Spring 1-1-2009

The Slow History of a Sugar Beet

Hannah Penny Nichols
nichols114@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/engl_gradetds

Part of the American Literature Commons, Fine Arts Commons, and the Literature in English, British Isles Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.colorado.edu/engl_gradetds/5

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by English at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Graduate Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu.
THE SLOW HISTORY OF A SUGAR BEET

By

HANNAH “PENNY” NICHOLS

B.A., Colorado State University 2005

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Department of English
Creative Writing

2009
This thesis entitled:
The Slow History of a Sugar Beet
written by Hannah “Penny” Nichols
Has been approved by the Department of English

______________________________
Julie Carr

______________________________
John- Michael Rivera

Date

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
This thesis is a memoir of poetry and prose that attempts to navigate through the personal, emotional and spiritual discourses of an esoteric family, using inherited language to connect a poetic presence with a disjunctive and illusive history. The sugar beet is the metaphorical and literal model at the heart of the project. Various themes include, relationships, sexuality, contraception, divorce, trauma, mortality, and the nature of "self". It is a series of stories about loneliness and coming of age in a violent world, interspersed by poems which transition the reader through a narrative of childhood and parenting, looking through the lens of ancestral lineage. The family becomes characters in the imaginative drama of self, as the narrator attempts to understand the strange and wonderful spiritual knowledge and gestures. The poetry and prose push toward a transformative understanding about violence in a personal and social context.
For my family
Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Julie Carr for her many hours of thesis advice, honest criticism, and her belief in my work. Thanks also to John-Michael Rivera and Noah Eli Gordon for sitting on my thesis committee. Special thanks to Ruben Donato for his important research to shed light on hidden history, and for inspiring me to take charge of my own story.
Contents

Introduction 1

The Slow History of a Sugar Beet 5

Annotated Bibliography 69
Introduction

The narrative of the sugar beet began as a lyric essay, written for my final project for Intro to Multicultural Literature, taught by John-Michael Rivera. The essay is based on the personal family histories that have always been floating in the back of my mind since childhood. In the class I was exposed to Hispanic/Latino/American literature that covered a huge range of topics surrounding identity and border politics. Books like Tomas Rivera’s …y no se lo trago la tierra, and Gloria Anzeldua’s Borderlands/La Frontera, forced me to pay attention to my family history. As I continue to search for my own human/writerly identity, I feel responsible to bring the stories of my family into the light.

I was inspired by reading Ruben Donato’s non-fiction work, Mexicans and Hispanos: in Colorado Schools and Communities, 1920-1960. This was not part of the assigned reading of the class, but I encountered it in my own research. Reading this book allowed me to encounter my grandfather’s experiences through the objective lens of a research project. Donato’s research narrows in on the history, culture and civil challenges of the Mexican and Hispanic families and agricultural workers in the Arkansas River Valley, where my grandfather was born and raised. The book also gave me insights into the shady business practices
and labor abuses by sugar beet companies, which was, at one time, the largest agricultural crop produced in Colorado. This information gave me a deeper perspective of what life was like when my grand-father was growing up.

Reading Tomas Rivera’s *...y no se lo trago la tierra* (*And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*), was highly influential in grounding my ideas for the project. Rivera’s narrative weaves through stories and fragmented conversations of his characters; from the charred bodies of neglected children, to betrayed love, to murder and disillusionment, and economic exploitation.

In constructing my lyric essay, I took Rivera’s poetic work as a model and tried to integrate my own lyrical voice to new information I picked up from Donato’s sociological synopsis. This lyric essay, while sufficient for the class assignment, became the starting point of my thesis project. Julie Carr encouraged me to keep the prosaic format, but infuse the essay with more historical research about sugar, as well as interviews and discussions with my grandfather, and other family members. I even made a special trip to Phoenix to interview my grandfather. I had high hopes for this visit, I expected to come away with a treasure trove of information about my family, and a deeper relationship with him. Instead I found myself frustrated by his reluctance to tell me what I wanted to know. He didn’t want to speak about his childhood on tape. He seemed pained by his memories, and I felt uncomfortable and even a bit embarrassed at my desire to expose him in my writing. Every conversation was dominated by his questions about my life.
After the visit with my grandfather, I re-evaluated my intentions with the project. My family history is indelibly tied to my own personal childhood experience and it seemed that the more I tried to delve into the past, the more I came face to face with my own story. I began a new section of short narratives about my experiences growing up in Boulder with my mother. I felt compelled to highlight the influences of parenting, specifically mothering, and how they relate to spirituality. The idea of “Spirit” became a character that shaped perceptions of reality. I read Selah Saterstrom’s novel, *Meat and Spirit Plan*. I felt that my personal narratives had a lot in common with hers, especially with themes of relationships, sexuality, contraception, divorce, trauma, and mortality, and the nature of “self”. I also liked her “matter-of-fact” storytelling style, and I tried to impersonate that style as I was shaping my own stories.

The theme of loneliness and coming of age in a violent world seemed to translate through my grandfather’s narrative as well as my own. The thesis, as a whole, pushes toward a transformative understanding about violence in a personal and social context. My personal writings became a compliment to the sugar narratives I had been writing and researching. There is gravity and simplicity in the grandfather narrative and it grounds my childhood narratives, and (hopefully) keeps them freefalling into a black hole of cliché.

The homonym poems, which are dispersed throughout the manuscript, are born from experimenting with a device to generate language. I began to compile a list of homonyms that might relate to the various themes of the thesis. I wrote out the dictionary definition for each word, including the numerical organization. I
worked in my own lyrical text. I used the definition as a guide, and over several drafts, I was able to capture the essence of the word, without binding it in the existing definition. In the end, I was left with a series of strong poems that work individually, as a series, and speak to the larger project.

In the spring of 2008 I lay in bed with a horrible cold and tried to read Lyn Hyjinian’s *My Life*. I drifted off to sleep with the little book open over my heart. I dreamt that the images, concepts and memories which Hyjinian had written about in her poems were blending together with the visions and memories of my own life. I could see Hyjinian’s chosen typeset, the blocks of text and the italicized line in the top left corner. In my dream I could not tell which were her memories and experiences, and which were my own. I feel akin to Hyjinian’s work because she allows herself to become “entangled in language” without sacrificing the beauty of the moment.

I am noticing that in much of my poetry and prose, I strive to find a balance between telling a story, and letting language take over. My poetry (as a mirror to my own consciousness) is learning how to be more grounded. My language has sometimes has a tendency to fly off into space without knowing where it is going, yet that is where the best poetry is hidden, just out of view. There is a delicate balance at work. On one hand, narrative is a necessity in my work, but the narrative also needs to be porous, allowing the language to guide the way forward, rather than follow a set of intention
The Slow History of a Sugar Beet
i. produce n

she surpasses the yield.
the roots, stocks, and heads only last so many days cut from the ground.
she is consumed by the weight of her own incompleteness.

the producer allows art to manifest.
good is manufactured.

i. produce v

to give birth to results.
to offer, to view, to notice, to praise the gracious weather.
to extend the length, area or volume in order to feed our sustenance.

our best thoughts accrue in the dim light of daybreak.
Simple sugar is born of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. Sugar flowers, bulges, roots, fruits and falls down the chin of the world. The fermentation derived from sugar’s corpse is something to behold. Sugar comes to be from an opening process. Dehydration synthesis occurs when two sugar molecules reshape their memories, forming water, and then the excess oxygen breaks away to form a bridge between the two molecules. The world’s voice is coated in cane, powder, malty syrup, corn, fructose and concentrate. We see through sweeter eyes.
My parents met at Unity Church of Boulder when it was a little gathering on Walnut Street. My father was most eligible bachelor of the Unity congregation. Reverend Jack was a young up-and-coming minister. I lay partial blame of this spiritual awakening on the Beatles. In 1966 George Harrison traveled to India for a master sitar lesson from Ravi Shankar where he was encouraged to read the seminal book, *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda.

