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THE COMPULSIVE INSPIRATIONS BEHIND THE POETRY COLLECTION “THE MAIN WORRY” BY ZOE BUTLER

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WORRY” BY ZOE BUTLER

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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ABSTRACT

Zoe Butler's poetry collection *The Main Worry* is a means of escaping the clutches of self-doubt, where readers can commiserate with the insanity that is reality. *The Main Worry* works to include small snippets of life that aim to capture feelings that congregate in the gray area of the human condition — emotion. Using a background of psychological phenomenon, *The Main Worry* brings readers together by connecting with the all-encompassing human experience. In her first poetry collection, Butler documents chronological lessons that she carries with her as metaphors, strength, and art. *The Main Worry* works to explore the unspoken corners of the shadowy psyche and celebrate the triumph of escaping the pit that all humans inevitably fall into. As an only child, analyzing became a way to interpret life, and writing became the vessel of her interpretation. Zoe Butler has spent her life coping with the intense anxiety of obsessive-compulsive disorder by burying herself in her writing. Now, she works to create a space for free feeling throughout the collection so that any mature audience can feel seen, heard, and validated through the commissary of an artistic outpouring of emotion. Where poetry meets the abstract will of feeling, *The Main Worry* surrounds the reader and allows them to step away from the isolated experience of personal turmoil.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people that I want to thank as they helped see this project through, which has been four years in the making. First and foremost, I want to recognize my incredible mentor, Professor Allison Benis White. Her mastery of the craft led me toward the best version of my voice. Poetry is a very personal, vulnerable thing and she treated me and my art with such care and support. I hope everyone gets to experience a mentor with such kind tenacity. I also want to thank my poetry professors Rachelle Cruz and Katie Ford as their classes were eye-opening as I pursued this project. I also want to highlight Michelle Holland and all of her help in high school that kept me writing and finding the fire within to continue writing *seriously*.

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There are a lot of people in my life who continue to push me towards pursuing my passion and eventually getting to this stage in my writing career. Thank you to Isabella, DD, Ethan, Morgan, Julie, Marley, Erik, and Cinlong. I greatly appreciate you all putting up with my random poetry drops into your DMs, as well as the impromptu spoken word sessions you all endured as I worked out my life through my written word.

A huge thank you to my parents, Lora and Brent Butler, who never once doubted my passion and pushed me to pursue more for myself. To my extended family, such as my

grandparents Joanne and LaMar Fahnestock, and ‘Papa’Dan and Andi Butler who were always excited to hear what I had to say next, thank you. I love you all so much and thank you.

And last, but certainly not least, thank you Jacob Nielsen for being the muse for all the love poems I have yet to write. You make it hard to articulate what I feel for you, and that’s astounding to me as a poet. Thank you for being my home and my adventure, I love you very much.

Here is to all of us, each one of my audience members and beyond, trying to get through life. I hope you enjoy the ride and emote with each high and low, because it is bumpy and it is beautiful. I love you all.

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BEHIND THE MAIN WORRY - INTRODUCTION

Dear Journal of Worry and my audience,

This may be the first time that a journal entry of mine will actually see the light of day. As a kid, I used to journal almost every evening and sign off with WTYL or “Write To You Later”, which made me feel like there was always the possibility of an audience. It is surreal to be addressing people now. I began writing poetry when my journal entries began to transpire into something else entirely, not quite a story, not quite a song. And I would call them blurbs. Unlike what might be on the back of a book, in praise of the author, no, I more so just wrote words thrown together which came pouring out of my psyche when I had no other place to put it. Sometimes it was a downpour, sometimes it was a sort of burst water main, other times a trickle like looking up into the sky as a few raindrops fell into my open eyes.

I believe the last time I journaled was during the heat of the pandemic but the first time I journaled was after I finished the Dear Dumb Diary series and my mother gave me my very own. However, it felt overdone to call it a diary, so I decided that I would call it my journal of worry, *you know as an adult would*. I believe that a lot of my upbringing around adults shaped the vernacular I have today and that I may be better at speaking or writing than I am with receiving information. It wasn't until I was much older that I understood that my terrible reading comprehension skills as a child might be something more than just not being able to spell, or what I assumed to be plain idiocy. I believe that is why it was easier to make up the stories and entrench myself in a way that I could seek out my own solutions in a parallel, metaphorical, manner. You see, I used to keep a journal when I would play outside with the neighborhood kids to track who had what powers and what was happening so that when I went back outside the whole neighborhood would know where we left off.

