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EXECUTION BY ALIEN

by

Sara Emma Kahane

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford

May 2023

Approved by:

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Reader: Prof. Melissa Ginsburg

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Sara Emma Kahane

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ABSTRACT

EXECUTION BY ALIEN: A Collection of Poetry

(Under the direction of Derrick Harriell)

The following is a collection of poems narratively depicting the childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and death of a woman and her memories. I will analyze the poetry in meaning and form as well.

PREFACE

A complex and rewarding task. Thank you to all and I hope you enjoy my work.

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I. OVERALL THEMES

For my thesis, I focused on creating a narrative of a woman's recollection and navigation through her childhood world, adolescence, adulthood, and ultimately death, in a process that feels dream-like yet coherent to the reader. I wanted my work to convey the distortedly beautiful memories of life while also maintaining a structure of clarity and accessibility for someone to easily read.

Beginning with "From The Homes," my poems follow the accounts of a woman's memory of her family's origins and simple moments from her childhood that she now retrospectively realizes had a lasting impact on her life. I wrote these poems in the speaker's adult voice, while also trying to fit in observations of her world that seemed authentic to that of a child. The beginning quarter of the collection starts by exploring stories that were told to the woman as a little girl, by her family, as her identity is put together like a puzzle from the many pieces of her family's history. "From The Homes" and "This Land is Not Mine: My Grandfather's Escape from Germany" specifically focus on her family's accounts of Mississippi small towns and her grandparents' escape from Europe during World War II. These unique and very differing origins come together to make the speaker who she is and shape her original perspective of the world and add to her reverence for her family and her own history. Other early poems such as "Fire in the Window," "Grandma Claire took me to the indoor YMCA Pool," and

“Marbles in the Sun” also incorporate stories of her family members meshed with the speaker's own memories from childhood as she begins to develop her own perspective on these topics.

“A Tube of Crest 3D Whitening,” “For My Mother: She Plants Trees,” and “You: Grandfather of Wonders” delve further into the psyche of the speaker's own mind as she is maturing and begins to place herself into the stories and interactions with her family. “Childhood Chronology” is an attempt for the speaker to cohesively and categorically compartmentalize her life as a child in relation to her family and maturing, yet proving an impossible task, as the poem ends with the unsettling and unsure line, “14. A brand new mini pink iPod has songs only I can sing.”

Transitioning into adolescence, the speaker begins to focus on more mature issues with “Can I have the ones with pearls?” exploring her relationship with her mother on more than just a surface level of recounting memories, but now dissecting their relationship through these memories. Further in the collection, “How to Brush Your Enemy’s Teeth” deals with bullying and retrospective regret of not being able to fight back. “He Sat Outside St. Philips” is one of the speaker’s first personal experiences of noticing poverty and the discomfort of the world’s disregard for “the other.” A definitive, melancholic moment of the woman’s life, “i wish You had lived” deals with the loss of her grandfather who was a monumental part of her childhood.

Further transitioning into young adulthood, “Drown in the West,” “For Anthony: He Spoke French to Me,” and “A Night Amongst One Hundred Twenty-One” speaks to some of the woman's first feelings of love and inability to hold onto people and places she desires in her life. She deals with pent-up anger and sadness turning to violent images of “knives” and “searing” in “I dreamt of you last night” from her inability to control her own life.

After more contemplation and exploration through letters and regret, the speaker finally meets her death with a matter-of-fact outlook for these events the human mind cannot fully comprehend, circling back to the way in which her account of childhood is distorted and often dream-like as she described then too the things that could not be totally understood. “From the Mouths of Babes, Into the Hand that Feeds,” “Addressed to 845: Posthumously,” “How to Grieve,” and “Fantasia: Night on Bald Mountain” explore the speaker’s death and its enveloping presence as she tries to offer commentary on how she would like to be remembered and what the afterlife is like.

Overall, writing this collection was an exciting process for me and very fun to create, explore, and play with these concepts. Starting out, I went back and looked at previous work I had done for poetry classes, revising some of them for use in this collection such as “From the Homes,” “Can I have the ones with pearls,” “i wish You had lived,” and “How to Grieve.” When I had written these poems and been in any poetry classes for that matter, my teachers presented me with specific themes to write about and also deadlines to finish them by, so designating my own creation and timeline of this process was definitely a challenge for me and required much self-discovery and regulation. Looking back to these previous poetry classes, I was heavily inspired by works we had read in class, specifically those of James Wright and even the work of PhD candidate at the University of Mississippi, Joshua Nguyen which inspired my “How To” poems (“How to Brush Your Enemy’s Teeth” and “How to Grieve.”) Meetings with my thesis advisor, Dr. Harriell, offered me so much insight on my piece as a whole from an outside perspective and gave me the clarity and editorial guidance I needed to complete this collection. Once I developed the conceptual idea of the poems taking place in the mind of a woman narrating her own life, it was much easier to see an overall vision, what type of poems I

needed to write, where I needed to fill in gaps of time in her life, and which thematic concepts I wanted to explore. Revision and self-reflection are always the most difficult parts for me, as I am usually inspired by an image or esoteric thought I have in my head, and going back through my work and thinking about technicalities and concrete meaning of the work was a challenge, though very rewarding.

. II. IN DEPTH ANALYSIS AND INSPIRATIONS

I will further delve into the four quarters of the collection and the inspirations behind their meanings. The collection focuses on four stages of the woman's life: childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, older adult life and existential questioning, followed by death and others' reactions to her death.

