

THOUGHT IN CERULEAN:
A POETRY COLLECTION FROM THE SAN MARCOS RIVER

by

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HONORS THESIS

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ABSTRACT

“Thought in Cerulean” is a creative body which surveys the effect of place, specifically the San Marcos river, on my writing process. While poems of place is its own genre, I sought out to explore specifically themes of eco-feminism and the relationship between humanity and the natural world. I wrote all of the poems in this collection in three separate areas along the San Marcos River, and my expectations were not only met, but exceeded. Although the effect of humanity on nature is pessimistically inescapable, we can approach that dynamic with an open perspective, allowing us to find beauty we can learn from. The natural world is resilient and provides a guide for humans to follow. Within the paralleled negative experiences of womanhood (from the patriarchy) and the natural world (from colonization), both subjects transcend limitations when looked through a poetic lens in context with one another. The San Marcos River is noted as one of the longest constantly inhabited places in North America, and the Indigenous people of this area source it as the birthplace of humanity. The many perspectives of this area provide a landscape in which all types of people can exist. Similarly, the flowing motion of the river allows its visitors to let go of any constraints society has placed upon them. The timing of my thesis, during the middle of a pandemic, has also changed my perspective of and access to the river, which provided meditations on the location of the river itself within the town of San Marcos. I encourage readers to read this collection at the river, and explore how place can influence their reading experience.

I. NEAR CITY PARK

Degrees of Green in San Marcos

inspired by “Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg” by Richard Hugo

You might come here at eighteen
on a whim. Say you didn't get into
the school you wanted, so you picked
the nearest place. You walk these streets
paved by people who followed the river,
which determined the town. The churches
kept up – even the Black one burned
down by the kkk in 1873 – a historical landmark
memorializing “Love yourself
as your neighbor” – and one of Texas' first
desegregated schools, overgrown
with grasses and vines but if
you stroll down Blanco street at sunset
and look through the auditorium windows,
you can see green-curtained ghosts
performing for velvet seats.

Support Local Businesses has been branded,
Target and Sonic seem too far away
so you lose your chains but freely
stay by what neighbors you. When
they shouldn't have lasted (depressions
recessions, pandemics) they remained green –
the walls in Jo's Cafe are a few shades
lighter than the dollars I give them.
We have to sit outdoors now, but the little
leaves that fall throughout the seasons do
what they can. And Zelicks. One good
bar, originally a gas station from the 1930s
that won't fall down, can wipe the boredom out
and stage blurry memories of sunday night
free pizza where you learn to like beers

and play pool and get good.

Isn't this your life? This sun has kissed
you for four springs now. Isn't this resilience
so accurate? The river has flowed for thousands
of years just because it can and it will.
Water and sunlight are sufficient to support
a town, and not just the photosynthesis of
San Marcos, but any town North to South,
even when pipelines dare to intrude.
Won't you feel this inside you always?
Isn't this home?

Say yes to yourself, because the river
keeps flowing and still holds room
for laughter. Sleep in your renovated-
church apartment now, because it will
house new students in the fall, and Rachel
and Ashley, your baristas-turned-friends at Jo's,
will make iced lavender lattes with oat milk
for other people and eventually flow along too
and you'll learn the names of baristas
in New York who will know your name
and pour you espresso that flows like the river
with milk-alternative foam that dances
just below the surface like Texas
Wild Rice – that green river grass.

Where Do Monarchs Go to Die?

Her majesty fluttered to the left
of my tattered boots. The leaves
compensated for her lack
of orange with reflections of apricot
and tangerine in the water.
Wings closed – white and
the wind whisked her over
sideways into a pool
on cratered limestone.
I thought she was ruined.
As I scrambled for a twigged
crutch to gift as a scepter,
her divine orange awakened
and she left – following
the hereditary succession of
brown leaves drifting
southward with the current.
The river, older than
royalty, is resurrection.

Unknown Holiday

Like an ornament forgotten
on a dried out Christmas tree
tossed sideways onto a curb
in January, a red and white
plastic fishing floater
tangles in bare Cypress branches.
Where roots meet water,
algae forms a skirt as if
preparing to be adorned
with gifts. Shiny
tall boy Budweiser cans – empty
and crushed and wrapped in brown
paper bags – distort the green and I think
this is the start of destruction
of all the green on earth
but there is movement in the reflection
of Cypress – shimmers from
water-striding bugs, and ripples
from something living and reveling
deep below my dappled face.

Headwaters

Green is arriving late this year
because a rare snow eradicated
what was beginning to grow.
I'm next to hundreds of buds on
the Red Maple tree, but they are drowned
out by the sound of dead foliage
in the wind – beige and brown like a fake late
autumn but the Texas Wild Rice is almost glowing
green under the water.

