

Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice

Volume 6

Issue 2 *Spectacle, Identity, and Otherness: Nine Poets*

Speak, Special Issue of The Journal of Pluralism,

Pedagogy and Practice

Article 8

Fall 2014

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Recommended Citation

Young, Natalie (2014) "Natalie Young," *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 2 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/jppp/vol6/iss2/8>

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Natalie Young

Each of these poems focuses, more or less, on everyday life, attempting to pull out the universal through the individual. I am fascinated and frustrated by the day-to-day, how we navigate the big and small, and how the big and the small affect each other—I'm tempted to call it a ripple effect, but it's also a weaving, how this adds to that and makes a life.

My poetry tends to be very character driven, no matter if the speaker is me or if it's a persona. I like certain things in the scenery of my poems to be very specific (sometimes brand names of products, items the character(s) holds, etc.), while at the same time allowing the reader the ambiguity to insert their own details and make it unique to their experiences and/or imagination.

NATALIE YOUNG

After Years

of laws
and belonging

tending
and keeping

hands in proper
places

in seconds
a nudge
it's done

would never
is now

a Bad Person

doesn't apply
not like the movie
or book

no
it's more like
the small dog

outside
the back door

who cries
as though nothing
cries

will ever
be the same
cry

it cries
again

not ever

Dirty Yellow Blanket

The reason she cuddles up the unseemly is: *comfortable*
a familiarity with a nothing-new-here

Browned lint balls around the corners of her mouth her crotch
raw, bumpy from the blankie

She moves faster through folds yellow fuzz under fingernails other places
Saliva looking for the wooly strings covered in tongue
not even the dog will lick Wants doesn't want it but it's here

She polishes with Desitin dabs dry skin with dots of aloe
still cheeking the comfy mucky sunshine A heart beats quick
wanders clumped fabric

ends up the same mangy it began palm sweaty
can't peel the sticky corner from her

HonK's \$1 Store

Aisle 2B: shelf upon shelf
of pastel porcelain animals. Lavender
hippos with polka-dots and a slight

peach-like fuzz. A kitten in a sweater
that spells L U V E
in fake stitches. Two pink

puppies play patty cake. I pick up one
with a droopy left eye,
a drop of red lacquer nuzzled in her

tear duct, an extra lump
of porcelain on the out-stretched paw
scratches my pinkie. Back on the shelf,

she resumes the game. I mustn't
take the puppy home; I could never
stop running my fingers over her

one-dollar defects.

What the Wild Animal Knows: Maybe that lady who climbed into the polar bear exhibit wasn't crazy—simply couldn't stand change. Or the changing man beside her. His small mouth. Dull teeth. Big eyes. Bad thoughts. Your own bad thoughts bob in time, but Princess, no one asks, so forget guilt. Unlike your rivals, you don't believe in happily ever after, so it's not that. It's strange after years to feel you could leave and neither of the two would melt, beds continue to unmake, bugs web and sting. Princess, you're laughing out loud at the picture of a white bear biting the lady—probably because she jumped into a bear tank in Berlin at feeding time and didn't die. But maybe you saw glee in the polar bear's eyes and knew those shoulder blades felt high-quality. Knew he felt wilderness, felt reckless to chomp into one of the watchers, the commoners.

Sorting Bulk

Buying blueberries and spinach at the warehouse
where all that's sold is bulk
means commitment.

For a household of two it's at least a week
of daily blues and greens: whole,
chopped, boil, blend.

On day six, the berries come out of the fridge,
I pluck through, remove the rot, store
the less sad in a plastic bag.

A miniature caterpillar crawls on the counter,
before I think
I smash.

Thumb to speck. His guts a patch of midnight
blue inking a fingerprint.
Evidence

of his commitment.

Teddy Thompson Croons Leonard Cohen

...tonight will be fine, will be fine, will be fine...

It's not even a love song,
it's the last drop of milk on dry cereal: the / that knows,
small windows, a finale of *soft naked lady*, a sighing
soft naked lady.

(Remember that first side sway, first spinning hug
with someone of possibility? A lot of sweaty skins ago.)

Not just ooh-la-la slow stuff, also others
with beats, their powwow on feet, hips
who must swing, must knock the head back
in time—not century time, music time—4:4, two-step, whatever.

(Try not to remember. You still feel
a grapefruit clenched in your chest.)

Maybe it's a room of ladies in coordinated sigh.
...I know from your eyes, and I know from your smile...
reminds me of lace, which is a poor representation
of us all, all the sighing ladies.

(A lot of things conjure craving,
but he's only a man, a man who is too thin, singing sweetly.)

In place of explanation I put Teddy on repeat.
In turn, he repeats Leonard; someone hums along,
even after 20 plays. The lyrics not memorized,
the pounding harder, less bright, less brave

...for a while.

You Call Me Howie

And I should be offended,
because it's not the pseudo-cool Howie

Mandel with a bald head and a deal or no
deal, it's the lunatic-in-hair-and-eye

Howie. Instead of insult I am thankful
to still feel lucky. That's the best
I can do as far as love letters go.

Don't take that wrong.
I'm still glad it's you
looking at me, coffee cup after salsa

bowl; it's nice to wake up to your Breathe
Right strips and Alka-Seltzer wrappers,

to have your itchy back, trips for soy,
cheap cheeseburgers—in need

of me. To know that we are both good and
bad at this, but leaning good
and that's more than most expected.