

THREADS BARED

A THESIS IN
Creative Writing and Media Arts

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

by
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is part response part exploration into the world of those fighting and losing the battle over addiction. It is meant to follow the progression of addiction, from the root causes beginning in early childhood trauma and abuse, to the continued need to numb and erase the memory of these traumas. These poems, all a blurring of imagining and real, are inspired by the experiences and memories of my sisters, Maria and Marcy, who succumbed to the fatal outcome of unresolved personal battles and addictions, and from the voices of women in recovery; women fighting every day to restore their lives and get their families back.

Threads Bared is divided into three sections which follow the stages of addiction, crave, binge, and purge. “Crave” explores memories of the how and why someone begins using a substance, in this case drugs and alcohol. “Binge” follows with poems about addictions and the cycle of recovery and relapse. Finally, “Purge” continues with the subject of relapse and the end result of death.

The voices in this collection are multiple and elliptical. Points of view include the many voices of addicts, the personification of the drug, and the voices from the outside, the witnesses. As addiction is cloaked in secrecy this body of work attempts to answer the *why*, expose the struggle, and inspire a positive outcome for those who read it.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “Threads Bared” presented by Michelle Marie Navarro, candidate for the Master of Fine Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis was inspired by the tragedy of my two sisters' deaths from addiction. It then developed into something larger in an attempt to answer the questions: What is the root of addiction? Why did this happen to my sisters but not me? When does addiction begin? Why did my sisters' stories end? These questions became my obsession.

Poetry is my vehicle to a truth. Poetry, for me, is the divide between the real and mythic, sometimes poetry is a way of fleshing out answers. C.D. Wright wrote, "Poetry does not presume to know, but is angling to get a glimpse of what is gradually coming into view; it aims to rightly identify what is looming; it intends to interrogate whatever is already in place. Poetry, whose definition remains evasive by necessity, advocates the lost road; and beyond speech—waiting, listening, and silence." As an outsider to addiction, as a witness to its aftermath, I express in poetic forms the stories I have seen.

One of my entry points to creating a project manuscript on the stigma of addiction came through classes and workshops in which I discovered poets like Natalie Diaz and her book *When My Brother Was an Aztec*. In her words I found a way to write about the tragedy of addiction through, to create the subject in a mythic form and at the same time allow me to approach the painful truth of my own family's secrets. Diaz's title poem influenced several of my own poems including the "Project Dungeon," and "Sister Suicide," with lines like these, "He slept / in filthy clothes smelling of rotten peaches and matches, fell in love // with sparkling spoonfuls the carnival dog-women fed him. My parents / lost their appetites for food, for sons. Like all bad kings, my brother / wore a crown, a green baseball cap turned backwards." (26-30) Diaz mixes the images of the addict's appearance with the metaphors

like “sparkling spoonfuls” and “crown.” These descriptions give a mythical quality to a harsh reality of the drug and its victim.

Through these past three years I have been fortunate to work with professors with different styles and points of view, Dr. Boisseau, the formalist and modernist, and Dr. Bar-Nadav the post-modernist. Through classes and seminars on craft, meter, form and syntax I added depth to my rather flat poems. In workshops, working with fellow students, I learned to see my writing through different eyes. Critiquing other’s poems helped me with my own. When I couldn’t write, I read. I learned to write with my body and not with my mind. The body does not lie. All of this lead me down the path to the better poet I see in myself now. All of these moves and the instruction led me back to poems written four and five years ago—some included in this thesis—and I was able to revise them into completely new poems. “Ekepepotamena [escape]” the ending poem of my thesis was part of a collection of poems I wrote as an undergraduate in 2013 using Sappho fragments. I wasn’t sure why it wasn’t complete but I continued to revisit it and make small changes. A word or a line break would change but it wasn’t until this past winter break—it snowed all day—that I realized where the poem should go. It was the snow and the idea of the finite, of how fragile and immense we are that led me in a fresh direction. One snowflake added to a million others creates a drift. I felt the echo of poets I had read, like Emily Dickinson, Susan Howe, and Dana Levin, their work influenced the imagery of the liminal body. When I finished revising the poem I knew or rather the poem told me it was the ending poem of the thesis.

I must give credit for some of the poems in this thesis to the Expressions Therapy class that I teach for women in recovery. As a way to help them write about their own

struggles with addiction I decided to use the framework of *Alice in Wonderland* as a writing prompt for the class. Some of the women found it difficult to write about their personal experiences so I suggested they use Alice as the vehicle to write in third person. Immediately they identified the white rabbit as a metaphor for their addiction. At the same time I started writing my own poems about my sisters through this same lens. The poems titled “White Rabbit” and “White Rabbit Returns” are personifications of the drug and addiction. Other poems, “Down the Rabbit Hole,” and the two titled “Chapter X,” use the titles from the Lewis Carroll book to springboard the poems. Throughout the thesis I embed lines from characters in the Carroll book. For instance, in “Half-Way Home,” Murry the creepy neighbor quotes the Mad Hatter, “I see what I eat, I eat what I see,” which was taken from the Mad Tea-Party chapter.

