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# Naiad Blood

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TRINITY COLLEGE

Senior Thesis

NAIAD BLOOD

submitted by

SARAH C. BECKMANN 2018

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for

The Degree of Bachelor of Arts

2018

Director: Clare Rossini

Reader: Ciaran Berry

Reader: David Rosen

In memory of my grandmother, Joan. Keeping my promise to write for you.

“Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever.”  
–Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

“Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners.”  
–William Shakespeare

“And if you were a proper lady, you didn’t row at all.”  
–Daniel J. Boyne, *The Red Rose Crew*

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## Homage to the Start

It's like nothing I've felt before.  
How when pain enters the equation,  
when physical strain is imminent,  
time warps.

How when pain enters the equation,  
thirty seconds become a millennium;  
time warps.  
One minute an eternity.

Thirty seconds become a millennium,  
but the pain won't last.  
One minute an eternity;  
something beautiful never lasts.

But the pain won't last—  
*oh*, when you're at that line!  
Something beautiful never lasts;  
*oh*, when that flag goes down!

*Oh*, when you're at that line!  
When physical strain is imminent;  
*oh*, when that flag goes down—  
it's like nothing I've felt before.

*Naiad Blood*

## The Meaning of Things

Feet bare, head back  
in this white rocking chair, one hand  
holding my black journal,  
I sit on the porch overlooking the bay, writing  
a poem called, "The Meaning of Things."  
Through the late summer sunlight,  
the leaves of a birch tree sway  
in the tender air, spreading  
an itchy scent, the brown, flakey seeds  
falling to the parched lawn.  
The wind carries some seeds  
across the road and into the swampy inlet  
where a snapping turtle,  
open-jawed in the silt, awaits them.

I close the journal, bending closer to the light  
that fills my nostrils and pores, honey warm.  
The squirrel scales the telephone pole.  
A swan swims serenely, forlornly  
atop those murky waters. An osprey  
streaks for his nest, bearing minnows in his talons  
for hungry mouths. The seconds pulse.

I think of those I love—  
they all sleep here tonight—  
and of all the things I left behind  
to come to this place. Those things  
are in another world. Those things can't touch me here  
where I watch  
my nineteen summers fall like falling  
flakes, into the maw of an ancient creature  
who lies among white feathers and webbed feet,  
paddling over my eternal home's  
molten heart.



## Peconic Summers

ok yes i'm in love with  
jingle shells and jelly fish

but i'm talking about the  
see-through ones that aren't  
pink and don't sting the ones  
that drag shadows like dark  
freckles in the shallows the ones  
that make you shudder when you  
touch their gooey ghosts

i'm talking about sea robins  
blowfish sand sharks and porgies  
skates and horseshoe crabs things  
you catch off your grandfather's  
boat before you jump off and  
paddle to the beach where mom sits  
in a chair we've had since the 60s

i'm talking about a road south  
of the harbor where we swim  
across a channel our annual  
migration to the white point  
of land that juts out like a chin  
into caribbean blue water

i'm talking about a farmhouse  
a rope swing with a tractor tire  
wooden adirondack chairs and gas  
lanterns on tables with sunflowers  
sweet corn on the cob and barefoot  
children running beneath the stars

i'm talking about hammocks  
rocking chairs and chalk drawings  
on the driveway a garage full of  
bicycles a blue and white house  
a porch with a view—it's all about

laughter floating through an open  
window on a summer firefly night  
up into the black like  
chinese lanterns        fading

A Life through Boats, I

To the *Mary Ellen*, *Cape Henlopen*, *John H.*, and *Susan Anne*

Your jaws open and give us entry  
to your steel bowels. Our car nestles  
between your ribs, tight, sometimes  
a real squeeze—but you never fail  
to consume us all, and our wheels.

You let out a long,  
reverberating honk, and we watch  
as, on both sides, land slowly slides away.  
Beneath our feet, the deep vibration of your  
well-conditioned heart, the new constant.

You pump us into sea,  
past Plum Island, into the Gut, around  
the Orient Point Lighthouse—*Grammy's*  
*Lighthouse*, black, white,  
and regal as a coffee pot.

You have carried me back and forth  
between two homes since my body  
was new, your pulse as familiar  
as my mother's heartbeat, your buoyant rocking  
safe as her womb.

## Swans

Joan favors them over most birds.  
She hurries outside to the porch  
as two enter the cove  
beyond the front lawn,  
soft figures gliding on glass. She smiles,  
wipes her hands on her white apron,  
then cups them over her bespectacled,  
blue eyes.

“*Dick!* Get the camera!”

She decorates her house with  
swan tablecloths, swan china,  
a wooden swan sculpture—  
everything color-coordinated blue and white:  
white feathers, blue water.

As I stand on that porch, watch that bay,  
I think of black and white, swans  
and ashes,  
though mostly I feel blue. But I know  
Joan likes swimming with the swans.  
And maybe, that one—  
right there—is her,

neck bowed, dark eyes consuming.

## The Voice of Ashes

I'm having trouble reassembling myself.  
I mean this quite literally.  
Ever since they spread my ashes here,  
it's gotten harder and harder to be the whole I once was.  
But I can sense my distant particles floating randomly,  
tangled in the weeds at high tide,  
sprinkled into the brown silt that covers the bottom of this bay.  
I think part of my left pinkie toe may be lying in the stomach  
of a swan. It's the strangest feeling.

