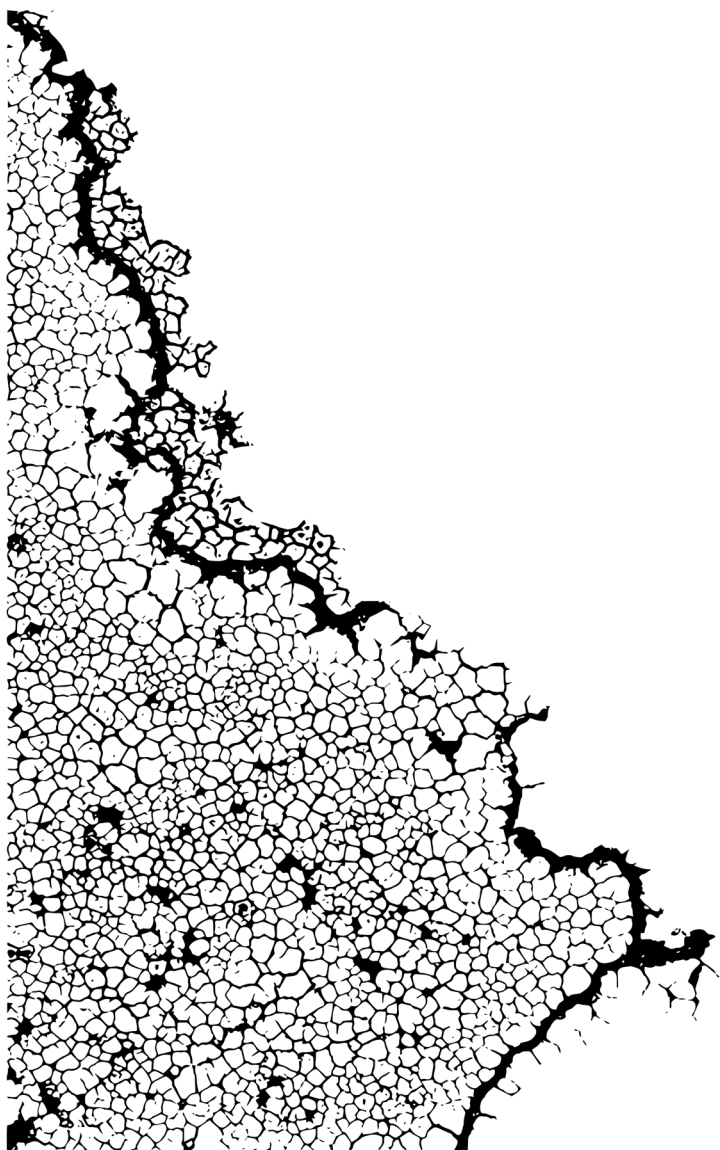


COVER

*Southern Gothic Corpse Machine*  
by Hannah V Warren

Carrion Bloom Books (2022)





**SOUTHERN GOTHIC  
CROSSER MACHINE  
HANNAH V. WARREN**



**Carrion Bloom Books**

carrionbloombooks.com

Jace Brittain and Rachel Zavec, Editors

Carrion Bloom Books gratefully recognizes the support of the Student Media Organization at the University of Utah, and we also thank the U's Book Arts Program for the use of their studio, letterpress, and materials.

*Southern Gothic Corpse Machine*

© 2022 Hannah V Warren

ISBN 978-1-XXXXXX

Cover design by Jace Brittain

Book design by Rachel Zavec

*for everything the bruises & the devil taught us*



## *Southern Gothic Corpse Machine*

Omission of the Tongue.....	2
Let Us Have Our Own Suffering.....	3
Horrid Fruit .....	4
Corpse Machine.....	5
The World.....	6
Saltblood: Contaminated Zone.....	7
Interpellated You.....	8
Rendering Fat.....	10
Every Octopus Is A Planet .....	11
Dear Girls .....	12
Weather Submarine Peach Structure .....	13
Southern Gothic County Dispatch .....	14
Oceanography & Other Marital Bloodsports .....	16
The Melodious Songs of the Blessed.....	18
<i>Poet's Acknowledgments</i> .....	36



