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We Might Be Salvaged

Hannah Kroonblawd
Illinois State University, hannah.kroonblawd@cune.org

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HANNAH KROONBLAWD

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We Might Be Salvaged is a dissertation that hinges upon poetic loci of disaster, survival, despair, and hope. The dissertation includes a critical preface, “Beyond Repair,” which contextualizes the central creative work alongside the concerns of the Anthropocene, as well as the collective necessity of environmental justice and disability activism. The creative work, “We Might Be Salvaged,” explores contemporary catastrophes and the lingering hope of an unknown future. The final chapter, “Teaching in the Anthropocene,” provides a pedagogical link through the design of online undergraduate creative writing workshop courses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEYWORDS: Creative writing; Poetry; Anthropocene; Creative writing pedagogy; Online pedagogy

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HANNAH KROONBLAWD

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HANNAH KROONBLAWD

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Duriel E. Harris, Chair

Gabriel Gudding

Ela Przybylo

Sheree Renée Thomas

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CHAPTER I: BEYOND REPAIR: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, DISABILITY ACTIVISM, AND POETICS IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Prelude

This is a project about contemporary poetry in the United States, and it is a project about the revelatory language that surrounds continued human existence in the face of the end of the world. In the convergence of disability activism, environmental justice, and definitions of the Anthropocene, crip activists and scholars question vocabularies of survival, queer Black feminist academics and advocates create archival legacies, and holistic conceptions of embodiment and existence are formed. What kind of poetic work can happen through articulation of an anthropocentric ambivalence, or in writing through the momentum of the twenty-first century, a momentum that can swing wildly between radical hope and immense despair? As poets continue to make poems in the middle of an era labeled the Anthropocene—a human-centric era, at once embodied and disembodied, global and local and hypermediated—what then is the possibility beyond that making?

When I make a poem, I mourn and dream in the same breath. My poem-making is at times excess, at times restraint. The acts of mourning and lamentation acknowledge reality: inequity, injustice, decay. Mourning as a present-tense action reckons with the past and brings that recognition to the present. Dreaming, also present-tense, is located in the present but pushes toward the not-yet, the might-be. Dreaming is not isolated to the solitary body-at-rest, as imagination can occur in both sleep and waking. The dream in tandem with the lamentation is incarnational. To mourn and to dream at once can be heard and seen on the public stage: speeches and eulogies, not to mention social media posts and think pieces. But it is also found in intentionally intimate moments: caring for flowers at a graveside, walking in solidarity at a

protest, or sharing a meal with a newly-arrived neighbor. This kind of linked grief and hope acknowledges that human existence is at once anchored in time and place as well as extended through relationship to one another. The poet, bound by a lifetime but unbound by the act of writing, employs the medium of language to juxtapose and embody past, present, and future.

When I consider the apocalypse of the twenty-first century and my position within it, where am I located as person and poet? I use the apocalypse first in its historical sense, as revelation. While the present-day use of the word focuses on cataclysm and disaster, the original use of the word is the title of Revelation itself. An apocalypse is a revelation, something uncovered and made known. The twenty-first century apocalypse makes evident the need for continual revelation as violence and injustice continue. Police officers kill unarmed Black men across the country—Michael Brown in Ferguson in 2014, George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020, Jayland Walker in Akron in 2022. A violent mob angered by 2020 election results, and spurred on by the then-president, stormed the United States Capitol Building and threatened lawmakers. Societal systems and individual bigotry continue to discriminate against Indigenous peoples, queer and transgender people, and women and people of color. The climate crisis, border walls, the pandemic, the advance of capitalism and the polarization of politics: each of these compounds and complicates the social, fiscal, and political structures that bound and bind lived experience.

I am a middle-class white woman, cis-gender and heterosexual, able-bodied, educated, and traveled. I am an orthodox Christian, a part of a religion that both collapses and complicates my identity, and a belief system that also illuminates how I encounter others and conceive of the larger world. There are so many affordances within my day-to-day navigation of crisis and calm, affordances that are both collective and personal—the way my body moves through spaces

oriented toward and privileging whiteness, my poems' English language that is also the language of global capitalism and colonial power, the Christian God I pray to whose name is also invoked by white supremacists. The money I spend, the body-mind I inhabit. When and where do I encounter oppression, and what do I do when I see it in the world around me? What is its work within and upon my writing?

When I consider the past, the future, and my lived experience in the present, I am drawn to language as my primary mode of navigation, and then making follows. The act of making is generative, what artist Makoto Fujimura calls "New Newness" after the Koinonia Greek word *kainos,* or new creation. "Art taps into this New Newness instinctively," writes Fujimura. "An artist hovers in between what is conventional and what invokes the future" (48). Language allows me to be both maker and museum, creator and curator. Language becomes way-making and way-knowing, an attempt to make sense of existence via the revelatory action of giving voice to thought, idea, and experience. The earliest stories I heard were biblical sagas of creation and destruction via a divine word: the Genesis account of *Creatio ex nihilo*, creation from nothing; a few chapters later, the earth destroyed by a cataclysmic flood, a remnant of creation afloat in the ark. As I grew older, other biblical texts became fixed in my imagination: the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, told to prophesy to a valley of dry bones. He spoke—language as action—and the bones sprang to life. So too, I heard language as action, as embodied, repeated in the first verse of John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." My experience of language is intrinsically tied to a systematic theology of divinity and language as understood within Christian belief, a belief predicated upon the Old and New Testaments as they have been translated and taken up by orthodox Trinitarian Christianity.

This belief and my application of it to language as action is necessary in illuminating my subsequent response to the twenty-first century apocalypse. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus explains his parable-oriented teaching style as an act of revelation: "For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not come to light" (Luke 8.17). My work as a poet and my orientation to the way that language functions is reflective of a revelatory pedagogy. Writing is an intentional decision and a way to reveal, question, and confront both personal and collective experience. It requires an acknowledgement of where my own experience stands apart from the experiences of others, as well as where the work of empathy and compassion can take place.

My body-mind is on its own tangled path through the world—or at least the parts of the world that are open to me, that have opened to me, that I have opened. My currently-able body-mind has had the affordances to teach teenage middle schoolers and adult college students, to live and travel abroad, to mediate adulthood in the Midwest. These affordances come with challenges, but also reckoning: recognizing where systemic oppression has allowed me, but not others, to cross borders without being questioned, walk city streets without being confronted, worship in sacred spaces that are not under attack, fill bookshelves with uncensored books. I am able to spend and expend my life on poetry, on experience shaped into word and line and image. The way I conceive of brokenness and survival, how I imagine the end of all things, the end or not-end of my own body-mind, the limitations of the known, the possibilities of the unknown… All of these layers are a compendium of the first thirty-or-so years of my life and the space my life has taken up. *It was very good*, I learned. I believed, and I continue to believe, in goodness, in truth, in light. And what St. John of the Cross describes as the unknowable dark night, *la noche oscura.*

My poetic tendency, or perhaps more specifically my poetic posture, is to stand in the light and stare down the darkness. I write about sorrow and isolation and guilt not because it is my constant, but because it is *a* constant, past and present and future. I write about the apocalypse because the apocalypse is not mine alone, has never been mine alone. I am not the only one working to make clear what I do not understand. Revelation is not a solitary act, nor is it a static one. No first or last here, no absolute beginning or end, but rather the continued, collective understanding that we exist in a world that is always beginning and always ending. That every moment is both a genesis and a revelation. The moments that bring me the most sorrow—present-day, past, future—the oppression, the abuse, the neglect, the trauma—radiate through me and outward, beyond. And then… what is left? What lies ahead?

I am as confounded by the possibilities of progress as I am captivated by them. I cannot look away. This is what draws me to the Anthropocene, to the klaxon-call of activists, to the stories of those whose lives are not my own. The world spins faster and faster, and more and more warnings sound. This project, poetry and pedagogy's place in my particular sphere, is one way to slow the speed, to pay attention to the warnings, and then to build. To create. To listen and learn and lean into. I fixate upon the earth because I am fixed to it; the order of creation implicates me in its hierarchy, the aftermath of the Fall pulls me into dust. I believe in the God of the Old and New Testaments and a doctrinal interpretation based on the five *solae* of the Protestant Reformation; others hold different beliefs distinct from my own. We all breathe the same polluted air and send our digitized lives into the same sky. My faith-full spirit and my body are inseparable, inseparable, too, from the planet wherein I exist. And there will come a day when I will come to die. The sixteenth-century theologian Martin Luther wrote in his commentary on the book of Genesis that "meanwhile our life is a life in the midst of death"

(263). Death is an ultimate apocalypse: an ultimate revelation. What does my fixation on survival, on human-centered hurtling towards disaster, become when this fixation is equal parts life and death?

I don't have answers—or, rather, the way I would answer leads to more questioning, more learning, more listening. A necessary part of this project is that turn to listen, and in my particular case, listening to the work of queer, Indigenous, Black, and disabled scholars and writers whose lives and work are informed by similar questions but found in different contexts and arriving at different, though not far-off, answers. This is a project of writing, yes, but for me it has become even more so a project of listening—where pedagogy becomes practice, where learning becomes an act of living. The act of apocalypse, the making seen of things not seen, means taking the time and space and energy to uncover hidden things.

Contemporary Ecocriticism, Environmental Justice, and Indigenous Knowledges

The Anthropocene is one avenue for revelation, for uncovering how environmentally-grounded conceptions of the past have influenced understandings of present and future. In his introduction to *The Value of Ecocriticism*, Timothy Clark writes that since its early rise to interdisciplinary spheres in the 1960s, "ecocriticism has become a diverse and vast field, a mix of literary, cultural, political, scientific and activist strands" (15). Ecocriticism, with its myriad branches and hopeful ideals and troubled assertions, is a necessary component of contextualizing the Anthropocene. Clark's text does much work in parsing out the possibilities that ecocriticism affords twenty-first century literature, from prose narratives and material ecocriticism to biocentric poetry and issues of scale. Literary ecocriticism is positioned as both interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary, offering traditional modes of analysis, questions of authorship and audience and context, while also identifying where traditional critique has fallen short.

The history of ecologically-oriented literature in the Western tradition is long—from the oral traditions of creation stories to later forms of pastoral, haiku, and Romantic poetry. Ecocriticism itself, both as a term and as an interdisciplinary academic approach, is a more recent arrival, and it wasn't until 1992 that the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) was founded (*Cambridge Introduction*, 4). Initial ecocritical applications focused on the writing of conservationists and literary works that might be variously defined as "nature writing" but were also wide-ranging in form, content, and context. More recently, ecocritical approaches have continued to complicate and reevaluate definitions of environment and implications of human existence. In half a decade, the very boundaries of "environmental" have shifted, much like the boundaries of "nature writing" itself. "Environmental criticism has moved beyond earlier preoccupations with subjective experience of wild or rural places to increasing considerations of urban environments, collective social situations [...], postcolonial social and political realities, and global threats from pollution and climate change," writes Louise Westling (6). Similarly, Clark writes that "ecocriticism evolved primarily to address local and easily identifiable outrages and injustices [...] while [critics] have been inventing ways to think and act in relation to their national cultures and histories, they seem - like almost everyone else - still a long way short of thinking in the way and on the scale demanded by a truly global issue" (11). This global scale is where the Anthropocene intercedes.

The Anthropocene is defined as the human epoch, an era distinguished by human activity and resulting changes across ecosystems. Modeled after geological epoch labels like the Holocene, the term Anthropocene first appears within *The Biosphere*, a 1926 text by Soviet geochemist Vladimir I. Vernadsky, and it was "used from its very inception as a measure not of geological time but of the *extent* of human impact on the planet" (Chakrabarty 7). The

Anthropocene then gained traction in the early 2000s due to the work of biologist Eugene Stormer and chemist Paul Crutzen. While the applicability of the Anthropocene to the fossil record remains a point of debate among geologists, the term's implications allow for a critical awareness of agency, socio-political complicity, and humanity's embodiment as located on and reliant upon the Earth.

"The Anthropocene, in one telling, is a story about humans," historian Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, notably using a metaphor that lends itself towards the literary capabilities of the framework. "But it is also, in another telling, a story of which humans are only parts, even small parts, and not always in charge" (29). Timothy Clark explains that "one advantage of using 'Anthropocene' more loosely, in relation to the transgression of plural boundaries in the Earth system, is that this keeps in the foreground its plurality, and its contamination of natural systems with cultural and political questions" (22). Erle C. Ellis concurs. "There appears to be a common thread across the Anthropocene's more creative interpretations: the Anthropocene as crisis," writes Ellis. "A crisis of nature, a crisis of humanity, a crisis of meaning, a crisis of knowledge, and above all, a crisis of action. The Anthropocene demands action" (Ellis 143).

To be ecocritical is to wrestle at the junction of the historic and the contemporary, the present-day and the future-oriented. Ecocriticism within the Anthropocene situates literary work within a multiplicity of scalar contexts—the long-game of future survival, the day-to-day of lived presence, the cycles of ongoing systemic and systematic injustice—but it extends that scale outward, critiquing the boundaries that have been drawn up around a human-centric world. Critique, however, might only go so far. In her 2020 book *Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger*, Julie Sze writes that a justice-oriented approach to environmental concerns requires a better understanding of the relationship between social ecologies and extractive capitalism,

whose systemic solutions for a sustainable future increase injustice, particularly racial injustice, rather than alleviate it. “Deregulation/privatization, disposability, and invisibility work together for environmental racism to thrive,” Sze writes as she draws connections between #NoDAPL protests along the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota and responses to the Flint water crisis in Michigan (54). She argues for alternative answers to a death-oriented culture, answers that center “art, pedagogy, freedom, and liberation,” which can be linked together in restorative solidarity (74). Environmental justice “is about love and creation in a moment that fetishizes death and spurns care,” she concludes (102). For Sze, creativity and beauty are not unattainable, abstract ideals, but rather the lynchpins of a future-oriented life working against suffering and towards care.

Indigenous scholars, too, look to unsettle ecocriticism and popularized notions of environmentalism and sustainability. Much of the work of ecocriticism is still tethered to Western thought and the traditional canon and, “despite apparent differences, all Western attitudes toward nature come from the same European philosophical roots, i.e., Descartes, Bacon, and the Enlightenment,” write Raymond Pierotti and Daniel Wildcat (1334). Pierotti and Wildcat’s interdisciplinary work in biology, the environment, and Indigenous knowledge dates back to the mid-1990’s, nearly parallel to the founding of ASLE. They emphasize the importance of recognizing Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) *as* knowledge. TEK involves:

> (1) respect for nonhuman entities as individuals,
>
> (2) the existence of bonds between humans and nonhumans, including incorporation of nonhumans into ethical codes of behavior,
>
> (3) the importance of local places, and

> (4) the recognition of humans as part of the ecological system, rather than as separate from and defining the existence of that system. (Pierotti 1335)

TEK is specific and embodied, unable to be separated from the orientation to and towards *home*, knowledge as it is connected to existence that is localized and practical, rather than mystical or disconnected from place. "To live with the geography and biology of your environment without trying to alter it solely to meet human needs is our concept of what it means to be native to a place," continue Pierotti and Wildcat (1335). "TEK is expressed in the ability to experience a sense of place while casting off the modern Western view that 'space' exists to be conquered" (1335).

In his introduction to the 2013 special issue of *Climactic Change,* Wildcat describes how "Indigenous peoples' awareness of climate change effects and possible adaptation strategies to address those effects are born of practical lifeway exigencies and experiences accumulated over extremely long periods of time in particular places where home is identified with ecosystems and natural environments, not street addresses" (510). Yet TEK cannot be taken up and integrated without a holistic understanding of the situated, relationship-oriented nature of knowledge that "means entirely shifting our current patterns of living in the everyday: it is cumulative and dynamic, adaptive and ancestral, and produced in a collective process that is fundamentally centered on the *way* one relates," as Jaskiran Dhillon writes in her introduction to the 2018 issue of *Environment and Society* (2). "Critical questions need to be asked," continues Dhillon. "How are Indigenous political demands for decolonization taken up within the broader scope of impending planetary dystopia? How might 'environmental justice' work to (re)inscribe hegemonies of settler colonial power by foregrounding settler interests?" (2–3). Dhillon

emphasizes the necessity of Indigenous politics, histories, and ontologies within any environmental justice action.

In her 2013 book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*, biologist Robin Wall Kimmerer provides essay after essay filled with stories of how TEK, understandings of home, and imagination work together toward holistic flourishing. "All flourishing is mutual," is a refrain of Kimmerer's (15), whether she's writing about the maple sugar harvest, her visits with an elderly neighbor, or memories of camping with her parents. Kimmerer's focus is on flourishing close-to-home, emphasizing the way that flourishing can be realized within what might otherwise be considered mundane. Ceremonies, aging, reciprocity, gratitude—she lists a multitude of ways to deepen and enrich understandings of living generously in the world. Her stories encompass taking biology students out into the garden to watch vegetables grow, attempts to clean a backyard pond of algae that lead to discovering microcosmic life-sustaining systems, raising daughters in cultures of gratitude and contentment. "If what we aspire to is justice for all, then let it be justice for all of creation," she writes (116). Her perspective is that of the small-scale daily life (see also Wendell Berry's *Think Little*), where justice is no less important than that found on a planetary scale.