I began to move away from the “Alice” theme as it became easier for me to write about my sisters. Through readings in Dr. Bar-Nadav’s Contemporary Poetry classes and workshops I discovered new voices in poetry. Poets like C.D. Wright, Patricia Smith, and Kevin Young all taught me different and valuable lessons in craft. C.D. Wright’s collection *Shall Cross* presented a way to disrupt form and dig in to images in a colloquial way. “Down the Rabbit Hole” “Lost Out,” and “Far from Home” are examples of how to use the language of the natural world as metaphors. Kevin Young’s use of drastic enjambment in *Jelly Roll* steered the way for the poems “Tool,” “Bloom,” and “Wheeling.” And Patricia Smith’s *Blood Dazzler*—her collection about Hurricane Katrina—taught me how to take on the single subject—addiction—and write about it through the use of personification, multiple lenses and voices. Smith’s influence is found in poems throughout the thesis.

In preparing and ordering the thesis I thought it appropriate to use the stages of addiction as section dividers. This helped me organize the poems in a sequential order spanning the life of an addict from the introduction to drugs to the final destruction of addiction. In doing this I discovered where the holes were in the overall narrative of the collection, and at the last minute, I realized I needed to create new poems for those spaces. Most of the missing pieces were in the “Purge” section, and I found that I had not addressed the subject of rehabilitation and recovery. This led to my research into high-end, “painless” rehab facilities similar to the one described in the poem “Malibu.” From there it led to another poem about facilities run with the assistance of Medicaid, what rehab and transitional living is imagined in “Half-way Home.” The “Scripture” poems were designed to dispute and then actuate the philosophies of addiction as interpreted by psychoanalysts Carl Jung and R.D. Laing. The poems “Beach” and “ReSet Fail” are imaginings of my sister, Maria, and her struggle to come to grips with a cycle of recovery and relapse.

The overall sonic quality and rhythm in the thesis finally came after a long road with Dr. Boisseau’s Poetic Forms classes. Her classes shaped my way of writing with the body and beat of the heart. I learned that poetry is a physical manifestation of the body, and I became aware of a language that came out of my center. When attempting to sit down and try to *think* a poem, the poem was unsuccessful. But when I felt something physically in my center I could not get the words out fast enough and onto the paper. This brought forward another conflict, that of the revision process. As furious as the words first came out onto the page, during the process of revision, I was forced to put my focus on each line, each word. Revision, I discovered, is a process when the poet slows down and *thinks* language and form. Syntax and diction became a key part of revising. It is necessary to know and work with

traditional forms of poetry. I included a few in this thesis, for instance, the heroic couplet in “Mutable Day Dream,” was modeled after Dick Davis’s poem “Into Care.” I used part of the first line of Davis’s poem to jump into my own poem, “Here is a scene from...” My palindrome “Nexus of a Mythomaniac,” was influenced by Randall Mann’s “Fantasy Suite,” and Spencer Reese’s “Ghazals for Spring” taught me how to disrupt form and helped me shape “Half-way Home.”

The voices of the poems at times become elliptical in the spirit of what Stephen Burt in *Close Calls with Nonsense*, describes as “the elliptical self, uneasily social, grows only uneasily grammatical—each distortion or shock to the syntax means, usually, shock to the self...I am X, I am Y.” The *I*, *you* and *we* are slippery in these poems. Addiction is a circle in this collection—using, recovery, relapse, and death. The reality is that in the majority of cases 40-60% of patients relapse after treatment. The addition of the poems “demi-god,” “Lost Out,” “The Nihilist,” and “Chapter X” among others illustrates how relationships can result in another level of dysfunction. Domestic abuse and unhealthy relationships are known causes of substance abuse and addiction. I worked with different character voices, some with imagined points of view, others from the stories of my sisters and recovering addicts. For this I referenced the moves of C.D. Wright and her project book *One Big Self*. Wright’s collection is a cacophony of voices, the inmates, the poet, other poets, historical figures, all puzzled together. My experience with the women in recovery and the Wright book taught me how to write their words and narratives in fragments of images. One example from the thesis is “Scripture According to Laing.” The narrative is based on one of the women in my recovery group. Another poem “Project Dungeon,” uses the message my sister

spray-painted on the basement wall of our home. “Post-Apocalyptic Love” is from one of the last stories my sister told me, before she died, about her ex-boyfriend-dealer.

