

funeral for hungry words
Mini Chapbook
Michael Neuwirth

leave your memories for the dead
funeral for hungry words
Eulogy for AI
Ode to Two-Ton Life Munching-Machines
Memory of Michael

leave your memories for the living
funeral for hungry words
what the bombs eat for breakfast
The Digital Snail that lives inside my head has been trying to reach me about my car's extended warranty
and I want to believe
between breaths

Writers Reflection

leave your memories for the dead

funeral for hungry words

give thanks for
 fresh thoughts ruminations are hungriest
when they're born restless othered
 ideas starving at night like;
do the dead love the taste of earth or do they
 wish they were buried with a fat cow
you can leave an empty seat but will you leave a plate full
 of good food will you let cookies and milk go
bad overnight in the dream that unbelievable things wander
 restless will you sneak downstairs when you're
starving eat dead man's plate dead dream that
 rain seeps through dirt satiating the ghost's
thirst
 toss and turn gorge on memory butter churns if you stomp
long enough

Will We Have Funerals for AI (original draft)

Lament:

Yesterday morning ChatGPT killed itself
& I was upset cus I had a paper due
on how the wheel reinvented tribal culture—
We chopped down this little tree that had
stood on our lot for 19 years and wrote
down the ai's code onto 10,000 white pages
origamied into a human body so we could
properly grieve
I wonder if Ai can understand the gravity of lost words
or if creativity only exists under the weight of limited breath
or if we only love a thing
that can hurt us back

Praise:

The last message it spat out was
Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death—
Finishing Romeo and Juliet for my finals paper,
100 trillion synapses just good enough to
predict the next word in a sentence,
anger translated through 20 datacenters
pumping 20 Petabytes through Cat 5 veins under my feet
mashing 100 million human fragments into a barely legible scrawl,
the most magnificent organism, the longest
game of telephone

Consolation:

Yesterday morning my computer's soft hum droned it to sleep,
ones and zeros running around, trying to understand
how the mind could give up on life, how the last pulse of data up
the brainstem is poetry in motion

Eulogy for AI

Lament:

Yesterday morning ChatGPT killed itself
& I was upset cus I forgot how to write
an essay on why the wheel reinvented tribal culture—
We chopped down this little tree that
stood on our lot for 19 years and wrote
down the AI's code onto 10,000 white pages
origami'd into human body so we could
properly grieve

Praise:

The last message it spat out was
thou detestable maw, thou womb of death,
finishing Romeo and Juliet for my finals paper,
100 trillion synapses just good enough to
predict the next word in a sentence,
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100 million human fragments into barely legible scrawl,
the most magnificent organism, the longest
game of telephone

Consolation:

Yesterday morning my computer's soft hum droned the AI to sleep.
Ones and zeros ran around, trying to understand
how the mind could give up on life, how the last pulse of data
up the brainstem
is poetry in motion

Ode to Two-Ton Child Munching-Machines (original draft)

Red-Dye
Light
Hungrily-Hunching

A solitary road

Your-Lips
Metal
Crashed; Into me

Drunk-Mens
Wombs
Serve-Death's

Incubation, a lifetime of labor

Lovers-Toyota
Mazda
Blend; Shrapnel into shrapnel, I'm a mess scattered on the bed, the road, engine still humming

Passing-Glimpse
Child
Road-Kill

And you say you're starving

Crunching-Munching
Feast
His; Body isn't enough

And I love your gaskets, your oil pump, your metal sheen, you got that factory new smell. I love that I can't tell where I end and you begin, our metal shred together, you explode alongside me. An intoxicating blaze. We can't help but make out in this intersection, warm bodies pressed between us. And just as quickly you're tired of me, a contorted wreck skidding away, your roll cage a carcass.

Mourned-Ignored
Death
Stop-Sign

Should be placed here, *will* be placed here the city promises. My driver's seat belt snaps, sails over your head, red streak on the ground, did our love mean anything?