During childhood, the woman recalls events from her early life of her family and their interactions with her. "Marbles in the Sun" tells the story of a simple moment of childhood as her father teaches her to play with marbles as she rushes home from school. The imagery is simple, from a child's perspective, "they were so clear/ I could see my front teeth coming in," yet also foreshadows her "growing pains", including the milestone of her front teeth coming in and "Smooth, wet colors curving on the pavement,/ forming their battle positions/ piloted by my hands," alluding to a war reference, perhaps a personal, internal war she will face.

"I want to be in Toyland, too" further follows the speaker through memories of childhood, a scene of playing with dolls, yet signaling a growing disconnect with herself and reality as she grows up. She possesses the simplicity of a child, describing herself playing with

dolls, yet also yearning for an escape from reality, wanting to be like the dolls, “When I have hit them/ they do not move,” possibly signaling her distrust of society due to early trauma she has faced in childhood and the desire to no longer feel painful emotions.

“Grandma Claire took me to the indoor YMCA pool” is another account of a distinct memory the woman has of a moment of fear and excitement she felt when her grandmother took her swimming. The atmosphere of an indoor pool, humid and sticky, represents the discomfort and anxiety the speaker is facing. She explores the juxtaposition of love and distrust for her grandmother as she pushes the speaker to do something she is afraid of, as her grandmother’s, “enthusiastic, forceful smile launching tiny bullets/ searing through my gritted teeth.” The voice in these first poems is that of a child yet also possessing the realizations of the significance of these smaller moments as the woman is now much older, looking back.

As the speaker reaches adolescence and early adulthood, her tone shifts to more melancholic and not as unassuming. “Can I have the ones with pearls?” explores the speaker’s relationship with her mother and their interactions as she goes through the stereotypical coming of age moment of getting her ears pierced. “I was twelve the first time/ I pierced my skin” sets the scene of the ear-piercing process, yet also hints at the ominous tone of piercing one’s skin, perhaps done by herself, even alluding to self-harm at this young age. The lines, “No reaction to the casualties/ instead she bought me/ diamond earrings,” is representative of her mother’s disregard for her daughter when finding these inflicted wounds or piercings, signaling complacency or disconnect in their relationship. Further, instead of acknowledging the bigger issue at hand, her mother tried to compensate with expensive diamond earrings, but not the pearls the speaker asked for, referenced in the title of the poem.

“How to Brush Your Enemy’s Teeth” deals with growing feelings of resentment the speaker feels for society and other people, in this instance of a retrospective account of being bullied. “I’d like to stab the words/ out of their mouths” alludes to undertones of violence mixed with metaphor as she is unable to fight back mentally or physically to the bullies amongst other things hindering her happiness, but she fantasizes of this violent scene of injuring them through the metaphor of brushing their teeth.

“Drown in the West” is a quintessential, coming of age, running-away-from-home poem, as the speaker recounts a past lover, who was a fleeting part of her life, but who brought monumental change to it. She journeys West, a nod to the grand ideals of “manifest destiny,” or the “American dream,” yet is let down by her lover’s inability to satisfy her desires and stay with her, ultimately leaving her to finish the journey alone.

The speaker begins to settle into her life as an adult, more contemplative of her past, yet more accepting of what she cannot change. “I wanted to write you, but I didn’t” focuses on the speaker’s regrets of a past love; how she wanted to write to him and reach out, but she never did out of fear and now regrets this as she states, “Time slinks on in this way. In silence/ it too eats/ these confessions of yours up./ Devours them into oblivion./ leaves only scraps that will turn to/ withered dust.” These lines were inspired by one of my favorite poems, T.S. Elliot’s, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” which showcases the speaker’s attempt to compartmentalize his life, so focused on his own anxieties, that he is faced with the inability to act and realizes the inevitability of fleeting time.

The later part of the collection is focused on the themes of death, dream-like remembrances, finality, life after death, and others’ responses to the speaker’s death. “Addressed

to 845 West End Ave: Posthumously” references an earlier poem “845 West End Ave” as the speaker is transcending the line between life and death with this letter that is written to the inhabitants of her old apartment. She writes of the way she wants to be remembered, but inevitably she will be forgotten as time passes on without her, “The black and white tiles,/ you replaced them / with white oak, hardwood,/ turpentine.”

“Fantasia: Night on Bald Mountain” is a reference to Disney’s *Fantasia* 2000, in which the beautifully nightmarish scene of a devilish monster, who resides on a mountain, calls his minions back to him. My poem is heavily inspired by this surrealist imagery and a take on a scene like that of *Dante’s Inferno* or life after death, in limbo between heaven and hell. The creatures described are demonic, yet interestingly beautiful entities that descend to the speaker and their new home.

Throughout this collection of work, I found myself particularly referencing and inspired by the works of Emily Dickinson, James Wright, and the film genre Neo-noir. Emily Dickinson has been one of my main inspirations for writing for a long time, as I studied her first in high school and continue to expand on my understanding of her work and the meaning behind her words and style. She wrote an incredible number of poems, most remaining secret, on personal matters on account of the way she interpreted the world around her differently than most of society. She remained unmarried and lived in her family’s home the entirety of her life, mostly keeping to herself, yet corresponding through letters with her friends and close connections. I was inspired in this way to make many of my poems throughout the work in letter form, symbolizing something close to the speaker’s heart that she cannot bring herself to say to the receiver, or a way in which a disconnect of time or space can be bridged through a letter. “For Veronica and Jonathan: Accomplices in the taking of my fifth-grade heart,” “For My Mother:

She Plants Trees,” “For Anthony: He Spoke French to Me,” and “I wanted to write you, but I didn’t” are all examples of letters throughout the collection.

