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The Vernal Pool

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Cabbage Soup

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Peer reviewed|Undergraduate

TONY HUA
FOUR POEMS



THE VERNAL POOL

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PAYING THE PIED PIPER

“By a piper, clothed in many kinds of colours,
130 children born in Hamelin were seduced,
and lost at the place of execution near the hill.”

--Lueneburg manuscript

Children hid behind their mothers' dresses,
as the piper played his flute.
The children did not want him,
this man with the
toothbrush moustache,
and a crackling voice
that the adults loved to hear.

But fathers urged their children on,
pushing them towards the piper.
Do not be afraid.
This man is a rat catcher.
He will catch all the rats in Germany.
The children obeyed,
following the piper as they
marched from Munich to Berlin.

With his seductive promises

of food and automobiles,
the piper soon had the children hailing:
Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!
And before long, they became
his puppets, his executioners.

Then the piper vanished;
the spell on the parents released.
My God! What have we done?
And the bodies of the children
lay in snow-covered ditches,
their faces, a shade whiter than ash.

THE LIFE OF SEIKILOS

“While you live, shine,
don't suffer anything at all;
life exists only a short while,
and time demands its toll.
From Seikilos to Euterpe”
-Epitaph on a Greek grave

Did you herd sheep,
the flock grazing as you sat
under a tree, telling the tale
of Odysseus evading the cyclops,
while your grandchildren listened?

Were you a soldier
on Alexander's campaign, sympathizing
with an elephant away from home,
your wife and children eating dinner
while your chair sat empty?

Were you a blacksmith,
molten bronze poured into clay,
as you scratched your beard
before counting the day's earnings,
your unborn child in her womb?

Did you sail the Mediterranean,
praying to Hermes for fortune
or cursing Poseidon as waves
battered your ship? In your mind,
her hands wrapped around your chest.

Were you a bard,
playing a harp or lyre
to seduce Euterpe
as the boar roasted
on the evening fire?

Or were you reared a farmer,
a child living in a hut
with rows of olive trees
on gentle slopes, the sun
laying down to rest?

ODE TO THE ONION

Forget
the apple.
Onion,
great seducer,
it was you
who tempted
Eve.

Onion,
when
in the heat
of flames
sheds that
ivory coat,
revealing
the opaque
skin,
you promise
carnal desires.

Sometimes,
Onion,

you are
the wingman
for an otherwise
timid item,
like plain
boring
chicken.

You will
guide
and reveal
the flavors
of our shy
friend,
who in gratitude,
will take the
center stage
and forget
about you.

Onion,
guest of honor,
you are welcomed
at every party.
Although you
frequently prefer

to remain out
of the spotlight,
Onion,
we know
you are there,
hiding
in the soup
or
behind
curtains
of noodles.
Your presence
is expected.
Without you,
the party
has
no appetite.

Onion,
sometimes
you punish me
for my indulgence.
You leave
in me,
a familiar

hidden from
my eyes
and ears.
I would be
embarrassed
by my peers,
by a prank
you played
on me,
but I know
you tease,
and you are
never harmful.
We will
have a laugh
over our next
encounter,
and all
will be
forgiven.

I endure
your abuses,
Onion.
Though I

may shed
tears,
you will
reward me
with your
sweet flavor.
And when
we are done,
the vestigial
nectar from
your stay
will remind me
of you.

CABBAGE SOUP

Cubes of pork bathe in hot water
while I pull apart cabbage leaves.
In another pot, mung bean noodles rest
in a gentle simmer.

As I wash the cabbage leaves,
the hum of steaming water in a pot
comforts me. I drain the noodles
and prod the pork with my chopsticks.

My chopsticks are like wands of incense.
At their tips, white smoke leaves a
swaying trail into the air.
I place the cabbage leaves in,
and sit, waiting for the soup to boil.

Today is the New Year. I am alone.
A bowl of cabbage soup sits untouched,
its warmth fleeting in cold solitude.