

Spring 5-2023

## Confessional Poetry and the Human Experience: When Art Imitates Life

Caroline Winnenberg

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### Recommended Citation

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*Honors College Theses*. 192.  
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Murray State University Honors College

HONORS THESIS

Certificate of Approval

Confessional Poetry and The Human Experience:

When Art Imitates Life

Caroline Winnenberg

May 2023

Approved to fulfill the  
requirements of HON 437

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Approved to fulfill the  
Honors Thesis requirement  
Of the Murray State Honors  
Diploma

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Project Title: Confessional Poetry and The Human Experience: When Art Imitates Life

Department: English and Philosophy

Date of Defense: April 27th, 2023

Approval by Examining Committee:

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Confessional Poetry and The Human Experience:

When Art Imitates Life

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements

for the Murray State Honors Diploma

Caroline Winnenberg

May 2023

## Table of Contents

I.	Research and Literature Review .....	iii
	A. Introduction .....	iii
	B. Sylvia Plath .....	vi
	C. Phil Kaye .....	xiii
II.	Self-Analysis and Discussion of Influences .....	xix
	A. About the Author .....	xix
	B. Adulthood At: .....	xx
	C. In Memoriam .....	xxii
	D. Sisterhood: A Text Thread .....	xxiii
	E. Fuck It, Get Better .....	xxiv
III.	Fuck It, Get Better: Poetry about Becoming a Real Person .....	1
	A. Dear Mom, .....	4
	B. A Soul For A Soul .....	5
	C. Gifted Kid .....	6
	D. Just Ignore It, Girl .....	7
	E. Fuck It, Get Better .....	9
	F. How Much Do You Love Me? .....	10
	G. Dr. Pepper .....	11
	H. Who Sings This? .....	12
	I. To The Poet's Cat On Her First Christmas .....	14
	J. Sisterhood: A Text Thread .....	15
	K. (Places) .....	16
	L. Twin Flames .....	17

M. Things I Pulled Out of the Toilets in the Boys' Restroom During my Two Weeks as a Part-Time Middle School Janitor .....	18
N. This Poem is About Nothing .....	19
O. When Jen Died .....	20
P. GRWM .....	22
Q. If You Ever See Me .....	24
R. Upon Opening My Utensil Drawer .....	25
S. Adulthood At: .....	26
T. Healed Little Girl .....	29
U. Antipsychotic .....	30
V. La Femme Au Jardin .....	31
W. In Memoriam .....	32
X. Pink .....	35
IV. Final Thoughts and Reflections .....	36
V. Acknowledgements .....	36
VI. Works Cited .....	38

## Introduction

The year is 1959. America sits in silent fear at the constant threat of nuclear warfare. The Red Scare had hit its peak just five years earlier with Joe McCarthy's Communist witch hunt. Neighbors no longer trusted neighbors and marginalized groups have had enough. The LGBTQ+ community begins to unify, people of color march for civil rights, and women march for equal rights. The people are using their voices, but the fight for social justice is draining. The constant feelings of anger and depression are boiling over, searching for an outlet. Enter the author Robert Lowell and his volume *Life Studies*, a collection of raw, truthful poetry that offered his heart into the hands of the masses. The publication of this text would be a pivotal moment in the beginning of the Confessional movement ("Confessional Poetry").

Confessionalism is generally defined as a genre of poetry known for its self-centered professions of emotion and thought, unfiltered by the author, as if the audience were the author's closest friend. This contradicted the generally fear-fueled need for privacy amongst the common population. Secrets, fears, embarrassments, regrets, joys, and celebrations all came to light as poets like Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath wrote honest depictions of their innermost thoughts ("A Brief Guide to Confessional Poetry").

The Confessional movement also developed in response to two other popular literary movements of the time: Modernism and New Criticism. Modernism, which was prominent in the 1910s through the 1940s, was a stylistic philosophy based in separation from reality. Authors like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, who wrote imaginative poetry, ruled the Modernist movement. Symbolism and abstract metaphors were vital to the world of Modernism. Confessional poets rejected this idea and chose the opposite side of the spectrum: explicit truth.

T.S. Eliot was also a key figure in the development of the New Critics, who valued the symbolism of Modernism. The New Criticism movement was a critical theory of literature from the mid-20th century that removed the context and author from the work. Scholars in this school of thought believed that everything the reader needs to analyze a text is in the text itself; the social, political, and personal circumstances surrounding the composition of the text did not matter. Confessional poets responded to this theory by writing in a way that forces the reader to learn about the author. The unavoidable personal details were crucial to the work's meaning.

There were no more walls. Poets of the Confessional movement would spill their guts to everyone, strangers and friends alike. Every moment of the author's life was fair-game for poetic inspiration. If it could follow the phrase "Dear diary," it was subject to the confessional movement.

This movement was rejected in its early days. The exploration of these personal thoughts broke etiquette and answered the question "how are you?" honestly. Deborah Nelson in her article "Plath, History, and Politics" describes this as a "double breach, violating poetic decorum by refusing to transcend the particulars of family and the body, and social decorum by flouting the tacit limits of public discourse" (Nelson, 26). By ignoring what society deemed appropriate for public discussion, the Confessional poets broke through the glass ceiling and introduced a new era of honesty and healing that would continue to resonate with readers, even today.

As humans, we have an innate need for belonging and understanding. We are a social species and thrive only in packs. Of course this is an oversimplification of the nuances of humanity and our evolutionary success as the dominant intelligent species, but this is nonetheless true. Mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression thrive on isolation. The more alone one



feels, the more susceptible they are to the fatalities of mental illness – primarily suicidal thoughts and ideations.

In response to this correlation of isolation and fatality, the “you are not alone” consensus is used to combat mental illness. By sharing one’s innermost thoughts and feelings, especially negative thoughts and feelings, the notion of isolation is diminished. You are not alone in your suffering, and there is a light at the end of the tunnel. This is the primary benefit of Confessional poetry, not only at its birth, but also into the modern age.

Many scholars argue that there is a note of insincerity within the genre of Confessional poetry. Maria Takolander is such a scholar, writing in “Confessional Poetry and the Materialisation of an Autobiographical Self” that there is a certain separation between the poet and the poem, even in intimate genres like Confessionalism.

“ . . . there is clearly much more going on than organic self-expression in these carefully crafted poems. For one, the confessional poet is self-consciously working within a genre – autobiography and, more specifically, confessional poetry – for an audience . . . the poetry is also motivated by a professional ambition for success and recognition from the gatekeepers in their domain – for publication and acclaim, and even monetary reward” (Takolander, 375).

While this may be true, such is the case for every creative art. Just as an actor may draw from personal experience when developing a character (specifically within the Meisner approach to acting), a poet will draw from personal experience when developing a poem. This does not dismiss the authenticity in the piece, nor does any social or monetary gain from the success of the piece. The Confessional poet is characterized by an explicit use of taboo subjects and a “sense of worn-on-the-sleeve self-revelation” above poets who favored other modes and who

may have used such experiences in a more nuanced fashion (Yezzi, 3). Truth is still truth, no matter the result of it.

