

Mung

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**Abstract**

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This is an address of love. And the failed language that follows. Situated within spaces of waste and decay, the poems attempt to resurface buried or forgotten events, fragmented memories, in hopes of extending care to neglected bodies and languages. When traditional expressions of love are inadequate, when shame prevents speech, when there is violence in exposure—where else can the body turn to for comfort? How else can it nourish itself, or suture the pain? Through reiterations and redefinitions of “mung,” these poems explore the tensions between language, memory, intimacy, and refusal with the hope that one can find solace somewhere, even if not here.

MUNG

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Start with the earth with soil and sprout

Start with stems to cut the bare and pitied

Start with bark that splits the sound  
and stress on skin and sheath

Start beneath what mangled vein  
sunk in water Hours and days

Start with an image of fruit or bruise  
when soaked and skewed

That shape of mung

Noun

A verb

Spiraled dates

Memory splatter

“Mung appeared in a dream then your arm

Curiously the shape

discolored and blister

A family home, set on the window

cooled

You took a tablespoon of mung

You took some pepper and salt

On the ground, where one bathes and drinks water

We built the outline

thinking it safe

Monge from the mingled

For cattle and corn

husk Munge until none

grow wild in crumb

To mongrel or mother, who

barked that dogged

A speech or mutter

crowded and blunt

On countertops surface Mungled

from moonge and 멍

Or 멍! you muddled



**mung (n):**

mung

at the smallest

center, mashed

formless

It took some time to heal,

Some of this happens in bread and  
flowers, a tunnel station in blood  
and Bloor

Spared two dollars for cinnamon  
emptied your [pocket], [you rummaged]  
the bag  
or purse

Our dribble and throat

Was it your love in place of  
heat or syrup  
on the lip

From where

a stomach grumbles

spoke affection and hunger

Had you pinched then

chewed

the pigeons flown

to our balcony full of shit

and rice

Plate set

next to metal, griped

about weather

“Have you

“Have you

eaten you asked

which I mistook

for anger, but grief

Poke those ribs

the corpse not mine

in your mouth already

Have you turned over from the pounding

that made your flesh

so tender

HouseHome One's PlaceDwelling Mansion ResidenceHome  
FamilyPoint Collections (of writings)

[INSERT IMAGE OF HOME]

At the words that tighten these lips  
Heavy air on our chests  
The times you played music to sleep

I dreamt of porches  
closed around Could (one) see  
the metal from here Could only  
set the table Again

Again your blue so thin  
The bottles shook Your hands  
prune What image  
A family borrowed  
stove and heat  
Or ate our sorrow  
defined

I found in mutter

, A blunted cry

the quickness in which you

stood Brushed oil to your

skin

Ground and spit the curd

to gently nest in spoon

“Have you

tried the salt

and grain

“Have you

slept and

washed



Purple split

traced down

that weeping

limb

Packed pity

in plastic

stench

and worms

could eat

unburied

What nourished

left

disposed

Into the dirt

before the stop

“What was

A belly rub

to indicate:

Full

and grace,

the shame

Piled

at the end

Toweled

in three

then swept

What kept

your taste

bitter

The mold

picked and

clothed

Did you know your closeness to dirt

Hacked and hacked

A dizziness

from where you might see the bottom



**mung (v):**  
mong

articulation, a bark

Another call to love

Image when they tenderize the meat

Image pulling apart the limbs

Image slow and slow

Image wrapped in foil

Image stirring occasionally

Image salt to taste

Ate the fatty portion Tasted of  
dog

Tamed full and dripping Palm against  
checker pressed

Tasted memory drawn  
from blue redrawn

A dress muzzle torn sewn

Tasted crooked the spine  
served dinner to friends

Was there help Did you gnaw

the bone Tasted warm

from pressured wrapped

in flesh Tasted sharp in that hand  
who cut the treat and asked

for more

At the corner, then a hole  
was stained and flaked was not  
blood but pepper was canned and  
stoned

