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Late Bloomer

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment for the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing
Poetry

Allyson Nobles
B.A. University of New Orleans, 2013

December, 2017

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Poetics: A Preface

The theory and practice of my poetics stem from several sources. First, it is important for my poetry to connect with the audience on both the interpersonal and social levels. Additionally, I enjoy playing with various forms, formal and free, and grant priority to sound and to structure when composing.

Beyond these aspects, my poetics come from what drives my act of putting a pen to paper. I don't feel that I have accomplished my goal as a writer unless there is more meaning and integrity behind a poem than simply its ability to mold into a form or style of writing. Although form and other poetics devices are important, they are secondary to subject, which is inspired by literary influences, family, music, film, and my hometown of New Orleans.

Writers

Recently I have begun to appreciate contemporary and women writers, while also acknowledging the importance of the masculine perspective. Identifying my favorite poets and other literary inspirations is difficult because the answer changes with the day. However, I have been inspired by Margaret Atwood, Hilda Doolittle, Jericho Brown, and Sappho, as well as my mentors and many of my peers.

Besides poets, I have always had an earnest appreciation for writers such as Paolo Coelho, Don DeLillo, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. In fiction, my kneejerk is Hemingway. He made me want to write with his simplicity and craft. Additionally, Sylvia Plath and Gertrude Stein were strong female influences introduced to me when I needed their motivation and confidence to guide me in my adolescent confusion.

Plath's darkness and honesty were foreign, but welcoming when I struggled with my own sometimes out-of-control emotions as a girl coming of age. Additionally, Stein's *Tender Buttons* served as a map, introducing me to new ways to describe everyday inanimate objects. This excerpt from "A PIANO" serves as an example of Stein's distinct perspective and style that initially attracted me to her writing.

*If the speed is open, if the color is careless... if the button
holder is held by all the waving color and there is no color, not any color.*

Family

My family influences my poetry, whether I like it or not. I do not feel that my writing has integrity unless it contains at least some personal integrity to anchor it. Individual experience is the foundation of every poem I compose, even in my imitations of other writers, such as "Fuzzy with Men," which I wrote in the style of Kenneth Koch's "Sleeping With Women." At times, this makes it difficult to share my work with family and close friends because of its intensely personal nature. My poetry, at its core, is confessional, as it allows me to open up about situations I normally do not feel comfortable sharing directly with loved ones.

In "The Last Time," I was inspired by Aaron Bakers' original poem and his relationship with his sibling – wanting to pull from my own sibling experiences over the years. It does not recount a single moment, but represents numerous flashbacks during my older sister's substance abuse from when I was as young as six to as recently as two years ago. Additionally, "Popeyes" is an isolated narrative that pulls from multiple situations over a six-month period when I was caring for a close family member in the hospital.

Music

Music is an art I live and breathe and it is a continual influence. At the age of five I had to be dragged away time and time again from my kindergarten friend's keyboard. Finally, my mom treated me to my own piano lessons. This fulfilled my insatiable need to create with my voice and hands what I heard in my head.

That drive has stuck with me in my art, no matter the medium. I always carry a pen with me and write on whatever I can find. Instead of hearing melodies in my head, I hear beats and one-liners that usually end up written on a scrap of napkin or my forearm.

When I am at my weakest, my mother reminds me of a time when I was about eight years old and struggling with practicing scales for my weekly lesson. I always resisted the classical repertoire and when forced to follow sheet music fiddled with the notes, creating all kinds of nonsense that came out of thin air, out of me. Every memory returns to me like a scene in my mind:

I am at the cherry wood baby grand piano. The damper pedal squeaks with each press and lift of my foot. The F key in the bass clef range sticks. The bench holds me steady, but also with its own gravitas that created my comfort.

My mom is cooking, or in her room typing, or upstairs cleaning, never idle for a moment. But sometimes (and I hate this part) she stops. I play something she reacts to. And she peeks at me from behind the brick counter of the kitchen. I feel her stare as she remembers something sensory that she once lost, returning to the present. And sometimes, worst of all, she approaches me and kisses me on the back of the head, giving me more love than I ever felt I deserved for something so ordinary to me.

At eleven I shied away from classical music, and began whittling my musical taste into jazz, which lead me through high school and kept me grounded in a tumultuous time that included hurricanes, drug addiction, deaths of friends and family, alcoholism, sex, and the day-to-day pattern of playing music for hours on end. From there I began a cycle of switching between classical and jazz, bridging two distinctly perfect genres of music.

This hybridity and fluidity in my art form is essential to my creative development and my poetics. In each of my poems there is an intense juxtaposition between my need for structure, formal or informal, and lyric quality. My poetics are nothing without this music. Every song, every poem, is a soundtrack in my head. My collection is a mixed tape of moments, what I was hearing, what I was seeing. Poetry allows me the opportunity to mold these aspects of my inspiration into something tangible that I can share with my audience. Often, film scoring and its creative process serves as the bridge that binds the music in my head and the words on the page simultaneously.

