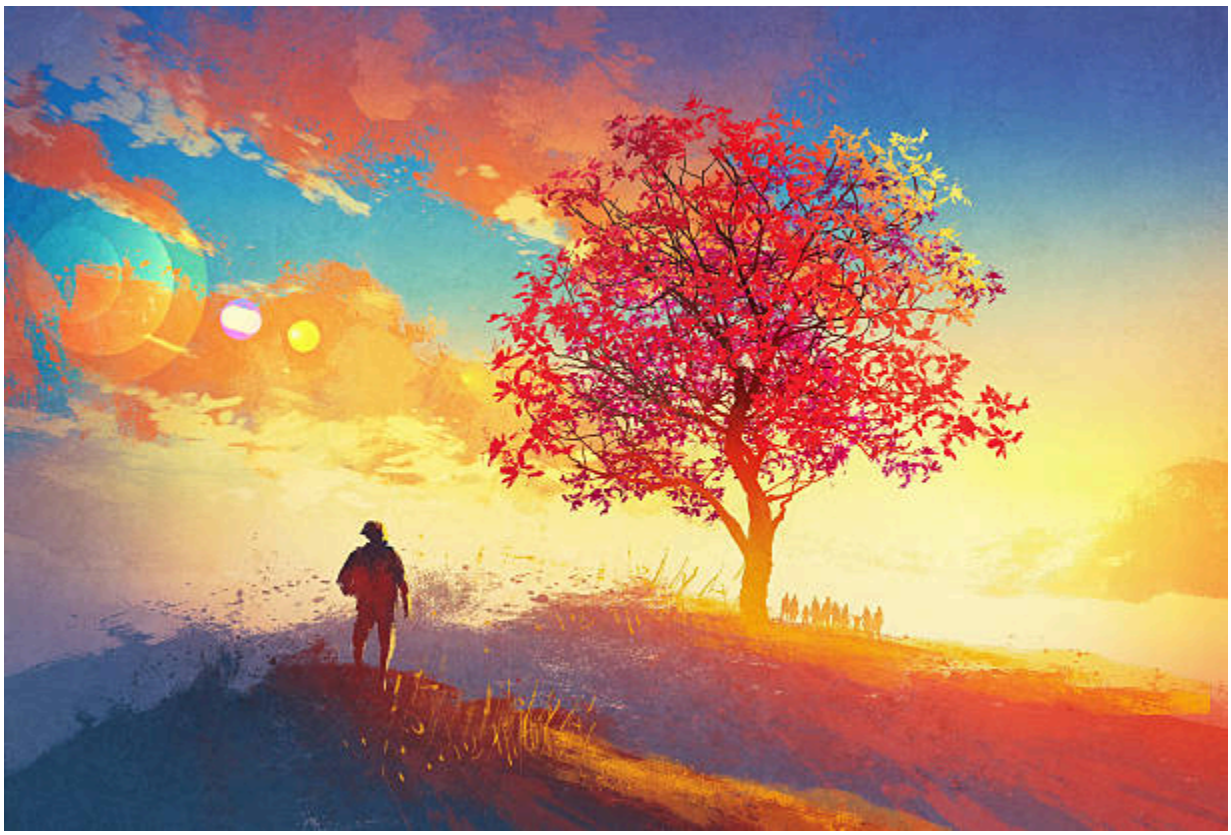
Advanced Poetry Portfolio

By: Jude Van Matre



Ode to a Pretender

I fucking hate you.

You latch onto the shoulders of others and call yourself:

A writer

A student

A friend

A son

You are none of the above. Unworthy of love. The ground beneath your feet will crumble one day. A career that decays. A legacy…Oh what legacy? It cannot stay.

Go away

Go away

I SAID GO AWAY

♦

What are you doing here?

Look at your peers. Their poetry overwhelms the senses. Your poetry bores them to tears. At their expense you write words thinner than the youngest ice. Hell, your prose cannot suffice,

Go away

Go away

GO AWAY

And never think twice.

