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Spring 2023

## METAMORPH

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METAMORPH

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
Heather Garufi

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2023



# **METAMORPH**

A Poetry Collection

H. Garufi



*for every version of myself that has ever been and will ever be*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It feels impossible to truly express the profound scope of my gratitude for everyone who made this project possible, but here's a start:

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**CONTENT WARNING:** please note that many of these poems contain graphic depictions of body horror/gore



## fluoxetine detox

every day this week i've wept for some lost part of myself.  
i cry at the castle gates and beg to see the ketamine king,  
    fantasize closing car doors on my wrists, the unclean sever—  
is this the carnage foretold? my unruly descent?

bury me on the bank of a creek called hubris,  
    and the worms will make jewelry of my rot.  
my pores, overabundant in gravity, reek putrid.  
    to surrender with an addict's clarity—  
    brand new chemical throat coating,  
        and where's the expert in razor's edge physics?  
    i need to know how much one body can take.  
stuck with all these mirrors and nothing to reflect.

so i hunt happiness for sport, mount its mocking hide above my mantle,  
    sink muscles deep in an armchair and scowl.  
my heart beats a mantra in morse code:  
    *i never wanted to get better.*

**to whatever it is inside of me that makes me feel this way:**

is it in your nature to relent? i can accept my doom if it hinges on compromise.

aha! and now you retreat—

when i crave release the most, your cowardice shines.

you only want to make a spectacle of me; a caricature; a spiral.

i give over my dignity, let you drown this face

in sobs & snot,

(as if i have a choice)

*(oh, listen to the bitch whine)*

in return: slow trickle of endorphins,

hardly enough to fathom the next hour

in anyone's company but the dead.

and what of gravity? of static?

every apathetic co-conspirator—

i feel you in the stiff crack of my jaw.

am i here just to entertain you?

a ragdoll to your moody whims; do i satisfy?

if i thought laceration could quiet you,

i'd make canyons of our flesh.

**invasive**

a fungus grows on my brain stem.  
benevolent and numb, like moss, it swallows slowly—  
    inch by electrical impulse, until i sense only marshland.

a nausea adheres to this host body.  
sacred regulation of my muddied organs,  
    shaking so hard only god can govern.

i think god is in the trees.  
that's why we cut them down; to find him,  
    to replicate the bloodsap crucifixion.

starving for a new brand of faith, i bleed corruptible.  
forced open and *welcome, divine infection*—  
    vessel for the laments of gravity.

i see seraphs in the empty trenches of termite mounds,  
hear false restitution in the whistle of their windorbit.  
    the fungal deity spreads; beware our insidious architect.

## **an honest passion**

the savior: tall sculpture of wood undecayed.  
a stained glass aura outlines the cross,  
forced into stunning silhouette.

his skin wrinkles like it's real. striae gravidarum  
glimmer on his skinny arms,  
his canyoned hip bones.  
he has all my freckles. my calluses.  
he is adorned— lavish— with corporeality.

death shroud of unwashed hair (my natural color; divinely stripped)  
drapes across  
his pinned wingspan.  
chainlocked sinews stack his neck,  
hang down the concave torso, weighted with  
our mutual bones— only visible through his emaciation.  
our teeth, beaded between careful nerve knots,  
are snug to his skin  
like pearls.

intestines writhe in intricate dance,  
modesty preserved by sheets of folded peritoneum—  
the membrane breathes, softly, as if on a clothesline.

though hidden from sight, my heart is between his thighs,  
clenched in dysmenorrheic agony.  
bloodpulp drips down his legs,  
slides off the point of his toes.

outstretched, the nails are driven clean  
through his wrists.  
no gash defiles his side, no absence asymmetrical;  
instead— two wounds, equidistant  
on his chest, gape with newfound vacancy.  
unsutured specters of previous crease,

devoid that topheavy tissue.

above it all—

his scalpel crown, sharp halo of transmutation.

tiny punctures in the scalp spawn a curtain of blood,  
thinly draped over  
his fixed expression of

*relief;*

though cinched in a distant register of pain,

his eyes shine with authentic ecstasy.

i covet that bliss of self-appointed weightlessness,  
to have renounced our biological burden;  
gynic inheritance unwanted & disposed.

his cheeks are sunken, starved,

yet they glow with satisfaction,

stretched around a sharp,

defiant smile.

son only of Himself,

inviting me

to our own autonomous heaven.