Film and the Score

The narrative arc of film is essential to my work, as I feel each poem – even part of a larger work – should have a beginning and an end to frame it. There are obvious exceptions in my work, as with numerous films, but generally this is the framework that I preserve. I want a narrative to control chaos. And the writers and film directors who have influenced me the most are those who use structure to organize their material, notably Darren Aronofsky, Danny Boyle, the Coen Brothers and their respective film scoring partners through most of their filmography, including Clint Mansell, Jon Brion, Carter Burwell, and Johann Johansson.

When I began writing more persistently as a teenager, I always documented what I was listening to and/or watching in that moment. I thought it was crucial to understanding how I felt

and how that was influencing what I wrote. The feeling I get after leaving a well-made film is addictive. And it's always the score that hooks me even hours after I have left the theater.

I want my poems to have that kind of hook-like effect. And that has also been my weakness in writing, as I tend to have a landing with my penultimate or final line – that can drive the poem flat instead of leaving it open to the reader for interpretation.

In “Late Bloomer,” I have reworked the arrangement so that the punctuation of the final strophe instead frames the overall poem rather than distracts the reader from it. It has the punchiness of the end-rhyme, but calls back to the painting itself and serves equally as a sort of ultimatum for the speaker of the poem.

New Orleans

Speaking of finality, it has taken me a long time to fully accept New Orleans as a part of my person as well as my art. Raised blocks from the parish line and immersed in all the classic tropes of New Orleans culture, I sank into the swamp, and drowned. In my poetry, New Orleans exists mostly as my perception of a dramatic situation and its diction. Because of my upbringing in this city, I am inclined to a very specific way of thinking, reacting, telling, retelling, speaking, and writing.

It would be hard to read through the section, “What We Talk About When We Talk About New Orleans,” and dismiss it as separate from my feelings about my hometown. Inspired by an actual shooting that took place only a block from my home two years ago, I went mad with the corruption, disruption, and perception of crime in New Orleans and ran with that insanity, trying to create art that would make it easier to live with the madness.

In order for me to be able to look at New Orleans and *write* about it, I would have to leave the city. I did this only a year ago when I finally uprooted my life and moved to New York City with its own quirky and at times infuriating characteristics.

The original sonnet-like drafts in “What We Talk About When We Talk About New Orleans” were too specific, and lacking in facts that I imagine my readers would have required to fully understand. Instead, I went back to my block, back to my neighborhood, and back to my city in my mind to recapture the range of perception and get my facts straight, but more importantly the nonchalant reactions that come out of the random acts of violence that seem to punctuate each day from my past experiences in the city. In this I hoped to connect with a very specific audience that normally brushes off these dramatic situations in New Orleans.

These days, I only miss the food and sometimes the laissez-faire character of New Orleans that charms every tourist that visits. But mostly, I do not miss New Orleans. Maybe someday I will. Until then, she is a part of me, my inspirations, my poetics, and a part of my healing and art and character just as much as my family, friends, and influences are. I am curious to see how my writing changes, how my subject matter shifts, and how I define myself as a poet the longer I am away from there.

This thesis is not necessarily an ending so much as an opportunity for a segue in my creative arc, allowing me to move on and further explore my growth personally as well as artistically. I am thankful for this thesis and its process in allowing me to allocate my experiences and feelings toward creating something beautiful, to revisit myself, to connect with others, and to use this interaction to finally heal and grow.

Sepia

The International Catholic School Girls Society

When old men talk, and talk. Cannot understand. Yes, Father? Latinate. Cannot listen. “Don’t push on the steps.” Maroon and brown plaid skirts cocooned in burnt wool cardigans and faded Doc Martens. “Single file line, young ladies.” We play heart strings while humming the psalms. Nurse crushes on Mr. Whoever-Wasn’t-Our-Dad. Any Catholic will do. Communion to Confession. Rinse to repeat. Renegade Catholics and a generation of modern guilt. Man of God to God of Man. But what of women? We pick our female martyrs to present on All Saints Day. Pray to Saint Lucy to help us see. Apples of God’s Eye versus the worship of a dead king. Knees on the pew, red-marked and singing Heaven and Earth full of his glory. *Hoes aren’t in the highest.* Missals raised, morals erased or maybe just eased. Blessed are we stuck in the International Catholic School Girls Society.

Popeyes

Empty, moldy corridors on a Friday afternoon
I walk with a Popeyes bag in tow

Cheap artwork and confusing signs line the walls
Popeyes bag filled with fried chicken, mashed potatoes

He got moved from the emergency room to ICU
I wander the quiet halls disoriented and smelling of grease

It seems that even hospitals close early for the weekend
Just me and the Popeyes bag

I got for him despite the doctor's sighs
His liver has had enough

But Popeyes never did him wrong
Just his drinking, drug binging,

Hepatitis C, diabetes, gambling,
Chain smoking, acid tripping

A woman yells out for help from her room
And yet the air remains still

A young nurse sits idly at her station
Eyes empty, looking down to her phone

Her escape till I walk up to ask for his room number
Never meeting mine, her eyes follow a pointed finger

Five doors to the left, room 366
Eyes roll as I turn and walk away

Wafts of warm biscuits drift along with me
Mixing in with the sterile stiffness of freshly used bleach

I first meet the high-pitched ring of an old tv, his only company
And he adorned in a hospital gown half tucked into off-white briefs

He's smiling at a rerun of some college football game

I ask what team he's rooting for, blue or maroon

He only responds asking for a drumstick

I look back to the hall, wondering if any nurses nearby will see

Do you want some water for now instead?

