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### Prentiss Cheney Hoyt Poetry Contest

Clark University, English Dept

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# English Department 2020 Prentiss Cheney Hoyt Poetry Contest



**First Place**  
Hannah Ortiz '23

*Hannah Ortiz writes poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction. She has participated in workshops such as the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, the Juniper Institute for Young Writers, and the Young Writers Workshop at Bard College.*

## Ode to Moses

Come split this sea down its hairline / to give everything I give everything / I'll put my hand in the hand / saltwater is a gritty wash against my callouses / at the bodega the men salute God with Coronas / a cat tail rounding one of them like an anklet / you're all like, There's a club across the street / and I can say somebody got shot / There. / we waste time miming television / children fly above their parents like airplanes / tiny arms and legs soaring / and the kid is usually laughing / gurgling / well I want everything inorganic growing from the ground / I want a house with its driveway circling / a beast never settling / well we all know Moses was a murderer / instead of a pistol whip it was a wave / it was a whirlpool / it was the Red Sea / but if we banish wheels and chariots to the drain / wheels spinning silently to the sky / it isn't as if they were real / righteous / at first I say don't come around / the mice are following every wire outward / they circle your feet like a tumbleweed / the bottle is a glittering threshold / we argue if beer or piss smells worse / I tell you I hear drag races in the parking lot / I let them drive / I think living this way is a constant cycle of not my business / I think I want green grass and sunflowers gilding my foundation / but how can I tell you to go when your saliva is flooding my mouth / your eyelashes frame your eyes like coronas / well Moses parted the Red Sea with nothing but his hands / and when I walk through the doorway of any bodega / of any bus / everything and everyone recedes for me



**Second Place**  
Ruth Fuller '20

*Ruth Fuller is a senior studying Sociology with a minor in Women's and Gender Studies. She loves cookie dough, crossword puzzles, and talking to strangers. Some of her favorite poets include Adrienne Rich, Ocean Vuong, and Tommy Pico.*

## Panic

It goes like this:  
the mistake—left instead of right—  
trips the wires in my brain. No one knows  
because the detonation is  
internal. No one knows  
because they are all in  
their tiny worlds,  
Very Busy, under  
A Lot of Stress. Next,  
the rabid howling,  
the great aftermath of decades—old  
violence. Several acquaintances  
whose middle names I don't know  
witness this carving out  
of myself at the bottom  
of the stairwell. Trust me when  
I say it is a carving—  
a re-interpretation of the violence  
of my father screaming at my brother  
screaming at the hole  
in the wall that my mother  
tried for years to  
fill and sand down and  
fill and sand down and  
back in the stairwell the truth  
admits itself—  
*I am not human and now  
everyone knows.*  
the spectators are afraid  
so they call in reinforcements. I lie  
to the police officer when he asks  
my name because he is a man  
with a gun.  
I say the right words, the ones



**Third Place**  
Danielle Black '21

*Danielle Black is a junior Psychology major with minors in Creative Writing and Women's and Gender studies and a concentration in Comparative Race and Ethnic studies.*

## Truths Split

fear taught me at  
a young age, words like  
*yes* and *thank you*.  
I re-embolden my limbs  
and become trustworthy again,  
not like the kind of girl  
you'd find hanging in a closet,  
un-pretty and blue.  
If I must be exceptional,  
I will rail against you  
and prove you right.  
Exceptionally  
psycho. Exceptionally  
tragic. Watch me win  
the Trauma Olympics  
And swallow the  
gold medal. Go ahead,  
try to revive me  
in this absurd position.  
Asphyxiated,  
howling,  
mad.  
—dry lips.  
drying, dying  
from low use,  
too much use.

lips, my lips,  
pull apart like gum stretched from sidewalk to shoe.  
my mouth agape. words taken from me.  
skin, my skin,  
kissed darker by my ancestors,  
blends and blurs into the pockets of rooms  
purged of furniture.  
i'm sometimes prized, exoticized.  
other times neglected, rejected,  
depending on the night, on the drink,  
if i'm pretty for a black girl.  
nonstop validating,  
talked through not talked to.  
stuck between choosing me or you.  
you want them  
i'm not like them.  
you don't like me,  
you just want to try me.  
a statistic, a grade,  
another face for the school website.  
target practice,  
ego boost,  
a desk chair  
swapped for a jail bed.