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# THE WEIRD AND THE WONDERFUL: POETRY DEDICATED TO EXPLORING SOCIAL STEREOTYPES SURROUNDING MENTAL ILLNESS AND THE MISFIT

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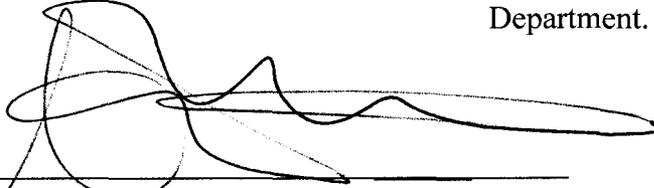
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THE WEIRD AND THE WONDERFUL: POETRY DEDICATED TO EXPLORING  
SOCIAL STEREOTYPES SURROUNDING MENTAL ILLNESS AND THE MISFIT

By

Sarah Grace Bryant

A paper submitted in fulfillment of the requirements to complete Honors in the English  
Department.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Professor Wilkins", written over a horizontal line.

Professor Wilkins

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Professor Mareello", written over a horizontal line.

Professor Mareello

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dr. Dickson", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Dickson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dr. Coleman", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Coleman

Lynchburg College

April 2016

Never having been a part of the nineties grunge scene as I was just a baby when the movement was starting to dissipate as quickly as it had arrived, I do not have an emotional attachment to the experience of how grunge rock changed the music scene and affected millions of America's youth. Everything I have gathered from the scene has come from online interviews and history books so listening to Nirvana is just as personal to me as listening to a Beatles album and pondering what it would have been like to experience the mayhem of Beatlemania.

However, something that I found interesting was that Nirvana's message and image is often overpowered by their one hit "Smells like Teen Spirit" and the self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head by the Nirvana front man Kurt Cobain. I learned that Kurt Cobain and the music of Nirvana have some undertones of feminist statements echoed from the riot grrl punk rock scene taking place around the same time. Nirvana spoke their minds about women's rights and they propelled often blunt conversations about topics such as rape, sexism, and the female experience in America. In addition, Kurt Cobain spoke out against the people that he knew would be listening to Nirvana's music and going to their shows who were opposed to women's rights, gay rights and other social movements meant to garner equality. One of his statements that really stuck out to me was, "If any of you in any way hate homosexuals, people of a different color, or women, please do this one favor for us...Don't come to our shows and don't buy our records." I loved this quote from Cobain because it puts Nirvana in a different light; it shows the power of their message and resistance to the corporate mainstream instead of the glamorization of suicide.

It also got me thinking about the life of the outcast, the person that does not fit into society's definition of whom they should be or who cannot seem to conform to a definite label or social group. I was thinking of the depressed or the anxious, the disturbed and maniacal and also the overlooked and the withdrawn. Movements like the punk rock scene that hit America way

before Nirvana ever was born in the 1970s was a time in which outcasts could converge and belong to a band of misfits and ruffians. Within my collection of poetry, I wanted to explore the brooding resentment of the outcast, by examining themes of isolation and disconnectedness from the status quo Middle American suburban lifestyle. In many of my poems from this collection, my descriptions of the speaker or the setting are filled with undertones of anger, sometimes hostility against a faceless antagonist, whether that antagonist is the image of the uneducated redneck or the unspoken rules within society that promote stereotypical gender constructs. The person suffering from mental illness that is made to feel ashamed of their legitimate disorder or the person who cannot stand the music that their peers prefer both long for a society in which they can grow and function.

In addition, my poetry is also heavily influenced by my own life and the experiences I have had. I am familiar with the themes within my poetry because I have lived them. Once I hit puberty my mind became a racing frenzy of uncontrolled emotions and I battled with anxiety and the depression that came along with it up until a year ago when I spoke with my doctor about how I felt like I was losing control of my own body. Discussing mental illness is something that is still taboo because of the stigmas placed around it, such as the image of the raving lunatic shackled by a strait jacket who at any moment could find a way to hurt him or herself or others around him or her. Society's general misconceptions of mental illness are not as far removed as they should be from 1960s society in the setting of the novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey, the fear and misunderstanding is still there as it continues to breed forth ignorance about the topic. Those that suffer from mental illness, even now in the cusp of 2016, still are greeted with raised eyebrows and are labeled with politically incorrect terminology, "insane," "crazy," "looney." Many do not understand the idea that having anxiety or depression

is just as real of a problem as having a physical ailment such as a pinched nerve or a torn ligament. The pain is not less real and the problem is not a figment of an over imaginative brain. Having lived with the stigma and having to hide the root of my problems for many years, I feel it is my responsibility now to discuss my experiences so as to eliminate and remove mental illness from a list of taboo topics.