"We should be troubled by the world, and we should seek to trouble it," Sze writes in *Environmental Justice* (98). Apocalypse itself is a troubling, a revelatory unmasking.

Kimmerer's employment of TEK alongside her training of a biologist, her emphasis on the importance of gratitude alongside critical examination is a way of troubling the world and a way towards apocalyptic unveiling. Her work exists, too, within the context of collective trauma and grief related to mass genocide, compounded oppression, and continuing discrimination and racism (Yellow Horse Brave Heart 282–283). The essays in *Braiding Sweetgrass* uncover a way

of seeing the world for what it is: an intricate web of ecological systems, as well as the importance of identifying and naming human activity and influence on the earth, including both trauma and resilience. “How can we begin to move toward ecological and cultural sustainability if we cannot even imagine what the path feels like?” asks Kimmerer in response to her students’ concerns regarding ecological destruction (6). Kimmerer’s method of revelation, informed by Indigenous knowledges and scientific inquiry, is a gentle unveiling of life as it surrounds us—what is, as opposed to what is not.

Disability Justice and Imagined Futures

As Indigenous knowledge provides a holistic approach to revealing environmental crises and positioning humanity not above or against but rather alongside nonhuman flourishing, disability justice advocates also unsettle what it means to be human and a part of humanity, as well as what it means to flourish and envision future flourishing. In *Environmental Justice*, Julie Sze asks “Who gets to live and who is made to die?” in reference to survival and flourishing as an intersectional concern (74). This same question is found within disability justice activism, though with a more specific referent. “What is needed is an ideological shift and political transformation in the service of social change, whereby disability is understood as a productive part of a shared imagined future,” writes Emilia Nielsen in “Chronically Ill, Critically Crip?” Disability justice and environmental justice overlap as future-oriented, imagination-fueled collective action, and both make space for mourning and dreaming. Disability justice activists are not hesitant to use language as a means of making that space.

Patty Berne co-founded and serves as Executive and Artistic Director of Sins Invalid, a disability justice performance project that centralizes the work of artists of color and queer artists with disabilities. In 2015, Berne published a post titled “Disability Justice—a working draft” to

the Sins Invalid website. Much of Berne's work for the past fifteen years has involved what they call a "second wave" of disability rights, pushing back against how

> the disability rights movement simultaneously invisibilized the lives of peoples who lived at intersecting junctures of oppression – disabled people of color, immigrants with disabilities, queers with disabilities, trans and gender non-conforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless, people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who have had their ancestral lands stolen, amongst others. (Berne)

Berne's working draft, later revised for *Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Movement is Our People: A Disability Justice Primer*, outlines the work of Black and Brown, queer and gender non-conforming disabled activists, and identifies ten principles of disability justice. All ten principles are essential to the framework, but three of particular concern here are Recognizing Wholeness, Interdependence, and Collective Liberation.

Scholar and activist Eli Clare was an early collaborator with Berne—he and Berne worked with others to form the Disability Justice Collective in 2005. In his 2017 book *Brilliant Imperfect: Grappling with Cure*, Clare reckons with how principle five, Recognizing Wholeness, is complicated by contemporary understandings of diagnosis, cure, and survival. In dramatizing the personal and historical implications of forced sterilization, definitions of disability that deny membership to the chronically ill, and implications of fear-motivated charity fundraisers, Clare articulates the ambivalence at work in a world that defines value by personhood, and cure by elimination. "I mean that as a widespread ideology centered on eradication, cure always operates in relationship to violence," he writes (28). He later elaborates, "Once a person is deemed not human, then all sorts of violence become acceptable" (118). Definitions of personhood-as-

human, intelligence-as-personhood, ability-as-personhood, then become a weapon—Clare points to Terri Schiavo in a hospital bed in Florida, Carrie Buck in a Virginia mental health institution, and the many whose names label the files of the medical-industrial complex.

But Clare also recognizes that cure tied to wholeness is complex—even as power and privilege is attached to diagnosis and treatment, an anti-cure politic is not the answer for all. He references Susan Wendell, who writes that "some [unhealthy disabled people] very much want to have their bodies cured, not as a substitute for curing ableism, but in addition to it" (61). Clare's own definition of disability shifts over the course of his writing. His understanding of cure, and why someone may desire cure, is expanded as he listens to those who are chronically ill, whose experience as disabled people is as complex and nuanced as anyone else's. "We can shift our focus from cure to access," Clare writes, "or hold the two in tandem, insisting that our present-day body-minds are as important as any vision of the future" (90). As he grapples with cure, Clare grapples with how wholeness and disability have been taken up as mutually exclusive, and how this increases shame and distances the ability to call the body one's home and name the body as one's own.

Clare's work in communicating the contradictions and complexities of disabled experience, as well as the nuances of interdependence, claiming, and care, is echoed by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. In the preface to their 2018 book *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, Piepzna-Samarasinha returns to Patty Berne's work on the principles of disability justice, describing the Sins Invalid Disability Justice post as culture-shaking. Disability justice is intersectional and hinges, like Sze's depiction of environmental justice, on creativity. "Culture makes culture," writes Piepzna-Samarasinha (17). They, too, make the connection between disability justice and environmental justice clear: "Disability justice is to the disability

rights movement what the environmental justice movement is to the mainstream environmental movement" (22). Piepzna-Samarasinha's approach to disability justice differs in style from Clare, though not in intent. *Care Work* is part handbook, part manifesto, and part cheerleader for queer, disabled artists of color. "What if some things aren't fixable?" they ask. "What if some things really never will be the same—and that might not be great, but it might be okay?" (235). Integral to Piepzna-Samarasinha's conception of disability justice is the way in which disability justice centers slowness and sustainability. They ask practical questions that push towards the possibility for mutual aid: "What made it possible for us to receive care? Under what conditions could we be vulnerable?" (56). They also emphasize the importance of dreaming creatively via what sociologist Carl Boggs calls prefigurative politics. "Prefigurative politics," Piepzna-Samarasinha writes, "is a fancy term for the idea of imagining and building the world we want to see now" (149). For Piepzna-Samarasinha, imagination and creativity comes in the form of grassroots organizing, making gallery shows and theater performances that are accessible to all, writing packing lists and travel tips for conferences and tours. "I want us to live," they write. "I mean to survive, and I can't do it alone" (204).

What do I learn from these writers and scholars, who are living not *despite* the perceived brokenness or inadequacy of their physical bodies, but rather at once both *within* and *beyond* the limitations of an ableist society? Within acknowledges the reality of disability and the necessity of collective mutual aid; beyond is enacted in the creative, imaginative work generated in community and change. Within and beyond, too, apply to concepts of time, where future hopes do not supersede the reality of the present or the implications of the past. This sense of time and relationship to others extends outward from the body into the environment, as the environment is where collective action resides as well as where the body finds its location. TEK's fourth

understanding, "the recognition of humans as part of the ecological system, rather than as separate from and defining the existence of that system," is in alignment with disability justice's principle of Interdependence. Disability justice activism holds its tension alongside that identified by Indigenous ecologies, intentionally working to dissolve boundaries and reorient definitions prescribed upon bodies (human and non-human), spaces, and ideas of survival.

Every Day, an Old Apocalypse

In the June 2021 issue of *Harper's Magazine*, short story writer Greg Jackson published an essay titled "Prayer for a Just War: Finding Meaning in the Climate Fight." Jackson had worked on draft after draft of his essay over a stretch of two years. "Like a spinning wheel that becomes a uniform blur, the relentless pace of unfolding catastrophe is turning into a fixed calendar of disaster that in many places will soon become as regular as the seasons," writes Jackson. The emphasis of his essay is on the impetus of *fighting* against climate change, how the terminology of war and battle might be used to spur confrontation of the climate crisis. Jackson positions environmental activism as a "collective shared endeavor" that can unite humanity to take action towards survival, akin to fighting a war. "Every body can be burned by fire, choked by ash, drowned by rising waters, as well as cherished, loved, and kept safe by the will to fight, protect, and survive," he concludes.

In many ways, the argument that Jackson makes here shares many values with Kimmerer, Clare, and Piepzna-Samarasinha. Kimmerer's "All flourishing is mutual" shares the emphasis on the value of every body. And Piepzna-Samarasinha, too, articulates the desire for survival. But what about the fully-disclosed and grappled-with contradiction of Clare's notion of cure, or the slow-sustaining creativity of Piepzna-Samarasinha, or TEK's assertion that humanity does not define the existence of the ecological system? How does Kimmerer's gentle consideration of

gratitude contrast with the rhetoric of battle? In some ways, the language of battle, fight, survive—whether referring to climate change, chronic illness, or otherwise—is so deeply rooted that it is an additional imaginative task to consider the place of generosity, vision, or thanksgiving within the tension brought on by environmental or physical decline. But that imaginative work identifies the gap: how we define survival and flourishing reveals our priorities, our beliefs about worthiness, and our aversion to death and decay. Liberation becomes, rather than a way of life, a way of not-death. What might be collective emancipation is twisted into individually-oriented survival of the fittest. And this individual orientation necessitates non-collective means of flourishing, moving beyond human or environment toward a liberation disconnected from any kind of relational, interconnected life at all.

The 10,000 Year Clock is one such "liberated" entity, which Josh Marcus describes in his essay "Eternity Now!: Jeff Bezos's 10,000-Year Plan." The subject of Marcus's essay is a $42-million dollar, 200-foot-tall clock under construction in the Mohave mountains. The Long Now Foundation's website describes the work of the 10,000 Year Clock: "Like a heart beating while we sleep, the Clock in the mountain keeps time even when we pretend the past did not happen and the future will not come." Jeff Bezos's own website for the clock centers a T.S. Eliot quotation on its homepage:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time. ("Little Gidding")

Marcus wonders at the proposed optimism the builders claim to hold. "The clocks and the [Blue Origin] rockets are spectacular monuments to nothing, built by people who have little to suggest

about improving the future beyond their own centrality in it, and even less to say about the present world order of scarcity and precarity they helped create," Marcus writes. He notes that in 2015 the president of the Long Now Foundation, Stewart Brand, signed onto "An Ecomodernist Manifesto," which argues for "decoupling humankind's material needs from nature" and that technological progress is the way forward (27). Rather than viewing the Anthropocene as an apocalypse, the ecomodernist movement hopes to "achieve a *great* Anthropocene" (31). The Ecomodernist Manifesto does not see humanity as part of the natural world, but rather tangential to or beyond it: "By appreciating, exploring, seeking to understand, and cultivating nature, many people get outside themselves" (25). Technology liberates; the natural world is for enjoyment, rather than use. "It is the continued dependence of humans on natural environments that is the problem for the conservation of nature" and, according to ecomodernism, it is technology that will liberate humanity from that dependence (17).

The lack of human dependence of ecomodernism stands in stark contrast with the liberation of the disability justice and environmental justice movements. Within justice-oriented activism, there is a necessary reliance on other lives—within the mutual aid advocated by Piepzna-Samarasinha, as well as TEK's emphasis on relationships between human and non-human. Interdependence and relationality also involve specific and embodied liberation that recognizes individual identities within the larger collective. This kind of liberation can be found within *The Combahee River Collective Statement*, published in 1977 by the Combahee River Collective. "We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity," write the authors (*How We Get Free* 19). "We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy" (19). The Combahee River Collective

recognized the nuances of oppression, that there are locations where allyship and oppression exist at once, and articulated concerns with and needed accountability regarding white feminists' racism and the beliefs of Lesbian separatism. The Collective wrote: "The inclusiveness of our politics makes us concerned with any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World and working people. We are of course particularly committed to working on those struggles in which race, sex, and class are simultaneous factors in oppression" (26). But in those commitments, there was also a commitment to collective relationships, nonhierarchical and anti-capitalist organization, and a constant re-envisioning of politics and the self in relation to activism and revolution. Liberation returns to a way of *life*.

Petra Kuppers' *Gut Botany*

Gut Botany, Petra Kuppers' 2020 collection published by Wayne State University Press, exists within the spiraling centers of the disabled body and the spaces the body occupies. A queer/crip disability activist and performance artist, Kuppers' collection is both written word and embodied performance. At the start of the sequence titled "Moon Botany," Kuppers includes the description that it is "Armchair botany: my collaborator went on wheelchair-inaccessible nature hikes and brought back found materials for a creative exchange" (42). Kuppers and visual artist Sharon Siskin shared an artist residency cabin, and Siskin would bring back objects found on inaccessible hikes and lay them out on the cabin's table. In "Moon Botany," Kuppers takes up those objects and reexamines them in their remove: gun shells, mice bones, dragonfly husks, and mushroom caps, as well as barbed wire. "Do not walk here, in the land of light stones and ancient wire, / there is no hold fit for the hitching." (43)

This particular sequence is built upon relationships, a disabled body writing as an abled body hikes, the found materials within and without their environmental context of Oregon's high

desert. It also explores how the making of a poem both unsettles and renews as Kuppers contextualizes the way poetry shifts the objects laid out before her. Time and knowing are both unsettled, as the perspective of each poem in the sequence shifts from living thing to nonliving thing and back again, from plant to rock to manmade object. The algae bloom describes how "time alchemies lift / us into multitudes" (47), while the pond deck "wood weeps and uncoils / what it knew when it stood, tall in a wet Redwood forest" (45). There is also an unflinching approach to the unchanging nature of a changing world: "watch the world split, explode, decay, because you can," says the horsetail fern (46). "If your system can't / take transformation, desist" says the algae (47). And then there is the rhubarb, the nonnative species: "No one can understand you" (49).

While the context of this sequence might set the reader up to expect a movement through a particular kind of observational description, the poems instead dismantle what is natural: farm machinery is as much a part of the high desert landscape as the arroyo, bullets and mice bones lie next to each other in a cave, and the rhubarb and the strawberry both drink from the same water table. Another expectation might be a distancing from the landscape, as the materials are distanced from it. But rather than removed, each facet of the botanic is re-placed—reshaped and reinvented, whether through voice or image, and then reencountered. The barbed wire becomes a cautionary tale for a cow but does not *end* in caution:

> if you are a cow, your hooves will puncture and swell
>
> gush bloody puss on the desiccated land
>
> boils explode on the grey cacti, clings onto life,
>
> roots deep in the pores of pumice, treacherous hold (43)

The lines move from warning into living, where the injury becomes another part of the land itself, down to the very rock. The direct address of the horsetail fern, too, moves from accusation to invitation: "I try to stay alive. You plucked me. Puff ball: do you / have no decorum? Wait to swell, stay around a bit" (46). There is an invitation into the lengthened time of *landscape*, one that extends beyond whatever kind of lifecycle might be defined. It is a full depiction of existence, where rock and tree and wire speak to one another, argue with each other, try to understand one another (though, as with the rhubarb, understanding sometimes fails).

The next sequence in the collection, "Craniosacral Rhythms," similarly approaches relationship and landscape, but the location shifts into the body, even as the body becomes land: "Earthquakes everywhere my head / hurts till she touches." Blood and magma are interchangeable, icebergs float through the brainstem, and "we rest here, our plates in thrall with each other" (51). As the body begins to break apart and take on more and more of the earth, "Crystals invade my bones, my joints / calm heat pressures raw nerves," the future is put into question: "What becomes of the writers' cottage on the dry lake rim? / Whose bodies shapeshift protest in nuclear futures?" (56). This sequence is far-reaching, considering Indigenous histories, colonizer legacies, technological advancement, dinosaurs, and all contextualized in the life of a writer. In the final section, there is a rush towards action: "and now it's too much and it hurts and I feel all the pinch all pressure all the all the all the all the leave it and let it and drop this any why. / So I sit down and write, palm tingling with the bark's rough tongue" (64).

The question of survival is unavoidable. Whose survival? And how? In what manner, or state, or substance? Kuppers is constructing a narrative that is intimately aware of a life's position—on land that is not its own, fifteen thousand years after others moved across it. In a later sequence, she writes "I am not spared precarity / in my occupation of Indigenous lands. / I

cannot see the lake the way you root / drum, burn the chitin, an alarm" (72). In the collection's afterword, "Field Notes", Kuppers writes:

> "Gut Botany charts my body/language living on Indigenous land as a white settler and traveler. My writing grounds itself in surrealist and situationist techniques of derive and freewriting: losing myself in land, letting my attention drift as I wheel myself through space, notice how the land heaves, the lines of my wheelchair's glide, how strata of occupation shape urban and rural scenes" (85).

Occupation takes many forms here—how a life moves through the world, how a white settler life is lived out on land taken from Indigenous lives, and the BIPOC lives also taken in pursuit of ownership of that land, how one's attention becomes occupied by the very world it occupies.

I am drawn to Kuppers' work, and *Gut Botany* in particular, because I want to learn from her movement and way of looking at a world that I share with her. I've visited Oregon's high desert, driving east across the Cascade Range. Those outside of the Pacific Northwest might find it strange to reconcile long-ingrained images of Oregon's rain-soaked, fern-covered forests with the other half of the state, long, dry stretches of sagebrush and rock. As Kuppers reshapes and reorients both the *material* of the high desert and her *encounter* with it, through collapsing the body and the landscape as well as the very collapse of the body, I too am reencountering a world I think I know, but will never know in full. It is not a broken world, even as it is a world that is breaking apart. Instead, the breaking is an invitation from one body to another: "Just speak, walk with me, close the loop" (2).