Again ignored,

We're in the red zone now.

Alone in Drag

She took me to her island,
a sandy lot and water hose next door.

We wrestled in the moist afternoon,
smothered by the brackish granules.

We hid away from the sun under the elm,
explored our anatomies when we
should've been playing with dolls instead.

She stranded me on her island,
not wanting to play our games anymore.

I ran home sunburnt and hurt,
sobbed while I tore a sheet from
my religion notebook and wrote

I'm gay

I climbed up to the roof.
Lit the page on fire with a BIC
I stole from my older sister.

Years later, I remember the torn-out page
the only evidence of who I was.

I dig around for my notebook.
Looking for the key to my puberty
that so awfully bloomed inside.

I find the remainder of the burned page,
only a sliver bookmarking the middle of
bible study verses from Leviticus
while I sit alone in drag.

Sepia
After Jeffrey Yang

One must look meticulously
and cautiously when in search
of a cuttlefish in the reefs
of the Caribbean. A loner,
she undulates separate from her
Sepiidae family. Camouflage
is her forté, a chameleon of the sea.
As a child, even if I spotted one
I could never keep up, floundering.
Do not misconstrue a cuttlefish
for one of her cephalopod peers,
squids and octopodes. This mollusk
knows her true intention, for when
there is a gap between one's real
and declared aims, *one turns as it
were instinctively to long words and
exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish
squirting out ink.* Tread lightly.

Ötzi

You said he was a spectacle.
Everyone dying to see
the famous Iceman
preserved over 5,300 years.

His torso
half-frozen on the border,
Italy and Austria fighting
to claim him.

Earth's oldest known hero:
the fatal wound, arrowhead
pierced his shoulder as he gave
up his life for his tribe.

A Chieftain leading in his
tanned skins and plush bear fur,
reduced to a tourist attraction, a fragment
murmuring in observers' vacations.

You were so excited
to see his leathery flesh.
Your discovery of his lost life, to help
cope since we parted.

I received your postcard,
his weathered hand the centerpiece.
I flipped it over.

This is what my hand feels like when you're not holding it.

Late Bloomer

After the Hayley Gaberlavage painting

I

came to the party too late
carried my prepubescent bouquet to you
felt my red blossoms bruise, cheeky
 a rosy flush clearly seen
couldn't hide beneath fresh-pressed suit

stretched roots, reaching out for room
wilted only with your disapproval

I

left in the faceless crowd still
standing combed tight and slicked
won't last long in this heat
 reach out for your light anymore
become a bloom that won't ripen fast enough

have my bowl of fruit
have my eye on you

Tous les Coullion ne sont pas Encore Mort

My Papa Jamie sits looking out from his raised porch to Grand Caillou Bayou, banjo resting in his lap. James Taylor's "Fire and Rain" plays out of an old boom box we brought for him to pluck along to. There's something in the way he can't remember one minute to the next, but repeats himself what he finds important: Creole phrases as response no matter the subject. Kids crab across the bayou and a four-wheeler loudly putters by. "Tous les coullion ne sont pas encore mort;" Papa Jamie motions his hands as if holding a shotgun. He fires it off, thrusting his left hand upward from the jolt of its expulsion, spitting "KHAO KHAO!" – attempting to mimic the rifle nestled in his cabin nearby.

The air still except for the awakened mosquitos floating in the muggy dusk. The lily pads drift out with the tide and Papa Jamie chuckles that the Spanish word for mosquito is, in fact, mosquito. He jumps again, then impersonating Curly from the Three Stooges, chuckling "nyuk nyuk nyuk" while he picks up his banjo and again tells me to get it appraised when he dies, "It's a relic." He talks about death as an old acquaintance he's preparing to visit. He tells me the term for his style of strumming is "framming" as he begins to play by ear to "You've Got A Friend."

Another Morning Here

I heard from God inside my dream last night.
He told me water dries up quick to dust
as I inhaled a tumbleweed. I choked
and woke to tender paws and long toenails.
God's voice transformed, your chuckles filled the room,
the tumbleweeds becoming dander.
Another morning here in bed with you.
We slowly stirred in early morning light,
white fibers floating tender round the air,
too short to bother sweeping anyway.
As Charlie cocked her head, confused, I barked
and mimicked growls from some ancestors lost:
Caveman, with broom in hand, a civilized fool.
You laughed along my rhythmic sweeps and sighs;
we smiled, saw the fur suspended mid-air.
Encircled in puppy fuzz, that's all
we were; lovers that lived in hairy sheets.
If God won't speak to me again too soon,
at least I had this morning here with you.

The Door Framed Time

When I was eleven, my dad began to mark my height on the frame of my parents' bedroom door. The ledger lines of my growth spurted up over two years as my study in classical piano shifted to jazz. The scale climbed, then stopped, missing a minor third or so starting August 16th, 2005. Ten days before my thirteenth birthday. Thirteen days before Katrina. The door frame safe, the armless ladder persevered. I swear I grew over an octave while I was away, the next line penciled in after I had returned, November 23rd, my sister's birthday. My hands grew, reaching thumb to pinky just the same over the piano keys. I eventually stopped growing, the lines ceasing from there, as I began to smoke more and care less. Now I return home to a quiet house, seeing the scale of my youth. I sit at my piano, with a newly reupholstered piano bench, tinkering with Schumann's "Little Piece," the only song I still know by heart.