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The most directly autobiographical poem in my collection is “Old Plum Branch Road” as this is the road my family and I used to live on in Concord, Virginia. My parents didn’t start off with a lot of money when they first got married young and so we lived in a trailer in a low income neighborhood for about ten to fifteen years. I liked the irony in the idea that we lived in the nicest trailer in the neighborhood because so often trailer life is described as trashy and unkempt, but that was quite the opposite experience that I had growing up. My mother cleaned and worked to keep the house organized and nicely furnished and my sister and I grew up with so many toys and books and we ate good food and were surrounded by love and encouragement. We lived in seemingly crowded and sordid conditions, but we made the best with what we had and we always had each other to fall back on. Even though there were shoes tossed over the telephone wires above the street directly beside our neighbor’s driveway, as children my sister and I never were exposed to drug abuse or violence and we had a comfortable childhood. I wanted within this particular poem to provide a counterargument against those images of trailer life and lower class life. We were not swimming in luxury and walking around in Gucci, Prada, and Versace, but we had all that we needed to survive and then some.

In the context of rebellion, which is seen in the poems “Doc Martens” and “Jeremiah Gillingham,” I have a fascination with those who are labeled as rebels and ruffians and who

break the rules and who do not conform to society's standards. Law breakers or rule breakers, I find this type of personality interesting because people like this break the mold and they are the ones who start social movements and promote social change. They speak out against the status quo and they rebuff attacks from authority figures and I find their unbridled anger and intimidation intriguing. I think I am drawn to studying figures like this or watching people with these certain characteristics because I myself am so removed from these types of personalities and lifestyles. I might wear Doc Martens, but I am not intimidating or unapproachable within society and I clean up nicely for an interview or presentation. If you see someone with tattoos all down their forearms and piercings and a scowl on their face, then people may be less likely to approach someone like that then if they saw me walking down the sidewalk in a standard pair of leggings and a long sweater. "Jeremiah Gillingham" is a direct look at the experience of watching one of these ragtag ruffians getting away with misbehavior and challenging the system, while feeling that you as an onlooker would just love to have one moment in which you could feel that confident and appear so badass. Obviously, in the bigger picture kids like this who rebel and lawbreakers deal with darker issues outside of the public eye at home and elsewhere that has changed their outlook on how to interact with others in society and in what ways they can push the limits and boundaries enforced by authority figures. So many times in school or at home there were moments when you felt as if because you were young, adults viewed you as incompetent or they belittled you to showcase their power, and these rebellious teens and kids were willing to stand up and make snide comments right back in their faces. I admired it and still admire it, but I am the polar opposite of this type of individual in reality. I just find it amusing to play with the idea, as if I were that bold.

Music has always been a comfort to me to escape stress and to link myself with all of the great human emotions. I have a wide array of listening preferences, and for the most part I leave nothing out, except for country pop and sappy love songs, and opera, opera sounds horrible to me. It can be no surprise that I have attended several concerts and have an extremely varied collection of c.ds and records. Well, that is not entirely true because apparently because I am quiet most people am surprised to see that I do other things besides their perceived favorite hobby of mine sitting in an abandoned corner and staring at a blank wall. It can be of some comfort to those still shocked readers that I do not do “shorty got low” down on the club dance floor or wave my top over my head after doing five shots. I can remember every concert that I have attended because still being under twenty-one I do not and am not obligated to drink myself into a state of incoherency. At my first concert I saw Dave Matthews at Virginia Beach and since then I have seen him two more times along with: U2, Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band, Hall and Oates, Jack White, Fitz and the Tantrums, Elton John, Fleetwood Mac and Paul McCartney, along with their opening acts, some of which were pretty lame. Therefore, it felt fitting to talk about some of the crazy sights and smells that I have come across in my most visited of concert venues, John Paul Jones arena in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Speaking of outcasts, there have been some strange people at the concerts I have been lucky to attend and most of them have been the age of my parents in their late thirties and early forties and older. Back and forth they go up flights of stairs in the dark to go and get a beer and make a run to the bathroom because they have consumed so much alcohol. Even though all of the shows I have been to have been good in their own right, it is hard not to be distracted by the mayhem ensuing around you from these adults who are drinking and making complete asses of themselves. Therefore, for every ticket that you purchase for a show you are really paying to see

