

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  
emblemmed 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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