Fuzzy

Fuzzy With Men
After Kenneth Koch

Youth: an echo.
Prytania Theatre: fuzzy with men.
Men: fuzzy in *The Terminal*.
Voices: a distraction.
Lakeview: a wasteland.
Lakeview: fuzzy with men.
Girls fuzzy with boys,
boys fuzzy with women,
women fuzzy with men,
everything fuzzy with men.
Him: asking you for a hit.
Him: fuzzy.
You: fuzzy.
Everything east of the levee: entrenched and drenched with them.
Fuzzy with men: as in the aftermath of the storm.
Abuzz with men: as in the flood, as in the mold.
Fuzzy with them: by fogged night, as if high, fuzzy on the roof,
The crusted slate, entrenched and drenched with them – fuzzy with men.
Moon dim lit and no longer innocent, abuzz with men.
Pontchartrain: like a song.
Pontchartrain: a lake, entrenched and drenching.
The haze fuzzy with men, hair of the dog-eyed drunk.
Abuzz, fuzzy with men, everything a woman could want,
Oh hair of the dog-eyed fearless drunk.
Fuzzy with them: as in *A Confederacy of Dunces*.
Abuzz with them: as in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.
The Futile Precaution fuzzy with men and ceasing all control.
As in the eastern transgression, as once Czechoslovakia
Post-Velvet, and still fuzzy with men,
Pro-Binary, Fritz Lang, Wolfgang, any night, fuzzy with them.
A busty foreign blonde fuzzy with men.
A Moldau riverbed's tease, abuzz
And fuzzy with them, fuzzy with men.
And what for, fuzzy with men, big-eyed
Bug-eyed, glass-eyed, wide-eyed, side-eyed men.
Abuzz and fuzzy with them, grown, fuzzy with men.
As in lust, as if Italy, the pope, abuzz and fuzzy with him.
As if possibly true, the Vatican, Basilica, abuzz and fuzzy with them.
Fuzzy with men, as if they were jaw shoulder and head abuzz
And fuzzy with them, and the emerald claw of the shore.
Fuzzy with men, and the quiet sigh of Blore.
The question: asking again for a light, fuzzy with men.

Abuzz and fuzzy with them, the oak
 The willow, the weeps: the trunk and its breezy fiend.
 Abuzz with men, abound with women
 In noontime, abuzz and fuzzy with them, and buzzing fog
 Sailing, and the sailing then, to Dublin, abuzz with men.
 And their intentions, what then, drinking interventions
 For fuzzy bars abuzz with men, rats fuzzy with men,
 Irish-Catholic or Irish-Protestant church service rats
 Abuzz with men, abuzz and fuzzy with them.
 The fog and the mist, abuzz and fuzzy with them.
 The schoolgirl's coo, the slippery skirt
 Abuzz and fuzzy with men, as if Unorthodox.
 Fuzzy with men: eyes not set on the morrow
 Of the lackluster slumber: fuzzy with a snore
 Of frustrated groaning men, abuzz and fuzzy
 Bees, fuzzy with men.
 And students abroad, fuzzy with them.
 Sweaty, fuzzy with men, five-story clubs abuzz with them.
 Fuzzy with men: no choice, as of a farce.
 As with a lily, as with a parrot, another school, fuzzy with men, and
 You are the one.
 The one fuzzy with men, in Costa Rica, fuzzy with men.
 The green land, the gringos, fuzzy with men.
El hombre del cabildo, vaiducto, el sol
 Its atmosphere: humidity
 The saints: their purpose
 Where are we now? Or San Ramon, senorita
 Or Santa Lucia, cabrón
 Fuzzy with men
 In the trees and their leaves
 Cabrones and their wide eyes, any month
 Abuzz and fuzzy with men
 One June: a girl
 July: fuzzy with men
 The smile: a sign; the tail: a trail.
 To the pig: ignore; to the night: devour.
 The year of youth: fuzzy with men.
 Or which year was it abuzz with them.
 Rainforest, Rainfall, Katrina, Lakeview, Youth fuzzy with them.
 The roof, the root, the truth, inconceivably new,
 Fuzzy with men, the slated rue, abuzz with them, the canal,
 The marina's leveled, and the few: fuzzy with you.
 Abuzz with men, a shot and some aspirin, as in the flood, as in the mold,
 Fuzzy with you: as if the levee, as if the swell,
 As if the storm, as if Venice and Grand Isle "could survive
 The surge and the rain and stay afloat beyond the barrier islands."