The Beatles’ encounter with alternative spiritualities, and the inclusion of four yogis faces on “The Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Heart’s Club Band” album cover, brought mystical teachings into the pop culture limelight, feeding young hearts and minds that were craving new thought. My parents locked eyes on a wave of alternative thinking. They pushed their way out of various blankets of religious suppression and into the blinding warmth of the New Age.
Unity of Boulder was the hippie’s answer to traditional Christianity. Christ should not be worshiped as a historical man, but as a way of thinking. God was not an aged trinity draped in robes, but a sweeping energy that motivated people to be their best selves. Rev Jack wore a suit, cowboy boots and a bola tie. “Jesus…” he said, crouching down with his hand reaching out, “is not of this world, he IS the world…” he let the sound out in a groaning hiss. “Jesus IS our divine consciousness… This,” he says pointing his finger down at his bible, “is not the truth. The truth is waiting to be unlocked by you!” He pointed to his flock. The congregation would sit for a moment, infused with this blessing. Then slowly, each mind would silently erupt in praise to be reminded that their divinity was also their humanity.

_In the summer days of life, teach me to gather the honey from flowers of quality, which grow in the garden of human souls._
I have no conscious memory of my parents as a couple. Love was, as far as I have
determined, a suppressed clause of their togetherness. Their love was, as far as I
have determined-- me. There is a box of slides documenting the pregnancy. I
look at the tiny thumbnails through the natural light of the window. My mother’s
wide eyes are pointed, yet wandering. I can feel my father’s presence behind the
camera. They were married in a small city park; Mom already showing in her
sundress, Dad in a short sleeve dress shirt. They swapped vows and bicycles
instead of rings.
In its first year, a sugar beet’s wide roughage grows in long tight rows to keep the weeds at bay. From the stem down to the captivating root, she can grow anywhere they let her. She must be harvested when she is at her peak weight, for optimum sucrose extraction. If the farmer lets her grow into her second year, she will consume her own root and produce a flower and seeds. She is harvested from the dry earth, neutral and white with dirt in her creases. She is fat in the middle and her body curves down to a thin spine of a root tip. The root system is a complicated tangle reaching five or six feet below the ground. We unabashedly crave the nutrient-stripped granules.

I imagine a map and the way it whispers in miniature; countries the size of fingernails. I can follow the drawn border with my fingertip. I snip into the intention of boundaries, like cutting into paper dolls into miniature real life. The scale slides up into real time. One orange = Zillions. The harvest pulls hard on the grove. There is lineage in paper. The senses sweep in through, drawn expressions animate in the imagination. I pursue forward with the rhythm of cutting and
walking, filling in all the uncomfortable spaces with separation as I scissor the outline. I remember that I am not what I think I am, not a series of thought passing through cranial tissue, but a cyclical grove of learning. I search through a ramble of clues left by the dead and undead. I am grateful to the ferocious dust cloud of passed away memories. I continue walking and cutting. The green Technicolor farmland would shrink into postage stamps if my footsteps were to take flight. Somewhere in the midst of experience, I lose the credible glow of my own defensive newness. The blood clots in the air. I can’t look too closely because the truth may not be there. When we lose everything at once it is tragedy down to the narrowest mustard seed.
My birth came auspiciously on my father’s 31st birthday. My mother went into labor the day before. She had planned to birth me at home, but when the labor pains faded, she had to go into the hospital. I was breech and came via C-Section. My mother says I came through the heaven gate instead of the earth gate. Bruce, my father’s best friend, was recruited to photograph the birth. He snapped away at the pivotal moments, but later found that he forgot to load the camera with film. Also present in the delivery room was the birth coach, Carol.

Somewhere the love of mother and father in union cleared away and smoky fear seeped in under the door. The milk and honey of a city park wedding, of baby on the way, could not bind my parents toward oneness. I would not attempt to know what fear melted them apart. There were no custody hearings, no squalor in the back room, just a simple split. Divorce seems so simple in the afterthought. My mother went one way, my father went another, but it was my father who opened his heart to me for the long haul. I was raised with loving intentions and some second guessed decisions.
i. mother

the female messenger interrupts light across a parent body.
hormones lactate from nodes for a noticeable introduction.

*Woman is the compassionate afterthought.*

a cold under the door notions the woman
to throw spoiled milk in the lyric of care.
she builds monuments to the cardinal directions.
deities are called upon with incense and morning yoga.
she keeps mason jars on the counter for dry grains.
she takes rescue remedy under the tongue.

*Woman turns on the instep, mending what was torn with a dance.*

SOURCE: fruit juice, milk, protein, remedy.
ORIGIN eases transition:
amoeba, salamander, lizard, dragon.

maternity names itself as necessity.
affection is a razor encased in wax.
My maternal grandfather, George Gutierrez was born in 1936 in Swink, Colorado, just outside of La Junta. He labored with his family as a field hand, harvesting sugar beets, cantaloupe, beans, peas, onions, corn and other crops. His parents, Fidelia and Condido, were of Spanish descent and had come from Northern New Mexico. The family was fortunate in have their own home and garden.

In the growing season, the family would thin the weeds. They took up the hoe and the dust with blistered hands. They pulled up two beets at a time from the ground by the stock and knocked them together to shake free the loose dirt. They lined the beets in a row, root to one side; greens to the other. They took a beet hook and chopped the crown from the root and lifted the root onto a cart with a beet fork. They made a compact journey, working down the row, 5 miles per acre, 25 acres per year, 125 miles per year.

During the sugar beet harvest, my great grandmother, Fidelia, would take the cut beet tops and fry them like collard greens.
A first memory is tricky, like a clue-- some cryptic voice of things to come. This memory is clear, haunting my dreams and nightmares to the breadth and depth. I couldn’t have been more than three. My mother and her new boyfriend, Rex, took me to a ski resort and left me at a day care center in the lodge to hit the slopes. I remember the vaulting ceiling high above my head, the shiver of winter, and the undeniable separation of mother and child, the incurable sensation of abandonment. When my mother came for me at the end of the day, I was exhausted from crying. This is the sensation that comes creeping into the dark corners of sleep.

My memory is strong where sugar is concerned. I once asked for a Pepsi and my mother told me I could have one on the 4th of July (which was some months away). When the 4th of July came around she was astounded that I asked for the Pepsi that had been promised to me. My dad let me have a Coke when we went to a baseball game. In high school I drank Dr. Pepper every day from the vending machine after school.
i. access n

sugar is light and particles and distance, moving outward.
the space opens, lifts, allowing the veins to bud and separate
in a fit of intense feeling: an OUTBURST.
truth rolls around on the tongue like a vintage wine.
access reaches up, approaching like a ghost, walking through held space.