Further, Dickinson’s personal version of religion was praising the natural world around her. She was not a devout Christian follower as society warranted her to be, but found beauty in stillness and the wonder of nature. “For My Mother: She Plants Trees” and “Marzipan” were partially inspired by this idea of contemplating the beauty of the natural world and the holiness of a simple moment in nature that fully envelops you.

Dickinson also faced dissociation and depression due to her extreme isolation. “How Much I Can’t Communicate” is specifically inspired by Dickinson’s poem, “Hope is the thing with feathers” amongst others of her works that focus on the speaker’s isolation and feelings Dickinson was not able to say or convey due to her alienation from society. The speaker of my poem tried to communicate, but “they” did not listen, mirroring the lines in, “This Land is Not Mine,” “You did not understand me/because you did not try.” Further, in “How Much I Can’t Communicate,” I also used a variation of Dickinson’s intricate dash system, in which she used different types of dash marks as most of her punctuation.

James Wright’s work also highly inspired me in this collection, in his ability to describe a specific moment suspended in time with vivid detail of the setting accompanying the contemplative style he uses to write about the meaning of life. “There was nothing you could do,” “Dying by the Vine,” “You: Grandfather of wonders,” and “i wish You had lived” are all inspired partially by Wright’s ability to describe nature and people in beautiful, fleeting moments.

“Death’s Beginning” is specifically inspired by the writings of James Wright’s, “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota” in which the speaker contemplates the beauty of nature around him in a quiet moment suspended in time, yet the fatality of man and the fleetingness of existence. The last line of “Death’s Beginning,” “Have I truly lived” is a direct reference to the declarative last line in “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota,” “I have wasted my life.”

Again, the genre of Neo-noir also heavily influenced my writing, and the ironic, almost sardonic outlook on important life events I use as well. “Like Tears in Rain: These Memories Will Be Lost” is a dedication to the 1982 film, *Blade Runner*, in which a futuristic world is imagined as a distortion between technology, alien-like advancements, dreams, and reality. I really like this idea of an imagined distorted reality between real and fictitious, combined with pieces of your thoughts as well as that of machines. As the speaker watches the rain fall, she comes to the realization that everything “is all the same.” Further, “Neo Noir: Brazil 1985” is also inspired by the Neo-noir movie from that year of the same title in which again the world is distorted until the “numbness” of this false reality becomes beautiful and “elegant.” My poem, “Execution by Alien: This is What They told me,” is my own take on an imagined apocalypse of aliens destroying earth with a bit of understatement, humor, and irony. The aliens seemingly specifically address the speaker in this letter or address all of humanity to inform them that their mundane lives will be wiped out and there will be no more “Hall and Oates records” and no more “tomorrow I will...” This is where I got the title for my piece, a bit of a sardonic take on the familiarity and recollection of a woman’s life being taken away by a foreign entity: death.

III. POETRY TERMS

I used repetition of phrases, words, and ideas throughout the poems themselves but also methodically throughout the entirety of the work to give the poetry a circular feel and to make the reader think about the changes in the woman's life and how certain things stay the same throughout her story. Pearls are a recurring theme, symbolizing purity, or something that is salvaged and polished or made beautiful again. Specifically, there are pearl earrings referenced in "Can I have the ones with pearls?" and the mentioning of "pearly whites" in "A Tube of Crest 3D Whitening." Juxtaposingly, this image of pearly teeth is missing in "How to Brush Your Enemy's Teeth" as this poem does not focus on the purity of the teeth mentioned, but rather on her enemy's teeth; full of evil and unredeemable. I also repeat a variation of the phrase "stained satin and smothered pearls" in the poems "Dying by the Vine," "Execution by Alien," and "Death's Beginning." This imagery provides a celestial, atmospheric feeling for me; an imagined concept of something idealized and vintage. These poems are much later in the collection than when the speaker had referenced pearls as teeth, perhaps reminiscent of a fixation with the idea of a pearl the speaker had earlier in life, now as something dreamy or unattainable as she nears her death. The repeated imagery of alienation due to immigration or social isolation is touched upon in the early poem, "This Land is Not Mine: My Grandfather's Escape from Germany," and again by mentioning herself fitting into the "refugees of society" in "How much I can't communicate." In the poems "Execution by Alien" and "Dying by the Vine," the line "my future is in the past now," is repeated in both of these, again representative of the speaker's inability to get back to her earlier life or a time period that is now out of reach.

Letters are also an important point of reference in this collection, as they represent written documents and manifestos of feelings, perhaps unable to be spoken in person (again in reference to my inspiration from Emily Dickinson's letters.) Beginning with "For Veronica and Jonathan: Accomplices in the taking of my fifth-grade heart," the title acts as the address of a letter itself. It is the account of a young girl experiencing her first heartbreak and writing down her feelings of pain she cannot bring herself to say. She was also given a letter by Veronica in which Jonathan broke up with her, initiating her response, making letter writing a common tool of correspondence throughout this collection. Further, the speaker goes on to reference letter writing in "For My Mother: She Plants Trees," "For Anthony: He Spoke French to me," "I wanted to write you but I didn't," and "Addressed to 845 West End Ave: Posthumously." The woman is prone to letter writing, and interestingly in the latter of these is denoting how she wants to be remembered after death; the letter bridging the barrier between life and death. "Addressed to 845 West End Ave: Posthumously" is a reference to the earlier poem, "845 West End Ave," where the woman lived at a time in her life; showing the building's permanence and the human susceptibility to fleeting time and death, as she is now gone, but is still able to address a letter to the same apartment building.