In Florida, fuzzy, in the sand, abuzz with men.
 And in the sun, abuzz and fuzzy with you, fuzzy with men.
 Abuzz with men, the boats, the beach, the burn and the once-prude.
 The dune cats: fuzzy with men.
 The canary: abuzz with them.
 Litterboxes fuzzy with men; solar panels abuzz with them.
 Lakeview: the gasp of breath
 Abuzz and fuzzy with you, fuzzy with men.
 As if I would say no to you – adolescent idealist.
 The force of a levee break: fuzzy with you.
 The oil rigger's daughter: fuzzy with crude, mother of pearl, abuzz with them.
 Fuzzy with men: in the Vltava, the Arenal, the Liffey, fuzzy with big
 Bug glass wide and side-eyed men, fuzzy with two
 Ten thirteen twenty-four and fifty-six men, fuzzy on the inside.
 Pressed on the outside of men, a piano, like tickled ivory, men, fuzzy with men.
 In the heat of May, scorched July, August noon
 Fuzzy with me, "I can't remember last night," fuzzy with men
 A floor of cypress, a storm-surged birthday card abuzz and fuzzy with them
 "Wake Me Up When September Ends" crooning for droopy news with men
 The sloppy and giddy, abuzz with them
 "Shelter in the Rain" shouting *vavavoom* abuzz and fuzzy with them.
 The sliding in oiled noon, to the earliest time, and the swamps of resurgence
 Oh young men pouring through the cracked space, fuzzy with men.
 All Lakeview entrenched and drenched with them,
 Houma fuzzy, Baton Rouge fuzzy, Panama City Beach fuzzy with men, shallow
 Faced finders fuzzy with men, and then the levees of the South.
 Catching sargassum in their trousers, brown sludge fuzzy with men
 And the green pulse of dusk, if you can ever even see it, neon ports
 Fuzzy with men, sailors, and skipping, expats.
 You know it where, steadfast when I share the fuzz with men.
 The Autobahns fuzzy with men, abuzz and fuzzy with them.
 All tarnished hollows, each brandished hand, the nightlife,
 The nightclub of the dead, the diluted skinny girl martini, the force
 Fuzzy with men, abuzz and fuzzy with them,
 Fuzzy with men. And the Biergartens in Bavaria, fuzzy with men.
 The pint: a vow
 The night: a nod – too fuzzy with men
 The humidity – an excuse: fuzzy with men
 The levees: fuzzy with men
 The age: any
 The thoughts: now
 The cardboard box: fuzzy with men
 The tried and tried again mundane, fuzzy with men, and the too tired try again
 Abuzz and fuzzy with them, abuzz and abuzz and fuzzy with men, fuzz
 And fuzzy with them, fuzzy with men.

What We Talk About When We Talk About New Orleans

I

A woman stands under the apartment
awning of a Marigny complex. She
rotates the cigarette between fingers.
The Gold Duster baton flickers and twirls
as it once did in Metairie Mardi
Gras, twenty years ago. Smoke plumes
erupt from her cracked lips. She leans
hunched against the grimy pole. Wonders what
to do, too young for assisted living,
too old to start over. Puts the butt out,
looks around her neighborhood dreamily
at the humid night taking her in. Hears
barking as fireworks go off nearby.
Is it the 4th of July already?

II

A teenager walks his pit on Dauphine,
heads towards the buzzing air, turns on
to Frenchmen. Underage trumpeter's
frustration, holds his warm tall boy in a soggy
paper bag he had to "hey mister"
from a homeless man, sighs to the dog,
waiting till he can grow enough facial
hair to sit in on a jazz set at the
Spotted Cat and blow along. Sees two chicks
strutting his way, pulls his shoulders back
in hopes of catching their attention. The
pit tugs behind him, barking, and causes
his lukewarm beer to fall, spewing amidst
a cacophony of bangs and screeches.

III

Two chicks strut along Washington Park with
forty ounce 190 Octane daiquiris
in hand. Heels high, dresses tight, ready
for their favorite Frenchmen clubs.
“OMG girl, is that pizza I smell!?”
They turn the corner and see the lit up
stand in all its greasy glory, melted
cheese beckoning to be mixed with eighty
proof flavored sugar in neon purple
elixirs slurped out of styrofoam go-cups.
Stumbling up, their heels click with the clatter
of shots nearby while one chick mid-
sip of her boozy big gulp yells, “Bitch you’re
CRAZY if you think I’m getting pizza!”

IV

A man works his pirate-themed pizza stand
while drunken customers throughout the night
fraternize along Frenchmen. His hand wipes
the sweat off his forehead from his long shift.

He ignores the two chicks as they lament
their decision to get a slice. Breathes in
a drag from some chain smoker up
the street, then exhales over thirty years
without a single cigarette. *God bless the patch.*

He knows the sound of gunfire,
ducks behind his neon pirate ship,
protected in the glow of his rainbow
hanging lights. A cop car speeds
by, sirens and lights still off.

V

A couple drives along Elysian Fields to Royal's sparse intersection. Hand in hand, just engaged, while sitting idle, thumb rubbing her ring as it glows red. A truck pulls up behind them, bass shaking the rear view mirror of the van. He releases her hand, headlights reflecting in his eyes.

The truck revs its engine, drives up to their bumper. Bullets burst through the glass of the back window. He floors the pedal. Their minivan surges across the neutral ground, striking two cars in its path before slamming into a building.

