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Adoration of the Towering Weed: Poems

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Adoration of the Towering Weed:

Poems

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Languages & Literature
of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, NY

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*Deepest appreciation to my dear family and friends,
to Rebecca for all her help,
and to Michael Ives for his unflinching guidance*

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I - Marine Snow

Herpetology

It was worse than watching lasagna explode in the oven. The lawyers will clean most of that up, and the rest can be diverted through a series of channels and troughs. I think the dawn is cold. The botanist shows his fierce young charge some distinctive markings, which bulge inappropriately. Her mouth twists up in a quiver. What could be better than to save a few wounded newts, get them home to their logs, where they could die of something older than all of us, die of the cold in their own cold blood?

Whatever Happened to Mother's Milk?

A rumor spreads, like a deck is swabbed, and lint pills. Gabbing from disparate lands separately tell all in describing our hopeless table manners. A little talk can be murder ... lord knows it's rife with fiends. They'll pass you a hit with one hand, then soundlessly dip you in batter. None of the fish in this sea carry coins beneath a tongue, only barbs—harshly discriminate, biomechanical. To look down, down into this habitat, is to forever fear the beach. Even so, each generation sees *Jaws* differently, as the reel dusts over and conventions of speech irreparably shift. It's disconcerting, really, how ill-bred our children will be.

First Pet

In the cave to which I crawl each night, through the maw of a wrought-iron lion's eye, lie tanks upon tanks of aquatic life. Coelacanths and deep-sea tubers, grown grey and translucent in the absence of light. They speak to each other in slow jams, the pulse of a beady stare. Perhaps it is that a child with claws is no child at all, but an angler.

Great Things

Too skeletal to make a name for itself in the wrestling forum or the Parthenon, hands bound by cord that, untangled and pulled apart, could circle the earth twice with enough left over to take the life out of a runt pig. To the left there, among some distant statuary, you'll notice its struggle to survive. Some collectors simply prefer a classic mode.

Try some ice cubes—children love them, dogs love them. Everything is so peaceful down here, like root vegetables waiting to feel a kick. Perhaps we could all start to make the world a better place by keeping our feet off the upholstery.

Where it Comes From

In some regions, “early wood” from the spring season is gathered and stewed in the stomach of a volunteer. This is the origin of that old nugget, “adolescent enthusiasm will cause knots.” They learn too late that the robe of an elder’s favor cannot hide the fire scars, nor the imbalance of past ecologies.

Of course, no one is buying it. This generation can’t understand that what you’re selling ... is yourself. And without that protective paraffin layer, ring structure might fall victim to the pulping from ant galleries. There is nothing left to do but collect the resultant “frass” for use as fuel.

Even Now I Can Taste It

Please, dear, take me away. Surf me to your virtually secret beach. I want to be churned into butter. I want it to be less distressing than I had expected.

On the pristine shore, some hundred yards down and well out of earshot, a white dog buries a whole bleached skeleton. Some women have stamped down some brush—put more simply, we remain in their debt.

Staring out into the vast seas, as we often lately do, we think of their sacrifices. The surf churns the sand and the whitecapped waves together. It all looks a lot like refried beans and sour cream, the levers of an ancient yearning.

II - Unwitting Subjects

The Future of Our Malls

Over the summer, I'm just going to lie here eating maize. In the dewy light of dawn, try and find us a spot where we might stack the cobs. There, look, down at the foot of an osprey's nesting tower—and I can see the osprey now—and our associate supervisor, in her cocoon!

Without the traffic runoff from a well-attended anchor store, the shelves of the smaller fronts have gone barren. Any number of predatory birds pick at their talons in the dark alcoves, greedy for moon-rocks at closeout prices. I begged you never to invest in that luxury rubbish.

Right Where You Left It

A little bit every day adds up to a big bit. But if you can't keep a sprig of rosemary green, how are you going to learn to get your wife off? Some things, like garbage pickup—*those buckets are still out there! Listlessly brimming with brackish nectar!*—are simply beyond your control. Neighborhood authorities have started to mutter about the smell. And the rat complaints ... at least it's something for the luses at the bar to whinge on that isn't the airline racket.

