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# The First and Final Poetry of Joanne Deming

Joanne Deming

*University of New Hampshire - Main Campus*

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# The First and Final Poetry of Joanne Deming

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University of New Hampshire  
English Literature  
Submitted in Completion of English 788  
Senior Honors Thesis  
Advised by Professor David Rivard  
Spring 2012

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J

a hook to  
gouge to  
reach to  
slice slide into  
the back of  
My neck  
to pull  
to puncture  
a tracheotic hollow  
your J hand  
inhuman  
inhumane  
metallic filth  
a symbol  
a wrist-flick  
meaning-afforded  
meaningless  
.

## Frosty Berry

I can taste the strawberry juice of a snow cone  
 dripping slowly out the bottom of a wax paper cup.  
 I can smell the unsettled seeping virus  
 in your skin. Crawling through you, endearing  
 itself like purple sap to your veins.  
 The doormat serves its purpose; the bee pollinates efficiently.

You, caked in a layer of ballpark dust, efficiently  
 work your tongue like a potter's hands on your ice cream cone,  
 skillfully twisting upwards until dripping veins wind  
 down your fingers and you surrender—drop the thing headfirst into a cup.  
 By then though the sugary sap has endeared  
 itself to you, its sticky spider cells a virus

clinging to your skin—a pink virus, a delicious virus.  
 It stinks across the room like a cup  
 of three week old Raman covered with a cloud of the most efficient  
 most task driven, little flies. Forming a spiral cone  
 around their congealed treasure. I suppose the flies have endeared

themselves to you. Yet those that find you endearing— whether  
 flies or academics or countrymen have some level of wrongness in their veins  
 some addiction to a problem which cannot be unproblemated.  
 Like any good virus you do what you do efficiently—

purpling through the body, first washing through the veins  
 that fan about the stomach muscle,  
 then building on yourself like a great wart—  
 your roots digging into the organ's core  
 and your tendrils snaking around the bones.

Those who don't see value in a dripping  
 snow cone and throw the slush  
 away are those I have no use for, and though  
 your fat faced virus endears itself to me like swarming  
 fire ants I brush it efficiently from my veins with ice and cold.

Yesterday  
*(For my dear friend's ex-boyfriend)*

we burned your picture  
in a pizza-box teepee  
in the sandlot out back—

and even though I've never  
met you  
I felt myself buoyed by  
the colorful ink-sap  
gurgling toward your face.  
It was

as if,

as you smoldered  
into dirty soot and dust,  
a pressure that had been building  
on the synapses just under  
the surface of my skull  
was released into the smoke along with you.

And the chilled breeze whipped you  
in circles and away like  
it was an overly excited child  
trying too hard to help—

And we smiled like maniacs  
and danced on your muffled flames.

## The Seed

Sweet little sesame seed—  
you did not ask to be divided  
by the ultra-fine felt-tip  
point of my pen.  
It was in your dreams to be consumed—  
swallowed, by me as it were, since I am  
the consumer into whose possession you came.  
And yet when you parted  
from the bagel's shining surface  
upon which you toasted  
to a reproductively frozen  
crispness,  
you knew  
you'd never  
be able to make it  
to human lips.  
Your toasted crisp  
allowed you a hollow snapping sound,  
you cracked in a jagged  
toasty pattern—  
and the felted ink  
bled  
into the edges  
where it parted you.  
You'll never be consumed,  
little seed,  
nor shall you ever flower to a plant,  
your ovaric core scorched as it is.  
But then, you did have the chance  
to soak in a bit of ink  
and that,  
I suppose,  
is something.

Come, We All

We ill formed maggots,  
we less than living matter.  
there is a supple black flower  
that smells to us like rapture,  
like salty desire.

We crave to bite at its tender petals,  
to sink into its soft bed of seeds.

It blooms somewhere above us,  
pulsing out dizzying yellow scent,  
tantalizing us with the sprawl  
of its perpetual layers.

We whip ourselves forward  
hoping to be the lucky one  
that sinks its ravenous mouth  
into the sweet blossom.



## The Placenta

Short circular fingernails,  
her skin darkened tan  
and speckled with dark brown dots,  
a tiny raised purple spot on the knuckle—  
she stretches them into tight white latex  
and lifts the pink and purple mass to the light.

Her fingers move like a pianist's through the sinews,  
like a child letting wet sand drip from his grasp,  
just barely catching it with the other hand before it  
falls in a swollen pile  
on the surf.