Was streaked on white was ingredients  
catalogued: Water, salt, sugar,  
carpet, shrimp

pulp,  
fist

Was your back [hunched] and a red bin  
in which you bathed  
the  
mung

Image from the sprout, soaked in water

Image beneath the skin

Image fried and stirred

Image on high heat

Image to bark

Image a bruise

It was only the carcass on your bed outlining your body  
legs snipped When you carried the muzzle over your head  
“speak and bark

bark english and weep  
here, which you tried to do

Fill your mouth with sticks

Reduce  
to a simmer

coat

the dent in your gum

When watching the crowd

gather  
to eat you

— submerged in sauce  
when your hair on my plate

Blanket the rice

You  
in the yard

ticks on your cheek

the pleasure of licking  
smoothness of stock

Your tolerance of pain

Image the dog woofing in broth  
What kind of dog becoming  
Made to strangle From the inside  
bursting Saw shimmer and licked  
Food deprived for days That runs  
through the skin Sign notice  
before reading

The entrails

dumped,

where twisted and split

which parts

couldn't be chewed

which crumbs

smeared over open

Scampered your torn

What left

was compressed

How easily you pulled

Replaced limb with limb

Minced your name

and mine

“Have you eaten  
the kibble

over tablecloth

“Have you  
eaten

the shame

of dog



Still I remember coarseness

Spoke of silence

, bent

What tickled ear

alerted machine

After morning is sleep

After sleep,

were at the base

From age loosened  
counting days

This image and there  
placed opposite

Around which walls cornered

infested      slept

woven in fingers

Mung over breakage

Holes crawled into

“Body at rest

“They tortured and lashed

[All that we could see between

Sloping culture

To slit

such metal

On occasion, somewhere

Image by name, tagged

As mum and field

fenced

In copper

In a dish, flayed

The taste

soft flaked

at the chin

Ate the bloom

arched purple

Thawed in a bowl,

and then



mung (n):

mung

crumble of skin

pluck and boil

several enter

closest to bone

I check off the items

embedded in body

Pulse

A carrot

Touch

Fragrance free lotion

Piano chords

Bacterial flow

Warm bread

Text message

Expanded cotton

Spider web

Right side of bed

Left side of pillow

Bristles

Blood



The terms expected  
“Thank” shown for air

The mercy of outsiders  
After we lowered on knee,  
lower than begging  
  
we were told to meet with care

Prayers for food  
shelter,  
body  
compacted  
  
then nothing

All the many held we arrived in wash

It was the bone that kept us wake

Next to refuse : a grief

Wilted, the song

sung apples and grass

Nothing but the filling uncooked to your mouth

As cradled to warmth,

under layers of jar

determined by some record of worth

I could give you such

Here, silk and brine

In another birth which body I rinsed would be yours

Mourned weeks

Years suspended and feared

Not in this time      before a timer set,

(sliver of film

to your tongue

If I described you a dog

“A dog ate the seed

or the fool”

I'd watch your arm extend to touch it

Everything packaged then pleased

Recirculated things

They asked about weight the impact of metal

What kept us there,

What lead us directionless

Why did you say no

On the other side of attachment

neither phone call nor shame

momentarily settled landmass and memory

Sunday night the after-math of clean-up

I found a label in the cabinet

Begged and you promised No matter

The sickness that left your stomach pitted



Image What keeps your broken mouth

Millions of mung caught on teeth

Distortions and disproportions

Placement of limbs Flattened

molars Heavy

bitterness of

what you store

seamed along throat



**mung (n):**  
meong

a fatal transition moves  
about the body

Well could you speak

And would I know it

Would I call your love inadequate had I known,  
or remembered the still pain of soft stone

Would I mimic your speech, perfect the strain

I turned at the tension in your breath Did you know  
you would carry this even now

One day I ripped the drawing You said:  
What bad luck to run paper under water To  
fold it against the edge and soak the body  
Some things we couldn't mend We huddled  
on the mattress      Then we were three

I make a map of our memories Always they take me to this  
Some date and year / While we dreamt of paper roofs and poppy  
Awoke to carry you HERE  
I think of the measurements of a bed, its limitations  
How many bodies can it fit before it collapses