It was around then, despite horrid spelling mistakes, that I realized that it was easier for me to understand language through writing than it was for me to read. Now, disclaimer: this is not saying that writers shouldn't read, because that is certainly not the case, and in fact, it was only when I was an adult that I realized that I could take my writing to the next level after entrenching myself in reading. Throughout my elementary academic career, because yes, where I come from it does feel like a career at that age, I would pride myself on my note taking skills. Granted, it was out of necessity if I were to be able to fully understand the lesson. I would have to go back over my daily lessons with my family or myself until I could understand it in my own way. Clearly, little Zoe had no idea that she was dealing with some serious learning issues. Nevertheless, writing notes helped me consolidate important thoughts so that I could decipher them at a later day, and I believe re-addressing literature has led me to engage with content at a deeper level.

My note taking ability allowed me to synthesize ideas which later led me to understand myself through the strokes of my pencil. Hence the journaling, which later evolved into 'blurbs'. *However, 'blurbs' is what the rest of the world knows as prose poetry.* Although it wasn't the fact I was making the conscious decision to leave out lineation, no, it was more so me messing around with words that I never thought would see the light of day. This excludes my small stint in fiction where I wrote "Fun Soccer with Zoe," my debut novel. The title is pretty straight forward, although the twist is that somehow she gets attacked by a shark and chooses to talk about how it was her fault and not the sharks because a fun fact about me, I adore sharks. Regardless, as it passed through the grubby hands of elementary school kids, accumulating chocolate smudges and rusty staples, "Fun Soccer with Zoe" is still sitting somewhere in my

journal trove in my childhood home. It was obvious that words gave me a way to express myself that didn't frustrate me like reading or drawing did.

It only made sense that I would find myself with a journal tucked under one arm, and a pen dancing between my fingers as I walked to classes or sat on the school bus. Throughout middle and high school, essays became easier, reading became enjoyable, and my journal was as full as it had ever been. I had a few supporters back then, and I would take every opportunity to enroll in any and all creative writing electives. Soon, I found that it wasn't stories I was looking to tell, it was *my* story I was looking to tell. All of the things I was too scared to relate to someone about, wanting it to be somehow mine while also being a haven for people to escape to, to commiserate with. It was no doubt that I found myself on the other end of rather panicked phone calls from like-minded individuals who simply did not have any way to express themselves, nor the words to articulate the fear of living that haunted them.

It was a few years after that, in my junior year of high school the fear I plucked so often in my chest, rung out in the ear of my voice, and eventually, took over my life. I was diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Generalized Anxiety Disorder when I was 16. And before I was diagnosed, I used to call what was OCD "The Main Worry" which is where the title for this collection comes from. Although my writing never stopped, it helped me through the times when I felt not necessarily alone, but when I felt hopeless. It felt as though all the eyes and arms that were outstretched to help me were the ghosts that plagued my nightmares as a child. It felt like each of my irrational fears was spun into the drain of my younger self's delusions. Everything became a spiral of chaos, where the only tether to reality was recognizing that same vein of fear I saw struck in people and their pursuit of life, and how fearful they were of facing it. But most of all, it was a testament to how I could help them overcome what plagued them, rather

than dealing with what was affecting me. It felt easier to do the right thing for someone else, and self-loathing began to forbid me from helping myself.

I believe I let that same vein bleed into my pages today, with different literary elements, and the fear that so easily fogged my vision in that ghoulish gleam. It was from my own hand that I understood the fruits of my unseen labor. I believe that creating was the only way for me to have gotten away from the dark place that I once hid. Whether that place be the fear of facing a deeply anxious life, and all it had conjured in my own mind, or the fear of losing the only reality I have ever known. To me, art involves capturing one's reality, which is such a beautiful feat to accomplish. By illustrating the tragic parts of a personal story, art allows us to see so many different perspectives active in everyday life.

I would tell my friends that they were mosaics, as I would add to my own. The broken glass around me, all the little shards of myself were pieces of them. We would exchange, maybe catch some as they flew from our pockets with reckless abandon as we continued to dance circles around the Earth. I found that there were these little pieces of everyone else, jagged, misshapen, just kismet in their appearance that I was able to put myself together. It was not a matter of losing myself, it was a matter of gaining something foreign, ideas, and people that related to me for better or worse and left not their mark, but the bit of their life that resides in the heart of my mosaic.

I believe that my mosaic is represented in words. As if I were able to take the glass and concrete, all these leftover textiles and string them together into meaning using literary devices that a few of my biggest supporters taught me. It was Mrs. Simms in kindergarten, followed by Mrs. Goddard in sixth grade, Ms. Hailey in freshman year, Mrs. Holland in senior year, who

taught me the real craft of poetry. Then, it was my mentor, Professor Allison Benis White, who helped me hone in on this mosaic and breathe life into my strings of words.