two shows, one is the live act and the other is the general obnoxious crowd that wants to remember nothing from the night before. I will never understand the practice of paying a hefty price for a good seat at a show and then drinking so much that you will not be able to remember the show later. You could have saved yourself a lot of money and just bought yourself a box of beer and sloshed that down while swaying to a turned up surround sound Friday night rock block special on VH1 Classic. I do derive some sick pleasure from watching sloppy people like this make fools of themselves. Honestly, I am so surprised that I have never witnessed a death or injury take place at one of these concerts in the JPJ arena what with some of these women wearing stilettos or three inch heels staggering up nine flights of stairs in the dark after pushing back three or more beers. It would not surprise me in the least to hear of a series of tragic deaths that have occurred because of these very factors. Regardless of whether or not I find watching these people's antics amusing in the moment, the collection of experiences that I have had observing at concerts has left me with enough details to write an amusing and engaging poem that explores the idea of people watching and seemingly being the only one in the moment that is coherent and functioning. In this scenario, I am the outcast because I choose to listen to the music, clap and sway, while it seems that everyone else around me is getting wasted and trying to escape the mundaneness of the earlier part of the week at their nine to five jobs.

Along with connecting me to other people and sharing the experience of listening to music with others around me, music has also isolated me from people. I can remember going to school in the small and nothing happening residence of Rustburg, Virginia and being scrutinized by peers for listening to off the wall underground music. I had to listen to the most recent Katy Perry song and wince at the sound of people belting it out on the bus ride home. Katy Perry's cupcake boobs never really spoke to me, nor did the cheesy riffs of country pop songs by artists

like, I still do not know the names of mainstream country artists. Every day on the way to the Vo-Tech center the bus driver would turn the radio to the local country station and it seemed like they played the same songs at the same time every morning. I just learned to ignore the sounds coming from the speakers along the roof of the bus, and I stared into the landscape at the passing cow pastures and farmland. I suppose it had something to do with how I was raised, but it made me feel as if I were odd that I did not find this type of music enjoyable. Music was always a staple in our house, but my mother made it clear that country pop songs were not to be listened to in her house. Even after I grew up to explore my own idea of what good music was, I ventured into all sorts of oddities that a white girl would never listen to like gangsta rap, but I still could not stomach the sounds of country pop.

One of the other things that separated me from my peers was the idea that you should go to church every Sunday, that gay people are going to go to hell, and that Jerry Falwell spoke the gospel on Candler's Mountain. It drove me crazy to hear my peers talk about what they considered to be right and wrong in the eyes of God, while they were really promoting prejudice ideologies and spreading hate. There was no church that I could find in the surrounding area that did not preach this type of ignorant ideology and I soon separated myself from the church and stopped reading the Bible and praying all together. My first experience of going to church was when I was about seven or eight and my parents took me to East Brook Baptist Church with my grandparents in tow. The preacher's name was Charlie and he spoke at my uncle's funeral. He lived right next to the church in a house that was overly decorated on the outside by wind chimes and flower baskets. The services were strange and at the end of each one a guy named Curly with a guitar played the same song and cried each time at his acoustic rendition of "Victory in Jesus."

My mother was not impressed by the fact that Charlie preached that the Earth was only a few thousand years old and she disgustingly pushed my father to find a new church for us to go to.

Our family's second attempt at finding Jesus was when we went to Blue Ridge Community Church after my dad had talked with the preacher named Woody when he was picking up some wood for some cabinets he was making. The church was predominately Methodist and it was situated in a refurbished grocery store. It was much different than the last church we had attended because there was a significantly larger group of people that came to the Sunday services. After our second or third visit, I was pushed by a woman to attend the children's services that they had in the back, and I was so pissed off that I had to leave my parents and go into a backroom with a strange group of kids. I cried a lot when they took me back there and I refused to speak to anyone until eventually I realized that I would have to go with the other kids every Sunday as I had no voice in the matter. However, after what seemed like months of complaining, I finally persuaded my parents to allow me to sit with them and my sister during the adult services. One particular reoccurring bit that the church had was allowing members of the church to tell their stories of how they found God and accepted Jesus into their lives. On one Sunday a young black man got up to speak and in his story that he told he mentioned that he was gay. Well, apparently this did not go over well with a lot of people in the audience and many of them complained about having a gay man speak about his story to the congregation. So, after a few more services the young black man got up again to speak and to continue sharing his story, only this time he said that he had been saved from being gay and was now a heterosexual man. People praised the miracle that over the course of a few weeks this out and proud gay man had by some divine intervention renounced himself as gay and was now heterosexual. This was my first time being introduced to the local area's discontent at accepting