## Sylvia Plath

In 1956, Sylvia Plath wrote the following task at the bottom of a to-do list in her private journal: “your problems are universal enough to be made meaningful” (Plath). Plath’s works are particularly interesting to analyze because they can be read alongside her letters and journal entries composed at the same time. This allows for a more precise exposure of the implicit intricacies of her poetic works. However, a complete and factual record of her life does not exist. Despite her relentless dedication to keeping a journal from a young age and the hundreds of letters that survive, her family and friends contest that no biography of her has done her justice. In the editor’s note of the collection of Plath’s journals, Fran McCullough writes “in the absence of a good biography, this journal offers something that no biography could – in its best passages the voice that speaks through these pages is as true and unique as the Plath of the poems” (McCullough, Editor’s Note, *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*). Therefore the majority of my biographical analysis of Plath will be taken directly from her writings.

Sylvia Plath found immense inspiration for her writing in 1962 following the separation and eventual divorce from her husband Ted Hughes. In a letter to her mother on September 24, 1962, Plath writes, “Since I have made the decision [to separate from Ted], miraculously, my own life, my wholeness, has been seeping back” (*Letters Home*, 462). From her letters alone, we cannot gather the fullness of the circumstances that led to Plath’s separation from Hughes. Furthermore, no personal journal entries exist from the last three years of Plath’s life. But from what was written to her mother, Plath’s divorce from Hughes was a long-due liberation. Plath’s

poem "Burning the Letters" discusses this liberation and the mixed feelings of separation and gives us some insight on the relationship and its downfall.

The first stanza of Plath's "Burning the Letters" reveals Plath's anger as she defends her decision to destroy the letters (and therefore the relationship) between her and her husband. She says she is "tired/ Of the white fists of old/ Letters and their death rattle/ when I came too close to the wastebasket" (Plath, lines 1-4). The imagery of the "white fists" to describe the crumpled up letters describes the knuckles of a hand clenched in anger. Plath is tired of being angry at Hughes and of his anger towards her. Furthermore, Plath is tired of holding onto these letters and memories. A "death rattle" is the sound a person makes in their throat upon death. This rattle (representing lingering love and hope for Hughes) kept her from throwing the letters away in the past. However, Plath overcame this hesitation and "made a fire" for the letters to destroy them once and for all (Plath, lines 1, 3-4).

In a letter to her mother on August 27th, 1962, Plath writes, "I have too much at stake and am too rich a person to live as a martyr . . . I want a clean break, so I can breathe and laugh and enjoy myself again" (Plath, *Journals*, 460.) She explains to her mother that she is fed up with letting her husband negatively affect her life. She sees herself as too full of life to allow someone to slowly kill her. Therefore, Plath enacts this "clean break" by burning the letters.

The second stanza reveals a cyclical pattern of manipulation by her husband. She describes the letters as they burn, saying, "And here is an end to the writing,/ The spry hooks that bend and cringe and the smiles, the smiles / And at least it will be a good place now, the attic" (lines 20-22). These letters ("the spry hooks") act as the last ties she has to Hughes. The happy memories of their early relationship are the only things she wants to hold onto, but she still lets them go. Plath goes on to say,

“At least I won’t be strung just under the surface,

Dumb fish

With one tin eye

Watching for glints,

Riding my Arctic

Between this wish and that wish.”

(lines 23-28)

Fishing is not a violent sport, especially when compared to other forms of hunting. By using the imagery of fishing instead of a more violent hunt, Plath dismisses any possible rumors of physical abuse and instead describes a manipulation. The fish is dragged just below the surface as its death is drawn out. The last line of the stanza insinuates a series of empty promises from Hughes, perhaps rewards for behavior that were never fulfilled.

In another letter to her mother on September 29, 1962, Plath discusses the financial matters of her divorce. She tells her mother that all finances will be split 30/70, with the 30% belonging to her. She is rightfully upset by this because all of her earnings from writing and selling her poetry belong to Hughes and make up 50% of their joint income. Plath goes on, writing that her “solicitor says I am within my legal right and to draw all money out of our joint accounts and put them in accounts of my own since my husband has deserted me” (*Journals*, 464). The circumstances outlined in this letter resemble tactics of financial abuse and manipulation from Plath’s husband.

In the final stanza of her poem “Burning the Letters,” Plath reflects over the ashes of her memories with Hughes. She realizes that despite the fact that physical evidence of their happiness together no longer exists, she still holds the memories of it. She writes, “a cry . . .

telling the particles of the clouds, the leaves, the water, / What immortality is. That it is immortal" (lines 50, 55-56). The sadness, the anger, and the pain are all still there, even though the letters are gone. She will live the rest of her life remembering the good times and mourning that relationship, despite its tragic ending. Everything around her will remind her of this relationship and of Hughes, the man she loved.

Of course, my analysis of this piece in particular is a matter of speculation and is based on just the writings of Plath herself. At the time of the separation and divorce of Plath and Hughes, emotions were hot and tensions were high. Many of the things Plath was saying and writing about her husband may have been exaggerated by anger and pain. Plath's mother addresses this herself in a note on a letter she received from her on August 17, 1962. In this note, Plath's mother writes, "I must ask the reader to remember the circumstances in which they [the letters] were written and to remember also that they represent one side of an extremely complex situation" (*Journals*, 459). Any insinuation of defamation against Ted Hughes and his character by me are unintentional.

Sylvia Plath committed suicide on February 11, 1963, but this was not her first attempt. Though largely undocumented, Plath attempted to end her own life at age ten following the death of her father. At age 19, Plath suffered a nervous breakdown and attempted to overdose on sleeping pills. Finally, at age 30, Plath died of carbon monoxide poisoning upon sticking her head in her oven, breathing in the unlit gas. In the months leading up to her death, Plath had been suffering from a major depressive episode. In October of 1962, Plath wrote her poem "Lady Lazarus," detailing her "resurrections" from her failed suicide attempts. She also foreshadows a future attempt, which later is the one that takes her life.

First and foremost, the title of the piece is an allusion to the Bible. Lazarus was a friend of Jesus' who was resurrected after dying of an illness. This is the only person Jesus brought back from the grave until his own resurrection, so it is a significant story in the gospel (John 11:1-44). Plath calls herself "Lady Lazarus," comparing her unsuccessful suicide attempts to the miraculous resurrection of Lazarus. In fact, she does so directly in the first and second stanzas, saying,

"I have done it again.

One year in every ten

I manage it –

A sort of walking miracle . . ."

(Plath, lines 1-4)

In using the term "manage" instead of a similar word like "do" or "accomplish," Plath invokes an exasperation in her revival. In a letter she never sent in the summer of 1953, Plath wrote that when she woke up after her attempt, she felt "a hatred toward the people who would not let me die, but insisted rather in dragging me back into the hell of sordid and meaningless existence" (*Correspondence*, 131). She does not want to be alive, yet by some miracle she is unable to die.