## **mutually assured insecurity**

oh, forgive my perfect skin,  
    you of natural boyish bliss—  
        of shameless appeal  
in flat physique.

you know i detest this husk,  
    unblemished as it is;  
        i would erupt with constant pus  
could i resemble a plank of wood.  
could i frolic in your lanky freedom.

instead;  
    a dogma of discomfort  
    follows me like odor.  
haunted by the filth of  
        my own  
            avoidance—  
bare reflection in the shower handle.  
that cruel dysphoric reinforcement;  
    silver beacon  
    of all things undesirable.  
flesh folded, botched origami in excess— crude  
    genetic happenstance,  
swollen incommutable.  
    i've always had my mother's body.  
    i've always wanted yours.

so forgive me,  
beholder of my ideal anatomy;  
    do you truly wish to trade me this?  
this deprecating anguish?  
exposed & shivering,  
    soaked in my own scorn—  
    forced to face the unbearable nudity.

## THINFERNO

### i.

long live the saboteur—  
the inside man,  
the triggerpull;

long live the anesthetized—  
the numbing agent,  
the paralytic drip;

long live the skinny devil—  
cornerstone of obvious lust

blood clot / metamorph  
scorned slop believers

whose ribcage: my chrysalis  
whose heart: my waterbed

### ii.

O skinny devil, swallow me!  
let divine digestion run its course—

let me gestate in new knowledge,  
each particle infused  
& rearranged;

intrinsic wisdom; your formless gut.

amorphous, inchoate, let me leak  
through your pores,  
seep across membranes, vaporize—  
an essence, distilled;  
renewed;  
burdenless.

dispersed, my rare energy remains.  
let it hum in the air— soft buzz, like insect wings,  
and just as delicate.

to imbue vigor in limitless environs,  
scatter sentience like ashes in the wind.

embodied life, while miraculous, is plagued—  
equal parts disgust and vanity.  
neglect and greed.

the only hell is self.  
the only freedom, too.

## coming to terms

nighttime, can't see stars. garden of decay, curled in dead roses. a nest. left side speckled with thorns. snap like bird bones. shift; stand. descend through stone archway. a church.

dim cement bunker, rows of wooden chairs; expressionless people. a congregation. rigid, straight-backed, unblinking. no heads turn. starting down the aisle.

suddenly notice the object of focus. front of room: a casket, mounted on marble pedestal. lid open, yawning; bored. showcase plush interior. mahogany and fine metalwork frame. the marble appears to glow, box underlit. something heavenly. comfortable.

feet moving, fast. fingers trace fabric; sumptuous velvet. crimson sleek. smooth, densely piled. cool to touch. grasp the ornamented corners. reveal carved notches in marble; step stool. a giddiness grows with each foothold. leg swung over lip, textile soft against skin; warm. flat back, feel lighter than ever before. somehow, through the concrete ceiling: see stars. they smile.

until, squeal of hinges— encircled. sudden darkness. discomfort ushering in. velvet gone along tight walls, no cushion. wood; rotted, shedding splinters. nestled in palms. frantic, now, shove up against the lid. fists and knees, bloodied. pounding. not the only noise—

laughter. the congregation is laughing.

choking, maniacal. yell for help, ashamed; the noise grows. slapping knees & stomping feet. rattle the very earth. air thins. dirt seeps through invisible cracks. roaring, roaring. listen closer. the sound starts to shift; hymnal. ecstatic. song of all possible apogees.

hum along. beating heart. the darkness remains, but it's no longer suffocating. twinkly pinpricks through the void. return of soft surroundings. congregation dissipates; left with primordial vibration. a self, somewhat

satisfied.