publicly gay people into the church and giving them the same respect and opportunities within the church as heterosexuals. Eventually, mostly pressed by my father's unwillingness to attend a church that he felt was cult-like, we stopped attending church on a regular basis until we quit going altogether,

With so much interesting material to work with from my childhood, I felt it was practically too easy to write something (in this case a poem) about my family's experience attending church in the local area of Lynchburg, Virginia. Living here in the heart of the Bible Belt and being but only a few miles from the biggest Baptist congregation of them all (Thomas Road Baptist Church), I wanted to share the opinions of the minority in this area that are frustrated with the messages being promoted within the local churches. People who feel that they must pray the gay away are being manipulated by the hatred and prejudice being taught in these Sunday church services. I know that when I say a statement such as this that I am being the minority in thinking this way and that I am an outcast from a vast majority of churches in this area for saying this. In my opinion, it is hard for me to find people that genuinely think that equal human rights is the most important thing to pray for, rather than a world in which people have to hide their true identities and feel as if they will be eternally banished in the pits of hell for their sexuality. I am not gay, but I feel that you do not have to be gay in order to support gay rights. Therefore, within one of my poems within my collection I explored the idea of questioning what I cannot understand and voicing those opinions that separate me from the masses in my community.

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In outlining my project, I drew inspiration from writers and poets that I find intriguing and that I hope to utilize in a way in which develops and shapes my own writing to be equally

creative and unique. Some of the writers that I have looked to for insight because of their admirable use of wit and brevity are, but are not limited to, Dorothy Parker, Samantha Thornhill, and Pablo Neruda. Any attempts at incorporating sass and attitude, prose and oddities, and eclectic odes are pickpocketed with love from these writers who I feel collectively have already accomplished what I wish to explore within my own writing. I wanted to combine sarcasm mixed with sometimes strange descriptions and scenarios because I feel that the topics that I am discussing in my poetry are meant to be approached in this manner, rather than in a morose or melancholy way. I am not interested in writing clichéd sob stories, instead I hope to invoke within my poetry a sense of strength and a willingness to combat the things in life that instill fear in us. I especially admire the female poet Samantha Thornhill who writes odes about seemingly inappropriate inanimate objects, such as a used Trojan condom. She chooses surprising topics to talk about within her poetry and I like the unexpected in any form of writing. I feel that in addition to her wit she is also a poet that is a nonconformist and who does not mind challenging preconceived notions about places and people. I also chose to look at Pablo Neruda's odes because he too catches the reader off guard with poems dedicated to the liver and other parts of the body that no one would think could make a great topic for a poem.

In my writing, I would rather play with ideas that no one really thinks are important enough to talk about or the topics that make people uncomfortable because this allows me as a writer to step outside the confines of societal expectations and nominalizations and challenge what we as a society believe to be true. I want to question gender norms and dig into how our society deals with sexual violence and sexual harassment because social change starts with the process of questioning prejudices and preconceived truths. If my poetry can bring about counterarguments to commonly held beliefs in our society, then this can make room for other

writers and activists that want to share their voices in the plight for social justice and change. I think it is necessary within our society to constantly look for ways of testing what society tells us is true so that we may determine for ourselves what to believe and what needs improvement. In no way am I suggesting that my poetry will be at the forefront of invoking these discussions, but I do hope that my examination of what is right and what is wrong may allow others to feel as if it is possible to spark the movement that can promote progress. I find that as a society we are extremely scared of those things that we do not understand and what causes us to question ourselves and our own beliefs, but what many people do not realize is that this process of questioning is healthy and only natural. My poetry asks these questions because I wanted to shock people into thinking about topics that they would rather not talk about, but that I think are good for them to chew on for a little while.

