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# Wolf

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# WOLF

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WOLF is a collection of poems written over the past two years. It began with an interest in writing every day. I have always been interested in the poetic process; specifically how successful poets work through their own writing. I recognize that different poets have different writing tendencies. While some write sporadically, others write obsessively. As a young writer, I was easily troubled by the difference between my need to write and my desire to write. I soon discovered that my desire to write dissipated when the academic *need* to write was present. At the beginning of last year, I spent six months traveling abroad. During this time, the anxiety around writing disappeared because it was no longer a requirement; therefore, I found myself writing everyday.

To call this collection a project would be a misnomer, since my writing process works towards a singular poem. For this reason, the poems in WOLF are intended to stand alone. As Hoa Nguyen states in an interview with Joshua Marie Wilkinson:

I tend toward the singular poem. That is, I'm a pretty poem-y poet and do not work toward sustained projects, as such. So I probably do the typical thing and print out all the poems and sit and sift through the pieces trying to find a poem to introduce the work, construct some kind of flow, involve the temporal in some way.

(Bookslut)

The collection, however, is cohesive in its voice. I am not interested in writing into themes but rather into identities. My work engages with the identities of being a young person, a feminist, a woman, and a lesbian while at the same time resisting to be defined by them. Though engaging with these identities, the work seeks recognition apart from their social/literary limitations.

In my poetry, I am interested in pursuing an experimental-confessional aesthetic. I put these two terms together not as separate adjectives for my style, but rather combine them into one term, “experimental-confessional;” I am not interested in either/or, but rather both as one entity. To me, experimental poetry—outside of stylistic obscurities—is a way to address experiences that cannot be easily grasped by the conscious self. As Joan Retallack writes in “What is Experimental Poetry & Why Do We Need It?,” “Experiment is conversation with an interrogative dynamic. Its consequential structures turn on paying attention to what happens when well-designed questions are directed to things we sense but don’t really know.” Experimental poetry engages in non-traditional poetic forms in order to push at the limits of what is available to the self in language. Confessional poetry, on other hand, can address intimate and honest moments in a poet’s life. It deals with experiences through the autobiographical “I.” An experimental-confessional

aesthetic, therefore, combines these two ideas in order to examine the margins of the self. An experimental-confessional aesthetic is not limited by conventional language as it moves us to question ontology.

Therefore, a common theme in my poetry is the palpability of intimate moments and experiences. I examine the possibilities of indirect cause-and-effect relations. I create poems where private experiences are addressed indirectly in order to examine the liminal space between the conscious and the unconscious self. Right now, I am interested in how normal or colloquial language can be reworked and presented in this liminal space. My goal is to rework colloquial language in a way that still values challenge and conceptual sophistication through syntax and form. The levels in which language exist are relevant to me because I feel the huge gap between colloquial and poetic language; therefore, my poetry lends itself to the space between these two disparate linguistic paradigms. In this way, I work to form a bridge between inaccessible and ordinary language.

Within the past year, my work has been increasingly concerned and in conversation with the issue of accessibility. Though accessibility is important to poetry, I do not intend my writing to be “easy.” As Joshua Marie Wilkinson states in an editorial on *The Volta*, titled *On Poetry and Accessibility*:

The moment we concede the terms of what form a poem should take to a reader new to poetry—in service of readability and access—the discussion shifts to accommodating or pleasing somebody who doesn’t now read or necessarily care for it anyway. Am I naive to be confident that poetry doesn’t need to be diminished to attract new readers, having endured as it has for at least a few thousand years?

I subscribe to this ideology, in that my work does not need to dumb itself down for the sake of the reader; however, one of my biggest struggles is to ground the reader in the abstraction of my work. When I read, I like to be challenged by the work and asked to seek full conceptual meaning, and I want the readers of my poetry to do the same.

My interest in the issues of accessibility began as an interest in contemporary poets such as Graham Foust and Hoa Nguyen. Both of these poets adhere to this poetic philosophy, in that they push readers to deconstruct inaccessibility within their work. As Nguyen writes in an interview, “Sometimes I don't know what I "mean," too. But I don't think you need to hit people over the head with content and meaning. Whenever I encounter that in poetry, I feel pandered to, manipulated and/or bored” (Bookslut). In her poetry, Nguyen is able to create a concrete reality that is juxtaposed with specific and fragmented thoughts and ideas. For readers, this can seem arbitrary and confusing; however, through Nguyen’s confident assertions, these disparate ideas must be connected. Foust will always be an

important poet to me because of his ability to constantly reference back to the “self,” even as he works with a disjunctive form. Like Nguyen, Foust’s work is accessible in language, but challenging in content.