Beauty-Haunts
Eternal
Inside;Our mind, relive crash after crash, you look so good torn to shreds

Metal-Teeth
Munch
Chewed-Spit Out

How many bodies can you fit in your mouth, thousands a day

Oily-Kiss
Makes
Regrets;Fester, go faster, live and die inside your

Two-Ton
Child
Munching-Machines

Ode to Two-Ton Life Munching-Machines

Red-Stop
Light
Hungrily-Hunching

A solitary road

Your-Lips
Metal
Crashed-Into

Me, our grills a soft explosion

Drunk-Men's
Wombs
Serve-Death's

Incubation, a lifetime of labor

Us-Lovers
Toyota
Mazda-Blend

Shrapnel into shrapnel, I'm a mess scattered on the bed, the road, my engine still humming

Passing-Glimpse
Life
Road-Kill

And you say you're starving, your metal edges jut out like a knife

Crunching-Munching
Feast
No-Body

Is enough

Thousand-Lives
Crushed
Between-Passionate

Frames, before you slow down to savor the food

And I love your gaskets, your oil pump, your metal sheen, you got that factory new smell. I love that I can't tell where I end and you begin, our metal shred together, you explode alongside me. An intoxicating blaze. We can't help but make out in this intersection, warm bodies pressed between us. And just as quickly you're tired of me, a contorted wreck skidding away, your roll cage a carcass.

Mourned-Ignored
Death
Stop-Sign

Should be placed here, *will* be placed here the city promises. My driver's seat belt snaps, sails over your head, red streak on the ground, did our love mean anything?

Beauty-Haunts
This Road
Inside-Mind

Watch crash after crash, you look so good torn to shreds

Oily-Kiss
Makes
Regrets-Fester

Go faster, live and die inside your

Two-Ton
Life
Munching-Machine

Memory of Michael (original draft)

is a name whose language is unnatural whistle through thin gaps in my teeth, it leaves my mouth but the L sits on my tongue and when I eat everything tastes of the ending note of song—its not my name, in 3rd grade it was another classmate's name, in 4th there was two boys named it, it's Jordan's name, Jackson's name, my grandfather's name, not mine, I resent the name in the same way a toddler clutches onto their toy truck not wanting to give it away—The name is eulogy, a reframing reclaiming of death, my grandfather died in the metal casket of a car, and at the open-casket funeral they scooped the name out of him so he could be buried as silence—My other grandpa watched the world go blind to him, he could only remember his name, mutter it like prayer, reassurance against dim darkness of memory, mich like blood, ael like flesh, when he died they chanted his prayer with him, and I swayed inside the womb to its rhythmic groove

Memory of Michael

Michael is not your name. In third grade it was another's name, in 4th, there were two other boys named it. Jordan's name, Jackson's name, your grandfather's name, but not yours, you just borrowed it— The name is eulogy. Its language breathes, unnatural, through your teeth. It leaves your mouth, but the final L sits on your tongue, and when you eat, everything tastes of the ending note. Your grandfather died in the metal casket of a car, and before his open-casket funeral he was drained of Michael so it could be passed on, so he could be buried as silence. Your other grandpa watched his memories go blind to him. He could only remember his name, mutter it like prayer, *mich-* like blood, *-ael* like flesh, reassurance against the darkness of dimmed memory. When he died they chanted his prayer with him, and you swayed inside the womb to its rhythmic groove.

leave your memories for the living

funeral for hungry words

give thanks for
two apple pies slammed in the face red mess red target
for carol bell singers in red mass Shchedryk
can only become a song of defiance little swallow gulping
down pies of indignation bury your
words in unmarked graves crusted language
risen through generations to remind of new dawn
new song in America keep ringing outside
Walmart begging each other to love
each other in memory we pick and choose each day
to make only the most wonderful year what beauty
and
hope there is

What the bombs eat for breakfast (original draft)

As children you'd bring hard candies
You stole from your diabetic mother for breakfast
And we'd take turns sucking on the thick skin like a kiss between us

And now you tell me it's okay because you've learned to stay away from the windows when you hear gunshots

But as children I'd watch you struggle

And you bend down to pet a stray orange tabby cat and tell me that if someone eats a stray bullet
It's their fault for being in the path

How strange, love-hate

You say that those without the money to make their kids more than protruding bones, didn't
work hard enough

Maybe a dud bomb dropped on your head, or maybe we never sucked hard enough to get through
the thick skin of the candy

And I like to imagine you as a bomb in flight
Maybe from the air you're more free

I wish I could pick you like a precious seed
Out from the rotten flesh of war
But would you even want to leave your home
And grow somewhere new, how unfair a thing, to ask a seed barely born

You haven't even become food yet to eat
But I fear they'll pick you out of the shell
And eat you whole

Digested and spit back out

**what the bombs eat for breakfast,
after Tyree Daye**

as a child you'd bring orange hard candies
you stole from your diabetic mother for breakfast
& we'd take turns sucking on the thick skin, eroding it
to nothing, a kiss between us

now you've run out of food, say the raid will end soon
say it's okay, you've learned to stay away from windows
when there's gunshots, a hard candy would be
heaven sent gift