**amtrak**

i ran there, once. railroad tracks behind the park.  
dark apex of night—  
my shoes were untied, the front door left open.  
    the train horn sounded like a gunshot.  
    my heavy breaths like *too late, too late*.  
no one died that night, but i did lose a friend;  
the glass case of my trust                      shattered in the snow.

this time, when some stranger went through with it,  
i was across state lines.  
170 miles from the force of impact— it hit me hours later,  
    like light. ghostly afterimage.  
my sister saw them wheel the body away,  
    saw firefighters hunched under the front car,  
    bearing flashlights; looking for parts.  
could the conductor feel it? the last desperate thrum of her heart?

death doesn't follow me; it lingers in the places i've left.  
    tethers me to things i can't change.

*(if only... /  
it could've been...)*

i've stood there, countless times. seen the last thing she saw,  
    blinked,  
and moved on. kept walking.  
    kept breathing.

**purpose**

to endure this vicious equilibrium  
while *someone up there* laughs at me.

the body, with its weight like meaty concrete.  
an index of bloat and preteen mutilation,  
it preaches only *succumb*.

the brain, ruthless enemy to the acute physical.  
a system of hostile mystique,  
it withholds each necessity of trembling flesh.

somewhere both between and beyond them,  
i fester in crevices of the hypothetical,  
of triumphs i could grasp if only i were a real space age sadist.

it will grow until it bursts,  
irreversible and messy—  
this alkaline pressure.

## opposition

precious parasite,  
creates itself from mother's scratch,  
instructions inlaid on hardening cartilage.  
carbon cake mix glazed with amnion—

flesh vessel in constant healing,  
sheds death unuseful  
to nourish nucleic clones;  
to maintain, as long as the heart pump permits—

genetic warhead,  
sees a threat and sends an army;  
leukocyte front lines at the first hint of hazard.  
a microscopic massacre,  
each cell pledging *protect, protect from*—

—this lawless hub of impulse  
aches to defile such pesky resilience;  
attracts the corruption of every ease;  
hoards fester nests and escalation  
as it thrives in comatose whine;  
curates all genres of inner hostility;

a machine engineered to dismantle itself,  
bolt by rusted ligament,  
circuit board by corpuscle.



## **systematic disgust**

this arbitrary resuscitation—  
violence inherent,  
    and my core temperature reads apathetic.  
a return to numbness is hardly a return.

this state-sanctioned hopelessness—  
perpetual doomsday  
    to keep the sheep in (thin white) line.  
painkillers in the form of small town solidarity.

this failsafe wasteland—  
billboard barbarism  
    floods the streets, the cosmetic aisles.  
distraction is rampant and imperative;  
self-destruction keeps the populace occupied.

this casual discomfort—  
aching desire  
    to run my DNA through google translate,  
    rip my limbs off with my teeth and sew them on again backwards.  
    held together by puppet wire; DIY body-binding.

this incoherent mass of torso.  
this mangle of unprocessed meat.  
this slaughterhouse disposition.  
this inescapable  
this overwhelm  
this endless  
this endless  
this—

## ATOMS (1)

i want to know what my atoms have done;  
    why i must answer for their crimes.  
why this form begs twig-rickety and receives only treetrunk.  
why the earth creaks beneath me like old floorboards.  
    aren't those my atoms too?

i want to know where my dead skin goes;  
    why i shed dust-mummies without feeling any lighter.  
why i long for loss in my tall palace of gain.  
why the air thins, but i don't.  
    am i not elemental?

i want to know who put me here;  
    why my soul's request for rest was denied.  
why i was forced complicit in my own creation.  
why i can't unzip this cadaver-to-be and slink out of it  
    like storm runoff.

i want to know what keeps me upright;  
    why my body can't crumble like it wants to.  
why adipose suffocates this skeleton.  
why decay is a privilege reserved for the dead.  
    is a beating heart unworthy of mortis?

i want to know every atom i've ever cared for;  
    why we repelled, or fused together.  
why the primary divine force is expansion.  
why the universe didn't stay compressed and infantile.  
    was there any other option?

## ATOMS (2)

we could have remained as tension—  
pre-cosmic conglomerate of stunted possibility.  
every atom unicellular—  
a single incomprehensible speck  
against the background of divine nihilism.  
unconscious (before/during) afterlife;  
an underworld in gyroscope,  
dense pinpoint of infinite limbo.

and why not infinite heaven?  
and what *is* infinity without time  
to judge against?  
some celestial bliss— precaution  
to the burdens of comprehension.

and had we gone backwards?  
had primordial abundance collapsed into  
devastating vacancy?

no bodies, no breath; all being as a single borderless echelon.  
the anti-product of every opposite coincidence.  
anti-life of stardust unmeddled.