The people who live here
and lived here long before all of us call
it *Canocanayesatetlo* (a word I am still
learning how to pronounce, reminding me
that this story, this river, is not mine) meaning
warm waters. They say a deer led humans
out of the underworld and emerged
through the waters onto earth
and that is how we got here.

Historians say this is one of the oldest constantly
inhabited places by humans in North America
because of the Sacred Springs,
the warm waters.

And who am I to say that the river carries us
carries life, like a mother, but I say anyways
the blind salamander is my sibling along
with the fountain darter. I make room
for the bottle cap and the cigarette butt
because they dare to contrast
the green that is arriving late this year.

All of My Muses

I woke up early to write
about what the river offers
on a dreary day, because the sun
draws crowds and I wanted to be
alone with my river thoughts. But when
the sun creeps out and lifts mist
from the morning, it makes blank
pages too bright for my light
colored eyes

and guides families
strolling past me and my paper
stays empty, but I roll up
my sleeves anyway on a whim
of optimism and listen
to kids babble about fish *tiny* fish
because they don't know the word
minnow, or the deception

of tadpoles. They would stay
pointing in awe, but grandparents pull
them away from their muses, down
the concrete path – grey like clouds
that seemed to fail me – out
of my earshot right when my pen
hits my paper and all of my muses
are gone.

Sedimentary

I sit on limestone shelves
in the shade of train tracks
held up by concrete and rebar
stabbing the river. Grey lines
of where water used to be
haunt the pillars' base.
What will water not erode?
Below water's surface
stumps of utility poles –
in rows too neat to have been trees –
collect moss and solitary
skipping stones. When a train
comes barreling overhead
at the right time, everything could
come crumbling down and I
would be the girl who died
in a flooded train wreck and finally
floated down the river.
What will water not erode?

Graffitied Poem

Aunt Jen

Rylie

Nick

ACAB

Azeem + Kiran 10/23/19

bruja

surrounded by stars and flowers

be kind to yourself :) <3

(a quick *self portrait* etched in rust)

eat the rich (painted in pink)

a

r

BONK

m

dyke!

p

i

t

LOVE YOURSELF

sailor daria

SENIORS21

Felix

<3

Tiff

FUCK EUROPE

The Half-Life of a Celebration

As I wait to take a photo
in my cap and gown,
I watch people
pose in confetti,
like they didn't spend at least
two years on campus seeing
the "DO NOT USE
CONFETTI" signs
displayed next to rain drains
emblamed with the blind salamander
reminding us to "keep our river clean."
More chromatic shreds,
frozen in photographs to be
hung up on fridges, fall
to the ground and they leave.
I stand behind the glitter
litter I don't want in my photos,
smiling like I'm not picturing
plastic swimming through gutters
on their way to replace
sun rays sparkling off water.

II. RIO VISTA PARK

The Old Man and the River

I met a silver-haired man at the river this morning.
He asked me to take a picture of him
and his little white dog where the calm
water gives in to raging rapids.
He spoke of his family gathering for cookouts
before the pandemic, right where I was sitting.
I told him I was a poet so he would know
his spot was in good care. I think he sensed
this moment would be transcribed, and he offered god's
blessing from six feet away: *always do your best, go
the extra mile, and remember what Isaac
at the San Marcos River told you*, like he wanted
to be memorialized in a river poem.

Who Am I to a Dragonfly?

As I sit with my back towards the Sun
Minnows swim towards me
like I am only an extension of the Tree
Root I sit upon. They brush against
me as they inspect my leg hair; seeing it
as me, or mistaking it as moss. Cicadas
and Crickets converse in foreign languages
until I almost convince myself
that I am not a human on a Riverbank
merely skirting the margins. Yet here
I am, sitting on Tree Roots,
lounging in undocumented history
as Water Striders dot the River with
Dragonflies, who have sauntered
for centuries carrying omens for no one.
As they fly closer to me, with each stroke
I hope and wonder; will One
land on my pen? It would be worth more
than all human attention.

A Catalogue of River Rats on a Sunday Afternoon in January

1. yoga bros getting high off their own breath
2. a grandma holding a soccer ball for her grandkids
3. lots of blonde girls with dogs
4. emo teens in ripped black jeans
5. the Sun God (a San Marcos celebrity known for his swooshed back white hair against sun-crisped skin, eccentric dance moves with headphones blasting in his ears)
6. the Sun
7. a young gymnast doing tricks and
8. her mom taking photos of her
9. a middle aged couple, watching
10. kayakers paddling upstream
11. light green blades of grass
12. girls in sweaters
13. kids bouncing between rocks and their hollers echoing in their parents absence
14. girls in bikinis
15. me, soaking in spring water, sunlight, and the expanse of one little river park

Who I Study Under

“I had some dreams. They were clouds in my coffee, clouds in my coffee.”
- You’re So Vain by Carly Simon

Raindrops dapple the water, at first
I think they are springing water bugs
because I don’t feel wet, protected
by half full branches of Cypress trees.
One poet wrote about this: watching
something happening without it happening
to you, to me, but through the leaves
I still see reflections of sky in my coffee,
reminding me of that Carly Simon song.
I stay with those clouds
until they are almost out
of sight, bring my mug up to my lips
and sip them so they won’t leave me.
My hair ripples in humidity as the fish
surface to eat bugs that are actually rain.