The tissue and clots stretch in her fingers,  
and she gazes upon it, lays it  
in its blue tupperware coffin,  
and thinks, now kicking tiny bulbous legs,  
warm in a plastic crib several rooms away,  
of the product of its brief existence.

I retch.

She looks up at me,  
burning eyes bright  
not seeing  
my disgust  
through his twitching little nose.

A Current, of Life or the Things that Resemble it

There is nothing in this hollow  
except  
a blushing pussy willow,  
an array of solar functions,  
a tree with another's branch  
in its mouth—

Outside it there is  
blue fire, there is  
a green entanglement of  
embryonic life,  
there is a painter's pallet  
and a devil's mask.

The sky goes soft in cobwebs  
and a rotund quadruped turns  
to look back  
as it crawls into the red void.

Mean

Your freckles  
like those  
of a spoiled, pouting little boy  
do not endear me to your childish face  
and your hair  
hasn't changed  
since you were thirteen.

Grow up, weakling.

Like a stupid  
bleary-eyed puppy  
chewing a rubber toy  
because the high pitched squeal  
fulfills some primordial craving  
you chase and squeak as though  
you had no higher brain function  
to weigh the decision  
or to realize  
the whole act is pointless.

And then, rather than standing up  
to own what you say and do,  
you hide shriveled behind a wall  
shouting cruelties from afar  
and hoping  
your inconveniences  
will just go away.

You sad little boy,  
a man's dick attached  
to your adolescent body,  
perhaps you're simply the victim  
of wherever it decides to point you.

Or perhaps  
your mannish dick is the victim  
to be so permanently hardwired  
to your weak  
gutless  
little boy brain.

Either way you seem to have no  
method of handling your mistakes  
than to be needlessly mean.

You hide from your decisions until forced  
to face them and then you snap  
and bite until you are let go and can run away.

Grow up, coward.

Possess your actions.

Tippy

Bulbous creature  
toothpick-legged  
potato of a dog.

But you had to admire  
the dedication—

To have taught oneself  
to push chairs away  
and open a fridge  
without thumbs

To have known to wait  
until the steak  
was on the coffee table  
and the man  
in the kitchen

To have waddled back to us  
panting and happy  
her fur soaked and sticky  
with the smell of rotten milk.

I recall she never learned  
not to investigate skunks  
and her fur always smelled  
faintly of tomato soup.

## Creature

There is anger in the curves  
of his body, not simply the focus  
of a hunt.

His tree is propped  
and unsteady, shrinking away  
from his riotous fury.

Without his collection of fern-like  
tail feathers, without  
the questioning eyes of his underbelly,

he would be uncontrolled  
in the power  
of his straightened vertebrae—

Instead, he pushes  
his sword-beak  
toward his tender belly.

## Dream, Well-Done

The night swaddles me  
as though I am an infant,  
and there I am, its babe, its darling.

And you were there!

And you were there!

And you were there!

Wait, no you weren't there, but that kid who drives the bus was,  
and we all sat melting in the Mos Eisley Cantina, smoking pot to the  
repetitive jaunt of the band, their bulbous heads  
bouncing above their staring eyes,  
black and wet and deep, like Harvey Lake at night  
when John and I would sit on the dock  
swishing our feet in the slimy water.

Baby Jo was better in those days,  
not happier, but better;  
but then being good only makes a person miserable,  
and you can only have happiness with smoldering anger—  
I could let myself fall into that fire now,  
let the flames tickle at me till my skin shines  
a crackly, delicious brown,

but it's my turn for a hit, so I don't.

The smoke slips out between my lips and mixes into  
the brume above us, our own  
private clouds, growing thicker with  
each exhalation.

Then there you were in the haze, taking a mug from the  
pig-faced bartender and laughing with  
some Tatooinian beauty.

My steaming cup whispers in my hands

*Amore meus pondus*

*meum eo feror quocunque feror*<sup>1</sup>

and I gulp down its burning innards, and slam it  
back on the stone table.

Love or fury, take your pick:

a burden is a burden

is a burden.

But being burdened is getting old I think,  
rotating on my solitary rotisserie.  
My skin starts to bubble a sizzling brown.

---

<sup>1</sup> Quote from Confessions of St Augustine book 13. Translates to "My Love (or read, my Fury) is my burden, by it I am carried wherever I am carried."

## Eyes in Green Confusions

A planetary void,  
an ocean that saturates its  
every thing.  
Pollen finds its way  
to disembodied nostrils.  
Everything drips  
and melts  
and dissolves.  
The sea creature  
drools  
on its tentacles.  
Snow  
falls  
and is water.