Alexis Pauline Gumbs's *M Archive*

M Archive: After the End of the World is the second book in Alexis Pauline Gumbs' speculative tryptic about the convergence of Black futures and Black ancestry. *Spill: Scenes of*

Black Feminist Fugitivity, the first book in the series, engages with the critical work of Hortense J. Spillers and breaks open the movement of Black feminist activists, scholars, and writers as world-builders living not apart, but in tandem with one another. *M Archive* is a similar simultaneous breaking open and breaking away, this time with M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred.* In the introduction to *Pedagogies of Crossing*, Alexander writes that these particular ways of knowing and learning and growing, centered on the horrors of the slave trade's Atlantic Crossing of the Middle Passage, "disturb and reassemble the inherited divides of Sacred and secular, the embodied and disembodied, for instance, pushing us to take seriously the dimensions of spiritual labor that make the sacred and the disembodied palpably tangible and, therefore, constitutive of the lived experience of millions of women and men in different parts of the world" (7). She continues: "This, then, is the existential message of the Crossing—to apprehend how it might instruct us in the urgent task of configuring new ways of being and knowing and to plot the different metaphysics that are needed to move away from living alterity premised in difference to living intersubjectivity premised in relationality and solidarity" (Alexander 7–8). *M Archive* spins outward from Alexander's work, calling back to it as a textual ancestor while at the same time passing far into a future beyond the earth itself.

Gumbs writes in the introduction to *M Archive* that the book "imagines another form, speculative documentary, which is not *not* ancestrally cowritten but is also written in collaboration with the survivors, the far-into-the-future witnesses to the realities we are making possible or impossible with our present apocalypse" (xi). Each page of *M Archive* contains a piece of and provides a reading of *Pedagogies of Crossing*, resituating the present as the past, the future as the present, and the past as a portent: "she had predicted this. even intended this. so she

taught us to prepare for the incomprehensible in the best way she knew how. the poems" (73). The book is made up of seven sections: the opening section introduces the impetus for a long-distant departure; the middle four archives (dirt, sky, fire, and ocean) recount the memories and lineage of an archivist and her instruction for collective survival; and the final two sections transcend the moment of instruction to move into a not-yet future.

Pedagogies, acts of learning and knowing and remembering and sharing, are central to *M Archive*. These pedagogies become essential to survival, because this apocalypse is shrouded in embodied forgetting and mutilated memory: "the conditions of our bodies were simply reflections of the conditions of our storage units. and the conditions of our rain forests. and so the landfill actually became an ontology. the ontology. / simply put. every piece of the planet was filled with trash. our minds notwithstanding. our bodies included" (46). There is no distinction here, no separation between body and mind and landfill and forest. Those who survive are those who enter into earth, air, fire, water—the individual sections of the archive—who learn from what they find there and then return to the surface. The knowledge is remembered and brought to life by a central *she* who the reader follows through the text. This archivist is attuned to the earth to the point that she hears the vibrations of the earth singing, which leads her into memory: "she felt it. just walking by. so she stopped and pressed her hand to the earth" (66). From her posture on the earth readers follow her into the active construction of existence, from memory into ancestor and history and language, from language into water, from water into birth. Her body becomes the technological hinge of survival, which is embodied memory: "when she sat still and looked at water or a mirror, she could remember. or, to be more precise, she was aware of her function as a technology for remembering. specifically, she activated her body as a connection site for all intergenerational knowing and reveled in the edges of herself" (200). Body as *techne*,

body not just as noun but also verb, as the action of creation and memory-making and revelatory celebration.

This *she* is investigative and iterative, falling into the future even as she examines the remnants of the past. She is creativity and creator, she is archivist and archive itself. Gumbs writes that "this book centers Black life, Black feminist metaphysics, and the theoretical imperative of attending to Black bodies in a way that doesn't seek to prove that Black people are human but instead calls preexisting definitions of the human into question… offer[ing] a possibility of being beyond the human and an invitation into the blackness of what we cannot know from here" (xi). Throughout *M Archive*, the necessity of Black knowledge, ancestors, and memory is reiterated. The question is not *why* (questioning authority) but *how* (because it is not authority, it is life)—how to love, how to remember. Early on in the text, the necessity is made clear: "you can have breathing and the reality of the radical black porousness of love (aka black feminist metaphysics aka us all of us, *us*) or you cannot. there is only both or neither. there is no either or. there is no this or that. there is only all" (7).

The final pedagogical act of the archivist-archive is that of creation: "she imagines electrons sparking (*eji ogbe*, she says, *let there be light*) and she encases them in a wild orbit around atoms (*and let there be darkness, my love*) and she differentiates the molecules (*se to it, see to it*) and sets them all on their tasks. and finally she yawns and screams. / finally she laughs and sings. / *sound the alarm! I am here!*" (211). This is not a biblical *Creatio ex nihlio*, because the world already formed is formed anew, and light and darkness intertwine in atomic naming. Power is not metaphorical here—it is fully realized, life-giving, and remembered. "what could be more real than a person shaping herself in the image of god?" also revolutionizes the definitions of created and creator—collapsing the two into one (178). Not only are the divisions between

earth and humanity dissolved, but also those between god and human. Stories are told over and over again, and the world is seen for what it is, for what it could have been. The presence of the past is overlayed with the possibility of the future. The ravages of history are named—"first we would have to say how they forgot. / they forgot because it was stolen. they forgot because they were stolen. they forgot they were not us. they forgot that they were us. we forgot that they were us"—and then life begins—"we became a people by remembering. / we remembered by becoming a people" (165).

M Archive works differently upon poetic impulse than *Gut Botany*. It is more oracular. "she wanted to be like chlorophyll on a brown planet already too near to sun. she wanted to turn light into food and bright up everyone she knew. had known" (196). The tension here is not the tension of Kuppers' drifting attention, where the prophetic impulse finds itself in *writing*. The archivist's resolution, and resolution as in *resolve*, as in *steadfastly onward*, is in *teaching*—teaching not as a hierarchical, top-down dissemination of information, but as an outpouring, life-giving remembering. This remembering, though storytelling, through movement, through dissolution of borders and grounding in community, through honoring those who've gone before and preparing for those yet to arrive, pushes towards dignity and flourishing. Yet the archivist, too, recognizes the body and spirit and life that moves in the written word: because the audience she is longing for has yet to arrive, she *must* write, and the readers will take up the language and meaning and build from its pieces. "and so I decided to write in salt adhered by tears adhered by spit adhered finally by blood… and the language they derived from it was beautiful. I certainly never could have thought it up" (212).

There is a loosening even in the culmination of the archive: there is no control here, not even in the midst of the precision of language, not even in the clearest gaze or tightest grasp.

Giving the readers and viewers of the archive equal agency in its interpretation means that the archivist's work has come full circle—she is equally part of the archive because she, too, has opened herself to the possibility and promise of the as-of-yet, the not-yet-been. No longer archive and archivist, but one. Presence and reciprocity is both *within* and *beyond* the archive/ist herself—the archive/ist is both herself and what will occur because of her existence. The archive/ist is pedagogy and potential energy. The archive/ist is poetry, as the creation of the archive via written text is a reciprocal creation of meaning and existence.

Coda

In September 2020, the West Coast was on fire. The air was full of smoke, the sky heavy. I saw photograph after photograph of towns that looked like negatives in a red-lit darkroom, all those forests I once hiked through now ember-burned.

The Rocky Mountains were buried beneath their first snowfall, over a foot in some places. A week later, it was ninety degrees and sunny.

There was a new pandemic, there was ongoing racism. Conversations and arguments moved online, protests and grieving into the streets. People continued to die: some in hospital rooms, others at the hands of police officers. In the grip of police officers.

The Chinese government was operating what it calls "re-education camps." The United States government was operating what it calls "processing centers." A fire raged across the Moria refugee camp, Europe's largest, leaving thousands without even a tent for shelter as they waited to be granted asylum.

Every day, a new disaster.

Perhaps the apocalypse is not a bright flash, but rather an ever-lengthening nightfall.

Perhaps the apocalypse is not what is about to happen, but rather what has been happening all along.

What happens when I hold onto the apocalypse?

What happens when I let go?

Friends opened their homes to others who'd fled their own. Friends recommended books to read, seminars to attend, phone calls to make, emails to send. Week after week I met with others in my local congregation who want to learn how to be actively anti-racist; my white friends and I listen to our Black friends described what it is like for them to live in Bloomington, Illinois, where "Black Lives Matter" signs were stolen from their yards, where someone drove a motorcycle through a crowd gathered outside of the courthouse. Every day, another task, another conversation, another effort to lean into suffering rather than ignore it.

I taught my students through my screen, and they saw me through theirs. I taught students at Illinois State University who stayed in the dorms but could not serve themselves food in the cafeteria; I taught students at Illinois Wesleyan who attended classes from their childhood bedrooms. I taught students at Bellevue University who worked long "essential worker" shifts at Wal-Mart, students who supervised their children's at-home learning, students who lost their jobs at Disneyland when amusement parks closed. One of the composition courses I taught was titled "Writing the Future Today." I wondered if we really want to think about, much less write, the future at all.

A friend had been grieving the death of her father for seven years. In a single moment, her world, her future shifted on its axis, and all she wished for was to remain in the past. Another friend had been in transitional mental health care for months and months and months. I was her first visitor in over a year. *What happens when the people we assume will remain with us into*

tomorrow are no longer there? my first friend asked. *Is this a world in which I should remain?* asked the second. My own father's body was an apocalypse in and of itself—unpredictable, unmanageable. The ravages of cancer were sometimes visible, sometimes invisible. There was no promise of healing for him, only consistent assessment and measurement. Only management and consolation; no cure. My father did not label himself as disabled, though he was on disability leave for half of a year. We acclimated to the precarity that resided within his lymphatic system.

"When we rely deeply on other lives, there is an urgency to protect them" writes Robin Wall Kimmerer (177).

"it was the half-blind poets and the beautiful remaining grandmothers who finally taught us to see. to remember. to be," writes Alexis Pauline Gumbs (177).

My own remaining grandmother, 93 years old, spent much of 2020 and 2021 in a single room, mostly alone. On my last visit, before another precautionary lock-down, she pointed to two acrylic paintings on the wall, one of a green-tinged basket of fruit, the other a vase of pink flowers. "Did you know I painted those?" she asked me. I didn't—hadn't heard the story of her community college art classes, though I knew about her love of the Japanese garden there. My grandmother's mind and body were less in tandem with one another than they once had been, but the things she held onto—old hymns she could sing by heart, the artwork she kept on her walls, the faces of her parents she could see more clearly in her memory than she could see my own when I sat in front of her—those are the life-giving archive she returned to. My grandmother's life in the midst of death was not a lesser life. Instead, I became increasingly aware of my own urgency to know her, to rely on her stories and lingering memories, even as she increasingly depended upon the care of those whose names she could not remember.

This relationship, this tie between my grandmother and me, is a tender one, uncertain in its length but precious in its presence. There is an echo of this precarity in my poetic practice, as I learn to let go of the boundaries I draw around myself and my environment in order to better understand language, landscape, and the limits of understanding. Life in the Anthropocene, in the year 2021 or 2022, is mediated by social media feeds and news alerts, consumerism at the touch of a computer key, and the ability to isolate unto the self. There is so much to wade through—images, paragraphs, plastics, bones—that tenderness so often seems an impossible task. But tenderness isn't a task at all, but rather a way of being. Tenderness, in life and in poetics, involves recognizing that there is a time to mourn and a time to rejoice. Tenderness comes in the ability to not harden oneself one way or the other, but to exist both within and beyond mourning and rejoicing.

This kind of tender poetics allows me to explore language of and between dreaming and mourning. Poetry can exist within and beyond the impulse to despair what has been and is. It can promote with urgency the celebration of what has been and is. Poetry allows for the dreaming and the mourning to collide in the *could be*. The poems in *We Might Be Salvaged*, which follows this preface, begins in a consideration of the stories we tell ourselves that in turn shape what we believe to be true. There are cosmos-large creation myths ("Almanac, Early Evening"), repeated genealogies ("Invocation to Simeon of Trier in the Aftermath"), childhood bedtime stories ("At the Psyche Mirror"), world-ending Armageddons ("Maundy Thursday"). These stories fuel the poems' localized dreams: dreams that celebrate love requited ("No Need to Be Cultivated") and mourn love unrequited ("These Hidden Things"), dreams of self-discovery ("It Was So Near the End") and self-denial ("Littered with Beautiful Buildings"). And by the final sequence, there is still grief, and there is still glory ("I Turn to Grief Again").

The initial impulse of this dissertation is to mourn—and sometimes it might appear to exist there alone. Pointing to the tangible position of grief—within and/or beyond the body, the planet, the spirit—comes naturally to me. The overlay of dreaming, the location of perseverance and possibility… this is more difficult for me to allow. There is a certain amount of postmodern conditioning that precludes joy. When I pull myself apart, when I lay bare the world, what am I to find? And yet—Reliance upon. Remembering of. Weaving into. In order to let joy enter, I need to relax my grip. Like the archive/ist, I have to let life be (Gumbs 205).

Joy, too, comes from the act of making. In Hebrew, *avodah*—sacrifice, worship, agriculture. Growth. In the reading and research I've done for this project, I've listened to the ways that joy grows from embodiment and spirituality, including prescribed confines of a wheelchair or disease, including lives stolen from their own dignity, including the complex reality of life in the midst of death. I've learned from Alexis Pauline Gumbs' communal archive of queer Black feminist futures, and from Petra Kuppers as she documents an individually embodied relationship to her partner's hikes—different ways of enacting creative making as life-giving and necessary. There is an unending capacity for learning, within the grateful recognition of the openness of those who are creating the living archive, those who are living to teach.

The pandemic, too, has necessitated a revised vision of joy. When capacity for relational connectedness extrinsically shifts (decreasing, decreasing, decreasing), so too does my own capacity for creativity. And so, again, the return to intentional relationality *beyond* and *within*, the letting go of expected conclusions and anticipated ends. The incarnational reality of existence that extends beyond myself into others, into other-ness. The extension of the spirit into the poem, where I am and am not, where I speak and do not speak. The spirit hovering over the surface of

the deep. The necessity of care work, the necessity of listening. The return to the body, all of its tenderness, bruise and blossom.

To allow the poem to enter into the work of the world, the world as it is and was, the world as it could be, means relaxing my grip upon it. Relaxing into my humanity, both within and beyond it. The Anthropocene is a mad rush, a tightening spiral, but the intervention of poetry—written and remembering—allows for life to enter in again. Like the archive/ist, like the botanist: to take the world and the word and make something out of the ruins, out of the remains—and let it be beautiful. Let it be joy.

CHAPTER II: WE MIGHT BE SALVAGED

i.

This Recent Transition

we are told the world will end in drought in flood sky yellowing from the smoke that leaps over the border wall we thought the thing we feared most had a heartbeat but we were wrong now every Sunday we pray to the fields

I am unable to sleep throw off the sheets open the windows to better hear the absence of moths they've started tossing seed into Lake Michigan Lake Ohio Lake Illinois the first man I ever loved looks out over the water and turns his back

no wonder this world holds so much worry every road we've built has buckled every house askew from its foundation even what we harvest we throw into the fire the prairie creeps toward us the bison and antelope we last to be created first to go

Almanac, Early Evening

God named the first country *War*, and the last.
We have the habit of saying God did this to us
and have come to believe it is true.

The sea rolls back to reveal a desert, sand
scattered with twine-wrapped anchors,
this backlit dream:

I am spinning in circles in the citrus orchard,
watching my father's shadow collect moon drop
grapes from the vineyard.

The stars turn sour orange and the moon pushes
through a winepress and my father becomes a man
of sorrows.

Outside of the dream there has been another
execution. I stop reading the weather reports.
It begins to rain.

I Won’t Speak of My Leaving to Anyone

This fall, no frost on the fields—how long is the line
between departure and arrival? In the south, the sky

flourishes as if there is another dimension of the heart,
one tended to without being pared back or pruned, branches

tracing a rib-vault ceiling. Even north and south don’t mean
what they once did, when you could tape a map to the wall

and count each latitude. Instead, a constant tilt either toward
or away from springtime, snow’s sudden vanish into the earth.

interlude: after the fallout arrived

hands

do not protect against fall out

avoid touching

if possible

if possible

wear a mask

children

continue to practice

keep a distance

of at least six feet

people who are not

your household

reunite later

when it is safe

to exit

identify

who can afford it

Invocation to Simeon of Trier in the Aftermath

My father's voice the synagogue and mine the palace basilica—
I've carried God from one country to another, from bimah to apse.

No wonder I feel a stranger in the vineyard, columned gate turned hollow
church turned gate again. Simeon, I want to learn how to flood the first floor

of the house. To build a ladder and descend the wide curve of the Moselle
until my skirts are heavy with amber, until my mouth fills with appled wine.