♦

I heard they say nice things about you. Do they know about the luck fixed to your skin? The wheels you spin? The personality wearing thin? You will never win. Sinking your teeth into the hand that feeds you. Because what are you worth?

A washed writer

A sloppy student

A faulty friend

A shameful son

Do us a favor, if you will.

Go away

Go away

Please

Please

PLEASE GO AWAY!

♦

I want to believe in you. To tell you that you're worthy of love. That the ground you stand on is steady and sound. That your career is bound towards success and happiness. That your legacy remains intact. That your poetry does, in fact, move them to tears. That the nice things they say are true. I want to plead with you.

Please stay

Please stay

Please stay

DON’T GO AWAY!

I want to love you. I really do.

But I hate you

I fucking hate you, Jude.

Rose Hills

I remember Baba's funeral. I must have been four, or five? My mom told me something called "cancer" had taken her away from us. I didn't know what this *cancer* thing was, or why it took her, but my mom assured me that Baba would be going to a better place.

Something about being with Jesus.

The service took place inside the SkyRose Chapel. I remember a vast hallway, filled with rows of pristine wooden benches.

I thought wood was only meant for trees.

A series of cutouts shaped the nave we sat under, raking in the warmth of a bright summer's day. I remember the *booming* pipe organ, and thought maybe it was a sound from the god mentioned in my Dad's bible stories. Everyone wore such fancy clothes! In fact, I even brought an ironed out blue polo, and this time, there were no spaghetti stains. It was all so beautiful.

Then I remembered someone died.

I was a happy kid, but in this space, I felt bewildered like never before. At the front of the chapel was a framed photo of Baba beside her urn, enveloped by the pristine pinks and whites of various flowers. My mom sat next to me, her eyes flooded with tears. I wondered why she was crying so much. After all, grandma was *right there*! I know she had to go to a better place, but surely she could still talk to us, right? Please come back, Baba. Mom needs you now.

The urn never moved an inch.

There I sat, wrapped in silence as words were spoken, and speeches were read. Everyone said such nice things about Baba, but I remember the sound of my mom's weeping. It made me so upset at that "cancer" thing, so I wept too. Why did you have to go, Bubba? Why did it take you away? Will it take me away too? Please, Baba. I'm scared.

I remember very little after that.

They placed her urn beside the gravestone as my mom continued to sob. It must have been time to go to that better place. And so, my time on Rose Hills was over. I'm sorry I don't remember much about you. I was only four, or five. Mom tells me you used to listen to "Hey Jude" by The Beatles because it was your absolute *favorite* song. You loved me that much. I remember its lyrics in your memory. I hope you know that. I took a sad song and made it better, because after everything is said and done, I remember all the good in my life, and how I've made you proud.

I remember.

Beachcomber Blues

The bar bustled with

Beer bottles bountiful in their bright reflections

Laughter echoed across the wooden floorscape

Suppressed only by the sheer thunder of 2010's pop tunes

A pool table surrounded by the dearest of friends

Glances embraced with tender love and care and

In the night sky beamed a waxing gibbous

It should have been perfect and yet

There I stood by.

Spaced out from my surroundings and as I

Stared blankly into the abyss

I brooded, and brought about those Dr. Dog lyrics:

Where'd All the Time Go?

It's starting to fly

Five Years Gone

Five years gone since the first day I met you

You sat in psychology with the silkiest (*very very very*) dark brown hair

You graced me with the hazel in your eyes and sincerity of that smile

Holy shit you love *Mindhunter* too? Fireworks went off in my head right then and there

Thought I was speaking a secret language when I posted on Instagram:

"Started talking to someone really special"

Forgot you followed me so you must have figured it out

❤

Five years gone since I pressed my lips against yours for the first time

You would have thought we met in a past life

Our chemistry ignited the room and I remember the taste of strawberries

A single kiss sent me out of orbit

Babe, I'll be right back (On a mission to somehow keep my feet on the ground)

Your hands were made of clouds, caressing my face as we erupted with laughter

Oh, what a time to be alive!