Today, whenever this reaches the audience that felt so distant when I began writing, I write you my mosaic. A piece of it at least, hoping that you can find this shard, this chip of vertebrae and jaw someplace within yourself. Because I wrote this for myself originally, but I didn't understand until recently I wrote it for myself to give to others. I am known to wear my heart upon my sleeve, and it has gotten quite dirty facing the elements like that, keeping me warm, but I would be happy to lend anyone my jacket, and as this metaphor continues to be drawn because dang it I'm a poet, I hope you enjoy this little history of the bone shards in your hand, because my dear, this was made for you.

LET'S TALK ABOUT FORM AND ALL THE THINGS HIGH SCHOOL LEADS YOU
ASTRAY ON IN POETRY

There is no right or wrong way to interpret my poetry, everyone will get out of it what they wish, what reflection they want to see in the mosaic. And although I will touch more on my different motivations and inspirations, I want to focus a little more on the basics, to help you find your interpretation in writing.

Open form has always been the most natural for me, while rhyming is more of a rare occurrence in my writing. I tend to enjoy open form because well, there really aren't any rules so there is no way to mess up, and also, it can flow in the way my brain does. I can decide to start writing

over here and

maybe end up here.

There's really no right or wrong way, and I enjoy that because I have an awful sense of direction. There is flexibility as a writer, which I need to be able to articulate myself. Space in poetry is certainly overlooked, and although a lot of my work tends to follow the same tried and true left margin, I believe that there is a way to use lineation (literally having lines within the poem) and enjambment (fancy word for continuing the line onto the next line whether it be interrupted or not) to better get at the mindset and pauses that the speaker of the poem takes while the reader digests it.

Space in my work is something I attempt to put a lot of thought into, making sure to give the words the room they need to breathe, letting things sit with the reader a little longer, or even reminding myself of the gravity of the content when I try to overlook my own issues. Rhyme, as I have mentioned before, has not ever been something that I feel necessary in my work; despite the utter respect I have for the poetic element. I will occasionally play around with it, but poetry does not have to rhyme to be poetry, and I like reminding myself that there are really no rules, which allows me to pour my mind out onto paper.

Rhythm on the other hand is a pillar of poetry that I try to hone in different ways. A lot of this is by reading the piece out loud, allowing myself to hear the music of the poem and what has emphasis, or what flows well together. Rhyme is how a lot of poets achieve a more seamless rhythm, but you don't have to rhyme to achieve it. It can be fun to play around with rhythm, and I try to do that often as I rarely stick to a rhyme scheme.

Keeping this in mind, I hope that the reader can let go of the 'right' and 'wrong' notions of poetry interpretation that were common in high school lessons. Instead, take on their own interpretation of the work because ultimately, that is what art is for—commissary. This collection

aims to let the viewer place themselves within the work, entrenched and content, maybe even a little scared until they are able to derive their own meaning, taking something of it for themselves, taking a shard to add to their mosaic.

INSPIRATIONS

I was the kind of kid who rarely picked up a book on their own accord. *Luckily, that changed when I hit college.* I found just how inspired I was to write when I was actively reading. It felt like I could adopt the way the narrator and speaker spoke in the book as my own cognition's narration. Not only that, but it helped inspire me with the content and literary devices that I found throughout those texts.

It was extremely helpful to read my mentor, Allison Benis White's, work *Please Bury Me in This* to not only get an understanding of her work and the way it struck a chord in me, but also to see how a collection flowed. Being able to pick her brain about the decisions she made throughout the piece was imperative in my journey of writing this collection. It was also a fun ride going through different suggestions made by Professor White, such as *The Wild Iris* by Louise Glück which was a beautiful collection that tended to tie into the nature imagery which I was very familiar with.

I want to highlight some of the books I read during the creation of this capstone and for different classes that helped inform me about the craft of poetry in general. These writing texts include Lea Bronwyn's and Philip Nielsen's sections "Poetics and Poetry" and "Life writing" in *The Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing*, Miles Merrill's *Slam Your Poetry : Write a Revolution*, Robert Pinsky's and the Poets Laureate Collection *The Sounds of Poetry: a Brief Guide*, and J.T. Welsch's *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry*.