I do not know if the God I pray to is the God who hears me and yet
I understand the humming sigh of the paddlewheel as it contemplates

the riverbank. Every man I thought to love has been consumed
by his own breathing. Simeon, I dream I am flying above this city,

plumes of smoke flowering above slate-sloped hills. I know the sheen
of the ground I've covered—kerosene, planned for, ready to burn.

Port of Call

twelve armored trucks are parked in the stadium across the harbor the smog-caked sky fashioned from the same cardboard as the oiled sea the children of the city cover their faces and press their hands into the soft ground of cement rivers

in the newspapers, the city remains the city that I love: every so often a clear day, the slow slope of the mountains kite-flying across the water lilies bookstores, pineapple trucks listening for the melody of the high-speed trains

I've carried this outline across the ocean I left the city I love and learned to love other cities other exhaust pipe tunnels, bricked-over doorways the young family who bought the house across the street and replaced the roof

tonight they're painting the walls the lamps have no shades and the windows no curtains, so when I walk past at dusk it's as though the first city followed me here block after block of wax paper light

The Crumbling Sacred Canopy

Hollow month, October
like paint, blight-bright

magnolia trees. Afterglow.
my wrist. This is how

in spirals and in the looking
leaves, columbine flowers.

memoirs. Hymnal pages
Here was a church,

moon a mouth,
yellow looping

Steady hum in the wires
the world ends:

glass a crying child.
Even the sanctuary is

floating in the air
a steeple, all the tombs

radiation peeling from walls
in slow circles around

I've used to strangle
snakeskin draining

I pray to her for mint
giving up its teatime

like goose feathers.
emptying their pockets.

The Last Days of Pompeii

sailboats handkerchiefs along the shore fog lifting off oil painting a horse

flaring still life or landscape rivers so still they might be walls

it is enough blue and brown picture it

shipwreck rubble the future pieces together

on the sand a parasol digging for clams directions to morning

the edges of the river haven't fishermen far enough

no one can make out anyone else's face just swathes of light

crossing the water unable to move

interlude: radiation

radiation

the whole body

the correct angles

is painless

tired

trouble breathing

the heart

memory

temporary blindness

be inside

before the fallout arrives

lie face down

you will have ten minutes

At the Psyche Mirror

the music room ceiling is first to catch fire citrus wood and ivory splitting in two if I cut my hands I can catch each yellow diamond falling from the hedgerow my mother taught me to paint my face with linseed oil to melt delicately so as to keep my skin from being scraped away after the music room then the cinnamon tree the olive grove the wheat fields my father told me that we mistook a star for the devil that God looks less like an angel and more like a man still when I lift the lantern I can see his carnelian wings the grass-green glow of foxfire in the undergrowth in the morning there is no place to go but into the river two coins under my tongue as if I will return to a different home to the portrait room that has yet to fade

Shallow Enough to Stand In

Midsummer we come back to our bodies
hesitating along the canal, old wall of the lock
washed with bellflowers. Enough greenery

that it must be before the war, before the river
catches fire. A person does not drown but decays
and even the foliage knows better than to drink

from the shallows. *Haven't you heard the stories
about this river?* I ask, but he kneels down despite
the warnings and I don't try to stop him. The vows

we make are easy to break. When he stands again
a slick of oil glimmers on the surface. I'm curious.
Of all the places to return to, it's the one that burns.

Alone in the Garden of Hesperides

As another evening comes swinging
through the larch trees, I close my
eyes and turn my face. I know how
well this wood will burn. How bright
the flames. When I was a child, home

was just another cathedral. Tile floor
and a god on the mantel. See how I
am civilized. See my cultivation—
I must be kept out-of-doors, I must
hide my making. Do not pity what

was once my sadness. Even this
muffled timbre is another voice
crying out. I am always pruning
back, pulling at the bark the way
I would an orange peel. Ice-cold,

a vision rests against the nape of my neck.
Tomorrow already deadwood, an arrow's
hollowed stem, the featherlight weight
of the chalice against the mouth—fever
forever following at the feet of the Lord.

interlude: the disease

immediately obvious

pattern

illness

symptom

listen

follow

contact

cover

layers of cotton

wear a face

yourself

wash yourself

avoid crowds

yourself

do not share

yourself

No Need to Be Cultivated

The last man I ever loved was a man of the desert, all brittlebush and quartz.
Daylight illuminated the barren beauty of his body and I loved him

because he was not the flood. He was not the drowning field of my thirtieth
summer or the typhoon sky of my twenty-fourth fall. I'd had enough

of water and sorrow, had fled to the south in search of dry heat and solitude.
But there I found a man who rubbed my skin raw, who traveled

across my spine in shifting circles. He touched my hair like I was not on fire.
I held onto him like he was not a drought. There was little comfort

in each other but there was the whirlwind. The saltation. When the world lit up
that farthest day, the taste of the air was the taste of his mouth.

Creed, Cradle, Cry

The forests of the country of one of the many men
I loved are burning. I mean I loved the forests. I mean
the men are burning. I mean the forests and the country
and the men and the burning are all different versions

of the same doubt. Notice that the action always belongs
to me. *I loved*. *I say. I do not know. I take. I pray.*
I mean so many different things but only write this:
still, the land is burning and the man I once loved

or perhaps didn't love is unable to breathe. The ferns
smoking like a bonfire at Easter Vigil, fronds curling
towards their own hearts, the lightning sky cracked open.
That country aflame and this country ready to eat itself.

I know that my country is the one place left in the world
where we ask ourselves the same questions again and again:
How unusual are the fires? How dangerous are they?
Is this different? Is this more of the same? The newspaper

can tell me what caused the smoke over the city but not
what happened to the man I once loved or why both
this country and that one give so much over to prayer
even when we say all of the last of our faith is gone.

It Was So Near the End

the night she found the body,
a tangle of milkweed and moss.

All the soft parts of her
tuned Sonata in E Minor.

A silver flute tarnishing in its case,
the spit-slick hardwood.

On the last day,
at the sound of the trumpet—

but there was no sound.
There was no anthem, no cry,

no shining brass doorknob
grasping for a new sky.

Only the summer brushfires,
the lonely bright-burned sun.

Only the fight with love in the house of prayer.

A Lengthy List of Empires

the porcelain peak of the urban wild

jade hill gleaming palatial just past the gates

if we stretch our arms we might touch paradise

god knew this— giving ground its gavel

grafting tree to earth and man to his labor

leaving us alone to learn fidelity

from the blood of a child in a field

and then the precipice the vast expanse

wandering with the wild things we carry

a shadowed statue on a lesser mountain

the only presence of god we can bear

***

Shipping crates stacked like blocks

and along the bay

the long snakeskin

of an abandoned beach. Skyline holding

the appearance of democracy.

Sovereignty

and *shopping malls* and *storm clouds.*

PVC-boned party tent

moored

in the sand and

upon the rocks

a watchtower.

***

Lagoon turned land turned lot turned factory turned Starbucks

turned photograph turned memory turned story turned the night

a man followed her down the sidewalk trying to touch her hair.

***

For ten dollars, we took a bus
across the border we were told
was not a border.

In the darkness
the streetlights flamed into a row
of long-limbed matches.

***

Do I miss you, my aching cobblestones,

my glass-curtain frame?

Each morning

stood sentry, concrete island loosening

within a treeline typhoon.

Old heaven.

Impeccable facade.

Balcony shearing off,

straight drop to the reservoir, late summer

tenderness warm on my neck.

Do I miss you?

Come and see

how I meet every evening

caught in bauhinia lace.

***

Oh city,

my mother,

my difficult passage.

***

The earth broke open and out of the earth

a chord a strand of pearls a lime tree

out of the earth a thickening of the air.

I lay down on the fault line on the clearcut blade

of the forest morning light papering the karst hills

and in the east a grotto in want of an oracle.

Warm-chambered body I might abandon you here

with the limestone and oilfields so-certain caverns

all your veins and pockets all your coalmines.

Away from the skyscraper sprawl the curved spoon

of the harbor a window casement fissures open

and from within the halting call of a whippoorwill.

Land/Grave

wheel spinning over the land
wheel outside of the mind, in the air

spiked oil running through streambeds
oil overflowing the graveyard

Saint Catherine on fire, Saint Catherine
a ghost with myrrh pouring from her hands

wine mixing in a silver casket, drink
or do not drink, lifted to the lips

or brushed across a panel, anointing
the forehead in a shower of sparks

looking for a tree, looking for a burial
a place for the body, grave, gallows

bones hinging open, stars inside flaming
only seen in the shape of their breaking

interlude: hot

extreme heat

can lead to death

community

a false sense of comfort

libraries

shopping malls

windows

insulation

if you are unable to afford

costs

never leave

go

use

less

don't wear a mask

if using a mask

pulse

pains

pulse

last

Our Perilous Futures

She walks into the valley of vision
where grain has never grown.

The mountains slope like carillon bells
and on the edge of the sky the coalfield

blooms a thundercloud. She tastes sulfur
in the air, firedamp waiting for flame.

She wraps her hands in gauze. In the city,
people stand on the rooftops and drink

too-new wine. They build caskets and lie
down next to them to sleep. She waits

for the careful kindling of dawn, the long
sigh of cirrus clouds. *Where I die, I will*

die, she knows. *The body is a vessel*
intent on wandering, and I have

carried it here. The valley of vision
sinks beneath its own anticipated ache.

As If I Could Abandon This Body

Into the countryside of torment I carried
a tire iron. I carried an open jar brimming

with pencil lead, with cancelled stamps,
newspaper clippings—obituaries, opinions,

advertisements for always-in-season avocados
(two-for-one), tender curls of unspooling thread.

Two thousand miles someone carried these
and I thought it was I—skin pulled back,

the moment after every soft-fleshed death.
An autopsy, a reckoning, unrecognizable

account. What I thought my face was not.
What my hand held was another hand.

Littered with Beautiful Buildings

To lay down your gloves you will need
someone else to untie the laces and unwind
bloodied lengths of gauze. You left your scale

and compass on the desk for such a time as this—
laying out curling sheaves of tracing paper, watching
for the right time to plant the fields with winter wheat.

You'll relearn to seed the ground, shallow and slow.
Knuckles scraping across each page. City at rest
against city, each green meadow small skiff, adrift.

You are not the first to leave the boxing ring's soft
ground for the charting of a changeable world.
There was a man who built church after church

from concrete and hollow, an iron cross rising
up from a night-cold lake. He saw a panel of light
and suspended the rock to frame it. If you choose

to hold the soul, you also hold its quiet chambers,
its damp curve. The Church of Light, the Church
on the Water—long after the next meltdown,

the next collapse, someone will dig into the earth
and they will see how the land took the heart of God
into its mouth and held it there, gently. They'll stand

within the walls you lay in such a way that they
have no need of a door, the threshold always open
for those in search of both blessing and breath.

Another Dream About My Father

In this dream my father is not God but he is
caught in a rainstorm as he crosses the desert

and then he is on a mountain and can see all the way
to the ocean with rain covering his skin in islands

and leaving small scars on the back of his hands
also he is barefoot in this dream like a prophet

so trees grow from his heart in groves of pine
and cedar and willow and rivers pour down

from his eyes and my father in this dream
is the rainstorm and in this dream he knows

which way is the way out of the wilderness.

ii.

No Need to Look Back

Let's build things for war, says the government, as if in a parable Christ might have told.
A different plant, not soybeans or corn but guncotton—granular, sometimes, or coiled in spools.
Four-month war and then victory and then abandonment, fairytale towers at dusk. Same old
story: crumbled bricks, smokestack trees hued iron in winter. Children climb through broken
windows, briars writing red across skin. I drive slowly down the highway and phantoms
rise out of the earth. And we tear them down and tear them down and tear them down.

interlude: overflow

onto land

failing

slowly

no warning

sweep away

stay

stay

move

stay

do not walk

stay

stay

safe

asthma

and/or

immune suppression

children

snakes and other animals

power

can

charge the water

Apologia Upon Arrival

We've learned to send power across the river along with our voices.
Reach your hands in deep enough and you'll come back with a handful

of shells, once-forgotten bodies. Begotten, not made. So tight a grasp
you won't recognize death in your palms, a surface pearled smooth.

What can we say about this necklace in a glass case: the remains
of a body's disease, an intrusion, an injury? The river is wider here.

We are unable to remember our own beginnings. When our loudest
voices reach you, they will arrive in a strand taut to its breaking.

Maundy Thursday

in the library they are dropping bombs desert deserted

sky clear over my head windows blowing out my heart

on one side of the world my lungs looking out on a field of flowers

a gun springtime shaking or gone they said it would not rain

but the lake falls into the sky the children learning to read

they watch the clouds the sun pushing down they cannot breathe

in the library someone is screaming *mother* *oh mother*

will you wash the ashes away *mother* *where are my feet*

Listen When I Tell You to Listen

Your mouth is only your mouth when you are silent. Your mouth is only your mouth when you are able to lift your hands to cover it. If you could move maybe your mouth would be your mouth but as it is you cannot

Your ears are still your ears but you wish you could cut them from your head. Malchus in the garden. Peter with a sword. Except here it is

and he does not love you enough to remove you from your body. No one to lift a hand to the side of your head where the blood would be if you had any blood left within you. Not even you. Not even

There are no hands here. No mouths. The story you hear is the kind of story you were told as a child to keep you from wandering off. No one wanders now because there is nowhere to go.

Someone somewhere has blood pouring down the right side of their face. Dripping onto the leaves. If you had any feeling left you might feel

but what good is fire

already burned?

Oh, My Heart, My Little Faith

Once upon a time I believed in preservation.
I believed in the future progressive: there will be

children, there will be an aquarium, there will be
the stingray's cautious angelic flight. But this world

is both progressive and imperfect: there has been fighting
and we are still at war. We have been preparing for the end

and there are still rumors of salvation. We have been
cutting into the earth and we are still unable to forgive

ourselves for our own survival. Today is still present.
I do not want to make any new predictions except these—

at the last day, the aquarium walls will slide apart, the stingrays
will make for the sea, all of the children will begin to return

from wherever the buses have taken them. By the last day,
I will have heard absolution two thousand and six hundred times,

and I will have been absolved of my sin, and, still, I will sin.

Abecedarian for Visiting Hours at the Time of the Apocalypse

Alcatraz was named for the foolish birds racing
over its rocks. Every bomb test after the war—

Bikini Atoll, world at a crossroads, the ranking
of disaster unrecognizable below sea-level.

Chernobyl's Red Forest buried in a shallow grave.
Ashes, ashes. See also: our ongoing obsession with

death row, fifteen years between this sentence
and its execution. Knowing we will die, we make

Ellis Island another stop on the tour, careful to avoid
the tuberculosis lingering in the long wards. We freeze

Fukushima to keep it from seeping into our skin.
Each island is a solitary act of containment—

Greenland's canyon hidden beneath a sheet
of ice. What space remains for sightlines?

Hiroshima leveled inefficiently, experts said.
As if it wasn't enough. Before the battle broke,

Iwo Jima was *Operation Detachment*, an attempt
to remove the war from the body. But watch as

Jerusalem wraps the Western Wall around
its four-chambered heart, as faces stare from

Kensington Palace but do not address the gathered
crowd. What makes a kingdom? A capitol, a war?

Los Alamos at dawn, the ground scattered
with wild roses and western bluebirds. On

Midway Island, each albatross becomes half-
debris. The children map missile flight times,

North Korea to our living rooms, doomsday
clock the size of the sun, yet we continue to think

Oak Island a treasure trove. Like the man
who planted six thousand silver coins in soft soil,

Pompeii was preserved precisely because we
left it alone. But now, decay. The inward turn as

Quantico's pretend village is painted over
and the agents lose all sense of language.

Rikers Island closed down, too, and someone
offers up a prayer of thanksgiving. Farther off,

someone on deployment begs to go home.
Indefinite, this tenure through the apocalypse.

Three Mile Island a multiplicity of failures
and a mimic of our dependency upon the whole.

Universal Studios had an ark of its own,
flood plans and evacuation routes, because even

Versailles survived the Revolution. What we
have built, and what we haven't, will outlive us.

Wake Island is not as isolated as imagined to be,
sacred birds continuing to land on the launch site.

Xinjiang like Auschwitz like Manzanar like
Ursula, bespoke torture. Our race to the finish:

Yanaba the last coastline between the open sea
and the shuttered sky. And one final flood through

Zion, the noticeable lack of an epilogue,
our vision narrowing to a single narrow stream.

interlude: power plants

in a contained environment

accidents are possible

living near

the country

emergency

loses strength quickly

help a neighbor

who may

or not

return home

only

keep

covered

Doctrines of ————

————*Creation*

We teach the history of our unmaking. We build museums to preserve the decline. See the degree of the angled line: how it took no time at all to cede the ground we stood on once we realized it was sinking. How easily we gave ourselves over to destruction. We pretend we were not present but the photographs cannot lie. Our own faces reflected back in the mirrors. See: conservatories, planetariums, missile silos. See also: *succès de scandale.*

————*Man*

Of course we were brutelike. Of course we were intellectuals. Play the reel in reverse; annotate the sequence of events: the bruised man on the ground, as though asleep—the bruised man lifting himself towards the whole man's fist—the whole man's arm pulling back toward his side—the face of the other whole man, not yet bruised—the two whole men, indistinguishable—rewind—replay—rewind.