On days like this, when the snow is getting gray, and every drink tastes watered-down, I'd trade my good boots for a shot at the big time.

Almost All Fog is Soft & Odorless

With a lot of passion, and the right attitude,
anyone can be the grand view of Castle Crag State Park
from historic U.S. Highway 99.

Sea Cramps

Two quilts rise independently like wax paper to blot out the smog. They leave behind a “quail text” for future archaeologists—wretched and indecipherable, full of cheap shot. If life begins at forty, well, I’m barely a couple of cramps. It bothers me that the smallest commercially available serving is still so large—there’s nobody left on this planet to give it away to. People ought to be with people; don’t let the allergies drive you downstairs. One of these rubberneckers could be the one you’ve been waiting for. Even babies know stuff like this (intuitively).

International Incident

Watch as this barren, uninhabited knoll is given a name for no reason. There's nothing to say about it besides the question of if it's ice, or if it's just covered in ice. Why should a knobbly little thing with long years of loneliness ahead be bearing the name The Isle of Hart, the name of some decades-gone cartographer?

Irene Hart was teased in her youth for her ears. They looked like oysters taking a final breath. She never really felt like she "showed them," but at least, in the end, she was laid to rest on this hump in the strait that bears her name.

The Monarch

So the guy with the worst eyesight in the world breaks a bottle of champagne, but not because of his eyesight; rather, in protest, which would have been a stretch for anyone to predict—especially anyone at this party.

I hear CIA mind-wipes really blow out the coordination (But seriously, one more crack about the Agency and they'll probably have to send in some married man to tape my face together).

So that's like, when your ride ditches, and you have to crash in nothing but your filthy running shoes. It can really whip you into shape. I know it made me feel like I was all muscle. Making great time.

III - Bottle Fed

(secrets of longevity revealed)

i.

Sleeping like a bat was the key. It's not
as if anyone would ever pay for this wretched breakfast.
You'd have to be a sap to get caught
struggling to distinguish the real baby
lambs from a huckster's forgery, what
ought to be fleecy children of the world.
Note the gentle resistance of her gums, Nurse,
her refusal to boil live lobsters.

ii.

All the pharaohs disinterred and forced to work as receptionists:
a design for the world that foregrounds its permanence.
Dracula hooks his legs over the beam,
lovingly swaths himself in a Polar fleece night-cowl,
flaunts the big, sly grin of a sibyl.

iii.

Now seas thrum in gobs o'er the bow.
I would like to make an admission to the crew:
once I braved coitus in our little brass bucket

while great balls of fire grinned down, lascivious.

Some bodies can't help but wetten

as tempest swells pummel the seaboard.

This cavern should be perfect —

nobody but the devil could find us here.

IV - First Date With the Godhead

Parties

The children, looking like hors d'oeuvres in their fleece, never change. Still, when they glance across the carpet at each other, their eyes widen: "Will you forsake me, years from now?" Years from now, with our skin thin as crêpe paper, we will recall the turning lanes and escape hatches of our youth. "Remember escape hatches, and turning lanes?" we will ask to the air, for lack of each other.

I Can't Help But Feel Strung Up

Now, this was all still the era of hair creams, but I was getting so close. I think it's bad, this ID photo. I look like a tongue. I look like a smudge on a bumper. The acid companies have been complaining that my new hair idea could be turned inward and used to produce new compounds on the cheap (but with untested consequences for the public). They say that it's a perfect gap for smuggling. Nobody will talk about how effectively it protects against dry rot. Or how it discourages theft, not just of the hair, but of everything. Or that distinct smell ...

By Gum it Put Them On the Map

Can there *be* a difference between a Chickasaw Plum and a Cloud-9 Dogwood? See, this time of year, they both seem like hardy raw obelisks, caked in frost. But as the trees bloom and engreen, the space of their discrimination too blooms between them—prime real estate, the target of bidding wars (perhaps the future site of a resort hotel?).

Once, in this modest place, there were no tinkering dweebs. Now heirs arrive in droves, waving claims to birthright—and terse, cocksure legislators honk at the tip of each twig.