Plath goes on, describing her face as

"a featureless, fine

Jew linen.

Peel off the napkin

O my enemy.

Do I terrify?"

(Lines 8-12)

Her paleness, a symptom of almost-death, is her defining feature, representative of her feeling like a walking corpse, later depicted as a mummy. She laments that

"Soon, soon the flesh  
the grave cave ate will be  
at home to me

And I am a smiling woman."

(Lines 16-19)

Awaiting a death without resurrection, she feels joy. She knows that the suffering of being a walking corpse will soon end. In her journal entry on July 14, 1953, she wrote "I am incapable of loving or feeling now: self-induced" (*Journals*, 87). This emotionlessness is enough to drive her to her third attempt.

However, immediately following this line in her journal, she snaps out of her depression for a moment. She writes, "out of it, kid. You are making monumental obstacles of what should be taken for granted – living on a past reputation" (*Journals*, 87). She goes on to discuss the good things in her life: her success as a writer, her newfound fame, her friends.

This fame, however, would also be discussed in "Lady Lazarus" as she describes herself as a mummy being unwrapped for an audience. She writes,

"The peanut-crunching crowd  
Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot –

The big strip tease.”

(Lines 25-29)

The exposure that she describes feeling as public figure who's overcoming a suicide attempt is heartbreaking. She lists her fame as something to live for, yet she feels it is taking advantage of her life, as though it puts her on view as a roadside show, like a freak at a circus.

Further along, Plath talks about the ease with which she meets death. She writes,

“Dying

Is an art, like everything else.

I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.

I do it so it feels real.

I guess you could say I've a call.”

(Lines 43-48)

She writes this as a testament to how often she feels this deep depression. She is self-aware of her consistent fall into suicidal thoughts, often begging herself to rise above it. In the same journal entry on July 14, Plath pleads, “Think. You can. You must . . . please, think -- snap out of this . . . you must not seek escape like this. You must think” (*Journals*, 87-88). These are the last known lines of her journals before her suicide attempt in the summer of 1953. She was aware of her feelings and fought so hard to overcome them; fortunately, this time she rose again.

Plath found a morbid pride in her resurrection. In her piece “Lady Lazarus,” she writes



"It's the theatrical

Comeback in broad day

to the same place, the same face, the same brute

Amused shout:

'A miracle!'

That knocks me out."

(Lines 51-56)

The sudden burst of manic euphoria when she recovers from her near-death experience is overwhelming. She is amazed by the people who cared that she lived. Plath finds a new motivation for life, writing in her unsent letter from the summer of 1953, "I long to be out in the wide open spaces of the very messy, dangerous, real world which I still love in spite of everything . . ." (*Coorespondence*, 132). Plath would live the next ten years of her life apparently happily. She would marry, have two kids, and publish her novel *The Bell Jar* a month before her death. Her collection of poetic works titled *Ariel* would be published the following year.

### **Phil Kaye**

Alongside Plath in my survey of confessional poetry and the confessional movement, I want to analyze Phil Kaye, a modern day poet I believe to fit the definition of the confessional poet. Kaye published his first full-length collection of poetry, *Date & Time*, in 2018. The collection is full of deeply personal pieces about his experience with divorced parents, racism, a stutter, and countless other timely topics characteristic of Confessional poetry. Kaye describes his love of poetry as "freeing, exciting, and challenging" (Gilchrist). He realized his passion for

poetry at seventeen years old when he first saw a live spoken-word performance. What he loves most about poetry is “the idea of being able to tell my story and talk about whatever I wanted to, in whatever way I wanted to” (Gilchrist). This is exactly the Confessionalist mentality that the movement’s pioneers wanted to generate.

My analysis of Kaye’s literary works will not be as supported by his personal experience as my analysis of Plath’s works because I do not have Kaye’s journals or letters. However, I hope to give some poetic insight to his writings just the same. In my analysis, I will rely on biographical material shared in interviews and other poems.

In his poem “Beginning, Middle & End,” Kaye opens with a stanza of what he believes to be the universal truth of his piece: “a great story as a beginning, middle & end / but not necessarily in that order / we are all great stories” (Kaye, 17). He uses this to introduce his overarching motif: life as a chapter book. Throughout the poem, Kaye uses chapters to signify the passage of time.

However, the chapters are not delivered in chronological order, nor in verse as his opening lines are; instead, he writes these as prose poems. The first “chapter” of the poem is Chapter 389, which reads,

“The boy: hair still long, fingers still too short, is 98 years old. He sits at a restaurant. Alone. The wiry stranger next to him is eating bread pudding – the boy’s favorite. The boy leans over and takes a forkful”

(Kaye, 17)

This decision to begin the poem at such a late chapter, such an old age, is a startling one. It evokes a sadness in the reader at the image of an old man dining alone, or with someone he once

knew but has forgotten as his mind has deteriorated. Kaye begs the reader to think about why the boy is alone. What happened in the previous 388 chapters?

Kaye provides three more chapters before breaking the pattern and using verse once again. Two chapters in particular provide a whiplash of life events before the prose is cast aside.

“Chapter 146: And the boy and girl lived happily ever after.

Chapter 231: And the boy and girl vow never to speak to each other again.”

(Kaye, 17)

The lack of details between the two chapters is horrifyingly sad, yet the reader has the freedom to fill in the blanks. Maybe the boy and the girl had a tragic falling out. Maybe they just weren't right for one another. Maybe there are circumstances surrounding them that have nothing to do with their actions and are instead unstoppable external forces. Whatever the reason, the relationship was decidedly (by the author) doomed to end. Kaye's use of “vow” in Chapter 231 mirrors the “happily ever after” of Chapter 146, which can be assumed to be about the couple's wedding, during which they made vows to be with one another forever. This overt antithesis creates a feeling of finality in the relationship: they will not live happily ever after together.

Kaye goes on, replacing the third person narrative with a first person voice. He talks about feeling alive, writing,

“I am a leaf

off of the tree

of my parents' first kiss

& if I hold my shrubs to the sky

I can still see their veins there”

(Kaye, 18)

He uses the image of a family tree to remind himself that he is alive and that he is just a piece of a larger story. He is explicitly talking about himself, which begs the question of the identities of the boy and the girl earlier in the poem.

In other pieces (such as "Repetition"), Kaye reveals that his parents are divorced. Could the boy and the girl be his parents? While the argument for this exists, I refute this because of what Kaye writes later in his poem. In the final "chapter," piece, which he titles "Prologue," Kaye writes, "Once upon a time there was a woman and a man and the night they first kissed a seedling blossomed from the back of her neck" (Kaye, 19). This mirrors what Kaye says about himself earlier in the piece, defining himself as the main character of the novel within the poem.