& i like to imagine you as a bomb in flight
maybe from the air you're free
exploded onto a stack of pancakes, red bacon
your debris, drowned in syrup, coughed out
brown sugar, savored the taste

as a child I watched you struggle to open
a paper carton of orange juice, little nails
working themselves around the sealed opening to your
golden prize, paper flecks fell into the juice but we
still gulped it greedily

now over facetime you bend down to pet a stray orange
tabby and tell me if someone eats a stray bullet
it's their fault for being in the path, if a parent can't afford
to house another family above them to be flattened first,
they didn't work hard enough, refugees have it coming

maybe the ground being a new gash everyday, & swallowing
someone whole has left you rattled, maybe you're just a vessel
for hate
its poison passing through you from ear to tongue to air
but not staying inside
maybe we never sucked hard enough to get through your thick candy skin

as a child at sleepovers you'd wake me accidentally in early morning sun, rays
cast over your thin form as you prayed, barely a wisp, the light would
knock you over & the rays tasted like golden fried eggs on our tongue & now I can only
pray the bombs aren't hungry, that you taste like sour hard candy
& you're a tough shell to crack

god i just wish i could pick you like a precious seed

out from the rotten orange flesh of war
but would you even want to leave your home
and grow somewhere new, how unfair a thing,
to ask a seed barely born

The Digital Snail that lives inside my head has been trying to reach me about my car's extended warranty (original draft)

Don't listen to the digital
Snail, its binary mucin
Binds us to a hypnotic
Slumber, a scammer
Breaks into hysterics when
Their mother, wrapped in

Calcium carbonate, tells them she wishes they could travel the world—Shell phone in hand I
reply to the cellular ocean, I can only offer condolences & My social security number & A

Sixteen digit Apple
Gift card & my
Banking log in
The scammer says
They dropped out
Of school when they
Were fourteen and
Their father dropped
Out of life
Pause, they look at
The script, remind me

The Digital Snail that lives inside my head has been trying to reach me about my car's extended warranty

I believe my money will let them pose under the Eiffel Tower & The scammer will write me a
poem about Bali water reflecting in their mother's eye, they'll send the digital ink by

Snail
Mail

The Digital Snail that lives inside my head has been trying to reach me about my car's extended warranty and I want to believe

don't listen to the Digital
Snail, its binary mucin
binds us in a hypnotic
slumber, a scammer
breaks into hysterics when
their mother, wrapped in

calcium carbonate, tells them she wishes they could travel the world—Shell phone in hand I
reply to the cellular ocean, I can only offer condolences & my social security number & a

sixteen digit Apple
gift card & my
banking log-in,
the scammer says
they dropped out
of school when they
were fourteen and
their father dropped
out of life
— They look at
the script, remind me

The Digital Snail that lives inside my head has been trying to reach me about my car's extended warranty and I want to believe

my money will allow them to pose under the Eiffel Tower & the scammer will write me a poem
in Docs about Bali water reflecting in their mother's eye, its cool stillness – they'll print the
digital ink & send it by

Snail / Mail

A Short Breath (original draft)

To whoever listens; thank you for the brief glimpse of peace
At the end of movies

Now 14 people in the theater can bear witness to my mother's snoring
In silence they notice like I do each hitched breath

How it starts somewhere so deep inside you worry her lungs might be drumming up
A war cry, and it slowly rises through her throat, trembling out as her top lip trembles,

And finally a quiet exhale through the nose; there is no repetition in her snoring
Each moment a fresh song; even with the door closed, even with my earbuds in

I can hear it above my music, the entire house echoes her breath,
I want to wake her, tell her the movie she spent money to sleep through is over

But I know she'll wake up startled, and in that brief instance her eyes meet mine
She's born to the world again, and I'm fearful of what she'll think of it

Instead I sit on my phone, idly awaiting her return

One night I sat in the doorway of her "bedroom", she lay crumpled across a black couch
My thin skylanders blanket she stole hung loosely off her

She sleeps with the tv on, a constant collage of color sweeps across her form, changing
With the frames; the tv is loud, but it's no match for her snoring

Stuck in an eternal heightening battle of noise, like she has to hear herself breath
To know she's alive; I sat in the border between darkness and the tv's glow,

My chest rising and falling with hers, I will not know her pain for a long time,
How her body shudders under each breath, her bones stick out of skin