The woman also feels overlooked much of her life, reflected in a variation of the line, "there were too many people in the world for you to notice me," in "He Sat Outside St. Philips" and "845 West End Ave." There is an ominous, omniscient voice calling to the speaker, saying a variation of "run far away, do what it says to do," in "Neo Noir: Brazil 1985" and "How to Grieve," showing the absurdity and distortion of the ideas the woman has in her head.

I also use repetition of a word or phrase within the same poem to give emphasis to the meaning or highlight what is changing. In "This Land is not Mine," the word "understand" is

repeated in the lines “I did not understand you/ because I did not know your language./ You did not understand me/ because you did not try,” to emphasize the desire for acceptance overshadowed by the overall alienation felt by immigrants in America. “i wish You had lived” is a reference to the earlier poem, “You: Grandfather of Wonders” with a repeated use of a capital “You” when the woman references her grandfather. He is a critical part of her life, almost a holy figure to her, in the way one would always capitalize “God.”

In the poem, “For Anthony: He Spoke French to Me” I repeated the phrase “dream now, sleep later” changed to “sleep now, dream later” in the final stanza to show the speaker’s once happy relationship that was “dreamy” which is now dormant, perhaps reminisced about in dreams later. I have two “how to” poems, containing instructions from the speaker on how to perform certain tasks in, “How to Brush Your Enemy’s Teeth” and “How to Grieve” in the collection as well. In “Like Tears in Rain: These Memories Will Be Lost,” the poem begins with the speaker questioning, “Don’t they echo all the same/ when they hit the pavement?” and ends with “But then I am reminded, they all hit the ground/ just the same,” as she comes to the conclusion of disillusionment with the beauty and individuality of life and her experiences. My poem, “You said “No?” I thought you said “Go!”: My Parent’s Trip to the Grand Canyon and Lake Tahoe” is a pantoum, in which the entire structure follows a repetitive pattern throughout the lines with slight variation, showcasing the lines that are repeated, and how their meaning varies, such as the lines, “but instead I learned to drown on my own” and “I drown in my memories alone” which show the speaker’s attempt, yet failure to be with who she loves, leading into a depression or acceptance of defeat as she now only possesses accessibility to the relationship through memory.

Lastly, there is an underlying theme of violence and built-up anger that comes out in descriptions of fantasy of weaponry and aggression repeated throughout the woman's poetry. Beginning with "Fire in the Window," the woman's early life is filled with memories of fire and destruction, followed by "i wish You had lived" referencing a fire that took her own grandfather, containing the lines, "maybe You thought this/ as the fire took You with it." "How to Brush Your Enemy's Teeth" is a description of how the speaker would like to punish someone who has bullied her, and then in "A Night Amongst One Hundred Twenty-One," she even wants a lover to "strangle my veins/ cling to my arteries." "I dreamt of you last night" uses the line, "and my pillow was your knife," to show metaphoric deceit, death, and violence in her relationships. The imagery of soldiers, battles, and enemies bombarding the woman's thoughts and reality is again present in "Marbles in the Sun," "Grandma Claire took me to the indoor YMCA pool," and "How to Brush Your Enemy's Teeth." Finally, in her later poetry, the speaker begins to accept her death, by questioning, "What does dying feel like?" in "From the Mouths of Babes, Into the Hand that Feeds" turning to a declarative statement of "this is what dying feels like" in "Fantasia: Night on Bald Mountain."

I also enjoy writing with a sardonic tone and including understatement in my work, sporadically, such as taking lines from other known works or phrases, such as referencing the hymn, "Great is Thy Faithfulness" to characterize the loss of faith from the speaker and the phrase "from the mouths of babes" and the idiom "don't bite the hand that feeds," combining in the title, "From the Mouths of Babes, Into the Hand that Feeds" describing the woman's death. Certain understated declaratives throughout the work I also find interesting and poignant to use, such as the lines, "I need these things" in "Drown in the West" and "There will be no more tomorrow I will..." in "Execution by Alien."

Enjambment and interesting use of line breaks were also an important part of my writing process, as they add to the way in which the poem is interpreted, if it is fluid or rigid, and can completely alter a line's meaning. In "A Night Amongst One Hundred Twenty-One," I put the line break "not too tight, just so that/ the weight of your doubt crushes me slowly," giving the lines a double meaning, making "the weight of your doubt crushes me slowly" into a declarative. Then in "How to Grieve," the lines "let them run/ down the faces/ of the people in the pews," describes physical running and also tears running down one's face at a funeral.

I often also like to put the first line of a poem as a title, making the title flow into the stanzas and read seamlessly, namely in "From the Homes," "i wish You had lived," "And He Goes," and "I dreamt of you last night." I also attempted to curate interesting sounds of alliteration and assonance within my poetry, such as in "I wanted to write you but I didn't" with the lines, "the moonlight snuck beneath the sinking dusk" which creates an interesting rhythmic flow to the phrase, mirroring the way time is sneaking up on the speaker. Other examples of playing with sound include "fleshy frame of debris" in "From the Mouths of Babes, Into the Hand that Feeds" and "a million mourning doves descend" in "Fantasia: Night on Bald Mountain."