## Omission of the Tongue

everything has slipped our minds. slip of a paper. we slip on our slip of a dress. all the words we've ever known slipping through our oily fingers. we call our own names when we want to remind ourselves of melody. slip of our tongues in one language & out the other. we slip by. count the days until we can slip through our own skins. we know the one who raised us. slip of a woman. the callous hands. the glum tablecloth. we touch our cheeks to the sky. slippery & expired. we come away with bruises. oh the fruits of our bodies. the slippery satisfying savory fruits. we comb our hair with the ocean. the teeth of someone else's children. we don't mean to invite our husbands. slip of the hand or slippery slope. they demand to come slippery when wet slippery as an eel. to slip into something more comfortable. to slip into the creases of our bodies.

## Let Us Have Our Own Suffering

let us deny the way our lips curve around others' mouths  
defined in terms of lack

what if we schluck away any semblance of holier ground  
& decide nothing is worth our trouble

everyone we meet needs to be loved endlessly  
blooded poinsettias so loud & dark

let us invert who we are in a world that survives  
just as the rain revises the earth

taking everything written & unwritten  
then melting it all equally into damp smudges of oil

or newly-fleshed pelts—& isn't there something beautiful  
in knowing we can laugh our gothic laughs

the snare of medusa brushing our corneas like taffy—  
sexual deviance & the immense curling mass of snakes

the ocean as our auditor we drudge up all the hidden  
grotesqueries: take us into your damp folds

layer by layer until we're salt of the earth & our ashes  
are sliding wet & jupiter-bound

let us travel to space in fine bone china  
little flecks of gold chipping off & mixing inside us

## Horrid Fruit

take this rice. it will heal you. expand in your body & curve everything back into place. prickly cucumber, chicken broth, salt & spikes. you must remember who grew you, how you were planted in the ground with the cabbage & butterbeans. if something is to be wasted, let it ferment inside your body, inviting in the carrion birds. feed the birds the caged birds the birds reaching down your throat with their rancid water shallowbeaks. the rice turns to larvae in your soiled belly & those tiny flies burst from your mouth in the pretty plague you always wanted.

## Corpse Machine

it was evening or maybe summer  
down there  
they never stop willing  
    never find the despised blade  
    never forget the adders or the kings

she never paid her father any mind  
he had festered

rusted & mordant  
he hungered for us & nothing else

by midsummer he had vanished  
beyond the mossy valleys  
in that venomous & feral place  
    nothing left but the roots

every man was a skull  
known to be lost & a little damp

the wasps had soured  
the peach trees started singing

no one rotted  
where the devil fed the dogs

## The World

you strip the coat from a hare, little cuts like bracelets severing the ankles. smell of forest damp & nothing else. when you hang the rabbit to drain, a whole woman falls out. her nose bleeds giant clumps of blood like she's been sick for too long. she wipes it on her arm leaving dense streaks of the world behind. you take the pelt she offers, thumbing the softness. she grows clothes from the forest—leaves & hickory shells & gemstones shivering up her body, a thousand ants fading into rippled fabric. she disappears into the trees, blending & becoming. you try to follow but nothing. you take the pelt home & hang it above the mantel, smooth the dry fur against your cheek & imagine the taste of fleshed earth.

## Saltblood: Contaminated Zone

the things we want least are the things our mothers are willing to give us.  
when we ask for hot & fluid anger our mothers deliver dish towels  
handpainted tea cups night warnings fluted glasses rusted shivering.

we learn to ocean the flesh from our mandibles & portion it back at night.  
to return tired & misshapen to our skeletons. patchwork of stitching & staples.

we shovel small dust to feed our moongirls. we clone our roots. ancient lap  
of the tongue. bitter underside & cherry powder. when did we decide  
this was our bone hour. a needled treble clef angled in our throats.

we re-home the sewers. flush out turbine rats & tuck soft down pillows  
in the muddy water.

we think about it for a long time & realize, no, nothing can save us:  
not the bees or the baptism or the performer who swallows flaming swords—  
the one who looks so much like the devil we touched his skin to check for heat.

we watch for the trembling bouquets of fresh flowers & we don't step on them  
just because they're small. we want dandelions marigolds calla lilies. their  
glowing sun petals prim & too bright. limp against poured concrete & leakage.

not an act of tarot or an act of god but a small crash then fragment  
before entire worlds spin webs in the creases of our hands.