Overall, WOLF is a selection of my very best work. Many concepts and ideas resurface throughout the collection as WOLF serves as a vehicle to work through the repetition in my subconscious. The resurfacing ideas or objects are often indicative of unsaid undertones in my conscious self. Much of my work in and around this project was obsessive, not only in content, but in editing and selecting poems for inclusion. Though the body of work presented is quite varied in content, it represents a mere fraction of the work produced over the last two years, in which obsession is much more obvious. Each selected poem in WOLF is a conglomeration of many other poems dealing with similar ideas. Because I am always writing, my poetry is always present in me and around me, and for this reason, I am quick to discard poems, as my process pushes my writing to grow at an accelerated pace. A challenge of this project has been to write poetry that I will grow out of more slowly. WOLF is a collection of just such works.

Unlike the poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much of which was defined by movements and manifestos, I find myself without a specific lineage for reference. It is very much of my generation to be engaged in multiple areas of aesthetics. Lyn Hejinian presents this idea in her book of essays, *The Language of Inquiry*:

Language is nothing but meanings, and meanings are nothing but a flow of contexts. Such contexts rarely coalesce into images, rarely come to terms. They are transitions, transmutations, the endless radiating of denotation into relation (Hejinian).

My poetry is a transition/transmutation. Words are perhaps the most remixable materials that we have. As a poet, I fit into a history of artists who engage within the multiple spaces of language. Because language is a flow of contexts, I work to combine the disparate ideas and identities of a remix culture. Therefore, the lineage I fall into constantly blends past, present, and future. I try to avoid the current mode of poetry where the voice of the narrator is willfully naïve and painfully direct. I want to own language just as I want to own my identity.

The following books have pushed, inspired, and in various ways effected my poetic process:

***Boris by the Sea* by Matvei Yankelevich (Octopus Books, 2010)**

*Boris by the Sea* pushed me to explore a more conceptual, experimental poetics.

***Sign You Were Mistaken* by Seth Landman (Factory Hollow Press, 2013)**

*Sign You Were Mistaken* inspired me for its non-imitative voice and presentation of intimate experiences.

***It Is Daylight* by Arda Collins (Yale University Press, 2009)**

*It Is Daylight* inspired me to investigate domesticity and its hidden beauty.

***Alpha Donut* by Matvei Yankelevich (United Artists Books, 2012)**

*Alpha Donut* pushed me to explore a more conceptual, experimental poetics.

***40 Watts* by CD Wright (Octopus Books, 2012)**

*40 Watts* reminds me of the importance of place in relation to voice.

***Scary, No Scary* by Zachary Schomburg (Black Ocean, 2012)**

*Scary, No Scary* inspired me for its successful creation of surrealist content and images.

***Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson (Vintage Books, 1998)**

*Autobiography of Red* pushed me to question form and limitation in relation to the poet-scholar-feminist.

***Advice for Lovers* by Julian Brolaski (City Lights, 2012)**

*Advice for Lovers* pushed me to juxtapose different levels of language (romantic and colloquial) in my poetics.

***Necessary Stranger* by Graham Foust (Flood Editions, 2007)**

*Necessary Stranger* inspired me because of its ability to constantly reference back to the “self,” even as it works with a disjunctive form.

***The Men* by Lisa Robertson (Toronto: BookThug, 2006)**

*The Men* inspired me for its feminist content.

***Maxfield Parrish* by Eileen Myles (Black Sparrow Press, 1995)**

*Maxfield Parrish* pushed me to explore and own a queer poetics.

***100 Notes on Violence* by Julie Carr (Boise State University, 2010)**

*100 Notes on Violence* pushed me to investigate issues of theme and narrative.

***Dear Jenny, We Are All Find* by Jenny Zhang (Octopus Books, 2012)**

*Dear Jenny, We Are All Find* inspired me to merge the multiple identities of the self in the space of my poetry.

***Futility* by Kevin Barrett Kane (Slow World Press, 2012)**

*Futility* always inspires as it reminds me of my coming into poetry.

***Sarah – Of Fragments and Lines* by Julie Carr (Coffee House Press, 2010)**

*Sarah – Of Fragments and Lines* pushed me to explore the relationship between motherhood and writing.

***The Descent of Alette* by Alice Notley (Penguin Books, 1996)**

*The Descent of Alette* inspired me for its feminist content.

***The Cosmopolitan* by Donna Stonecipher (Coffee House Press, 2008)**

*The Cosmopolitan* pushed me to explore spatial relationships and geographies.

***Equivocal* by Julie Carr (Alice James Books, 2007)**

*Equivocal* inspired me for its feminist content and exploration of intimate relationships.

