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# For a Muse of Infinities

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For a Muse of Infinities

A Poetical Thesis

Presented to

The College of Graduate Studies

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Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

Aubrey Collins

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07/06/2017

## ABSTRACT

AUBREY C. COLLINS. *For a Muse of Infinities* (Under the direction of Dr. Andrea Spofford)

This thesis is a collection of poems.

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## Memory

I keep a journal so I don't forget.  
I want to remember unthinkable phrases,  
shredded crayon art decorating our walls,  
my phone—who knew it could bend  
or that under the glass was a reflective LCD layer.

Memories fade. Words don't, but are here ripped out.  
Many days, I find only seams where pages used to be.

“If you write bad things about me, I will tear them out.”

Here, bad is harrowed by a disparate energy.  
No reports of those beer stains on the wall.  
No records of my car being run off the road.  
No mention of those hands on my face, the sting.  
Words trashed, it's almost enough.  
But a barbarous residue remains,  
and I cannot help but be grateful  
for a sound temporal lobe.



## Put on a Good Show

Wearing a short, paper-thin dress  
my doubts flee in the face  
of confidence  
of growing forces.  
I switch my heels for flats—  
I don't want to stand out.  
These shoes are better for dancing anyway  
and we're putting on a good show.  
By the end of the night,  
the haze meddling stupor  
of freedom turns into a paralyzing  
bout of puke  
and spins  
    spins  
    spins.

As night leaves through windows,  
the dullness of the Ellipsoidal lights  
nicks on the cheap raised floor.

## On a Southern Night

Inside a quiet infused with  
the harmonies of crickets,  
I place the blanket on  
an outer rim driveway,  
the two of us whispering  
in moonlight as embraced  
spears of a dandelion's pappus,  
until a movement causes you to  
flurry everything into the car.  
I expect blue lights to  
block our only escape.  
Slowly, headlights creep  
closer until a night-tinted horse  
and a long-bearded man on  
a shadow cart appear,  
a black hole barely  
discernable in the night.  
Without pause, both heads  
fixate forward like we are  
unperceivable dark matter.  
I grab your hand and squeeze  
knowing gravity undulates around us.

Whittier, Alaska

Tall fortress walls grey and snow topped  
overlook the town, home of two hundred people.  
Mountains surround, defend against wind and intruders.  
Smells of fried fish and boats' wet wood wafts through  
this alcove. Kayakers float through the bay  
where the rivers meet sea, where sky meets  
smooth rock. The marina is bigger than town,  
and in the graveyard where ships go,  
exhibition in rusty glory,  
iron oxide encroaches, paints all shapes,  
and highlights the lack of cemetery.  
Besides a few shanties along the banks, every person lives in  
the Begich building—fourteen stories of homes, police station,  
garbage collection, post office, laundromat, health clinic, store,  
and guest rooms rented by a woman in loud earrings.  
This is a reminder of the army's presence.

On the other side of town sits the Buckner building,  
also abandoned by the army. It, too, held everything in  
one place. The soldiers there could eat, sleep, dance,  
watch movies, play tennis, and get well.  
The building now shivers in the cold and high winds as  
its skin flakes and trespassers wind through its  
howling halls spraying paint like ecstatic detritivores.  
Its carrion is filled with the slime of snow, with  
dirt and asbestos and glass and shadows all that used to be.

## Once Driving West

You were in a hurry.  
I watched the heat roll over  
ancient red rocks.  
The single dotted yellow line  
on the road made you impatient  
behind those seven cars  
all in a line.  
Pushing on the gas,  
you raced them all  
even though we could  
see cars coming  
the other way.  
The tail of the car wavered,  
sounded like an oscillating fan.  
I gripped that door handle  
so hard, thinking how the impact  
would feel and if it was  
possible for Cap'n, laying  
asleep in the backseat, to survive.

My eyes almost shut in indignation,  
an attempt to squint out unnecessary recklessness,  
next to yours that beamed with a sparkle  
sky watchers only dream of.

We barely slid into  
the front amidst anxious honks  
of fist-shaking drivers  
and sped off towards  
the hazy horizon of dust.

## A Taste of the South

Lying on the pick-up's hood  
in a place we aren't supposed to be  
surrounded by hedges of dewberries,  
the stream babbles so gently  
it doesn't need a muse.