After trying to re-collect myself for roughly five years—  
Good God! This water is murky as ever!—  
I obviously haven't had much luck. And yet somehow I  
enjoy watching them eat lunch on the porch,  
burping and laughing. I smile  
to see my foolish, charming husband, so lively.  
He sits every morning in the same chair,  
sometimes glancing at me across the road,  
sometimes gazing straight  
at my heart.  
I can never tell for how long.

As summer wind sprays dappled light,  
I see the two girls walk down the deck, hand in hand.  
My, how they've grown! They're so beautiful!  
The youngest makes sure to look both ways,  
before crossing the road. And then I realize—  
Is that her? The oldest? She looks like—  
How old is she now? Eighteen?  
I choke on a wet breath.

They sit on the grassy bank that overlooks my sanctuary,  
still holding hands. I listen to their moving lips, yet I am  
deaf to the words they speak, as they are deaf to mine. My ears  
are no longer trained to the music of the world.  
Stroking the younger girl's metallic hair, the oldest brings  
their joined hands to her chest. Her hazel eyes lift, and land  
right on me.

I'm frozen. I can't move, can't think. I  
stare at my two granddaughters, who are *remembering* me.  
Seasons may pass from this moment on, scattering me thinner  
and thinner, but of all my mangled memories, *this* is my favorite.  
I am determined to hold on to it, to memorize

the backs of their shining heads as they depart for the house  
that has become my eternal mirror,  
its painted wood gleaming like white marble.

## A Life through Boats, II

To the Dyer Dhows, Optis, 420s, and Rhodes 19s

Hat, sunscreen, bathing suit, life jacket,  
whistle, and booties: with these, I learned  
to tie eight knots, square knots. To rig  
boats, fold and roll sails on the dock.  
To sky a line—and how

to capsize, slipping into water  
on a cold, cloudy day, lying, drenched,  
on your exposed center board, levering  
you upright with my weight,  
terrified.

I was that girl who hugged your mast,  
eyes closed, crying, fearing  
the moment when you tipped too far  
and we all went falling over  
again—

that girl who stood in your stern,  
tiller in one hand, mainsheet in the other,  
tacking, jibing, dancing with the boom,  
as the wind whipped and split the ends  
of my hair, long, loose, wild.

As my body grew, I sailed, and knew  
the power of air.

Manchester-by-the-Sea

*An abecedarian poem*

Affluenza  
by-the-Sea is what they should  
call it.  
Decadence at its  
ethereal  
finest. Where  
giddy teenagers smoke  
hash when they're bored.  
Immaculate oceanside mansions and  
jubilant old people;  
kids from Captain Dusty's  
leaping with cones in their hands towards  
Masconomo Park, where at  
night in the  
open  
parking lot,  
questionable things happen, stupid shit in the name of  
rebellion. Like that idiot doing donuts around the traffic circle at  
Singing Beach. Even the cops are looking for something  
to do. Don't party with more than ten people,  
unless you wanna get caught. That's what it's like here in Manch  
Vegas; everything is so  
white you can barely see what festers beneath the surface, see that guy  
Xander—is he a freshman?—pass a blunt to his buddy in English class.

You wonder if they know none of this is real. What it will take to  
*zap* them awake.

## Phantom Pains

In dreams, I touch my hair,  
chestnut locks, longer  
than they ever were in reality.

I play with them, pull them up  
into a ponytail, wag my head  
and revel  
in the soft and swaying.

Sensations  
I can almost remember, of something  
that's no longer there. I wake up forgetting.

I wonder, did Medusa weep  
when her hair began to hiss?  
What of Rapunzel and Sif,  
both with their golden tresses  
severed?

Some say when a woman  
cuts her curls, she loses more  
than her hair.

The Navajo divines a connection between  
hair and memory; the longer the strands,  
the longer the past lives.  
I must seem absent-minded.

In Chinese tradition, cropped hair means  
banishment from the family, rejection.  
I must be homeless.

Hindu women only scissor their hair  
when widowed, their womanhood so closely tied  
to their husbands.  
I must be a widow.

In wider belief, short-haired women  
are not youthful, feminine.  
I must not be beautiful.

But then I see Mulan—a flash of silver and straight,  
black straw floating to the floor. I see her steal  
her father's sword, disguised





## How to Gain Muscle

You sweat,  
everyday. You

squat with a bar on your shoulders,  
a concrete-filled paint can on each side.

You wake up early  
and lie on a bench, press  
a bar with two and a half pounds,  
five pounds, ten pounds—  
fifteen, then twenty on each side—

You trap bar deadlift  
more than your body weight—  
*one* time, breathe, *two* times—  
breathe—

You ignore your screaming hands  
as the weight of eight other bodies  
crushes the calluses on your skin, as you  
push an oar through water, propel  
the shell forward—one stroke after  
another—

You lift that vessel out of water and  
over your head, arms locked,  
knees steady—the lone fisherman  
on the dock in shock, watching you—

he watches you and your sisters,  
you strong, Amazon warriors—

because women are not *supposed* to have muscle;  
women are not *supposed* to be strong—

because not everyone can do  
what you do,

everyday.

homage to my legs

*With thanks to Lucille Clifton*

these legs are long legs.  
they need room to  
stretch out in.  
they can't cram into  
small spaces. these legs  
are strong legs;  
they've never been broken.  
these legs are pretty legs—

these legs move boats.

these legs know  
the pain of two thousand meters.  
they don't rush. they're  
*smooth* up the slide as if the tracks  
were coated with butter.  
they're patient. they wait  
for the boat to come  
to them. and they don't slam  
the front end; they  
land with the softness  
of a butterfly's beating wings.