***Museum of Accidents* by Rachel Zucker (Wave Books, 2009)**

*Museum of Accidents* pushed me to pursue a confessional aesthetic.

***The Book of Whispering in the Projection Booth* by Joshua Marie Wilkinson (Tupelo Press, 2009)**

*The Book of Whispering in the Projection Booth* inspired me by its personal awareness, and its constant attention to sound and surrealist imagery.

***The Explosions* by Mathias Svalina (Subito Press, 2013)**

*The Explosions* pushed me to explore various poetic forms while maintaining an idiosyncratic, non-imitative voice.

***Destruction Myth* by Mathias Svalina (Cleveland State Press, 2009)**

*Destruction Myth* pushed me to explore forms in narrative poetry.

***A Mouth in California* by Graham Foust (Flood Editions, 2009)**

*A Mouth in California* inspired me because of its ability to constantly reference back to the “self,” even as it works with a disjunctive form.

***As Long As Trees Last* by Hoa Nguyen (Wave Books, 2012)**

*As Long As Trees Last* helped me find content in disparate poetic forms that find connectedness through voice.

***Videotape* by Andrew Zawacki (Counterpath Press, 2013)**

*Videotape* inspired me for its form and sound through the use of sliced-up syntax.

Hi woman/women

listen to how I love:

the wardrobe in the corner

the vowels against the pull  
out bed

the laugh put back.

Do not drop the lower lip just to win me over wolf!

There were never leaves under the snow.

I can still grow into the ocean.

dear caroline,

whenever we walk  
near a cemetery my stomach falls backward or  
I am still blinking.  
it is so typical to be tortured  
by people coming in & out of other countries.

dear caroline,

you do not want to understand the machine  
in wyoming. she always said to leave your fingers  
alone—that they will take care of themselves. we can do our own dishes, and peel our  
own mangos. i would like to forget any affection near staircases and the way you walk across the kitchen.

dear caroline,

that all encompassing i-cannot-look-at-your-teeth. when you said, i could fuck  
with that, near turning lanes, i wanted to hold your entire family.

*to not be so nice*  
*to not be so fun.*

i disappeared, but i do not want you to see  
that.

Think about it:

I ache when bodies stack in your mouth. I  
bow in every city away from you.

Literally—I wear these boots and grab my  
crotch near kitchen counters like these legs have  
something to say, like you know how your mouth  
gets around the ocean. We are in a cave  
and you are smarter than ever—holding  
some version of Spain.

I only ever want to see you  
with your toes facing each other.

to not be here:

black jeans, wool socks, legs spread

I love like this—  
    every kitchen faucet  
    every spring

my hands do not know  
what to do in the sun.

Everybody talks about themselves  
here.

We eat flowers out of photographs dressed in denim dresses.  
We surround rib cages near slanted walls.  
We ache when elbows bend into the sunlight.  
We admitted once that Iran was like the orchid near your window.  
We wear snow on our feet like our mothers never went to the hospital.

Oh, I am objectifying you.

The back of my chest still leather sometimes, too.



Mostly my ears click  
how they are supposed to and  
whenever I slide my fingers across wood panels  
I am so loving!

While everything in the walk-in  
closet sways, the striped sweater is still  
beneath the yellow in all of our words.

I am white and your teeth feel so nice  
close to my face.



I am not afraid of the way you drag  
your dreams back and forth across the driveway.

I can still hear the neighbors sleeping.

please, stop me now  
before I fill my suitcases with snow  
and check your hairline

like every woman who almost said my name  
like every child stacked  
near the woodpile by the lake.

you in may

~~i feel~~

*to feel:* to attend a wedding  
amongst trees  
with fingertips wrapped around your ribcage.

you, you, you, you, you by the ocean, you are convinced letters cannot be singular,  
and that when similar pronouns fall in love

only one can have a sense of self.

Unlike heaven,  
my knees are wet.

And I am inhaling the dinner table—trying  
to be all rich.

O, sleeping scarf.  
O, wolf.

seriously thank you            I love  
you        kneeling in floral.

I think about how you all die  
everyday.

Sometimes I get all  
German— make lists, and could only ever write  
a poem with someone between my legs.

you stand next to shirt racks and say things like,  
*life is too short to be wrapped in Septembers.*

I see how young things happen—  
how you carry Iowa's as if they were aisles.

You corrected me when I grabbed your hips your face— as if I do not sleep at night.

let's make a game of it:  
I'll make the backseat into a garden

while you say, "I am standing above the tree line," or whatever.

You could not get in someone's good,  
    have not seen the way she stands  
at the airport kiosk.