Being a psychology major also means I was particularly interested in doing research to understand how poetry helps the reader and the writer in a therapeutic way. As writing was the way that I got out of some of my darkest spots, I felt as though my experience was only one of many. It was refreshing to see how that was the case in Hoffman and colleagues article “Living Stories: Modern Storytelling as a Call for Connection”, Pițur and colleagues article “Poetry-elicited emotions: Reading experience and psychological mechanisms”, and Lindsay Emma Reid’s doctoral dissertation *I Am Still Bed Six: a Collection of Poetry, and, Poetry as Therapy and Poetry Beyond Therapy*. Although not outright, I loved being able to synthesize my experience with psychology as an inspiration for this collection, especially as I highlight my struggle with mental health issues.

ORDERING THE COLLECTION

A great deal of my writing has been inspired in some way by my life, and frankly, before I realized it was poetry that I was writing, I would take a lot of solace in figuring out what I had going on within myself by writing it out. So naturally, a lot of the collection is chronological in terms of my life experience. I also deal with very vivid and sometimes disturbing dreams and decided that I wanted to include that in my poetry collection. Similar to how I wake up in the morning and have a hard time deciphering what is reality or not, I wanted to emulate that in my collection as an analogy for dealing with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. I thought it would be fun for the reader to engage in the thinly veiled flow of the collection while being confused as to what may or may not be reality.

PART I

For the first part of the collection, I decided to prepare the reader with the perspective of my life. I included poems that for the most part, explained events that were rather poignant in my

life. This seemed like a natural starting point for the collection since we all stem from our memories. I thought that the beginning section should be a primer to better explain my emotions and reflections that follow in the remainder of the collection.

The beginning is not my most intense work, because I didn't want to scare the reader off. However, I tried to choose pieces that were still enough of a hook to keep the reader interested. It was fun to include pieces that I was very proud of from as early as my first year in college. Finally, it became clear that I was finding my voice by being able to talk about what I had experienced. Many of the experiences I recount in a thinly veiled way include times with people in crisis, and some rather toxic friendships that had a lasting impact on my own self-worth. In fact, my first published poem *Candy Candles* found in the 2021 Palouse Review, was about said toxic friendship.

I believe that leaving for college saved me to some degree, and I had wonderful friends who supported me and my writing. I believe that allowed me to write about what happened to me in the shroud of poetry. It's this blurry gray area where I am able to commemorate myself, create through my pain, and keep it vague enough for others to find comfort in it for themselves which is precisely the premise of part one. As an example, here are my own annotations to explain my poem, *If nostalgia were a candle*.

(metaphor-ish)
Hypothetical

That specific smell of home (olfactory sense is the most memory-sensitive)

If nostalgia were a candle

it would have burned each one of my homes down and smelled like the ashes of sterling and lilac.

Struggling with change and the bitter pain of reminiscing

my mom always smelled like lilac soap. Sterling is an homage to innocence.

The pain of trying to hold onto the past.

I would have licked the wicks clean of flame letting the aftertaste dance upon my tongue.

personification

Till smoke flooded my teary eyes and gave this heart such purpose.

I would have lit it in the corners of my room as I selfishly painted myself in its light.

To see oneself as they once were (younger, happier) - Also a hint of vulnerability

Showing the candle has been burnt many times. My tinged walls—the canvas of the present self I'll never be.

re-define setting Not ever being able to be the shadow.

If nostalgia were a candle I should have never lit it.

repetition to bring it home.

A small 'an-na' moment of the hypothetical the wish to go back and not bring back the memory of the past.

• Nostalgia was an emotion I struggled with as it entangled itself in anxiety. The change that younger me deeply struggled with.

PART II

The second part of my collection has to do with the fallout of the events mentioned in the first part. That is to say, the emotion that came as a lasting result. A lot of the content in this section highlights grotesquely visceral imagery where I can parallel my mental pain to physical pain, as well as illustrate the psychological feelings that accompany my distress. I find that some of my strongest poems tend to involve body horror to some extent.

To me, I am someone who feels too much, but it is easy for me to explain it by mentioning the somatic sensations that accompany my insight. I believe that anatomy is a beautiful way to convey the depth of my emotions. As a long time proponent for everyone's mental health but my own, I decided to really let that frustration and pain come through in this section. I find that very visceral imagery brings a certain gravity and seriousness of content to convey just how helpless and terrified I am while dealing with OCD and extreme anxiety. I believe that this is a very therapeutic way for me to express what I deal with, and allow others to sympathize with the silent struggle that many people *also* experience.

I find that imagery tends to be at the forefront of my writing, in this section and most of my work, because I am someone who observes. Growing up as an only child, it was typical that my favorite pastime was to observe what was around me and then add in my own little world to entertain myself. This section is all about lending insight into the not-so-pretty side of my mind and just how beautiful horror can be. Below, I have included my annotations for a poem in this second section to highlight the visceral imagery that I often use in my work, titled *Myocardial Infarction*.