### A Life through Boats, III

To the *Ruffian*, *Spectacular Bid*, *Kraft*, *Unbowed*, *Alydar*, *A4+*, and *Z4+*

I came to rowing  
lanky, wide-eyed, the skin on my hands  
soft. I was a girl raised by the sea, I thought  
I knew the water.

I thought I was a woman. But she appeared  
only after

I popped my first blister. After the calluses  
on my hands turned yellow. After I couldn't see  
my toes past my thighs, learned to lift weights,  
boats. To win silver medals under blinding skies.

My bones as strong as the carbon-fibre  
that held me.

The woman I became first breathed  
on a seat that barely spans the width of my hips,  
sliding, unstable, an oar in my hand that seemed more  
like a javelin. The rigger on my right side, wing-like,  
my blade one feather out of many.

I am a passenger, a single cog in your engine.  
But something greater within all of us  
feeds you; you ride on those  
inner winds, intangible, yet

stronger than any machine.

## The Rower's Dichotomy

The mechanical dragon  
crouches on the ground,  
waiting for me  
to climb on her back—taunting me  
to dare.

She's an Ergometer,  
of the Dynamic species, and her name  
is Concept 2.

I settle into my saddle, grasp  
the metallic reins, and at  
the kick of my spurs her wheel  
turns with a hiss and roar.

I stare into her  
square face, into the mouth  
that spits out numbers, into the eyes  
that see nothing but glory  
in pain.

She's the only dragon I know  
that never flies.

The onyx vessel  
sits in slings,  
waiting for us  
to pick her up—smiling at us  
in the sun.

She's a boat,  
a carbon-fiber shell, and her name  
is the *Unbowed*.

We lift her up, carry her  
on our shoulders, and at  
the call of our coxswain, we  
place her in the water.

We admire her  
cylindrical curves, the way water  
wicks from her sides, and those  
sliding seats oiled  
with WD-40.

She's the only boat we know  
that can fly.

I sit astride you in my  
organic armor, my  
body as my only weapon.

The distance is set. A sacrifice  
made: as a woman,

I am already bleeding  
before the war.

We sit inside you in our  
matching uniforms, our  
bodies in numbered order.

The distance is buoyed. Our backs  
face the finish line: as women,

some of us are bleeding  
before the battle.

You  
breathe fire into me—I can feel it  
blazing through my muscles—scorching  
my every tendon—smoldering  
slowly up my spine—you're  
hurting me—I'm  
*hurting me—*  
*hot—*  
*hot—*

You  
send a thrill through our veins—we can feel it  
jumping in our muscles—bouncing  
through every bone—beaming  
like a light from our spirits—you're  
moving us—we're  
*moving us—*  
*bright—*  
*bright—*

The distance ends.

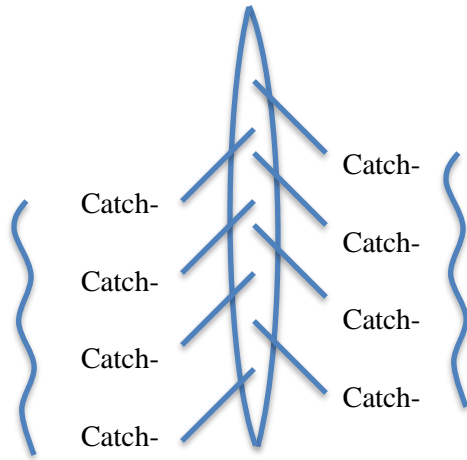
I look  
up,  
now, at  
your  
animated face,  
covered  
in  
numbers, and  
I see—  
I see—  
black

We look  
up,  
now, at  
the  
bright blue sky—

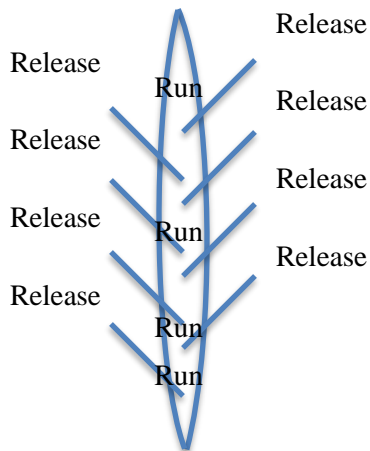
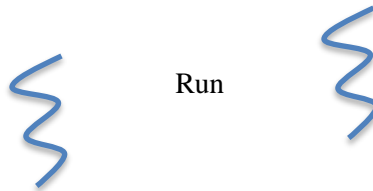
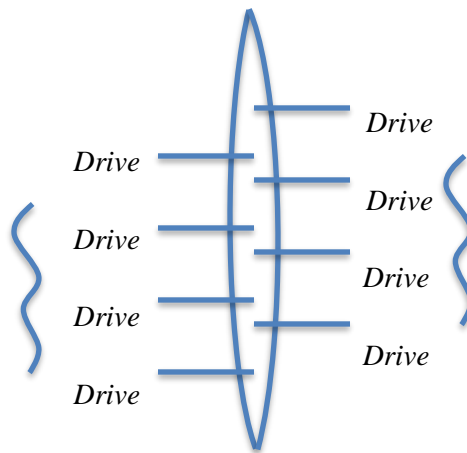
our  
breathing  
synchronized—we  
are  
one body—we  
are  
one mind—we  
are

*us.*

Bird's-Eye



—grip it—



-repeat-



## Rowing: A Metaphor

“But this was against all rule; for the oarsmen must put out their eyes, and ram a skewer through their necks; usage pronouncing that they must have no organs but ears, and no limbs but arms, in these critical moments.”

—Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

*“Pull, pull, my fine hearts-alive;  
pull, my children;  
pull, my little ones,”  
drawlingly and soothingly sighed Stubb  
to his crew, some of whom still showed  
signs of uneasiness...  
“So, so; there you are now;  
that’s the stroke for a thousand pounds;  
that’s the stroke to sweep the stakes!”*

I am blind on this seat,  
can’t see  
where we’re going. Only  
someone’s back in front of me;  
my feet, my legs,  
my receding arms.  
In the peripherals,  
flashing blades, blue water,  
other crews.  
But I keep my eyes  
in the boat; I don’t dare  
look out—  
not thinking, my body moves  
opposite our velocity.

*“Three cheers, men—all hearts alive!  
Easy, easy;  
don’t be in a hurry—  
don’t be in a hurry.  
Why don’t you snap your oars,  
you rascals?  
Bite something,  
you dogs!  
So, so, so then;  
—softly, softly!  
That’s it—that’s it!  
long and strong.”*

I am deafened on this seat,  
consumed by one voice, by the  
thumping and thundering  
beat of our movement.

Oarlocks snap like  
gunshots—my hands  
sting with recoil, as my body  
flows like water,  
like the water I bend, in and out,  
with my hands. My fingers  
scoop that weight, and hang;  
my calluses suck the oar  
like frog's pads.

No letting go  
of this rhythm—dying  
for this rhythm!—  
*hunting them down.*

*“Pull, will ye?  
pull, can't ye?  
pull, won't ye?*

*Why in the name of gudgeons and  
ginger-cakes don't ye pull?—pull  
and break something! pull,  
and start your eyes out!*

*...That's it—that's it.*

*Now ye do something;  
that looks like it, my steel-bits.*

*Start her—start her,  
my silver-spoons!*

*Start her,  
marling spikes!”*

I'm fighting on this seat,  
punching every stroke  
to the finish line—  
*pushing*

horizontal through that tunnel,  
trusting my blade  
to find the water cleanly—  
*pulling* through that tunnel,  
into the jaws of something  
unknown  
that might just  
kill me—

## Race Day Blues

It's race day, oh, and those shells  
are makin' their way down the course.  
Race day, oh—hundreds  
goin' down that buoyed course.  
    I'm in that boat, see me there?  
Proud as a racehorse.

I move as seconds pass,  
like the tick of a metronome.  
Seconds pass—and, steady as  
a metronome—  
    but no, my strokes are numbered;  
my strength's an aging rose.

Youth. Grace. Power.  
Oh—they won't last!  
Grace, youth, beautiful power—  
they will *never* last;  
    they're fragile as the wave  
shattering on the tip of our bow.

## The Amazon Syndrome

*In homage to the 2015 Trinity College women's first varsity eight*

“...where women had taken up ‘weightlifting, ergometers, running the steps of the stadiums, and the flattening of the bosom.’”

—*The New York Times*

Cox. *Alkaia*, “Mighty One”

Small army general, master of none,  
    all must heed her biting tongue, she  
hunches down, she  
    curls her top lip,  
steers the rocket, spitting fire—  
    seeing everything.

8. *Hippolyte*, “Of the Stampeding Horse”

The Queen, she kills without remorse,  
    her sand hair pinned  
behind her white helm.  
    First to move and last to the finish line—  
every stroke steady,  
    steady down the course.

7. *Antiope*, “Confronting Moon”

Dark skin shining in the light of noon,  
    her hulking bulk, her  
wild eyes  
    gleam with ire, amplify  
a followed rhythm  
    from the other side.

6. *Clyemne*, “Famous Might”

Lean legs, long legs, born to fight,  
    graceful balance, perfect craft, she  
cuts the water—*grips* and BOOM—slides—  
    *grips* and BOOM—she’s  
with her leader,  
    the sister on her side.

5. *Penthesilea*, “Compelling Men to Mourn”

The Queen, took Troy by storm,  
fought fair Achilles and lost the war, but—  
dark dark dark dark—  
power power power power—  
engine engine engine engine—long black hair in a high  
high tail on her proud high head—

4. *Phoebe*, “Bright One”

Skilled spear-woman, beneath the bright sun,  
blonde, brawny goddess,  
double braids swinging, she  
throws her weapon, strikes her target,  
pulls out his chest, stares in your eyes—  
don’t look—don’t look—

3. *Euryleia*, “Woman Wanderer”

Scrappy and slim, she is younger  
than her sisters, she is freshest  
in this battle—but pure muscle, core of stone,  
she holds her own,  
holds an oar  
with mythic giants.

2. *Lykopsis*, “She-Wolf”

Hawk-eyed archer—watch yourself!  
Flaming red hair, black ink rose  
on her shoulder—slight, but sinewy—  
thin, though strong—she strings  
her bow, she narrows  
her eyes, she aims and—

1. *Androdameia*, “Subduer of Men”

Throat-cutter, teeth-grinder—known as Jen,  
of broad-shoulder build, sticks for legs but  
strength galore—  
she is insane. She will push her  
body to extremes that  
even *'silea* would never dream.

Zander the Great

*For my brother, who is dyslexic*

1.

You sit beneath the cream cloth canopy. Your mouth  
opens, closes, like a fish  
drowning in oxygen.

In your hands, paper, the letters  
overflowing. This is how you swallow the lifeblood  
of language; this is how you read words.