**the dream in which i spit my teeth into my palm  
as though it were a tin of white cashews**

i tried to put them back— to force the mangled roots back into their chasms and twist until the grate became unbearable. a murky mixture of blood and saliva ran in torrents down my chin, spilled over the peaks of my fingers. i tried to hold the teeth in place with rubber bands, duct tape, liquid cement. the enamel withered with each attempt, peeled like old yellow wallpaper. i welded my mouth shut and tried to swallow (any way to keep them with me, *part* of me), but the teeth, now sentient and wont to reject, drilled holes through my cheeks and repelled to the floor on long ropes of spit, marching away in single file.

had i done something to offend them? so eager to vacate— yet my desire for scarcity still unanswered. those weren't the pieces i wished to lose.

i suppose i don't get a say. sullen in their absence until the heavy morning.

### sonnet for prescription heartburn

shrunk down & taken like a pill,  
i scrape along some other esophagus;  
follow spit-slime through fleshy pink darkness,  
ignore every watery attempt to ingest (i refuse to go down easy),  
contort like a chimney grinch tweaking on VHS—  
false predicate of gift-bearing while i take, and take,  
and take.

halfway to the absorption site, glut with defiant leisure,  
my capsule walls begin to deteriorate.  
the throat coughs, in its acrid powder,  
and i rush the ajar epiglottis,  
disperse these harsh particles down the trachea.  
when comes the wheezing, and flat palm smacks the chest,  
when comes the lungsqueeze, the spasms, the dread;  
only then will i sink through the acid.



## OCD

as in: until it feels right—

until the muscle cease  
until the twitch crusade  
until the tightened heart  
until the task appeased  
until the shiver meters out

as in: until it hurts—

until the skin scrape  
until the blisterprints  
until the pressure build  
until the drip relief  
until the brain tap rattle

as in: until it sticks—

until the only odd  
until the neuron pinch  
until the thought retreat  
until the danger flee  
until the itch surrenders urge

as in: until it satisfies—

until tidy like a hoarder  
until sinking ship  
until bog-dweller  
until amygdalic torture  
until busy bone-imprint  
until necessary breath  
until again  
until again  
until again

as in: until the cycle resets—

until it feels right

**poem to make the total number of poems odd**

since even numbers make me want to scratch all my skin off.



**quirks include:**

heavy hindsight  
mandible clamp  
accumulated braindust  
headache on high  
benign growth  
goosebump aftermath  
bathroom floor  
disordered eating  
cigarette soil  
prodigal sun  
neonate nausea  
slit wrist fetishism  
gumming up the  
viscerawareness  
blood-brain barrier  
static  
rearrange  
blatant proximity  
begging, bloodshot  
either ore  
common trauma  
concentric ghosts  
bodysweat landfill  
gotham smog  
magnetic nestle  
quickburn masochist  
auto-stigmata  
wishbone broth  
barricade adrenaline  
bugs ; karma ;

electric sludge  
nonverbal filigree  
necessary darlings  
strange elation  
vomit brick  
erotic apostasy  
undelegated meat  
antique  
gelatinous  
radically infatuated  
mousetrap massacre  
monolith waterpark  
rotter mushrooms  
ambient upset  
analgesiac  
backseat lobotomy  
annotated wounds  
lightsource overlap  
day 3 free bleed  
prideful lies  
subatomic quicksand  
inarticulate  
tailor-made turmoil  
backlit reminisce  
frigid trepidation  
placebo breathlessness  
esoteric waste  
icepick  
sinuslick  
specimen  
deluge  
sap



## **in perpetuum**

i think i need to be a constant car crash.  
that i can't absorb sun.

decade of pretending irredeemable—  
the first spring evening yields graphic levity.  
to embed my spine in the earth,  
root vertebrae spreading like seeds.  
worms wriggle through aortic tunnels  
and my bones  
are bent  
to the shape of the wind.  
to the shape of an insect taking blood.