As the stickiness of summer air stagnates,  
we set down not-quite-ripe watermelon  
next to toes squishing in soft cocoa earth  
so our mouths can twist to bites of pickle  
because in the South the big dipper is sweeter,  
and happiness hangs on honeysuckle.

## Endings

I close my tired eyes and turn toward the sky  
reminding me of freshly turned soil and mausoleums,  
bodies stranded under sticky layers of dirt,  
ashes held inside that glass ball  
speckled with flakes of azurite —  
waiting on Oma's mantelpiece.

Fleshy bodies,  
conscious minds,  
fated unknowns  
until death with

souls flying into dark reaches of space,  
souls rejoicing at dead mothers made tangible,  
souls merging back into one consciousness,  
souls nothing— energy diffused to dirt,

until perhaps a shattering or  
a failing of gravity  
when all celestial bodies will fall  
to the ends of the universe,  
to the end of movement,  
the end of being.

Beneath

I know the way a scab feels  
when I want to pull it  
baring what's underneath  
to see the way bodies repair,

how edges  
stick to what was  
a wound bleeding.  
The sides of brown brittle blood—  
ripples like rolling hills of  
Tennessee Appalachia  
decapitated and burned.

Like lifting a heavy trap door,  
I want to dig my fingernails  
to peak underneath  
see the flat skin  
not congruent but not quite broken  
not a Phoenix, but a hum,  
a plane, a slate.

## Life Insurance

A year ago, Mom found our weed  
 a simmering rage that mad    cheeks red    spending money vaporize    car keys  
 disappear  
 P.O. box fill with Cancer society pamphlets  
 Jesus buzz    conscience twinge

I thought, *fuck now what*  
 meal plan    soggy eggs    patty melt  
 I needed wheels and an excuse for ducking rehab  
 and *thank God tuition was already paid*

embers numbed  
 and the rage died with her

but now money's here    deeply encoded in some bank's vat—  
 over two years' worth of rent a new car    ten thousand double cheeseburgers  
 pounds of herb    endless ecstasy  
 no club inaccessible    no bar unapproachable

a fortune to fading children    who don't always eat  
 who sell clothes for gas    pile seven into the red coupe    sneak into the back of the bar

we live unafraid  
 dance into the depths  
 and walk toward death  
 like stars grown old before their time



## Still Round

See it in the glass bowl  
spinning in the microwave  
or the old clock,  
hands twitching.

A ballerina, in place,  
will pirouette  
over and over,  
as planets do.

Einstein, motionless inside  
a moving train,  
knows circles are infinite.

In mathematical terms  
movement never ceases,  
even in stillness.

## The Tick

Over time: See the talk of humans.  
Once, they communicated only through in-person tête-à-tête.  
Then, writing, then the telephone, and then  
not long after, I.M., text, Snapchat,  
FaceTime—back to face-to-face,

reflections everywhere pixelated on electromagnetic airwaves  
human sight reaching its greatest achievement yet,  
to see that which is not present,  
to converse despite great distance.

The pace of life rolls down endless hills,  
a massive avalanche with no buffer,  
pixels not only reaching into  
and reflecting human eyes  
but also skin and nose.  
No tree will stop its massive wake,  
piles of ultraviolet radiation  
surging, gracefully becoming grander  
and faster with each tick.

## Becoming a Second Millennium Poet

Did Neil Armstrong's hand shake  
as he placed the flag on the moon?  
Did he feel small or unbalanced  
in that space of unfathomableness while  
marveling at the levitational powers  
of a universal force?  
Did aliens raise their eyebrows  
at this new feat of Earthlings?

Sometimes, my Nana will raise her eyebrows  
at me as I try to stake my pen on the page.  
With whispers in my ear  
I wonder if we went to the moon at all.

## Madwomen

Such a loud voice  
drowns my words,  
so I quit talking.  
My thoughts stifled  
until words build up.  
As pressure mounts in my  
chest, and I think of Antoinette  
locked in the attic,  
Minnie Wright's strangled canary,  
and Jane barred in with her  
yellow wallpaper.

No wonder we all got mad.

## New-Age Fire

Reality T.V. is more captivating than throwing the ball.  
Sweet frenemies, staged gunfire, and plastic surgeries  
stimulate more than shifting waters in backyard pools.