———*Conversion*

On the other hand, I love flyover country. I love unplanted fields. The sky that lifts its single eyelid to reveal a clouded cornea, satellite spindles in a thickening void.

And the angel said unto me, "Write."

The hill outside of the city that carries the refuse, a chambered cairn. I like to go into the earth and sit with all of the bones, the comfort of our polypropylene longevity.

The living hinge. Plastic's excellent fatigue.

Every day I awaken to the understanding that though God knows we might be, must be, salvaged, he prepared the new earth in a place we cannot find.

And I said unto the angel, "I cannot see."

Every day the dark.

————*Good Works*

quality assurance of the autoclave pressure cooker explosion ting-ing *ting ting ting* across this suburban horizon -tal clavicle cantilever chord in A minor compulsory education to prevent child labor unless in case of except for and in addition to the hawthorn and bramble birdcage around the bocage florist and jeweler and chocolatier our men on the golf course but even the sprinkler system has disengaged and the hotel bar is full again tonight we dance with headless mannequins from the bridal boutique we drink beer out in the parking lot toss Styrofoam into the ocean the two things we remember from history class one: dredging the estuary two: lining caskets with torn pages of paperback romances and as the world flattens into a single runway we hold our counterfeit tickets as tightly as we can

————*Sunday*

today the light of the world is razed to the ground
today is the day called that of the grain-burning
vine-tearing evening anticipation & blue laws

a mustang herd racing across the Pryor Range
invasive species feral not wild exotic
not native & the children continue to die

there is no way to precisely determine nativity
no way to precisely determine the magnitude
of predominant loss compassion passed over

ἴσος means equal but not in English wrong
language wrong civilization how can we
continue to lay claim when we have forgotten

the name of the first king of Athens *Cecrops*
Κέκροψ the only definition of native I know
his name born from the earth itself of two natures:

a double citizen man & monster self & soil
desert marigold & pink primrose this sunset
calling the canyon larkspur a probable poison

————*the Millennium*

the second visible coming is heralded by a flash of light and then
the advent of the stump grinder,

the men of the city in their too-brilliant
tees, water jugs strapped to the sides of the white trucks sent to save us.

we hear the low heft of the chainsaw humming inside our throats
as the branches thrash themselves into dust.

seventy-five years, maybe,
to grow, one second to fall. one minute to dissolve beneath our tongues,

chalk dust and almost sweet. it takes darkness for the neighborhood
to walk into the street. the sky stripped

of all those stars we know died long ago
and then finally our own. the leaves still green on the trees. water still

reflecting whatever stands above it. we lift ourselves one by one
so we too can feel the surge,

the arc gap leap. if this is truly the end
we'd rather think of it as the beginning. first light, then tree, then man.

The End of Human Flourishing

We have decided to give up the earth, the myth of its perfection.
In the cool of the day, among the trees of the garden, we go
walking as if we still hope to be smaller versions of a larger god.

But the day is not cool and there are no trees in the garden and our
souls start smoking in the gravel pits where we last abandoned them.
Notice how we've always managed to avoid the mines and coal shafts.

What is this we have done? My face begins to peel back in long scrolls,
lacework trailing behind like a veil. Dragonflies land on my brothers'
shoulders. The garment of my father's skin hangs loosely on the cage

of his body. I do not know where to look for my mother. The ground
from which we have been taken does not want to take us back. If this
is the kind of city we've built ourselves, no wonder. No wonder.

These Days in the Developed World

Not a single river through the anguished province, only long fragments
of lake lining the road toward the glassworks. A man stands at the gate
and names each ghost. There has always been a furnace here, always a man
bent on establishing his dominion. Finery is to bloomery as furnace is to flame.

To touch molten glass is to touch three thousand years of ice. Controlled
burn, polished production. The skylight falls and the house fills with smoke.
We imagined escape would come in forsaking the ground's hard tug, but now
we crawl into the same earth we were taken from, the same earth we took.

The last lake is varnished silver, iron reeds flocking its shoreline. Oil-sick,
we step in without knowing how far to go. Someone told us that death feels
like walking, or waking. But not the truth—the wild nightfall, the uneasy curl
of sleep. We, who made every hour day, forgetting there was such a thing as dark.

interlude: pandemic

new

new

keep a distance

between yourself and people

stay

non-living

safe

virtual

safe

non-perishable

stay

digital

safe

exposed

safe

stay

information

safe

discrimination

stay

future

safe

stay

freedom

safe

stay

These Hidden Things

This love for this city where I loved
you, where I left you among the ruins
and florescence and slow-sinking tarmac.

There, in that far-off gleaming, will you
touch my wrist? Will I kiss your face,
a holiness we didn't allow ourselves

here? I sometimes dream of you, the skyway
over the boulevard. Air conditioning tender
on my skin. Holy Spirit, comforter. The way

I remember typhoon wind, metro-glow mirage.
It was the flood, it was theophany, winging
over the deepest parts of me. Even darkness

might be as light. In that someday unveiling,
forgive me. When I reach for your hand, it will
be to make certain we've left all else behind.

iii.

Since You Have Come This Far

Last night I dreamed that fire flew
down from the east and when I woke
the sun had lit the snow aflame.

After living alone for so long,
the sky became another prophet,
the snow another burning bush.

Soon the embers died down
into white ash—and then you
came over the hills. I did not pray

for your arrival but I should have
guessed that God would send
a messenger. Tell me. How many

wars, how many children, how many
new stars have you named?
You ask what I will do when you go

as if my life continues to change.
But I will do what I've always done:
hunt for deer, re-caulk the house,

erase all reminders of you. I'll pray
that when you come again
in five or seven years

you will have nothing new
to say and that I will still be
here to welcome you.

I, the last believer.

The Body, Highly Susceptible to Infection

how lonely sits the city
of skin turned stone

streetlights coupling
strange-celled paths

evening undiminished
still highways

across the interior
we have forgotten

once laden with people
& glass anatomy

blooms of light
multiplying & then

this vast sight
even without us

resting between
spire & fault line

morning silence an overcoat
blueprinted & serene

to blooms of light
extinct

uncalculated: highways
carrying our illness

the blood & the body
always lie on the same map

Coral and Other Collectibles

cold water catching against piano keys harmonic sent down to agitate

the bone china silence of the sea bell-like and murmuring

over the water a quiet-voiced sea eagle lifts up its head

and listens to a village resting on the interior of the tide

where fish are laid out to dry around the soccer pitch gray skin

sharpening in the morning saltstorms this the last inhabited island

the sun just a name we gave the brightest light we could see

On Our Inability to Measure the Universe

We've strung silence
between the trees.

We've given ourselves over
to this partial hollowness,

an arrangement of windows
we are not allowed to touch.

There is more to light than light:
when struck by lightning,

the white oak does not burn.
The sky is not beautiful

enough, so we build new eyes,
metal and glass, to see the colors

we should not be able to see.
Someone decides to divide

the observatory from the cathedral.
We plan to die after we coax silver

slivers of the sky into our hands.
From plane windows, we will see

how the fire-bombs pressed
the houses into seashells

emptied of curtains and carpets.
Still, it will not be enough.

Let the Bird Go into the Open Country

Every new day is a new risk, a possible end. The panic-built
hospital wards stretch out across the gravel lot like block letters,
a child learning to write her name. Bars over the windows
to keep whatever it is we keep within, every breath dust-dry.

Beyond the apartment buildings, a river and a man climbing
down to wash the mud from his eyes. On the opposite bank,
a solitary deer leaning down to drink. The river curves around
them both, man and deer, and continues onward past the hospitals,

the barracks, the slaughterhouses, shipping crates and freight cars
and highway tollbooths. If we follow the river, keep climbing past
the headwaters, forget any borderlines we've ever drawn, all the wars
half-finished, we'll find the people once sent out to find anything

unknown, untouched. *Unclean*, we'll call out, our skin red and boiling.
Unclean. Their eyes will follow us as we pass in a wide arc, how our eyes
once followed any gentle, careful creature, even as we would lift the gun
with two hands, knowing just how the branch of the shoulder shatters.

More Oranges than Anywhere Else

This fall we fill the fields with smudge pots—our last attempt to save
the citrus trees. This winter we fill the air with smoke, the river

with dams. It is our final turn through the seasons, the paddlewheel
ghosting across the water, the children waving. In the overgrowth

we've lit a thousand small fires. I've learned to pronounce the word
desiccation as if it is a luxury, this ability to see the earth cracked open.

Just when we think we've found a new sapling, tiny hope, we lose it
in the smokescreen. On the other side of the mountains, a windmill

picks up speed. The poets stop calling us *human.* They refer to their
children as *real objects*. Real objects have a better likelihood of surviving

the apocalypse, they tell us. Somewhere in Brazil, the first orange tree
is also the last—no one there to cut one branch and graft it to another flaming.

Orange, we find, is the most real color. The most real fruit. One girl still knows
enough of the past to tell a story: King Louis XIV, a thousand trees in their boxes,

the false spring. If we close our eyes, we can see the fortress of ferns and palms,
air so clear it must be peacetime, or if not peacetime then at least a remainder of it.

What Is Significant Is Significant

because the world is dying I make needless lists and bring them to the saints and the saints tell me that they learned to live without lists *but how*, I ask them, *did you survive?* and the saints tell me that they did not outlive the world

and they remind me that all I've done is try to outlive the world

and how foolish it is, that yearning

the world is dying and the saints can see its ending more clearly than I and I take the last candle to the saints and light it a single votive before the bye-altar of the saints at the end of the world and I ask the saints to pray for me

I have no more lists to give them I have run out of love for the dying world for trees and windows and cocktail glasses and velvet all those things I claimed to care for but could not save did not try to save

and one of the saints reaches down and touches my face

Perpetua, I say and she, too, is weeping

Saint Juliana the Vessel, the Tapestry

By the end of my first life, my father
was not my father. He couldn't follow me
into the cool water of the cistern well, where
I washed my hair three times and came
back glowing with oil. My father's only gift
to me was a husband the mirror of himself.
He held an iron to my skin and burned away
my face. He cut off my head. *Behold what*
manner of love this father has given unto me.

_____

By the end of my second life, I'd learned to hide
a knife against my skin. Even to church,
golden-walled city of sinners. It was so cold
the winter they cut off my hands and feet,
my body thrown into the current. Then, in April,
I arrived along the shore of a village that wrapped
me in goldwork. They named me *thaumaturge*
after the first miracle, the child who touched
my embroidery and was given back her sight.

interlude: space weather

sudden bursts of

intelligence gathering

and Northern Lights

Cuba and Hawaii

both

ground-based

cascading

loss

if there's room

make a family

keep a key

throw out

hours

doubt

appearance

if you are not sure

take its temperature

The Goddess Aurora, Solar Cycle 10

If you look carefully you can see their shadows on the wall, these ghosts
I've come to accept—

anticipate, even, the way they coolly linger. They, too, have removed themselves
from the earth. I don't remember any hesitation, any desire to decline. I don't believe

in missed opportunities. Even if it was a mistake, I went into the storm, communication systems
failing, Armageddon at our doorstep. We knew the end of the world

would be spectacular but no one predicted this: *A scene of almost unspeakable beauty, one color
fading away only to give place to another (if possible) more beautiful than the last*

*and always curling round, leaving a clear strip of sky, quiet streets of the city resting
under this strange light.* And I, hurtling towards the center of the magnetic field,

a window cut into the curved aluminum above my head so I might witness the cleaving
of the universe. The ghosts crowded behind me, gazes fixed like mine

at the Earth engulfed in a green flaming. After a time, I lie down and prepare for another day.
I wait for the moment just before sleep, when you lose

your balance, when you fall.

Therese, Lift Up Thine Eyes

Repeat for us the word we've gotten wrong,
apocalypse, the uncertain passage. Point us
toward the gravel-lipped lake, where we
can practice skipping stones, burning
bedsheets along the shore. We'll leave
the icons on the wall. We'll walk along
the road looking for blackberries, hear
the trumpet winding its way above the walls.
Summertime, always storming, every dry
place a sign. We don't need to ask God
again. We'll keep looking for the lake.

Sister, not-my-own.

My sister's house leans against the sharpest edge
of the softening end of the world.

My sister sits on the softest ground
before a sharpening mirror

counting the sparrow feathers caught beneath
her nails, nesting in her hands.

Outside, the cool light of a rusted sea,
barbed wire cutting across the sweetness.

Sister, not-my-sister, not-my-mirror.
Sister, my dearest end.

The Thousand Bowls of Samothrace

This is the only way for you to see me,
winged possibility, beloved but
dust in my mouth.

It was summer when we unearthed
the sacred grove, the portico
and theatre. But today

I stand alone in the quarry. No ship,
no fire. Instead of a winepress,
a stepping stone.

Softening light, cut me for the temple,
chisel against my mouth.
Pull back the veil.

Lord, to be a wineskin in your storehouse.
You know I'm about to be
poured out. I know

the water within me will soon taste sweet—
that because of my hollows,
I have my uses.

interlude: well-being

if assistance is available

document all your damages

health

home

injuries

death

stabilize

the disaster

washed out

contaminated

broken

poisonous

do not enter your damaged home

send us vulnerability reports

we will attempt to confirm the existence of the vulnerability to you

Things We Call Barren

This flatness, this frozen ground, this sky
devoid of clouds. The long stretch of empty

pews and bar tops, their quiet. One-stop-light
town, consolidated school, drought-dried

river. Desert. Mountain. Sea. See,
we are not alone in our sorrow.

Even the trees meet December
by tearing their garments,

snow falling like ash on our hair.

The Soul, Fastened to the Body

eternity in the downward pull this constant gravity the speed of the waterfall
taped to my wrist human error shrapneled & quarantined & alone

forgive me this adventure this solitary portrait *girl on plane* *girl on island*
girl on the second terrace purgatory in bright midafternoon sun light I loved

in my ears the cathedral on fire cracking my eyes sewn with barbed wire
the only green I remember a church forest in the desert the sand a coral sea

& out of the earth the trumpet the grasping of hands the raising up
each face ablaze each day-lit flame a windblown fruiting

Shelter in the Afterlife

A long siren winds around
the electric wires of this city.
The tranquil bodies laid out
beneath the florescent lights,
between the checkout counters.
Piles of shoes in the streets.

So quiet, the dollhouse of this world
and its furnishings. Its afterlife.
Walking through untouched rooms
and the only sound the sound
of that coiling siren. Every echo
another station of the cross.

Glass Harp Song

Love, I am standing at the rim of the canyon.
Each morning brings me here, to this scar
that runs the length of your thigh. My country
has sliced you open. There will be no return
to the cedar beams of our first home along
the river. This net that laces skin to skin—
if I close my eyes, I see the shape of the knife.
Love, I married you long before I could see
how our faces would appear at the end
of the world: layer of rust, bottle, bone.

Vespers in the Absence of the Sky

Evening lifts and this land is all things:
shadow of smoke, sweetness of calamity.

You of the unspeakable drought,
leave us in this night built for dancing.

Even if lightning kills the cities
and we wander in a wasteland

you will pour out a drifting
of lavender and paintbrush

to comfort us, to pull
the veil from our face.

interlude: unplanned

in natural areas

like forests

grasslands or prairies

but also communities

free of leaves

closed off from outside air

you may have

children

it is best

to shelter with them

to bring

if possible

if trapped

lights

to help rescuers find you

The Future We Call Tomorrow

In the future we call Tomorrow
morning light streams through
like a pained kindness.

The well has gone dry like every
bright July we can remember,
like every oblong August, forgotten.

Our children ask for the fairytale
where lightning strikes the field
and the fountain leaps up

from the ground like a deer,
like a heartbeat, and the children
with their silver eyes

cup their hands into small bowls
and listen to the only ocean
we've saved ourselves.

Again, we tell this story.

Again.

The Lord Planted a Garden

The Lord said that there might be
the slightest of slender stalks, softest
petal, tender root. That the ground
is a place to begin and to end. That
not everything need be visible, that,
perhaps, there is even more we cannot
see. How else does the world continue
its swift passage? Why else seed the sky
with stars? Somewhere there is a hand
and an eye and a mouth. When we speak,
it's but an echo. Singing, the ground cracks
open. All the earth—all the growing and all
the still and all the sleeping things. If we
but turn to look at the path we've woven,
maybe we'd also see the bright way before.

This Earth a Lightning Jar

Lily of the valley, lingering bells
tingling against the scorched ground.
Never the same place twice, though
all I've longed for is a return. Firefly
after firefly sky filled with sparrows.

There is a flash along the ridge—
the foxfire a single stream of light.
Seraphim and Catherine wheels
in the air, justice splintered open
and washing out the highway

between mountains. In my heart,
the syncopation of sunrise, always
mistaking that light for another more
glorious, meaning that this flickering
vision will always stay in sight.

The Evidence of Things Unseen

invisible birds & invisible trees
when there is no other enemy
but our increasing frailty

we hide birds & trees between
each conclusion marked down
laid out in stained glass

the stories of the saints
close enough to touch &
not quite vanished

the way the body learns to fight itself
within cinderblock walls
falling branches & beating wings

encyclopedia pages, skin-thin
with overlapping lines in lead
the way we used to teach ourselves

passion & pain so holy &
yet so hollowed out that anyone
might stand within them

I Turn to Grief Again

And yet—even in these wraith-filled,
wrath-torn last days of summer, there

is a vine heavy with berries. The close-
stitched hem of an afternoon rain. Deep

in the decay there is a welling up,
a scraping-away, star-bright, sight-light.