Yes we’re, open.

ii. access v

you can put a pin on a map,
bring two fingers together at the grid,
but you can never thumbnail the universe.

we never obtain--only reach through.
the moment is caught with spindly fingers.
My father and I lived in a yellow trailer off of Mapleton Avenue. Behind our house was a creek with a narrow cement bridge and no guard rails. We had a fenced yard with trees and a sand box, and a large porch. The rain fell loudly on the tin roof. This is where my first memories are constructed. My mother stopped by regularly. She lived with her boyfriend Rex on the south side of town. My father put everything into raising me. He took photos, arranged birthdays, fed me oatmeal with apple sauce and maple syrup every morning, let me watch Sesame Street on our 5 inch television, helped me build a tolerance for spicy salsa, and built me a bed to keep my dolls in. He quit smoking the day I fished a cigarette pack out of his pocket and asked him what they were for. He took me to church every week, and afterward we drove to my grandparent’s house for Sunday roast. I liked to help my grandmother make Angel Food cake. After baking, the cake slipped from the mold with a thunk. We drizzled sugary frosting over the spongy surface.

Every night my father would read me *The Night Before Christmas*. I memorized the words according to the rhythm. I would hold the book and follow along without knowing how to read the words. I watched the detailed illustrations for clues.

“The children were nestled all snug in their beds,

while visions of sugar plumbs danced in their heads.”
Stars and insects feed into each other like brothers and sisters. The whole world tapers out for an instant shooting straight back into the distance. Scale is unimaginable, temperamental, grossly, under and over. Fidelia is a slender shadow, Candido is vocal grunt. They are part of the ghost heritage of La Junta. As I walk through the countryside, I look for them in spray painted signs on fruit stands:

APPLES, PEACHES, SWEET CORN.
Love always inconveniently intersects. My father and I had a happy life together, but there came a time to mend our split family with another. My father reconnected with Carol, my mother’s birth coach (who had since moved to California.) He convinced her to move back to Colorado and be his wife. Carol brought Angela, 18 and Brandon, 16 and Angela’s daughter, Julia, 2. For a short period we all lived in the two bedroom trailer meant for my father and me. I called Carol “mom” once. My mother was heart broken and offended.

Fidelia and Candido are here, implanted in my body. We all hold fast to the density of the time that has passed. Mechanical arms reach further out with a satellite telescope, and further in with a microscope. Somewhere around the middle we congregate, playing with light coming in and color going out. The words that trickle behind the thought like a casing left after the snake has transmuted. This is where I want to be. Our skin disintegrates in a rainstorm. I want to be where the creek bleeds out and the sand washes in. I watch the billowing curves of evening like an old European city, with her secret pregnant tunnels, cobblestones and arches that bless the ignorant and brilliant alike.
Carol and my father were married on Easter Sunday in Sedona, Arizona. The ceremony was officiated by Torkum, Carol’s eclectic spiritual teacher from Armenia. The marriage was symbolic of the resurrection of stability, our two families becoming one. Before I could participate in the wedding, Torkum insisted that I be baptized. I giggled as a trickle of water ran freely down my head and off the tip of my nose. I looked up into Torkum solemn face and intense eyes.
Like me, the sugar beet has ancestry. In ancient times, the “sea beet” (an ancestor of the sugar beet we know today) was collected and domesticated as a crop in the Persian Gulf, Greece, and Rome, sweetening the Cradle of Civilization. Beet is garden, fodder, ethanol, sugar, and leaf. In the Seventeenth Century, sugar beets became a trade commodity, moving into the industrial forefront. While the British clung to their sugar cane monopoly, Germans began to perfected the root for premium sweetness:
Andreas Sigismund Marggraf *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 1754

Having prepared the way by this experiment, I took the roots of white beets, and having cut them into small slices, I laid them by the fire to dry, taking care not to burn them: I then reduced them to a coarse powder, and laid it to dry a second time, because it is very apt to contract moisture: Whilst the coarse powder was yet warm, I put eight ounces of it into a glass vessel and pour’d upon it 16 ounces of brandy, so strong that it fired cannon-powder.

By this method… I obtained from the three roots… the following quantities of sugar.

1. From half a pound of the root of white beets, half an ounce of pure sugar.
2. From half a pound of skirrets, an ounce and a half of pure sugar.
3. From half a pound of red beets, one ounce and a quarter of pure sugar.

It is evident from these experiments that lime water is not at all necessary to dry and thicken the sugar, as some pretend, since the sugar crystallizes without it.

Under pressures of a sugar cane embargo to France, Napoleon ordered the cultivation of sugar beets, constructing 334 sugar processing factories. This disrupted the sugar cane markets and sent prices plummeting. Sugar beets were easier and cheaper to produce. The word caught on.
i. transplant n

the grass is always greener the moment we open our eyes.

in the event of my death,
lift out my heart, liver, corneas, kidneys, marrow and blood.
root them in the cavity of the living.

ii. transplant v

the rising eye lifts through the chapters of daylight by calloused hands.
a plant is lifted out as a thirsty bud and carried from the clay,
dreaming into a bigger bowl of earth.

soil is remorse.

to stay would be deadly,
to shift the ground from the roots and settle elsewhere
is a possibility to live for.
For about a year after their marriage, I lived with my dad and Carol and Brandon on the east side of town, with a yard big enough to raise horses. But we had no horses. We had no pets at all, except for an infestation of mice in the basement. My dad built a homemade mouse trap. Every week or so, the trap would catch a live mouse, and we would go to a neighboring field to set it free. While we were out for the day, our house was robbed. Somewhere in this scuffle, Carol decided that she really wanted to return to California to continue her training as a reverend in the Church of Religious Science. She and Brandon moved back to California. A few months later, my Dad followed them, leaving me in Boulder with my mother.

In my Waldorf School, we were infused with artistic culture. I learned German counting songs, to knit and make felt by hand, to sew pillows, make wooden candle holders. I was lead angel in the school play about St. Francis. I learned my first lettering by copying poems about saints and fairies off the chalk board. My eye copies whatever it sees and inverts the letters, scrambling sentences and words to my own delight. To a linguist, it looked like a dyslexic nightmare. For me, the rules of language were far away. I followed the shapes with my eyes, lines and crosses. I drew people in pictures and wrote their stories in loops along the bottom of the page.
Today I sing the blues for misplaced letters.

Lines swoop out like fawns tangled in a hunter’s net.

You tell me to TAKE

and I scratch my crayon from the paper,
to the floor, up the wall, and out the window.

You tell me to BREAK

and I dip my brush in all the watercolors
so they blend into twelve muddy ovals.

You tell me to straighten up my lines

and I translate the garden of my heart with wool and yarn.

I write familiar words like foreign objects,
hitching them to my sides like appendages,
hoping they will grow into my calculations.

It makes no difference.

We all want to tenderize our tongues into script.

This is my first language.