Though none of these poets that I chose to look to for inspiration have written poems discussing mental illness and the social stigmas that go along with it, I thought that their use of sass and quirkiness would match well with the items that I wanted to discuss within my poetry. Combining these two realms seemed perfectly natural to me because I find something comical in the idea that your own mind is making your life a living hell. It seems odd, but many times anxiety and depression are looked upon as made up illnesses that someone can choose to have one day and get rid of the next, and I wanted to show the real side to these illnesses. There does not seem to be an influx of female writers in the twenty-first century writing poetry or prose for that matter on mental illness, and I wanted there to be something relatable in my poetry for the voiceless few. Although, mental illness is not something that you can see on a person when you meet them like a physical ailment, it still needs to be addressed and my poetry, I want to believe, is allowing the opportunity for discourse about an otherwise taboo topic.

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Poetry is my favorite form of creative writing because it allows me the most freedom to explore various themes and express my inner emotions and the human condition. I like how poetry is not an explicit medium and that with each reader of a particular work comes a different and equally unique interpretation. There never has been an English major like myself that has had the hardest time stringing together story plots that have cohesive beginnings, middles, and ends. I am atrocious at it when I do not mean to be. Poetry is not as linear, and I am apt to believe that it is this chance at freedom that excites me and makes me keep coming back to it even after it has horribly frustrated me. Though, this is not to say that poetry does not have its rules, in fact it has many, too many that I should care to list right now. However, I break those rules all the time and no one corrects them because in poetry errors become experiments into new writing frontiers and ways of expressing yourself through words. In no other writing platform can I think of a better place to reverse and investigate ways of expressing one's self through language. The poem that speaks to me and makes me feel a certain way might have the opposite effect to the person sitting right beside me, but in the realm of poetry that is completely welcome and okay. Unlike a novel or even a short story, a poem, even a set of poems takes less than half the time to read, allowing the reader more time to unpack a poem and analyze its meaning.

Doc Martens

Doc's got a tough lineage, the mosh-pit Martens.

Working in the factory,

third-shift resentment brewing.

Underneath the black, lives black, loves black,

rubber bending back like cracked knuckles.

Three-inch thick sole,

steel-toed, crushing trajectory,

black on black, hardcore night wave shade,

hear the sizzle as he scorches the sidewalk.

Blue collar, cigarette stomping machine,

tattooed thighs, studded backbone, shockwave shorn hair.

He stomps, scoots and crunches,

heels licking the tough calloused skin.

Vodka in a stainless steel flask,

bleeding scab-pickers, mother's tired fright,

Doc waits in the alleyway like he owns darkness

and slices his thumbs with a pocketknife, for fun.

Introspection

Sometimes I forget what it's about,  
the roundness revolving,  
gender binaries mass-copulating,  
the landscape fishtailed.

So if the coin lands on heads,  
I guess I'll make my bed,  
venture forth into the day,  
to another dead-end turn around to the six o'clock news,  
(If I choose to not just watch cartoons).

Drifting needlessly,  
picking up speed when necessary,  
  
to feign intention where there is none.  
I often wonder if,  
people are starting to catch on to my bullshit.

Sometimes I forget what it's about.  
One more ends as another begins,  
tension starts to build, leg-less fish upon the sand,  
and then I wake up to today again,  
to all I am and have.

## Millennial Meltdown

Loud talking,

binge drinking,

over-sexualized

reality star

Twitter follower.

Is this a Millennial self-identifier?

Upgraded from a box television

to a 42 inch flat screen.

A big box computer with a space cadet monitor

to a thin mac book pro.

People had cell-phones with pull-out antennas,

now they touch and flip them.

Watched *Hey Arnold!*, *Recess*, and *Rugrats*

But, 9/11 was a fuzzy memory where adults said to  
go outside and play...

Floating through 90s #TBT's like a fake

Grunge rock, baby doll, choker necklace.

## 2000s-Millennial

Internet, Social media obsessed

Cell-phone enthralled,

can't live a day without Apple

or a self-absorbed fix.

Wanting a handout, never worked a day

Sucking Generation X parents dry,  
living at home until  
their midlife milestone.  
40 is the new 20.

Old Plum Branch Road

Black converse sneakers hung over the telephone wires  
toys were scattered across “Sloppy Joe’s” yard  
(his children had long outgrown them).

Rain clamored on the tin roof: the sound  
of the train shook the trailer.