Therefore, in Chapter 189, Kaye describes himself punching a mirror to wake himself up from his lifelessness (much like Plath in her journals before her age 20 suicide). He compares his bloodied hand with a conch shell, holding it up to his ear to hear the ocean. Instead, he hears "the ocean of his bloodline," writing:

"Stand up, boy. Not just with your legs. Be your own story. You -- magnificent page-turner. You -- 600 words per minute. You -- never read the back cover though you know what happens at the end."

(Kaye, 19)

This message to himself exhibits strong similarities to Plath's messages to herself to "think" and "snap out" of her suicidal thoughts. Kaye urges himself to redefine his story and take control of his life. Though he is a leaf of his parents' tree, he is his own tree as well.

Following this message to himself, Kaye writes one more numbered chapter before the prologue. This is chronologically the final chapter of Kaye's story. In this chapter (Chapter 431), Kaye writes:

"Once upon a time there was a boy. He is not here any more. But the branches he left all hold their leaves to the sky, and you can see the outline of his shadows on the sidewalk."

(Kaye, 19).

Kaye writes himself as his own tree with his own branches and leaves. These leaves cast shadows, reminders that he was once here. Whether these leaves are his poems or his children (of which he does not yet have), Kaye has left his mark. Another tree will grow from his life and he will live on.

Phil Kaye is a master of storytelling through poetry. Whether in the chapter format of his poem "Beginning, Middle & End" or explicit narrative style such as his piece "Ferris Wheel," Kaye succeeds in telling a story. In "Ferris Wheel," Kaye explores the topic of suicide and its taboo nature, especially at a young age.

This piece opens with Kaye and his childhood best friend Ben (who is a recurring character in Kaye's poetry) eating "cheap & gigantic" slices of pizza. Kaye describes it as "a bounty fetched / by our 11-year-old suburban allowance" (Kaye, 80). By using the term "bounty," Kaye insinuates that this was a hard-earned slice of pizza, something long awaited. This contrasts greatly to the subject of the poem because Kaye lived his life for a time in order to earn this pizza.

However, the next stanza indicates that Kaye has long been thinking about why he lived his life at all. In this peaceful moment, Kaye decides to confide in his friend, writing:

"& in a steady ocean breeze like this

it seems as good a time as any

to set sail

the rusting vessel

lodged in my throat”

(Kaye, 80)

The “rusting vessel” indicates a long existence. Kaye has owned this ship of words for quite a while, but has never had the opportunity to sail it. He decides to do so here, in the confidence of his best friend: “I speak the words slowly / looking straight ahead // *have you ever thought about suicide?*” (Kaye, 80). The social taboo of discussing suicide, especially at the age of 11, held him back until this moment. A boy at just 11 has been thinking about killing himself for so long the thought rusted in his head.

In surprise, Ben laughs and chokes on his pizza. This laughter is either a nervous response or a mocking response. Either suicide is such a startling topic for discussion that Ben has no other response but to laugh or the notion of ending one’s own life is so ridiculous that he laughs at Kaye for even considering it. This causes Ben to choke on his pizza. The thing that they called a bounty was now going to kill him. Phil Kaye then writes,

“I hit him hard

Twice

in his back

to make sure

he does not

die”

(Kaye, 80)

The antithesis between Kaye feeling suicidal and Ben’s near death promotes the idea that life is fleeting. There are moments that remind someone that they are alive for a reason. For Phil Kaye in this moment, that reason is to make sure Ben does not die.

In the final line of the piece, Kaye cements this idea by writing “& we keep walking” (Kaye, 80). By not allowing the conversation to continue, Kaye tells the reader to move past the darkness. He and Ben move past Phil Kaye’s suicidal thoughts and return to the peaceful moment of their hard-earned pizza. They return to the life of an 11-year-old without the knowledge of self-harm.

### **About the Author**

I am only 21 years old. I have not lived every life experience a human can live, and I hopefully won’t experience every tragedy a human can see. Nonetheless, I have lived some life. I was born just weeks before the events of 9/11, the first foreign attack on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor in 1941. I witnessed my parents navigate the 2008 financial crisis, the worst economic crash since the Great Depression in the 1930s. I was a teenager when we faced some of the most difficult political elections our country has seen in a long time. I was just 18 years old when the world shut down due to the Coronavirus pandemic. I’ve lived a lot of life for someone who is only 21, and the situations I’ve mentioned are only societal influences on my childhood.

My unique, personal life experiences have shaped me even more. In 2010 my aunt died suddenly of an overdose after being clean and sober for six years. In 2017 my mom was diagnosed with skin cancer and received experimental non-chemo treatment for the next two years, which she thankfully survived and is now cancer free. In January of 2020 I woke up permanently deaf in my right ear as a rare side effect of a sinus infection I caught from my roommate. In February of 2020 I met the love of my life. In March of 2021 I attempted suicide. In June of 2021 I received my hearing aid implant and adopted a little orange kitten named Rudy. In August of 2021 I was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. In September of 2021 my dad lost his pinky toe to a blister that became infected and septic because of his diabetes. All through 2022 I

was involved constantly in theatrical productions as an actor and costume designer at Murray State University, Murray's Playhouse in the Park, and the Marshall County Arts Commission. Just recently, I received and accepted an offer for a full time position at Common Ground Research Networks in Champaign, Illinois, where I will be relocating after graduation. I have an amazing group of friends, a supportive family, and a beautiful life that has been struck with both celebration and tragedy.

I have always believed in the power of community, and Confessional poetry has been my tool to contribute to my community the best way I know how. In sharing my life experiences, my community is shown that they are not alone in their suffering or celebration. Before this project, I was unaware of the Confessional movement and believed that this highly-personal style of poetry was a modern trend. Now I know that talented creators have paved this path for me, and I'm honored to be amongst Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath. In writing my collection, I've taken a lot of inspiration from both Plath and Phil Kaye, the poets I discuss in my research. In this section, I will discuss four of my original poems: "Adulthood At," "In Memoriam," "Sisterhood: A Text Thread," and "Fuck It, Get Better." This discussion will include inspiration, context, and brief analysis of my work.

### **Adulthood At:**

My piece "Adulthood At" was inspired in part by Kaye's piece "Beginning, Middle & End." I really enjoyed the way he used chapters to tell time irregularly. I wanted to do something similar, so I told time by age. Each age is representative of my siblings: my sister Lauren is 30, my older brother Sam is 27, my younger brother Joe is 19, and I am 21. I know that the four of us have very different experiences in our young adulthood and I wanted to capture how someone can feel exactly as lost and confused about being an adult at 30 as they do at 19. I sent a google-



form to each of my siblings with questions about their daily routines, hobbies, and how they define being an adult. That question in particular, “Define adulthood (as literal or metaphorical as you want, just be honest)” produced the most inspirational responses. Every one of my siblings had a different definition, cementing the idea that being “grown up” is a subjective state.