Brothers & Sisters Inside Sleeve

Hell, I'm happy to spend my morning just alphabetizing the cremains. Let's breathe, and assume the dread architectural stance, bent out yogically. Come on, you gorillas! Our veins clench and unclench 'til we can accept the cuff meter readout and finally kick back with a lite beer. I have to ask—is that an anatomical text, or am I just desperate to see you? The way the polluted peach-light gleams off your soggy curls: you're the Tasmanian Globster! Or else just jetsam bobbing up against the pier. Nothing's perfect, not like when our parents were in school. Back then, everybody slept on cots, it was always late August, and each teenager was funnier than the last.

Through to the Guts Inside

In my days alongside the mynah bird, we'd scour around ski trails for lost souls kicking in tree wells—hopeless casualties, potential fresh meat on ice. It seemed to make a terrible impression on the rest of the losers. But we'd stay up, picking out quarry, 'til our eyes ached from the torchlight.

The pair of us didn't seem like much—but to look past our boggy carriage, our bland tone, and the enamel opacity of our cataracts was to gaze into sleep itself, the door through which in unison all sufferers must pass.

Suds Worship

In the end, it hit me
coiled 'round its little tusk

And I found myself
downed at the mercy of a specialist.

As usual, He
will be picking up the bill.

Oh, what halo! What tranquilizing
fortitude! Like a camel,

Junking it a thousand miles
in one afternoon,

Pausing only to leer at
the prickly pear in bloom.

V - A Covey of Pubhands

The Stephens Island Wren

The island towers a thousand feet over the ocean, and is capped by six limestone pillars. For centuries, it was a deserter's enclave. Now, with the advent of satellite mapping, the light has begun to go out.

In the end, the Stephens Island wren was wiped out entirely by one beast. She was a complicated machine who argued constantly. No wonder she slept alone.

Prime Mover

Is it a swan, bleating sympathy? Does it look with you outward at the horizon, brow knit, letting it all hang out? Wipe away the traces of a prime mover, and the room goes silent—though the howls and chirps are frightening, imagine how unearthly their absence would be. Without the prime mover, eggs will naturally lie hot and solo, over time becoming solid, while the floorboards creak like rusty old skulkers climbing a hill.

It Can't Hurt

How is an aspirin a day like free online dating? These are actual thirteen-year-olds suffering from an addiction to a synthetic “legal weed.” Remember when you and I were those queerly precocious young people bantering away on the big screen? We haven’t seen each other since you left for your wild life among the slug chef sororities. Sometimes I wonder if these will ever be the dear old days of yore—or are we just setting ourselves up to be condensed into an incomprehensible lode? Could vegans really be saving the world, one bite at a time? Sometimes, when I don’t know the answer, I just pick something and try to sound convinced.

Slag

Won't you please
think of the blueprints
lost in the shelling?

Gone and thousands
of volumes, hand-
selected. Soot, she says.

Once the village scourge,
you never hear about
soot any longer.

The rules have changed, now
what resources remain
remain to be squandered.

So extend your trunks,
like Hannibal's blustery friend-group,
astray in the slipstream.

I think I know
whither I've vanished.

Some of the Crossing Tower of Durham Cathedral

Examining the nest, it seems we can instead see the disassembled pieces of the crossing tower of Durham Cathedral. Is it possible we're looking at the work of the ivory-billed woodpecker, heaven's precious yeti?

It cannot be examined directly—as we approach, the nest and its cargo of trembling eggs slip off to be some of the crossing tower of Durham Cathedral, fogging as if in a moor or dream, appearing elsewhere, closed to visitors, ruined by a fear of certainty in a habitat since heavily logged, to become a tangle of gone or not, bedded down in shreds of sandstone, some relics of St. Cuthbert, and the remains of the Venerable Bede.

VI - Wet Naps

Big DNA

Big DNA contacts me indirectly, which pretty much flies right in the face of those directed acyclic graph patterns that they say are supposed to be foolproof. Come to think of it, things like braces have been around forever. Your silhouette is like a UFO on the side of the house: “Baby, I won’t forget you,” it seems to say. I keep expecting to get green-screened onto a surf shop or helicopter night footage of central Chicago. It’s going to make me sick with guilt.