This is my first skin.
My mother dated a man named Cristo. We went to visit him at his home way up in the mountains. In the cabin, there was a giant bathtub with deep blue tiles. I stood for a while admiring the tub. A woman came in and began to fill the tub. I admired her long hair, like the women in the Victorian photographs. The woman stripped off her clothes and invited me into the tub. The blue tiles wiggled in the reflected light of my little naked body in the water. I heard an argument begin in the next room between my mother and Cristo. It would be a while. The woman looked at me with sympathy. She smiled as if she didn’t know what to say, then she closed her eyes. We sat in the silent glow of the water.
The water got cold and I climbed out of the tub. I put my clothes back on and found a packet of Rainbow Bright paper dolls. I worked the serrated edges, careful not to rip into the paper clothes. I could still hear my mother and Cristo arguing. I deepened my concentration. A party dress, a casual jumpsuit, pajamas, a formal gown-- each accompanied with appropriate space boots and a hairdo or hat. The volume of the yelling accelerated. Suddenly my mother burst through the room and ushered me to the car. My mother had Cristo’s prized karate uniform in her hands. “Hannah, its time to go!” We boarded the Civic and started down the driveway. I buckled my seatbelt. Cristo came running out of the house, jumped on top of the car and began tearing off the windshield wipers and the side view mirrors. We all screamed for different reasons. He jumped off the car as we came to the end of the dirt road, still in a raging in the dust.
i.  suit n

paper men and women line the bedroom wall.  
each suit is folded over the undergarment base.  
a wedding requires the least possible tatter.  
with age, the pieces will disperse into quilts and kitchen rags.

a deck of cards has suits as well.  
if one piece is lost, the deck is ruined,  
reduced to paper.

ii. suit v

we are in agreement, 
an accord on paper.  
the humble property suits us to an edge,  
satisfied without contention.

the land becomes our circumstance,  
our faces blend to the soil.
The first sugar beet factory in the United States opened in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1838. By 1885 sugar beet replaced sugar cane in production. Great Western Sugar built the first factory in Loveland, Colorado in 1901. The corporation recruited workers from Mexico with Spanish language motion picture film strips. They sat in the darkness. They saw themselves hoeing, weeding, topping. They saw themselves dressed in suits and ties. They saw themselves celebrating Independence Day. They saw themselves break for lunch in the happy sun. They saw themselves playing baseball in the Sunday heat. They saw themselves in the classroom absorbing knowledge the way canned fruit fills up the dry holes of a sponge cake. They saw themselves, and they came in thousands to the abundant prairie. The Arkansas Valley opened her bountiful arms. The American Dream wrapped around their faces to shield from the sun. Sugar was the first and last resort.
There were several roommates living with my mom and me in our Boulder townhouse. My mother and I shared a room and a bed. One morning I woke up to find she was not in our room. I found her and she was in bed with the downstairs roommate. She laughed at me when I squinted my eyes and made a goofy grin. Then she became sick. She had her friend drop me off at school. Half way through the day I decided that I was going to be sick too. At recess, I went to look for four leaf clovers. I ate the three leaf clovers in order to thin out the patch. When I came back to class, I threw up bright green in the middle of our lesson. I was sent home to be with my mother. This happened on a few occasions. My mother would be sick in the morning, and I would make myself sick during school. My mother told me that she might have a baby with the man who lived in the downstairs bedroom. I was excited at the prospect of having a younger brother or sister. We moved into a new apartment, this time we had the whole place to ourselves. My mother explained to me that there would be no baby coming.
ii.  *mother* adj

slowly, mother becomes instinct.  
of all possible right turns, the best is left unturned.

*mother, in this instance, is arbitrary.*

a heavy footprint leans on  
the possibility of erosion,  
a slippery slope of meaning well.

*a mother is not the only one who understands this.*

she pulls in paradigms from the outside world.  
she rates her motion by wrenching the bolt tighter.  
her knuckles whiten when she wrings the cloth of excess water.  
her demeanor may be altered by a mother of invention.

*sex is only the position of our entrance.*
“If you see a cute boy, scream!” My mother would say this spontaneously. I told her that she should have another baby. “What should the baby’s name be?” She asked. The baby could be named Harry. “Harry… Harry Butt!” she laughed.

She had a boyfriend named Scott who was an Eagle Scout. He had a VW Van that he would park outside our apartment. One time he came over and brought a hot pizza. He put the pizza (still in the cardboard box) in the oven to keep it hot. My mom and Scott went in the van and were out there for a while. I smelled the smoke first, then I saw blue flames coming from the oven. I screamed and ran to the neighbor’s house. The neighbor opened the oven, grabbed the flaming box and threw it on the sidewalk outside.
The truth is mixed into every coffee cake, in every chocolate stolen by or rewarded to a child, in every celebrated or guilty indulgence. Sugar is sweet discomfort flowering under the conscience. Sugar burns faster than a calorie in sweat. Sugar burns faster than a spoiled appetite. Sugar rots faster than a tooth can decay. In the bloodstream of our mountains, our chiseled monuments, our mines, our factories, our fields, our railroads, schools, taverns, bakeries, our houses and our courthouses there is sugary history in the soil. Sugar engulfs us: pre-packaged under supermarket flood lights, or pulled from the ground raw. Sugar is more enchanting than the witches of Salem, sugar settles into our soulbodies like a cultural rock. Sugar ferments into our alcoholic nightmares. Ban sugar, and gangs will smuggle it in under their coats. Release sugar without restriction, and the world might go awry. Beneath the soil now sold for suburban development, are invisible fossils, tragedies without the luxury of remembrance. My parents sang me lullabies with mouths full of cavities; for this, we do not have a photograph, we know what it looks like.
My mother and I met Helen and Lana at Unity Church. They were sitting in the pews across the isle. Helen sat on Lana’s lap. Reverend Jack was demonstrating some important point about human error and responsibility by having the congregation stand up and sit back down. I could hear Helen whining across the isle, “Mom, stop standing up and sitting down!” Our mothers became friends. They were both single and had a lot to share about their relationships, childhoods, and us, their daughters. Helen’s father was absent, imprisoned for some unknown reason. She was a year older than me, larger, and more assertive. Our mothers arranged play dates for us. They sat in the kitchen while Helen and I played in my room. “Let’s pretend that you are the wife and I am the husband,” she suggested. We dressed in our assigned genders. She gave me chores: “Clean up the house!” I would sweep the floor willingly. “Take care of the kids!” She shoved a half clothed doll into my arms. “Duh! We can’t be a husband and wife if we aren’t married!” We planned an elaborate wedding with all the stuffed animals and dolls in attendance. Sylvester the cat officiated because was the tallest and he could stand upright on his own. He was black and white, which was what ministers wore, especially in the Victorian era. Our mothers were also in attendance. They thought it was adorable when Helen kissed me, and carried me upstairs.
After the wedding, Helen threw me on the bed. “Do you know what people do after they get married?” I shrugged my shoulders, even though I had a vague idea. She made me take my clothes off. My heart spun slowly like a compass, trying to find its bearing. I laid down and didn’t move a muscle. Her skin smelled like vegetable oil. She was heavy, her weight suppressed my lungs. It might have been like drowning, it might have been like falling in sand. There was no caress, no petting, just the uncomfortable closeness of skin. “Don’t tell our moms!” She threatened. “You are my wife and you have to keep this a secret.”
i. compass n

capsulated in water, the needle knows her own north.
we circumnavigate eternity
like sweeping the rim of the glass.

stars dictate the layout of the sea.
comprehension is a tight fit.
pins and pens smooth their way between us.
the broom sweeps our conscience clean.

our mothers navigate in the kitchen, while we pilot forward,
locked in the bedroom.

ii. compass v

the sky seems too far away to touch,
yet we hide when it falls into our hair.