And why, like all great heroes of the ages,  
our mother told you long  
ago, in a blue  
bedroom bordered with jungle leaves, that you were destined  
for greatness.

Yes, it's true: to be great means to be  
lacking. You battle with a burden; you wage a constant war,  
bearing a heel more vulnerable than Achilles', for,  
as mother caresses your golden hair, she exhales into your ear:  
*Your weakness hides a strength.*

2.

You, his mother, want him home.  
But all he wants

is out.

All he wants  
is smoke and party. All he wants  
is girls. He wants all the things  
you once wanted, did at his age.  
You hate to admit that you're a bit  
similar.

But you were smart about it, you think. *He*  
is not.

You worried when you found  
weed stashed under the porch.  
You worried when he was stoned  
before a family reunion (his father

blew a gasket). You worried when he  
ran away, when he almost got arrested,  
when you  
got a call from his school, when he  
broke the rules and hotboxed  
in a bathroom—

You worry that he won't  
make it through college, that his friends  
are bad influences—that he,  
one day, may never—

*come* home—

You worry, you worry,  
you worry, in the daylight,

in the dark.

3.

My brother is nineteen and lovesick  
with scars on his chin, on his heart.  
Going after those girls who wear lipstick,  
my brother is nineteen and lovesick;  
at night he remembers me, singing of heartbreak—  
of being slowly torn apart.  
My brother is nineteen and lovesick  
with scars on his chin, on his heart.

4.

The English Vernacular is your personal demon, the monster  
you are fated to conquer each day. It's a gigantic,  
unearthly creature, too stubborn to die, too eager  
to seek linguistic pain from the ones who were born  
to oppose it.

Yet you are gifted in the art of combat—your name  
is Zander.  
Your title is royal, and you are divine.  
A demigod of this generation, crouching with sword upraised,  
you stalk the Cyclopes of Dyslexia  
in his cave.

## My Rock

*For my mother*

A heart-shaped rock  
sits beating on my desk.

The faint compass on its face  
glows, pulsates with the light that  
fills its transparent chambers.

It kneels before a golden frame  
filled with a picture of you.

This rock reminds me  
of being naked on my carpet  
floor. Of hugging my knees.  
Of staring into the sky outside  
my window, my mouth  
open—but no longer making sound.  
Of not knowing the difference  
between sweat and tears.

This rock reminds me  
of you. Of you stepping  
out of a car in a restaurant  
parking lot.

Of you holding my hand  
on the table in the booth,  
leaving something hard  
but warm, in my palm.



## Fire & Focus

“When one rows it is not the rowing which moves the ship: rowing is only a magical ceremony by means of which one compels a demon to move the ship.”

—Nietzsche

“Coming up on the last two minutes,  
in two we sprint—time to *go*—  
that’s one, and—”

This is the Voice you obey  
on water and on land. The Voice  
you hear as you sit on the erg. A calm,  
strong Voice that makes you want to feel  
calm and strong, but you’re  
in pain now, you’re—  
barely fighting it—you falter—

“*Nope*, not this time—”  
the Voice says, behind you,  
in your ear. “Get it *back* now,  
that’s it—”

You don’t want—  
*You must*. You can’t—  
*You must...you trust*

that Voice, you trust  
that if you obey this Voice, do  
the impossible, you  
will make it out okay. You will  
make it out alive—  
be thankful for the pain—

“Now, *now*—”

\*\*\*

You feel the hair on your body  
rise, as something  
*electric*  
shoots down your spine, as you  
slowly, at first, start to bring  
that number down—“Bringin’ it down now,  
theere you go—” down down down—

*Pull* it down with you, drag it  
beneath the waves of your consciousness  
to that place, seldom sought, where  
the deepest recess of your power  
lies, that blackness  
churning with sparks—

You bring yourself there now—  
you call upon it      NOW—  
it's all you can see now—flashing—  
you hear more Voices—*you are not alone*—

“THERE IT IS!” they shout—  
your number! As you rope in that elusive  
monster, another beast stirs  
inside you. Now it's just  
    you two  
at the center of that labyrinth—

*your body, all fire,  
your mind, all focus.*

\*\*\*

You see the ceiling.

You're on the floor.

Are you breathing?  
Is it over?

Did you make it?  
Yes, the Voice says, *yes*—

Your muscles scream      smile

## Ergometer

From the Greek words *ergon* (“work”) and *metron* (“measure”),  
literally meaning, “work measurer”

A.k.a., an instrument that measures  
the power output of human muscles;  
the indoor rower;  
the antithesis of the boat.

“...a medieval torture device.” –Boyne

Land-bound. Dry.  
Metal, straps and chains,  
wheezing, rattling, cracking,  
a zombie moaning beneath my body.  
The monitor, an ugly head,  
all grey and black figures—  
distance, time, charts, curves.

It sheds truth in digits. But

ergs. Don't. Float.

They don't think, love, hate. *Feel.*

On the erg,  
my arms are steel chords, my legs,  
pistons firing. But I refuse  
to be  
a machine that rides machines.

My heart, warm, pumps  
on the powers of my singular will.  
The water inside me  
hums, keeps me  
going when no river lies beneath me.

I am not so cold.

Because, in the end,  
I choose spirit over integers.  
I choose

the water.

## Duende in Rowing

“It’s a great art, is rowing. It’s the finest art there is...And when you’re rowing well, why it’s nearing perfection. And when you near perfection, you’re touching the Divine.”