❤

Five years gone and I can't say it was perfect

I've made many mistakes

I am distant, stubborn, moody, ungrateful

Sometimes I don't say *I love you* enough

My miscommunication fractures your heart and I'm sorry. I really am.

I must be better. I will be better.

Promises are often fragile, but this love is unbreakable

❤

Five years gone, and I remember how you saved my life

Dragged me out of the deepest pit to restore light

My gratitude knows no bounds for what you did

You saved my life, and I will never forget

It is you that keeps my soul grounded and cared for

It is you whose voice keeps me well rested

Five years gone, and it is you I love

Forever and always.

22

Do I even dare to turn 23?

I wonder if alcohol would make me interesting

I will never pick up the bottle.

1/31/11

You put your hands on my cousin and shook him around

Shook him around *violently* with what intentions?

That night, you were bound to blow up

A fuse ignited by the flaming vodka you consumed

He was just a little kid, you fucking bastard

Playing rough with Shane because he was

Just. A. Kid.

Who are you to put your hands on a child?

I remember screaming at you with all the fury an 8 year old could muster–

“YOU’RE CRAZY!!!”

I don’t know if that was the day

The day I decided to stay away from the bottle

To lock up the poison and throw out the key

But it was the first time I saw a real monster

One which didn’t lurk under my bed, or invade my nightmares

You were just a man, filled with the rage of unmedicated bipolar

All it took was a few shots

And that rage compounded after itself

Time heals, so they say

But the scar you left on me has endured

In the form of fear

Fear of what I might become if I simply

Pick. Up. The bottle.

Fear of the fever

The rage

The violence

You swore *never* to drink during holidays again

To limit the consumption of fire

But you still do.

The rage carried on when you cursed out my Aunt

For fuck's sake, she simply asked you to move your card game somewhere else

That's all it took to let the monster out again

Who are you to tell women what to do?

You've been forgiven, time and time again

And I forgive you too.

Because I often see the side of you that loves and cares so much for others

For your family

But know this, Dad.

I will *never* pick up the bottle, taste the poison, feel the fire

I will never be like you.

Para Nacho

I should have known.

The hacking, the heavy breathing, the hurt in your voice.

Late-stage lung cancer.

An operation would only span the clock another week or two and so

Your mom spared you any more pain

Gifted you all the peanut butter cups and treats one could ever hope for

Rumor has it you refused to stay still for the pawprints

You never did listen!

The cutest troublemaker there ever was

A steel beam shaped like a loaf of bread

With your flat coated coffee fur

Your dignified snout

Your hazel eyes that calmed a thousand storms

Your unruly-I mean unmatched resilience!

Standing by the dinner table **every night** as we wrestled with your

Stoic stare. As if to say:

"*Hey. I'm right here, guys. I'm…right here*!"

How could we say no?

After all, not a single step was taken until the plates were *empty*

Your appetite was matched only by your heart

Your vocabulary: love, kindness, and care

In the best and worst of times, your warmth held us together

I should have known.

I can't help but stew in anger

That fucking tumor

Took away your lungs

Took away your time left

Took away everything.

All that remains are

nights flooded with tears

dinners plagued by your absence

The detriment of hindsight that we could not save you from

The hacking, the heavy breathing, the hurt in your voice.

I am so sorry, Nacho. I should have known.

Mom talks about you everyday

About your love, your warmth, your (unruly) resilience, your kindness, your care

She never forgets, and neither will I

I hope you've found peace up in the stars

I hope your days are filled with feasts of splendor

I hope you know our lives will always be graced by your presence

All we have to do is look up.



Te amo mucho, Nacho. Por siempre y para siempre.

Disposable Heroes

Alone I clench my rifle
in a red sea of

Bodies
riddled with lead

Machine gun fire

Shredded skin

Mangled mouths

Gashed stomachs

Guts hung

Bodies.