To think of splinter

To be held and covered

To imagine a timeline in which we share a meal

    build a townhouse with open walls

To paint the door yellow and call from upstairs

I would ask for another scoop

You would empty the rice maker

How does a body show love when it is bruised

How can you hold me before you have eaten

All we do is tremble

I write you some poems

You could never read



Am I to say your name

or face

In a box of silver, peridot

ends of war

Coins exchanged for

pencils        tarts,

memories of broom

Several times

wound

severed

still when you laughed

What it meant to be ordinary

if kept in containers

works of travel

between firm and gravel

throttled

“There where we were

drawn curtains

pancake batter

door chain

The times the roofs burned down  
rationed affection

We took our servings

Of someone's pity  
That which appeared whole

Shapes of tenderness

Images of your body in landfill

A fallen shoe

Images of your body on plate

Burial grounds

The dogs come to mangle

Wherever the lesion

How many times you stood

The woken hours

What is seen as waste

Your emptied gut

Garlicked hands

That foulness of speech



**Notes on mung (n):**

mong

meong

mung

a bark

bruise

bare

In place (of)                    an image that tugs

If I rewrite the word turn mung on its head

Remember the taste of a peach A peach for eating

Remember its sweetness

to spoil, ruin, mangle

damage                    *irre*

What is done,

## Risks of erasure

grind it down until it resembles new

Mung into skin

tangled meaning

I found variations to lessen the print

What other image recollected

to split memory      smooth its seams

How else would language protect or

All the times asleep could we have predicted the terror

In the aftermath

[increased friction, methods of extraction]

Proceeded to grate the word until it formed  
mounds      pointed to gaps and outward

There was the gutter.

I wanted something else for you, to gather new  
flowers but I kept picking the same

If mung degrades, is immortalized

If events start to haze

If home in flux and emergent

At the center where you're standing where all the objects  
collide

Perhaps this constant movement carries your fractures

could help you shoulder the weight

Mung, a noun a noun a verb

Your distance and nearness, this timeline

In gaps

Mung under surface

puddles of water

All the rest    All the remains

I swallowed in hopes you'd live

I wonder in what pipe or sewer you decided

to stay            How much of you has broken

down enough to            escape



Instructions for care:

There is friction inside the speaker's mouth. This friction on the  
throat. Friction brings awareness of connection and of  
obstruction.

Caroline Bergvall, *Meddle English*

It's no longer possible for me to write something about a  
particular subject. Often I even have difficulty putting together  
coherent sentences.

Yoko Tawada, *Where Europe Begins*

I wanted to write about waste. Records of disregard, or decay. The value we attach to, take away from materials and bodies. Which lands and languages, which natural and unnatural living. There are receipt papers in junk drawers and produce scraps in compost. Dust collected at the foot of the bed. The objects that accumulate over time in the spaces we describe home, in their own ways becoming landfill.

And much of the body marked by waste, its cruelty and breakage. At first the relief of distance, waste's unseen presence, its unforeseen memory at our feet. And this trouble I have in remembering—an impossibility to forget. In the home, when blood-splatter on drywall. A hole that reveals the trees. After the stillness of terror, to peel the skin off a peach. Of force applied that lines the body with bruising.

Waste as worn, as ruins, as lack. The unspeakable excess of our lived time. The continuous spill of past into present, of entangled history, illegible enormity. I look to the body on the cutting board, plucked and skinned. These layers of living. And the awareness of my desperate need to expel the waste, to protect a body. How do I speak about decay or articulate the grief. Its overwhelming presence. What is this difficulty I have in revealing.

I want to build a fence around the pages. I want to bury the language underground. Because in my desire for safety, for normalcy, language became unbearable. I am not sure how else to write and wonder how many eyes turn away from the poems. But how else to release tension, that for many years soaked up our bodies, left marks so deep. Not as escape but a parallel to this. I think about garbage often, in its neglect and ugliness, and I wish to lie in it.