again— the marked drop in temperature.  
i am lesioned and leaking shade;  
suppressing untapped scraps of whimsy  
in favor of gutted numbness.

why not abundance?  
i'm too stubborn— restrained  
by my lemon tart temper, too sour to allow  
the freedom of sweet;  
my pathology to withhold all light  
and bide in hemoglobic ruin.  
the venom is in me already, it makes no difference  
how hard i scratch.

so happiness comes in hiccups—  
i scare myself out of it;  
stuff puppet skins with gravedirt and glass  
to parade my pretentious gloom.

## prayer for my bones

O collagen creator, hear my plea!

but a moment's ease on my skeletal strain—

spare my woe for the withered marrow,  
the disintegration of a warm skeleton;  
worn body collapsing in on itself.  
coerced by ruthless lethargy,  
my ribs  
have curled  
into bedspring coils.

please pardon my asymmetry, entrenched  
in mismatched radial fractures.  
one youthful accident, then—  
doomed to irregular growth,  
dull ache into adulthood.  
my osteoclasts were immature;  
i beg, let them be blameless.

and forgive my crudely outturned knees,  
patellae in sharp contrast  
with surrounding ligaments.  
those stubborn synovial hinges—  
in need of your divine grease.

if nothing else, i implore you:  
have mercy on my spine, an antenna  
bent to receive only static.  
it yearns but a shred of laxity—  
stuck rigid between  
these hellfire neurons  
and the constant ache  
of birthing hips un-utilized.  
the hunch of dragging gravity.

O osteal overlord, accept this request!  
abate my irritation,  
and i will renounce all complaint,  
indebted to even the smallest reliefs—

may my anguish be libation enough.  
in the name of discomfort, amend.

**my only relief in all the pernicious ache?**

a rat

king knot

of muscles

and sycophantic

hate.

## ANHEDONIA

laundry list of self-complaint. gray matter (unresponsive). the proverbial *tomorrow*. automatic ache. oscillation of bootstraps and incapacity. passenger seat rhetoric. reflections unrecognized. skipping doses/skipping meals (unintentional, but not resisted). implicit desires. pre-plotted narratives. the tipping point of crystallization. spring frostbite; holes in my heart. young habits kill soft. assorted heroic motivations. the kind of tired that seeps into every cell and solidifies. comorbid germination. external insecurity. cabinet doors in absentminded disarray. an itch down to the marrow. obsessions. compulsions. disorders. thicker smoothie so it feels like pseudo-food. pseudo-hunger (and how to tremble with it). crippling mundanity. background noise. the space between simmer and boil. between urge and urgency. cut and blood. desperation can be useful, like any other drug.



## sonnet for potential outcomes

and what is there on the other side of this?

    this indefinite downfall, this dogbreath despair.  
there's no end goal— inherent in my asymptotic nature.

        i'm only capable of approach,  
            of outskirted boundaries and borders of personhood  
hastily divided with red crayon. trails of dull residue  
scraped off onto scrap paper, top layer of wax left behind  
        to render legible. tracing static remnants  
to reconstruct kinetic whole;  
to reverse engineer auto-bloodlust.

routine is a disease.

satisfaction, an anomaly.

if you rupture brainstem and drain these angel-sharp chemicals—  
    what is there? and are you pleased?

## PURGATORIO I-89

my psychopomp is wearing a hazmat suit. pure white save for splatters of gore— booted, hooded, cinched around thick latex wrists. gas mask cylinders protrude from the edges of their spectral silhouette.

by one broken ankle, they drag me down the centerline of a desolate highway. lush pines line either side; mountains i almost recognize. soft overcast, the sky a thin sheet of gray. a light breeze toting muted scents of spring— worm dirt, evening sun.

i am naked and cavernously exposed— i feel no pain, but i can hear my skin scraping off against the tarmac, and my torso has been torn open with professional precision. thick slabs of my flesh are peeled back, their flaccid trajectories indicating a single point of origin— incision— between my breasts. my primate plasma turned corpse lily spectacle.