ENCOMPASS:
the curved motion is frozen in spirit and verse.

The father’s heart is a circumscribed space.
I survey the gages and bring my eye to the scope, looking to the surface.
My mother had a boyfriend named Steve, who delivered spring water. On Steve’s back porch there was a huge jug of brown liquid. There were thick pieces floating around inside. He told me that the liquid was fruit juice and the little moving bits were yeast bits that were fermenting the juice into alcohol. “The yeast is alive,” he said. My mother and Steve went to the bedroom and I stayed in the living room with his roommate to watch a movie. The movie took place on the dusty cobblestone streets of medieval Europe. Malicious men in robes climbed through narrow stairways and dungeons with their faces illuminated by candles. There was a scene where someone’s heart, had been cut out and was wrapped in a white cloth, the blood seeping through. I was scared. I entered the bedroom where my mom and Steve were. They were in bed. Steve yelled, “Oh my God, she saw me naked!” Embarrassed, I went back to the movie and watched people being impaled on spears.
I want to escape to the forming detail of the everyday. I want to remember the capable beauty of the moment. My thoughts are like floodwater, everything pushing toward the radiant trauma of the moment. Heaven and hell are spun into a wheel of the same substance. My great grandfather Candido made bootlegged gin; he butchered his own cattle, doused them in homespun honey and hung them to cure in a shack outside the house. Every so often, he would check his curing rumps by biting into them.

Candido beat his family; it was the thing to do in those days. He makes his way toward them. The chair legs drag quickly along the floor after he shoves it. The homemade gin and honey meat on his breath make no apologies. His boot steps flatten any pleas for peace. It only takes one muscular crack with his fist to initiate the refusal and reset the boundary. The violence will thin out further down the bloodline, but he thinks nothing of me. I am only a vague legacy to his carnal urges. His anger ticks like the watch on his wrist. I am the great-grand daughter, catching the last drops in my hand. It can’t strain through me. I absorb this violence and it becomes song.

When little George was born, he was not expected to live. The land infused him. He ate well. As a child he worked 10 hour days at 25 cents per hour. When he was older and stronger, he made 50 cents.
My mother would take me to the library where I would pour over old books with photographs of Victorian and Edwardian families; huge units of finely dressed gentry in hoop skirts, petticoats and breeches. The children gathered proudly around their seated parents. I drew replicas of these photos. Even the puppies and kittens and family pets were penciled in next to the folds of their skirts. I would imagine their family dynamics, and surround them with their own history.
i. refuse n

the worthless or useless part of something.
the cut off ends of the carrot.
spirit moves down, taking the center.
limbs can be mangled, sacrificed.
the torso is the heart.
luck is a profitable business.

ii. refuse v

journey is a metaphorical incision,
sometimes requiring hammers, cowboys and alimony.
non-compliance is an antacid.
to decline is to withhold acceptance, compliance, or permission.
identity is soft like noodles or white bread.

we leap over the border fence, disregarding its threat.
The south to north route is for stability seekers. Immigrants cross the northern border of Mexico, looking for work. The country notices the heavy weight at the feet. Tighten the belt. Round off the stolen border. It is definitely ours, used to be yours, and was neither of ours at one point. The bricks and cement are mixed from ancestral soil.

Race is a pinpoint of color, showing how our bodies are intoxicated by the sun, a geographic imprint. Yet we are insulated by this color, this knowing. We shade in trees and lenses, difference is our favorite fear, easily named by an arrow or a finger. Image is easy and genuine. Ideas are flat and radioactive. The Klan was alive in La Junta, infiltrating separateness like the sugar beets in the field, growing into their fate. In Colorado, Hispanics, Mexicans, Catholics, Jews, Immigrants, and other “others” were forced to watch movie pictures from the theatre balcony and worship in the basements of the churches, rather than the sanctuary. On George’s name day, he prayed that these ghosts would disappear.
Melody had two little brothers, Reid and Sam. She thought they were annoying, but I thought it was neat: they were a family with the same Mom and Dad living together in the same house. They even had ducks in the back yard and the ducks had babies. Melody and I let them come inside to walk around the living room. We would pet their soft fur. Melody’s mother took me with the family to Denver to be blessed by a hindu guru called Gurumayi. I shuffled my feet along the carpet of the hotel reception hall. I felt light and retrospective. We lined for darshan and I bent down take the blessing, letting the long peacock feathers bless my head. A woman in a white robe, held a tray of Hershey kisses. I took one. It was soft and stuck to the tinfoil when I opened it.

In the honeycomb of my heart. I will store perfumed forgiveness, myrrh-scented devotion, the rare essence of lotus-souls — fragrant honey of a million soul-flowers.
After weeks of putting up with my begging, my mother brought the class guinea pig home from the preschool where she worked. The guinea pig’s name was Sunny.

I gave Sunny all my love and attention. I fed her, and tried to hold her in my lap. She wiggled and scratched my skin, but I endured it just to take comfort in her warmth and soft fur. She had a wire cage and a big water bottle, which she would press her nose up to and stick out her little tongue to sip the drops off the top. One day she didn’t want to eat or drink or wiggle around in my arms. My mother called the vet. The water in her bottle was a little green. “I guess we should have changed the water more often,” my mother said sympathetically. She made a box for her so she could sleep by my bed. I put my hand down to feel her warm fur as I was falling asleep. In the morning I reached down and her little body was cold. We buried her in the garden of the Kindergarten. My mother told me that she would wait for me in heaven. I drew a picture of Sunny sitting on top of a rainbow.
When George was 17 he lied about his age to join the Air Force. He was sent to Japan for two years. His mother, Fidelia died shortly after he left. In the Air Force he was a featherweight boxing champion, and had a Japanese girlfriend while he was there. By 19 he was a full fledged alcoholic. George met my grandmother, Bonnie, in Washington DC when she was young and fresh from the North Carolina country. She was a typist for the FBI. George was clean and uniformed, a smile to cut glass- to cut grease. He was Chicano for Italiano. Romance languages translated easily. Bonnie was pregnant before she could inhale. She tried to get back to North Carolina with her baby, but her parents wouldn’t let her come home. She even tried to escape from a moving car while she was pregnant. She didn’t lose the baby. She submitted to the marriage, signing over her Baptism to a Catholic hierarchy.
The military family moves along with the drumbeats: Washington DC, Long Island, Delaware, Okinawa, Indiana, Colorado. The domestic tugboat hauls in her flagship and three lives tumble out. Ralph was the favorite son and walked across the hot stove for show. He was tagged as a scholar. My mother, Deborah, was born 18 months after Ralph, and was very shy. George faced intense racism and discrimination in the military. He confronted his superiors and as a result, was transferred to Greenland atoles for three years, where he witnessed atomic bomb testing. He became sick with radiation poisoning and came home to recover. Cathy was born 9 months after his return.
George retired from the military and settled in Aurora, Colorado. His drinking grew progressively worse. He stayed at the bars at night and hit kids with a belt by day. Ralph was a straight A student. He wanted to be a doctor and make money. Deborah, my mother, was bookish, hippyish, but not particularly ambitious. Cathy acted out the silent pain of the family. She ran away from home at 15, was arrested, and dragged back kicking and screaming. Cathy, the sweet bohemian princess, the screaming peacemaker; love sank to the basement with secrets.
i dove n
little white pigeon,
currier of peace,