My creative nonfiction classes expanded my skills as I worked with ways to create the narrative and scene instead of just reporting an experience. Readings that influenced me across genres included Edouard Levé’s *Autoportrait*—a stream of consciousness work written as a string of declarative sentences—and Lucia Berlin’s *A Manual for Cleaning Women*. Both exhibited ways that as a writer I could step out of my body and create distance to become a different voice and at the same time creatively auto-write my experiences and memories. This distance from the subject guided me to not hide or hold back my subjective truth from the reader. These new strategies of auto-writing drew from my own journal entries and became the poems, “Threads Bared,” “demi-god,” “Heathenly Girl,” and “Today Her Apocalypse Begins.”

The thesis as a whole only attempts to answer the *why* of addiction. My theme returns again and again back to unresolved childhood trauma and abuse. It is the thread that connects these poems overall. Near the conclusion of writing this collection I discovered the poet Cynthia Cruz. She is described as a post-confessional poet and her work addressing the issues of childhood trauma and addiction really opened a new portal of *weirding* language for me as in “Kingdom of Dirt,” “Death, / Disguised inside me, already, // As sleaze. / Grime and her magnificent seed.” Her books *Ruin*, and *How the End Begins* revealed new ways to begin and end a poem. Her influence can be seen in poems “Tool,” “Bloom,” and “Wheeling.” The poems “Hex,” “Golem,” and “Vaped” were created out of writing exercises shadowing her poems. Cruz also reminded me that a poet can mine the memories of childhood and create a mythical narrative, from her poem “Twelve in Yellow-Weed at the

Edge,” “Beneath the trash of willow, I am. The sorrow / Of trailer parks and carnie uncles. The poor / Girl’s underworld, a weedy thing. The Night.” (4-6) I branched out on my own from a memory, created a scene, some with a grain of truth, some, dream or fantasy. “Heathenly Girl” and “Tool,” exemplify the influence of Cruz.

Overall my thesis represents the fusion of poetic voices that I have been exposed to in the past three years. It is also the fusion of memory and stories of addicts struggling to come to grips with recovery. Since childhood I have thought of myself as a poet. I am deeply indebted to the professors that became my mentors in poetry, and I am thankful for the knowledge they shared through the MFA program. The craft and tools I have learned through this program moves my obsession to a higher level. Poetry lives inside me. I hope that the skills I have acquired can express, through this thesis, at least the beginning of an answer to the stigma and struggle of addiction; a secret that almost every family carries and attempts to erase.

Dedicated
to

my sisters Maria and Marcy,
and the women of Catherine's Place

CRAVE

Threads Bared

*All in the golden afternoon--full leisurely we glide.
--Lewis Carroll*

Back home at the farm it's summer again.
The honeysuckle clings to the humid air.

I drag Grandma's old treadle Singer out
to the front porch. The windows open—

Heart blasts out of the speakers: *Crazy on you*.
The song reminds me of when

we used to cut-out summer dresses.
Your's, a cotton sunflower print.
Mine, calico of blue moons and stars.

Today in the yard, your baby, barely three
years, and the dog run through the sprinkler.
The day filtered in sun sparked spray.

I sew and trim seams and sing:
I was a willow last night in my dream...
The stray threads roll away in the breeze.

The screen door slams like your laugh
in the south wind.

Vodka and oxy stole your everything.
Last time I saw you, laid out for display,

the mortician had dressed you in the sun-
flower dress. Your face was powder, under the skin

a map of broken veins—you left us
lost, mud-tongued, grave dirt in our hands.

Tool

What ruined me once, will ruin me always.
--Cynthia Cruz

At twelve you found
a taste for screwdrivers

in the morning. Smoked
weed with your sister.

Rode horses down the tracks
toward the green wood.

Already familiar with an older
man's hands,

you took to
the tool. Swallowed

the secrets. Cloaked
in this new way

of how not to feel.
You were saddled and glorious.

Hollowant

hunger comes
in many guises

a hollowant
a swallowant
to fill-a-want

the starved eye
empty belly

empty
mouth the sky
sky as big as

want the throat
guzzles

a nine dollar bottle
empty spirit
expands want

unbinds hunger
eats the sky

Heathenly Girl

Sunk in mud past her shoes, matted red hair with a bad bob-cut, cut in a kitchen chair “Chubby,” is what they called her. A homely *pig-nosed-freckle-face*. She wouldn’t speak up—trauma by proxy through way of the nuns—as day after day, in habits, they pinched, and paddled, and bruised. She squeezed her eyes shut, lay her head in her hands. *Five Hail Mary’s for it all to go away*. Lied in confession, skipped the penance. *Zero Our Father’s today*. Her brother stole her diary, unlocked her worlds:

*Dear Diary,
My 2nd cousin, Ed, home from Vietnam, showed me a scar
on his neck then kissed me with his tongue—he’s a vampire.
Tasted like grenadine and iron.*

After school she hid out in the attic reading *The Fear of Flying* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Some called her a shady girl. Some say she told lies. Some say she wished herself into the well.