Myocardial Infarction - chest pain - a pre-med friend helped me title it accurately.

These threads you tied lay slack since we parted. - Fabricated 'string of fate'

A greedy jerk heaves my cardiac chords taut
like a harp **similie**
like a fist full of hair

nerves held at attention. - The forceful description of making someone look at someone/something they don't want to. **homage to the title**

my shoulders ache as my gaze is forced up to meet the empty eyes of my wall's apparition. - The fact the other side is gone, it's the habit of hurt the damage leaves behind.

The one that pricks my dreams stringing them into nightmares. - The chest pain in severed heart strings

This sinewy guilt hangs loosely in my chest. - Each breath an effort to forget the way someone told you how to hurt.

I can hear it rattle with each inhale and my trembling hands will hold the socket of my once-voice exchanging warmth with your red-slicked hands. - The exhaustion and fear the speaker feels, even when the string of fate and heart is clipped.

Literally caught red-handed - Because the perpetrator replaced the speaker's voice for their own.

Imagery

• Using a partly narrative style to represent a natural progression of the aftermath of a toxic relationship.

The other side still being intrusive enough to hurt the speaker.

The part of the self which subconsciously hurts the speaker.

PART III

Immediately following some more intense imagery, I decided to ground the content in the painful lessons that I learned from the experiences in the first section and the fall out of those pivotal moments in my life found in the second section. I pride my parents on being able to instill such a profound sense of meaning in mistakes, as well as lessons that can be learned from small things that allow me to better handle my emotions.

I used this section to reflect on myself and how I was shaped to be a woman. As a young girl, I have a very vivid memory of staring into the mirror and waking up into consciousness. It had this lasting effect that to this day, if I look at myself in the mirror for too long, focusing on my eyes, I can disassociate. Everything feels like it falls away as I start to think about the ever-expanding universe, death, and all the things that plagued a very curious mind that had nothing but time on her hands to ponder.

Don't get me wrong, my parents were always present and very active in my life to which I am forever grateful for, but there were times (as all kids have) where I needed to entertain myself, and as an only child, that *really* meant just myself. I believe that the places and people I decided to create taught me a lot, and it felt almost gratifying to have done so on my own while I played in my own imagination.

Regardless, I dive more into the insecurities that I have around being a woman and all of the intensity that accompanies emerging into womanhood. Between coping with being a woman in society, as well as growing into myself with my experiences, my feelings, and my mental illness, I tried to derive certain lessons from that notion and wanted to reflect on that moment in the mirror and come to terms with who looks back. Below, I annotated my poem *Whose Fault Lines?* from the third section of my collection, which speaks to my experience as a woman. In

particular, I wrote this poem in honor of the art of Kintsugi, which is where broken pottery is fixed by filling the cracks with gold. However, this has a fun twist around it, which speaks to the objectification of women's bodies as well as the need for others to 'fix' and praise the imperfections that make someone unique and 'beautiful' and just how painful that is.

metaphor for Kintsugi

Whose Fault Lines? — After the art of Kintsugi and how it can be reverse engineered as performative praise to brokenness and painfully 'fixing' it.

A desperate attempt to fill the cracks with molten riches

My teeth chatter, as the branding gold funnels into every interstice and hardens on boiling skin.

Each crevice

But I glisten more, in the sunshine And I'm prettier to look at since the shell is rock and my reddened skin is haunted by the imposed perfectly-crooked fault lines.

There's a possessiveness to it. There is immense pain in being forcefully made whole with gold. Being an object of affection, not a person.

Connection to the title.

You'll have to wait until it cools before you can touch me again it's for your own safety.

The wholeness wasn't for the art, but the beholder - to touch, to use again. The speaker making sure not to hurt the "fixer" from the "help" they imposed.

By Mitus I was *blessed* with these fault lines and the cauterizing rage that simmers underneath as I arose whole once more.

repetition

Needing to seem thankful, when their need to fix the speaker was a painful, permanent curse.

The silent pain in sizzling flesh.

For the foil I wear the preceding wounds and those touches between moons

Mitus homage, to be touched by a man is to be worth

was always just so I could hold

more of you.

Kintsugi usually involves pottery or bowls - proving to be an object, not a human who can be pumped full of gold and proclaimed 'whole!' (Also intimate euphemisms)

PART IV

In addition to the imagery that I use often in my work, I also find my default topic of writing to be nature and taking in the world around me. It is also a happy place of sorts, where I can breathe fuller, notice all the little details, and let my senses wander into oblivion. It's meditative for me in a way, and having grown up in the middle of nowhere, the wilderness really does feel like my home.