ii. dove v
God only knows why she dove from the cliff.
At 18, Cathy worked as line cook and nude dancer. She missed her period and thought she was pregnant. She tried to terminate the fetus by ingesting Penny Royal Oil, a known abortifacient. In an emotional bluster, she ingested a whole bottle. The toxic oil took her body in a rapture. Her body bloated to twice its size and her liver and kidneys failed within a week. The autopsy revealed that Cathy hadn’t been pregnant to begin with. George spread her ashes in the Arizona desert.
i. tear n

a drop of clear saline fluid secreted by the lachrymal gland and diffused between the eye and eyelids to moisten the parts and facilitate motion.

weep weep sigh
weep weep sigh

a transparent drop of fluid or hardened fluid matter (as resin).

grieve grieve silence

grieve grieve contact

ii. tear v

to shed disillusion
iii. tear n

generating paper and cloth are material bygones,  
dissolving into soil like music notes.  
body torn from soul is an invisible departure.  
the act of tearing is bound up in delivery.

HURRY, the edges are never clear  
a tear has momentum.  
it bends, scatters burns through the sky.  
the pull to separate is inevitable.

iv. tear v


to move or act hastily forces us to shift forward.
When I was ten, my Dad was laid off from his job in California. He and Carol moved back to Colorado. I was thrilled to have my parents living in the same city. My mother had a boyfriend named Tim, who was a real estate broker. He had a son my age called Rav. Tim was a devotee of Gurumayi, the woman who had blessed me with her peacock feathers. Tim would get up at 5am every morning for yoga. He bent into his sun salutations with intensity and urgency. The fastest, deepest, yoga poses I had ever seen. On Friday nights, Tim, my mom and Rav and I went to Sussex One, a large office building behind the Jiffy Lube, for satsang chanting. I sat with my mother in our gender specific area. We would chant to Gurumayi’s framed photograph, perched artfully in a chair upholstered with silk. When Rav and I were bored of singing we would venture out to the vending machine. My arms were small enough that I could reach my hands under the flap and grab cookie packs from the bottom row. We took our booty to the indoor courtyard of the office building. The courtyard was a life size Zen Garden. There was a flagstone pathway across the center the Zen Garden. The flagstones were surrounded by a sea of little white stones which were raked in symmetrical patterns. The flagstone path led to a little house with wooden stumps to sit on. Rav and I hid there and ate our stolen treats.

And when the snowflakes of wintry experiences and earthly separation dance around me, I shall hide in the honeycomb of my heart, where I often found Thee stealing the honey of my stored devotion.
My mother, Tim, Rav and I went on a ski trip to Beaver Creek. My mother patiently guided me along the snow. I was delighted and hungry at the end of the day. But Tim was in a mood and for some reason, would not stop for dinner after our long day of skiing. “Food is for wimps,” he said. My mother flew into a rage at a gas station and refused to get back into the car. When I got out of the car to console her, he drove away without us. The air smelled of petroleum as we waited for the police to escort us to a shelter. Night was coming in, and we had no money for a motel. The bus would come in the morning. The officer gave us two choices: We could sleep in a local church, or sleep in the police station. My mother let me choose. My irrational fears told me that if we slept in the church, we would be haunted by ghosts. The police station had a twenty-four-hour guard. I lay under an itchy navy blue blanket and I didn’t sleep until we were on the greyhound bus the next morning. My mother lived in a women’s shelter while she saved money. In order to make sense of her life, she threw pennies for I Ching. The pennies told her to go to northern California, and at the end of the summer, she left.
iii. mother v

to measure the formula of birth.
to notice graceful aging.
to apply sunscreen in the heat.
to bless the doorway with a watermark.
to give restlessly for no one’s sake.
to PRODUCE in the reckless formation of an era.
to walk sideways to avoid danger.
to attribute savings as a unit of love.
to credit the unborn as a close likeness.
to arm the body with a blessing.
to accept maternity as a possibility of being.
to accept being as possibility of maternity.
to imagine worlds of better worlds.
to make a journey worth its anticipation.
to make a journey worth the homecoming.
to make music worth waking up to.
to chain link the truth with metaphor.
to milk a line of cows in the highest advocacy of care
to wait for the urge in the moonlight.
to protect a litter of reasons.
to like as a gateway
to love.

the pleasure of our being
deserves a mother in guard of our best secrets
My dad, Carol and I drove to Santa Fe to receive darshan from Ammachi, the hugging saint. The ballroom of the hotel was flooded with people who had traveled great distances to be hugged. We all threw petals at the floor and chanted the 108 names of God. She entered the ballroom to our cheers, dressed in white and had a long, thick, black braid down her back. She had a small stature but she exuded a joyful and infiltrating presence. She never stopped smiling. After a dinner of vegetarian curry, lentils and fresh dhal, we took our place behind the hundreds who had already gathered in line to be blessed by Ammachi. People approached in units. Sometimes she would hug a single person and they moved aside, they might cry, or smile with a great a sense joy. Sometimes a whole family came to be blessed together, she kissed babies on the forehead, moms and dads bowed their heads forward to take in the blessing of her embrace. The simple gesture was steeped in ritual and love. We approached the stage and she reached her tiny warm hands out to me and gathered us to her bosom. We were there, my father, Carol, Amma, the embodiment of the holy mother, and me, suspended in a moment of peace that I would ever be desperate to return to. My family moved off of the stage, but she held fast to my hand. She hugged me a second time alone.

*Where Thou camest — in that spot made hallow by the dust of Thy feet — I will lie. In the depth of Thy footprints may I find my nook of safety.*
From Santa Fe, I took a direct flight to Sacramento to spend the summer with my mother. She was living in a sparsely furnished studio guesthouse. The landlord, Nancy came over to do her laundry. Sometimes I found twenty dollar bills in the dryer. I used the money to buy books of paper dolls. Nancy’s big black cat, Nigel, lived in our studio. He would drool profusely and kneed his declawed paws into my thighs. My mother was collecting unemployment. Nancy came by looking for the late rent. “I am exhibiting signs of pregnancy,” my mother said. Nancy frowned. She told us we had to be out by the 1st. My mother drove to the grocery store with a bucket in her lap, too sick to go inside. She handed me a blank check and a list. I bought the groceries and a Congratulations-on-the-baby card. The supermarket cashier looked at me suspiciously, but said nothing.