IV. REVISION

For my revision process, I wanted to work on reordering the overall structure of the piece to be cohesive and understandable as the story of a woman's life. I reordered some poems and added new ones to fill in gaps of time that seemed to be missing.

Starting with the reordering, I tried to set the poems in a plausible timeline that would represent the woman's life and make a cohesive story that was understood as a narration of the completion of her life. I reworked the order of the poems to be in four stages: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and death. I moved "Marzipan" from towards the end of her adulthood stage to a transition between adolescence and adulthood, as the speaker is noticing the world around her in a more profound, contemplative tone, and reflecting on the beauty of nature and simple moments she has had in her life. I also moved "Drown in the West" to be much earlier as well, to fill in between the stages of adolescence and adulthood, as this acts as a coming-of-age runaway love story. I positioned "Great is Thy Faithfulness" to be closer to the time of adolescence and young adulthood rather than towards the end of the woman's life, where I had previously placed it, because while this is a poem about death, it is the realization of the inevitability of death and losing faith as the speaker is growing up.

Keeping consistent with the theme of letters, I placed "I wanted to write you, but I didn't" directly after "For Anthony: He Spoke French to Me" to create a cohesive narrative of letter writing. I then switched "Addressed to 845 West End Ave: Posthumously" to be after "From the Mouths of Babes, Into the Hand that Feeds" as the letter to the residents of her new home for how she wants to be remembered comes after her dying moment in "From the Mouths of Babes, Into the Hand that Feeds." I switched "How to Grieve" to be before "Fantasia: Night on Bald Mountain" as the first is a description of her funeral and the latter is a "Dante's Inferno" moment of transitioning into the afterlife.

I also made many changes within specific poems, beginning with consistency of grammar, which was a challenge for me. I changed "smiling faces" to "shining faces" in "From the Homes" to give a less generic description of the small Mississippi town and further changing

“drugstore sandwiches” to “drugstore egg salad sandwiches” giving a more vivid detail of the town with better imagery. In “Marbles in the Sun,” I switched the ordering of stanza one and two to make the first line of the poem “Daddy showed me how to use them;” a more powerful, captivating phrase. I changed the title from “Toyland” to “I want to be in Toyland, too” to give the poem a more candid, off-kilter feel. I changed much of the wording in “Magnolia, I don't want to come down!” as I wanted to keep the childlike feel to it, but without being predictable and kitschy. I kept some minimal rhyming with the words “here,” “near,” “green,” and “unseen” in the poem, but deleted the rest of the rhymes that I originally had in almost every line. “He Sat Outside St. Philips” and “845 West End Ave” felt too similar, so I edited “845 West End Ave” to have a more “stalkerish” tone adding the lines, “and the shop you bought the fur coat at next door./ Thursday, 9:12 A.M. I believe.” I edited the line breaks in “For my Mother: She Plants Trees” to be more interesting such as, “of the width I managed/ to venture from our home,” rather than being on all one line, and “beyond the crumbling you/ give to me magnolia blooms/ and angel oak” instead of “beyond the crumbling/ And give to me magnolia blooms and angel oak.” I also deleted the last lines of this poem “I am your lucky clover/ These are your four leaves,” to instead leave the poem more open ended and less predictable.

I also edited many other ending lines of my poems so as not to be anticipated, such as the last line in “Childhood Chronology” changing from, “14. A brand new mini pink iPod has songs only for me” to “14. A brand new mini pink iPod only I can sing.” Again in “Neo Noir: Brazil 1985” I changed the ending from “until the numbness becomes elegance to you” simply to “until the numbness becomes elegance” to make the ending less conclusive and more provoking. I also changed the ending of “And He Goes” from “maybe/ it was just the dreams of a delusional man/ or maybe it was just/ You,” to “maybe/ it was just the dreams of a delusional man/ wrapped in

cellophane/ delivered posthumously past your house.” In “Marzipan,” I changed the ending from “I sigh to myself/ that is beauty,” to “I see her standing now/ amongst the bamboo rods.” I changed the ending stanza of “I dreamt of you last night” from “What would you do if I told/ I had been thinking about you/ You would call me crazy/ Unashamedly in love with you/ But really isn’t the infatuated/ Figure, you?/ You cut into my brain/ And now it hurts to think of you.” to “What would you do if I told/ these things? The fact that I/ had been thinking about you./ You would call me crazy,/ unashamedly, searing/ these words into my brain./ Now it hurts to think of you,” in order to not be so choppy.

V. CONCLUSION

After reading this work, I hope the reader is left with the contemplation of mortality and immortality: the things that outlast time and the time that outlasts us. I want the juxtaposition between life and death and also the fleetingness of time and the slowness of simple moments to be apparent but also blurred. How we perceive our own reality is an individual experience, and I hope reading the recollections of this one woman’s life offers insight into one’s own— how our memories shape us and create who we are but also how we can purposely alter our future in a way that we see fit. There are so many simple moments of life that we do not realize the significance of until we look back, retrospectively, and then it may be too late for some realizations, but of course it may be the beginning of others. I hope the reader experiences all the emotions of joy, anger, grief, pain, sadness, melancholia, nostalgia, hope, irony, and many more as they read about the remembrances from this woman’s life and maybe contemplate their own

as well. One's life really does begin and then is gone, so to be mindful of this existence and to appreciate the imagery and the unknown embraces the meaning that can be found in everything.

From The Homes

of nowhere towns

in Mississippi.