I have been told on many different occasions that I should write about something happy and yet I often find myself just not nearly as satisfied with a happy subject as I want to be when I write. However, I believe that one of the only ways that I find peace in my writing and in my life is by being outside, so that I can tangle myself in all different kinds of life. I decided that the conclusion of this collection should end on a less somber note, where I describe my reprieve of my intense emotions and focus on the outdoors.

I believe that this is where hope can be cultivated, and that the land of my natural descriptions is where the end of this collection should naturally reside, *pun intended*. Although not all of my work in this section is happy or even remotely peaceful, it still holds my semblance of peace, where I want the reader to be able to sit with what was said; observe it as if you could sit atop a mountain and think about everything.

The wilderness or even outside elements in general are not gentle, there is a modicum of reality that must be sustained when talking about flowers and trees and how they all inevitably die. I think that finding a certain amount of peace is necessary and I was happy to leave off the collection in that mindset. Below, I annotated my poem, *Submitted, Summited*, where I recalled my love and devotion for the outdoors, and how physically taxing it can be despite finding my peace through that exertion.

Grounding in a specific setting

Cabin 2006, Touching Antlers

repetition
imagery

Painted aspens bleed yellow against the woods. juxtaposing calm/beautiful scene

Bones file into the homely pit of homage. Lamenting death and coming across remains.

Daisies encircle the cyclical pattern in fairy rings. - imagination

It's present in the vibrations of the Brazos, and the bumpy lumps across the buck's newly sprouted crown - alliterative rhyme to bring attention to

The river I grew up fishing in

of my childhood couch that I sank my sorrows in A virtue of innocence (something to respect)

sat proudly atop his head and I gently rubbed my baby palm across the fuzz. A personal implication from the speaker and relating this moment and feeling to finding peace

→ To portray the way that translates to "arms" in Spanish

innocence should be respected.

To paint a picture while also highlighting the speaker's youth to ground the meaning of innocence in the speaker (young memories can be very powerful in self-reflection)

OTHER RUNNING THEMES

I also wanted to touch on the few other motifs that have found their way into my work time and time again. One of which being the many different mentions of god or other biblical references seen throughout my work. I must confess that I am not religious, I was raised Christian but really align more with the very ambiguous and pat-hand answer of spirituality. The universe is wild, man. But regardless, I found that almost all of my OCD and other anxieties stem from guilt and shame, a lot of which was woven with the existentialism I began to associate religion with. In addition to looking for meaning in the cosmos and what God meant to me, I found myself beginning to have to pray each night while asking for forgiveness just in case I die through the night. The prayer became a compulsion to me, and I would have to repeat it many times and it would keep me up until I felt that sense of Yedasentience (that things are ‘good now’ or ‘okay’). Really, it is just a way for people with OCD to continue their compulsions until they ‘win’ what I like to call ‘the lottery of salvation’. I wanted to incorporate this divine and all encompassing dread and guilt that I experience and associate with God to stand as a common ground for readers to commiserate with, as even the most devote tend to waiver in their dogmatic beliefs.

Although not explicitly stated, my pursuit of a career in psychology, as well as my Bachelors degree lent a lot of insight into my poetry and what all I had to say. I believe that understanding different social and personal psychological phenomena greatly influenced my work. The brain is a staggeringly gorgeous organ, and the fact that it rules our lives made it that much more of an inspiration when I began writing this collection, and throughout my four years of schooling.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for embarking on this journey with me, as I describe everything that went into this collection. I plan on submitting to publishers, and one way or another, getting this out into the public's hands. It is because of this capstone opportunity that I had the guts to finish it. My goal in writing this collection was both a personal and intrapersonal journey. I write to save myself, and bring that evidence to light, so others can use it for their own motivations. I will continue to write, and hopefully, continue to publish. It took a lot of personal conviction to take this on, and come face to face with the reality of my passion, and I am proud of myself for doing so. Thank you for reading, I hope you found some bone shard to add to your mosaic, something from this you can take with you.

The Main Worry

By Zoe Butler

PART I

Heterodox Night Deals

Sleep has become a curse
a fever-headed
dry lipped prayer
for relief
repenting in the witching hour.

Admittedly, envy seethes.
At least my shadow can rest.

Unlike, the all-swallowing sun
granting me company

with the absence of myself reflected
on the ground.
Proving my presence
in the light.

Please, lull me to sleep
take my hand
rub my back
push until my breath lies
shallow in my chest.

Until under the blankets,
you permit me
to trade with my nonself.

Kneeling in my tacky ghost costume

Knees bent
making contact with the floor.