## Warm Shadows

You are the creature that floats  
in the gray edges of consciousness  
upon falling asleep  
and waking.

Your wide, rounded shoulders  
blanket my small form,  
and wrapped in you  
I curse my body's weak need  
for air.

My ear presses into  
your upper arm  
Your chin rests on my head,  
your face occasionally twitching  
from a tickle of my hair.

Your body rocks with  
uneven breath and I,  
pressed to you,  
and with a breath not as powerful  
move along with it.

Then the grayness fades, either  
to black nonsense  
or reality,  
and you disappear,  
still trapped within it,  
so close I can almost have you,  
far enough that I can't.



## What Else is There Besides

nail clippers  
in duct tape rolls  
in desks-

relying on oneself  
to know about nail clippers  
in duct tape rolls  
in desks.

air ducts  
every fifteen minutes  
drying  
freshly dampened  
hand towels.

the broken belt  
I patched with red duct tape  
and still wear  
even though it still breaks.

and in the pocket of my old winter coat  
hanging on a hook behind a door  
in my mother's house,  
a sleek blue camera  
smashed into itself  
is waiting for me  
to do something with it.

For Doris

There was always something darling  
in your horrified reaction  
whenever I tried  
to serve you rolled up doilies  
as food—  
tucked together  
like pigs in blankets,  
a fork to the side  
as though it had a purpose.  
I'd shriek with laughter  
and do it again  
and again  
and you delivered each time  
giving me the same twisted face  
and the invariability of it all  
felt like love.

I remember specifically  
the sickened green of the bathtub—  
the matching bar of Irish Spring  
roosting on its edge.  
And the small blue hand mirror  
with the twisted gold-tipped handle  
that seemed to add a royal magnificence  
to my round child-face.

At home, in the third drawer down  
of the bathroom sink, is the small round puff  
you powdered your face with each day.  
And when I press it to my mouth  
it smells like your hugs  
and I can almost feel the soft leather  
of your skin on my cheek.

## Blood Splinter

It was a blood splinter  
she said  
under my  
saran-wrap skin  
almost poking through.  
Metal coils contaminate  
pristine cotton  
black rust on my fingers  
charcoal in my eyes  
my eyelashes rub  
and stick  
rub and  
stick  
purple rust on my  
fingers in my  
nails wedged in  
redwood bark  
and stuck.

## Visible Rushes

Soft and swift as Pegasus,  
eight foot wings—  
his hair, malleable, bends to the  
will of fingers, melts into stiffened  
rods of feathers— one between each knuckle.  
Bend down against his warmth or  
let the wind take you  
like a broken sail.

\*

Sew my wings, do not  
seal them with hot wax,  
do not burn them into my shoulder blades—  
Sew them with a gentle seam  
that my skin, hot and smooth, will mold  
like soft scars into the rippling strength  
of my feathers.

\*

Let the fan blow my hair back  
I don't care how cold it is.

## Dust Bunny Roses

The troll's name is Gustav,  
kicking through chuckling leaves,  
smoking because it is familiar.

A black squirrel nibbles a cherry  
and juices soak his fur.

Bunnies dip roses in dust,  
an even coat

of fluffy grayness suckling each  
plastic petal.

The painted woman's cockeyed breasts,  
both mutant and beautiful, seem to bounce  
with vigor in stillness that mine cannot achieve  
in motion. I am her white voyeur— the  
other. A version of  
the boys who look at me and lick  
my hips with their eyes, possessing me in a way  
that is theirs, that I cannot control.  
She is unaware; she soaks in desire  
for herself.

## A Selection of Eyes and Grins

The turning flower is  
cell walls throbbing  
with the strength  
of moisture and sun.

Red spores stick to their surfaces  
like a disease of the face,  
one of pustules and  
jellied disfigurement.

But in it is a place for blossomed  
existence, a new organization  
of old matter. The smiles all drip  
and the producer of life and joy  
winks at me  
sideways.

For H

There must have been something  
somewhere inside of me  
that wanted to choke you.  
How else,  
in a drunken torrential outburst  
of frustrations  
turned to pulsing muscle,  
could I have pressed my fingers  
into your neck and  
your neck against the wall  
until my nails dug in  
and purple roses  
grew under my fingertips.  
I cannot imagine  
who I looked like  
to you in those moments—  
certainly my eyes weren't brown,  
rather they must have blistered  
to a boiling crimson stretching  
from my irises  
to the roots of my hair.  
My freckles surely melted into my skin,  
too timid and sweet to watch.  
My face, I'm sure, glowed two inches from yours—  
a creature steaming from my pores  
and spitting from the corners of my mouth.  
I want to understand  
what breathed life into it-  
but then you're the only one  
who's ever met her.

