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Sunday Dinners Creative Introduction & Poem Analyses

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By
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Sunday Dinners Creative Introduction

Sunday Dinners is a chapbook for my mother—the one who planned, cooked for, and did dishes after each Sunday dinner the years my triplet brothers and I first lived in dorm rooms and apartments. The dinners, like the poems, are full of holding onto tradition and also attempting to let go. The poems lie in the in-between: between leaving home and finding my path and voice as a writer; between my mother and I.

In Fall of 2017, in the midst of the #MeToo movement, my mother told me she was raped by a male babysitter when she was twelve. That semester, I was writing poems in poetry studio through the academic discipline of entomology. Through that discipline, I began to write themes of motherhood at a distance in early poems like, “The Cicada Killer Loves.” Next semester, I was enrolled in Creative Nonfiction studio and began exploring my mother’s narrative head-on. Although the pieces were far from polished, they allowed me to begin grappling with her childhood in comparison to my own. Through writing both poems and prose about my mother, I slowly found her trauma circling my writing like a dragon circling a village. Writing this chapbook, I feel I am finally face to face with it.

I hadn’t originally planned for my mother to be the subject of my thesis. I decided I wanted to write about my family strictly in terms of the place most important to us: our lake house. However, I discovered that subject was too close to my heart and I needed more distance in order to write genuinely about family. The distance of my mother’s childhood between my own allowed me enough room to move through different dynamics, settings, and disciplines without feeling constrained. My mother is not only the nucleus of my family, but the nucleus of these poems.
The secondary theme of *Sunday Dinners* is what it means to be a triplet. Since being a triplet is somewhat of an anomaly, writing about triplets proved to be impossible for my first three years of undergrad. In prose, I referred to my brothers without ages for fear that the implication of triplets would distract from the narrative. I told myself I wasn’t writing about triplets—only family dynamics. It wasn’t until after I began meeting with my thesis mentor that I realized I *was* writing about triplets because that’s the only family dynamic I know. In order to write a chapbook about family, I had to explore being a triplet.

The poems “Triplet Myth,” “Middle Triplet / Only Daughter,” and “The Minton Twins” each deal directly with triplets. I decided to put either the word “triplet” or “twin” in each title to declare that these poems are strictly about the experience of multiples. Similarly, the abecedarian “The Minton Twins” allowed me to take a step back from my own triplet experience and examine another.

There are many sets of multiples in my family—two sets of triplets and one set of twins as cousins—which resulted from many mothers in my family suffering from endometriosis, a condition which causes infertility and miscarriages. My cousins, our family friends, and my brothers and I were all conceived from in-vitro, which adds another interesting, darker layer to the chapbook. The poem “From Where You Came” deals with the idea that we came from great loss and the horrific pains of our mothers, while the poem “The Cicada Killer Loves” explores the idea of mothers passing traumas onto their children.

The summer after my freshman year, after anxiously switching my major to Creative Writing and wanting more than anything to write poems, I wandered into an English professor’s office. By chance, he knew my mother. “With a nice family like that, where is your mater-
ial? he joked. This is the question *Sunday Dinners* attempts to answer. Instead of writing about my happy family in our perfect place, I dove into our flaws, hidden traumas, and oddities. In return, I found more wholesome and honest poems. And after each dinner and poem, I love my family even more.
Sunday Dinners Poem Analyses

“Mothership”

“Mothership” is a poem for the speaker's mother written in five quintets with cascading lines. The family (five members) is represented by both the quintets and number of stanzas. The cascading lines represent a sort of breathlessness and celestial element to the poem as it works itself through “not knowing / our own mother's rape / at twelve” into a broken floating to heaven (3-5). The mother’s rape is at the heart of the poem, which informs the speaker's adult voice recounting her experience as a child.

The perspective shifts between the first stanza and second stanza from the first-person to the second-person. This shift, coinciding with the opening of the collection, represents a shift from a detached, adult perspective and into the perspective of a child. The first stanza represents an introduction to the poem and chapbook as a whole, as the speaker deals with her mother's rape in comparison to her own childhood throughout.