This is not rage:  
    this is the kitchen counter.

The place made from  
the dog that jumped on the bed.

I want to feel everything  
    in my shoulders.

To know how to ache backwards into your skirt  
even with the glaze of the snow in living room.

All black  
everything like sleet and  
a fur coat  
without falling to my knees.

I am so self-involved, etc.!  
To go to lunch.  
To hold the lakefront near every city.

I am always falling asleep in my street clothes.

Your eyebrows did not unfurl in my lap,  
and it is okay to come home soon.

*What happens when you leave:*

The sun  
Tofu at the store

In response to the upheaval,  
I am glad you found the cocktail dress  
with the sleeves.

We are so particular about  
the way we have next door neighbors.

*Poem for Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*

Let's get all superstitious—

yell down gold mines, wear sweaters over our coats,

because I am in this country [underdressed] and I have looked at my mother  
many times through the orange cut outs of a tree & the purple under her eyes.

She claims, Americans want to be upside in forests, but

there are no birds here.

She claims she wants to fall off beds, and grab handfuls of carpet—had seen gold years ago.

*Sifting*—These mouths sound so sophisticated:

this hotel room, this different country.

The earth looks so good from the Midwest.

I told everyone to hold  
my secret under the dinner table—

to eat tomato soup laying on the wood floor.

I will never use boyish adjectives  
to describe snow through glass,

but I'll consider your cowlick over countertops—  
as if it were meant for someone else

and how you lay  
on a bed that is not yours.

I only want good things in the wolf-pen,

and this is what my hands look like  
with you            undone.

Soon you will    leave you  
so perfect

The sun still in the alley way.  
The birthmark below your shoulder.

The clothing between us is  
also between everything else.

And that's when I think about carpet—

pick each floor, so early mornings  
are not spent this way.

step on carpet, lay on carpet, stand on carpet,  
whichever will make the phone ring.

I saw the lasagna recipe on the counter

if you would not have said happy birthday a day late, I would have forgot  
and that is why I do not keep paper by my bed.

There is a reason you fall asleep with  
your back to the snow,

your own hands scare you at any moment.

We are all violent when we step into  
the living room—  
do you see how clean the coffee table is?

I am stuck somewhere near an “oh okay”  
but nowhere near the cracks  
in your laugh.

I want to have a black life before  
I see the moon

because the weather feels so nice on your skin  
and sometimes dream don't come true!

the plane ride  
the aeronaut

I did not know you, but our lips  
moved slowly.

We love, and then there is the sadness  
at the end of your bed.

The wool jackets stacked inside  
the fence— your throat tucked  
into the bed frame.

Watch me carry your chest in my hands –  
try to be elegant with it  
in grocery stores.

Have you ever seen a blouse hemmed up,  
so neatly that I still get flowers  
jammed in my nose too.

To act humanely and check  
the tire pressure.

my backyard or the grill must be fifty feet  
from any type of landscape

They told me that  
if you allow yourself to be shook  
winter will come sooner.

*dear December,  
we bought cookies and even more (for naming what is between your legs) and walked  
around in gold scarfs and gold robes.*

I am just in the backyard to see the snow melt.

I am supposed to be embarrassed when I sleep.

The wind still in my eyes like,

“I caught the bouquet.”

“There is wheat in the corner.”

“This is the master bedroom.”

We do not call people by their names anymore.

We wear yellow  
dresses and feel strongly about things.

No more dark room and corduroy  
ink stain.

We all have a husband and wife somewhere,  
and their pants fit so well.

Let's forget about the lipstick on the coffee  
cup and that day everybody thinks you are  
great but then you fall into the harbor.

I am a poser in all black.

We could all wear women who wear blouses  
in the middle of countries  
right under our collar bones.

Look at you, blurry lined  
up on the pier, every smaller day full of water.

I tried to hold your sleep in my throat.

Tried to hold your eyes, face, face—  
never not troubled, not even  
a possibility.



greatest hits: 1991

Exit this poem for: milky way bars, san francisco,  
and daughters staring into empty closets.

                  carry your memories from another  
state because you are           still too close.

you up there by the counter,  
Whoever you are, we can hear you through  
five-year-old hands.

I missed my train, but  
I kept my manners  
near the restroom.

I crossed my legs  
grace!

and I do not want  
to think of you in that way:

sweaters at the dry cleaner doors only here to see jaws unfold.

I love your  
city back against the wall.

I saw you on the dirty blanket.  
I heard you  
in my mother's voice.  
I am not done until I find you in the hotel lobby.

Do not worry about the sidewalk talk if  
I will see you in the boutique.

My cheeks smell different in Chicago.

Are you here WOLF?