

**you wrote your name in
the margins of my heart**

by Sarann Spiegel

These poems were written over the course of the 2024 Spring Semester at Wesleyan University for Professor Danielle Vogel's class Techniques of Poetry: Hidden Histories. They are not to be reprinted or published without the poet's consent. Other students in the class include: Valentina Arnold, Mel Cort, Emma Goetz, Christopher Hadley, Rosie Hassel, Anna Hynes, Caitlin Levy, Elizabeth Littell, Anna Logan, Margaret Melcher, Isabella Miranda, Ibbey Newland, Emma "Stecky" Steckline, and Ryan Wong.

These poems are entirely original. No identification with actual persons (living or deceased), places, buildings, and products is intended or should be inferred. Unless you know the poet personally — then the poems may well be about you.

Spiegel turned nineteen while writing. This feels important to include.

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meditations

i. the line

Before this class, the line as a unit of measurement was not of real thought to me. I did not bother with enjambment or really know what end-stopping meant (an end-stopped line ends with punctuation and an enjambed line does not, requiring the reader to continue down the page to feel fulfilled by the sentence or phrase). Through reading poets like Ocean Vuong and Cole Swensen, I discovered just how powerful the unit of the line can truly be. End-stopping is useful for a sucker-punch or a line meant to feel full. The punctuated ending supplies structure and a sense of completion, even if the thought does not end with a period. Enjambment, however, causes everything to blend together. The blurring of ideas and concepts within a line forces one to defamiliarize language and the world. Mostly, I learned to utilize enjambment to present ideas I could then twist on their heads in the following line. In the case of “i try my hand at protagonism,” the first line “tonight i steal back” creates this sense of revenge. But the following line starts with “-wards,” revealing that nothing in the previous line is as it once seemed. Enjambment is now one of my favorite things about poetry. I have always loved, in stories, how flashbacks can change the context of situations I previously believed I understood. Enjambment does the same kind of work. In the context of my own exploration of love through these poems, I learned to keep people together within a line even if the thought separates them later on. “Sarann and i” from “i try my hand at protagonism” keeps the two of us together, but the following lines

(“coalesce twice reflected world / bending into breakage”) tear us apart. And yet we still exist together, as a unit, in one line. If the line was “Sarann / and i,” this sort of intimacy would not be present. This is the power of enjambment, and it has taught me to be far more purposeful about what stays together and what does not.

ii. imagery, simile, & metaphor

Imagery is the foundation on which poetry stands. Most of imagery works to ground the poem in reality, recalling people, places, or things that a reader would likely be familiar with. In “origin story vol. 1,” I challenged myself to imagine something no one has ever or will ever see.

Researching what came before the Big Bang was incredibly difficult, as most theories have been disproven and we truly do not know the answer, but I like unanswerable questions. The singularity theory proposes the universe started as a small ball with infinite density. Infinity is not a tangible image, and neither is a minuscule void of space that once contained all we know and love. So, to ground this poem with specific images, I had to turn to simile and metaphor.

These types of comparisons allowed me to create new, unexpected connections between ideas. I was never going to be able to wrap my head around what the singularity actually was, so I turned to a peach. A peach is easy to visualize and works to create a spectrum between a mundane fruit and the cosmic “before.” The entire poem, through simile and metaphor, fosters this relationship between the mundane and the cosmic. Black holes kiss singularities and the painful screams of birthing are television static. And who is to say that kisses and televisions are not cosmic? So

much of how I love the world is in looking to the small stuff we often forget and appreciating them as manifestations of our universe. Singularities die and are reborn as the universes we know and love, as the mothers that tend to us. Through imagery, simile, and metaphor, impossible concepts become grounded in the five senses and break our hearts. Concise images and beautiful comparisons give us pause as we access new angles from which to view the world.

iii. syntax, sound, & silence

Like with enjambment, before this class, I did not think much of sound or silence in my own poetry, other than alliteration or rhyme. Both of those strategies are powerful — sound patterns satisfy the ear, connect concepts, and create structure within free verse — but there is more to sound and silence than patterns. So much power is nestled in the breaking of patterns, in a long, silent pause that leaves room for language to resonate in open space. “Woman in limbo” was a poem full of problems that I had little love for before realizing the work sound needed to do within the poem. I learned to love working with sound through reading my poems aloud. To create dynamic sound, one has to be incredibly purposeful in their syntax, and know exactly how each word will land both on the page and in the ear. “Adrenaline aggression” becomes live when reading, as the “ah” sounds are the perfect example of alliteration. The same is evidenced by “golden” and “gild,” which both have the hard “g” sound and the odd “-old/-ild” that feels like a near rhyme. Silence manifests at the end of that stanza: “giving is a middle name / yours is .” The absence, or the white space, creates the sense that a word has been removed or taken from

the poem, then creating this contrast between giving and taking. This poem was written about a friend I am no longer in touch with, whom I also had a bit of a crush on. Giving and taking was the essence of that relationship, especially since it mainly consisted of texting, and the silence is indicative of her silence. All of this taught me that sound is not only about structure, but about relaying concepts and packing emotional punches.

