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GIRLS AT THE SKATE RINK

THESIS

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

JENNIFER KEY

May 2019

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ABSTRACT

A collection of original creative writing.

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VITA 49

Blue Ridge

On the porch my father lies flushed
and dreaming back to boyhood
or war, when soldiers crushed heroin

with their hands and smoked it.
He refused, but now wears a patch
more potent than opium behind one ear.

Beyond the porch screens, bug-picked
and spider-laced, the hills of Virginia
march into a future we can't see,

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long after it's gone. The lilies father planted
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the first just yesterday and by today
two turned trumpet. There is no silencing

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The more that open the sooner he'll be gone.

Ghost Psalm

No longer will I find you
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Clover fed, the deer walk through summer,

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sounds the syllables sewn to its own.

I will stand in the field clothed in silence.
Tell me, Father, where should I look
when not even the rain can find you?

Blue Ridge

On the porch my father lies flushed
and dreaming back to boyhood
or war, when soldiers crushed heroin

with their hands and smoked it.
He refused, but now wears a patch
more potent than opium behind one ear.

Beyond the porch screens, bug-picked
and spider-laced, the hills of Virginia
march into a future we can't see,

just as birdsong insists on daylight
long after it's gone. The lilies father planted
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open their awful mouths—
the first just yesterday and by today
two turned trumpet. There is no silencing

their dreadful fanfare. Why must they persist
when each pink tongue only says the same thing?
The more that open the sooner he'll be gone.

Ghost Psalm

No longer will I find you
as blown ash and bone
in flattened grasses where deer bed down

but in the sun flare and flash that move
through this world as dapples
on the backs of those we number in the field.

Their bodies steam in the pre-dawn damp,
and when they rise they wear you in the mud
thatched to the v of their hooves

and in the wet slicked to their fetlocks' curl.
On the slenderest of legs, they carry you
past what blurs into bramble and branch.

Once you were the field and everything in it
that grew while the sky, pearlescent
in its making and unmaking, slid over.

Now you, who have already traveled
from one world to the next, must travel again
across lowlands on the paws of the dog, on

the hooves of the deer, docents of dirt
each divot recalls. They carry you
into the reeds at the water's edge,

silver tongue lapping the bank where they stand.
They carry you beyond my cries.
Clover fed, the deer walk through summer,

then winnowed by want, long miles,
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Jennifer Key is the author of *The Old Dominion*. Her writing has appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Callaloo*, and *Prairie Schooner*. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the University of Virginia.