## Static Uncontrolled

Something something  
something  
something something  
red squiggled lines something  
faucets clunk on  
clunk off  
something  
someone pees  
through the wall  
my  
refrigerator  
moans the  
soft sound  
of cold production  
something  
something some  
thing  
makes me  
do this even  
though  
thinking tastes  
beige right now  
I still  
have to make  
sense of the lack  
something closes  
a door and  
locks something  
my knee bends  
up  
to my chin because  
I told it to  
or  
my brain did—  
that one  
piece of me that  
won't listen just  
tells and tells  
and tells and  
never takes  
an order from me  
unless  
I trick it  
somehow  
but  
it always knows



what I'm up to  
so  
I still  
never  
something  
pip tit  
slap slat  
something  
something something

## I Want my MTV

Like freckle-dappled stars—  
glo-bright and plastic  
as they pulse from the ceiling  
and press their imprint upon  
closed eyes, certain shimmers clump  
together in sticky waterfalls—  
a motley of smells and stillframes  
attacking all at once—  
And suddenly there are grapes in baggies,  
and the sickened smell of your dog's fur before she died,  
and something seems  
to make you want that music  
television back—  
In a white room you sit  
on blue carpet that's  
almost too blue for  
so much carpet  
and you draw colorful pictures  
of shapes that you scribbled  
and then carefully filled with crayon—  
the same colors never touching.  
And Liv Tyler swings around a pole  
for her father, something oddly non-seductive  
about her metallic cone breasts—  
something oddly non-sexual  
about the way Alicia watches  
and claps—the way you watch  
and clap.  
Soft, shuffling tones overwhelm  
and topple over one another  
calling back upon themselves  
to make sure each one follows in line  
and suddenly you are in your friend's back seat,  
sprawled out comfortably,  
books in your lap,  
a touch of window-warmed sun  
flitting above your eyebrows.

On Being told to Write Poems that can be “Understood”

Prepare for understanding.

A bell chimes three, but I have digital clock.

Beneath a layer of frozen leaves

is a worm

existing.

When I smoke, I like the unnatural image of my blood cells  
carrying the clouded air to every vein before I breathe it out.

I’ve had a bracelet on my desk for years

that I’ve never worn,

and have no idea where it came from.

I don’t kiss, I am kissed.

I think there is something I am trying to write but  
it won’t come.

It tickles at the edges of my thoughts  
and sits in my wrists, unable to formulate enough  
substance to reach my fingers.

I can’t reach it, so I am stuck

and unsatisfied.

There are ashes under the picnic table.

The tip of my pointer finger is raw.

My skin is fair and I often have bruises  
without knowing their origins.

The sunlight pushes its way through my blinds,  
penetrates me with a dulled brightness.

I’m telling you now,

this is, probably, just a bunch of words.

I’m going to take a nap.

As of Yet

eat an orange

drive to New York

drive back home

drop a teabag in a cracked yellow mug

pull it out

drop it in again

feel pulls and drops and make everything loud—

louder—

scream out toward the black rectangle underneath

your eyelids—

black rectangles that form upon each other

until only bright pinpricks of anything

exist within nothing.

No thing draws or climbs or bites

without intention of fulfillment—

an innocent ideal

that leads to crackers

then to chocolate turtles

then to a light bulb

burning into your forearm.

only sit

and pretend to know

how to sit,

then stand

and pretend to know

how to move

Sitting, Clothed, Contemplating the Next Poem I'll Write

The air in this room is unremarkable  
 but satisfies.  
 The walls are yellow and pale  
 and washed in the pinkish light  
 of our corner lamp. I'm sure  
 the sunchips in my drawer  
 are in crumbles. I'm sure  
 that men dressed as milkmen  
 think their empty bottles  
 are still full  
 and that the cream sits thick  
 in the bottles' stubby necks.  
 I am therefore I think  
 therefore I cannot see beyond my thought  
 therefore what I think is probably  
 all that matters unless it isn't  
 which means that what I think  
 doesn't matter, which means my whole life  
 doesn't matter, which means the water  
 doesn't matter and the solo cups  
 amassed like soldiers didn't matter  
 when they stood quietly  
 and blocked the path  
 to my sweatshirt  
 that day. Go delirious.  
 I'm going to rub the base  
 of my skull on this futon's metal arm  
 and refuse to tell myself  
 to go delirious.  
 To instruct oneself  
 is to misguidedly empower  
 one's sanity with both  
 interior  
 and exterior  
 omniscience. So I instruct myself to—  
 Go delirious.  
 Let the air in the room wrap  
 comfortably around you  
 as air does.  
 What you're about to write is half-  
 oaked and delicate but then  
 you can't be sure— what you write  
 is not difficult and  
 will remain not difficult only  
 as long as  
 the chocolate