From crying over misplaced tablets, wailing  
into plaster walls as the sun sets,  
to adult's *damnit we lost the firestick again*,  
humans lost something more than fire  
feeling in the dark world lit  
with contending electromagnetic signals.

Artificial intelligence diminishes human instinct  
knowing the mass tendency to revel in the terrible.  
Motivation only to return home and turn on where  
electricity replaces tinder, isolation replaces ash.

The longer people look, the less they will return.  
Drama is the latest education and  
addiction the new mesmerism.

## Reminiscing about the Messina

by the Cumberland, back to back on  
a wooden bench with chipped green paint  
we sit, moldering into each other as she tells me

I used to cook to feed the deckhands, good money,  
my excuse to escape and take long journeys down the river.  
Sometimes, I would look out  
to coy maples glistening on my bed,  
night wake sending ripples under the bow  
with nothing but moon and spotlight  
to guide through the quiet unless of course  
banjos and guitars mumbled lulling us all.

So, I asked her why she had stopped  
And, looking out to our little piece of  
Earth's cytoplasm, she replied:

my children hated missing me.

With a Muse, a Séance to Unborns

Inversion of Thomas' "Do not go gentle into that goodnight"

Thirsty, we sip lemonade and Bombay gin,  
ignore shadows lurking the ceiling.  
Faster, faster the planchette does spin.

Like fiber optic lights by the billions,  
our spirits chant and emerge with feeling,  
"If you choose to enter, don't fear the end."

Cacophonous music fills my skin.  
We're now a stop for an underworld dealing.  
Faster, Faster my head does spin.

But still we dance and move in rhythm;  
I pulse in time by her compelling.  
"If you choose to enter, don't fear the end."

The dancing Spirits like this begin:  
"Welcome to night's eternal burning  
Faster, Faster the world does spin.

The Angel lifts his bowl for pouring.  
Cities in blaze will end writhing.  
If you choose to enter, don't fear the end.  
Faster, faster the world does spin."

To the Tall Man in Red

Oh, for a muse of fire  
as they crash and burn  
with licking blue flames.  
I heard the dying cry,  
a blaze to prove it was

not a defeat, but a rally—  
a call to arms. Make us great  
as my neighbors  
sell their furniture to brace  
for the knock of deportation and  
small towns anticipate  
elusive but promised jobs.

Waiting for supreme rulings to emerge  
from a smoldering world, I know  
change is a coming as  
money lies while fires simmer  
hissing with whispers  
that sound like static transmissions  
from old, heavy televisions.



On the Roof Outside my Window

I tell her, let's play twenty questions.

My muse's pale lips part to say,  
*Our death imminent is infinite?*

I don't answer but look out  
to misty fields lit by night's glow.

Her charcoal eyes search as she says,  
*lines are not so clear cut anymore.*

Grasping my hand, we jump to elude  
human velleities and impending wastelands

while hearing the long, desperate, unending howl  
as the universe readies to mourn its most alive atom.

## Blaze

it's easy to sit by  
while an asteroid  
in the night  
heads this way,  
its target ambiguous  
with millions of  
indefinite ricochet paths

Earth finally  
in the pathway  
feels like the civilian  
in war always  
on the verge of bombs  
of uncertainty  
that make brains teem  
and eyes surge  
to cry tears for  
our daughter's  
daughters  
while humans,  
similar to the scientists  
who prayed  
for the erasure  
of the atomic bomb,  
try to forget fire

## Descent

In the loud dungeon  
 posing a hidden entry,  
 a damp disco  
 with colorless lights,  
 sparkles reflections of  
 dark knights.

I, too, am a dark knight.  
 The only one in a family  
 of every-Sunday churchgoers  
 who always pray for me

and don't know their greeted admission  
 through glass doors leads to ritualistic delusions  
 inspired by fears of death deeper  
 than Hubble's revelations

and who don't know how we damned  
 are at odds with buildings  
 laying claim to divinity

who don't know drums  
 inspire the same pulsation  
 they feel as they raise their hands  
 toward the ceiling  
 during service.

I know and forget about cloth pews  
 and coffer plates, maddening dances with the unseen  
 as revolving doors drum slowly open with dawn.  
 Expecting *I really wish you'd go to church.*  
 I retreat to darkness, heavy drapes where  
 I can never fully escape the light.