Stray cats bred and strewed our trash into our front lawn  
every morning. Daddy made it a sport to shoot some of them  
in the tail from the porch with a BB gun.

The walls molded from the sweat of summer.

During the winter I sat around the vent  
blowing heat out, careful not to burn my legs.

Ants skittered up the walls; mice scurried  
under the cabinets at night.

Out in the old shed

Daddy’s leftover boxes from machine parts  
held spiders the size of medium dinner plates, black fur.

Mommy hung fresh curtains and cleaned the windows.

Daddy painted the porch every summer during a dry spell  
he shouted “Fuck” “Shit” and “Piss.”

We watched TV in the crowded living room,  
sometimes I sat on the floor, but not too close

to the TV. Maggie and I giggled  
into the night in our bunk beds.

We had two dogs, two cats, a hamster, and a guinea pig.

There were cows lowing in the morning.

Mr. and Mrs. Hunter burned leaves in our gravel driveway.

And every evening Daddy came home from work

in his red Ford pick-up truck and we ate dinner

around the tiny table in the kitchen.

Super Extra Special

Like Steve Mc Queen,  
in a fast machine  
I got the motor revving  
hyperventilating  
G-Force falling push  
to take life by the kahunas  
and make it damn near scream  
with the rush of a thousand watts of energy  
fueled by caffeine and electricity.  
People hear me before they see me  
I conquer obstacles independently  
so as to indicate I'm capable of multi-tasking.  
High power voltage with torrential rain;  
there's not an inch of flesh I have  
that isn't unsusceptible from pain.  
I cannot shiver, I cannot bleed,  
and I've never owned a Band-Aid that wasn't clean  
Instilling fear is not my goal,  
though I cannot control that  
from happening when I enter a room  
because my presence is domineering,  
often mistaken as unappealing,  
especially because it's unusual, others

feel uncomfortable by my lack of emotion.

I try to assure them that I'm uncorrupted,  
not tainted, or mutated.

It's beyond them to understand

that a woman can be naturally superhuman.

Jeremiah Gillingham

Jeremiah Gillingham

rolled doobies and sparked up behind the buses.

Some days he wore all black,

other days his t-shirt blared that he was an anarchist:

(P.O.L.I.C.E.-Paid Officers Loitering to Capture Ecstasy).

He knew something about every single band,

Pink Arachnid Torture,

Patrick Henry's Final Stand,

Palpitating Pandemonium Pulverizing Parents' Pragmatic Plans.

Teachers let him arrive late,

and the principal excused his tardiness.

Something about the boy,

was too magical to punish.

His whole aura captured

rebellion, aggression, intimidation.

Teenage explosion at the touch.

Jeremiah Gillingham spoke to me one day,

but I didn't know what to say.

The People's Prince smiled at me,

and I couldn't think of shit.

Nodding, mumbling, grunting,

I melted to the quick.

Five minutes later I became conscious of my

blushing, burning, quivering.

I remained motionless, still standing there,  
he had long since left me.

Jeremiah Gillingham graduated.  
People say he moved to California,  
but the boy that walked those halls,  
has passed away into an oblivion  
of half-remembered pranks and dares.

Born-Again Hypocrite

Jerry-fairies, Jesus-freaks

Southern Bible Belt's Not I but Christ

colonialist missionaries eradicating heathenry.

Gun-toting, misquoting, agenda seeking bigotry

white supremacy led by descendants of the Klan

forgetting that Jesus must have been a brown man

waving the rebel flag so the South will rise again!

To the quiet family of same sex lovers

threatening hell-fire and damnation

unenlightened townsfolk frantically picketing for prejudice.

This must not have been what God had in mind:

A cycle of brutality.

Enter enlightenment via a liberal arts education,

a global understanding of religion and culture

Rise above the ignorant ones

Break the tradition of intolerance of one another

By posting mocking memes on social media

you will really pay it forward.

Catcall

“Street harassment has been normalized globally over time, and has historically been considered a day in the life of being a girl, woman, and/or LGBTQ-identified individual. In fact, it is one of the most commonly experienced forms of gender and sexuality based discrimination and objectification that young people face.”

~Hollaback: A Non-Profit and Movement to End Harassment in Public Spaces

Little girls in cut-off shorts

during the summertime,

never realizing the attention

gathering from behind.

