

January 2010

Sonnets to My Father

Brandi George

Follow this and additional works at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate>

Recommended Citation

George, Brandi (2010) "Sonnets to My Father," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 9: Iss. 2, Article 22.
Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol9/iss2/22>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

George: Sonnets to My Father

SONNETS TO MY FATHERS

Brandi George

I. Midwestern Air Guitar

Double fathers with double faces sing,
a parallelogram of mouths rewrite
the silence: "night so long when time goes crawling
by." They croon out discord, fight
the static hum of feet—desire to run.
He swung me through the air. The wind sunk through
my cells and spun a web. O father, once
I was a house collapsed, amends the blue
silk I struggled to escape. Hank Williams,
guitar in hand, lips open, knows
a rambling man is only free in dreams.
Behold each one—scarred, broken-nosed;
I've loved him. A martyr in waves, I break
and lift them like Diana in your wake.

II. Eternity Take Us—I Will Not Remember

In every atom pulled with fingers care-
ful of decay, I find your half-mooned eye-
lash. Down the windmill of cells, through air
and noise, embedded with Samurai
grace, I dredge up respect—descant
of crows. I wonder what you are. A doll
without a falcon cry, a sycophant
whose tongue is sliced receipts? A toll
of discord sounds from your heart—the blue
sky. Father, I've named you every star
I see. Nebulas shriek their maxim—truth
is in forgetting. So I will. Bars,
neglect, lies, forgotten. You are a sore
with no platelets, an Olympic torch.

III. "Thought Kills Me That I Am Not Thought"

The you I love will die with me. My brain
like leaning towers falls to ruin, deft
fingers used to measure iambs, tranquil
on my breast. Stained papers in a chest
will outlive us. Unseen, words amount
to snail-less shells. O father, I'll treasure every
leaf that hits my face, and try to count
compulsively the stars, and punch with fury
eternal air in hopeless contemplation
of my fading eyes and limbs. Father,
do you feel the same beguiling pain
when laying bricks or building roads, or falter
hammer strokes when Monarchs, in a hex
of panic, brush their wings against your neck?

IV. "A Bootless Inquisition"

O Rattler, who knew it'd come to this: a flank
for Jeffrey's ankles? Tight as scales, you hug
a denimed calf. You're not alone, this rake
who wears you wears us all to clouds of dust.
But why? Because he didn't grow until sixteen,
and boys would stand in line to beat him up?
Because he loved a girl who loved cocaine
and OD'ed? I recall his boots, the muck
that fringed the soles. My mother's song for him:
"Behind Blue Eyes," the white of her knuckles,
warning, "Men are snakes," while salting the rim
of a Martini glass. I saw too many fickle
fools in place of him—my father. He,
sunset of blood, for which my mother grieved.

V. Pole Vaulting Jeffrey's Weakness

I am a bird in father's eye. His peacock's plume obscures my bookishness from view. Holidays, he'll purchase me a pass to Gold's or running shoes. The nest is far and cold as Icy Hot on knees that couldn't vault a chair. O damn his records! The sixteenth foot can go to hell. Degrees of sauna grace are meaningless to hold above my head. My mother said he laughed, before the beauty took hold, so loud and pure—the ringing cut the asp from Cleopatra's breast. I'd love to shout, "Why do you love being broken, father?" From silos, he learned too many times he couldn't fly.

VI. Imagining Myself an Apparition

You texted me, "Good Morning." Shocked, I pictured you among Wyoming hills and smiled to think of edges. We haven't talked in years. Miss you? And wish the snow-filled yard a track, or the autumn leaves descend the branches all at once? You are what you are. Those bagpipes wailing loud enough to summon up the dead can't call you home. Bizarre, you wear destruction like a crown of laurel. Apollo of the Rockies—condescend to view your cell. I texted back, "Hello." I meant to say: Don't worry about the end or those you left. We don't matter. Just love the empty sky that conjures us.

VII. Trying to Be Romantic, Second Father

Engraved my mother's name upon a bullet
 shell. But those were his militia days—
 camo jackets, eyes disguised with soot,
 unmarked helicopters waiting to betray
 us all. By ten years old I learned to shoot
 clay pigeons at 500 yards,
 track a deer and till a field. His boots
 were worn, fingers stained with oil, large
 calluses warped the hands that also shoed
 my Barbie dolls and circled hair
 round house fly's necks. He used
 to catch me baby rabbits, wild and frail
 I'd find them dead in cages, stiff limbs
 outstretched, jaws locked in mid-scream.

VIII. Hush

Little baby, daddy cocks a forty-
 five one-handed. The blue expanse
 is a shattered by a gunshot. I only
 want to play outside. There's still a chance
 he'll shoot the cats from kitchen windows, so I
 wait with the hose on. I'm tired of chasing
 that which I would love to safety. Goodbye.
 There is a tree in your path I long for. Waiting
 for the barrel of the night, I bleed the birds
 you shot for sport and wish their death masks
 struck in you a horror that was earthed
 long ago, when your old dog snapped
 at your father, and saying, "This is for the best,"
 he shot him fourteen times and ploughed the carcass.

George: Sonnets to My Father

IX. machine

he takes the piston off the line
he hoists it lifts he takes the piston
off the line he vomits while
at work he hates his work he is
a plaid of wires he's photons bosons
father is a flannel blitzed
with grass he is a motor dodging
lilies all around he worships
friend-machines but I've been knit
with petals hammered to the barn
he used to tuck his thumbs in fists
before he learned to punch with hands
like wrecking balls and once he beat
a boy almost to death for me