I try to paraphrase or quote my siblings as much as possible in this piece. Lines like “The choice is yours: the / future or present pleasure” is a paraphrase of my little brother’s definition of adulthood. He sees growing up as an acceptance of responsibility and a time of preparation for the future. My big brother says the same thing, but in his additional years as an adult, he has also come to appreciate the present alongside the future. The line “joy is found at home” is another paraphrase from my big brother’s definition of adulthood. My sister, who has been an adult for 12 years now, has a bit more realistic view than my brothers, who believe they have life all figured out. In her age-earned wisdom, my sister knows, “you’ll never really be prepared for this phase of life.” She knows that life is unpredictable. I appreciate this about her. I wanted to end the poem with that uncertainty because I know nobody will ever know everything about life.

Compared to my siblings, I have the least complete definition of adulthood. This time in my life feels very scary. I agree that I should be focusing on building my future, but I don’t even know what that future looks like yet. The actions I am taking towards this future feel uncertain and mechanical, like an autoresponse to graduating college. I am still learning how to properly take care of myself and I’m expected to start a career and get married and have kids. I can’t even reliably clean my cats’ litter boxes – how am I supposed to take care of a child?

I compare adulthood to a roller coaster throughout the piece. The highs and lows, the creeping stops and sudden starts, the simultaneous fear and exhilaration are images I associate

with one's early adult years. This metaphor captures the different phases of adulthood and the thrill of going along for the ride.

### **In Memoriam**

Sylvia Plath's work "Lady Lazarus" loosely inspired my poem "In Memoriam." I wanted to explore my suicide attempt and the circumstances surrounding it. However, I decided to explore a series of what-if's. What if I hadn't woken up? What about my funeral? What about after that? The first half of the piece describes an unknown man's memorial DVD that came into my life by happenstance. I couldn't bring myself to watch the entire slideshow, but I could tell by the first minute or so that he was well loved. It broke my heart that his memory was left behind for some random college student to find. I wanted to know how he died. I wanted to know who loved him. I wanted to know if he had spent time in a hospital room, surrounded by his family. I wanted to know if he was who I would have been had I died that night.

I ask these questions in my piece and I compare his after-life to my near-death. I used the discovery of his memorial DVD to ponder what almost was.

Would I have been left behind?

A disc collecting dust

In a stranger's video cabinet,

Unable to throw me away

Because I was a real person?

When I returned from my time in the hospital, I thought about the DVD man a lot. I saw him as a cautionary tale, a warning not to isolate myself from the people I love. I didn't want to be forgotten like him. I didn't want to be left behind and discarded and resold like him. Then I felt guilty. Maybe the DVD man wasn't forgotten or left behind. Maybe this was a simple mistake. I

reminded myself that he was a real person, not some character in a story I made up. I decided in that moment to remember him.

### **Sisterhood: A Text Thread**

I have recently found a love for abstract form. I love giving my poetry a visual meaning on top of a literary meaning. My poem "Sisterhood: A Text Thread" plays with form to visualize the conversation between me and my sister. The piece is a combination of two real conversations I had with my sister. I decided to use these conversations in a poem after I had a conversation with some friends about how sibling relationships are portrayed in books and movies. We were laughing because we can tell when an author is an only child by the dialogue between siblings. The stiff interactions and awkward "hey sis" "hey bro" greetings felt like an alien writing a book. I wrote this poem because I wanted to write about what it is actually like to have a sister. I wanted to share our amazing friendship and our childish bickering and our beautiful comradery.

My sister is my best friend. I tell her everything and my life is better because she and I are as close as we are. I love that I get to be goofy and serious with her in the span of six seconds. There isn't much to read into in this poem; I didn't intend the piece to mean anything other than to illustrate the unique relationship between siblings, specifically sisters. In particular, the way my sister and I use profanity demonstrates how comfortable we feel with each other.

"God you're such a bitch

Man up and help me

...

I'm fucking sick

you bitch"

We probably curse too much, but the casual nature of our relationship allows for us to be relaxed with our conversational manners. I could have cut the profanity from the text, but that would have taken away from the authenticity of the piece.

One feature that is lost in this piece that existed in our messages is the animation that accompanied the line “Do do do do do do.” On iPhones, when you send a message to another Apple user, there are several animation options. The one I attached to that message was a laser scanning animation. This is the context needed for the next couple lines in the poem. I feel that I have captured sibling relationships accurately.

### **Fuck It, Get Better**

This is the poem that motivated the entire collection. My close friend Cody inspired the content. After a tough couple of years, he came to us (my whole group of friends), he sat us down, and he told us he’d had an epiphany. He wanted to be happy and to enjoy life again. He wanted to put all the loss and anger and betrayal behind him. He told us his new motto: fuck it, get better. There are two halves to the mantra. “Fuck it” is the piece that signifies a separation from the past: leaving the bad, the sad, and the embarrassing behind. “Get better” is the piece that motivates the future: eating better, sleeping better, doing the work to be a better person. Now, whenever something bad happens to any of us, we give ourselves a moment to mourn, and then we say “fuck it, get better.”

I wanted to capture that moment in this piece. I wanted to show that second of clarity before the choice, the picture of long-term depression that spurs the change. The first stanza captures this the strongest, “Wake up alone / in a sheetless bed / sprinkled with popart wrappers.” The isolation is captured in the first line as the character starts his day the same way it ended the night before. The second line depicts the self-neglect. Sleeping on a bare mattress is

uncomfortable, but the character has no motivation to wash his sheets and make his bed. The third line shows the malnutrition that accompanies this depth of depression. Prepackaged foods are a staple of depression meals: easy-mac, hot pockets, soda, and pop-tarts. This stanza sets the scene as we watch the gears in the character's head turn.

The turning point in the piece is the fifth stanza, "Sunlight peeks through / The dusty blackout curtains: / Blinding light at the end of the tunnel." These lines reveal the glimmer of hope in the midst of the fight. Whether the character wants it or not, growth and change are coming. This drives the reader to the final four lines: "Admit that it's bad / And make the choice./ "Fuck it, get better." // And you do." The call to action is the most important part of the healing process. That decision to do the work to heal is essential. The first step is admitting you have a problem. This poem captures all three of these phases.

Fuck It, Get Better:  
Poetry About Becoming a Real Person

By Caroline Winnenberg

For my dearest friends;  
you know who you are.

*This is her autobiography, far from complete, but complex and accurate.*

*-Ted Hughes*



**Dear Mom,**

I'd like to preface this  
Collection of poetry  
With an apology  
For the profanity  
In the collection's title.

I promise I am a lady,  
Not a sailor like  
My father before me.  
There are other words  
That I could use.

I am an intelligent girl  
And I know better words.  
I promise next time  
I write a collection of poetry,  
I will keep the cursing to a minimum.

In summation:  
Dear Mom,  
I'm sorry for saying "fuck."  
Love,  
Me.

## A Soul for a Soul

Part mainecoon, part toddler,  
Fluffy, orange, loud,  
Rutabaga Toledo Winnenberg

He sleeps on my pillow,  
his body wrapped around my head.  
He was born the day I died,  
A soul for a soul, he holds a piece of me.