There is a thing called dawn. There is
everything that follows after it.

All That Remains of the Ruins of Babylon

we build a factory on the wildlife preserve—freight trains heavy with casement shells & cell phone batteries—& out in the quarry our children lace limestone with dynamite—

farmers plant field after field of goldenrod—the state prison indistinguishable from the football stadium—floodlights—taxes—
all the ways we pay to watch people die—

no one travels to Rome anymore—every country has its Palatine Hill—its future excavation—we are content to become tourists of our own ruin—buried here—
buried here—buried here—

we hear there is a voice in the desert—*the kingdom of God is near*—what kingdom?—we ask—what God?—
when the stars went out the newspapers stopped printing our horoscopes—

how can you expect us to believe the world is coming to its end—we've given the world every opportunity—every chance to leave us—& yet it remains—

& yet—& yet—& yet—

pear trees & persimmons—lilacs—lindens—lichen—lingering algae along the lakeshore—each new day still mostly miracle—dawn—decreasing—

I lift up mine eyes unto the hills—
into the hills—whence—

preserve—preserve—preserve—

thy going out & thy coming in—

Notes

“Invocation to Simeon of Trier in the Aftermath” was inspired by the life of Henriette Pressburg, the mother of Karl Marx.

“interlude: after the fallout arrived” is found text from ready.gov/nuclear-explosion.

“The Last Days of Pompeii” is after Gallery 171 at the Art Institute of Chicago.

“interlude: radiation” is found text from ready.gov/nuclear-explosion and cancer.org/cancer/non-hodgkin-lymphoma/treating/radiation-therapy.

“At the Psyche Mirror” reflects the childhood of Harriet Arbuthnot, a 19th-century English diarist and political hostess. She was a close friend of the first Duke of Wellington.

“interlude: the disease” is found text from ready.gov/bioterrorism.

“Alone in the Garden of Hesperides” references Habakkuk 3.5.

“interlude: hot” is found text from ready.gov/heat.

“interlude: overflow” is found text from ready.gov/floods.

“interlude: power plants” is found text from ready.gov/nuclear-power-plants.

“The Doctrine of Conversion” references Revelation 19.9.

“interlude: pandemic” is found text from ready.gov/pandemic.

“Since You Have Come This Far” was inspired by Agafia Karpovna Lykova, who has lived in the Siberian wilderness her entire life. Her parents fled religious persecution in the 1930s, and the family had no contact with the outside world until 1978. She is the sole surviving member of her family.

“The Body, Highly Susceptible to Infection” references Lamentations 1.1.

“On Our Inability to Measure the Universe” was inspired by the life of Henrietta Swan Leavitt, an American astronomer in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In her work measuring the brightness of stars, she discovered the first way to measure distances to far-off galaxies.

“Saint Juliana the Vessel, the Tapestry” refers to Saint Juliana of Nicomedia and Saint Juliana, Princess of Vyazma.

“interlude: space weather” is found text from ready.gov/space-weather.

“The Goddess Aurora, Solar Cycle 10” includes phrases from the Wikipedia article on the Solar Storm of 1859.

“interlude: well-being” is found text from ready.gov/recovering-disaster and https://www.fema.gov/about/website-information/vulnerability-disclosure-policy.

“interlude: unplanned” is found text from ready.gov/wildfires.

“I Turn to Grief Again” takes its title from Canto IV of Dante’s *Inferno*.

“All That Remains of the Ruins of Babylon” references Psalm 121.

Poems from *We Might Be Salvaged* were first published in *The Journal*, *The Citron Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Small Orange*, *Blue Earth Review*, *Outlook Springs*, *Radar Poetry*, *Ruminate Magazine*, *The National Poetry Review*, *the minnesota review*, and the chapbook *The Leafcutters, the Minor Saints* (PRESS 254, 2021).

CHAPTER III: TEACHING IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: PEDAGOGICAL EXPECTATIONS AND THE ONLINE CREATIVE WRITING COURSE

Introduction

In early 2020, the mass-movement to online instruction necessitated a shift in higher-education pedagogy—practical, theoretical, and environmental. With the COVID-19 pandemic shuttering in-person learning across the United States in mid-March, my own face-to-face courses—two sections of an undergraduate general education literature class at Illinois State University—made the transition from in-person instruction to online-only. Students with little online learning experience completed the final six weeks of the semester online, and I made rushed adjustments to adapt those final weeks of learning for students who were displaced, uncertain, and adjusting to an unanticipated end of their school year.

In some ways, I had much of the scaffolding needed to support my own pedagogical adjustment, while my students did not share the same foundation in their own pedagogical positioning. I had four years of online teaching experience via adjunct positions. I had taken a digital pedagogies course, was familiar with the practical uses of Illinois State University's Sakai-based Learning Management System (LMS), and had a basic understanding of online instructional standards specified by the Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric. My Spring 2020 course was already built into the LMS: assignments were turned in online, readings and videos were grouped into weekly folders, and general information was stored on our course page.

Organization, however, does not indicate pedagogical soundness. And in my own pedagogical training, online instruction itself has often been a footnote—an if-needs-must, haphazardly pieced together via encounters with different LMS platforms at each school I've taught, different supervisors with differing pedagogical concerns, and different students.

Students recognize the variety in pedagogies, as well—a recent conversation with an undergraduate business student centered on the fact that every instructor organizes their online course presence in a different manner. Even within a single LMS at a single institution, each instructor's pedagogical choices remained, and continue to remain, distinct.

As I considered the direction of the pedagogy chapter of this dissertation, I realized that within recent scholarship in creative writing studies, research seldom references how educational technology itself influences digital pedagogies and online instruction. Creative writing studies itself, as a pedagogical sub-field, is a fairly recent entrant into creative writing scholarship at-large. As undergraduate and graduate-level creative writing coursework has become an integral part of English departments in the United States, pedagogy-focused conferences, discussion groups, and texts—whether edited collections or the peer-reviewed *Journal of Creative Writing Studies*—provide resources for creative writing instructors. These conversations and texts move beyond the craft of creative writing and into the analysis of workshop or course-oriented experiences. Some recent books have addressed online creative writing pedagogy. While Michael Dean Clark and Trent Hergenrader's 2015 edited collection *Creative Writing in the Digital Age: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy* addresses digital writing practices—the affordances that technology brings to creative writing itself as an expressive artform—the essays within the text are less focused on digital pedagogies and more focused on digital writing, discussing what is created through technological resources rather than how that creation is addressed within an instructor-led, technology-infused course. More closely tied to my interests in instructional design and course development is Tamara Girardi and Abigail G. Scheg's *Theories and Strategies for Teaching Creative Writing Online*, released in 2021 as a part of the Routledge Studies in Creative Writing Series. That text provides detailed ways that creative

writing instructors are utilizing online modalities to suit the needs of their courses, and it brings to light many questions that current writing instructors are asking. *Theories and Strategies for Teaching Creative Writing Online* will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Over the past two years, from 2020 through 2021 and into 2022, as a majority of university-level creative writing instruction took place online, I imagine that many instructors worked to duplicate in-person workshops in digital spaces—that is my own inclination as well, to use Zoom or another other video conferencing platform as if it is "still" a "real" classroom, without recognizing that it is a real classroom of its own, with different and unique affordances and limitations. This chapter of the dissertation situates the online creative writing course as a distinct location for pedagogical practice, articulates the affordances and limitations of LMS-hosted creative writing workshops, and links these particular digital pedagogies to recent creative writing pedagogy scholarship. I align Quality Matters standards and educational technology research as sites of grounding for online creative writing instruction that is aware of and responsive to localized, student-oriented needs. I also articulate areas where online creative writing pedagogy might learn from Indigenous pedagogies and necessary interventions from accessible Universal Design (UD) practices.

Online Creative Writing Courses and Pedagogical Interventions

In order to understand the 2022 context of online creative writing instruction, it is important to understand its earlier beginnings. Online creative writing courses have existed since the start of online education. In 2002, Marcelle Freiman published "Learning Through Dialogue: Teaching and Assessing Creative Writing Online" in *TEXT: The Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs*. While Macquarie University's WebCT-based course sites sound archaic almost twenty years later, WebCT was a pioneer in web-based educational

technology, and WebCT itself was purchased in 2006 by Blackboard Inc., the developer of Blackboard Learn (more colloquially called Blackboard). In his 2002 essay, Freiman distinguishes between internally-enrolled on-campus students, whose use of WebCT is supplemental to in-person instruction, and external distance students whose entire learning experience is completed online. A unique aspect of the course is that internal and external students have a chance to interact with one another in a main forum, which, Freiman writes, "has had some unexpected results, one of which is to contradict the usual external students' experience of alienation, dislocation, and underachievement."

Freiman focuses on three different affordances of the online workshop: constructivist knowledge building, student-focused learning, and cognitive modeling. "The online workshop provides an environment for active learning in which it is possible to see what students actually do in their learning," he writes, referencing small groups of students who read one another's work and provide written responses in discussion forums. Freiman also articulates the way that time and space is mediated differently in an online setting: "The online context provides a slowed-down, or 'expanded', time structure, together with a clear focus on student learning." This expansion occurs for students, whose responses can take shape over a number of days or weeks, rather than the immediacy of an in-person classroom. It also occurs for instructors, though conversely, as instructors may more quickly identify student concerns through written responses (or their absence). Freiman does recognize socio-economic accessibility issues that arise with online instruction, but does not address how online instruction impacts students whose learning is affected by disability, or the ways that an individual instructor, and not just an LMS-at-large, may accommodate for individual student needs.

Two years after Freiman's article, Heather Beck published "Teaching Creative Writing Online" in a 2004 issue of *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice & Theory of Creative Writing*. Beck's courses, which are situated within Manchester Metropolitan University's online MA in Creative Writing, are also taught within WebCT. While Freiman focuses on the use of discussion boards (which Beck refers to as bulletin boards), Beck also incorporates the chatroom feature for live online seminars, providing synchronous instruction and conversation via written messages. Beck's description of the online course is also indicative of the context of educational technology in the early 2000s, where chatrooms mimicked America Online instant messaging, and students were learning to differentiate the place for personal chatter with that of assigned discussions.

Beck's initial concerns were related to ease-of-use for both instructor and student, feelings of anonymity, and lack of structure. She turned to Gilly Salmon's 2000 book *E-moderating: The Key To Teaching and Learning Online* and Salmon's five-stage model of online course design: Access and Motivation (introducing students to the course design itself), Online Socialization (modeling interaction practices), Information Exchange (ensuring students are following instructions), Knowledge Construction (instructor-student interactions), and Development (providing resources beyond the online course). Salmon's model is an early precursor to more recent instructional design standards like Quality Matters, and Beck finds it useful to have a checklist of steps to work through over the course of a term, as students become more acclimated to online interactions and expectations. Like Freiman, Beck finds online instruction to be student-focused, writing-intensive, and less intimidating. But she also notes that online instruction is time-consuming on the part of the designer, interactions with students can mean less content is covered, and participation levels are difficult to anticipate and/or effectively

mediate. As Beck and Freiman navigate the first iterations of online creative writing courses, they begin to identify the challenges that they see for both instructor and student; they also start to articulate what they see as important components of online creative writing instruction and course organization. Their commentary emphasizes how instruction and student-instructor interaction unfolds in an online setting. Larger-scale concerns regarding accessibility and inclusive, diverse teaching practices are not fully addressed.

What is striking about reading accounts of early online creative writing instruction is that they are not all that different from the narratives of creative writing instructors almost two decades later, though perhaps the prevalence of such narratives has increased to mirror the increase in online instruction. In the recent increase of online instruction, larger-scale concerns of accessibility and inclusivity may also have been lost due to the speed and stress of moving coursework online in, for some instructors and students, less than a week. In Fall 2019, the term before the COVID-19 pandemic shifted much education online, 17.6% of American college students at degree-granting institutions were taking their college coursework exclusively online, and 19.7% were taking at least one, but not all, classes online (NCES.ed.gov). One year later, the total percentage of students enrolled in any kind of distance education course doubled from 37.2% to 72.8%, according to provisional Fall 2020 data gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES.ed.gov). The number of U.S. college faculty teaching online has also increased over time. *Inside Higher Ed*'s "2019 Survey of Faculty Attitudes on Technology" reported that 46% of college faculty surveyed had taught an online course in 2019 (10), and 43% had participated in some kind of professional development about online instructional design (20). Nearly 70% of faculty teaching online taught their courses asynchronously (10). While the quick shift to online instruction caused many challenges, faculty also reported positive pedagogical

outcomes: decreased lecture time, increased active learning techniques, and improvement in pedagogical skills resulting from their online teaching experiences (14). Surveys reporting 2020 or 2021 faculty instructional modalities have not been published at the time of writing, but increases in the number of faculty teaching online courses taught are likely to mirror the number of students taking online courses. To look at the future of higher education is, in no small part, to look at the way that online instruction changes and shapes students, instructors, content, and instruction itself. All English department instructors, not only creative writing instructors, must navigate both the ways that language and literature is taken up and put into practice in online spaces, and also how creative activities and communities form and develop in those same spaces. In addition, there is need for continued reflection on the ways that online instruction too-often replicates and reinforces problematic institutional priorities; silences BIPOC, queer, and other marginalized students; and remains inaccessible for disabled students.

Increasing distance learning enrollments means that more and more people are engaging with online learning environments, and such people are not limited to student and instructor roles. In her contribution to *Theories and Strategies for Teaching Creative Writing Online*, Amy Withrow reflects on the gaps created by differing online teaching philosophies held by faculty, instructional designers, and institutions as they negotiate ever-increasing online enrollment. "It is vitally important that we do not debase this differing of philosophies about online education and what can be taught successfully online and, instead, embrace frank conversations and address the core reasons why such change is challenging," Withrow writes (5). Challenging not only for faculty, but also for students. Withrow continues: "Online education has come a long way since the 1980's, but national data have shown lagging online student success rates compared to face-to-face student success rates" (9). As all stakeholders navigate online learning environments, one

particular difficulty of the current pandemic rises to the forefront: it feels as though there is no time to consider the pedagogical implications of online instruction—not when the move from in-person to online instruction takes place over a month, over a week, over a weekend.

But it is never too late for instructors—creative writing or otherwise—to look at the affects and effects of online course design, instructional techniques, and affordances and constraints of distance learning. And now, two years following the initial frenzied shift online, that reflection is no less important, for the sake of instructor and student alike. Many students, now and moving into future years, may hold a range of beliefs and ideas about what online courses are or should be. Some may think that online instruction is equivalent to in-person instruction, others may prefer online to in-person. Some students might see online classes as easier, while others may struggle. And these opinions simply focus on modality, not taking into account affect, activities, expected outcomes, or the opinions of the instructor of the class. Instructors, too, hold their own set of opinions and beliefs about the capabilities of online courses, the interactions of students in online settings, or the efficacy of their own instructional practices. For instructors long-used to in-person settings, the online course may feel like a complete upheaval of instructional habits and norms.

But this upheaval does not have to be a negative one. An unavoidable shift in instructional practices can shed light on areas of teaching practice that need change. That change might include inclusive accessibility, as Lowenthal et al write in their 2020 article "Creating Accessible and Inclusive Online Learning: Moving Beyond Compliance and Broadening the Discussion." Lowenthal et al argue that "online educators and workplace learning professionals need to begin employing inclusive pedagogical design choices, which are not only about universal design but also about proactively employing empathetic design, while also being

flexible and empathetic with students while a course is being taught" (12). Change might also look like listening to and learning from Indigenous educators like Pamela Toulouse, as Aubrey Hanson and Patricia Danyluk do in "Talking Circles as Indigenous Pedagogy in Online Learning," published in *Teaching and Teacher Education* in 2022. As Hanson and Danyluk describe how talking circles foreground Indigenous pedagogies, they write that "engaging well with Indigenous pedagogy requires learning about and plugging into the broader context of decolonizing and Indigenous education" (3). In considering the priorities, activities, and challenges of online courses, instructors have an opportunity to deepen and develop their own understanding of the way that teaching occurs, the definitions that have been prescribed upon students and instructors themselves, and the complexity of teaching as an act of empathy, engagement, and activism.

Many creative writing instructors are already engaged in reflecting on what the shift to online instruction means for their teaching and for their students. Stephanie Vanderslice, in her reflection after teaching creative writing online for the first time, writes that "there is a great deal already working in the online creative writing classroom, without the bells and whistles, without images and videos or writing a student-centered novel to illustrate the course. Indeed, in some ways the online creative writing classroom is the face-to-face creative writing classroom on steroids" ("Teaching creative writing online without tears," 14). Vanderslice's recognition of the affordances online creative writing courses can offer is echoed by other contributors to *Theories and Strategies for Teaching Creative Writing Online*: Lex Williford compares different software used for teaching editing, Nicole Anae describes Zoom's video-conferencing remediation capabilities, and Lori Ostergaard and Marshal Kitchens describe their approach to asynchronous workshop and feedback expectations. Each of these instructors focuses on a concept of writing

instruction that is emphasized within in-person courses as well, but demonstrates the ways that synchronous or asynchronous instruction changes or adds to its pedagogical effect.