The tone of the poem in these final stanzas shifts from hopeful to more realistic. The family isn’t really floating to heaven—they’re floating to what the girl thought was heaven (the moon) and then what the mother considers heaven, which is “here, in these rafters” (16). In this deceivingly hopeful ending, none of the family members really escape their earthly bounds as the mother never escapes her childhood rape.

“Ghazal for Not Him”

A ghazal is an ancient poetic form used to explore love and hope despite pain. The poem must be written in couplets and each couplet must act on its own, like small poems within a larger poem. Additionally, the last word of each second couplet should be the same,
and the final line of the poem should reference the poet’s name. The subject of “Ghazal for Not Him” is again a mother’s rape, but the speaker explores her relationship with her mother apart from the family and specifically the mother’s rapist.

Since the identity of the mother’s rapist is difficult to grapple with, the speaker addresses the poem to “Not Him” and ends each second couplet with the same phrase. This examining of the rapist without naming or characterizing him alludes to lack of information passed from the mother to daughter and also the speaker’s resistance in acknowledging the rapist. The speaker allows the mother to be the focus in each stanza, leaving each “him” at the end of each couplet like an afterthought.

“The Case”

“The Case” is my first attempt at a sestina. My professor advised us in poetry studio to simply ask a question within the poem when we get stuck writing. Channeling that solution, my poem became a series of questions. The speaker asserts in the first line that the poem is “an open murder case,” which alludes to the poem as a narrative and also an ars poetica (1). In addition, the form’s repetition of end-words proved to be effective in driving the narrative. For example, since I ended on the words “mother” and “boyfriend” in the first stanza, they became central figures.

This poem is the longest in the collection. I usually stray away from longer poems, although I’ve found that writing in forms allows me to flesh out concepts (especially as an underwriter). Even so, the poem is lacking one line in stanza six, where the form is purposely broken. Instead of using the word “knife” as an end word, I used it in the middle of the following line. This rupture in the pattern emphasizes the word “poet,” which sets up the final
shift in the final line of the poem (the second person revealed to be the reader and fellow poet).

“Family Band”

“Family Band” is written as a Petrarchan sonnet and broken into two quatrains and two tercets. The decision to break the original form’s octave and sestet plays into accounting/not accounting for family members. There are four stanzas in the poem instead of five, which hints that something is missing. The incomplete form adds tension to the vehicle of a family band. While the band plays “without making a sound,” clearly, the vehicle points to a family not speaking to one another; that this is the preferred method of family dinner (12).

While the first stanza introduces each family member’s contribution to the band, the second stanza mirrors the first and announces that the speaker is lying. Instead, each family member is presented with a real attribute—musical or not. The speaker never reveals her own musical attribute, hence the four stanzas. There is a sense of individuality and secrecy, as “Dad plays guitar / on Sunday mornings in secret” (8-9). In the third stanza, the enjambment of “Nights, we pretend we’re a family / band” is important, as the poet alludes that not only is the family pretending to be a band, but also a family. The final stanza alludes to the unsaid tension, as the speaker plays an unknown instrument alone, “missing / a reason, a tension, a main act” (13-14).

“The Minton Twins”

“The Minton Twins” is my first abecedarian, which presents the challenge of beginning each line with each subsequent letter of the alphabet. The poem compares twins and triplets and uses the form to explore a specific narrative of twins—the Minton twins. While my siblings
and I were born healthy, one of the Minton’s sons died shortly after birth. My mom tells stories
of pushing babies in a three-baby stroller next to Julie’s two-baby stroller, introducing her two
babies as twins. The Minton “twins” constantly compared their lives to ours—our mothers, our
dinners, and—of course—our birthdays. The poem is based on a real event and I was proud to
have captured the whole narrative within such a strict form.

In revising, I decided to replace two lines about a three-seat/two-seat stroller with the
line: “A psychic said / Johnny would have been homecoming king” (9-10). Taking into account
my thesis mentor’s feedback, I wanted to write a painful line that would emphasize the poem’s
central theme: comparison and what could have been. The elementary tone of the poem,
informed by the elementary elements of the abecedarian, is what makes the narrative effective.