Bloom

A plain girl
all pinked and plumped,

green-cow-eyed, she was ready
for anarchy.

In his parent's rec-room
he turned her on

to Pink Floyd's *Wish
You Were Here*,

Thai-stick,
and her first concert,

Bad Co. Everyone
saw him

so bent. She'd never hung
so high.

He watched her blossom,
cling to the branch.

It was the outset
of summer and she—

riding *bitch* on the back
of his Triumph—

already loved him.

Kudzu

I'm a dirty whore.
He bewitches me

In the rupture
From barren to

Alive again.
Vines tangle &

Grow in me.
Choke me out,

Width & breath
& crush.

I say
Escape but can't,

Breathe. Can't
Feel

Nothing but
The bruise of

His stem crushed
To a purple

Honey inside me—
A sweet wine.

My plea:
Never release me.

demi-god

He's one broke down mess in his 2006 Rockfest t-shirt—the one that *Staind* headlined—and oily jeans. Got no bite left. And me, he broke me too. He says I'm *some ugly gnome*. I listen to his toothless vibrato and once it'd stir me to attention. Give him a blow job for love cause that was all I had and well I loved him anyway mouth and heart and the only thing he loved was the mouth and what it could do—not what poetry came out of it. Even gnomes need time off from grinding on the stone that replaced his beating heart. Jerk and smack with him. Me, dormant in a neglected garden. This girl has learned when to stop asking for what a *mushy-mushy gnome* wants. And when dealing with a renaissance man I've learned to develop an affinity for a secular vernacular. I really envy the relationship between a goat and a horse or a man and his guitar. They play each other with such devotion. Such a two-faced demi-god. He sits upon his velboa skinned Lazy-Boy throne with a golden can of ale in his hand. Bullies his archaic words—spitting morose and maudlin with melodramatic lunacy.

Wheeling

We stole Dyrenium from my dad
'cause pot was not enough

of a buzz anymore.
The pills made us pee for days.

Ludes and Valium
became my thing. Gulped

down with swigs of slo-gin.
You shot black

beauties, coke, and smack,
said you always wished

for *more than wings*.
I sheltered in the valley

of a roof. Watched
as you wheeled

mid-air like a swallow
and crashed

down bloodied. Pin pricks
of the missing feathers on your skin.

Far from Home

She picks a conch shell out
of the pile in the terra cotta pot.

Thousands of miles from its home
and still the shell spills sand

from its center. She wants to crawl
in, cup a beach in her hands.

Listen to the prose of the ocean—

Tell me about your emptiness.
Tell me about the moonrise.

How blue is your home.

Thinking Man at Colfax Tavern, NM

--after Rodin & Keats

Fallow man, suit of marble
man. He watches

his back in the bar mirror.
Spine line, deep as a canyon,

river chiseled of muscle.

Eyes settle on a cigarette
burn next to his beer, right fist

pressed to his mouth,
he attempts to eat a knuckle

of intense scrutiny. *I need*

another whiskey and beer.
His left finger traces the words

graffitied next to the burn:
man is capable

of being in uncertainties w/o
any irritable reaching

after fact & reason...
He takes the shot.

His toes curl inside work boots that brace
for balance on an unsteady stool.

Gin Angst

How much gin
causes a breakup?

A bird flies
in an open window.

You're prints
left on the pane.

Numb I sit in a cage
with the bruise of
an empty glass.

What's worse? You
not here? Or you
lying here? Biting,
punching, weaving
drunken lies. I'd rather
listen to that bird
tell stories about your empty
cigarette pack crumpled
beneath the bed.

Sister Suicide

Loss implies such rigid divisions. *Come in.*

--Karen Volkman

You kill you, deliberate, slow. Slowly shaving yourself away like a razor pressed against a sodden current of self. A ruddy pit. Press harder, curl layers of skin. Slivers sliver like soap to a core bared useless. How long before the whittled bone melts away in the minutiae? How long before dissolution of it all? Ah, but you love prolonging pain, need the affliction of the almost dying daily. Floating your own fate, to take small breaths below a water line. Soon a harbor will empty.