## Buffer Overflow

a binary anomaly  
 information seeping  
 from the data's assigned space  
 overwriting adjacent memory locations  
 within the computer

like endless billboards and  
 videos with unrelenting sounds  
 vying for attention  
 entering my cortex  
 only to seep from the teeming reservoir  
 into the air because my brain  
 is unwilling or unable to accept anymore  
 of the data smog—  
 a dense, impenetrable cloud  
 suffocating all under its grasps  
 with blinding visibility

more knowledge            ever  
 escape    only    fund  
           fo electro    m  
 al ne      hi    alt de  
           de p o

## Tohubohu

Like particles in the cosmic ocean vibrating  
to the hum of the monk's deum verum,  
children run and crash together in their plastic kingdom  
with screams and cries and laughs reverberating  
through open space.

A curly haired child holds the plastic light saber to chase the little blonde.  
Still another dashes this way, stops uncertain  
and darts to the edges of this little tohubohu — chaos the noun.

Tohu wa bohu—the Bible's version of pre-universe, an evasive Hebrew name  
interpreted: waste, void, formless, desolation.

In theory, we should not be here— not the children, the playground, the  
Bible, the sun, or even the Milky Way.

In the great battle of matter versus antimatter  
pure energy is the mathematical result, but instead the atom prevails  
as scientists scratch their heads and move ever closer to God.

Tasseography :

‘Tis the time’s plague when madmen lead the blind. – Gloucester in *King Lear* IV.i

This evening, tea tastes like the ashtray.  
Inside the dregs— seers’ ties to the underworld—

the horned black alligator shows himself,  
standing on a sinewy, gel-tight moustache,

fist in the air, whispering falsisms,  
salivating with each shake.

Bottled snake oil escapes his hands  
with a new label “Progress.”

The alligator signifies danger, moustache immaturity,  
and the bottle—artifice.

It’s a fake cure, promising under charismatic deception,  
but one that ultimately fails, even in placebo.

The blind won’t see, but the patterns are there  
put forth by the universe, waiting to be recognized.

## Soothsaying

The icicle knife stabs my sternum in sticky coldness. It doesn't melt against my flesh as I drive and push it downward. I scoop red insides and lay the mess on the table, a modern-day soothsayer. In pieces, I see a zombie, eyes milky white, and in the black hole where ribs and lungs used to be, I am pulled into darkness. On the other side, my hips push back, body made boomerang. Hair and toes positioned into the night of space towards the earth writhing in flames like a dying star, not as fiery but just as fierce.

## Rage

lights pulse  
sweaty bodies aim for touch  
rage one last time

headed towards something with  
mouths made dry by a shortage of joy in the air

rage, rage with the flashing of lights in youth against the problems of our mothers

against the steel of compressed flesh of our fathers

against the stained fields, blood chemically solidified into their fibers

against the burning urge to not have children

in a world made of fake money we don't understand how to live  
money that corrupts pushes mollifies, wins every fucking time  
capitalism in the name of competition  
at the cost of people, of nature

nature that used to inspire  
nature that is disappearing  
no human self without nature  
just zombies, nothings, raging against the decay of time  
earth without life is just a rock  
imprints, histories say we used to be beautiful  
we used to have green  
now all we have is currency  
robots, and a deserted Earth.



## Concrete Certainty

The Grand Canyon.  
It's real. It exists.  
Huge. Unassuming. Unmoving.  
But what made that canyon,

gone, a vision of what was.  
A ravine theorized on the whims  
of educated geologists.

People are mass.  
Concrete.  
Made of atoms.

But, concrete and theoretical ideas make our reality. Neurons, too, have a say.  
Relationships which we rely on are directed by chemicals in the brain.

Those particles of unseen power carrying visions of all past and present,  
their own universes inside their tiny selves.

It's all interconnected, you see.

Perhaps our universe is one piece in the cosmic puzzle.  
One proton whizzing around in the LED finger lights of God.

In the universe's conspiracy

the world will end with a heat wave.  
Hydrogen will cease to be.  
The sun will expand to consume our little blue planet.

I am prepared to take her in my arms and  
crouch over her as a new-age Pompeiian mother,  
my body protecting her from the heat waves  
pouring through my skin and tearing our shadows apart.

Instead of being preserved by Vesuvius's lava,  
we will float as two indistinguishable dust particles  
into the outer reaches of space and time.

This universe is reaching its finale, but  
human emotions are ineffable— the only  
element ungoverned by laws of physics.