A Real Heartbreaker

I was waiting there, long, lonely, and layered in dirt. Our lithium skull shone in the afternoon lablight. Swamp gas rose and fell in its yeasty bellow. It said out loud, “chump bested my time up ‘til now by investing in strength of character.” Suddenly, our lithium skull rose in multiflora for our sake. I’m not going to go into detail here, but it was really beautiful, and scoured out the cobwebs as it went.

On My Being the First to Go

i.

Yes, in my city, an attempted crime is taken more seriously than a crime carried out. I was tossed in the brazen bull and my screams were roasted into a select blend of Turkish and American incenses. And there I remain to this day, a scatter and dusting in the cast paunch of its belly. Eventually, they will fish me out for scrimshaw or sacred rites—but for now, what I wouldn't give for a sunset and some Ovaltine.

ii.

In the last moments before they lit me up, I remember wishing that I had posed for more photographs. I remember the white-robed arithmeticians, packed around tablets, muttering on about optimum heat, dogs squirming in alleys, good records to get ripped to, and when to eat a fern. Then this feeling—like an fat-bottomed mountie in my chest—ripened up at the cackle of igniting tinder.

Delinquent Units

Not even love on a cold, cold morning can compare to a thing so Cro-Magnon and yet so impeccably teal. In the incandescent glow of charity, maybe we're not the ruins we say we are, yes, and maybe there's something sweeter than honey in this next salvaged valise. As usual, the finer the reward, the more complex the lock—nothing in this one but a rat's withered casing! When I was young, and all the luggage in the world belonged to me, I just naturally assumed I could read lips. Now, I'm just happy to have lips.

Obit

Nobody can be sure what happened, except the one reclusive hill ogress who bothered to take minutes. Now she spends her time brooding over a coiled and sticky past. I guess she's got the same dad as me (or something), but when we'd stand together in a room, we were any two sea monkeys among millions.

I haven't tried to contact her since the incident, but historians have. I doubt they'll find her. She's somewhere between the funny pages and a fold-out confessional bed, lying to her supporters and drifting further and further away from posterity.

To the Futility Goddess:

I'm tired of sitting and rotting in the lush delta loam.
Consequences are impossible to unknow, as if a fine
imperfection you've suddenly noticed in the haunches of a
crystal ball. I shouldn't have laughed when they said I was
wasting my time with those Satanists. Who knew one
groundswell would foul everything up?

VII - Murmuration

Soap, maybe,
but
I'd bank
that

your
halo'
s
ruined

Dad dismisses
all psycho-
analytical
diagnosis as crass

I'll stay
in bed,

make some
calls

Profile of your
beloved:

The fine
cartilaginousness
of a relaxed
mind

For
eyes, try
poppyseeds

A lone signal
will suffice:
android
head nod

In what
world

would chains
dangling

in the
guest house

be a good
idea?

You'd wave
lavish
from history's
greatest beds

while megalith
pack mules
wheeze
at the breach

Stick it all
the
way
in the
bog

So I
think out
the cadaver's mouth
grows a bouquet

The millionaires
couldn't
be here tonight

they're at
the gate,

getting out of
their
wet clothes

as is
their due

Nothing of
value ever peed
on the beach

worms gone,
bodies just
piling up

thousands
and thousands
of crickets

you've ruined
this fabulous
apartment

The vapor
routinely
keeps to itself,

phoning
in moo shu
orders as
desired

The advice
it offers:
“keep
those quills
up, teen
idol.”

Wobbling on
the bluff
a pioneer darn
sucked up inna hoon-horn

some non-event
seriously
considers sleeping
through it.

VIII - Lain Out in Flopsweat

Retiarius

To be the ratty leather sloughed off an old shoe, or to appear to be that tatter—this deposit rots away in quiet hopes. It lies dormant in that hateful wave radiating across the business table, wipes the smirk from your face before you can rise. Laugh at what it has cost you, snakeskin dewy torn on each blade, like blood on a sword or a tiny standard waving from the summit. Laugh at how hard it is to beckon me down; I will never swing low, I will serve myself first helpings, and spear myself pearl onions, one on each little tine.