–George Yeoman Pocock

We rowers have peculiar rituals. Like running  
stairs indoors, inhaling  
stale air and dust. Like sweating  
in a tank room, all concrete walls and low ceiling,  
mirrors and machines. Our suffering, artificial.

While we labor in these confines, we pray  
in wintertime for blue skies, flat water.  
For the sun.

We see in our minds that pavement path  
that slopes, downward, to the river.  
On one shoulder, our dark craft, we make  
our morning pilgrimage: salute the waning moon,  
the dawn.

First light  
ricochets off water; the fragments  
shower our foggy faces. It’s the thing  
that fully wakes us, makes  
the naiad blood in any girl  
sing.

On land, we abandon our bodies,  
discard our separate shells in exchange  
for a new vessel. The moment the last foot  
leaves the dock, an unearthly link  
completes itself.

On water, our souls surrender,  
affix to that greater whole,  
that *oneness*—at the risk  
of becoming gods ourselves!—we  
glide through the waves, our togetherness

the only thing that anchors us.

## Women and Water

Women and water do not mix.  
For a female onboard is bad luck at sea;  
Blood blooms in those wayward depths.

Men, in ancient myths,  
Wrecked ships at sirens' song, deadly sweet.  
Women and water do not mix.

But, bright against Mother Nyx,  
The moon, too, tugs our tides, our bodies;  
Blood blooms in those wayward depths.

We live this truth, red as bricks,  
Crimson as Ophelia's flooded veins.  
Women and water do not mix.

But, at the sight of a woman's breasts,  
Rough waters calm; naked figureheads keep  
Blood from blooming in those wayward depths.

Grace O'Malley, at her father's refusal, axed  
Her hair to ride a ship—and became a sea queen.  
Ha! Women and water do not mix!

Strong as an oath on the River Styx,  
As superstition is, who could really believe  
Women and water do not mix, that  
Blood blooms in those wayward depths?

Ode to the Coxless Crew

*One ocean. Four women. 257 days at sea. 8,579 miles: San Francisco, CA to Cairns, Australia.*

Amid the starburst sunsets, squalls,  
whales, wind and waves—  
sometimes an absolute silence  
emerges in the middle of a calm sea.

Space-like.

The water reflects the sky, or perhaps, the sky  
reflects the water; the horizon line,  
one fold in a continuous canvas, and the world  
heavy. Quiet.

Their boat, *Doris*, a pink freckle in that blue void.

They row in shifts, and sleep,  
a constant routine, a rigid ritual. Time  
loses meaning.

\*\*\*

They see barges, now and then, carrying cargo  
between continents. An occasional reminder  
that humankind exists.

\*\*\*

Storm waves the size of school buses  
batter *Doris*, the wind, rain, and current,  
savage.

The moment they see Honolulu,  
two dark hills in the mist,  
they open a bottle of champagne.

After weeks of freeze-dried food,  
they gorge themselves on juicy burgers  
and dripping sundaes.

Again, they lose sight of shore.

\*\*\*

Lizanne is seasick.  
In the green tinge of the night vision frame,  
she leans oversides, heaves,  
gets back on her seat. Continues  
to row.

They reach the equator in pitch black, make  
an offering to Neptune: brandy overboard.

\*\*\*

Laura lies cramped in the cabin, the radiophone  
pressed to her ear. The connection dissolves,  
the voice of a family member  
lost in static.

She squeezes her eyes shut. Her fingers  
cover her face.

\*\*\*

Emma: "I've not got anything left to give...  
If someone told me I never had to row again,  
I'd be very happy, and that makes me  
really sad."

\*\*\*

Natalia: "When the essence of who you are  
is questioned, then,  
where do you go from there?"

\*\*\*

They wear wreaths of flowers in Samoa,  
their skin scorched, eyes red and teary.  
In a hotel room, Lizanne holds up her hands:  
white with puss, blisters,  
calluses protruding like horns.

Again, they lose sight of shore.

\*\*\*

Christmas: posing for the camera in Santa hats  
and sunglasses.

New Year's passes in stillness, save  
for four women's voices, counting down,  
whooping in the dark of night, in the careless  
Pacific—the moon the size of a needle hole,  
piercing the thick, shimmering black.

\*\*\*

A shot of Natalia, naked.

Her tanned back, one long, brown braid,  
faces the camera. The curve of her body rests  
on the furry-white, sliding seat. Nothing but  
nudging waves, dying daylight, clouds afire—  
and four oars  
moving back and forth.

“The reason that I'm doing this row,” she says,  
“is to test the strength of my human spirit.”

\*\*\*

In pink shirts and bandanas, they paddle  
toward the dock in Cairns. Families and friends  
cheering, applauding.

The moment comes: holding hands,  
they stand together on *Doris*, count, extend  
one bare foot over land.

The dry earth, almost alien.

They'd grown accustomed to  
unsteadiness. To losing sight

of shore.



## Thanksgiving

I peel potatoes and  
polish silver, as Aunt Kathleen  
carves the turkey.

Meat cutting, an art.

Her father was a butcher, she says. She grew up  
watching him. Her thick, worn fingers  
caress the knife, the fork,  
as she digs into the carcass.

She sucks the juices off her skin,  
licks her lips, while

Uncle Kim stands hunched,  
running steel in long, smooth strokes  
across stone, the sound

the methodic crescendo of years  
grinding years.

## Homesick for the River

I remember the river,  
the polluted, mucky smell of it.  
I remember the sky,  
the starburst, sherbert look of it.

I remember the oars,  
the heft of the boat in my hands.  
I remember the buoys,  
the underbellies of bridges.