My mother left me with my friend Alicia, and went to abort the baby. Alicia and I spent the heat of the day at the pool. Afterwards, we walked to the park and set up our paper dolls in the grass under a big oak tree. The grass helped the dolls to stand on their own. We walked home as the sky turned pink. The next day my mother took me to the airport to go back to Colorado.
iv. mother (addendum)

a cherub clipped of memory at the wing bleeds forgiveness for an unwelcome womb. her guilt is an aura smelted to the membrane of tissue/soul. composed in the thrashing furnace, a little black box of untapped histories. who will write the memoirs of live yeast? linking proteins and carnations turning glucose into you. little unwritten savior driven off at the source. Are you a bacteria of frostbitten finger or toe? which are the cells that calculate a thousand nerved smiles? which are the bones that call the means to the end? a heartbeat doubled develops unnecessarily, unhinging the narrow line of sorrow on the tight bracket of her thoughts. she chooses to phase out in the dark, behind the furrowed brow of complexity. born into the alcoholic sub-plot: a substance (mutilated paternity/isolated maternity) self-perpetuated into ruinous rain-drop life. acetous dreams with irresponsible aftermaths and clear evaporations. fermentation is the best way to preserve history and her hand hangs on to a slice of cirrhotic heart. I, standing full bodied among the ghosts of my aborted siblings, added into the living like a fluke. to be sure, you are the survivors, suspended in an inarticulate cloud. I am here, tipping the wine glass just enough to taste another age. you are the young apple remembered in the cider. our real mother is a universe of spindling shoots, ready to green us and brown us in one lifetime. to produce an egg is the art of her season. She astringes the bath water with vinegar to teach us the value of penance. sugar is the aftermath of love.
Sugar, like salt disrupts the osmotic pressure in the body, solutes outside of the cell, draws water out. There are no dark places in the open desert’s day. The only shadows cast are from the cracks in the sand. Who is here? Like the open tundra, the desert is a lucid dream of snow illusions. The wind echoes like falling water, rippling in a stagnant swamp. Green is a hazy confusion. The desert is greener than we would ever imagine. When we think of water, we think of the blue refreshment of submersion. The sand wipes out a claim to anything we ever knew. Coldness is a refracted syllogism, a line on the planetary sectors of eternity. Coldness is brighter than the snowy tundra in sun, brighter than the tunnel moment when the soul segments itself from the body. This is the prophetic afterthought, the breeding ground of visions. Sun and clouds race forward and then it is night. We relax into our sandy tomb and sleep in the great expanse.
i. desert n

here is the uncultivated tract into the yellow-red horizon.
we are an arid sort. the dust we inhale gives us color and space to draw in.
the horizon leads us in slow circles.

ii. desert v

to withdraw from the intuitive source.
to leave in the lurch, severing the memory like a lesion.
to shrink away from combat like a violet,
into the gritty pace of peace.
to fail in a time of need. bravery cloistered by survival’s flight.
a family name wilts in orange air.
Today I sing the blues for misplaced vowel endings.
Like a pancake with one side A and the other side E
and I keep flipping them over.
You tell me to TAKE
and I tocar,
You tell me to break
and I romper.
You tell me to let go
and I swing back over a valley of sharp glass shards.

The learning is mandatory.
I add foreign words to my sides like appendages,
hoping they will grow into my calculations.
It makes no difference.
We all want to tenderize this speak to our tongues.
This is my second lingua.
This is my second skin.
My mother grins with a feather weight body. She justifies her sparkable temper with the infusion of Kali the lover/destroyer. It is a joke but only partly. My mother’s diabolical laugh and the way she shakes her head with a hint of manic glee tells me she is truthful.
My mother met and married Lenny the lawyer. I came to live for the summer with them and Lenny’s two kids Shawn and Kristi at Ananda Village Cooperative Community, tucked away near the San Juan Ridge outside Nevada City, California. On the surface, communal life seemed blissful. Everyone would rise and smile with the sun, devoting their daily work to the enchanting spirit of the village founder Kriananda, devotee of Yogananda. I never saw or met Kriananda, he was out of the country avoiding some legal matters involving former female devotees. But these things were not discussed, no one wanted to ripple the peaceful pools or ruffle the trees. The people there were eerily nice. Since there wasn’t a day when my mother and Larry didn’t fight, I spent a lot of time with Sean and Kristin and the other teenagers who were bored beyond oblivion.
I was introduced to the gods and goddesses through the names (or should I say renames) of the devotees: Lakshmi, Krishna, Durga, Shanti, Rama. I made friends with a girl my age named Mirabai (named after the prophetic poet). She had fiery red hair and a sassy attitude. She also had an expansive Beanie Baby collection. Her mother, Kali, was heavyset and a bit fearsome. Kali and Mirabai’s father, Nitai, were divorced, but instead of living in some distant city or state, he lived a few houses away. Nitai was a timid man, although he once told me that my poem about winter should be more joyful. I couldn’t quite trust him after that. The marriage between my mother and Larry ended after seven months, much to our relief. Some agreed that my mother’s demeanor was too intense and volatile for the image of the community. She didn’t radiate happiness consistently enough to meet the requirements of a true devotee.
In the summer days of life, teach me to gather the honey from flowers of quality, which grow in the garden of human souls.

In the honeycomb of my heart. I will store perfumed forgiveness, myrrh-scented devotion, the rare essence of lotus-souls — fragrant honey of a million soul-flowers. And when the snowflakes of wintry experiences and earthly separation dance around me, I shall hide in the honeycomb of my heart, where I often found Thee stealing the honey of my stored devotion.

Where Thou camest — in that spot made hallow by the dust of Thy feet — I will lie. In the depth of Thy footprints may I find my nook of safety.

-Paramahansa Yogananda
Recently, Carol thought she sat at the feet of the ultimate Guru, Swami Vishwananda. He told his followers he was the reincarnation of the Paramahansa Yogananda. It was an easy sell, everyone loved him. He was a beautiful young Indian man with long wavy silky hair, and a broad smile. I drove Carol and my father to the airport while they were still in love with him. They paid big money to sit in his presence and seek council. At the bidding of the guru, Carol and my father came home and made plans to remodel their basement family room into a temple for Kali. Once a week they would burn the holy cow dung in the living room fireplace. They were going to dress statues of Kali and pour honey and milk over the embodied effigy. They played the guru chanting “om” on a 24-7 loop.