BINGE

Solitude Tastes Like Opium

--Adam Zagajewski

cloved in waiting

a forbidden blue

rose cupped

the bite of poppies

tears into iron sleep

awakes such velvet ardor

midnight a den with no moon

my Assyrian dream

floats on trails of smoke

so lucid

quite what flying must be

fluent myrrh

heat up tar of exquisite

flowering Asia

lull me past

alone

and ache

to arrive home

taste some spoonful

of another self

laud the bitter bouquet

Hex

Yes, stoke the fever

Burn in

A spoon

Cook up & consume

Ignite the pit inside

A seized body

Smacked or deathed—

Close a window

Smother the flame

Let the dragon

Smolder in the vein

Golem

Born of smack

Kill It itched

It scratched

A scab

It didn't shit

For days

A blank stare

Saddle the beast

& ride

The only dream

A prick of

Blue roan sleep

Rigged lies

White Rabbit

Give me your sufferings. I'll swallow
them all. Just know I give
them back three-fold.

You'll find you hover
over your wounds—don't look down
they're always aware—

The maladies, like sand bags, hang
from the hot-air balloon
you love to ride in.

The gravity of those wounds will bring the fall. You crash
and wake from a gooched-up dream

to face the gloom—your life's work—
to renounce the used rig, to elide

the putrid sting...Ignore
the genii in the body that needles you:

Look at me. I am your war. You must flay yourself.

Malibu

I'm on vacation at a resort
called rehab.

The Pacific is oxide and alumina,
a slight curve on the horizon

proof I still live on earth
as the sun sets.

I can't imagine watching
another day drop

in the ocean w/o
a joint, a Corona w/lime,

a twinge inside the mouth

that wants
the prick that pushes

the warm moon
into a vein.

I've never felt this
unfixed.

In yoga pants, an *ohm* tank,
clean, bare feet, salutations

tend the night.
I'll never feel

unbinged. The nurses like a coven
of White Witches

with their wands and fairy-dust
tans, and teeth too

straight float by in gauzy
sundresses and flip-flop

chants: *Namaste, time for group.*
No twelve-steps here. No god.

A resolution for nihilists.
I fill a journal

with nothing.
The passage not so easy.

Instead I ride the horse
bare-backed into the marine-misted beast.

Beached

*In this short Life / That merely lasts an hour /
How much—how / little—is / within our power.
--Emily Dickinson*

Prime the rig, push in the tide, hit the big wave—

You too become

an ocean.

You too

a grain of sand.

Until *you* disappears.

The tide & the erosion.

Fucked

up on the strand we

wait for the swell to recede.

Mutable Day Dream

Here is a scene from today's sudden daydream:
The poet wanders into a tree-rimmed field.

A pasture of clover buzzes from beneath;
dragonflies swarm as she pauses in the heat.

She looks straight up into the sun, blinded
by the sting of high noon. It's summertime

and horses mow the meadow one bite at a time,
their tails slaughtering flies—

the sound, snaps to their hides like a willow switch—
They issue tremolo breaths between the whips.

Here are subtitles for the same daydream:
The poet suffers random thoughts of being.

Horses. Do they have a strong sense of self?
What would they do if their spell of love failed?

Is there a link— a lyrical track to alone?
What if they can't find a way home?

Shooting Stars

When I need that thing with feathers,
I cling to small lights.
Burn a candle. Fold my hands

like a church.

I see past the cataract-
clouded moon, to the Milky Way
—an altar of dead

stars—each engraved with a request

to stave off your death. You used to pretend
your hands were guns—aimed to shoot
the stars—*pow!pow!pow!*

So tonight when I watched a bird
fly into the pane, I fell
back on a chant.

The only spell I know by rote:
Hail Mary full of grace...lull me past repose,
Let me survive another night

amid all your murdered stars.

Scripture According to Jung

There is no longer any higher power,
save that urge for another religious conversion.
No longer any inside or outside.

I am a *We*, a mind/body/feeling machine.
There is no place between sky and earth.
Yet, we find a space in between. Our secret
thirst for the spirit. *The ego does not know,
doesn't waste much spit telling you
what you already know:*

Always return to emptiness.
All merges into the genie trapped in the bottle.
We stand as a divergent shadow.

Scripture According to Laing

*There is a great deal of pain in life and perhaps the only pain
that can be avoided is the pain that comes from trying to avoid pain.*

--R.D. Laing

Stayed up all night
with you,

my wound. The room littered
with empty

whiskey bottles,
roaches, and a 9mm

cocked in my hand.
I saw

my beast-self

try to break out—
a nightly

soiree
that once was fun—

Broke the mirror
with my fist,

to release and divide
us. Glued

the bloody shards back
to the wall.

My jagged jigsaw face,
dear wound.

Eyes blooded
the color of rose

quartz, known as healing
stones—

Properties that pilot
the flow

of the capricious
heart. Don't serve

like a healing
stone's supposed

to do. What's left but
a release? Squeeze the trigger,

take the shot,
eradicate the wound.

