

**Amberlee Perry
Poetry Collection
Senior Showcase
Ripon College
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I chose to present five poems that I have written during this past year -- the most challenging, and most rewarding, year of my college career. The first two poems I wrote at the beginning of the semester in the Intro to Poetry class, while the last two poems are pieces I wrote for publication in Parallax. I have chosen these four poems for two reasons: to illustrate the progression of my poetry-writing skill over the course of the year, and to speak to the therapeutic aspect of writing poems, as writing these have helped me process events, emotions, and desires in a positive, creative way. I plan to continue writing poetry as a way to express myself and my deepest thoughts -- thank you to the English Department for bringing poetry back into my life.

Baby Hippo Statuette

Bulging boxes of dusty, used trinkets are not special
to just anyone -- pack rats cannot resist such opportunities.

I peer over the edge of your cardboard cell; your droopy eyes command
my gaze, those long, synthetic eyelashes framing an obsessive, lonely stare.

Intrigued by the way the sight of you crinkled my nose -- how your cool marble
skin burned my fingertips -- I reach for you, bring you home. Why have you

Chosen me? I place you on my worn bookshelf, amongst my collection of
discovered treasures, memorable moments -- sand from the atlantic ocean;

A dusty cast-iron teapot; pale, shriveled flowers from an afternoon ordinary;
a geode from an admirer turned lover, a clay footprint of a lost best friend --

Mouth carved into a smile, you clutch a chiseled, polka-dotted
blanket, each fold caked with black, oily grime -- a part of you.

From a Slave

“When I found I had crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven.” -Harriet Tubman, 1849

I. Mind Made Up

Tonight I board the freedom train

Tonight the floor on which I sleep
Feels colder, firmer than the leather whip
Used to tear the flesh on my back

Tonight I will not suffer from nightmares -
Freedom does not sleep - the railroad
Only designed for one-way trips

Tonight I board the freedom train

II. Moses of Our People

Her name is Harriet Tubman -

But don't get caught even thinking it too loudly
Infamous - poison to the tongues of slaveholders -
You see, she's the conductor of the freedom train

Escaped once on her own, she returns
Leads her brothers and sisters under a quilt of darkness
To the North - the promise land

Ain't lost a single passenger yet.

III. Escape

Our liberator emerges from the darkness

Her voice low urgent raspy

Wholly reassuring -

I move quickly to make her proud

Branches whip face arms chest

Reminding me of what I run from -

Gunshots ring out from behind, heightening senses

The conductor continues on - I follow

IV. Pennsylvania - From Harriet

The air is sweeter at the Mason-Dixon line

The sun shines brighter, like gold

Through the trees and over the hills

I almost mistook it for heaven, the first time

I turn to my passengers, smile at their weary faces

Exalted, they drop to their knees, kiss the earth -

Ah yes, I remember the first time

How it felt to be truly free.

Honest Feedback

During my last summer home, my little sister
asked me: *Why are you the only brown person
in our family?* I only laughed. Yes, I suppose I never felt

much of an outsider until four years ago, after arriving
Here. This teeny school in a tiny town nearly identical
to the place I call home--plains and cornfields surrounding

a midwestern white sea (if that was too blunt, I find myself caring less).
Yet here I am made to be foreign--my raven black eyes, my smooth
ebony skin, this wondrous mass of coiled curls (that I hid for years)

--all of it such a sharp contrast to my peers' many shades of white.
The most pitiful part? I blamed myself. My personality. My innate
uneasiness with other human beings. My crude, sarcastic sense of humor.

I could see no other reason for my alienation. No other explanation for that
blank, downward stare--how has it not yet burned holes into the concrete
sidewalks? Staring into their foreheads, eyes screaming a silent plea--*please* just look up.

No other cause for that paralyzing tension that gusts through the door
as I open it--I must remember how to move my legs--*where is a seat farthest
from that dreadful stench of intimidation?* Only recently did I ask out loud:

What is it about me? What am I doing wrong? My confidants look at each other,
then shake their heads at me, sorry that I have not yet understood. Carefully, they say:
It's not you as a person. Don't you see? It's your skin. That is what they will always see first.

So it is. How could I be so oblivious? So blind to an answer that stared back
at me in the mirror each and every morning? How could I not have seen it?
Breathe. There is nothing more. *I get it* -- nothing personal, just a matter of skin

And internalized fear. I am sorry for you. In May, I will leave those empty
memories lying on the stone steps of our graduation stage, walk away tall.
But, admittedly, I do owe this place something -- after all, without all of you,

I may have never found me.

Love

-- a thing I wanted so desperately
to be tangible so I could hold it
in my hands, run my fingers over
its smooth, easy edges, examine its
mechanics, uncover its darkest spots,
understand how to experience it in a world

full of false advertisements and shallow intentions.
after all, I learned early to be wary of all things
that I could not see, touch -- for how do you know
that something exists without feeling its texture
raw on your own skin? without being able to trap
it, lock it in a box lacking holes for breathing?

you feel it. yet I have felt so much -- that slow,
dull caving of my chest; pure ugly, spitting rage;
suffocating indifference -- I know those. I have
locked them in their own boxes and they sit on
a back shelf, watching me. but love? always an
enigma; something I could never quite grasp,

hold in the palms of my hands. instead, I
visualized love as a solid, always dangling right
above my head, held just out of reach by the one
who ought to love me most, my fingertips never
able to brush even its lowest parts. finally, I grew
tired and simply stopped

looking

up.

and there, looking back at me, I found you.

broken beings speak their own language
and you understood. gently, you lifted me
as if I was weightless and explored each of
my edges, and I yours, until finally -- together,
we found something worth believing in
without trapping it in breathless boxes.

Mom: things I would say if you spoke poetry

August 2015

Summer has nearly passed -- my twenty-first birthday,
too -- and still you have not called. Beneath this mountain's
unfiltered stars, I muse over the thought that I could disappear here

And you would never know where to search for me, where to begin.
Would you even notice? I surrender to the damp ground,
the bitter fire fueled by blood finally smoldering in the thick ash.

The lonely, empty smoke seeps through my pores, sneaks around
my lungs -- this feeling of raw distance between us not unfamiliar.
After all, a fire needs feeding, and you have it starved -- your indifference

to the sweltering truth drapes itself around your bare shoulders -- stinking,
suffocating -- how much longer can you ignore your faults, continue perpetuating
this cycle of manipulation that drags me under, holds me there until I weaken, brings

me back -- mercy. As a child I colored these moments of grey and black bright hues
of yellow, orange, pink, blue; nurturing my vulnerable chest, taking care to prop my favorite,
blue teddy bear in such a way he could gaze out the window, feel warmth in ways I tried to.

Here, the cold rainwater soaks through my t-shirt, numbs my skin, reminds me the way
I shrank from your guilty embraces -- stale alcohol on your breath, shame in your voice.
I just wanted you home. Reminds me of the times I pleaded, needed you while you danced

underwater in poison, unable -- unwilling -- to listen. Reminds me of how I learned to use love
for control, to keep someone within fingertips reach, close enough to wring dry, far enough to wash
away with a stiff drink -- but that cannot rid me -- you have always been the stone that crashes
through my calm waters, causing violent ripples, disturbing my stability. You reach me no matter

How far I am from your center. This familiar fire will soon again blaze in my chest, and I will let it.
You have infected my veins. Love is a foreign object -- terrifying, unpredictable. Something to ruin.
When it presents itself, I contemplate the weight in my hands and I release it, let it fall to the ground,

Wary of how I learned to love.