Fluttering gurgles sound from
an empty stomach.

As bones crack against the tile.
A hardwood creak can be heard
in the distance.

Creeping into sheets
to play the role of an
invisible once-soul with eye holes
traversing the journey back
attempting to find the end.

Deep breaths puff out the
fabric — all too human.

Gain composure enough to stop
breathing.
But keep your eyes open.
A subtle stare
to shadow into the background
without a peep.

Join the rest of us wallflowers
with sloped spines
and all your secrets to keep.

Your stale sheets leave no stains
upon a crisp, tear
Let the void seep through the polyester

Come meet
with a bowed head
the two eyed holy ghost

My Father Told me the Tales of Mr. Grasshopper

I passed a grasshopper in the parking lot today
and tangled myself in apprehension as I stalled,
lowering my hand and launched into a kneel
to grant him my reverence.

A man became roadkill today
and my stomach did flips.
Bodies like to commiserate
with the fragility of tissue.

My neighbor walked the gray line of oblivion.
And now there's a catch in my voice

a lump in my throat as I choke on the word:
goodbye.

Unable to swallow this hollow.
My stolen stomach drops at my feet
Grief's nails clung to my neck
carving out "unworthy" in my flesh.

A cricket hopped below my shoe
and I found myself keeling out of the way,
shielding the bee curling into itself
a husk of shivers donned with stagnant wings.

I let them leave.

If nostalgia were a candle

it would have burned each one of my homes down
and smelled like the ashes of sterling and lilac.

I would have licked the wicks clean of flame
Letting the aftertaste dance upon my tongue.

Till smoke flooded my teary eyes and gave this heart such purpose.
I would have lit it in the corners of my room as I selfishly painted myself
in its shadow.

My tinged walls—the canvas of
the present self I'll never be.

If nostalgia were a candle
I should have never lit it.

PART II

Dermatillomania

This perverted infatuation
with the vulnerability of
scabbing-over flesh.

The shells of cells
weaving themselves back together.
A seamless stitch as a silent pain
is quite a novelty.

To destroy yourself
just to watch myself reconvene
in the quiet corner of my resolve.

Myocardial Infarction

These threads you tied
lay slack since we parted.

A greedy jerk heaves my cardiac chords taut
 like a harp
 like a fist full of hair
nerves held at attention.
my shoulders ache as my gaze
is forced up to meet the empty eyes
of my wall's apparition.
The one that pricks my dreams
stringing them into nightmares.
This sinewy guilt hangs loosely in my chest.
I can hear it rattle
with each inhale
and my trembling hands
will hold the socket of my once-voice
exchanging warmth with your red-slicked hands.

I've borrowed too much trouble

And I'm leaving dribblets
to my doorstep
my kid hands full
of greedy fistfuls
these liquid shards
are reflexive in the light
I had no place to store it
—just in case.

So I opened my mouth
and said “Aaaa”
I held my nose
as I lifted mercury blades
to my lips
and tilted the static to my mouth
letting it crawl down my throat.
I had no pockets.

Momma, please don't be mad
I watched you knock yours back
and wipe the blood from your lips
before you kissed me goodnight.

So I snuck into your nightstands
—the one with the cedar painted deer

and I borrowed your trouble
just for safekeeping.

But I'm throwing up mirrors
and my hands tremble
in the carnage of
my bloodied mouth
and shredded vocals
as my eyes splay wide
holding my hands close to my chest
My lips will part
as if to say: *I've borrowed too much trouble.*

Greedy Grins Run Red

through my mouth
to usher the words
of the most nonsensical kind
wishy-washy
syllables

paint our fate
tongue and cheek
I lap at my gummy sockets

unsure as to why
my hands are bloodied
wearing my smile in my
knuckles

I just wanted my baby teeth back
but it seems that I have
gone
and stole my smile instead.

You said I am a pretty crier

Also seen in Mosaic, University of California, Riverside's Undergraduate Art & Literary Journal

Unraveled, jewel-bared knuckles
Painted in muted watercolors.
Be the azure to my violet
and I'll paint this wall in regrets
with the hollow words you gave me

Trapped inside my
trembling
fist.

PART III

Whose Fault Lines?

A desperate attempt to
fill the cracks with molten riches.

My teeth chatter, as the branding gold
funnels into every interstice
and hardens on boiling skin.

But
I glisten more,
in the sunshine.
And I'm prettier to look at
since the shell is rock
and my reddened skin is
haunted by the imposed
perfectly-crooked fault lines.

You'll have to wait until it cools
before you can touch me again
it's for your own safety.