Brothers that
fought to protect us

Back to the front, said the men upstairs
Answer the call for your country

to be cannon fodder
Meat shields for the rest of us

Let yourselves be riddled with machine gun fire

No faces to mourn
No ashes to spread

No tags to recover
No brothers to call friends

Just *Bodies*.
Condemned to die

Generals and Politicians
barking commands behind their shimmering desks

Dangling pristine medals
Back to the front, they said

What good is sacrifice when we are sacrificial?
A herd of caged cattle

Come and see for yourself
Submerge in the red sea

as machine gun fire rips and tears at

Every fiber

Every pore

Every inch of flesh and bone

Answer the call
For the sake of the greater good

Answer the call
For the sake of your country

Join the club of

Disposable Heroes.

Dedicated to Kevin Van Matre (1965-2006)



Rambling On

Drake made a song in Spanish oh Dear God I thought he would be too embarrassed to appropriate another culture after the Super Bowl I mean he was basically called a PDF file on live television but anything to keep those numbers up I guess. The Super Bowl was cool but I don't much give a shit about football because I'm a Lakers fan and have been since I watched Kobe play when I was five and the game looked really boring anyways I mean the Chiefs were getting locked up they had nowhere to go nowhere to even throw the ball when I say locked up I mean

Locked up I think is a phrase in football but who knows because I only know about slam dunks and three pointers and referees who rig the games? Might get in trouble for that with Adam Silver but it was his (stupid) idea to have Mr. Beast take over the All-Star Game and only about 15 minutes dedicated to basketball played according to sports fans on a three hour program what a fucking waste of time almost as boring as the Super Bowl and the Chiefs getting wait what's the phrase again? Anyways terrible program I mean

The program had ads too I mean at that point I should take a page out of the middle-aged suburban dad notebook and sleep off the boredom after a few beers. I should ask my girlfriend about baseball because she knows way more about the Dodgers than I do apparently they're very good at *hitting balls* across the field but I'm a fan of color so their blue is really cool hahaha lmao cool blue I'm very poetic that was indeed poetry right there at its finest. Poetry is like the finest game of tennis it's elegant and packs a punch speaking of tennis

They keep asking to play tennis at the WC the Writing Center and I think maybe they're talking about the game I played on the Nintendo Wii back in 2009 when Santa Claus was kind enough to make us the cool kids although I'm pretty sure the milk he drank was spoiled so sorry Santa can't go to the produce store right now I hope you will accept almond milk next year because maybe it won't hurt your stomach so bad wait are you lactose intolerant?

Song of the Seasons

The world Springs forth

a surge of sprouting

love, sweet sentiments

steer us with soft

strings of serenity

So says the Scarlet Sage

A shining Sun

sets Summer souls at ease

shelters us with warmth

its shimmer can swelter

and sear the skin at times

The Solidago suggests self-care

Fate fuels failure's fortune

Fearful fluttering leaves

find the floor and face

the formidable future

Have faith friends

Even the Flame Lily must Fall

Weighed down by whirring snow

We weep with waves of wistful wonder

Why weave the wounds of wretched time?

Worry not

Withstand Winter's weariness

as Wisterias would and

Welcome the world once more

Artist's Statement

I. A Few Words…

I like to think of my own poetry as a diverse form of self-expression. Expressing reflections on personal experiences. Channeling the forms and styles of other poets to compliment my own personality and interests. Challenging myself to improve my craft by continuing to write, and write, and write, even when I finish writing and think to myself: *Holy shit*. *This is the worst thing I've ever written*. It's all part of the process, of which there are 3 steps. The first is to *produce*. Whatever idea I have, even if it isn't fully fleshed out, I just need to get it on the page! Sometimes, this requires music to compensate for my general exhaustion. It may also demand a google search such as "*word meaning another word that starts with the letter such and such*" to nail down those alliterations, and I have no shame in admitting that now. No second guesses, no edits, no stop and go. Just writing! Step two is to *perceive* (there may be better words to describe this step, but alliteration presses on). Now that I've produced something, I must explore two key factors: what it *looks* like on the page, and what it *sounds* like when I (oh dear) read it *out loud*! AHHHHHHH! But in all seriousness, listening to the poem goes a long way in helping me with *polish*, the third and final step. It requires a few more questions to be considered: What am I missing? What won't be missed if I cut it? Where is the grammar, and do I need it? More metaphors? More imagery? More everything? It's all part of the process! Should I reallllyyyyy use that -ing verb? (Probably not).