“Triplet Myth”

Originally, “Triplet Myth” was written as a prose poem. In an exercise for poetry studio,
I was required to lineate the poem. After completing the task and breaking the poem into
tercets, I realized a lineated form was more relevant to the subject of triplets. The tercets are
organized into four stanzas and the final stanza alludes to an underlying element attached to
the speaker’s childhood memory: hindsight.

Writing through an academic discipline—greek mythology—allowed me to step back
from a specific memory in order to dive deeper into its meaning. Before writing the poem, I did
some basic research on the myth of the labyrinth, which characters were involved, etc. In
combining the worlds of childhood and mythology, the labyrinth terminology is balanced with
a narrative involving the speaker and her two brothers. This balance also creates a balance of
the child-voice and the adult-voice. While the language of the poem is simple, there is a level of sophistication and maturity as greek mythology terms are dropped into the poem.

“December Tradition”

“December Tradition” is made up of two sonnets attached to one another. In a collection about a mother, these sonnets surround the father. Like “Triplet Myth,” the poem uses characters from the movie *It’s A Wonderful Life* as a vehicle for a family. In addition, the sonnets ask questions about family tradition: “What make a home / one to come home to? What / are the rules of ghosts?” (26-28). The speaker of the poem—the daughter of the family—loves her father, but feels trapped in tradition. She is compared to the youngest daughter in the film, Zuzu. The line, “Zuzu, too, wants to see the world, / but someone has to keep on / the tradition” relates to the father character, George Bailey, who ends up stuck in his hometown by keeping up the tradition of the family business. This line alludes to the negative “tradition” possibly being passed from George to his children—a concept the movie doesn’t explicitly address.

The connecting line between the two poems—“Again, we sing Auld Lang Syne”—is an element of a crown of sonnets. My original series of sonnets was longer, as a crown is composed fifteen sonnets. Although these two sonnets have elements of a crown, they stand alone together. The dual nature of the sonnets correlate with the duality of the father and daughter within the family and their comparison to the characters in the movie. The first sonnet takes on a child voice, while the second takes on an adult voice as the speaker “stayed asleep and turned / twenty-one in a black & white bedroom” (17-18).

“Holiday Daughter”
“Holiday Daughter” is a villanelle portraying the gendered concepts of American holidays. The “ghost” in the poem’s A line refers to an underlying darkness surrounding the daughter in the poem. In writing this darkness, I attempted to subtly hint at themes of the mother’s rape. Although this isn’t necessarily apparent in the poem, the “ghost” intends to be a metaphor for a past trauma or tension which essentially haunts the holiday. The villanelle’s B line—“Break the wishbone with both / hands”—informs a deceiving element of hope in the poem (3). As each line alters with its repetition, this hope becomes more hopeless and violent as the ghost “sets knives at both hands” and “sons wish for meat” (9,15).

In addition to each repetition’s altered meaning per the form, each repetition of the A and B lines are literally altered. This is a tactic that many contemporary poets use to rupture the form while still fulfilling its requirements. I decided to incorporate this tactic into my poem and used the elements of both A and B lines in each repetition. In concealing the two repeated lines (like the daughter conceals her ghost), I combined the two lines into the poem’s final A line: “like ghost bones break” (19). This ultimately renders any final hope in the poem essentially hopeless, as even the ghost bones break. The final line—“like wishing with both hands”—is equally as hopeless, as it reminds the reader that praying is wishing with no answer.

“To Stay”

“To Stay” is a prose poem centered around home, with themes similar to the ones presented later in “Dear F#m,”. The vehicle of the poem, which relates to the next poem in the sequence, deals with bugs—dead stink bugs, to be exact. The speaker has decided to leave these dead bugs in her childhood bathroom, describing them as “tiny pinless grenades.” In
doing so, the speaker leaves “the room intact” upon leaving each time. The tenor of the poem points to the speaker’s longing to maintain her childhood, or at least, to make it readily available to reenter at any point.