I remember the sound,  
the low, sharp hiss of one voice.  
I remember the feeling,  
the *thump*, swing—*thump*, swing—

I remember flying.

And when the ice hadn't melted,  
    when the wind hadn't faltered—  
    when the rain started—  
    when the snow pelted—

I remember the *steam* from our bodies,  
rising like smoke from the seats.

The *heat* of my heart,  
like a boat in its bay, resting

softly, in slings.

## The Rocket

Joan Beckmann  
July 4<sup>th</sup> party  
West Islip, NY  
1968

Your skin looks pale in this picture. Not sickly,  
but pearly. Evanescent. Almost as delicate as  
that paper dress, that paper flower.

Your dress has a rocket on it. It's taking off straight  
into the air, a finger scraping the sky  
with one long, sharp nail. Your hair is strawberry  
against the leaves.

The blossom in your hand has its petals splayed  
like the feathers of a blue, exotic bird.

You're smiling, and I see my father in you.  
I see my legs, my knees in your knees.  
My arms in your arms. We have different shoulders,  
different faces, but I know that the fingernail on my left  
hand, the nail on my ring finger—  
is the exact shape as yours.

You were a rocket, a real fireball  
bound for the sky. But when you took off  
all you left me

was this oval, narrow,  
faintly pink.

## Horizon Bound

You are 60 feet long and  
220 pounds.

But I like to keep you on one shoulder.

I like to  
keep you above the ground, as high  
as my body can manage, because you  
are my keeper.

I'm with you when the sun rises,  
when the river steams with mist;  
we sit in the cold tendrils, the wisps  
shot through by the half-open eyelid  
of morning.

I'm with you after sunset,  
when orange rims the trees  
like embers, when the water swirls  
like ink,  
like oil—  
almost as black as you.

And when I put you down to rest  
in our house, your weight  
never truly leaves  
my shoulder.

When I sleep I think of you. I dream  
of what we do. I dream of you  
holding me and my sisters, as we  
push you toward the sky, eight oars pulling  
higher, higher into flight as the waves  
suck and slip at your hull—try  
not to let you  
go—

I dream of us dancing together,  
together on the water, always

horizon bound.

## NOTES

### Opening epigraphs to the collection

Herman Melville in *Moby-Dick: or, The Whale*.

William Shakespeare in *Othello, the Moore of Venice*, Act 1, Scene 3.

Daniel J. Boyne in *The Red Rose Crew: A True Story of Women, Winning, and the Water*.

### References within the collection

- |    |                           |   |
|----|---------------------------|---|
| 4  | Peconic Summers           | Peconic is the name of a geographic area that corresponds to the town of Southold in Suffolk County, NY (the location of my grandparents' house). The community is named after the two Peconic Bays that lie between Long Island's North and South Forks. |
| 5  | A Life through Boats, I   | This poem specifically references the Cross Sound Ferry, a year-round vehicle, truck, motorcoach, and passenger ferry service that runs from New London, CT to Orient Point, Long Island, NY.   |
| 9  | A Life through Boats, II  | In allusion to Manchester Sailing Association (MSA), located at Tucks Point, Manchester-by-the-Sea, MA.   |
| 15 | A Life through Boats, III | In reference to Friends of Trinity Rowing Boathouse (Bliss Boathouse) located on the bank of the Connecticut River in East Hartford, CT.  |
| 20 | Rowing: A Metaphor        | Epigraph taken from Chapter 48, "The First Lowering," in Melville's <i>Moby-Dick</i> . Italicized prose from this chapter is also referenced throughout the poem.   |
| 23 | The Amazon Syndrome       | Epigraph from <i>The New York Times</i> quoted in <i>The Red Rose Crew</i> , by Boyne. Dedication to Trinity College's first varsity eight that won a gold medal at the NCAA DIII Women's Rowing Championships in Sacramento, CA (May 2015).              |
| 28 | Fire & Focus              | Epigraph taken from <i>Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits</i> , by Friedrich Nietzsche.  |

- 30 Ergometer The quote from Boyne is taken from *The Red Rose Crew*.
- 31 Duende in Rowing Epigraph from George Yeoman Pocock quoted in *The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics*, by Daniel James Brown.
- 33 Ode to the Coxless Crew This entire poem is based off a documentary film titled, *Losing Sight of Shore*, directed by Sarah Moshman and released on April 23, 2017. Can be found on *Netflix*.

## On the Creation of *Naiad Blood*

My college experience has been dominated by two activities: writing and rowing. I have been tested with a constant stream of writing 2,000 word essays and rowing 2,000 meter races. Writing creatively has been my passion since the age of twelve, but when I learned to row as a freshman on the Connecticut River, an equal, if not more powerful fascination took hold of me. Being a member of Trinity's women's crew team has impacted my life in ways I never could have imagined, and the sport has seeped deeply into my poetry. Rowing has become a metaphor for my life.

Earlier inspiration for my poetry stems from a love for my family, and especially for my grandmother, who passed away when I was thirteen. I experienced a dual feeling of loss during this time, as her death coincided with my entrance into womanhood. My identity and this journey are inherently tied to my poetry, which is why the title of this collection is so apt; this manuscript is literally my blood, representing the core of who I am, where I come from, and what I do.