VI

An artist above his gallery lies
down in bed and drifts to sleep. The air cool,
he inhales through the window. *Quiet night.*
The busy city nights do not disturb him
as they once did. The rumbling of car sound
systems pass below like strokes of his paint brush.
The shots don't faze him anymore. For all
he knows some kids are popping off bang
snaps from Mardi Gras just weeks before.
The screech of tires, the blaring horns,
the engine's rush. The crunch of crashing
are merely rubbed sandpaper. It's not
until a thunder shakes him up, the side of
his brick building struck, the minivan a floor below.

VII

A rookie cop begins his red-eye shift
in the Marigny at eleven. He has his music
on in the patrol car, cruising up St. Claude.

He notes the regulars who stroll along
the busy street. The night slugs on in the
humidity, but he's just waking up and excited to patrol
the never sleeping Marigny. Approaches
Elysian Fields, turns left illegally and heads for the river
to scope out the scene on Frenchmen, *always
something happenin' there*. Outside the Spotted Cat,
he hears the gunfire, the ensuing crashes. Siren
off, he speeds to Royal, running the stop sign
to Dauphine, turns right and pulls up to the struck
gallery, the truck nowhere in sight.

VIII

A pianist plays a jazz set at the
Spotted Cat with a trio of musicians,
tinkering at the upright along with
the sax's croon: St. James Infirmary.
The regulars sing along, Satchmo's words
slurring out of the room into the warm night.
The gang'll know I died standing pat.
All evenings blend into one humid
droll, same old shit that he just can't seem
to quit after six years of mediocre playing. He
glances out the bar window's condensation,
hearing a vague hullabaloo, watching
as an NOPD patrol car, once
idling by, immediately zooms away.

IX

A girl sits on the leather couch in her house
at Royal and Frenchmen while her man's just down
the street playing a gig at the Spotted Cat.

A spotted dog named Charlie curled at her side,
she works on another crossword; Sundays are always
the hardest. It's the top of the hour for WWOZ
and they begin their nightly announcement of shows
about town. She follows the alphabet as they call
out the nightclubs' line ups eager to hear his name
after the venue. Before they get to the S's,
Charlie gets spooked and begins growling at some
commotion beyond the stoop. Oblivious, she turns
the volume up more to bask in her lover's local fame.

X

Two writers sit at R Bar, cold beers
sweating on the wood. Hear far off
gun shots from blocks away, pull out
their phones to check for breaking news.
NOLA.com's Twitter page unchanged.
Refresh. Nothing. Another round of beers.
One writer tweets, “NOLA do ur job, gun
shots in marigny.” *Refresh.* Still nothing.
One writer takes to Facebook, “Even on
a quiet Sunday night, is anyone safe?”
Despite the status liked, commented on,
and shared numerous times, the writers sigh.
Still no one knew why or where the shots rang out.
Search again. Unchanged. Another round. *Refresh.*

The Four Seasons

Summer

*A river don't stop to breathe
The water don't stop to dream no dreams
The river flows like you and I*

*Leave us these moments, they're the only thing we have
Let us wash silent to the river's cursed mouth
A river don't stop to breathe*

Múm

Michael Sleeps in White Sheets
June 13, 2016

Last night I busted my knee on the roof of a Williamsburg apartment trying to see Brian Wilson perform *Pet Sounds* at Northside Festival. The wound dried up fine until I fell asleep, worried, and picked at it all night. I awoke this morning to Michael's peaceful face and saw that I had bled on his pristine sheets. I looked at my fingers and saw maroon under the nails. Iron. Tried to get some soda water to rub it away without waking him, but blood stained Michael's bed as last night's mass shooting will probably leave a mark on his identity. He sleeps peacefully just as he always has. My Michael for thirteen years. My Michael who came out to me in college. My Michael whose parents still don't know. I can try not to disturb him, to remove the stains, to let him sleep without worry in his innocence. But he'll wake up eventually like we all will have to.

Der Rhein

You are the boy I used to love, bobbing up and down, supported by a blue wickelfisch, bloated and shiny in the milky water alongside me. "A river don't stop to breathe" echoes within. Not touching you, I work to tread through the frigid current, without support. You stare through me as I struggle to gather words. "But... I didn't cheat." You still respond that you cheated *too*, a year earlier. While I was away *once again*. In our bed. With our dog somewhere near. *Who was she?* You don't remember. You never remember when you drink. *Who could hold that in for so long?* I get so distracted by the confession that the river slams me into a buoy, cutting up my leg. While you continue to hear yourself say how hurt you are, I hold my knee to my chest and swallow the river.

Up for Air

One eleven-hour flight from Zurich to San Francisco
felt like three days but time only moved forward three hours when I touched down.

Three years since I last saw her felt like three minutes when she opened her door.
So began seven days of a jet lagged lapse of self-control.

With the first of nine packs of Parliaments sucked through dehydrated lips,
three day millennial music fest or any reason for celebrated regression.

Pot packed into dozens of bowls passed through suffocated lungs,
bought off a “budtender” from a fresh bag of his daily trimmings.

Four hits of rainbow dolphin-printed acid settled on our tongues,
we melted into the back of the field, sitting cross-legged like kindergarteners.

A dime bag of month-old molly found in the bottom of her purse,
next day dulled, smashed and rubbed on our gums and giddy.