The nature of the poem’s structure as a prose poem plays into its meaning in that the speaker wants her bathroom (her childhood) to remain alive and in-tact for as long as possible. This is why I created a literal body of text, relating to the “hollow bodies” of the bugs and also the hollow memories that remain. The prose serves this poem, as its tenor and vehicle are figuratively fragile—too fragile to alter with enjambment or form.

“The Cicada Killer Loves”

“The Cicada Killer Loves” is written in sparse couplets and illustrates a central metaphor or vehicle and tenor. The vehicle is a cicada killer’s relationship to the cicada and her children, and the tenor is a family dynamic. The tension in the poem relates to the misconception of the cicada killer as the speaker personifies her to love the cicada. With this burden of love, the mother cicada killer must sting the cicada “to sleep” in order to use his body to protect her babies (4). In doing so, the mother must leave her children with the cicada, who will in turn love the cicada like a mother and begin the cycle over again.

The poem is written in couplets, which captures the nature of a relationship. However, the line lengths vary throughout the poem, alluding to the imbalanced reciprocation of love. The tone of the poem is longing, as a mother’s unrequited love is passed onto her children. There is also darkness between the mother and children, as the cicada killer must kill the cicada so her children can use its body to grow. This poem connects to a theme in the chapbook of mothers passing trauma (rape; miscarriages) onto their children.
“Homebody”

“Homebody” is the first poem I wrote using slashes. Since my collection is mainly confessional poetry, I decided to throw in a stylistic curveball. I later revised “Middle Triplet / Only Daughter” in a similar style, so I’m glad I took the artistic risk. The poem consists of made up words playing on and reflecting the structure of the word “homebody.” To form the words that make up the poem, I used a component of the home, like “room,” “bed,” and “curtain,” and combined it with a component of the body, like “brain,” “hair,” and “skin.” It didn’t necessarily matter the order of the two words, as I determined their order based on their sound together and within the sequence.

As I created the new words and spoke them aloud, testing their sounds, I decided how to order them on the page. The most prominent feature of the poem is the end or the turn, when I separate the words “house” and “heart.” To separate the two words, I used a slash. Since I liked the way that looked, I decided to incorporate the slash into the whole poem. At first, I paired the words two-by-two, so that “house / heart” would have its own condensed line. But the more I tinkered with the structure, I decided to shape the poem like a prose poem. This way, the “house / heart” ending was a little more subtle, and yet among the absurdity of the made-up words, felt more prominent.

“Awareness Ritual”

“Awareness Ritual” deals with awareness in the sense of personal growth and awareness of other cultures. The speaker recounts a trip to Mexico with her mother, who is fearful of all things foreign. The mother “brings / tequila from America that weights / down her suitcase” and opts to stay in an all-inclusive resort surrounded by sea walls (4-6). The speaker imagines
the mother’s spiritual healing cards lying on her nightstand back home, symbolizing that the mother hasn’t brought her own healing with her and therefore cannot grow from the experience of her travels. The speaker relates to her own “Awareness Ritual Kit” on her desk at home, admitting to having inherited similar fears and reservations, and like the mother, feels she’s unable to move past them.

Although the structure of the poem is not a specific form, I used tercets to structure my stanzas. Since the number three is important to the collection, I found that I often used tercets or quintets when writing specifically about family. In this poem, even though the brothers are briefly present and father is not, I wanted the tercets to instead focus on the speaker, the mother, and the unspoken tension between them. As both the speaker and the mother deal with their own healing and personal growth, they deal with it separately (as the speaker hypocritically judges the mother’s actions in Mexico), essentially creating another unspoken entity. This entity is similar to the “third heart” introduced in a later poem “Motions.”