doesn't go away.  
 Be oblivious to things  
 like chocolate.  
 Let oblivion soak into  
 the open pores of your skin      disregard  
 the scratching  
 of the mouse  
 in the wall. Forget  
 that the message  
 was from the wrong person  
 because that's just where  
 the right messages  
 always come from.      Forget  
 that you are still clothed  
 still lying on the futon arm—  
 that the yellow walls layered  
 with golden horses on weathervanes,  
 sail boats in square-inch oceans,  
 abandoned birdcages,  
 and ill-matched spoons  
 are still washed in pink light  
 from the corner lamp.  
 What you'll write will not  
 be difficult  
 verging on the edge  
 of simplistic, verging so slightly  
 that the edge has become a slow drop  
     that the edge is detached from the edge  
         that the edge is grassy-knoll-soft and you  
 are the lamb rubbing your ears  
 in the shining blades. You do know  
 how to sleep    but you do not sleep  
 easily      you only will when you're curled  
 like a fetus on the futon  
 your pen's ink seeping  
 into the poem between your knees.

Something Terribly Clever  
*A Reflection on the Undergraduate Self*

The collection of poetry I've presented here is representative of the very particular time in my life which has marked the beginning of my growth as a writer. In my four years at the University of New Hampshire I have been drawn into a literary community which is far more vast than UNH's tiny Durham campus and has become a sort of mental oasis for me, giving me the support and encouragement of endless other writers who believe in the importance and power of creative writing. Possibly one of the most important things I've learned here has been to give myself permission to be a *writer*. To imply that my writing is so good that I should be able to call myself a writer or that it is even worth the precious moments it may occupy of a reader's life feels a bit presumptuous and even arrogant at such a young age; but when everything's boiled down and only the salt is left the truth remains that I have to write. Something compels me to write poems regardless of any school-related influences or any potential reader. I need to write to make sense of my life, and so I am a writer. Giving myself this title and allowing myself to become comfortable with it was an incredibly freeing experience which changed how I looked at my own process of writing and at other writers as a whole.

Considering these poems as a representative culmination of my growth as a writer at UNH, I decided to encapsulate them with the identity of which they are a product. My thesis *The First and Final Poetry of Joanne Deming* is titled as such because I intend to legally change my last name to Wood, my mother's maiden name, after my graduation. Because this dramatic personal change is coinciding with the completion of my Undergraduate degree, the name "Joanne Deming" has come to represent a very particular identity and a very particular time in my life. Though identity is not entirely something which can be defined, we as humans tend to



connect it with the abstraction that is a given name. Thus I am able to connect the idea of “Joanne Deming” with the person I have been for these first twenty-one years of my life. Since I have begun my entry to the world of writing with this name and am changing it so soon, these poems, for me, have come to represent who “Joanne Deming” is as a writer before she becomes “Joanne Wood.”

In compiling these poems with the idea of their writer “Joanne Deming” in mind, I began to think about the role of self in poetry. What is the self and how do writers fight to identify it through the written word? The conclusion I came to is that writers endlessly work to achieve sense of self by imposing importance and power upon what they see and experience and their need to describe it. In this way writing becomes as unique and individual as the person who creates it. Two poets may both write a poem about the same lamp, but the poems will be entirely different based on what each writer sees worth discussing in the lamp and the voice he or she possesses in conveying it— and a third writer may be too fascinated by the wallpaper to notice the lamp at all. This individuality is central to what makes writing a product of the self. Only I can write my poem in my voice about what I see (whether the poem is any good or not is not really the issue at this point), and this discovery empowers my writing and the writing of any poet with a sense of importance and almost urgency for what needs to be relayed. In thinking of this I began to reexamine what Joanne Deming had needed to say in the last three years and discovered a development in the nature of my writing which has taken me so profoundly far from the ABAB rhyme schemes and forced melodrama of my early college poetry.