Still I must acknowledge the poems' resistance. Caroline Bergvall writes of a translingual speaker's "cat in the throat" which, when cleared, reconfigures the mouth (the tongue). A process of articulation, making room for one language over (next to) another. I find this has always been my problem. The impossibility to articulate, even with these languages crawling upward, at my disposal. So many words incapable of locating the unspeakable. So, I turn to poetry because there I can see an opening. A place for the grief to reside.

Because in my earliest memory, there is a body above me. The small protection of someone else's skin, their bone. To the side, a washing machine, tumbling. The unassuming violence of lint filtered through mesh screens, into our oceans. Ingested then excreted. Ingested then excreted. Its origin in our homes. A slow violence which occurs "gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction."

And another kind. Which I struggle to address.

Instead, these poems. Rewritten. Reimagined. Remnants digested over.

In many ways, I am always thinking about the landfill. That space of abandon where all the objects so abstracted, warped to oblivion. Materials colliding, composting. Becoming one, becoming several. Yet if one looks closely, there being the possibility that we could make out a shape or a history. Something lost in the mounds, and in its slow decay, perhaps an uncovering. Then, a sprout.

And so, I cannot help but love mung. As I separate bean from stem and find in its name, in its taste and sound, something that might hold all the gaps. With mung, the unburying, the patting off of dirt. How in English it means “to damage” or “spoil.” In Korean, a bruise or a dog’s bark. Or an emptiness. And after those definitions follows the recurring image of a peach thrown against an arm, which leaves a mark, which lasts days and weeks.

This word, not a return, never a longing. But a rewriting (again) of memory, the clearing from which another life or path—a movement. Mung rotten in cold. A small yet touching nourishment. Other forms of speech.

Mung is my directness. Everything in me spilling out.

But mung was also accidental. A throwaway word I found in earlier drafts. What was this strange bean that found its way into a poem about dogs and Tupperware. What other forms could it take.

Months after finishing the manuscript, I sit across from a friend and she jokes, “Among.” We talk about love, speak of detachment and isolation. Then of care, intimacy. Where to find them when the usual places betray.

Love being difficult.

How desperately I want to describe affection. But I am not affectionate. Or rather it is difficult to show affection the right way. Something localized in the body, made awkward on the outside. If I say “I love you,” is uttering the phrase enough. What is held in the weight or lack of that sentence. I want to prove my affection and perhaps that is why I am failing.

In a later memory, I am told my lunch looks like worms. Smells of rotting flesh. I picture the body's dead skin cells scraped from the arm as it dices onions. Sprinkled over hair follicles, marinated with soy sauce. Waste-body served in a cafeteria. After which a long line gathers. How they eat and digest and vomit. I walk home and pull my lunch, untouched, from my bag. Nestle it gently in the dirt. If waste is forgetting, then I try to forget the food wormed in the ground. Waste appears in the form of one's back hunched over the counter. Garlic to skin. Waste reminds me of what I have done.

And in remembering this, I bare something else. A brittle body on the edge. Long hours spent on its feet. A body born at the ends of war, inherits radiation and napalm and shrapnel in belly. And the scarcity of food. The extent to which the body stretches—is stretched—in order to feed.

I address this gesture of care. A survival.

I think about what exists after love. Where it endures. On a plate, or a spoon. As particles in the stomach.

I write these poems knowing what can't be undone. These poems in containment, everything leaking out. Waste, after all, in its enormity, no room for return. But in the need to reconcile something, to imagine a different world or reshape memory. In which language keeps the tongue smooth, leaves no barrier between countries. I might have courage to speak "love" without translation.

Because I love the body. In its smallness and sacrifice. And I love the body in its resilience and decay. And so much I want to carry it elsewhere, to a place forgotten. Where, in our silence, our fractured tongues, only we could see. A place one cannot follow.

(So desperately I want to refuse. This one time when I can.)

And in some moment of quiet, could we eat mung and bark mong and in meong, our suturing.



## NOTES

Page 71: Quotes from *Meddle English* (Nightboat Books, 2011) by Caroline Bergvall, and *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press, 2011) by Rob Nixon.

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