Lost Out

In the holler
of your throat

dwells a cavern
called sorrow.

You drink the cry
down in gulps

till the bottle
lies empty.

*My family
jilted me.*

*Most days children
creep me out,*

yours and my own.
That's why

you are so alone.
That low spot

blinds your eye.
Holler

stuck in your throat.
How deep

that valley below
the pass.

Like a crag you
sit sharp and ragged.

ReSet Fail

There is always the plan:
shapeshift into the next self.

A prospect: To swap
the needle & the bottle

for a different god.
The habit

of numb to numb
that one

looping scene:
His cold hands, his stank mouth,

stealing the places
that never belonged to him.

Half-way Home:

This home ain't no home. It's a Mad House. The nurses say,
"NO! You can't order everything on tonight's menu. No you can't smoke."

This place is depressing and smells like pee. No jellybeans,
no Oxy, or Metho, or weed. I'm always tweaked. Now have a smoke.

My dad died at 61. Not from cancer but from a blow to the head,
courtesy of my mom—She musta lost her mind. She smokes all day long.

She's 82. The way she got beat, nothing gonna kill her. I would
leave her and go down to the bar for a smoke and that's when I'd get

high. Yeah, I get it—I shouldn't be here—should be dead a hundred times
over. But somethin', some-thing always saves me. Not the smoke.

Not the dope. The vapor of beauty. It's ev-ry-where. The leaves
just start to turn. Fog lifts on the lake. An odd red

sunset that reminds me of "Smoke on the Water" playing on the radio
and being a kid. In a real house with a driveway, a chain-link fence,

and the neighbor, Murry—

who mowed his lawn in cut-offs and cowboy boots. He had a Mad Hatter
tattoo. He taught me how to blow smoke rings. Kissed me hard "down there,"

just so he could taste "my sweet," said, "I see what I eat. I eat what I see."
I thought he was gonna marry me. He told me not to squeal. He smelled

like Brüt and Vaseline. The music so loud. His fingers rough.
Never kissed me on the lips. The only ring I got was smoke.

Residue

wait don't drop me
too late
i'm fallen

on a bed of needles
i'm in the shadow
discarded a needle

dropped to the downy
downy ground
floats soft

soft as i am this
is me
the destruction

of me is this is me
the leavings spare
the needle

Nexus of a Mythomaniac

Found poem: Autoportrait by Edouard Levé

Solitude keeps me consistent. Is that lie really true?
Go see if I'm over there.

I feel like an impostor whose obscene
novelty disgusts me. My amorous states

bring two types of betrayal, simultaneous
lies. I would like to have myself hypnotized.

And when I look out a window I feel no nostalgia
for childhood or Bach or a spring snow storm.

I cannot perceive the delay in mirrors
or the last time it was yesterday.

The last time it was yesterday,
I could not perceive the delay in mirrors

or my childhood or Bach or a spring snow storm.
And when I look out a window I feel no nostalgia

to lie. I would like to have myself hypnotized.
Betrayal brings two types of betrayal. Simultaneous

novelty disgusts me. My amorous states
feel like an impostor who's obscene.

Go see if I'm over there.
Solitude is persistent, constantly my lies ring true.

Coming Down

Pallid-faced moon
sets in the morning sky.

I wish I was still
high as that moon,
fading, staring across,
the bloodied horizon,
and startled by the autumn
sun. The seize of grief—

overtakes my wake—
a slack body
reflected in the pane
of glass. To break or
open up. The night is
a blank scape.

Someone call me
by my name. Tell me I'm still here.

PURGE

Chapter X [Part 1]

All these beards around, I wanted
the man with the *Fu-Manchu*. The one
with White Rabbit tattooed on his chest.

I met him at a Social D concert.
He kept me in his room
for a week. White Rabbit

in a bottle. White Rabbit cooked
in a spoon.

It's all I consumed. & when I cried
quit—
I got shut up by his fist.

He named me Red
Queen 'cause of my hair.
He fucked me till I was

barely there.

& when I had
shrunk

to a hollow seed—
he rolled me up in a rug
that smelled like pee

& tossed my ass in a dumpster
like some gutter punk slut.

Today Her Apocalypse Begins

The sun has not risen. The birds refuse the song. A black Impala circles the lot. Its alarm the only sound. Behind the wheel Fu-Manchu stalks. Hidden inside tainted

windows: A gun. A pipe.
An eight ball for sale.

Her skin—a tight suit of wool. She's lost her hands. Can't scratch the itch for what feels like hair's fast-growing roots. By noon she'll be Rapunzlesque, braiding a way out to another fix and the alarm alarming, circling ever tighter. To flee but no feet, to where? There is no home. How do you run from a shadow all your own?