Snorted blue lines of adderall off a cracked mirror,
noses clogged with cobalt crumbs of mucus, stuffy.

Drank Dale’s Pale Ale for just \$6 a tall boy at Gestalt happy hour,
closed down the bar watching crotchety hipsters play Metallica pinball.

Eight balls of coke passed under the bar counter,
bumped off a cheetah-printed house key, dizzy.

Slept around to forget about you almost all seven nights.
The last day left sore-throated, with a UTI, taking Plan B.

Fall

*I've never been alone
Long enough to know
If I ever was a child*

Wilco

Dusk in the Mojave

The twin air mattresses are blown up, snuggled into the tent. Michael digs through his dirty laundry looking for sweaters to use as pillows. We take our melatonin with leftover beer in the trunk of the sandy Ford Escape, now idle and blended in an expanse of dust. Hammer the bottle cap of my Blue Moon into the side of a picnic table with a BIC, joining the company of past campers' beers. Do you remember all the times we'd talk about bringing Charlie camping? The portable radio grumbles "no letting go, no holding back," by Wayne Wonder. Can't help myself, exhaling. Slightly boozy, smoking stale Camels to help us sleep through the night. Gas station pasta salad eaten by hand, forgetting utensils. Hand sanitizer and a bush to piss behind. Hear the wind coming from miles away. Mistake bats for birds entering night.

Perseid Meteor Shower

Michael pulls the Escape into a playground parking lot. Another potential bachelor on Grindr told him that anywhere in Flagstaff is dark enough to see the meteor shower. We open the sunroof to climb through and crack open some tall boys. Michael's weight dents the roof as he dangles a foot off the side of the frame. We light our individual Malboros, but I wish I were back home with you sharing just one like we used to. Sparks in the night shoot off in fractions of a breath, flicks of the cigarette's ember. Blink and miss. Eyes fixated, Michael and I crane our necks back, straining to see shooting stars like we imagined in our youth. New Orleans nights were always too polluted to see any starlight, as if we ever cared to. I dangle a foot inside of the Escape and cigarette ash floats down through the sunroof. Michael spills his beer, raining down with the debris below me.

Western Lodge

Family Feud attempts to radiate the motel room, the audience applause a shrill ring from the old Salora TV. Michael wandered into the oven of Phoenix to meet a sugar daddy at the W Hotel.

I alone on a Friday night, the name “Claude” my only company, permanently affixed to my rib cage, the ink a fresh scab. *I’ll never need another man*, only whispered to lingering flies that entered through the cracked window.

I try to play “Clair de Lune” to fill the void but my phone has no service. McKay’s “America” in my head, *I love this cultured hell that tests my youth*, manifests in the popcorn ceiling.

I adorned in nicotine-stained bed sheets, the room muggy. No need for the holey comforter crumpled at the foot of the king bed, cigarette burned. The ceiling transforms with the tv’s ads,

McKay’s words now Monet’s water lilies, “Le Bassin aux Nymphéas.” And I’m back in Basel, bartering my view, from gazing at the painting to curiously glancing over at you.

The light again changes, and I lose sight of Fondation Beyeler, returning to the flies in the room.

Winter

things tend to untwist and open and someday they'll all be open

jck

Passing on Philip

Striations of cocaine wait to be vacuumed through his nostril from a rolled up five. He taps the makeshift straw on a copy of *Hitler's Military Strategy*, overdue from the library by two weeks. Once an economics graduate from Northeastern, now he's nestled in his five-figure student debt on a bunk bed for \$250 a month. He'd rather skateboard and bartend, but still gets off on World War II analyses, "ya know, for fun." Between snorts he tries to read me his poetry from crumpled notebooks. His script is illegible, the pages mostly decorated with penis doodles. He's in for a long night but I'm just looking for a place to crash. He breathes, "Honey," in my ear before pleasuring himself while I try to nod off, pretending I'm still graced by your love, somewhere in the bend of my spine.

The First Taste of Milk

entranced and drunk I stumble into
Milwaukee's Modern Hemingway
an upper Midwesterner with teeth
crooked creeping through his lips
peeking through a smirk and sad eyes
that almost remind me of you

face framed by a fuzzy jaw he
tried to grow out a beard un-
successfully his tousled
dark hair clouded above eyes
icy and furrowed beneath
pensive tiger moth brows

a journalistic demeanor shaped
his intimidating vocabulary while
still slugging cheap beers by buckets
and making the same mistakes profusely
apologizing internally folding
before drinking again and forgetting

I first called him a "milky boy"
because I couldn't spell Milwaukee
nor impress him with the common
knowledge of what state it resides
and he tried to take me home to meet
his mother brother and even father

a passing touch turned to a linger,
a linger to a finger, a finger to a fuck.

December 18, 2016

My vision blurs, focusing
and refocusing on rumpled white
hotel sheets, fouled.

One lamp on, and my face half lit. I press
myself down into the mattress to feel
the push back of the springs. To feel
lifted, because I can no longer hold myself.
Later hiding in the bathroom, I stuff
my panties with stiff toilet paper
to prevent staining, I'm torn.
Wash my eyes out, avert my gaze
as he watches me reenter. And he, lying
there, staring, nude. Dead panned and limp,
his eyes still shine black in the glow of the room.