By Mitus I was *blessed*
with these fault lines
and the cauterizing rage
that simmers underneath
as I arose whole once more.

For the foil I wear
the preceding wounds
and those touches between moons

was always just so
I could hold

more of you.

Satin Sadness as a Sexton

I wish my pain could be pretty

like theirs.

Sweet silky petals

with fragile feminine tears,

scabbed knees,

and silk white dresses.

Ones to wear when tending to some floral garden.

Chomping strawberries

like a tasteless fruit.

Consumed just to pull a glow to pallid cheeks.

A warm blush like a pretty petal

it compliments the well sullen,

dead knight

and his ornate headstone.

Dirty,

I tend to his grave.

I'm a delicate flower (repeat until true)

Hands feel colder
on a silent body
BUT the goosebumps
aren't a tease,
nothing well received.

I'm a delicate flower

I'm a delicate flower

I'm a delicate flower

They are to count
to blur into a place above
BUT pupils must shake into the gray line
of consciousness.

I'm a delicate flower

I'm a delicate flower

I'm a delicate flower

Hem lines are pushed shorter
and palms linger longer
BUT floundering isn't very
lady like.

I'm a delicate flower

I'm a delicate flower

I'm a delicate flower

I am petals and pollen
sepals and stems
BUT I've been plucked and chosen
to wither in his "she loves me..."

I'm a delicate flower.

To a Faceless Familiar

I said once in my dream
that you can't hate me
anymore than I hate myself.

I think I liked the way the words tasted on my lips
a sour kind of pungent
like wine
like cough syrup.

I'd choke on the sentiment,
bathing in sediment
rocky pillows and a piney bed.

I'm not sure if I meant it
but when the words tumbled across my chin

A hiccuping snivel escaped me as my body revolted against the notion
of ears hearing my fall.

I wept
on my scratchy carpet
older than I
by a lot.

It's better than tile
I can pour my face into the fibers
woven and worn.

Feel something as it irritates my skin red, and itchy
Let it soak up my body heat that my kinetic flesh creates
with my unmoving poise.

It reminds me of when I wake up
half dressed
in the middle of the night.

Of what I will become in the pitch blackness
searching for a memory to call me back
into the body which lays

sweat-strewn

panicking.
over nothing.

Chasing a figment of my own imagination
this shadow I found one day

and I told it, you are all I will ever actually be
and you cannot hate me more than me
because when I was alone in the corner of my stark white room.

The walls creaked and I cried,
the ghosts walked on the inside of my eyes,
and when I slept, I could feel their breath cool
across my neck.

And I would say
it is just me
playing tricks on myself
that pesky shadow.

And I hated it into being more than my imagination.

PART IV

I once wanted to be a Tree

I want leaves in my hair
that wild scent
dancing on my skin and
dirt under my fingernails.

Not just to watch it swirl down the drain
as I cough up soot and insect legs.

There are berry bush scratches up my legs
bumps into purple hushed hues pressed
against my shins and spine.

Finding my boundaries outside of
boxed up street addresses
or reflective road signs.

Cabin 2006, Touching Antlers

Painted aspens bleed yellow
against the woods.
Bones file into the homely pit
of homage.

Daisies encircle the cyclical pattern in fairy rings.
It's present in the vibrations of
the Brazos, and the bumpy lumps
across the buck's newly sprouted
crown— in the velvet
of my childhood couch that
I sank my sorrows in

sat proudly atop his head
and I gently rubbed my baby palm across the fuzz.

Driveway Yucca

Stems ring in the dance of rain
seeping into sepals
spilling into secrets
withering into soil
roots and dust and time.

Buds litter the empty parking lots,
frame the cracks in the foundation.
How pretty are those who grow
where they weren't supposed to.

I used to run my hands through dandelions
rearranging daffodils on the
kitchen counter.

That yellow threaded itself in the soft spots of my eyes
making promises to my mother that
I'll always be her little girl
picking flowers
and reminding her of the
backyard baby birds
chirping as she held her tummy
and told the before-me
I would fly.

I tried to follow petal paths in the forest
thinking of fairy feet
and their little prints
dancing forward in the circles of
thunder's reverb
climbing trunks
and shaking soil
as I pressed on
in the venture of tomorrow's trail.

I have ink on my body
in the shape of the yucca plant
from my front yard.

The one that would always scuff my parent's tire rims
and scratch my shins as I reached for the mailbox.

They have roots
that stretch so far
it is impossible to excavate.

And last week, my mother showed me it was blooming
with so many stalks
inflorescence in that bruise-purple
a fleshy kind of pink.

We grew parallel to one another
but I am no longer facing north
to see it.

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