## Above Lake Tahoe

Strip clothes for the small pond  
 that convenes with mountains above Tahoe.  
 In the middle lies a curious, lonely island,  
 basking in the inexhaustible pine, a pervasive aroma.  
 Even the cold, dark water is clear  
 enveloping and freeing.  
 Towards the land –

swim  
     swim  
         swim.

Chest comes up short, breath tightens.  
 Slimy bodies attracted to movement surface.  
 Huge fish with sharp teeth swim faster.  
 Mythical creatures appear at the smell of fear,  
 guard water from all intruders.

Stop, tread water.  
 Clothes are no longer visible.  
 The lonely island looks the same.  
 Breathe, turn, float on back,  
 fill lungs for buoyancy.  
 Clouds enough to block the sun, but not bring rain.  
 Meander through water, lacking energy to swim.  
 Now, it's clear why the island's alone.  
 Nothing disturbs the quiet,  
 not even the starving tourists or  
 emitting buses down below.

## Claustrophobia

Some feel  
small in the  
large, green Earth.  
However, the opposite  
seems more appropriate.

Mountain gorillas are confined to the very  
tips of peaks, a much larger fortress they once held.  
Their grounds now reserved for encroaching gardens  
from humans too distracted by hunger and war to look beyond their own plots  
to see one thousand mountain gorillas left on Earth  
will soon have nowhere else to go except down or out.  
Don't people know it's all about how you take care  
of what you have?

## A Solution

Essentially, the “flat-Earthers” or “mad-cappers” are right. As of now, the dome is impenetrable to all, except a few. And perhaps, not even those few go to the ISS. There is strong evidence that we didn’t go to the moon. Maybe it’s all staged to quell some anxieties that grow exponentially and stem from MAD-mutually assured destruction, food shortages, melting icecaps. The cleanest, healthiest humans to live, ever. Our most technologically advanced society, ever. And people still go hungry in this biotomb. Three generations are born before the oldest leaves. The human population grows like a cancer mass with expedited growth and inhibited death cycles. The only thing not carcinogenic round here is knowledge of rocket science. Aside from death, space is the only escape. If a common cause is the root of peace, let us all strive towards the lustrous heavens.

## Mathematical Universe Hypothesis

A dancer who has aged,  
is no longer pained from plies,  
but from brittle breaking bones.  
Wrinkling pulpous skin in pointe shoes.  
Her cane, a new point of pirouette.  
As a ghost of Arabesque,  
she is the most tragically beautiful thing in the universe.

With age comes wisdom,  
and the strength to bear such aging.  
Age—our only assured view of time,  
the greatest and oldest measure  
of heavenly bodies' movements.  
Perfect and endless,  
according to our calculation,  
measured by the rise of the moon,  
the turning of earth, the solstice of the sun.

If time doesn't exist, then we just are.  
Little balls of energy that rage and die.  
Lights that pop more randomly than  
fireflies on a Southern night.

## Worldly Matters

Riding through my town  
you will see we live  
in a place of cornfields—  
that's America for you:  
A few cows, but mostly  
crowded plots of land  
where builders are using  
every inch of space.  
That's America for you.  
The suburbs and  
little businesses  
just keep growing  
like bacteria  
in an uninhibited petri dish—  
All the little pieces  
connect and spread  
until there is  
no more space to grow.  
The fields will be gone...  
Over and over again.  
Who can agree on anything anymore?  
It seems the only thing we have in common  
is looking up, but even that is an idea veiled beneath  
more worldly matters.

## Permanent Fixtures

A whale surfaces forty feet from my kayak.  
The waters shift as she takes her breath;  
this is still her realm, but she's hiding  
so she sinks to darker waters.

Soon, the speedboat packed with those  
searching for echoes of wildlife  
in a world that is quickly losing its nature,  
shows up in the bay, somehow knowing the whale is near.

She's on the run.

I paddle back knowing bottles  
don't erode for five hundred years  
and that bacon causes cancer in rats.  
Plastic and cancer: humans' only permanent fixtures.

As I move towards land,  
I suggest to the whale  
that she should visit the South to see  
Jason Taylor's underwater sculptures  
growing new corals  
and I tell her I can't make any bigger promises  
but one day I will help  
build a wall of trees.

Though conservation is slow,  
the few are here,  
and one day things will get better.