My eyes shine back in the glow of my room.
Each morning I tense my thigh muscles
as I wish I had, pushed him out
of me. I roll in my own white sheets
trying to recapture what the color once meant.
The memory of him kicks at me, transforming from
a hollowed pit inside of me to a stomach
ache I cannot fight. I am the hole and
the gravitational pull of all 190 pounds
of his weight on top of me. I punch walls
and pillows, exchange from soft to hard
depending on the level of aggression. But always
a level of regression. How many times will I wake up
back in that bed breathless with his body on top of me?

Back in a bed with another body next to me.
I am given a cock to choke on. Throat
sore and hard to swallow spit. Too many
cigarettes; I've lost my voice again.
Told words don't mean shit if they're
muddled into moans and screams.
I forget about fear by fucking strangers.
Make it to three a week and I'll know
I am a whore, only here for a warm body to rub
my cheeks on after mediocre sex. Acrid odor
of a late night and beer/shot specials. Man-
ipulate their wallets while they dream up how
I'd look nude. I force them to keep the room dim,
my vision blurred, focusing and refocusing.

Drag Me to Spring

*I spent a lot of my life being afraid of things that did and didn't exist.
I realized how foolish I was – now I'm not afraid.*

Chan Marshall

Rape is a Four-Letter Word

I pictured a woman attacked
at random in an abandoned
dingy alley in New York City.

Her assailant's face covered
with a stocking. Her bleeding,
screaming, crying. Her
rapist disregarding. Not
caring. Shoving himself
into whatever hole he could
probe with leather-gloved hands.

In a tacky dance club, loud house
music, punctuated stiletto clicks
and a Wall Street business man.

Rohypnol-laced vodka sodas.
Steamed up and sticky bathroom
stall, her underwear at her ankles.
Meanwhile she stares into a toilet bowl,
dizzied, hair tangled. Waking
up dazed the next morning to
remember nothing but the uncertainty.

After, I realized my attacker has a face.
One I once thought I could love.
That sometimes still reminds me of home.

Not the fear of the big city,
nor the fear of being alone at night,
nor the fear of being drugged at a bar,
nor the fear of random assault,
nor the fear of never catching him,
nor the fear of never knowing.
The fear.

Wrist

I am my mother's daughter.
Perfection I built
Nothing can stop me

Her wrists are my own
Our faces molded just then
Remembering where I come

Her love pour out of me
Love held out at my wrist
Love in the freckles of me

Her strength in the knobs
Once playing along
To float the wrists

Sometimes when I think
She only at the pharmacy
Still 1000 miles away

Calmer than I ever knew
Cooing apologies then
And me and the burden

Six weeks and a hundred
Pretending to be fine
To see her happy always

In my weaker moments
In front of me, seeing her
Dainty, fragile compared

But that wrist she gave me
Even when I feel the grief
Her strength persists to teach

Staying up sleepless to work
Nothing stopping me
I make myself feel whole

My wrists make-up of her bone
Our seasoned eyes and nervous fidgets
From who I come from

Her love in my laugh & speech
Love graced in thousand mile longing
A near mirror image of her astrology

My curved hands, pressed fingers
With invisible little bubbles
Above the piano keys

Of when I had to tell her I cry
And I swaddled in my bed
Still afraid of the truth

Trading words between the pharmacist
And back to me and the bad timing
Did I disappoint her?

Lies pretending to be fine always
Worth it to see her happy
Pretending to be happy

I hold my wrists at arms' length
The outer edges of me
To the rest

Greater than any other part of me
The insatiable rage inside
How to let the past instead heal me

Feel Good Lost

It is the surest thing, solitude.
Wanting to sleep but daydreaming
about my libido. How you once made it
healthy. Let me sleep in while you woke up.
And a heavy dose of love in your morning eyes.
Heavy. The way the sun hit your guilt among
the floating dog hairs, while I made us tea or
manned the Wednesday crosswords, crossing
my feet on the cool leather couch with Charlie.

Remember when I first met you? Nervous
and talking of ports over Abita Grapefruit
IPAs though you quit drinking. Wearing
my mother's coat and half-inch taller than you.
And you playing *All Things Must Pass*, flipping
the record twice. And you asking if you could
kiss me. Shook, I kissed you, more than twice.
While George Harrison cooed, "*What is Life.*"

Sometimes I miss you,
in the absent days when my mind is left
to wander, to wonder where you've been.
But that house still stands with you on its
stoop, Charlie still sunbathing beside you.
I think I once told myself that the pilgrims
once sailed across the Atlantic Ocean
just to settle, so why couldn't we?

I get dreamy in transit now, in love with place
personified. Not sure if I'll ever be the vision
of domesticity that we once used to squint to see
in our everyday. And maybe one day my fear
will again catch up with me. But for now, it's all
right. I decline the loneliness; I am free.

Allyson Nobles is a New Orleans native, attending the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts in Jazz Piano. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Music Studies and English as well as a Master of Fine Arts in Poetry from the University of New Orleans. She is currently based in New York City but can normally be found on a sailboat, plane, or in her car on the road.