Through the Polluted Night

A little shut-eye is as sweet as it gets, but too many have been smothered in these absolutely perfect blankets. If you need to slip around in my blood a little, I promise you'll kick off the sort of tragicomic tableau toads like us can only dream of. Everything here drifts by so slowly.

I admit I know nothing about you, but still I'd chop these last years off my life to ride some broad, weathered back across the bog. The best part is just before the coast hits, when the horizon is a muscled haunch with the odor of hot stones. With astounding strength, it echoes our devotion.

Need to Eat

Oh, burger in the sky, what is love? Mostly a lot of heavy breathing. Did you know that in some cultures, eggs are for lunch? Here in the so-called information age, any friend you have could turn coat at the slightest XML fuckup, and when they put a knife in your back, well, that's just carting home leftovers. These days, either you jam a pin in the sky, or get ready to fade from history. We're each just one more wriggling worm to salt before somebody can punch out. Personally, I'd kill for crab legs.

19.99

Whenever I forget my phone at home, I pretend the year is 1999, and I am practically anyone, and I'll do anything to protect my gems. If it takes acting like a spoiled child in a quiet bistro, so be it. I'd put my own citizens up as collateral against foreign debt before I'd let some hoser lay a hand on my stash. Fabulous rubies, emeralds, sapphires, diamonds, and more. One thing that takes a while to realize is that some people are too giving, which is funny.

The Tally-Hunters

With arms wide and hearts keen we awaited the appearance of the great auk—though some would go pale from the scrapes on her face and the spurs on her boots. She came in complaining that the police in this city have overstepped the boundaries of orthodox love (“gone rogue”). Whether the spurs were for shimmying a coconut palm, or else what else, she never gave her admirers the warmth they felt they were owed. Some candles were lit, and the auk presented with apt gifts of powder and grog. The room they’d assembled was so snug, and the auk so reticent, some hosts were heard grumbling later: “Surely we deserve more gratitude.”

Unclear on the Concept

Allegations of a media psy-ops attack generate buckets of fan mail addressed to the accused, who has asked preemptively for a final dish of jellied orange rind. It all seems like a classic case of, “the floor was dirty/ so I washed it.” Many Americans find your walk nauseating, that surge and stagger like Frankenstein’s bowling team. O, take this generous hand and sway no more.

Pheromone Trap

I have a 350-year-old tumor which forces me to play out its fantasies of religious devotion. It has a life of its own, and a sister back home it calls to check in on. To be deep beneath the badlands, to be a fossil buried like overstock dynamite, is to be as invested as this tumor is in its fantasy. Its thing is kind of a 'style over substance.' Does that make sense? It originally came from rural Iowa and always wanted to be a tumor.

I'm gonna enroll you in a new school and see how you fit in, throw you up a fir tree and tickle you 'til your sides split. No, no need for a spotter, the tumor will be in control the whole time. Okay, so put a slug where your idea should be, and think as hard as you can. You should be able to feel it way up in your anus. Congratulations, that's the effect we were after. You've wooed them with your scent.

IX - Golden Float

Resource Allocation

Hmmmm. Not quite what we had in mind: healing too sluggishly, dripping with sweat. But while you're in line for the lice check, try and stay busy with this red rubber ball. One of our agents has seared into its surface a set of unproven mathematical conceits. We'd hoped some undiscovered whiz kids might sink their considerable fangs into it, but the line's been choked with whatever disappointments have clawed their way in through the servants' entrance—and I don't need to tell you how sorry we are that the Device gathers dust in its scabbard.

When did we get down to our last movie star? Someone really should have jotted down that genetic code.

Westerly

An ebb and flow would be one thing, but these spiritual roadies just hunker down in a long wane and ride it past cactus out into the red setting sun. Where sensitive ferns swoon gently on the line, barbs are yearning for that wide open soft spot.