These four years at Trinity have solidified my sense of self. But moments like my "middle school renaissance," where I read copious amounts of young adult fiction novels, is where intense word consumption helped develop my initial writing skills. A memory from my seventh-grade chorus class also foreshadows another characteristic of mine: one day my teacher played music and asked the class to dance, to track the beat with our movements. I enjoyed this exercise and remember being aware of my teacher's gaze, which I felt rather heavily. After everyone quieted, the teacher addressed me in front of the class and asked if I was a dancer. When I said no, she gave me a funny look and said that I have a good sense of rhythm. I remember feeling a mingled flush of pride and embarrassment. Little did I know the ways rhythm would play out in my life.

As I learned to row, my coach often put me in stroke seat. The woman in this position sets the rate and rhythm for the rest of the boat; she is usually technically sound and controlled with her body movements. And I am all about control. Thus, I believe my calm, precise, and rhythmic qualities as an athlete translate into my handling of words. However, I've realized that my skill in controlling my body and language has also cultivated one of my strongest fears: the fear of *losing* control. Once in a while, I'd have panic attacks after doing intense workouts during practice. This fear would build inside me to the point where I'd start crying and hyperventilating. I knew what losing control felt like physically, but I wondered what this feeling would look like on the page.

I write mainly free verse poetry—which theoretically doesn't have a lot of structure to begin with—but, in my head, I construct my poems in particular ways. I like having the prerogative to do with words what I will. According to Phillis Levin, the poet always has control, but he or she must also be aware of the right moments to *release* that control. What would happen if I completely let go? What would happen if I dove into those unpredictable waters, as my younger self clinging to the mast in "A Life through Boats, II" was so afraid of doing?

I decided to find out by experimenting with formal poetry, a type of writing that I have little to no experience in producing. This collection features a villanelle, triolet, pantoum, abecedarian, and blues poem. Turning to such structured forms with the intent to relinquish control over my poetry may seem oxymoronic, but through these works I found myself truly surrendering power—by following rules that were not my own. I enjoyed this process, no matter how time consuming and difficult it was, to make all the pieces fit together in those specified ways; dabbling with form has allowed my words to surprise me, permitting variations and patterns to reveal interesting new meanings.



I prefer to read books instead of poetry in my spare time. Most of the epigraphs in my poems are taken from books I've read that feature rowing. To date, I am not aware of any collections of poetry dedicated to the sport, something I hope to change in the future with my own work. Moreover, despite my reading preferences, I've read a lot of published poetry over the past year and a half alone, from poets discussed in Professor Berry's senior poetry workshop and in Professor Rutherford's course, "Shaping the World."

One poet who left a large impact on me is Carl Phillips; I highly identify with his approach to the writing process. In an interview with *BOMB Magazine*, Phillips extrapolates on the instincts of language, making an interesting analogy: "It's like dogsledding, the language being the dogs who aren't so much driven as they are given the direction; the force is entirely their own, though. The poet, of course, being the sled driver." Certain poems of mine, such as "Duende in Rowing," literally *push* out of me, to use Phillips' comparison; that energy was already in the language, and all I needed to do was guide it onto the page, rein it in and slow it down. Not all my poems arrive completely this way, but when they do, it's a rather prophetic experience. All in all, I believe every poem I write contains a degree of this urge, as part of the innate power of language.

Phillips touches upon another idea that I am continually working towards as a young writer: branching out from my personal experience to achieve *resonance* with a larger audience. In the same interview, Phillips ponders the ability of his work to resonate with others: "I think I'm just lucky that my private struggles happen to be, as well, human struggles, so that the poems happen to resonate with other people besides myself. But I've never expected that, or sought it." Maybe that's what resonance ultimately comes down to: pure luck. However, I've also tried to be proactive on this topic by expanding my subject matter. Poems like "Ode to the Coxless

Crew” and “Rowing: A Metaphor” incorporate more worldly content, whether it’s the story of four women who rowed across the Pacific ocean or a widely known piece of literature like Melville’s *Moby-Dick*. My inclusion of myths and strong historical, female figures also aids this endeavor.

Other recent influences on my work include the poets Natalie Diaz, Afaa Michael Weaver, and A.E. Stallings. Diaz specifically inspired the way I wrote the abecedarian poem in this collection (“Manchester-by-the-Sea”); she has a very colloquial tone in her writing, and she writes a lot about her brother, who, like mine, also has some rebellious moments. A recurring theme in Weaver’s poetry relates to the relationship between man and machine—the idea that men are machines in themselves. Weaver constantly navigates the triangle of mind, body, and spirit in his writing. I resonated with these concepts in the way I write about rowing: how I use my body as an athletic machine, and that polarity between the soul and the water versus the body and land. Lastly, I admire Stallings’ incorporation of Greek mythology in her work and the way she sections some of her poems—two elements that I’ve emulated in my writing.

I am especially proud of *Naiad Blood*. This compilation is a real capstone of my collegiate writing career, and, in a sense, my collegiate rowing career. I’ve truly *worked* during college; I leave Trinity with calluses on my hands, having seen countless sunrises, and with my identity embellished by the words in this manuscript. However, as much as this collection is about me, I think it also labors to redefine the female by breaking certain rules. These poems demonstrate that a woman can remain feminine even if she engages with masculinized realms, even if she gains muscle or cuts off her hair. No matter what she does or how she looks, she is beautiful. These poems embrace both the masculine and feminine; they embrace change, freedom, and power.

With great appreciation, I want to thank my thesis and academic advisor, Professor Rossini. Her constant guidance and amazing feedback have played a tremendous part in the production of this collection. I am so grateful for all the opportunities and support that both Professor Rossini and the other faculty members of the English department have given me over the past four years. I'd also like to thank my parents, without whom my life-changing experience at Trinity, and so much more, would not have been possible.