## Interpellated You

not the *you* someone shouts  
behind you  
the driftwood speech  
sludging your heel  
or the strange birdcalls  
echoing your name

but the thick description  
of what it means to answer  
a rumor with a silenced shout

you've discovered the world  
is a terrible rustdiamond  
all cocooned & restless  
& coated in dead starlings

you imagine yourself  
a clone—moss expanding  
from other moss

the body is a movable type  
& you're just now starting  
to understand  
all the wet scabs  
littering your shoulders

you inhabit the temple you built  
call the devil to worship  
at the edifice of your likeness

are you lyric or dramatic  
& why must such a wall  
slice between the two

as if we aren't all created  
with the beads  
of our mothers' tongues



## Rendering Fat

our worthless fathers have already seeded their patches of earth, swallowed our eggs whole & wiped the sap from their beards. they watered their vegetable gardens with saliva, soil lining their suctionmouths. we fed millions, carried their lungs in our small purses. we thought that one day we could be different, could pull our pinched skin from their tiny mechanical fingers & soak in red-dirt oceans, wanting for nothing. if there were a single year we could license our bodies & float lightly in ghostspace, we'd want it to be now.

## Every Octopus Is A Planet

who are we but daughters who pretended for so long we were sons, who wrapped thick banana leaves around our chests, who stretched our spines & nearly drowned in every gumpond, who touched our breasts in secret plucking all the hidden small curves of our bodies, who pried open our windows, who floated in jagged whisper to the broken glass & clumps of mud wasps, who traced the letters of our names on the ceiling for years after we lingered softspace in the solarium of peeled snakeskin, in a fury of light, the taste still rough on our tongues.

## Dear Girls

usually when we write letters we speak to the past  
but we forget what it means to lick our wounds

we whisper our own ribs into our bodies  
we use the words *lightning, thimble, ache*

we hope we find what we want  
a wish or a spell or a revelation

our rivering sucks out our lungs & turns plastic to paper  
we're tired so we say what we mean

& when we say our skin is paper we mean it's peeling away  
folding up into neat little bloody scrolls

slivers made from space-rocks or some other  
galaxy or some other stagnant water

we lyric away our own names & think ourselves ancient  
slimdark canyons or the sharp whistles of plastic flyswats

with love & without,

your precious iridescent beetle shells

## Weather Submarine Peach Structure

we stretch rice until it ends. we orbit a blank spot in the universe, a nothingness where something we used to worship once shined brightly. we lick the radiation from our lungs & paint deviant symbols. when we prayed for pieces of our grandmothers, we expected their voices to chime through the radio or appear god-like on sundust. instead we received stacks of dense cloth that smell nothing like them. still, our parents whisper the vaguest beauties as they cry into their hands. we don't remember that our grandmothers ever sewed so much, & we can't convince anyone to tell us whether the star-patched quilts belonged to our grandmothers or our husbands' grandmothers. crinkly little gap-toothed raisins smiling from pictures as recent as yesterday, but they can't remember either. the sundial. the breadbox. the cast iron pan shining with oil.

## Southern Gothic County Dispatch

we are originals: the birthplace of fetishization  
uncopied unmediated

eat us & you eat the actual body of Christ  
the whole body flesh & sinew & intestines

yes you must consume Christ's earwax  
his knuckle hair

& yes—

his inner thigh already marred  
by vampiric teethmarks

two little dots neatly aligned  
in the smallest constellation

to touch us is to touch excavation  
to expose all that which you freely plunder

we are not made of decaying animal bones  
or pollen or dusty charcoal

we are not made of those tiny fish skeletons  
or the finer details of auguring

we are of course made of holy water  
& the thin padding on church pews

but we will never be made of red ink  
or clean air or that ache in your femur

we are too fleshed for resistance  
too ripe for the plucking

too blooded  
too bright & dead & beautiful

## Oceanography & Other Marital Bloodsports

sweep us in with thoroughness  
so we may sing among a host of women  
who could never find their fathers

lock us in a crate of winded foxes  
their mouths open & panting  
loud as windmills  
their cabbage blossom chests  
still gaped with bloodsport