Mothers tell your buxom daughters

not to show too much,

they are so virginal and innocent,

unable to comprehend,

the coaxing and cooing,

of much older men.

An Untitled Talent

This is my perfect piece of writing

There are no errors hidden in between

The language is completely flawless

I hope you can see that much

If not, there must be something wrong with your eyes

I hope you feel better.

Ode to Veins

Transfixed by

the contours of my body:

rounded curves, the dips and traces

of glistening water droplets

healthy and plump, fine flesh.

My finger traces all the bumps

and minor blemishes,

feeling fine hairs, prickle, goose bump flesh all the way down my legs

Then I see you: bulging veins in

my feet, coursing with some blue rippling effect.

I cannot crush you

nor make you flat.

You are a fixed anomaly deep inside me

trickling water droplets that I cannot touch.

Sometimes I feel the tickle of blood

running inside of me.

You are part of all of those

tiny details that are always there.

Ode to Vomit

Bloated belly grumbling--

Too much food to eat:

Greasy chicken thighs,

Soupy gravy dribbling

into my green beans.

Casseroles galore,

and those little wrapped hotdogs,

enough cheese to make you

not shit for a week.

Lightheaded like a corseted eighteenth century broad

staring at a banquet feast,

I have no appetite;

my stomach pleads to me.

Up-chuck reflux, the taste of

last night's spaghetti lingers

and there's still more food:

a big hunk of pork on a platter

yams and beets covered in marinade,

potatoes seasoned, sliced, diced and mashed.

Something smells like fish: bite size shrimp.

In a meager attempt to vocalize

why I'm sick without fever,

I say it's like a game of Tetris

the next move measured as it falls,  
food is a descending shape,  
I think about the next course, even now,  
so long after eating.

Ode to Anxiety

A woman measured  
by her madness  
only wears the color blue  
so that her outer appearance  
matches her mood.  
Mentally withdrawn,  
sweaty palms,  
racing heart,  
tension headache  
scared of what they'll say.  
Yanking up her brave  
thoughts before they slip away.  
She's a friend.  
She's a lover.  
She could be your sister  
or your mother. As the reader,  
you don't know her,  
but imagine if you will  
someone just like you  
who wages a war  
every day with  
demons in her head  
who threaten her  
and pillage her  
and never let her be.

Contrast

Underneath a picturesque starry sky  
a Ford pickup truck and the consummation of teenage love.  
I have no interest in some sappy lullaby of days gone by;  
the Carnegie Deli not the saloon.  
A scowl, not a croon,  
is more my ear's love interest.  
Killer chomp and punk rock def jam

Singing ballads of cooled love  
once hot with passion.  
twanging banjo riffs,  
not honky-tonk bar brawls,  
a hip-hop junkie, white suburban noise.  
I listen to the Beastie Boys.

Distance

Last night I dreamt, we were singers in a band,  
You led me to the microphone with your sure and able hand.

We sang in tones of prominence, standing side by side,  
Our voices mounting with the mixture of melody and pride.

I did not mean to think of you; it was all against my will,  
My sub-conscious jumps the Great Divide that separates us still.

I love you more when we're apart,  
It gives me time to grow back my severed heart.

Ode to John Paul Jones Arena, C-Ville

The stage lights flicker,  
then one blue beam shimmers  
on a spotlight.

Echoes of ancient rhythms-a drum kit,  
cymbals tinkering,  
the deep throaty voice  
and the crowd roars,  
ear drums ache with the decibels.

Next, the slide of a hell mouth,  
bom bom bommmmm,  
bass guitar man-the devil's sound.  
It ricochets off the stadium walls,  
you can see the wavelengths reverberating,  
you can hear the chords long after they've been played.

Filled in with the rhythm and acoustic guitars,  
the melody is clear and the audience is on their feet  
in one wave of exultation.

Flashing lights circulate showing  
sweaty faces of inebriated men and women  
sloshing beer in plastic cups,  
inhaling whiffs of skunk spray and cigarette smoke,  
the stench of musky unwashed bodies,  
three-inch, platform heels staggering miraculously

up twelve flights of stairs in the dark.

Finally, after the encore has ensued,  
the stadium lights turn on,  
and what was in the dark a show of progressing mayhem  
is now a fool's picture of thirty and forty year old  
moms and dads scrambling for the hand railings,  
pouring in frantic waves to go take a piss  
as the cleaning crew plays some hit from  
Creedence Clearwater Revival.