When I sleep through my alarm,  
He stands on my pillow and  
Paws at my nose until I wake up.

When I get home,  
He's waiting for me in the  
Window, chirping for me to hurry.

When I get ready for bed,  
He screams at me to  
Turn on my humidifier.

When I've watched enough TV,  
He sits in front of the screen  
And refuses to move until I turn it off.

When I cry alone in the dark,  
He lays on my chest and licks up my tears,  
Tickling me with his whiskers until I laugh.

When I haven't showered,  
he yowls from the bathtub  
Until I bathe.

That stupid little cat.

## Gifted Kid

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## Just Ignore It, Girl

Let me set the scene:  
August, sweltering.  
My AC is perfect  
But I need to change  
The oil in my car  
And it'll rain  
The rest of the week.

I buy the oil,  
The pan and the funnel,  
And I get in  
My painting clothes.  
I get my socket wrench:  
The extended socket  
To reach the drain plug.

A moving truck  
Pulls next to me  
As I start to shimmy  
Underneath my car,  
Hood already popped.  
I hear that arrogant sound  
A man clearing his throat.

"Need a hand, babygirl?"  
He is a stranger,  
Cigarette hanging from  
His chapped lips.  
"That's a man's job, darling,"  
Says his passenger partner,  
Another unfamiliar face.

"No thank you."  
I'm polite, sitting up  
And making eye contact.  
"I've been doing this  
Myself for a while."  
They look at each other

And laugh at me

"I'm sure you have, baby,"

Says the first man.

I suddenly feel

Less cordial than before.

"I'd love to give you

A hand with that,"

Says the second.

"I know what I'm doing,

But I'll take a cigarette."

I'm not a smoker,

But I bum it bitterly

To prove something to

The men in the truck.

Maybe that I'm tough.

They laugh again

And he passes me

A Marlboro red

And a Bic lighter.

I light it up

And they drive away.

I got lucky this time.

**Fuck It, Get Better**

Wake up alone  
In a sheetless bed  
Sprinkled with popart wrappers.

"Are you still watching"  
Glow across the screen  
Of last night's show.

Empty beer bottles  
Stand like soldiers  
On the black bedside table.

Survey the room  
Carpeted by dirty clothes  
Wrinkled from being walked on.

Sunlight peeks through  
The dusty blackout curtains:  
Blinding light at the end of the tunnel.

Sit up slowly.  
Take a deep breath.  
Rub your tired eyes.

Admit that it's bad  
And make the choice.  
"Fuck it, get better."

And you do.

**"How much do you love me?"**

I watch you clamber up the tree  
Hugging the trunk  
Unable to wrap your arms around.  
Pulling yourself  
Higher and higher,  
Every branch, your ladder rung  
At the peak  
You stand tall  
Balancing on your toes.  
Your pinched fingers  
Reach to the black night sky  
And like a child  
Decorating a Christmas tree  
You hang the evening star.

I look at you that way.

**Dr. Pepper**

For the spring season,  
Our chef recommends  
Dr. Pepper.

Surely one of its 23  
Natural flavors will pair  
Nicely with your dish  
Of reheated pizza  
And dry cereal.

Sniff it, swirl it,  
Watch its legs on the glass.  
This beautiful blend  
The color of used oil  
Shipped straight

From the famous vineyards  
Of Wichita, Kansas  
For the connoisseurs  
Of corn syrup: cool kids  
Just like you.



### **Who Sings This?**

My dad has never upheld a tradition  
Like the game we play with  
His pandora radio stations.

He shouts to his table AI  
To "PLAY CLASSIC ROCK"  
And she repeats the request.

A familiar bass riff hums  
And the drums follow suit  
With Dad on the air guitar.

I walk in the room  
With my own agenda  
Only to be interrupted.

"HEY CAROLINE, WHO SINGS THIS?"  
Dad, a smug quizmaster,  
Sticks out his tongue.

"Is it The Styx?"  
He laughs  
And nudges me to guess again.

Dad and I don't have much  
In common, but he tries. I was  
In band all through school,

Which led him to associate me  
With music for my entire life,  
Despite the fact I quit the saxophone.

"I don't know, Dad."  
I shrug and roll my eyes.  
He switches to his invisible drumset.

"IT'S RUSH"

He names the singer

And the album and the year.

I wonder how much

Dad really knows me:

The me now, at 21,

A writer --

A poet -- not a jazz musician

Or classical pianist;

The me who can quote

Dickinson and Frost,

Not John, Paul, George, and Ringo;

I don't know which Boston

Albums charted. I don't know

The year Journey broke up.

But now I know

(for future reference)

Who sings that song.

**To the Poet's Cat On Her First Christmas**

You were so young  
And the size of a cell phone  
When you were abandoned,

Your paw caught tight  
In the metal underbelly  
Of the trash compactor.

You were so weary  
And your voice rough and cracking  
When you cried out,

Your tail tucked  
Between the bony hocks  
Of your weak fuzzy legs.

You were so relieved  
And your eyes gleamed bright  
When you were found,

Your knight dressed  
In the paint-stained clothes  
Of a blue collar man.

You are so safe  
And shaped like a frozen turkey  
Now in your home,

Your body is wrapped  
In the Christmas blanket  
Of your family.

**Sisterhood: A Text Thread**

Hey so like. Wanna give me  
a highway motel  
bathtub hysterectomy

Ew  
You know I can't do guts and stuff

God you're such a bitch  
Man up and help me

*Lauren is unavailable to facetime*

God are you fucking old  
or something  
it's only eleven

I'm fucking sick  
you bitch

You know what?  
I'm sick too  
Of your attitude

JFC  
You are a monster  
on your period

Do do do do do do

Holy shit what was that

I was scanning for the fucks  
I gave you.  
Turns out there aren't any.

God I'm so fucking funny.

We really are manic together.

Yeah, it's the moon.

That's what mom said  
To me yesterday.

**(Places)**

Thank you places

(Two minutes until go)

Thank you two

Curtain speech

(Light cue 1 standby)

We hope you enjoy

(Lights go)

Blackout

Count to three

1. 2. 3.

One last breath

And take the stage

Sit on the bench

Same spot every night

(Light cue 2 standby)

And count to three again

1. 2.

The lights go early

Pretend you're not blind

Shiver to yourself

Suddenly warm.

Steady your breath

Set the scene, and

Speak the speech

## Twin Flames

At the first wedding  
I will ever attend  
I am the maid of honor  
And the father of the bride:  
My best friend.

We met at age 15:  
Marching band,  
Love at first sight,  
Twin flames,  
Soulmates.

We were lovers for a time,  
A secret from the Catholic  
Montagues and Capulets  
Of private high school  
On the edge of the Bible Belt.

We were nothing for a while,  
An alternate ending  
Where Juliet lives  
Unhappily ever after  
Apart from Romeo.