White Rabbit Returns

I'm the hover-cloud
you crave. I always
return. Give me an ocean,
I'll repay with rain.
I'll drown you
dry. You know
I'm a fiend—
a faux. I'm your last
home. You suffer a wish
for a final sleep.
You bear me the assassin.

Project Dungeon

You could not sit alone in the Comfort Inn
in the aloneness of yourself dense as clay
your loyalty—*dear* friends:

The buzzards swooped in to pick
the red-rimmed-blue
eyes of you already staring
up beyond the stars

Your *friends*: pecked at
the blister of your heart and burst
you into a constellation

Your *friends*: voracious
swallowed up and left the empty handle
of vodka behind

your body spooned heavy
into itself on a bedbug ridden mattress

That last Christmas at home you spray-painted
a forecast on the basement wall:

Look up, always look up...

best friends forever gave Maria her stars

You wouldn't resist

You knew we'd find you later

Chapter X [Part 2]

—I run into the mini-mart

to make a call,
buy some smokes
& hide. White Rabbit.

He lurks in the alleyway
next to the chop-shop,
plastic packets in his hand.

Out of the shadow he comes
& says with a grin:

*You really a kitten after all.
you. so. small.*

Watch it rain.

Down the Rabbit Hole

She ignored
her left brain—sleep-sodden, stunned
thoughts turned to White Rabbit.

In the mirror, the shock
of pink-eyes—her eyes stare
through her eyes. It's not

too late,
too late. When you fall again how far is too far,
too out,
too high?

Is the center of the earth the bottom or is the center
of the bottom the earth?

She had reached a false bottom. Crawled through a muck
of fen and bog. To breathe crypt-air. Knees caked in dung.
Marly clay under nails.

Sowbugs and grubs hung in her hair. Now she
wanted to plant herself in a garden.
A bed made just for her. Assume a tiny seed.

enormous. She fears her filth. Sprout out of a mud-licked grave. She's sick of being
Filling that hole.

But down, down, down, she goes
alone. No one to follow but the abundant
White Rabbit
holding bags of ice and snow.

Would she sprout or shrivel?

Might she find a deeper bottom?

It might end
you know, in my going out all together like a candle. What I
would be like then?

She finally considered what that looked like
what—
the aftermath:

A candle blown out. No wish.

Trails of ghost-smoke.

Post-Apocalyptic Love

Fu-Manchu whispered in her ear:

I love you. 'For you ever
Leave me,

I'll rabbit your throat. Watch
The life pour out

On the floor. Fuck your corpse
Till its stiff.

Sheathed in your blood—
That's how deep I love.

Hooligan

I'm staring past my image in the silvered bar mirror at Jimmy's Jigger. A block from your ICU room. The Stones blast out of the jukebox. Your song, *Sister Morphine*. I order another Jameson, neat, a generous pour, and try to drink a Guinness—not my drink, yours. *Sláinte*—I faintly hear you say— I peek through the blinds of your ICU window from my perch. The machines inside beeping, the push in and exhale of the respirator. All the tubes, one red and a few more translucent, one glows quinine blue. Tapped like a keg. Trolling in and out of your arm—flushing out the gin and pills that have put you down. But then, you appear in the mirror, a flash of light, your long blond hair covering your face like a veil, hiding the diagonal scar—an interrupted X across your nose and cheek—the mark of a past combat. Your Claddagh ring flashes as you press your hand against the other side of the glass giving me the peace sign and then the finger. *Cause you know and I know in the morning I'll be dead*. Any minute your right ventricle will burst. Now I finish your drink. I'll wait for you here, I think. You'll be coming around again. One more round.

You Still Here?

I expected more from your visit
last night, more than just your blighted glare.

Even if it seemed like a dream. Being dead
nearly a year comes with consequences.

Mind full of grave outcomes, for those that remain.
Your truancy weakens the position in a fight

for both sides. A punch in the face

you won't feel. My fist whiffing through your shadow
hitting the plaster wall. You left in the middle

of a sentence, a dial tone then voicemail.
Silence. You called it in— *dead silence*.

Vaped
for Marcy

sometimes the spirit
staved the bottle
sometimes refused its leave

sometimes I forgot
my sister died
trying

to capture

what cleaved
sometimes
the bottle got her

most times she tried
to siphon the last
draught of vapor

most times that spirit didn't
abide the final time the potion
took her:

the bottle called suicide

Lost Road

--after C.D. Wright

Mid-way along the path
I lost the hand written
map. My only account

of you. Followed a trail
through the snow. I fell—
snow angel frozen

on my back. I was tired
of plowing through
to your next scheme.

I remember you
told me about the dead:
Silence, down a lost road,

horses quiver,
muscle a moonlit field.
The only sound the issue

of blue-cloud breath. Without
struggle. Horses speak
without words.