“Mother’s Menopausal Therapy”

This poem takes on the form of a questionnaire about menopause. I took the questions directly from an actual form found on www.menopause.org, which clinicians use to gain information about patients. The many layers of this poem also involve a persona and a vehicle and tenor. The persona is a mother going through menopause; answering the questions. The vehicle is the mother’s responses to the questions, which uses periods to symbolize the process of healing from a rape that happened in the mother’s childhood. An inner vehicle and tenor inside the larger one is that the speaker of the poem essentially uses the periods to mean the speaker herself as a young girl. Therefore, the responses’ larger tenor is healing from trauma
while going through menopause, as the speaker explains her visualization process in caring for herself as a child.

Although this poem has so many layers that are difficult to explain objectively, the poem’s abstract nature plays into its meaning. The layers and complexities of the speaker’s trauma and healing process cannot be defined by a simple questionnaire. The note of hope within the speaker’s final response, that someday the girl “will be grown” and the speaker will “never bleed again,” alludes to menopause as a positive healing process.

“Elevator Operator”

In an opposite way, “Elevator Operator” is clearly a persona poem with cutting language and little complexity. The speaker’s persona is that of entitled man grabbing a women’s ass in an elevator. The poem is written in unequal couplets, reflecting the man’s power over the woman whose drunk friends have ditched her. The enjambments in the poem allude to the women’s powerlessness and intimidation, like “blame her drunk” and “make her buttons glow / when I finger them. To take her” (10, 21-22).

The poem is extremely uncomfortable to read. In fact, I hesitated putting in the collection because it made me so uncomfortable. But my mentor showed me that it’s necessary—especially when dealing with subjects like rape and trauma. The reason this poem is hard to read is because it’s a persona poem. As the reader hears the man’s thoughts directly, it is disturbingly clear that the man knows exactly what he is doing and enjoys his power over the woman.

“Dear F#m,”
This poem is an epistle addressed to a musical chord. The chord—F#m—is a chord the speaker refrained from using when she played piano, as she describes it as “the rough end / of a rope, a villain someone used / to love” (2-4). The enjambment is on the word “end,” as it foreshadows the speaker’s discovery that follows. The first “progression” in the poem is the speaker’s journey from her apartment to her family’s house, to her piano that sits untouched in her room. The next progression is the literal progression of chords the speaker plays on the piano, transposing F#m “into Em, then Cm, then Bbm” (19). Both these progressions seem to progress while essentially being repeated over and over. As the speaker literally moves from her apartment to her house, she isn’t really going anywhere new, and as the chords change, they can each stand in for one another when played in different keys.

The second progression recalls the idea of endings with the word “villain” that was previously used in the third line of the poem. The final turn at the end of the poem, in which the speaker realizes she’s “been playing your / villain for years,” is the final progression (21). While the speaker thinks she has been changing and growing over the years, she discovers she’s just been playing the same one-dimension villain; the same sad chord in different keys.

“From Where You Came”

“From Where You Came” deals with similar themes as “The Cicada Killer Loves,” but in more explicit terms. The poem uses the specific circumstance of a mother’s endometriosis to portray the horrors of miscarriages, in-vitro, and carrying triplets in the womb. The poem is written in broken couplets, as the second line of each couplet is half the length of the first. The couplets allude to a strained mother/child relationship, and the nature of the form shows a
perceived notion of a happy pregnancy versus the reality of infertility for many mothers. This is also a poem for a family, as endometriosis often runs in families.

The title, in conjugation with the “imposter” baby presented in the poem, alludes to the idea that the mother’s babies come from a place of trauma (9). The fact that the babies were “made / outside of mommy” on “a Petri dish,” compares the imposter with the triplets in that they were all essentially created outside the womb (9-11). Within this comparison, the triplets also become impostors to their mother, especially when they grow and impossibly stretch the mother’s womb. They, too, harm the mother and cause her a different kind of pain—a trauma resulting from an overwhelming love.

“In-Vitro: Wikipedia Edit”

“In-Vitro: Wikipedia Edit” is an erasure taken from the definition of in-vitro from Wikipedia. Since I knew I wanted to write an erasure poem, I had the idea of taking my text from Wikipedia since anyone can edit and redefine any definition. Specifically, I chose the subject of in-vitro because it’s not only a constant theme in my collection, but a set process in which I could redefine. I’ve found that it’s often easier for me to “erase” a subject or definition that is both familiar to me and my reader, so that it’s clear what I’ve created from the original text is entirely new.