we've learned the swamp is a memory  
everything pickled  
beneath the green skim on top

carry us down to the ocean  
in a diesel truck  
one of those that scatters crows  
when you turn the ignition  
that sharp smell tunneling behind us

we won't be able to stop ourselves  
from whispering *louder than god*

saltwash the bliss & plums  
from our mouths until our gums bleed

do what you will to these pith bodies  
because it's true: to mutate is to live

& if you're anxious about the salt  
lining our teeth or our scourged rot  
flesh—if you fear the way grackles  
nestle in our blistered hair

you can leave this instant  
you can bury yourself in the sand  
& marry your clotted mermaid tail  
you can mantle your neck with shark teeth  
& wish they were your own



## **The Melodious Songs of the Blessed**

Religion couldn't be translated. It just was. Religion was Sunday heat. Sticky velvet dresses. Ancient hats in ancient hatboxes. Linens. Chicken house stench. Chinese buffet with faux crab meat & wobbling green jello with whipped cream. Fish house by the river, platters of hush puppies & sweet coleslaw, more mayonnaise than cabbage. White bread & whole fried catfish. Cash only. ATM in the back.

We don't talk about the dead unless they've risen. & oh how the dead rise & rise & rise. Broken ankles & crumpled pepper hands, stewing in primordial soup. We don't like to imagine Christ's wounds after rebirth, but we must picture the holes, all the extra holes upon holes, crusted & expired.

To love the devil is a sin. To love the devil is a sin beyond the sin of hating the devil. Talking back is a sin. Wearing that dress is a sin & you know it. The preacher said he saw you, he saw you in the car with that boy, the boy I've told you is a sin. Lying is a sin & you've always been such a little liar.

My grandfather died when I was five. He never left his house, slept in an old wood-framed bed in the only room with an electric outlet. Electricity was the devil, he said, & he would only have the devil in his house if he lit a lamp. To chase the shadows away. The house was raised off the ground with long wooden boards to keep from flooding. A hundred spider legs jaunting out at wild angles. Nails & chicken wire & rust. When the river flooded, it flowed right beneath the floor. The bottoms of all the trucks in the yard were rusted, seats mildewed, but the house was drier than saltbones. Sometimes I would imagine the river carrying everyone away & leaving just a few behind. A cleansing. A gurgling song. We'd wake up one day in gentle hurricane, our beds atop our houses. We'd fish from the new water earth, catch sharks & eels. & one day, it would all turn to blood. When the flood receded, we'd be left with beached whales in the middle of hay fields, their carcasses bellowing toward the sun in decay. We'd start anew in the house on stilts, the devil drowned with the wiring.

The first time I bled, I knew it was a sin.

Ontographies of the Southern Gothic Corpse Machine: a headless cottonmouth writhing in the tall grass, the coagulated blood of girls who lie with golden tongues for generations, the way our mouths form little round holes when we sing *glory glory hallelujah*, the sliding roadkill spatter of an armadillo back splayed open to the sun in praise of light, the simultaneity of cicadas swarming in crop circles & children drowning in flint creeks, an ear ripped off leaving little bloody flaps like a cat after a fight, a piano with the same key tapped again & again—*d sharp d sharp d sharp*, knees spackled with red dirt & tiny pink pebbles, the brown swampwater that creeps in our backyards closer & closer every year, the blooded switch still warm, viscera laid open on an invisible altar, the cancerous growth that eats itself, the ancient dust settling.

More often than not, religion was a broken fly swat, the sharp metal pieces at the end striking naked flesh. Pulped & red. Little bruises under dark pantyhose. Religion was wearing a thick scarf in church, even in the summer, to cover the dotted welts on our throats.

Hell was made for girls like you & oh how the devil waits.



In first grade I told my best friend, “The song we sing at church has your name in it. *In ex-Chelsea’s day-o*.” She didn’t know that song, she said. We laughed & I taught her to sing her own name. The librarian with blue ghost hair shushed us & we bit our thumbs to soften our voices. Outside in the fall sweat, we sang *Gloria* together, our tinny voices carrying the *o* for days.