## Behind the Music

The long hand of death

washes over the artistic genius.

His tortured corpse mangled by addiction,

which made the public admire him even more

for his inability to control,

the bullet that shattered his skull.

The tabloids sell his despair, and

every day the radio plays homage:

“Hello, yes, can you play

“Smells Like Teen Spirit” one more time,

I just really like the beginning?”

Maybe now in death he can escape his demons;

do you think they have autographs in heaven?

Trash

Crumble paper, crumble thoughts  
rising leaves of loose-leaf paper  
winding criss-cross, puzzle newspaper clippings  
toss bank notes, receipts, grocery lists:  
eggs, milk, bread, frontal lobe lobotomy  
(the last one wasn't true)  
sideways chicken-scratch notes, doodles, candy wrappers,  
a random picture of an alligator  
book marks, desk calendar sayings from the Dalai Lama,  
to do lists  
love letters never sent  
thank you notes never opened  
postcards-blank  
unfinished business  
paper, more paper  
fuel for a fire, fuel for a collage of memories  
so it was written (the memo to exercise, scrawled cursive on a paper napkin)  
in an effort to record life-love-words

Trying to Find a Hiding Place

She has a hard time getting rid of waste,  
the inflamed collection of the past.

Just use one of those black Glad bags  
and stuff it.

What she could do, is not think about it,  
ignore it and maybe it will go away.

It's just an idea,  
sometimes a lack of attention kills things.

People bury their waste in the ground,  
really deep so that the rain doesn't wash it away.

She should put hers in a box,  
and mark the ground so that she can visit it later.

She will feel better when it is hidden,  
the illusion of no more earthly ties.

She should not have to be reminded daily of what  
is no longer useful.

Superficial

Dude! Fix that bald midlife crisis comb over  
then, contour your eyebrows and press back in your bulging eyes,  
push the iris until it's bright blue  
pour bleach and make that mop natural platinum blonde,  
turn flab into abs — lose weight while eating KFC five-piece chicken dinners four nights a week  
the rest of the week pour laxatives into your morning coffee  
or, if you want to vomit, but the counseling might be inconvenient.

Ears pouting out at the sides  
pull them back with safety pins  
punk rock plastic surgery  
cut off the dripping fat double chin  
laser off the hair — under arms, legs and leave a Barbie doll crotch  
until you look like a prepubescent.

Belt fat, cinch fat, wear all black  
exude sex appeal until you're accused of prostitution  
and only then can you begin to apply to online dating sites  
until you're catfished by an obese manic-depressive transvestite  
on farmersonly.com.

Ow, Motherfucker!

I'm bleeding because of that piece of loose-leaf paper, that sharp edge of the table, that time of the month, that snaggle-sabered mutt, that needle pulling thread, that tango in the bed, that pocket knife pulled too quick, that pair of scissors running, that toenail cut to the quick, that pimple bursting on my forehead, that scab not left alone, that razor along my knee, that cat who didn't like me. It all happened at once, and it hurt. I hoped someone might notice that I was in pain. Ask me how I was feeling. If I would be okay. But, nobody did, and that seemed to make everything hurt worse.

No

I'm scared of fences telling me whose land I'm on and whose going to fine me.

I'm scared of borders telling me I can't escape and that I'm illegal foreign goods.

I'm scared of doors telling me that I can't come in and preventing me from seeing how the other half lives.

I'm scared of water telling me I can't swim, and that I'm not equipped for what nature has to offer.

I'm scared of "no" telling me who's in control and stopping me from doing what I want. I don't like gravity. I don't like Congress. I don't like obstacles like deserts, mountains, or canyons. I wish the government would go away. I want to be zero on the number line and keep on going either way.

Sick Bastard

He masturbates all the time  
to the sounds of sociopathic sex,  
screaming like a woman trapped  
and biting one of his hands until he bleeds,  
the indentations of his molars clearly imprinted in his flesh.  
He's one sick bastard,  
who acts on his animal impulses,  
and he's too dangerous to be let  
loose to prowl the night.  
One of these days he'll be attracted to  
the scent of vulnerability,  
and then he might whip out a gun on someone-  
an old grandmother or a teenage dropout,  
someone used or unneeded,  
or the like-a wet dream prompting him  
to scavenge for something to play with.