We are friends now,  
Reunited at long last  
Across time, my other half.  
I am not Ellis' Juliet  
Nor are they my Romeo.

I will be walking Ellis  
Down the aisle  
To their true love,  
*In loco parentis.*  
I am honored to give them away.

**Things I Pulled Out of the Toilet in the Boys' Restroom During my Two Weeks as a Part-Time Middle School Janitor**

1 milk carton

1 pint

Chocolate

Torn open

Dumped into toilet

With carton

1 gum packet

Extra brand

Watermelon flavored

No gum left

Skewered by

A number 2 pencil

1 applesauce cup

Single serving

Unopened

Wrapped in toilet paper

Brand unknown,

But likely Mott's

1 graham cracker

Whole

Shaped like a goldfish cracker

Soaking in an

Unflushed urinal

With low water pressure

**This Poem is about Nothing**

This poem is about nothing  
Don't read into it don't cut it up  
Definition the absence of anything  
Here there is no thing

Don't read into it don't cut it up  
This suffocating silent peace  
Here there is no thing  
For you With you Around you.

This suffocating silent peace  
Definition the absence of anything  
For you With you Around you  
This poem is about nothing



## When Jen Died

I was nine years old  
At my first overnight summer camp  
When I had the dream  
That killed Jen.

I look like my Aunt Jennifer,  
My grandmother's daughter,  
My mother's sister.  
Jen was tall and lanky  
And she had tangled curly brown hair  
That she often kept in a ponytail  
Just like me.

Jen was a ballerina.  
She slid across the stage the way  
A swan glides on the lake.  
But under the surface,  
Jen was kicking and splashing.

In my dream I saw my mother  
Crying, sobbing,  
Muffling her screams  
In a down-stuffed pillow.

I wanted to warn her,  
I wanted to beg my mother,  
To call Jen, to save her life  
But my mouth only opened  
To sing Jen's swan song.

Jen was clean for six years  
when she died.  
Her bipolar relapse  
Overestimated her tolerance.  
And she overdosed.

Jen and I were asleep when she died.  
Now I'm the dancing ghost  
Of my grandmother's daughter,  
My mother's sister,  
The ballerina who fell,  
The swan who drowned.

**GRWM****Step 1: Get dressed**

Just kidding,  
It's not that easy.  
This act will  
Decide how my  
Day will go.

**Step 1: Open my closet**

Stare at my clothes,  
Wait for inspiration  
To strike, give in  
To the fashion show  
I am preparing for.

**Step 2: Close my closet**

No ensembles were  
Inspired in the three  
Seconds I stared at  
The patterns and fabrics  
Hung in a row.

**Step 3: Check the weather**

That's probably important  
It looks cloudy outside  
But my app says  
High of 56 (in March).  
I will ignore this information

**Step 4: Consider my day**

What do I have today?  
I'm mostly inside  
Sitting at a desk  
Behind a computer.  
I could wear a skirt.

**Step 5: Praise myself for wearing a skirt.**

I am wearing a skirt!  
I will be the hottest

Bitch in town  
 In this cute-ass skirt  
 That I am wearing.

Step 6: Cultivate the *fit*

This shirt is comfortable  
 And the yellow matches  
 The yellow in my skirt.  
 I'll add frilly socks,  
 Silly earrings, and trusty shoes.

Step 7: Take a step back

Perfect,  
 Beautiful, stunning  
 Serving, and slaying  
 Twist to see the back,  
 Kick up my heel.

Step 8: Document this moment

Mirror selfie  
 Mirror selfie  
 Front face selfie  
 Timer selfie  
 Timer selfie

Step 9: Share my genius

With my sister  
 With my boyfriend  
 With my best friend  
 With my mom  
 With my private story

Step 10: Move on

Leave the house  
 Realize how cold 56 degrees is  
 Don't return for a jacket.  
 Suffer in silence  
 Fashion over function.

Don't forget to like and subscribe :)

**If You Ever See Me**

In a cubicle  
Wearing business casual  
I want you to shoot me

### Upon Opening My Utensil Drawer

My cat stole my  
Fanciest pen  
Last August  
And it hasn't been  
Seen since.

Unloading the dishwasher  
Revealed to me that  
I only have four forks.  
I used to have more,  
But they have vanished.

Maybe that's where  
My forks went.  
Maybe my cat has  
A secret dragon hoard  
Of pens and hairties and forks.

I see her sitting atop the mound  
Her tail curled around her  
Little body, covering her feet.  
It glimmers in the sunlight  
And she is proud of her treasure.

Funnily enough,  
My spoons are fine  
And my knives are plentiful  
And my chopsticks have partners  
And my straws are accounted for.

But I had to buy  
Four more forks.

**Adulthood At:**

19.

Your locker is still warm  
And your backpack is still  
Packed with notes and assignments  
Long ago graded.  
You love nights out  
With *da boys*  
Scheduled around  
Gigs and side hustles:  
A roadie for your friend's band.  
Like the finale of *Friends*  
You are satisfied.

You've outgrown your curfew  
So you go a little hard: raid  
Your parents' nasty mango rum.  
After late nights out,  
You don't feel hungover.  
You can take an advil  
And go to work  
Without the headache and nausea  
And sunglasses inside.  
You are immortal and

You've barely begun.  
The choice is yours: the  
Future or present pleasure.  
The life you will build  
Is just buckling you in.  
Your heart is racing for  
The ride to start,  
For the fun to begin.

21.

You still have classes in  
this grey space between  
Adolescence and adulthood  
You pay your rent

And take a math exam  
On the same day.  
You are confused –

You have a kitchen  
But no time or skill  
Or mental fortitude  
To cook a proper meal.  
You order takeout  
And pile the trash.  
You are malnourished but

So close to the real thing:  
9-5 at a desk in an office park  
Instead of a classroom.

After the cap and gown  
After the job interviews  
After the househunting  
You will build your life  
But right now you're locked in the cart,  
Slowed to the summit of the rollercoaster.

27.

You bought the ring,  
You dropped to your knee,  
And she gasped and said yes.  
You make the deposits on the venue  
And the flowers and the catering.

Joy is found at home  
Meal planning and reading  
And walking your little dog.  
Gym in the morning,  
Xbox at night.

Are you moving too fast?  
Is the lap bar too loose?  
You feel the loops  
Knotting your stomach:



You can't relieve it alone.  
This is a partnership,  
Choosing to ride with you.

30.

You're living your dream  
In the insomniatic city  
Because you never stop either.  
Constant movement  
Constant change.  
You are thrilled with the pace.

But the speed still catches you  
Sometimes. A jerk forward  
Before you get out of bed.  
You'll never really be  
Prepared for this phase of  
Life. But you love it anyway.

It's not all its cracked up to  
Be. But you have theatre  
And you have your writing  
And you can rent a car now.  
That's what its all about.  
Right?