Keeping the original structure and spacing of the definition on Wikipedia, I was able to follow the repeated word “whole,” which I found ironic due to the artificial nature of the process. Beginning with the words “glass cells” and ending with the words “artificial culture,” I was able to examine the tension between an unnatural insemination process creating “whole” or natural humans.
“Family Portrait as Newton’s Cradle”

This poem uses a central metaphor of a Newton’s cradle to describe an unbalanced family dynamic. Using the concept of three’s, the poem is collected into three stanzas of quintets. The speaker is a daughter describing a family portrait informed by the motions of a Newton’s cradle.

Like the number of stanzas, the number of lines in each stanza is also important. Just as there are three stanzas (alluding to triplets), there are five lines in each stanza for each family member. In addition, each line length varies or matches up with another line in each stanza as the poem itself creates a sequence (just as the motion of a Newton’s cradle creates a specific sequence). The movement of the cradle—as the movement of one ball triggers another, two triggers two, and three triggers two and an alternating third—acts as a metaphor for the movement of a family through time as different members “sway” with others or away from each other (10). The irony of using a Newton’s cradle as a catalyst for a family portrait is due to its movement—that no one can stay in one place or agree (within the same motions) at one time. The last line and final word “still” alludes to that micro-second pause in which the cradle is fully still—something only the flash of a camera can capture (15).

“Middle Triplet / Only Daughter”

At first, “Middle Triplet / Only Daughter” was a prose poem and the final poem in my collection. Based on a prompt from my thesis mentor, the poem broke down the meaning of my name and identity as a triplet, sister, and middle sibling. However, when revising the poem, I decided to model a newer version off of “Homebody,” in which I also used slashes. This choice provided me with the distance I needed in writing so directly about my identity. Instead of
writing the poem in poetic phrases, I wrote my identity in poetic titles like “The last choice,” “In-charge,” “The pink one,” and “To tell Mom.” The ability to write these titles allowed me to depict a more accurate representation of myself.

I enjoyed writing another poem using slashes and am glad that two poems in my collection portray the same style. Since I am a concise writer, using slashes helps me pin-point exactly what I want to say without adding fluff or having to make more decisions. Given such a complex subject of identity, the only way I could write this poem, it seems, is through a simple, stylistic choice. I plan to use and develop this style within the poems I write in the future.

“Sophie”

This poem takes on a supposed reality of the speaker never being born. This subject works after poems dealing with in-vitro and miracles, and allows a new perspective of the pain of motherhood. In this poem, “Mother never got pregnant” and the parents adopted a Russian girl who they named Sophie (5). The enjambments in the poem reveal the tension of the speaker—the unborn child—as the speaker points out that the girl “dyes her hair blonde / to look like mother” and that “One day, / she'll take over the family / business” (13-16). It’s not only that clear the speaker is envious of the girl, but that the girl is essentially living the speaker’s life. At the end of the poem, the speaker gives some insight into the mother’s feelings about not being able to have her own children in an enjambment—that “Mother loves her / more but wonders” (16-17).

The poem is written in tercets, although the triplets aren’t directly present in the poem. Instead, the tercets indicate the new nuclear family: the mother, father, and adopted daughter.
In addition, the last two lines in the final tercet shrink, as if to show the wondering of the parents.

“Motions”

“Motions” uses religion to examine a relationship. Both members of the relationship, as they “love like reciting / Bible verses [they] memorized / as kids,” are more or less familiar with religion (2-4). The “he” in the poem “went to Catholic / school and says his gratitudes,” while the speaker of the poem is less familiar with memorized verses. This memorization is a metaphor for the act of love—that one is better at acting than the other.