Furnished with shining faces,

drugstore egg salad sandwiches,

and slow streets beneath,

leading to the lake

and the sawmill

lumber stacked in '95 chevys.

From the hands,

waving goodbye

to nobody

on the boat

and the New York apartments

with their green tiled floors,

much better

than when we were hidden

in the home of the family

next door.

This Land is Not Mine: My Grandfather's Escape from Germany

The key slipped out of my hands

and into America's streets.

After French farmhouse hiding

eggs for breakfast during the week came

cold streets and skyscraping stone.

I was good at math,

outsmarted you all

but I never made you feel weak.

You threw rocks at my father-

one leg shorter than the other-

but I could not fight back.

I did not understand you

because I did not know your language.

You did not understand me

because you did not try.

We were not natives in your land.

I learned to speak with your voice.

Marbles in the Sun

Daddy showed me how to use them.

Keep them in the circle,

roll them in the sphere.

I ran home after school to play with them,

they were so clear

I could see my front tooth coming in.

I loved the way they shined.

Smooth, wet colors curving on the pavement,

forming their battle positions

piloted by my hands.

Fire in the Window

I woke up

to fire in the window.

A burning glow

of glazing red

encircling the room.

Donna screamed and I followed.

My ears could not stand it

if I didn't scream too.

It came from our window, but

we were not on fire, they were.

Just outside Mama and Papa's Bedroom.

Daddy tried his best to put it out, and he did,

but who knew the same fate would follow

him fifty years later.

I want to be in Toyland, too

The people are all dolls here,
their hearts are wooden crevices
sheltered from the downpour.

I do not know their names,
but I see their eyes.

Sheets of glass crusted
with sleep from opening at night.

When I hit them
they do not move.

They stand tall and content

I do not think they feel anymore.

Magnolia, I don't want to come down!

I want to stay and play

perhaps a little longer

in your leaves.

I think I could touch the sky

up here, the

birds are near

your green.

This world remains unseen

except to me.

You are my friend

I don't want to fall.

But when I grow

I will still be here, looking at

your face, I can no longer climb

atop your canopy.

But now, you can look down.

Childhood Chronology

1. Chrome cords, silver sheathed in wires sitting on Dad's office desk
2. "Yes I will play these CD's with you, but only while he's gone." Mom: "What's all that stomping up there?"
3. "But it has the E which means explicit.
4. "That's just for babies. It's fine, let's listen." Very well.
5. A. My favorite songs 1. Smooth Criminal (Alien Ant Farm version)

B. Rock Me Amadeus

C. Rock the Casbah
6. But also throw in some more 80's new wave and Hey Ya
7. Dad's gag gift from the Christmas work party (he's Jewish)
8. "I'm a big girl, I can listen to Hoobastank if I want."
9. Embarrassment.
10. Genesis, The Cure, Dexy's Midnight Runners on road trip
11. Blockbusters in the rain
12. In the car listening to Come on Eileen waiting for Mom

13. Pollyanna while I'm sick home from school, lying on our couch

14. A brand new mini pink iPod has songs only I can sing.

Grandma Claire took me to the indoor YMCA pool

Saturday, 9:00 AM.

The air was sticky and dense with heat

condensation sticking to tiles,

underneath my toes,

Go, go! Dive in!

I skipped my swim lessons all last year

but she was eager to see me butterfly

and breaststroke and frog kick. I looked back at her

enthusiastic, forceful smile launching tiny bullets

searing through my gritted teeth.

Blue engulfed my body,

slow motion flail,

a rendering of breath,

collapsing lungs filled with bromine.

The water held me in a one-sided embrace,

my ears popped and I

bubbled up to the surface,

spitting out saliva and tears,

dripping down my chin.

The humidity in the air clung

to my pores, stuck to the hairs on my arm,

stood them straight up-

soldiers meeting bullets and smoke.

Grandma Claire wrapped me in towelly fingers and hugged me in chlorine.

A Tube of Crest 3D Whitening

When my tube of congealed blue ran

dry and my mother was out of hers, too

I turned to my dad's supply

of cinnamon flavored crest to do the job

of protection from decay, pearly white, tooth atrophy.

It was always harsh, left a bitter residue of a subtle

crunch on the back of my teeth

when I brushed my tongue.

It was red hots, intensely chilled, sticky sweet.

For Veronica and Jonathan: Accomplices in the taking of my fifth-grade heart

The sun was shining,

or maybe it wasn't

the day you handed me

the letter.

He was done with me.

Do you remember I cried

on the fifth-grade field blurry

with the sprawling saplings

shading my suffering

stinging with regret

Come on, kick the ball already!

I left that day after lunch,

filled the tub with the bath salts

you gave me.

The jar was purple with bows

it smelled like lavender and circus peanuts.

I was so young then,

Why did you do that to me.

You: Grandfather of Wonders

Pull the rabbit out of your hat,

pick up the penny

facing right side up

on the street.

Wiggle your ear

and try to teach me,

but I failed.

A little catywhompus, but we'll go inside now,

Double Layered Strawberry Cake,

use your better judgment to measure the flour

and heavy whipping cream.

We left a button under the neighbor's stone,

a trail of rocks to the park,

worms underneath,

We'll use them to go fishing tomorrow.

You felt safe to me.

Can I have the ones with pearls?

I was twelve the first time

I pierced my skin,

calluses forming

cold and red

sticky sweet,

velvet tapestries

sheathed the bruising from me.

