
"you" who is assumed to be a lover, but also
functions as an intimate address to the
audience**

**there has been so much growth and
yet the speaker and their partner are
so young, so innocent, and still so
primed for more meals, so many more
moments in the kitchen**



To Conclude

to write you a poem is
to make you a meal.

let me take your winter hands
and pull you closer
to the stovetop-
peer over my shoulder and
breathe deep.

here we'll add an image
soft with time from
sleeping
in my pocket

and punctuation like flaky salt-
what a luxury to suck on a period.
feel the space between one sentence
and the next
dissolve-
the same space between you and I
and the atoms
of it all.

give me the lemon from your purse,
a little of your thyme-
sink your teeth into
the flesh of my mind,
stay for supper.

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