As for my own collection, I like to see it as the culmination of my poetic prowess, which I now safely say is something I possess. I am sad to admit that there are no brand new poems, as I spent way, way too much time revising my submissions from this semester, but I am so proud of these revisions. I open my heart to the fullest in this collection, and I must apologize because it is quite a heavy read. In many ways, the poetry is a reflection of much that I've experienced this semester. There is love, loss, introspection, some political commentary, an ode to nature, some fun inspiration, and so on. It is a bit of a mess in my opinion, but honestly, I was all over the place myself, so I couldn't think of a more appropriate conclusion. Some poems required more significant rewrites, cutting numerous lines while adding necessary details. Others saw me play around with the format and spacing of the page, to better compliment the piece's overall tone and narrative. And some…well, I felt they were better left as raw expressions, so they remained relatively untouched. But more than anything, this collection is also a sendoff for the creative work I've done during my time at USD. It begins with the deep doubt and imposter syndrome I faced in intro and intermediate, but as for the end, well…

II. *The Alchemist*

They say alchemy sought to reshape matter itself

Any mundane metal would grow into gold that glistened

Good health would forever be preserved

Immortality would finally be obtained

An outdated practice to be certain.

But I must confess:

I am an *alchemist*.

I transmute language into many forms

Prose, Odes, Sonnets, *eccetera*

Ballads, Epics, Free Verse, *eccetera*

I make the Solidago a symbol of guidance as the seasons sing

I shape stanzas to bring out the brutality a soldier endures

In my hands, blank pages become a safe space for grief and sorrow

A ground which preserves the memories of loved ones

My *Baba*, my *Nacho*, my *Hunter*

Though I possess this power, I often fail to recognize it

A voice in my head sneers: *It is an outdated practice to be certain*.

And so I hesitate to admit:

I am an *alchemist*.

But I am not the only one in this practice

With words alone,

I've seen others create absolute wonders of the world

On a Blessed Sunday, I've seen a woman ward off racial violence with wisdom and poise

I've seen a speaker express in vivid detail their wait for a fucking prescription

After being suspended in time for 12 minutes and 26 seconds

I’ve seen someone grapple with their faith in memories,

Unable to purge them completely, though desperate to forget, to cauterize their wounds shut

I’ve seen blank apartment walls calling out for a lover to bring more color

I’ve seen a plane passenger politely ask that God

chauffeur their body through the gates of heaven

(Don’t worry, her passport is in the breast pocket of her coat!)

I’ve seen a keeper of secrets cling onto a seed, bound to bloom at any moment

I’ve seen a mind peeled back with layers of

Trepidation, Adoration, *eccetera*

Repudiation, Intoxication, *eccetera*

I’ve seen the pains of someone’s past come back to hit them sudden and sharp,

Like a hiccup

I’ve seen another woman stand up for Laken Riley’s legacy, and confront the (mis)use of her name to *make a statement*

I’ve seen a poet open their heart to transcribe a grueling phone call, one which moved me to tears

I’ve seen how harsh the reality of birthdays can be and what they say about time and age

Indeed, wishes often don’t come true

I’ve seen a monarch (in the most imaginative detail) spread its wings far and wide, but perhaps too soon

I’ve seen someone drawn into the struggle of those silent hours and

I myself must also ask: Am I a night owl, or just an overthinker?

Do I spiral while the world sleeps?

After heavy rainfall, I’ve seen the Mother Sun rightfully return as the flowers blossom

I’ve seen a professor transform a Cropper Reading Room into an environment facilitated

by love, acceptance, understanding, and encouragement

Within these stories, I see good health preserved

Within these stories, I see not immortality

But a timeless practice, an artform

Within these stories, I recognize my own power

I open my own heart to it, allowing the gold to glisten

And so hear me, as I proudly declare:

I am an *alchemist*!