Refusal

Steam rises off river,
warming rain lilies
about to bloom.

This is something
I'll never do –
alchemize green.

Gender Issues

My friends were sarcastically
calling each other assholes, and I
tried to join in and make a joke
but I thought I was a man
and everyone was confused.

A couple days later

I dreamt that I had no breasts
and could walk outside without
a shirt. Anyways, the joke didn't
stick. I think this was because
earlier in the day I watched my male
coworkers move, and tower over me,
so casually in conversation, even
in a retail store.

Voyeur

I was only trying to find a peaceful spot
to eat my veggie burger from P. Terry's
before I went into work at my retail job
to fold clothes and use my customer-service-voice
for five hours when I accidentally
stumbled upon ducks mating
I think they live at Ivar's River Pub
just across the water from my regular
lounging spot on tree roots
where they probably
pay rent by entertaining customers on
the patio and get paid in crumbs
The two love-birds were also only trying
to find a peaceful spot a private place
for brown feathers to sink below
water and white tail feathers
when they stumbled upon me
halfway through my veggie burger
and writing a poem before I entertain
customers too and I think
why do ducks cross the river?
To get a room of course

Haiku

I do not envy
the trees. When my leaves fall off
I don't want them back.

Armed Parks & Recreation

The police are always near
with their jabbering radios
and vicious stares. I could hide
in roots of thousand year old
trees, but loud ATVs swarm
like flies seeking out anything
sweet, their tires uproot green.
Bulletproof vests protect breasts
from fishing hooks and their tasers
tame the raging rapids. Yes, guns
at their waist will keep
the litterers away. Even at night,
their car lights shine onto
the water, to shun the ducks
and moths from coming home.

Nocturne

Dearest moon,
why are you coy
on your brightest night
hiding behind clouds like a child
behind her mother's legs.
Your amber makes silhouettes
drift across the sky
that I mistook as clear.
You steal glances of me
while my eyes follow ducks
guided back home by your light,
but I turn back sooner than you
expected, and you quickly retreat.
Like children playing hide
and seek, we play this game;
tagging peripheral vision with
each others glimpses
until my dilated pupils
meet your full face
that Dickinson called
Ample Blonde – but
like her, you do not
take up your space
and recluse back
behind clouds.

III. THE OLD GIRL SCOUT CAMP

I am a woman in the same way that Texas has seasons.

I am a woman in the same way that Texas has seasons.
Some winters it snows, making steam rise off the river
that refuses to freeze. Two days later, what was
creeping back as green is revealed
dead and my bare feet crunch grass.

Texas has seasons, mildly, so I am a woman when
the grass is green, people are in swimsuits, but
trees are still bare, revealing my late-spring
hiding spots. There are so many flowers I could
pick a bouquet and not feel guilty.

Texas has seasons, extremely, so I am a woman when
hiding in shaded coves of the river from this dangerous
late July heat, under leaves that stay green and do not burn
and peel like my skin. Everything that lives here has evolved
to survive this Texas summer within the Texas summer.

I am a woman in the same way that Texas has seasons.
The leaves are dead again, but people are still swimming.
Never really turning orange, they live green until
they dry brown, but this is what I imagine
an unburnt summer to be like.

I am a woman in the same way that Texas has all four seasons
because it does, somewhat. For some, being a woman is fully
winter, spring, summer, and fall, but my whole life I've only known
Texas seasons – almost summer all year, but a few weeks of winter.
I am only a woman, conventionally, in the sneeze of spring.

Early Solstice on a Leap Year

Dusk bugs shimmer the river
like false raindrops
on the eve of the extra
day in a year.
The sun beckons, and even
unlikely creatures come to
celebrate the revival of green
emerging through still fallen leaves.

Seasons blend and ease
as tie-dye girls with long red hair
pick ivory spiked flowers
and chime "My time
to shine!" Oh
fairies in the garden,
Who will I pick flowers for?

I wish I could transcribe
the verdant greenery
and inside it lie naked,
because Now has
bugbites and pointed
hungry eyes.
On paper, which was once
alive and green,
I can bathe in grass,
lie on mud
and write rebirth.