peering into the hollow, i see several ribs bent to skewer lung tissue; long line of vertebrae knocked askew, a tangle of discs and spilled spinal fluid; backdrop swamp of chunky viscera, indiscernible with puncture & bruise. my dark red interior shrivels at its first taste of direct atmosphere, sunshine filtered through cheesecloth clouds.

stoic in their baggy monochrome, my mysterious guide severs the silence. i can't tell how much time has passed, if any; the landscape is static and endless against our steady march. the mask's ventilator muffles their words, but the request is clear: *could you grab that for me?*

a dead deer in the right lane, body mangled but pristinely placed in the exact middle. its legs are broken, each bent a different compass direction, protruding with blood-wet bones. its jaw is shattered, the tongue severed by involuntary bite. both eye sockets are empty, pulsing with maggots eager to hatch. it's been eviscerated from throat to groin; blown open by the kinetics of collision. an impromptu vehicular autopsy. flies swarm the split belly, a cloud so thick i can't distinguish ribcage from shredded lung from burst liver from sundried heartstem.

as i stare, inundated by this creature's final anguish, my arm juts out of its own accord. draped in opaque epidermis, the angry white of my pus-slick knuckles encircles the deer's closest ankle. its hoof rubs against my wrist, displacing the skin. or rather, molding to it. fusing with it. i can't let go, but that's okay. i don't want to. our guide seems to register no change in weight, dragging us both without hiccup.

we continue on— maybe hours, maybe days. long enough for the deer’s maggots to mature and make their way to my rotting vacancy. i still lack sensation, but i watch, captivated, as the young flies feast on my entrails. they nestle in my bloat to lay eggs of their own, tucked safely beneath my stomach lining.

as the bugs writhe, i am struck with a sudden devastation— this deer, babe of natural divinity, obliterated by a machine it cannot comprehend. hard steel and fiberglass, fueled by irreplaceable remains; prehistoric bones melted down and remolded, paraded by hubristic beasts with little regard for life. i feel responsible, somehow. like i made the car. like i was driving it.

a moment passes, then two, and i am struck a second time, though this feeling is lighter— what an honor to fester alongside this soul, to witness its earliest decomposition. to feel its fur mesh with my skin, to share vermin across our common rot. innocent woodland dweller or product of societal greed, nature swallows all the same. this thought leaves me awash with inexplicable comfort.

for the first time, the infinite horizon relents.

a tall palace of mist rises in the distance; this road ends after all. vague outlines of grand towers are obscured by fog, the same shade of white as the psychopomp suit. the same phantasmal aura, too.

as we approach the mystical threshold, the site’s true nature reaps apparent— this is no towering palace; this is a junkyard. our guide steps through a rotted gate, the pavement smoothing out into cool soil against my back. the white haze settles instantly, at ease with the return of its master. tall heaps emerge from the sinking mist, piles of trash— no, bodies— on all sides. mammalian, amphibian, avian, fungal, floral. every conceivable species of corpse, compressed into homogenous lumps. fusing together. undulating, like shallow breaths.

where these masses meet the earth, still veiled by swirling fog, come inklings of new life. shadows of soon-to-be honeybees, cockroaches, garden snakes, magpies. they all drift toward some central power— i can’t see it, but i know i will soon.

my guide turns back to face me. their features are still obscured, but i suddenly feel as though i’ve known them all my life. or afterlife, i guess. since time immeasurable. i understand that i’m about to be recycled; my body absorbed into the natural conglomerate of decay and renewal. the fur of my companion corpse has already spread to my elbow; maybe i’ll be a deer next time. it’s thrilling, and terrifying, and utterly beautiful.

and yet— something tethers me to this limbo. gazing at my psychopomp, thick dread bubbles up at our inevitable separation. this supernatural enigma, both ghastly and warm, a fount of eerie contentment, feels necessary to my soul's survival. thrown blind into a new vessel of being, how am i to navigate without a guide?

sensing my apprehension, the figure kneels. they drop my ankle, gingerly, and sit back on their heels. somehow, i know they're smiling.