My love affair with poetry began, I suppose, in the most unoriginal of circumstances. I was nineteen and I found myself, as it seems every writer (or, indeed, every person) will at some point, with a broken heart and a boiled-over anger which had little focus or sanity to it. I had

always enjoyed writing and had played with some terrible, unrequited-angsty-love poetry in the previous year (if you're keeping tabs that'd be pre-, or perhaps mid-breaking of heart); but it did not fully capture me until I found myself in this state of too-much-feeling and latched into the book of poetry that would change my connection with the medium and sink me irrevocably into its world. That particular book was Erin Belieu's *Black Box*, a book written in the aftermath of her divorce which possesses a strength of voice, a sickened humor laced with sexuality, and a command of imagery which is overpowering, beautiful, and yet delicately terrifying somehow. This collection of poems intoxicated me and gave a voice to the wretchedness I was experiencing.

It was with this book that I first began to recognize and be captivated by the power of images. One particular poem, "Below Zero," is a shining example of the way Belieu is able to create fantastical imagery which is both surreal and yet vibrantly clear visually, allowing a tension within the images which allows them to be both beautiful and yet unnerving:

where the fan chopped like a guillotine,  
 where the sheets were always clean,  
  
 and where the white fairy appeared nightly  
 riding Western on De Quincey's  
  
 crocodile, crossing her beautiful legs,  
 batting her wet mosquito wings.  
 ...  
 Who could compete in that marketplace,  
 that bazaar of happy endings and  
  
 endless dunes of blow?  
 (Belieu 31-32)

I recall that "endless dunes of blow" particularly struck me. The vision of rolling mounds of cocaine stretching out like sand dunes in a desert overwhelmed me with its promise of an endless exquisite happiness which is sickened with the mental-numbness of such a drug. It calls to mind

the same trepidation felt by readers of *The Odyssey* as Odysseus and his men become entrapped by the apathetic bliss found in the land of the lotus eaters. The image alludes to a mental release, but is not a truly positive one because the release is not pure and is rather induced by overwhelming levels of mind-altering drugs.

The fact that I felt such a vivid impact from an image which was really no more than a few simple words introduced me to the extraordinary influence that an image can possess within a poem. I found myself entranced by Belieu's words. The book builds poem by poem to the climactic ten part piece "In the Red Dress I Wear to Your Funeral," a poem whose voice spoke so directly to the anger and loss I was feeling at the time that I felt empowered by it. The poem's beginning, from which the book takes its name, evokes the embittered sense of humor and the striking visuals which are laced throughout:

I root through your remains,  
 looking for the black box. Nothing left  
 but glossy chunks, a pimp's platinum  
 tooth clanking inside the urn.  
 (Belieu 41)

This image, this very idea of finding the black box of a failed relationship, is so fascinating and unique and yet it is so perfect it seems incredible that no one (to my knowledge) has found it before. By beginning the poem with a black box, Belieu lends the sense of calamity and destruction with which a black box would generally be associated—and what could be a more beautiful metaphor for the spectacular devastation which the end of a relationship so often is? There is also very present in this image the sense of longing and wistful reminiscence which comes with such an ending. One cannot help but run repeatedly over the memories that haunt a break up regardless (or perhaps because) of how painful they are.

This book and its tone and style worked itself into my poetry for a period of time, though my tone leaned further toward bitterness and did not tread a balance as delicately orchestrated as Belieu's. One particular poem (not included in this collection) possibly most clearly influenced by Belieu's voice began "I stand above your chilled remains,/ your tear-stained toe tag clenched in/ my chapped fist." This period in my writing was marked most clearly by an aggressively forward anger which I had not yet learned to control. It is represented in this collection by the poem "Dream, Well-Done" in which that tone is present but is not the central voice as it was with so much of my writing at that time.

It was also near this period that I discovered Ben Lerner's *Angle of Yaw*, a book composed almost entirely of short untitled prose blocks. I enjoyed the form of these poems and was fascinated by the conflict created in having blocks of prose that do not always show direct connectivity between the sentences they contain. Though I did not really know what I was reading I was still engrossed by it and each clever block pushed me forward to the next. One such poem exemplifies the odd disconnect yet fluidity present in these blocks:

THE ARTIST PROPOSES A SERIES OF LIGHTS attached  
to tall polls, spaced at intervals along our public roads, and illuminated  
from dusk to dawn. The public is outraged. The law's long arm cannot  
support its heavy hand. The public is outrage. Kindergartners simulate  
bayonet fighting with the common domestic fowl. Does this blood look  
good on me? Does this blood make me look fat? If you replace a cow's  
stomach with glass, don't complain when you cut your mouth.  
(Lerner 38)

What exactly is being discussed in this poem? There are certain social issues which are being addressed but more than anything it is the tonal quality of the images which display their connectivity. It is a poem which made me think three years ago and which still makes me think today.