Corey and I went to my parent’s house. We helped my dad move a heavy TV stand out of the family room to make way for the statues of Kali. Carol showed us pictures of her guru. “Isn’t he handsome?” She asked. We sat in the living room drinking tea. My father went to his wood shop to build the altar for the goddess. Suddenly we heard him scream. He had cut his fingers on the saw. Not straight through, but close enough to see the bone.
We sat in the waiting room eating fast food while my Dad was stitched up. It was crowded. People came and went through the automatic double doors. We heard them speaking to each other. Earlier in the evening, a baby had been brought in who had stopped breathing. The doctors tried to resuscitate. I could hear the hollow painful drones of a mother gasping for air with her sobbing. The worst sound in the world is a mother mourning for her child. She was young and unkempt, possibly just out of high school. A weight of sadness hung from her neck and clouded her red face. I imagined her pushing a cart down the isle of some box store; a baby strapped in the safety seat, a dream on the shelf next to the laundry soaps. Her shallow wealth has a deep dark hole and motherhood a faded sparkle. Had she begged Jesus to save her baby? I couldn’t imagine her knowing who Kali was. In my thoughts the goddess had come in a most unforgiving way. The hole in her heart could not be filled with enough blessings and cards and cigarettes to cure deep sadness. My eyes welled for her and for the child and for the strange cultural arms that every child is born into. Kali, through my father’s slip with her altar, had led us all there to witness this performance of life.
In the summer Swami Vishwananda came to my parents’ house. They felt a great honor to have him in their home. They made many preparations. He required not clean, but brand new sheets to sleep on. Another generous devotee gave my parents $15,000 to landscape a new yard and to build a new deck, just so the guru would be impressed. Flowers were bought and meals were prepared to the exact prescription. The guru came for a celebration to consecrate the new temple converted from the family room. Everyone danced and blessed the statues of Kali with prayers and honey. The guru spoke about peace, in no new terms. Everyone chanted hymns to the goddess of life and death. The party was a success. With blessings bestowed, he went back to his ashram. In the fall, he had a falling out with some of his followers. It was rumored that he had been fornicating with some of his close devotees, while he claimed to be celibate. It was just another unraveling of Kali’s sari.
Hungry, I sit down at a table with my family, as my ancestors have done. We bow our heads and notice the edge where the linen drapes the oak. Before the meal makes its way through our bodies, we take a moment to consider its source. There are hands that lifted it from the oven and scooped it into porcelain serving wear. There are hands that pressed it with a fork to make sure it was tender. There are hands that sprinkled sugar and salt through fingers, set the knife to chop, and measured oil with a spoon. There are hands that noticed the time, put the water to boil, set the temperature, and washed the dirt from the creases. There are hands that know the recipe by heart. There are hands that chose the best fruit from the market, picked milk from the back of the cold case, and know what to buy for the season. There are hands that stocked the shelves, measured cold cuts on a scale, and brought carts back to the door. There are hands that drove the stacked dolly down the ramp, held the wheel at 10 and 2, checked the horizon for weather. There are hands that know the soil, hands that pray for rain, hands that mark the row straight down the field, and hands that rise in the night to calve the livestock. There are hands that reach into the ground and pull out what has been made by the earth, the sun, the rain and the stars.

*Where Thou camest — in that spot made hallow by the dust of Thy feet — I will lie. In the depth of Thy footprints may I find my nook of safety.*
Annotated Bibliography

A basic scientific guide to the biology and genetics of sugar beets. There is also an interesting chapter on the history of sugar beets, from ancient cultivation to modern production and consumption.

A book of poems narrating a contentious relationship between husband and wife. The narratives are from the wife’s perspective, as she contemplates the fallout of the relationship, and mourns the lost love. The tangos progress toward realization, healing and closure. This was helpful thematically, and as a successful model of a book poetry that works in a confessional mode without being trite.

A lyric essay by Cha, a student of literature and film, the book blends poetry, history, memoir, image, and language, all pointing back to her family’s immigration from Korea. Cha used juxtaposition, hypertext, and visual media to explore connections in language, sound, geography, culture, and internal dialogue. It is hard to categorize this work, but I found it relevant to my project, especially with the visual and formatting aspects.

A non-fiction exploration of America’s fascination with and consumption of sugar. The book is well researched and covers a whole range of information and contemplation. Chen covers everything from physiological dynamics of taste buds, to the various international attitudes about sugar, cooking, eating and sweetness. It was very helpful in my research.

A book of prose poems that center around found objects and activities in the Bowery area of New York City. Coultas’s poems observe the neighborhood as it changes around her identity in the urban culture.
consulted Coltas’s work to understand the format of the prose poems, and
to see how she used objects and imagery to relate to her personal
landscape. This is a book that I always go back to for inspiration.

A sociological synopsis of the agricultural industry (specifically sugar beet) in Colorado after the turn of the century, and up to the social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s. The book focuses on the treatment of Mexicans and Hispanos, specifically the treatment of children by Colorado Schools and Communities. I feel connected to the issues that Donato covers and consider this the main source for my project.

A book of collected essays and papers that discuss the historical and cultural impact of Hispanics, Mexican, and Latin immigrants in Colorado over the past four hundred years. The book was a bit dated, but it was helpful and informative as a snapshot of Colorado history, especially detailing how the Spanish settled the southwest.

A well written and detailed historical text on the Spanish attempts to settle and convert Native Americans in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado. The text also gives a lot of information on Native American culture and migration patterns. The text has historical accuracy, but reads like a novel.

A book of selected writings, poetry, plays and speeches by Colorado Hispanic civil rights leader, “Corky” Gonzales. I was especially interested in his epic poem, “Yo Soy Joaquin” which is a coming of age narrative in its own right. The poem reaches into the images of history and embodying the ancestors to find a sense of self and identity.

The classic autobiography which superimposed by language so elegant, intricate and interesting, that it makes me blush to call myself a poet. The
tightness of the prosaic structure challenges me to spread it out in my mind. I like this book too much to explain it objectively.

A series of poems that explore the connections between sugar, a childhood in Brazil, sexuality, adolescence, colonialism, and emotional health; I felt these poems related to my project, but were also very different, especially the way she structures the book and the poems themselves. Still I felt that it was relevant to my project.

A book of poetry, prose, memoir, research, found literature, images, textiles and textures, sounds that interweave themselves into each other. The book is thick with exploration and anecdotes about her life and family history. This is another great model that I tried to learn from and integrate into my work.

The book traces the origins and history of sugar from colonization to modernization. While the book focuses primarily on sugar cane, there were a couple of chapters on Sugar beets that were useful to the thesis, specifically detailing how sugar beets disrupted the sugar cane monopoly.

Ortiz, Simon J. *from Sand Creek.* (1981): Arizona UP.
Writings of the Native American poet, focusing on the massacre on Sand Creek. Ortiz juxtaposes the massacre with the images of Vietnam War Veterans returning home, with stories about the atrocities of war. The poems are significant to the project because they take place in and around La Junta, Colorado.

Rivera, Tomas …*y no se lotrago la tierra./And the earth did not devour him.* (1992): Arte Publico Press.
A series of prose narratives about life as a migrant worker in the 1940s and 50s. The novel is divided into fourteen narrative stories interspersed by thirteen fragmented, poem-like, anecdotes, framed around an unnamed protagonist, a young boy, coming to grips with his world. This book is one of the main inspirations for embarking on the project.

A series of essays and poetry on fountains and other architecture and history from Vancouver. Robertson explores visual landscape through language, photography and history. She brings the mundane into the light and makes it sparkle.

A series of prose poems contemplating weather as a transitional substance. The weather is environment invoking a poetic response. These poems were helpful because they related to the loose contemplative places that holds the manuscript together. I love the way Robertson uses language in a sort of airy way that both soothes the reader and catches the reader off guard.

A novel about coming of age in a lonely world. exploring sexuality, violence and mortality. This novel was especially helpful when I was writing my own narrative stories. Especially the tone she uses. The straightforward explanations for sexuality and violence, keeps the narrative focused and “real”.

The Autobiography of an Indian man who embarks on a spiritual journey. At the bidding of his guru, he comes to America to bring yoga and meditation to westerners and open an international retreat center in California and gathered a following of devotees. The book was highly influential to new age spirituality, and greatly loved by my mother, father, and step-mother as a resource for their spiritual exploration.