### **A Healed Little Girl**

I am nine years old / dance classes after school / Mom drops me off / I point my feet / tucked in little canvas slippers / and I spin on my tippy toes / pure joy in my body / a ballerina in the making / I stare at myself / in the wall of mirrors / admiring my pink tights / and my pretty leotard / I do a spin / just for me.

I am fourteen years old / scanning the shadows / between my ribs / a cage too small for its residents / and I imagine myself dainty / floating across the stage / stiffly perpendicular tulle skirt / like a stock at my hips / holding me upright / a petite beauty / graceful smooth hair / spinning and leaping / I grab my wrist / familiar movement like a / tape measure bracelet / sliding up until / my fingertips part / too large to be a ballerina / too big to float.

I am twenty one years old / a ballerina part-time / my thighs touch / my chest isn't hollow / and my hair is frizzy and thick / but my tights are pink / and my leotard is pretty / and I still get to spin and leap / healthy and strong / the mirrors in the studio / don't scare me / anymore.

**Antipsychotic**

*You're not crazy  
But we need to  
Level you out*

What's wrong with me?

*You're manic,  
Caroline.*

What?

*You are manic.  
We need you to  
Calm down*

Why? I feel great.

*We're worried about you  
And your bipolar disorder.*

I don't understand.  
I'm not depressed  
Anymore.

*We're putting you  
On an antipsychotic*

I don't want it.  
I don't want to go back.  
I can't go back.

*This isn't a healthy  
Feeling, Caroline.*

I feel amazing  
I don't understand what's  
Wrong with the way  
I feel right now.

## La Femme au Jardin

Train of a white gown  
Grazes the soft grass  
Renewed with the life  
Of spring showers  
And sunshine.

*Et soleil.*

Birds singing hymns  
Perch in the blossom  
Tree, a skirt of roses  
The net for the chicks  
Learning to fly.

*Apprendre à voler.*

The nursery stretches  
To the cloudless sky  
And petals dust  
The ground in white -  
The saints of life.

*Les saintes de vie*

Frozen in time,  
An endless morning  
Alone with nature.  
Unbothered, undisturbed,  
A walk in the garden.

*Une promenade dans le jardin*

**In Memoriam**

I thrifted a DVD player  
Three years ago  
So I could watch  
Stuart Little  
With my roommate.

When I plugged it in,  
The disc tray  
Unceremoniously slid open  
And I stared at your face,  
Man I Do Not Know.

At your funeral,  
A DVD was played –  
Photos and videos  
Of your life.  
This is all that's left.

Whoever made the DVD  
Made the awful design choice  
To collage a single image  
Of your face  
All over the disc.

Whoever made the DVD  
Made the thoughtless decision  
To donate their DVD player  
To their local Goodwill  
Without withdrawing your faces.

Are you forgotten?  
Do they regret losing you?  
Did the player belong to your spouse?  
Your children? Your best friend?  
Will mine forget about me?

I awoke  
After the swallow  
To a needle-stuck hand  
Held by Mom.  
Sorrow in her eyes again.

Big Brother stood at  
The foot of the hospital bed.  
He smirked.  
Hands stuffed in pockets.  
“Hey there, Sissy.”

Little Brother sat  
In the window sill,  
Toothy grin spread  
Across his young face.  
He laughed at my catheter.

Dad walked in,  
Coffee in hand,  
His eyes tired and sagging  
From the midnight drive.  
“How’re you feeling?”

Boyfriend holds  
My pulse oximeter  
Hand. Rubbing my thumb.  
He reveals a stuffed dog:  
A gift upon my resurrection

Big sister sits on a plane  
Unable to receive updates,  
Ears ringing,  
Engines whirring,  
Begging to go a little faster.

Who would have made  
The DVD of my life?  
What pictures would've been used?  
What videos would've kept my voice?  
What would the cover have looked like?

Would I have been left behind?  
A disc collecting dust  
In a stranger's video cabinet,  
Unable to throw me away  
Because I was a real person?

You were a real person,  
Man I Do Not Know  
So you will rest on the shelf with  
Clueless and Mean Girls,  
And I will remember you.

**Pink**

Pink is newborn

Pink is fresh

Pink is embarrassment

And flattery

And flirting

Pink is chipping off my nails

Pink is my Starbucks drink

Pink is my backpack

And my water bottle

And my scrunchie

Pink is girly

Pink is soft

Pink is weak

And queasy

And squirmy

Pink is "oh she looks so sweet"

Pink is "those are boy's toys dear"

Pink is "that's not ladylike"

And "don't play in the mud"

And "my little ballerina"

Pink is assigned

Pink is resented

Pink is disgusted

And ignored

And left behind

Pink is forgotten

Pink is replaced

Pink is now Blue

And Green

And Yellow

Pink is reborn



### **Final Thoughts and Reflections**

I never thought I would ever be able to write a thesis. When I was just 18 taking my intro to composition class, I couldn't comprehend ever writing something to this extent. I was struggling to write two poems in a month, but now I've written over fifty pages of content all about poetry. I wrote 24 original pieces this semester. This has been the most overwhelming task and I am so proud of what I accomplished in just four short months.

My favorite poem from this collection is "A Soul for A Soul." I wrote it about my cat Rudy after getting into a screaming match with him about refilling the humidifier tank. I once said to my friends that I can be as critical of that cat because nobody is as critical of me than him. I love being his mom.

The poem that took the most work was definitely "When Jen Died." I didn't know my Aunt Jen very well, so it was difficult to capture her on the page. All I really know about her is what my mom, grandma, and sister have told me, so a lot of her is parts of me. I'm happy to keep her memory for my mom. This piece went through a lot of drafts before I even gave it to my advisor to workshop. I wanted to do her justice and cement her memory the best I could for my mom. I can't imagine ever losing my sister. This poem is for my mom most of all.

### **Acknowledgements**

I'd like to thank Dr. Carrie Jerrell for her guidance throughout this process. I would have been lost from the start without her giving me the resources and motivation to complete this project. I'd also like to thank Dr. Jeff Osborne for his support and encouragement. I'd like to thank my committee members for their suggestions to improve my work as well as the Murray State Honors College for giving me the education and tools needed to complete a project like this. Another person I'd like to thank is Dr. Dale Ray Phillips. He was my first creative writing

professor at Murray State University and he taught me how to read like a writer and write like a reader.

I'd like to thank my family: Mom and Dad for raising me to love life and see the beauty in everything; Lauren for encouraging me to be myself in everything I do; Sam for leading by example how to be a grown up; and Joe for granting me the gift of being a goofball everyday.

I'd like to thank my friends: Sam, Kris, Emily, and Cody. You're my second family and I hope we never grow apart. I'd also like to thank my best friend of all time Ellis. You've been with me through thick and thin for almost a decade now. I hope I never lose you.

Finally, I'd like to thank my partner. Isaac, you are my rock and my joy. I love you and our little family of animals (Ripley, Winter, Rudy, and Newt). You're the best thing that has ever happened to me and every day I wake up next to you is the best day of my life.

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