

SKELETAL

1.

there was no flesh

to satiate the starving ribs

that rattled as if key chains

hanging from branches in a weeping

willow, to fill the gap left,

untended by a feathered hand

Comment [Office1]: This was a poem I wrote for an intermediate creative writing poetry course. The assignment was to write a poem which adhered to some sort of form. I selected the sestina form which uses end-line repetitions in a pattern across each stanza:

1. ABCDEF
2. FAEBDC
3. CFDABE
4. ECBFAD
5. DEACFB
6. BDFECA
7. ENVOI

Comment [Office2]: When I wrote the initial version of this poem it was immediately following class. (Admittedly during another class' lecture) Some mention of Billie Holiday during one of these classes called to mind the *Strange Fruit* poem which she sang during all of her performances. This, coupled with my reading *Between the World and Me* at the time, and the political climate, all cohered into a sort of vision for something rooted in bodily physicality related to politics.

Comment [Office3]: Part of what is challenging about writing a sestina is selecting the words which will be repeated. In the case of this poem the words are: flesh, ribs, chains, weeping, left, hand. It's interesting to view just these repeated words as the act as a sort of abstract that encapsulates much of the piece's meaning, getting things to flow from beginning to end, however, was quite a challenge.

Comment [Office4]: I think it is interesting to compare human beings to inanimate objects. The imagery that the juxtaposition of living things and inanimate things yields is always very open to interpretation. During the poetry course we focused a lot on imagist poetry. I set out to capture a stream of images in this poem, whether or not it could be called "imagist" is another thing altogether. I will say, however, that this poem (*Skeletal*) is the last of a collection that I submitted in the same poetry course. All of the pieces in that collection are filled with similar imagery. It is interesting to consider the themes and motifs that appeared across the works even when they weren't (necessarily) designed to build upon one another.

Comment [Office5]: This is somewhat irrelevant to my actual writing of the poem, but the phrase "weeping willow," aside from being a type of tree, has always been of interest to me. I can recall having written something about weeping willows as early as in my third-grade journal.

Comment [Office6]: A "feathered hand" is an interesting image. I chose to include it here mainly because it works as multiple levels. There is the paradox of animate and inanimate, feathers are "organic" in that they appear on birds and inorganic in their man-made craft-style variations. While feathers are soft and lightweight, combining them with the image of a hand arouses a whole new scene. The hand becomes "taloned" and the feathers lose their gentle appearance. This is exacerbated by the verb "untended" at the beginning of the line.

2.

Only a heart where once a hand

whose meatiness tugged as flesh

that mends a void-chasm, left

there at the sight of ribs

whose mothers—left alone to weeping—

watch them breaking free of bonded chains

Comment [Office7]: Part of what I like about the sestina form is the momentum that is generated by the repeated word at the end-line at the end of one stanza and the end-line at the beginning of the next. (In this case it's the word "hand")

Comment [Office8]: I don't truthfully know what this line "means." The main thing I was thinking of when writing it had to do with the relationship between a mother and her children. There is definitely something that can be gleaned pertaining to relationships and a break of relationships. Perhaps, in some way, this came in subconsciously as my parents' divorce was much on my mind (and still is for that matter).

Comment [Office9]: Here I was trying to allude to cross-generational relationships. I was particularly thinking of

3.

hoping for something beyond chains—

for revival, a foundation fostered off-hand,

The grasping or gasping or weeping

of men bound on the basis of the flesh,

beneath and before which are ribs

not of hue or tone, but of fabric left.

Comment [Office10]: At the same time as writing this, I was in a writing course which focused on the “Black Lives Matter” movement. In the course we talked about movements and how some of them are not always started as “movements”. I suppose that seeped into the poem at some level.

Comment [Office11]: I noticed that this was underlined by Microsoft Word. This comment doesn’t really relate to the assignment (maybe it does), but I’ve noticed these new blue-underlined sections in Word. It seems that there’s some new grammar rules because I’ve found the blue-underlined-suggestions to be quite effective for improving the brevity of my writing. Just a thought. . . For a poem however, I’m more concerned with the sonic effect than the grammatical precision.

Comment [Office12]: *Between the World and Me* is an amazing book. These lines were directly inspired by Coates’ discussion of race as a construct.

4.

Bound, not by a bond of words, but left
watching forefather's tears and broken chains
fall up to the imagination—a carcass of ribs
placed there by tethered hands,
and shackled together by the flesh,
to be filled only with weeping.

Comment [Office13]: I live with my grandparents and one of my grandmother loves to watch court shows. Judge Judy is, without a doubt, her favorite person on television. A common theme on those court shows has to do with contracts (either verbal or written). I suppose, in some way, this thought comes through in this line. It also relates to my experiences with people lying, but those court shows have become a part of my daily life and I cannot say (for certain) that they didn't impact this in some capacity.

Comment [Office14]: Looking back at this now, I suppose this is a sort of condensed version of the cliché phrase “blood, sweat and tears.”

Comment [Office15]: It is interesting to play around with contraries and “oppositions”. I’ve found that I’m always putting little phrases like this into my poems. Other variants include “make upside down” or “sweltering cold.” I find that these sort of phrases amplify the effect on the reader, what that effect is however, I cannot say.

Comment [Office16]: Another thing I’ve found to be a theme in my poetry is the pairing of the animalistic and humanistic.

5.

[To be furnished by the weeping

of a declaration] The outline left

to undo itself from flesh

in hoping for the long-held chains

which Lincoln cast with a raised hand

[to query which meats had stuck to the ribs.]

Comment [Office17]: This is where I see a bit of a break in the poem. I recall getting a bit stuck (I might've stopped my initial draft just prior this stanza). The political side of the poem really starts to take off, at least for me, in this stanza. In my revisions (including this one) I injected earlier allusions to politics (i.e. "forefather's tears"), but I can't be sure whether the political "agenda" (if you will) seems forced.

Comment [Office18]: Aside from the political shift, I found this stanza and the remainder of the poem to be the most challenging with regards to maintaining the sestina form. When I first wrote the piece I didn't realize that sestinas required a particular end-word order. That made it much easier to write the poem, but I've grown to appreciate the form all the more.

6.

And I wonder about those ribs

on the wall. Left weeping,

held by tentative hands,

the ones protruding in a proclamation left

tied up in link-less chains

as if a chunk of colorless flesh.

Comment [Office19]: Something I'm not too keen of in this poem and perhaps it's due to the sestina form (or the words I selected) but I feel that the imagery is a bit stagnant. Ribs can only be repeated so many times and they can only be described in so many ways before beginning to arouse imagery of barbeque. Joking aside, I would've liked if I had chosen more flexible words, perhaps fewer nouns and more adjectives. In the future it might be interesting to use the same word to describe different things instead of describing the same thing with different words.

Comment [Office20]: In one of my comments I mention how barbeque might come to mind, but upon further consideration I'm not sure that's altogether a bad thing. In some way this poem is working with consumerism and consumption. Life itself is an act of consumption so in that way to live it to devour time. Also, there's the connection to animalistic imagery—that of hunting and feasting (I visualize a vulture chewing a bits of flesh dried to a corpse)...

7.

Touch a hand to the ribs.

Once flesh was torn away, they were weeping,

as are we, left with shackles lacking chains.

Comment [Office21]: This is one of my favorite lines. Not to pat myself on the back, but I think the image of chainless shackles is powerful, and it opens up to different types of struggle. I also find it interesting to consider that the body itself is a sort of shackle, one that contains a soul, a conscience, a psyche, or whatever one wishes to call it.