I was hiding for over three days

before my mother found me,

fingers stained with saline.

No reaction to the casualties.

She bought me

diamond earrings.

He Sat Outside St. Phillips

I saw

a man

sitting alone

on the stairs of the church

with a holey shawl

pulled over his face

so that only his eyes

could be seen.

Graying now from the long wait

withered face and tattered inseams.

He waited on that corner

with outstretched arms

but there were too many people in the world

for him to be seen.

How to Brush Your Enemy's Teeth

I'd like to stab the words

out of their mouths

and throw them in the faucet.

Wash the blood out of their teeth

scrape the plaque from their gums

for making me feel

this way.

yes, yes it will go this way...

For My Mother: She Plants Trees

In a field of clover,

You are my lucky one.

You find me when I am lost

amongst the ragweed,

tucked behind the planting pots,

overgrown with heath star moss,

restless beneath the canopies.

Sitting on the ledge,

furrowed contemplation setting

into the boundaries

of the width I managed

to venture from our home.

Forget the foggy

nature of the sapling

rooted indefinitely with its untouched

needles, resting impatiently on the wind.

You still find me

there and pick me up,

beyond the crumbling you

give to me magnolia blooms

and angel oak.

Marzipan

The pebbles in the sidewalk
scattered with the amber off the trees
moonlit, moonbeams
shafting through the air
swarming into obscurity
while the record spins
into the blue silk
of a Robin's egg.

The woman sits at the table
prying the memories
out of her mind and
into their copious trails
of autumn leaves
and sunlit crevasses

walking up the trees.

Walking beneath the grounds of horror,

I see her standing there now,

amongst the bamboo rods.

Drown in the West

You asked if I wanted to see
the desert and the Joshua Trees
with you. I need these things.

So we drove,
on the byways and
down the canyon,
til the sides were covered
cactus canopies.

We watched that first sunset
together. The amber light came through the RV
in refracted waves.

You left.

I stayed.

Now I bathe in goldenrods

and am swallowed by cicadas.

Great is Thy Faithfulness

When I was very young

my grandmother,

a devout follower,

would say to me

I pray He'll take me quietly

in the night and have my heart stop its beating.

Quickly,

perhaps painlessly,

leaving us to grieve,

but pardoning us from guilt.

She was never a bother to me.

Now I watch her

sit at her bedside

excruciatingly pick up

her fork to chew her pees.

I don't believe anymore

in what she told me.

You said “No?” I thought you said “Go!”: My Parent’s Trip to the Grand Canyon and Lake

Tahoe

I ran to the edge of the Grand Canyon

and I missed you.

I tried to catch your hat as it fell through the wind

and sank below the ledge.

And I miss you

when I think of your skis sloping through the white

sinking down the ledge

into the winter’s first snow.

When I think of your skis sloping through the white

I wish I had caught you in time to fall together

and into the winter’s first snow,

but instead I learned to drown on my own.

I wish I had caught you in time to fall together

I ran to the edge of the Grand Canyon for you

I drown in my memories alone.

I tried to catch your hat as it fell through the wind.

i wish You had lived

long enough to see me become pretty.

the ripples of blue water underneath

the weight of the line

crushed into secrecy

unearthed in the air's stillness.

Pick the fleshy fruit from their trees.

i wish i had shown

how i learned these things from You.

Even when i drown

in the fury of atoms

given back to the earth

through Your leaves.

i hope You knew

i could be more than this

unpleasant heap

of debris.

Maybe You thought this

as the fire took You with it.

Neo Noir: Brazil 1985

Parachute down nothingness,

realm of oblivion,

cascaded in your feathers

fall into existence.

Buildings of door

after door after steam

stack after

blue. Fault of

man in the neo world after

the death of your heart.

Run far away

make these necessary changes that it says to.

Distort your face

until it becomes unrecognizable,

until the numbness becomes elegance.

A Night Amongst One Hundred Twenty-One

Hold me in your arms,

decaying canopy of flesh

atop the collection of riddled bones

enclosed by our bodies' secrecy.

Strangle my veins,

cling to my arteries.

I want to breathe the air in your lungs.

Strip the silver

from my neck.

Clasp it while you're there.

Not too tight, just so that

the weight of your doubt crushes me slowly.

845 West End Ave

I was behind the record that spun on into the night

and the yellow light from the window that spilled into the street.

Beneath the crowded corners and buildings. The paperboy on his bike

in the early morning and the smell of baking bread that drifted down.

By the taxis that streamed past your eyes

and the shop you bought the fur coat at next door.

Thursday, 9:12 A.M. I believe.

I was there

I was always there

watching and waiting

for you.

But there were too many people in this world

for you to notice me.

For Anthony: He Spoke French to me

Your eyes were open when I left,

Dream now, sleep later

but I didn't mean to wake you

up, the floorboard creaked

when I was leaving.

I'll miss you when I remember the way

you practiced <<Le participe passé>>

was it poetry, French, Swedish, philosophy?

Say those words again

to me. From the day at Beverly Beach

when I fell asleep beside the Adirondack, cigarette underneath.

Sleep now, dream later

<<Elle s'est enfuie.>>

I wanted to write you, but I didn't

Yellow ink from the street lamp

spills into the room,

from the edges of the window sill,

it writes the letter for you.

Telling of how it is and how it was,

the way in which the wind tossed her hair

over the waves and into your arms. How the moonlight snuck

beneath the sinking dusk and out from under

the sun that swallowed these words.