In my own movement back and forth from in-person to online creative writing courses, there is much that I see remaining the same: excitement on both the part of student and instructor, conversations about craft and drafts, development of writers, creation of art, sharing of selves. But I also notice where my own pedagogical questions arise and concerns interfere: I wonder if students are engaged enough or if I am engaged too little, I wonder if I expect too much or too little. I wonder if students feel silenced. I wonder what more I should be doing. I worry I haven't done enough. I feel as though the screen divides me from the work of teaching and learning, even as it allows teaching and learning to occur in new and different ways while inhibiting other modes. If anything, I find that teaching online amplifies my own insecurities as an instructor. The confines of an online instructional space bring to light precisely the kind of pedagogical growth I want to pursue.

The questions I ask are echoed, albeit not from a state of anxiety, by feminist pedagogies. In their 2009 article "'Don't Hate Me Because I'm Virtual': Feminist Pedagogy in the Online Classroom," Nancy Chick and Holly Hassel list many of the questions raised by feminist pedagogies:

> Feminist pedagogy is deliberate about how students relate to each other. Do they communicate with each other regularly? What happens if someone has a different opinion? Do they collaborate? Do they learn from each other and not just the instructor? How do the gender, race, and class of each student affect the class dynamics and learning? Feminist pedagogy is also deliberate about the student-instructor relationship. How does the instructor relate to the students? Is she the

> absolute authority? How are high expectations communicated and upheld? Do students trust the instructor? How do the gender, race, and class of the instructor affect the class dynamics and learning? How aware is everyone of these dynamics? in the classroom, feminist pedagogy spotlights how power and authority are played out in the classroom. Do students have a voice? (198)

Here, I see the value of what I might mistakenly label personal insecurity, but is instead an acknowledgement of how power shapes classroom relationships, knowledge, and development. Later in their essay, Chick and Hassel describe how feminist pedagogy intervenes into an online classroom, and how an online classroom can provide feminist pedagogical engagement that face-to-face classrooms do not. "Rather than insisting on the incompatibility of feminist pedagogy with the cyber-classroom, we believe it is critical to explore the ways that technology can not only accommodate feminist teaching strategies but may be in other ways more compatible with some of the student-centered, collaborative, democratized, and action-oriented approaches that are characteristic of feminist teaching," Chick and Hassel write (212).

Chick and Hassel recommend a variety of possible interventions: initial introduction pages, small-group interactions, student reviews of discussions, real-world applications, the inclusion of outside resources, and social action projects. The opportunity they see in online coursework is echoed almost a decade later by Cathryn Bailey. In her 2017 article "Online Feminist Pedagogy: A New Doorway in Our Brick-and-Mortar Classrooms?," Bailey also articulates the consequences of personal discussion from a feminist pedagogy perspective, noting that the value placed on discussion in face-to-face and online classrooms alike needs scrutiny. "Emphasizing student discussion has been such a common practice for me over the past three decades that I've needed something as dramatic as a foray into online teaching to shake me from

my complacency," writes Bailey (263). She continues: "It is as if in being required to dismantle and rebuild this familiar classroom practice, I am forced to freshly reconsider it, confronting questions that, for the most part, I've left simmering on back burners" (Bailey 263). Bailey's practice of feminist pedagogies leads her to a close examination of one particular pedagogical practice, the discussion, and she gives herself space and time to consider its implications.

This practice, the close examination of routine pedagogical habits, is one that I find both valuable and necessary. In this chapter, I am interested in the parameters of an LMS and the functions of a creative writing course page, as online creative writing instruction, interaction, creation, and community occur within that space. Discussion of LMS use and organization in creative writing studies scholarship is limited. In *Theories and Strategies for Teaching Creative Writing Online*, articles are focused on the how of online instruction, rather than the particulars of where. Ostergaard and Kitchens describe Moodle briefly, noting that it "includes discussion forums, chat rooms, announcements, assignment uploads, and other digital affordances, including the ability for students and instructors to easily record audio or video feedback" ("Designing peer review," 103). Vanderslice writes about using the now-discontinued LMS writing@coloradostate as an "unofficial" platform for teaching creative writing before an official move to Blackboard ("Teaching creative writing online without tears," 10). Vanderslice describes the move to from one LMS to another as parallel to Withrow's description of misaligned philosophies: the instructional designer working with Vanderslice had different pedagogical priorities, expecting welcome posts and introductions, explanations and content and videos, much of which seemed opposed to Vanderslice's own intuition regarding the creative writing workshop. "She was used to assisting faculty in converting lecture-based, traditional courses to an online format that necessitated more student engagement and instructor facilitation

[…] But, as a teacher of creative writing whose courses were generally not lecture-based, my courses were already designed that way" (12). Vanderslice articulates what I've found to be true about my own online writing courses: creative writing pedagogy and online instructional techniques are more alike than not, and in fact build on each other as sharing student-oriented, writing-oriented praxis.

The differing perspectives of online instruction stakeholders can cause friction in the creation of and orientation toward new or revised online courses. If given the opportunity to work alongside an instructional designer or within the context of a university-sponsored Center for Teaching and Learning, creative writing instructors may need to articulate how a creative writing workshop is student-oriented, does prioritize reading and writing, already has faculty-to-student, student-to-student, and student-to-content interactions. Articulation of pedagogical moves is necessary to any kind of course design, in-person or online, collaborative or solo. But many instructors are left to (or keep to) themselves when it comes to designing online courses. And this is one reason why online instruction amplifies where my own pedagogies can grow: I feel more isolated in online instruction than I do in face-to-face instruction, even as I know that many of my colleagues are teaching online. The *Inside Higher Ed* survey reports that 32% of online instructors turned to instructional designers or the IT department at their university for support in course design, while 69% of online instructors developed their courses almost entirely, if not wholly, from scratch. To address the reality of instructional design as primarily completed by the instructor themselves, external criteria—beyond course learning outcomes or institution requirements—are one way to provide a foundation for online course design within an LMS. I've turned to external design rubrics, like the Quality Matters Specific Review Standards, as a grounding point for my online instructional practices. Such standards allow development of

course design skills, prioritization of specific instructional techniques, and a vocabulary set that is particularly attuned to online learning. For instructors who have limited access to support or have limited time for course design itself, the use of Quality Matters Specific Review Standards or other similar rubrics can focus LMS use and scaffold creative writing course design that does not simply replicate the in-person classroom, but recognizes the particular situation of the online writing course.

Quality Matters and LMS User Experience

Quality Matters (QM) was established in 2003 by MarylandOnline, a state online education consortia of 20 colleges and universities. Utilizing a Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, QM developed a rubric of higher education online course design standards and a peer-review process for online course evaluation and improvement. In the fifteen years since the initial grant period ended, QM has expanded to include K-12 standards, continuing and professional education standards, publishing standards, and review programs ("About QM"). The 2020 sixth edition of the Higher Ed Rubric consists of eight General Standards and 42 Specific Review Standards, which are intended to assess courses that are either fully online or have a significant online component ("Course Design Rubric Standards").

While many of the standards included on the rubric may appear to be an intuitive part of any kind of instruction, it is the clear articulation of the standards as a whole that is both practical and grounding for instructors asked to design an online course. In "Measuring the Impact of the Quality Matters Rubric," Ron Legon writes, "Although some best practices are simply common sense, such as informing students how and when they may contact their instructor, in a number of instances research findings have been instrumental in establishing these best practices, and, in

others, subsequent research has confirmed the positive benefits of compliance with best-practice recommendations" (166). Legon goes on to describe that while it is impossible to prove the correlation between QM Rubric use and course outcomes (due to the variety of exposures instructors have to the rubric, as well as the variables inherent to individual instructor and learner experiences across an institution), the efficacy of best practices themselves are undeniable. Similarly, it is not my intent here to claim what kind of impact the QM Rubric has, or could have, on creative writing instruction, but rather the use a QM Rubric can have on the design of an online creative writing course within an LMS platform. Because the rubric focuses on course content, the presence or absence of components, and LMS use, it articulates key affordances of online instruction, which in turn allows instructors to focus on the affordances online modalities offer to their own particular course and students' needs.

The QM Rubric, however, still exists within institutionalized structures and priorities. In describing the intent of quality assurance frameworks like the QM Higher Ed Rubric, Lowenthal et al. write that such standards serve as "reminders of essential information to consider when designing online or blended courses… They are not intended to encompass all training and resources needed to implement particular standards or create accessible courses" (26). Lowenthal et al. focus their analysis on how rubrics do or do not address barriers to online education that exist for disabled students. QM does offer additional resources for revising the accessibility of courses, but these resources exist behind a paywall and are not open-access themselves. QM, too, can benefit from a careful analysis through the lens of feminist pedagogies, which might reframe language popularized by course design fields—user experience (as used below), delivery (which Chick and Hassel discuss), and content—as well as prioritize holistic inclusivity in the online classroom.

The eight general standards of the QM Higher Ed Rubric include: Course Overview and Introduction, Learning Objectives (Competencies), Assessment and Measurement, Instructional Materials, Learning Activities and Learner Interaction, Course Technology, Learner Support, and Accessibility and Usability. As I discuss the application of the Higher Ed Rubric to creative writing course design, I focus specifically on Standard 2, Learning Objectives (Competencies); and Standard 5, Learning Activities and Learner Interaction. This is not to eliminate or diminish the use of the other standards, but rather to highlight two General Standards and their respective Specific Review Standards as they might assist in creative writing course design, as well as their influence on LMS use.

Before looking at the two General Standards in further detail, a note about the discussion of Learning Management Systems. *EduTechnica* reported on Fall 2021 LMS adoption by U.S. higher education institutions with an enrollment of over 500 students, with the following results: 41.2% used Instructure's Canvas, 25.4% used Blackboard Learn, 15.7% used Moodle, 11.2% used D2L's Brightspace, and 1.8% used Sakai, with the remaining 4.6% divided across in-house LMS, non-LMS, or other platform use. *EduTechnica* also noted trends in use: both Canvas and Brightspace use grew, while Blackboard, Moodle, and Sakai use declined. Of the five most popular LMS platforms, Moodle and Sakai are both free at the institutional level, while Canvas, Brightspace, and Blackboard carry institutional subscription fees. Outside of the United States, Moodle holds a much larger market share of distance learning platforms.

Distinguishing the difference in LMS use is important in any discussion of online instruction, as each platform has different interface elements, organizational principles, integration capability, and levels of institutional cohesion. An individual instructor encounters their LMS upon course assignment, and the decision-making process for LMS selection is

generally external to the day-to-day work of course instruction. External, that is, until an instructor is told that they'll be teaching within a new LMS in the coming school year! Even though LMS platforms contain similar components—announcements and message systems, discussion forums, assignment submission, content and lesson builders—each LMS looks different from the others. "While there are no significant differences in terms of features between different LMSs, differences might exist in terms of UX and different contexts of the LMS use, such as different cultures," write Maslov et al. (346). UX is both objective and subjective, as Maslov et al. describe the "objective part (e.g. functionality, reliability, usefulness and efficiency of the system) and subjective parts (e.g. attractiveness, appeal, pleasure, satisfaction of the system)" (345). Maslov et al.'s qualitative analysis, via interviews of students using Moodle, found that the most significant contributions—or detriments—to student user experience were communication practices and individual instructor's use of available tools. User experience as linked to LMS design is not a common concern in online pedagogy conversations, perhaps because it is assumed to lie in the instructional designer's domain or institutional decision-making. But students recognize that it is not the LMS itself that makes a course, but the individual instructor's use of it.

Having taught a range of online, hybrid, and in-person classes using four of the five major LMS platforms—all but D2L—I recognize the similarities and differences that exist across systems, as well as the way my individual approach influences how I arrange content, set up assignments, incorporate activities, and engage with my students. In many ways, I become a mediator between the LMS and my students, the first point of contact as they encounter not only the content and activities that are a part of the course, but how they are receiving that content and those activities. Online course design involves transparency regarding pedagogical values,

disclosing the instructor's decision-making via the organization of content, feedback, and interactions across all areas of engagement. This, too, ties to many scholars' thoughts about how different pedagogical practices are taken up and presented to students. As Hanson and Danyluk write about Indigenous pedagogies, "it is also important to ask "What are my investments?" and "Am I being respectful and humble? Am I being honest about what I know and how I have come to this knowledge?" and to model those values for our students" (4). Chick and Hassel, in articulating feminist pedagogies, write: "Deliberate, reflective attention to the classroom dynamics and environment is key to the cultivation of a feminist classroom, but the forms, kinds, and construction of knowledge that occupy a classroom operating under feminist pedagogy are also crucial" (201). Whether it focuses upon modes of instruction or engagement, or discussion of course design, structure, and content, this kind of transparency and reflection leads to recognition of where pedagogical values, norms, and habits come from, and when and how those areas might need to change or be examined further.

The pedagogical consideration of student and instructor LMS user experience leads back to QM's Higher Ed Rubric standards, which can help inform design and implementation decisions at the individual level as instructors build and reframe course structures within an LMS setting, and as students engage in that setting as well. Vanderslice's concern regarding the peril of over-designing an online creative writing course are important to heed here, so in approaching the two selected General Standards, I will also limit my focus to two or three correlating Specific Review Standards. In identifying Learning Objectives, Assessment and Measurement, and Learning Activities and Learner Interaction as key course design standards, I'm also making transparent my own pedagogical values. In Fall 2020, Illinois State University's first fully-online semester during the COVID-19 pandemic, I taught a synchronous online Introduction to Creative

Writing course, a multi-genre course made up of undergraduate students. The following spring, I taught an asynchronous section of the same course. Both of these courses used Sakai as their LMS platform, and the synchronous course incorporated weekly Zoom sessions. In approaching the selected standards below, I also turn to my own pedagogical decisions to see when and where the teaching and learning in those courses was influenced by the instructional values that I hold.

Learning Objectives

Higher Ed Rubric Standard 2, Learning Objectives (Competencies), encompasses the foundational components of the course: anticipated student learning outcomes and measurable objectives. Specific Review Standards linked to this standard include:

> 2.2 The module/unit-level learning objectives or competencies describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives or competencies.
>
> 2.4 The relationship between learning objectives or competencies and learning activities is clearly stated.

The use of learning outcomes in higher education has been standard since the 1990s, following trends in assessment, teaching and learning at the college level, and accreditation requirements (Ewell 2). However, effective learning outcome use and implementation varies across the higher education landscape. Kevin Schoepp's 2019 study of learning outcome use across ten teaching institutions notes the difficulty in assessing effective presentation of learning outcomes; a majority of syllabi Schoepp surveyed did not include learning outcomes at all. And of those syllabi that did include learning outcomes, Schoepp noted that a primary problem remains: "non-operational or abstract verbs like appreciate, understand, develop, recognize, consider, reflect, review, observe, and realize dominate written learning outcomes" (624). The QM Learning

Objectives standard, then, is one that extends beyond the online course environment, as instructor use of "measurable and consistent" outcomes and objectives is not a syllabus issue, but rather a course design issue that implicates pedagogical decision-making and instructor direction.

Is it possible to re-situate learning objectives as student-centered, rather than instructor-directed? This is one question an instructor faces when developing objectives. For the creative writing instructor, course-level and unit-level learning objectives are guided in part by the particular aims of the course itself. Is it an introductory course? Is it multi-genre? Single-genre? Is there a theme? Is there an orientation towards reading, towards reflection on the writing process itself, towards generation? How does the workshop itself function, if workshop is included? Add to this the intricacies of an online creative writing workshop. Is it taught synchronously? Asynchronously? The workshop, as Vanderslice notes, implies a student-centered pedagogy, but how does that pedagogy play out over the course of ten or twelve or fifteen weeks?

As an instructor faces the pedagogical concerns primary to the organization of workshop, making clear module or unit-level learning objectives may seem to be a secondary concern. However, students in an online workshop are navigating a space that is mediated by the LMS, an interface that complicates the learning process as much as it provides new opportunities for engagement. If students are asked to complete readings, engage in discussion board conversations, watch video lectures, participate in video-call or discussion-board workshops, the instructor has the opportunity to make plain the reason for such engagement, as well as the possible effects of it. Students might also be asked to articulate their answers to questions of engagement and effect: How does one become a writer, and what activities are a part of a writing life? Clear objectives at the unit level allow the instructor to make a smaller-scale case for the

work that students are doing, demonstrating the link between learning objective and the activities that make up the act of writing.

In organizing my first online creative writing class, an introductory multi-genre course taught in Fall 2020, I broke the course into three units: generation, workshop, and revision. The learning outcomes of this course were listed in the syllabus as follows:

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Demonstrate, through the production of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and/or hybrid forms, an ability to implement contemporary language and ideas into creative works.
- Read, recognize, and interpret literary and craft elements in published works of poetry and prose.
- Describe and constructively critique student-produced texts in a workshop setting.
- Demonstrate, through the revision of creative works, an investment in the revision process.