A Return to the River, Mid-Pandemic

How does a river close? someone asked
online. Well, the whole world shuts off
to the public because a disease starts killing
people by the thousands, so even river parks
are weaponized as super-spreaders.
\$500 fines for being in natural areas,
even alone. I was afraid
I wouldn't be able to write my river poems.
When the city removed the chain link fences
that damned us from the river, I thought
the silence of sole trees and water would ring
in my ears, but as the sun progresses west,
people trickle in near my hammock. The back of
my mind fears a flood, but I am subdued by the sun
and the hum of cars rushing up I-35 –
a river of its own – and I know
we were never too far removed.

Our Idyll Summer

Days drip languidly like honey
until a pool of spilled sweetness
glimmers in sun rays.

My golden lack of attention –
Raw peripheral vision –
Trailing off the lace tablecloth

points to you and time undone.
Our interlaced fingers unhinge
doors to solitary walls –

but when separated, honey
crocheted lines web between
my twilight and your night.

Burnt and bright, I slip –
stuck in yellow moments
like the last buzz of a dying fly.

Thought in Cerulean

Alone, home, or so I thought
in cerulean – I'll drown myself
trying to wash your gaze off
my skin, pale from summer hibernation.
I button myself up in dark soaking cloth,
neon bikini underneath, bare
feet on harsh bark – I climb trees
so you won't see me. Watch
the dragonflies and their iridescent
wings float between stone and twig,
as I (out of view) collect empty
snail shells to hide
in and fall asleep.
Cicadas announce the evening –
is it safe to come out yet?

Working 9-5

My workplace is amongst magic.
With a tree stump as my chair
and my legs sufficing for a desk,
each pebble illuminated by refraction
offers inspiration. I have many
visitors, no need to schedule
an appointment, show up and I'm happy
to have you. Today Monarchs barged in –
bright orange open wings flying and carrying
a folded counterpart, upside down and white.
A couple I know, one of them through mutual
friends, the other from a bar, also pay me
a visit and we talk about poetry and how
beautiful this spot is, fairies must live here.
They ask how long I've been here and
I honestly can't remember so we decide
it was the fairies languoring my time.
They leave to lounge in the next office over
and my assistant, a royal blue dragonfly, lands
on my hand to deliver a message
that the english language cannot express.

Virginia Spiderwort

I took over Texas,
staining meadows and riverbeds
with my indigo, speckling coffeeshop
lawns with my yellow. I bend
with wind, ease back tall
and you still call me widow's tears
as if my petals aren't a trinity.
My maiden buds open up
to mothering purple and shrivel beige
like a crone, spinning fate in a day.
Grief, if any, gives into gravity
through long medicinal leaves.
So call me by the name you fear –
snake-grass, spider-lily –
though little girls may pick me.

On the Road (2020)

Minimalism is only a word created
to make us feel better, he said,
when I asked about their backpacks
carrying the past seven years. Mine
merely holds the evening.
He and his friends –
Di Prima, Ginsberg, Kerouac, Bukowski –
but from Canada, Kentucky, Ohio and Here.
His singular front tooth complimented
my row of fabricated white
teeth. Train tracks and passenger seats
brought him to a place I have
yet to leave. With three scattered
transient souls and their dogs,
fresh off New York City park benches,
he found me along a riverbank
in the Texas Hill Country,
and this poem is not about him,
but about the people I met
while reading on a fallen tree.

If Disneyland was in the Texas Hill Country

The kayak tour guide pointed to me
“and there’s our hammock friend”
as if I have become integral to
San Marcos’ only amusement park ride.
On cue, I wave from my platform
and smile like a robotic doll
displaying a vignette
of how the people here live.
In the five seconds it
takes them to paddle past
me, I am always swinging
on a hammock in their memory.
I don’t know what comes before me
on this tour, or what the guide will point
out next, but I overhear
something about limestone
before they’re out of sight.

Self-Surrender at the River

I came out on a Sunday morning to celebrate
what has been almost untouched by humans,
but I am met with the smell of burnt rubber,
children screaming, bass boosted speakers, drunk
college students in tubes, cars whirring
down Cheatum street. Black rope wraps around
two trees to hold me up in my hammock.
Am I just like those people, interrupting
the inchworms stringing off trees?
I thought I was one with water
but I am like the sunscreen swirling
through moss at the edge of the river
and down the current, fresh
off a person who jumped in.
I am those children, screaming
is their form of revelry. Music
and drunkenness are forms of celebration
in their own way, and who am I –
alone in my hammock, reading words
from dead poets – to say they're not.

Poem

if I look through holes
in caterpillar-eaten leaves
and my peripheral is
framed with green
if I pick a blade
of grass to twiddle
between my fingers
before throwing it
to the wind
if I stay outside
all day and climb trees
over and over again to jump
into the river
if I make a friend
downstream and we only
exchange names and stories
and never see
each other again
if I lie in the sun
on my towel
and feel each water drop
evaporate off my skin
and don't write about it
did it happen at all

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