Mom held your hand
when you died.
Not everyone gets that.

The landscape shifts. Stops in
winter's night gleam.
I break in the last drift.

. Frieze

--after Edvard Munch

Let me be calm after
the fact. A scream in skin
with no sound. Trapped. I am
the haunt. An orb all head-
ache. My hands forever
cover my ears
to prevent
escape. My aura
radiates like
aurora
borealis
but hotter
and madder.

I walk in black
sleep my moans seep
out. Leaks from bones.
A mournful echo floats
across the bridge, an echo
carried down river
on a winter shivered
wind, an echo—
you're dead.
Calm. Let me be
calm.

Willow

for Maria

Each leaf, a corpse
of summer.

As they fall
so fell you. The willow

tree's
slender branches

shed simple leaves
feather veined,

serrated and blue—

All I saw of you
from the precipice

of the grave. Silver edges.
No flaws.

Shift

Finally you escaped the custody
of your body,

your deep-boned pain. The body
left behind an abandoned

shell dappled blue. Stained
by the sky.

I wish that you had been
turned to ash—set free

to the air or sea.
Seeded the earth,

reborn as a sprout,
more than a vessel of decay.

Your body
a fatal error under sod and fallen

leaves. A sealed box where
you would never want to be

with platinum hair, bare feet, pearled nails.
Perfectly departed.

A white gauze shift,
it's so cold here in the final fold.

Echo }

Sound reflects
your acoustic light.

I want to hear
your name bounce off

the canyon walls.
I want you to say *yes*

I'm sorry
I want you [still] alive.

We floated
the Rio Grande

last year amazed
at the corn-flower

sky. We watched crows
soar. So fluid

our laughter bounced off
sweating granite cliffs.

Now I look
down from the Gorge bridge

adrift. Your life roared
out rapid as a river.

Never Will

--after Emily Dickinson

Never mind that creak
in the floorboard,

never mind who-
ever. The empty room stirs.

Never mind so long, so soon

wandering in that room. Full
of sun exposes floating dust-motes.

A slight chill.
Never sick again, never seen again.

Forever— drift on
silence, covered over

in a white cloak .
Nevertheless called Ghost.

Echo }}

girl of one

spoken word

girl of another's

word girl

of the river

canyon

Echo dwells

in a shadow

of cliffs

artful in taking

the last

few words

only the last

few words as

her own echo

listen

her mouth is yours

a cave full of

reverb claim

the final word

her own

she opens up

merely sound

opens up

her voice your

voice skips over

a veil of water

Echo returns

a song she sings

your song sings

ghost sings the canyon

Like Bare Elision

The windowpane answers
the question with an echo.

The rain spilled out
of a sill. One last exhale.

What was the question?
I make you the night,

dream of the storm
that swallowed you

whole & carry ashes
over the threshold.

Echo }}}

outside myself

[a ghostly comfort]

I pour your ashes over the side of the boat

a gust of wind brings you back

the dust clings to me

I yell your name

into the river gulch

MARIA

my voice returns

hollow

three times

Ma

'ria---ia---a---}}}

only the fog

floats over water

an acoustic shift sounds like

nothing

Ekepepotamena [escape]

*Having been breathed out / you will go
your own way / among dim shapes.*

--Sappho

You, *Shadow*, gloaming
in the corner

of my eye. The frozen
moted light. Early winter

flexes its muscle in the door-
way of your body

or something more
liminal. The snow—

a wrested *escape of a soul*
into nothingness.

.
You, drift of a million
flakes. Fall into

a sparrow's nest. Yes you were
right there.

VITA

Michelle Marie Navarro was born on May 30, 1960, in Independence, Missouri. She attended Our Lady of Presentation Catholic School and then Lee's Summit High School in Lee's Summit, Missouri. She graduated in 1978. Michelle began her college career at Longview Community College, transferring to Johnson County Community College and ultimately dropping out in 1986 to focus on raising her son Sean. She promised herself she would return to complete her degree in the future. During this time she worked in the restaurant industry, moved through the ranks to management and corporate training with various restaurants. In 2009 she returned to college, starting at the University of Missouri-Kansas City to complete her undergraduate degree in English. In 2014 Michelle was accepted into the MFA program for Creative Writing and Media Arts. Her poems have been published in *Number One*, *Dossier*, *Bear Review*, *I-70 Review*, and *Sprung Formal*. She was an Osher Scholar, awarded the Crystal Field Award in Poetry in 2014, and The John Latosi Award for Creative Writing in 2016.

Michelle teaches an Expressions Therapy workshop in creative writing for women in recovery at Catherine's Place and is a member of The Writer's Place. She is currently a waitress and poet living in Kansas City, Missouri.