I became obsessed with blood & song, song & blood. Are you *washed in the blood*? I would ask myself in the mirror, checking my ears & eyes & navel. I imagined the golf course fountain spewing forth red clots, ducks & geese fleeing the spillage, all awash in fountained blood. A mighty & ravaging river, brought forth by Moses. I'd never seen a crocodile, but I knew the sharp crack of alligator teeth, all awash in chicken blood, the diseased chicks thrown into the river to avoid spreading contamination to the flock. The alligators would gather on Saturdays, their own social calendars driving them to the dock, mouths open & waiting. No one should have been surprised to find three twelve-foot alligators lazing in a patch of sun near the chicken houses on a Thursday, white feathers tucked between their teeth, washed in the blood.

Only little whores like oral sex. That cock is a sin, that cock in your mouth is a blasphemy. That crystalized manna on your tongue. You'll never be clean again. There isn't enough blood in the world to make you clean.

Christ rots in the cemetery behind the church. A seven-foot statue someone dragged from a flooded basement. When it rains—& it always rains—water gathers in the statue's mouth & Christ overflows.

Religion was hiding in the choir. A few minutes of nothing but song & breath in practice twice a week, no preaching, no swift wind of God in our lungs, no voices outside our own. On Sunday mornings my mother mouthed *close your legs* from the pews where she sat alone. My legs were already closed, knees snapped together. The sanctuary was slacks & pins & sweaters & cheap dresses. Too much cologne, too little perfume. & when I sang I almost forgot.

The only women who shave *down there* are little sluts who want a man inside them. They want to make it easier. Is that what you want? To make it easier for a man to get inside you? God knows you're a little sinner. He knows what you let inside, what you let slip right inside you.

It should come as no surprise that I fell in love with the devil. He was always waiting, just there. Just on the other side of bruises, familiar as sin. After all, it was nothing new to bathe in blood. I wrote love letters & odes & sweet little songs. I sliced them from my teeth like violin strings. Together we stained wide sheets of glass & slid the panes into thin metal slats, building a home of fire & brimstone & broken things. We pray in a language no one recognizes, our fingers laced like daisy chains. & when we sing, everyone stops to listen.

We raise our hands in the air. We worship. Oh mighty God. Oh rib of Adam. Oh blood of Eve. Oh blood of the lamb. Oh end of times. Oh devil standing on your doorstep, oh devil turning your doorknob, oh devil slipping right past your doorway & into the womb. Oh oh oh. Oh my brother don't forget to dig your hands into your wives' mouths & rip away signs of the devil. Don't forget to feed the animals. Don't forget to wind the clock. Oh don't forget to pick up your paystub. Don't forget to ring the bells & shout the news! Oh! Oh! Oh!



When I left God, my vocal cords turned to rust in my throat & oh how I love the bittercopper taste of blood washing it all away. The songs vibrate my teeth, the sweet by & by sticky as pine sap on my tongue.



### *Poet's Acknowledgments*

Kindest thanks to the generous editors and readers at Crazyhorse, Gulf Coast, The Pinch, Southeast Review, and Southern Indiana Review who have published some of these poems in their journals.

I am grateful to a number of people whose fingerprints ghost these poems. Among them are Magdalena Zurawski, Andrew Zawacki, Kyle Teller, and Christina Wood, along with the sharp editors at Carrion Bloom, Jace Brittain and Rachel Zavec.

And cheers to Zack Warren who drives us around Georgia for hours as I work through ideas and memories.

Hannah V Warren is a doctoral student at the University of Georgia where she studies speculative fiction and poetry, and she holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Kansas. Hannah's writing and research interests focus on the grotesque, post/apocalypse, and representations of monstrosity. Her chapbook [re]construction of the necromancer won Sundress Publications' 2019 chapbook contest, and her works appear in Crazyhorse, Gulf Coast, Passages North, The Pinch, Strange Horizons, THRUSH, and Fairy Tale Review, among others.

NOTE: [colophon needs updating once the cover paper is settled]

This book was printed in SLC, UT in 2022 on [smooth Mohawk Via paper] and bound using the long stitch with hand-dyed linen thread that varies slightly in color from edition to edition. The cover images were letterpressed from polymer plates [on grey cotton Armand Canal paper.]