iv. poetry & documentary poetics

Poetry is a lot of things, most of which are incredibly difficult to pin down. Taken literally, poetry is a literary art form that uses language to defamiliarize readers with their world. It can explore the unknowable (“origin story vol. 1”), contemplate half-buried friendships (“woman in limbo,” “my friend jeanie”), retell history while dissecting its established narrative (“(backstory),” “i try my hand at protagonism,” “origin story vol. 2”), and define a broad concept with plenty of nuance (“on love”). Documentary poetics, more specifically, accesses the historical record in order to construct poems delving into what may be forgotten or not yet investigated. Due to poetry’s pliant nature compared to other written forms, poets can use documents (be it photographs, legal records, written messages, to name a few) and take on voices otherwise inaccessible to ask questions of humanity. In this project, I considered newspapers and retold stories documents that I could rip apart and reform as conceptual discussions. For so long, poetry has been a way I release emotions I accidentally hold close. I used writing as my own form of speaking to my psyche. Over the course of this semester, I learned how to harness that

vulnerability into something more cutting and precise. Through practicing the usage of the line, imagery, simile, metaphor, syntax, sound, and silence, my poems turned from diary entires to speculations on the human condition. What I love about poetry is how it connects us to those who write — we learn just how similar we actually are in recognizing our own experiences on the page, or learn just how little we really know by being treated to new experiences. Poetry lets us breathe in new ways and appreciate the air a little bit more. A poem is an organism with millions of lives, and I hope my poems will have many with you.

origin story vol. 1

did the singularity long
for the soft kiss of a black hole or perhaps a
curved neck to tuck her face into one of which you have
searched for since bawling into the chlorine slick skin of a
swim instructor? how lonely
does one have to be to create time and space
in less than a second? how long did she sit there smaller
than a peach in the palm and far more dense before deciding
motherhood was preferable to her single heartbeat? if she even
had a pulse there was no reason no reason for her to
ache breathe sing did she? did she sing as she birthed
the universe a lullaby for newborn everything? it's likely
she screamed as mothers are wont to do a scream
like television static still echoing in the ears of a man
asleep in front of the box set he dreams of his mother
's arms around him. of a kiss that spans
fourteen billion years.

woman in limbo

I am always waiting for
the killing blow. anticipation
bubbles so quick precipitates
adrenaline aggression crystallizing
as the *coup de grâce* I
so readily seek.

golden fingers only gild
bodies if contact holds and
giving is a middle name
yours is .

washing blood bone from
skin flesh from ten moons
you slip from my hands yes
from my mouth. from instinct.
lips turn to lead. subtle alchemy.

is it sacrilege to miss
what you've slaughtered?

(backstory)

i.

in 1983 Sarann Kraushaar meets a man
not her husband, Stan, asleep by the TV
but another man. they dance through
country clubs and best westerns and dream
of the lighthouse in barnegat.

september 1984 is a knife
through black tires
and bullets in Sarann's second man's
wife. Maria, Maria. the most beautiful
sound she ever heard was likely
not her breath's exit.

i try my hand at protagonism

ii.

tonight i steal back
-wards in time slip into another
millennia. i reach a hand remove
women like a girl playing
god a hand invades a dollhouse
rearranges miniature lives
women are taken from
motel rooms and kitchens and i
hold them as perfect sobs
rise like water in bodies.

car idling on the parkway three
women inside. one dead woman
goes home alive tonight. one silent
woman goes home to a forgiving man. i go
home tonight unsure i'll get there

but a god is
welcome in every bed and mine
is forty years away.

a murderer pulls
over and Sarann and i
coalesce twice reflected world
bending into breakage.
we'll meet again in car
ride conversation and i'll say
i don't know this one
and dad won't include me
in the story and i won't be in it

iii.

yet

origin story vol. 2

thursday

hdtv by the river mom's

auspice of my arrival

starbucks reserve i come

product of drugs mom cradles

want kids but he will make a good

dipping sauce. the perfect amount of

in the grass in the moment in the new

to renege on his bachelor ways. she blindly

dad installs his first

underwear is the bloody

in the hospital now a

to fruition quick easy

me in the 2 A.M. light and dad didn't

father like he makes a good

mayo is, to mom, love. her toes

york city grime he loves her enough

turns onto 11th to meet him blindly does she

wonder if this is the last first date or is it

to shitting himself in their incidentally

he loves the red sox and he's from *jersey*. toes

disappearing he smiles

obvious he comes downstairs halfway

matching outfits. damn yankees.

in the grass she looks back instead of

like time

my friend jeanie

loves old things dead
things she rides a rickety
bike to antique stores playing forgotten
tunes on jukeboxes she wears
dead people's clothes and worships
at the graveyard. i read a letter she
wrote to a dead boy *you wrote your name*
in the margins of my heart and other such
platitudes she tucks clammy
hands into mine allowing
wisps of hair to graze noses underarm
sweat like t-shirt halos i am unsurprised
when it all ends. loving is hard missing
is easy so jeanie becomes an
archaeologist with hand clams in dead
dirt name on bones where she broke my
arm we don't speak anymore though i sometimes
receive a '40s postcard with new words

overlaying old *i miss yous* carved into borders.
i keep them in a box tucked under my
kentucky horse heart i am good at missing too
i am trying to be good at loving. i go
to museums and look for jeanie's name i
guess loving a dead woman is missing still
she is missing still

on love

*for those who have spent their
New York summers with me*

A bench in Central Park tells us Stephen Heighton *was loved / and loved, and loved, and loved*