Time slinks on in this way. In silence

it too eats these confessions of yours up.

Devours them into nothingness,

leaves only scraps that will turn to

withered dust.

And He Goes

on and on looking for you,

in the streets and the neighboring towns.

A crowd swarms

his thoughts drown. Faster

it fades into

the memory that stayed outside

locked in the nest of lies

you were told this whole time.

Farther you go

until it's only the fragments of you,

lining the pooling blood

on the edges of a thousand phone booths.

He doesn't hear you anymore,

he doesn't want to

remember you. Maybe

it was just the dreams of a delusional man

wrapped in cellophane,

delivered posthumously, past your house.

I dreamt of you last night

but it was never really you.

Your words were a blanket

and my pillow was your knife.

It cut deep into my skull,

creeping through connective tissue

finding its way to my brain.

There I have dreams of you.

What would you do if I told

these things? The fact that I

had been thinking about you.

You would call me crazy,

unashamedly, searing

these words into my brain.

Now it hurts to think of you.

Execution by Alien: This is what They told me

Hello,

Earthlings,

I have come to take your world.

My people and I are skilled

and I assure you it won't take very long.

I have come for the paperboy, the crowded streets, and

mice, the yellow glow that spills into the window panes

during twilight. I have come for the tv screens, the rotted beams

and the two lovers as your Hall

& Oates spins on into the night.

I have come for the skyscrapers clinging to the sky

the canopies of trees with slow streets underneath.

The stained satin and smothered pearls

that meet in the stars.

The corner street bus stop that you waited every day on.

The screaming silence

And the future that is in the past now

Yes, each and every thing

I have come to take it all.

There will be nothing left.

There will be no more *tomorrow I will..*

Death's Beginning

Inspired by poems from James Wright

Bury the ones you love,

on the riverbank beside the hill,

make their markers sharp, cleansed slate.

Embedded epitaphs. They will not crumble

as flowers do around them,

they will not mind the wind.

This is where reasoning is met with

fantasy, smothered in pearls and stained with stars.

This is the reasoning that died, killed, prevailed.

The everlasting of our antecedents.

Have I truly lived

There was nothing you could do

There was nothing you could do

but try to understand

when you fell overboard with the rest of the crew

the turnaround was not planned.

The sea stopped for only you

drowning its victims

in the dregs of billowing blue

but threw you into the stars.

And held you in the sky, far

above the clouds and past the prayers that went unanswered

you don't have to answer or speak out loud

it has already decided in its unknown kind of manner.

Let it envelope you into the night

Smothering, bolstered, harmonious light.

Like Tears in Rain: These Memories Will Be Lost

On Blade Runner 1982

Don't they echo all the same

when they hit the pavement?

Caressing the concrete,

falling fast down the drain.

But in the rain

there is electrical fire,

baptismal mist,

sets the world into embers

that drift down from the atmosphere.

But then I am reminded, they all hit the ground

just the same.

Dying by the Vine

My future is in the past now.

Drooping down from fleshy trees.

I watched them hang there,

unaware of my staring.

When they fell,

it was a new life.

Landing on the ground fixedly.

Slit their ties, cut unknowingly

from the vine that held their being.

Oh bury me in stained satin and smothered pearls.

In the clouds.

I cannot take this dying.

How Much I Can't Communicate

On Emily Dickinson

How much I cannot say —

—but I would like to!

It is swirling in my brain –

but will not be received—

the refugees of society-

laden in a corner —

that is where you will find – my thoughts!

In my head-

it is there

—tempered out of its cage

my thoughts can be found—

sitting at the bedside of a dying woman—

perching on her window – is the bird of veracity–

And you have not listened—

From the Mouths of Babes, Into the Hand that Feeds

Beyond the walls,

beneath the streets,

caved in with sewer rats.

Please, come find me.

They say when you pass

the ten lost and unaccounted for

pounds must be a fluke or clothes buried underneath.

But that was my soul.

my spine, my liver

leaving behind

the fleshy frame of debris.

What did dying feel like? you ask,

I can't begin to speak.

I have nothing but these asphyxiated

words to give to you.

Transcribed in bile and blood

and saline. This is my mind's

own to keep.

Addressed to 845 West End Ave: Posthumously

Don't you remember the way I wanted to leave you?

I didn't want my ghost

to follow, but it did, and I can't help

but watch the malice of your crimes

you left behind me.

The black and white tiles,

you replaced them

with white oak, hardwood,

turpentine,

a sofa, you call that?

Cushions jammed together,

at best a pile of rubbish, not fit for sitting.

I brought roses

for nobody,

left them in a vase by the door,

bohemian China,

I want you to remember,

see these things through my eyes.

How to Grieve

Stand on the rocks,

let it hit your face.

Crashing underneath the surface,

the waves

seeping into your skin,

with the hum of the horizon

on the sea.

Run far away.

Do what It says to do.

Lock yourself in its silence.

Let tears stains bleed through.

Let them run

down the faces

of the people in the pews.

Fantasia: Night on Bald Mountain

This is what dying feels like.

The sharpness of three hundred twenty seven

knives pricking their way to the cerebrum,

in the skull,

piercing gradually.

And a million mourning doves descend,

down from the hill,

collapse on the wind

to stop and look at me.

They pass away to reveal

the apparitions escaping

down to earth, the valley

quakes, shudders

at its new residentaries.

And these headless riders

welcome me in

their embrace.

Faster, they call, faster

I can't

I can't.

Go on.

They float down without me.