This tension in the relationship leads to the “third heart” that’s “buried / at the bottom of [their] apartment bed” (9-11). This abstract heart is quickly paired with the body in the fourth paragraph—not Jesus on the crucifix “against [her] chest,” but the boy (19). These layers (the recitation, the crucifix) fold away from love to reveal “something deeper” in the speaker’s heart (20). The third heart or real emotion is buried in the body as emotion is buried behind the recited prayer—hence, the love that is lost in “the motions of prayer” (24).

“Artist’s Note Left to Her Lover”

This poem is an ekphrastic poem inspired by Sarah Sipling’s artwork Left Behind - first. I found this artwork during an exercise in which my poetry studio class traveled to UNO’s Weber Art Gallery and found a piece of art to inspire an ekphrastic poem (a poem inspired by a piece of art). Sarah Sipling’s pieces were black and white abstract pieces with typed words and a fury of black lines depicting ghostlike faces, doodles, and written words. In writing the poem, I decided to incorporate some of the actual words from the piece into my poem and also come up with a scenario for the piece. I found tension between the typed, scratched words and the
doodles, and created a scenario in which an artist has attempted to write her lover a goodbye letter.

Although the meaning and scenario I derived from the piece is most likely different from the artist’s original intention, the goal of ekphrastic poems is to use the art in order to create a new meaning. Therefore, although I don’t know the original meaning of the artwork, I don’t need to know. Many poets have written largely different poems about the same piece of artwork. I thoroughly enjoyed this exercise, and even though I wasn’t originally writing the poem for my chapbook, it seemed to align with the poem “Motions,” as they both involve the speaker’s lover.

“Ode to Sticky Notes”

This ode is dedicated to a mother, though the poem itself is addressed to sticky notes. The sticky notes in the poem stand for the small things that make up a mother. These things—like sticky notes—often go unnoticed, but they are also what the speaker will wish for after her mother is gone. At the end of the poem, the sticky notes make up the mother: “you her blonde hair, her lips / tickled your kind of pink” (22). In some ways, this poem speaks to memory—forgotten daily life; moments not quite captured.

At times, the poem feels like a run-on-sentence. This effect is to overwhelm the reader in the same way the thousands of sticky notes overwhelm the speaker. The effect of the syntax also serves as a sort of desperation—that although the mother is gone, the speaker thinks she can recreate her with used sticky notes. Although this thought is delusional, it is the speaker’s way of coping with premature-grief and the unfathomable death of the mother.

“Old Girl”
In this poem, both the vehicle and tenor are present and balanced with one another. The vehicle is the mother’s seemingly spoiled dog, who milks a leg injury so that the mother dotes upon her. The dog in the poem is heavily personified to the effect that she is a vehicle for the emotionally injured mother. The difference between this poem and an extended metaphor is that the mother is present throughout: “Mother’s hand always on the knob. / Old girl, she says, but not that old” (6-7). The comparison of the dog and mother is clear in the last line of the poem, when the mother calls the dog “Poor old girl,” and speaker assesses that “she [the mother] knows” (16).

The poem doesn’t take on a specific form like “Ode to Sticky Notes” or “Dear F#m,”—“Old Girl” is just one stanza. The effect of this style blurs the characteristics of the mother and dog, making the two characters almost indistinguishable from each other.

“Flowerpots”

“Flowerpots” is a poem that was published before I started working on my thesis, but after examining my overall themes, I decided to include it in the collection. The poem is one of the first I wrote that deals with motherhood. Although it was originally published as three stanzas in The Flat Water Stirs: An Anthology of Emerging Nebraska Poets, I decided to condense the poem into a tercet and a quatrain. Since the ending of the poem—which also serves as the end of the collection—allows a glimmer of hope, I wanted the last stanza to feel more whole. After a collection of darker poems surrounding themes of trauma and pain, I felt that this was an appropriate ending as the collection begins with motherhood and hope and ends with motherhood and hope.
After reading and re-reading the collection, I discovered that as I was focusing on the mother’s trauma, I had written the mother’s hope and healing into the daughter. Therefore, ending with the image of “a daughter / holding a petal in her hand” was both ambiguous and hopeful. The daughter becomes a piece of the mother—a piece of her trauma, but also part of her healing process; of her flower.