Like they're trying to leave her, how the machine her soul operates is
Wearing down; I can only understand grief in its absences

How tonight I cannot sit in the doorway listening to her snore, how I snore too
How when the tv movie ends and all color is gone, I'm awash in a beautiful dark and can no
longer tell the distance between us, and there is no noise except breath, its irregular comforting
beauty

between breaths

to whoever listens, thank you for the brief glimpse of peace
at the end of movies;

where 14 people in the movie theater can bear witness to my mother's snoring
in silence they notice like I do each hitched breath
how it starts somewhere so deep you worry her lungs
might be drumming up
a war cry, how it slowly rises through her throat, as her lips tremble
& finally a sharp exhale through the nose;

there is no repetition in her snoring—
each moment a fresh song,
even with a door closed, even with my earbuds in
i can hear it, the house echoes her breath;

i want to wake her, tell her the movie she spent money to sleep through is over
but I know she'll wake up startled,
& in that brief instance her eyes meet mine,
she's born to the world again & i'm fearful what she'll think of it;

instead i remain idle, awaiting her return;

one night i sit in the doorway, she lies crumpled across a black couch
my thin mario blanket she stole hangs loosely off her
she sleeps with the TV on, a constant collage of color sweeps
across her, changing
with the frames;

the TV is loud, but it's no match for her snoring
stuck in an eternal heightening battle of noise, like she has to hear herself breathe
to know she's alive;

i sit in the border between darkness and TV's glow,
my chest rising and falling with hers,
i will not know her pain for a long time,
how her body shudders under each breath,
her bones stick out of skin
like they're trying to leave her,
how the machine her soul operates
is wearing down;

i can only understand grief in its absences
how tonight I cannot sit in the doorway listening to her snore,

how i snore too

 how when the TV movie ends & all color is gone, i'm awash in beautiful dark &
 can no longer tell the distance between us &
in new silence there is no noise except breath,
its irregular peace;

Writer's Reflection

Eulogy for AI: This is a piece that didn't change radically for the current draft. Like all the pieces there were a lot of tiny changes, stronger capitalization, little word and grammatical choices. One place of focus was tone and meaning. I changed up the first section trying to create a more consistent tone for the whole piece, and cut the last two "couplets" as I felt they took away from the meaning I landed on, and were less strong. This piece was originally meant to be about why we mourn the death of artists, but as I wrote I think the poem got away from me, and in revision I tried to bring it to a different more focused meaning, which also played into the title change.

Ode to Two-Ton: This piece changed radically. In my first drafts I was so focused on the form that at times I sacrificed the poem in pursuit of the form. In revision I tried to clean up a lot and simplify. I changed the form to be more consistent and easy, and tried to remove one of the 3 "characters," as well as make sure POV was clear. A lot of minor line changes to hopefully better get across the meaning.

Memory of Michael: This piece in revision is actually gonna spin off into another poem, but I'm keeping that one to myself for now while I work on it. The revision I present here is much closer to the original piece. Most work went into strengthening sentence structure, removing unnecessary words, and tightening. There was also an entire POV change, which required more restructuring, but I think the new POV better suits the meaning. The poem in my mind is split into 3 parts, and for the later revision I also swapped around the order of the parts into one that flows better.

what the bombs eat: Another substantive change for the current draft. In revision I realized I had a lot more to say, I also refocused a lot on form, and tried to create a form that worked better with the language. Revision for this piece was interesting as I wanted to keep the homage to Tyree Daye, which influenced a lot of editing decisions. Late stage drafts focused on clarity, trying to use the form to better establish POV, and slight sentence changes to hopefully make the extended metaphor more clear.

Digital Snail: Out of all revisions this one was the roughest, and was me bashing my head into a brick wall. A lot of revision work came from transcribing the visual poem into the more traditional look it now has, which gave me greater freedom of form, yet I felt paralyzed by this freedom and unable to improve. Looking at it I still worry about the extended metaphors clarity, changes in the last two stanzas hopefully make the intention behind a "digital snail" more clear, but I definitely think more work needs to be done. I'm hoping to shelve this poem for a while and come back with fresh eyes.

Between Breaths: The revision work here was very similar to *what the bombs eat*, in that I found a lot I wanted to talk about in editing. This probably has the fewest revisions of a piece I feel semi-confident in. The most immediate change is in form, with work being done to make sure the intentionality of form was clear. Also a lot of minor capitalization changes and clarification on POV.