Discovering *Angle of Yaw* introduced me to an entirely different side of poetry than I realized could exist. I thought poems needed titles. I thought they needed a thesis statement. I didn't realize they could be so oddly shaped into little blocks. Though I have never been particularly prone to writing prose poetry, it is a form which I am certainly attracted to when reading it and which is so beautifully crafted by Lerner in this book. Though much of the book has an undertone of social commentary it is underwhelming and the true energy of the poems lies in Lerner's odd but vivid images and wry sense of humor. The shorter untitled poems are surrounded by three longer titled ones, one each in the beginning, middle, and end. This choice in the construction of his book allows Lerner to develop a build and release in each section in which the shorter untitled blocks serve as a tonal base for their longer counterparts.

Another book which I discovered much later but also employs the form of short prose blocks beautifully is Julia Story's *Post Moxie*. The poems in this book are separated into three titled sections and are untitled on an individual level. Each section conveys its own understated connectivity through related tone and images within the poems. The first section "The Above Song" has a particular sense of stagnancy and an unfulfilled craving for movement within it:

You're down the street trying to forget  
about the Holy Spirit. That's your middle  
ground for Christ's sake. That's what  
died and entered you. The holy entrance.  
Your entrails wound round and round  
the world like a red knitter's yarn, like a  
ring of snakes before they turn into fire  
and then turn back into dim gray waters  
full of bored sharks.  
(Story 13)

The movement which happens within this poem is created solely by Story's imagination. It moves, but the movement lies in the images and not any real progression of action. This is

representative of the sense of stagnancy present in this first section. The second section “Its Plastic Light” moves slightly from the stagnancy of the first and presents an air of conflict:

When I say you I mean hair-brained  
 muzzle-toothed rat-bitten or however  
 you're appearing these days walking  
 hand in hand with yourself toward the  
 teacher of your dreams this is how you'll  
 get away from me while I drive air in  
 another state fill my ears with air fill my  
 tonsils with your voice  
 (Story 33)

Story's refusal of punctuation in this poem mimics the kind of restlessness present in this second section. The poem is moving almost too quickly now, and its construction is both deliberate and manic. The poems of this section seem to topple over themselves and into each other as if they are not individual but part of one continuous stream of consciousness which they struggle to contain. The energy driving the poems is restricted, controlled, and repeatedly forced into the shape of these little blocks.

When Story came to UNH to read from *Post Moxie* I remember she said of her writing process for the book that she felt she had been pouring her thoughts into little containers each day. This struck me as a particularly beautiful way to think about writing and about these poems specifically, and it helped me redefine the way I thought about stream of consciousness poetry. *Post Moxie* seems to be a book which is all about a contained madness. A constricting force is binding the poems within their small block form. It is as if the content of the poems cannot be controlled, and it is their shape which can only provide some sort of organization for them. Story has a need to contain and objectify things which is on display in these little poems. This containment is present in the title of the third section “The Sky is a Thing.” In the act of objectifying and bottling something as broad as the word sky with something as restricting as the

word thing, Story shows her need to make sense of undefined concepts by containing them within an objective perception.

Around the time that I discovered Story's book, I was fortunate enough to be able to attend the Association of Writers and Writing Programs Conference in Washington D.C. I attended it with my brother who repeatedly introduced me as being "unfortunate enough to be drawn to writing as well." Experiencing AWP as an undergraduate student was a rather fascinating experience for me. I was particularly interested in the way that people seemed to react to me as such a young writer. Some seemed to completely accept the idea and acted as though I was any other writer worthy of conversing with. Some seemed to brush me off as though I was too young to even try to start playing this fantastic political game that is writing and AWP especially. Some immediately became so worldly and experienced upon learning of my youth that it was rather interesting to watch them so suddenly caught up in themselves as they tried to sound lofty and wise. These interactions were made all the more entertaining by the introduction of alcohol in the evenings. Being so young and being able to observe this world made up of every sort from wannabe to established writers was overwhelming, yet I felt incredibly fortunate for the opportunity. I was a part of this, but something in my age did separate me from it all and allowed me to watch it objectively.