Hanif Abdurraqib imagines *love as an indecent animal... The unclean face kissed clean and made ready for the night.*

Bell Hooks said *we would all love better if we used it as a verb.*

Jane Austen correctly surmised in Mr. Knightley that *If I loved you less, then I might be able to talk about it more.*

Anne Carson is still thinking about *how else should I love you — in your way?*

Wendy Cope says, *I love you. I'm glad I exist.*

And I love words.

How they fit in the mouth, how their aim is precise even in the dark.

I love words but I don't know how to use them.

The reason I take your hand in Union Square between farmer's market stands is because I don't know how to use them.

I want to make a living off of words but I don't know how to use them.

If I did, I would say that loving you has drenched my world in gold like sunlight cascading on a Village brownstone while we laugh late into the still-warm night because it's summer and the city stinks of sun-cooked trash and we stink of sweat but all that matters is our laughter and I love you and that love thrums through my whole damn body.

I squeeze your hand.

They say actions speak louder but I speak louder, for speech is both an act and words. The latter converts sunlight better than a handhold can, though the handhold better voices the full-body tensing in love.

It's better to speak than to die, yet gazing at my father I write one million silent elegies that I would say aloud if the body weren't a closing vocal chord. The sun is in my eyes and words have become blood, bone, an open hand closing upon meeting another of its kind. Two stars colliding.

I love words but words fail and so do people and so do I.

Tomorrow, I will try to speak. For now: my hand.

note from the poet

“You wrote your name in the margins of my heart” is a phrase that has been sitting in my mouth for at least three years, though I expect the number is closer to six. It came to me when writing a poem, though all the other words felt wrong. “You wrote your name...” has always felt bigger than anything around it. When attacking a small collection, it felt wrong not to include the phrase I always return to. So I slipped the words into Jeanie’s mouth and alluded to something more — which may come and also may not, for margins are fickle things. Jeanie is also a fickle thing, less of a person and more of a concept that could be better explored in a different work. All of this is to say that this collection is about what everything has always been about: Love.

I didn’t know it was love at first. I wanted to write a Big Bang collection, and the remnants of that exist as “origin story vol. 1.” In my research, I discovered the theory of the singularity (which is basically debunked but makes for good poetry) and that the laws of physics did not exist before the Big Bang. Of course, that poem is about love, because if the laws of physics weren’t around then neither was love, and that had to be fixed. I came to love as the guiding force more specifically when writing “woman in limbo,” which appears second. I am something of a woman, loving as I go. I don’t know how to write about anything other than that, so I wrote that. This whole thing is that. “(backstory)” and “i try my hand at protagonism” are two parts of an attempt to explore Robert O. Marshall’s killing of his wife in 1984 while he was having an

affair with my cousin and namesake, Sarann Kraushaar. With those, I hoped to infuse love into a spin on the classic affair narrative's treatment of women. "origin story vol. 2" meshes fragments of my parents' dating history, my birth, and our histories with New York City to explore how love brought me into this world. "my friend jeanie" was a long time coming, as Jeanie has been haunting my brain for a long time. Earlier this semester my friends and I were laying on Foss Hill, and I (idiomatically) told them that I don't think doors ever really close. Then I thought about how we say doors close on relationships pretty frequently, and realized I don't believe that either. I think that's "jeanie" in a nutshell.

"on love" is most explicit in its themes in comparison to the rest, going so far as to tackle the definition of love. While working on it, a beloved friend recommended Bell Hooks' *All About Love: New Visions* to me for entirely different reasons. Since Hooks was doing the same work I was attempting, her inclusion was instinctual. The bench plaque is a space for modern love letters that we take for granted, so one of the many is quoted first. Hanif Abdurraqib has always been a genius, prophet, and destroyer of hearts, so lines from his gorgeous 2016 poem "Poems From An Email Exchange" were necessary. Wendy Cope and Jane Austen, two of our greats, have lines pulled from "The Orange" and *Emma*, respectively. The Anne Carson from *Plainwater: Essays and Poetry* came to me via Pinterest almost five years ago now; it stuck in my fourteen-year-old heart like gum to a desk's belly. Carson, with this question, gets at the real heart of this collection but also of life. We love in our own ways and it'd be folly to expect

otherwise. This collection is about how I love, how I love those I've watched love, how I love stories, and how love spans time and space. I don't think I could've written anything else. Work that disregards love is still about it — absence is presence, opposition is maintenance. Where love is not, love is. And love is everywhere.

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And, of course, myself. My forever friend. I love you more than anyone else could, which is saying something because no one knows you more intimately or judges you so harshly. Remember: You are already a body in motion. There's little to lose and so much to gain. I am proud of you always. Now — onwards and upwards, baby.