In considering the non-operational, abstract verb issue that Schoepp noted in his survey results, my own outcomes, too, suffer from this problem. "Demonstrate" and "recognize" are not a measurable outcome, though they are tied to operational actions like "production of" and "revision of." And while these course-level outcomes are clearly labeled in the syllabus, I did not carry them over into unit-level objectives. Each outcome listed in my Fall 2020 syllabus is tied to a specified learning activity (production, reading, workshop, revision), but within the module organization on the course page, descriptions of each unit are limited to the single word titling the unit.

The Fall 2020 course was taught synchronously, with students meeting on Zoom as a whole class in early weeks of the semester, and in smaller workshop groups in the later part of

the term. I did have the opportunity to verbalize connections between learning activity and learning outcome during our synchronous class time. But rather than explicitly orienting assignments and online activities towards outcome via written descriptions on our course page, I left the connections merely implied. These implicit expectations changed in my Spring 2021 course, which was taught asynchronously. Without weekly class meeting times, I felt a loss of connection to my students, as I was not seeing their faces or hearing their voices. All interaction outside of individual meetings took place via discussion board posts or individual messages. As the term progressed, I found myself writing more detailed descriptions regarding learning activities and their connection to one another, as well as creating weekly micro-lecture videos that summarized weekly expectations and their connections to learning outcomes. These videos were generally between ten and fifteen minutes long, so while they did not replicate a full-length class, they allowed me to talk through course organization each week. In each video, I screen-cast the weekly lesson page as posted on our LMS, and spent time orienting students to the work expected of them and the connection to overarching course goals.

Another change from the first online course to the second was a change in how I organized the course calendar itself. Instead of daily sub-topics, the Spring 2021 course was arranged by weekly subtopics. In simplifying how content—reading assignments, workshop distribution, writing prompts—was organized, I clarified the pedagogical intent of each week. This is a pedagogical reorientation that I did not expect, but even in returning to in-person instruction, it has changed the way I approach course design. While I still have work to do in developing unit-level objectives that tie learning activities to course outcomes, the Spring 2021 video overviews are evidence of the two-fold benefit of sharing small-scale objectives with students. The instructor is given opportunity to align learning activities with intended outcomes,

and students are able to see the instructor's intention behind the activities. For asynchronous learners in particular, who may not interact with their instructor beyond feedback or discussion posts, consistent and clearly-stated small-scale objectives add to a cohesive learning experience, aligning instructor intent and student expectations. As I recognize the importance of revising both course-level and unit-level objectives, a sample of that revision includes:

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Write creative work in a range of genres (creative fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and/or hybrid forms), prioritizing individual linguistic, emotional, and/or narrative concerns.

  Unit-level objectives:

  - Draft original creative work in a variety of genres.
  - Revise selected drafts of original creative work.
  - Assess success and challenges of new and revised drafts via artist statements.

- Articulate personal creative and literary influences and priorities through the evaluation of contemporary literature (individual pieces, literary journals, etc.).

  Unit-level objectives:

  - Reflect on assigned texts and their craft concerns via discussion group leadership and reading response essays.
  - Identify artistic influences and describe their impact via an artistic influences essay.

- Moderate and participate in workshops oriented toward Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process.

  Unit-level objectives:

- Present original creative work and guide peers through questions connected to writer-oriented goals.
- Respond to peers' creative work and questions with regard to craft and authorial intent and effect.

Learning Activities and Learner Interaction

The following Special Review Standards fall under Standard 5, Learning Activities and Learner Interaction:

> 5.2 Learning activities provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning.
>
> 5.3 The instructor's plan for interacting with learners during the course is clearly stated.
>
> 5.4 The requirements for learner interaction are clearly stated.

Both prior to and during the 2020 mass-migration to online learning, higher education scholars have surveyed both instructors and students regarding engagement priorities, activity structure, and the links between face-to-face and online instruction. In her 2019 study surveying online instructional practices, Sally Baldwin concludes that instructors rely on instructional strategies from face-to-face experience, but use a range of strategies to modify instruction for online environments. These strategies include embedding navigational cues within the course page and its modules, using templates to keep consistency across the course, and "chunking content" to clarify pacing and expectations (Baldwin). Similarly, Bolliger et al. report that while online instructors agree with students on the value of many online interactions (icebreakers, reflections, peer review, collaborative projects, discussions, etc.) students value clear organizational guidelines (such as module checklists for due dates and activities) more highly than instructors.

And in Kwon et al.'s analysis of online learning identities, they note that alongside instructor and learner identity development, LMS identity also plays an important role in effective online learning. Rather than being thought of as a repository or site of activity, Kwon et al. argue that the LMS's "fundamental identity needs to be regarded as an online learning community in a pedagogical sense." This shift requires co-participation from both instructor and learners in the course, dismantling a hierarchical view of the instructor/student relationship.

Dismantling hierarchy is paralleled in recent interventions in creative writing pedagogy. The development of creative writing studies as an area of pedagogical research has made evident a variety of the moves common to the creative writing classroom: the Iowa model of the author who is silent as their work is critiqued, the instructor who is the final authority in the room, and classic mantras such as "write what you know" and "show, don't tell." Felicia Rose Chavez writes about the implications of workshop descriptions and the need for explicitly anti-racist workshop practices. Chavez calls for workshop leaders to "expose institutionalized literacy as a politics of domination. We give it a name: white supremacy. We speak that name aloud and study how it operates, from canon to curriculum to publishing industry to literary criticism. In doing so, we are able to imagine, initiate, and implement alternative choices for change in our own creative writing workshops" (109). Other creative writing pedagogy scholars agree. "The onus is on all of us to be vigilant in addressing the core beliefs in creative writing that marginalize and foreclose possibilities for writers," Janelle Adsit writes in *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing: Threshold Concepts to Guide the Literary Writing Curriculum* (20). In conversation with Ocean Vuong, Sabina Murray notes that "writers have this power, writing has responsibility, but art cannot flourish in silencing of any kind" (Literary Hub). Chavez writes that the first step forward, away from the silencing of student writers, is to name the silence for what

it is: “To dismantle the ego—dominance, control, and the insistence of white universality—is to actively pursue an anti-racist writing workshop. First, we must admit to not knowing (Teach me, please). Then, we must listen, and insist that students listen, too” (18).

Active learning in the creative writing workshop is not as simple as “doing workshop.” There are assumptions, habits, and pedagogical values about writing workshop that Chavez and other creative writing instructors challenge. Carl Vandermuelen notes that creative writing instruction carries over from the way instructors themselves were taught. Citing a survey of graduate student instructors by Lad Tobin, Vandermuelen writes: “each instructor ‘seemed to be proceeding the ways she had always proceeded (and presumably the way she had been taught) with very little recognition of the assumptions and implications of (or alternatives to) a particular technique or method’” (5). As I interrogate my own instructional practice, there is a range of influences: I have an undergraduate degree in education, which gave me a rudimentary understanding of education theory and pedagogical practice. My undergraduate and master’s level creative writing workshops followed the Iowa model, with a silenced writer and an instructor who was more or less at the top of the classroom hierarchy. It wasn’t until my doctoral program that I experienced an alternative to the Iowa workshop model, an alternative that came in the form of Liz Lerman’s *Critical Response Process* as adapted by Duriel E. Harris. Different instructors prioritized reading in different ways, feedback in different ways, peer interaction in different ways. Each of the workshops I took influenced my own workshop development, which I continue to revisit and revise. Teaching online, however, required even further revision. No matter how student-centered workshop was in practice, the online identity development that Kwon et al. describe added new implications to my instruction, my students’ learning, and the LMS environment where our learning activities took place.

As the Fall 2020 term began, I arranged my synchronous introductory workshop in a similar model as I had my in-person workshops the year before, with a few LMS-mediated additions. The first six weeks of the fifteen-week class focused on generation, the creation of written work. Students participated in weekly discussion posts based on weekly readings, and our weekly Zoom meetings centered on writing prompts and discussion about craft elements. As the weeks progressed, students were also completing a four-week "Draft-a-Day" blog project, posting new or revised work each day on LMS-hosted blogs within our course site. As we transitioned into Zoom-hosted workshops in week seven of the semester, students posted workshop pieces in designated discussion threads, and responded to the work of their peers in written form within the thread. I decided that we were going to workshop in small groups only, as I was less certain how a whole-class workshop would work on Zoom. A small group felt more manageable to me, which aligns with Baldwin's work on assimilation of face-to-face instructional strategies in the transition to online instruction, as well as feminist pedagogies described by Chick and Hassel. Rather than a learning community, my use of the course site was in many ways a supplement to our Zoom meetings. While distinct learning activities took place in the LMS, primarily in learner-to-learner and learner-to-content interactions, my own presence in the course was limited to announcements and individual feedback. Students interacted with each other in the discussion board and blog posts, but I did not intervene in conversations there. My instructor identity, then, was less co-participant and more facilitator.

This needed to change in the Spring 2021 semester, however, as the course was no longer synchronous. Because there were no Zoom meetings, all workshop "conversation" took place via written feedback in discussion forms. There would be no one "running" workshop, because each student would be posting and responding to work in their own time. As I reflected on my

workshop pedagogy, I realized that it was time to introduce a modified Liz Lerman *Critical Response Process* into the workshop format. Students read Lerman's "The Basics" introduction to the format, and I posted detailed descriptions of expectations for both writer and reader roles. The *Critical Response Process* is oriented towards in-person conversation, so I resituated certain portions of the process to be included in the initial post by the writer, or in responses from peer readers. In brief, the expectations for each role included:

From the writer, include a one-page artist statement, answering the following questions:

- Summarize your project/pieces in one to two sentences.
- What surprised you while you were writing the project?
- What aspect(s) of the project posed the greatest challenge for you?
- What successes resulted from the project?
- What is your vision for future drafts?
- Include three questions about your project to guide workshop responses. What do you need help sorting out? (not yes or no questions, but questions looking for direction or possibility)

From the reader, include the following in your response:

- A statement of meaning based on evidence in the text, answering this question: "What was simulating, surprising, evocative, memorable, touching, challenging, compelling, unique, delightful?"
    - this is where you are observing what is happening on the page
- Responses to the 3 questions posed by the author
- At least three neutral questions about the project

    - these are not based on your own opinion as a reader, but geared towards the intent of the project
    - focus on possibility and opportunity—what if _____? how does _____? what caused you to _____?
- One opinion that you have about the project
    - this might include an area of confusion, a moment of insight, or potential that the project has

I am not the first to note how the *Critical Response Process* revitalizes the writing workshop and shifts its orientation away from the instructor's voice and towards that of the writer. "As a foundational study in the way it could be," writes Chavez, "the *Critical Response Process* is a game changer. Still, I adapt the methodology in my own classroom to best serve creative writing students and further distance myself as workshop authority" (139). Chavez's approach, which she lays out in *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop*, became essential for my adoption of a similar process in my course. And reading student's artist statements and peer responses was evidence of how well-suited this structure is for a creative writing class. In the asynchronous course in particular, I observed (1) a shift in conversation toward the way a writer thinks and the way their process unfolds, and (2) my identity shifting into co-participant, as I responded to work in the same discussion board format as students themselves and followed the same guidelines for each student. Students wrote about their writing identities, the way they came up with ideas or directed language or plot, and peers responded with their own thoughts about not just the piece at hand, but the act of writing. There was no distinction of difference in role, or waiting for the instructor to lead the conversation. The artist statement gave readers a direction for their response as well as their reading, and the discussion board itself functioned as a repository for all

drafts, comments, and questions. Students were assigned rotating groups each week of workshop, but they were also able to access the work of peers who weren't in their assigned groups. This allowed for self-initiated interaction, too, if students chose to respond to work beyond that which was specifically assigned to them.

Prior to the Spring 2021 term, I had taught composition courses asynchronously, but not creative writing. I knew that it was possible to workshop in online discussion boards, as my composition students had participated in asynchronous peer review, but I did not know how effective it would be for creative writing students. *The Critical Response Process* provided a necessary framework for workshop organization: while allowing for open and student-oriented responses, it also positioned the writer as the guide for reading and response. It elevated student agency throughout the workshop process. The LMS, too, became an actual site of learning, necessary for interaction and engagement. Rather than supplementing the course or functioning as a repository for materials, our course site was the means for and location of all activity. This also led to slight changes in course navigation. In addition to providing the weekly overview videos as described previously, embedding checklists onto each week's module page was an easy intervention to include. In the fall, these were posted at the bottom of each module page; by the spring, I moved them to the top. Consistency in layout across weekly modules was imperative for student navigation between readings, discussions, assignment folders, and logistical information.

While navigating a synchronous online workshop, and then an asynchronous workshop, the QM Higher Ed Rubric standards provide an orientation towards how interactions occur, rather than simply *that* they occur. Shifting to a *Critical Response Process* in my online workshop layout allowed the learning activities and interactions in my course to devest from the

expectations of an Iowa-oriented workshop. Instead of leading workshop, I became a co-participant alongside my students, and the students themselves took over the workshop process, adjusting it to meet their own needs and goals. This shift in the workshop process also changed the way the course functioned within the LMS, amplified by the asynchronous format. The course had to work alongside the LMS, rather than tangential to it. Expectations for interactions, student-to-student as well as student-to-instructor and student-to-content, had to be clearly planned and articulated week by week. There was no Zoom meeting to mediate student navigational issues or discussion. The LMS was the sole location for introductions, for encountering student work, for responding to work and assigned readings, for discussing what it means to be a writer and what it means to write. The workshop was not constricted by LMS use, but rather both dependent upon and amplified by it.

Further Considerations: Beyond the LMS

Learning objectives and learning activities were the two primary pedagogical concerns amplified by my own online instruction during the Covid-19 pandemic. Teaching creative writing online, in both synchronous and asynchronous modes, caused me to revisit the particular values and goals I bring to my workshops, the suitability or necessity of those values and goals, and the possibility for change. The specific alterations I made to these workshops were guided in part by the mode of instruction—the inclusion of Zoom for the synchronous course but not the asynchronous course, the particular tools within our Sakai LMS, and the move from instructor-led to student-led workshops via the *Critical Response Process.* The standards laid out by Quality Matters' Higher Ed Rubric help to articulate the importance of particular pedagogical decisions: course design and layout, activity and outcome language, and interaction expectations.

For my own instructional practices, these standards give me a starting point for finding and revising areas of online engagement for both myself and my students.

But the revision I've done with this particular course is not limited to its online format. In Fall 2021, we were able to return to in-person learning, and I taught an in-person poetry workshop. While it was a different course, with upper-level students who had different goals from students in the introductory workshops, the in-person workshop benefited from the pedagogical changes I'd made in the online courses. Workshop still followed the *Critical Response Process* format, but this time in face-to-face interactions. There were new challenges involved with teaching and structuring workshop—meeting one-on-one with students before their workshop helped with negotiating those challenges, as I was able to talk with students about their concerns and hesitations about leading workshop. In many ways, my pedagogical decisions were becoming increasingly transparent, as I explained to students the reasons why we were doing workshop this way, how it compared to other workshop methods, and adjusted certain expectations depending on student need. Course objectives also became increasingly focused on student goal-setting early in the semester, allowing for students to articulate areas of growth over course of the term. Students also signed up to lead small-group discussions on assigned texts, an organizational structure that I had not used before in a workshop course. These small, student-led groups strengthened students' ability to talk about craft and creative work, and also increased rapport among the class before we began workshopping. In many ways, my role as co-participant increased even more as we entered into an in-person setting.

I'm not sure if these pedagogical revisions would have taken place had I not taught creative writing online. Or, had I still made specific shifts in instructional techniques and objectives, if they would have had similar outcomes. But the examination of objectives,

outcomes, activities, and expectations have reinforced not just my online pedagogies, but my creative writing pedagogies as a whole. The specific values emphasized by the Quality Matters rubric have led me to make my pedagogical decisions more visible, both for myself and for my students. As I evaluate not just the outcomes of my creative writing courses, but the values implicit within those outcomes, I am able to reorient course and unit-level goals to meet student need and expectations. As I shift to an adapted *Critical Response Process* workshop mode, the hierarchy of the classroom shifts. I become a co-participant in my students' writing practice as they guide discussion and prioritize their own writing needs. Pivoting online and back again does not automatically make me a better in-person instructor, or a better online instructor. But evaluating and adjusting my pedagogy has shown me that there are better ways to teach creative writing, that the creative writing classroom can benefit from clear objectives and learning activities, and that students recognize the influence pedagogy has on their learning. Teaching and learning online is a reality for more and more creative writing instructors and students, and it is not an easy adjustment for anyone engaged in the instructional process. But the possibilities of online instruction—as well as the pedagogical assessment it can lead to—have clarified my priorities in the creative writing course.

Online instruction has refocused my attention on the ways my students interact with me and with one another, as well as with their writing. Teaching online has made me a better instructor because of the challenges it presents and the decisions it leads me to make. In the future, applying the lessons of online instruction to course design will likely cause new changes and shifts in pedagogy, but the past two years of instruction provide a foundation for that continued work. No matter the learning environment, prioritizing and assessing learning outcomes, activities, interactions, and expectations is ongoing work. As LMS and instructional

modes advance, as higher education structures shift, and as students and instructors navigate changing environments, this work will only become more and more necessary.

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