While at AWP I was introduced to the writer Rae Armantrout. She had a reading which took place during the conference and I went with my brother and sister-in-law to hear her read. I remember being intrigued by her style of minimalism and my brother told me that he thought her poems were better to read than to hear, and so I stopped by a booth that was selling her books later. I found myself entranced by the way Armantrout's words seemed to drip down a page:

If yellow  
is the new black,

the new you  
 is a cartoon

spokesman  
 who blows his lines

around bumptious 3-D  
 Hondas,

apologizes often,  
 and remains cheerful.  
 (Armantrout 45)

This section of the poem “New” shows how Armantrout is able to achieve a quick, clever tone without sacrificing her rapidity of movement or clarity of image. Though simple, her style is so captivating that I could not move on from the first several poems but read same ones over and over. I bought both her books *Versed* and *Money Shot* there at the conference. Armantrout’s books sparked a fascination for minimalism within me. Earlier in the year my poetry professor, David Rivard, told me that stripping down poems to the barest essentials often helped one realize what is important in a poem and what is not. Here in Armantrout’s work that very concept was being applied in an artful and unique way. I began to think about minimalism and the idea of specificity of images without a necessary connectivity between them, and this began to reflect in my writing. Some poems in this collection which I can point to as being specifically a product of this influence are “J” and “Blood Splinter;” and, perhaps not quite as directly, “Dust Bunny Roses.”

One of my most recent discoveries in poetry is the writer Mary Ruefle. Only this semester I was introduced to her book *Indeed I was Pleased with the World*, in which her carefully orchestrated words seem to move like music across the pages:

It was a dangerous day.  
 The earth was shining



and the sun drank its joy.  
 The little goat was chomping columbine.  
 All the babies smelled of sweet milk.  
 The old folk sold their recipes.  
 All the women followed them.  
 The men ate, pulled off their boots  
 and wiggled their toes.  
 The trout responded to the water  
 and the hermit found his herbs nearby.  
 The radiance of circles had never been  
 wider, more one-inside-of-the-other.  
 Who began to feed the goat  
 the pages of a book?  
 Who began to feed the goat  
 the tragedies of Shakespeare?  
 What would we do without them?  
 (Ruefle 24)

This poem “The Meal that was Always There” displays the minorly playful but mostly observatory tone which is present throughout these poems. Ruefle employs her images with a specificity that makes them stunning such as in the line “All the babies smelled of sweet milk;” and her use of repetition is sparing, calculated, and deliberate in a way that makes her rhythms understated yet unique and fluid as the poems move through each other. Ruefle seems to be very particular in her focus on the specifics of things. She sees beauty in minute details and crafts her descriptions of those details as though they are all that is important in the world. A particular tension which is present in these images, however, is that there is often a sense of separation between the speaker of the poem and the details being described. This creates a friction which adds depth and specificity to the tone of these poems. There is intimacy but also disconnect present in their voice, and this captures the sense of human existence in that we are so connected and yet so entirely far from what is outside of our selves. This manner of thinking has penetrated my thoughts in the last several months and one particular poem in my collection which I believe reflects that influence is “The Seed.” Though I did not have Ruefle’s poems in mind when I

wrote this piece, it is evident to me in retrospect that her writing was certainly in my head at the time it was written and it most definitely has worked its way into my thinking and my writing evidenced by the importance which I impress upon a single sesame seed in this poem.

My life at the University of New Hampshire has allowed me to develop so much that I feel like an entirely different person from the girl who entered the school four years ago. Here I have learned to look at myself and those around me in a critical manner. I have seen and learned so much of human interaction, and have more importantly learned to be continuously fascinated by it. I have learned to observe the world as a writer does, and have impregnated my eye with the all important status of being my own. My vision, though it is still developing, is mine and is thus the most important one that will ever exist to me. This is the real root and meaning in my poetry. My poems are important because they are a product of me; and since my world is the only one that I will ever experience, they are important to the only world that ultimately matters to me: my own. In this sense writing becomes the most important thing in any writer's individual "world," and that importance translates to others only when the poetry speaks to something in their world as well. I consider myself so lucky to be able to appreciate poetry in this sense. Because I can read, write, and be affected by poetry I am able to experience the worlds of so many writers who I would never have any knowledge of or access to were it not for their writing. This connectivity between the individual worlds of writers creates such a vast network of written word that is a beautiful mosaic of individual experiences, and I am so glad to count myself as a part of it. The poetry I've collected here is a representation of the world of "Joanne Deming" as she has experienced it up through her twenty-first year. They are of a very personal importance to me and I can only hope they can serve some sort of purpose and become important for anyone else.

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