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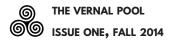
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Peer reviewed|Undergraduate

TONY HUA FOUR POEMS



PAYING THE PIED PIPER

"By a piper, clothed in many kinds of colours, 130 children born in Hamelin were seduced, and lost at the place of execution near the hill."

--Lueneburg manuscript

Children hid behind their mothers' dresses, as the piper played his flute.

The children did not want him, this man with the toothbrush moustache, and a crackling voice that the adults loved to hear.

But fathers urged their children on, pushing them towards the piper.

Do not be afraid.

This man is a rat catcher.

He will catch all the rats in Germany.

The children obeyed, following the piper as they marched from Munich to Berlin.

With his seductive promises

of food and automobiles, the piper soon had the children hailing: Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! And before long, they became his puppets, his executioners.

Then the piper vanished; the spell on the parents released. *My God! What have we done?* And the bodies of the children lay in snow-covered ditches, their faces, a shade whiter than ash.

THE LIFE OF SEIKILOS

"While you live, shine, don't suffer anything at all; life exists only a short while, and time demands its toll. From Seikilos to Euterpe" -Epitaph on a Greek grave

Did you herd sheep, the flock grazing as you sat under a tree, telling the tale of Odysseus evading the cyclops, while your grandchildren listened?

Were you a soldier on Alexander's campaign, sympathizing with an elephant away from home, your wife and children eating dinner while your chair sat empty?

Were you a blacksmith, molten bronze poured into clay, as you scratched your beard before counting the day's earnings, your unborn child in her womb? Did you sail the Mediterranean, praying to Hermes for fortune or cursing Poseidon as waves battered your ship? In your mind, her hands wrapped around your chest.

Were you a bard, playing a harp or lyre to seduce Euterpe as the boar roasted on the evening fire?

Or were you reared a farmer, a child living in a hut with rows of olive trees on gentle slopes, the sun laying down to rest?

ODE TO THE ONION

Forget
the apple.
Onion,
great seducer,
it was you
who tempted
Eve.

Onion,
when
in the heat
of flames
sheds that
ivory coat,
revealing
the opaque
skin,
you promise
carnal desires.

Sometimes, Onion,

```
you are
the wingman
for an otherwise
timid item,
like plain
boring
chicken.
You will
guide
and reveal
the flavors
of our shy
friend,
who in gratitude,
will take the
center stage
and forget
```

Onion,
guest of honor,
you are welcomed
at every party.
Although you
frequently prefer

about you.

to remain out

of the spotlight,

Onion,

we know

you are there,

hiding

in the soup

or

behind

curtains

of noodles.

Your presence

is expected.

Without you,

the party

has

no appetite.

Onion,

sometimes

you punish me

for my indulgence.

You leave

in me,

a familiar

hidden from

my eyes

and ears.

I would be

embarrassed

by my peers,

by a prank

you played

on me,

but I know

you tease,

and you are

never harmful.

We will

have a laugh

over our next

encounter,

and all

will be

forgiven.

I endure

your abuses,

Onion.

Though I

may shed

tears,

you will

reward me

with your

sweet flavor.

And when

we are done,

the vestigial

nectar from

your stay

will remind me

of you.

CABBAGE SOUP

Cubes of pork bathe in hot water while I pull apart cabbage leaves.

In another pot, mung bean noodles rest in a gentle simmer.

As I wash the cabbage leaves, the hum of steaming water in a pot comforts me. I drain the noodles and prod the pork with my chopsticks.

My chopsticks are like wands of incense.

At their tips, white smoke leaves a swaying trail into the air.

I place the cabbage leaves in, and sit, waiting for the soup to boil.

Today is the New Year. I am alone.

A bowl of cabbage soup sits untouched, its warmth fleeting in cold solitude.