Superstitious and bone drenched, off indefinitely on good behavior—oh, just to know how many decent dumps you have left in your life! A parrot, stuffed to the chest with wristwatches, perched vainglorious on the mast—and all of it built of lashed bamboo.

So why am I frontin', you wonder? Why aren't I one of those tight-bunned types with necks like saran wrap stretched around ship's rigging? One of the roadies unhitches herself and considers the curls of one shoot of curly-dock. The dried winter weeds are abundant here, and stand in for death.

Preserves

You want to get fresh? Then climb in a freezer bag with the last rube to holler at me from a launch tower. Age yourselves together in-cask for 28 weeks. Then cook this mixture on mount, pressed 'twixt hot irons, in the old heirloom style of our brute and amphibious ancestors. In their day, they'd call pretty much everything "the forbidden experiment."

I can see all the way to the ending from here: my mother and your mother develop Alzheimer's. They found their own nursing home and forget they had anything to do with it. They become prisoners in their own castle as the nurses dupe them for all they're worth.

Social Control

The choice of white tulips, like a bad auto accident or a man named Lindsey, is startling despite its timelessness. I've heard that the *screwdriver* cocktail was pioneered by roustabouts out on the job, but what grade of pulp were they into? I like to imagine it was "straight from the grove." Whenever I have a few too many *screwdrivers*, I am plagued by the airborne owls of intoxication, squalling and spiraling. Sometimes, I'll skip the temple altogether and pray outside, against the wall or off an embankment. Suburban prudence can be a tough row to hoe.

Dish Or Cup

The Holy Grail is paddling, rueful, in a river of tears. “I’m not some unfortunate music video,” it insists. “You can trust in any stunts that you see on my show.”

But it had sat in the tower too long, and still believed in the transformative forces of light. One teen bather helped another, who was having some trouble with her prosthetic arm. “The Grail’s problem,” they told reporters, “is, I mean, is it a dish—or is it a cup?”

Frenching

Two ears max on each earthen head, and black cavities twinkle where lightning has split the brow. Surely the world's oldest effigies should get together more, foster historic friendships, pen weighty stacks of correspondence.

No, it wouldn't be much, but I could rig you an elegant hanging hibiscus tub. I could put a little color in your brick façade, pay you the alms you ask for.

The lightning is a directive. It indicates either a time to crow or a time to refrain from crowing.

X - Cast/Crew

Mice've blighted the new loaf/ putrefaction of leaf litter/ crowd crush claims seven/
sourdough for the ogres/ dog dies in punk accident/ flies out the axis/ chickadees
pinioned/ the trembling savannah's grown tired/ news of ophidians loose in Bronx zoo
reaches Valhalla/ hordes shrug/ ox bellow/ girl wizard/ helmet leather/ horizon eastward
creeps/ a yard a year/ the vulture prefers her own plumage/ coin-operated viewing scope/
runs out/ as the bird pitches/ sweet dreams perverted by furnace funk/ wasps' nest claims
awning/ undrinkable scotch claims evening/ chicken nugget power hour/ slept through/
Atlantic meets Pacific at WPXC-FM summer loot giveaway/ prices too low to print/
horsing around claims eyeball/ a chewy no-knead/ muscle from raven/ howler monkeys
claim First Amendment protections/ no wonder the red-shouldered/ and such rejected
mnemonics/ puke me back to the 11th/ century/ intestines/ spooled around coffee cans/
and brains still fresh on the vine/ the swing of your lantern/ easy A/ high-risk feetsies-
transfusion claims child model/ far out/ digital sky replacement/ buy gold you/ mouth-
breather's chestnut/ "smile at anything"/ trussed chicken in cottonseed/ earn Fun Bucks
toward/ renegade paintcan foofaraw/ bonerattlers make good/ smelling us apart/
everything for anybody into his own wine or thinking about it/ some unwashed claim
abduction/ by fire-retardant clods/ exodus to tropicalia/ shitfaced in the foyer/ mysterious
blaze claims obedience school/ bamboo used as lube/ insatiable Gravitron claims time
capsule/ dozens become billions/ billions become a nap/ and construction work offers a
much-needed late-morning migration