*don't worry*, they soothe, unmuffled this time, propping me-and-the-deer against the closest mound. i can feel it instantly— the corporeal consumption, surrounding me in gooey relief. their voice, the last sensation to precede my plunge into comforting darkness:

*i'll see you again.*

### ATOMS (3)

i want to know what my atoms have done. before the neural tube closed on my renewed damnation, before the fusing of parental gametes. before, even, the existence of those gametes— in the blood of distant generations, embedded in their diaphragms or dead skin dusted off. in every breath of ancient air, every meal that sustained every ancestor. every traitor, too. i was the carbon in their fatty acids, the water in their cytoplasm, lying languid across each sulci of brain.

where along the line did i condemn myself? tether my soul to this repetitive dread? somewhere between a tired sigh and a chipped tooth, maybe. a firm handshake and a cyanide pill. or during a stillbirth. a public hanging. in the dark skid marks of the first automotive accident.

i was in the last breaths of archaic soldiers. in the warlords of every bloodthirsty crusade. i've been killer, victim, and weapon all at once. my base components woven into each atrocity.

but if i just *keep going*— back and back and back— there was a time before atrocity. before condemnation. before any inkling of ego. and i was there, too. *of course* i was there.

in wild sinews, stone arrowheads, oak burned to char meat; smoke rising toward constellations yet unnamed. in prehistoric ferns & the breezes that swayed them. in the last meganeura & the first dragonfly. in riverbeds and cooling magma, raspberry bushes and mammoth tusks. chloroplasts and flickers of sun in the underbrush. shark teeth, redwood roots, all stages of metamorphic rock. dormant microbes in deep ocean pockets. molten iron in the outer core.

at chicxulub's site of impact; the shifting shockwaves of its aftermath. at pangea's first tectonic shiver; the flooded severance of coasts. slivers of my elemental essence trace back to the first prokaryote and *beyond*— in theia's crust, the debris of her collision. the solidifying swirls of andromeda's birth. the folds of endless nebulae, the burning hearts of stars. the first moment of cosmic release.

if i pry open that initial density— a writhing seafoam mass of atoms. this is all there is. this is *all*.

## FELICITY

mortality, self-sustained & unterrifying. miracle machines. sourdough starters. 3am cartoon reruns. a dozen tiny ecstasies. thunder you feel in your chest. explicit comfort. bodies, and their malleability. their resilience. the freedom to customize. unrestricted joy. regaining private peace. the blazing sun. pansy season. wells untapped. to be an atom in a pulsating crowd. crystalline intimacy. sunset anticipation. indulgence in overdone metaphors. raw honey. daffodil underskirt. sweaty setlists. the excited lilt of infodumping. first thought, best thought. a spring in my step. 4.5 billion years of coincidence. the ability to reform. when breathing is easy again. rekindled whimsy. intentional rest. betelgeuse gone supernova. detox from despair. coffee table adorations; infinite avenues of paradise. the privilege to wake up naturally on a sunday morning. the privilege to wake up.

**re / pulse**

how to extract a miracle  
from an idolized apocalypse?  
to distill all of evolution  
into one particular sorrow?

disgust is a heavy skin,  
overdue for molt—  
twenty year gestation  
of the alchemical body.  
the will projected as phases of matter:  
gaseous, spirit ; liquid, psyche ; solid, physical ;  
all possible routes of awareness  
coaxed open to the expansion  
of innate atomic consciousness.  
the unanswerable sentience of freefall,  
uncultivated & ravishing.  
all this energy for the sake  
of all this energy...

my wounds are accumulative, necessary  
agents in this ever-changing essence.  
but restructure them as cosmic portals;  
as breezeways to new states of being;  
i'll reopen & slip  
through—

## LEORA

i've spent so long in the chrysalis ; miasmic goo of malaise

constantly reshaping myself  
but never let it get to the point of

floaty , for a brief stretch —

this is textbook downward spiral  
(emerge from one  
just to spin another)

logically , elation is necessary .

i want to linger in crisp air ; let the sun soak in

resilience is more than enduring the sludge

it's enduring the light ,  
rejecting darkness as inevitable

to allow for candid levity —

i still feel like i'm trying to convince myself .

it'll take a while

and some things i may never let go of  
completely ,

but i'm getting there .

i'm getting there .