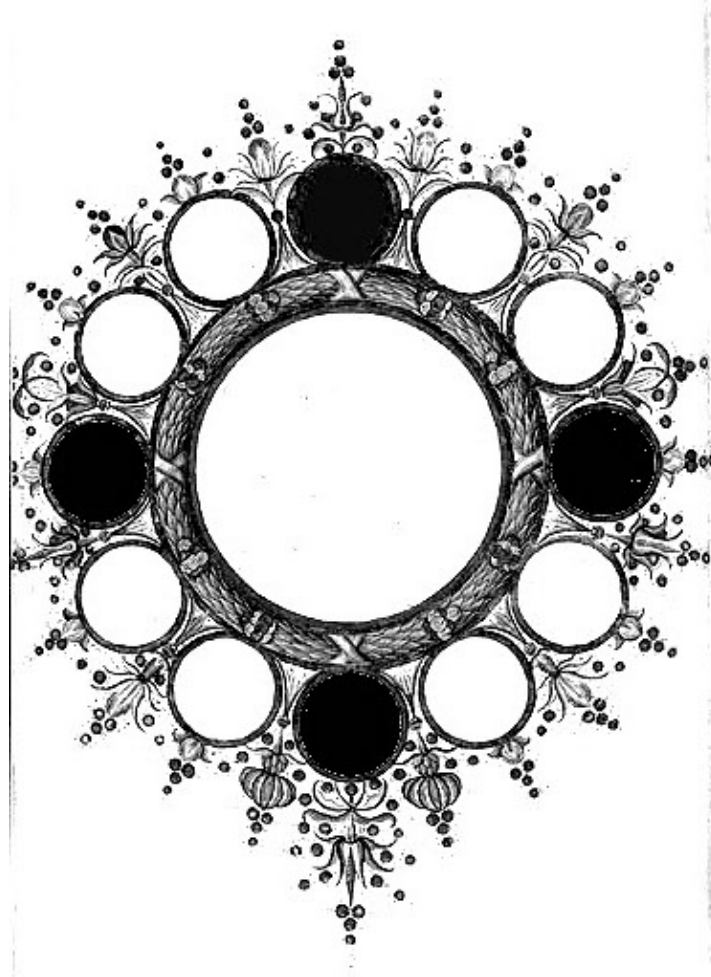


# OCTET



by  
Briar Moro  
[briarmoro.github.io](https://briarmoro.github.io)

“Octet” is a poem conceived in eight parts, separate but interlocking and dependent upon the others. Each segment of the poem occupies its own space and sense of time—its own microcosm within the piece—but is ultimately incomplete without its compatriots.

This poem was originally conceived as a digital work, which can be viewed here: <https://briarmoro.github.io/digitaleditions/octet/index.html>

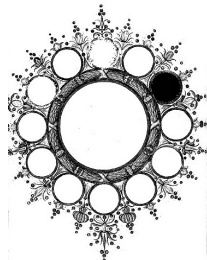
To create the poem physically, use a tool of your choosing—a divination practice, a random number generator, etc.—to generate eight different numbers. These will be the lengths of times you’ll wait before swapping out each line of the poem for the next, with each length assigned to one of the poem’s eight segments. Keep the same intervals until all of the segments of the poem have been gone through in their entirety. Alternatively, you can ignore any sense of having set times completely, simply improvising, reading, and changing each segment at a pace that feels natural for you. Cut out the lines to rearrange them physically—or simply imagine them where you would like them to be, constructing the visual poem in your mind.

## The Woman in the Gorge

The running of the river  
Was broken up by the sudden burst  
Of noise: like thunder, like gunfire.  
The current stopped, momentarily,  
Frozen in fractured time,  
Cut off from source of motion,  
Lolling in ancient stillness  
That felt new, new —  
New like a thrift store coat  
Washed clean of must and mothball  
Ghosts and sprayed thoroughly  
With aerosol angel descenders.  
There was no more flow,  
No rush and rumble;  
Just glassy water in statuesque stillness  
And rocks beneath the clear facade  
Halted mid-tumble, floating,  
Like dulled bronze balloons  
Hung ornaments for crawfish  
And salamanders.

She looked up from the bottom of the gorge  
And  
Spied the spores of smoke  
Rising up from a castle of flame,  
And smiled, inexplicably,  
Despite herself.  
The explosion was silent,  
Unalarming, a sliver of ice  
Beneath the snow of cloud-blanked sky,  
A hiccup of the gods.

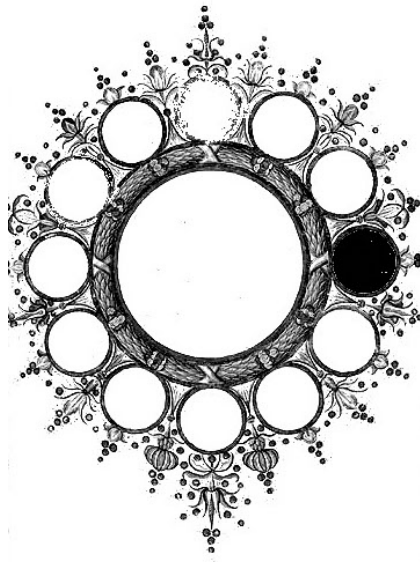
The world came to a stop,  
But she was still moving,  
Skirt blowing in the wind  
And foraging basket full of mushrooms  
Swaying gently as her arms swung  
Akimbo, relaxed, and she gazed on  
At the plume or upwards incineration  
Burning up motion and rendering entropy unto naught.



## The Mountain Climber

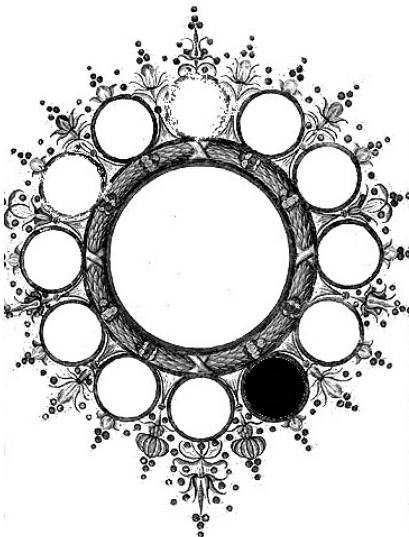
He was near the summit,  
Boots well broken in by now,  
Soles softened and toes blistered,  
Heels calloused and littered with rough pink patches  
Wrought by strenuous hike.  
The pine wall broken,  
Bare rock above and all around him,  
Gray slate and shale  
Crunching smooth and crumbling underfoot,  
His journey was nearing its end.  
The snow-slapped peak stretched out languorously before him,  
Beckoning its conquering,  
When the wind stopped.

The birds froze, too, halted mid-flight:  
Wings laid out like a book  
With broken spine hanging limply open,  
Unread. The fir branches shivered,  
Still, the pines feinting movement despite  
Their incapacitation. The sky  
Bled still-slipping clouds  
And shed its bright blue hue  
Like snake skin.  
The flames in the distance gave him pause,  
And he found himself unable to continue to climb.



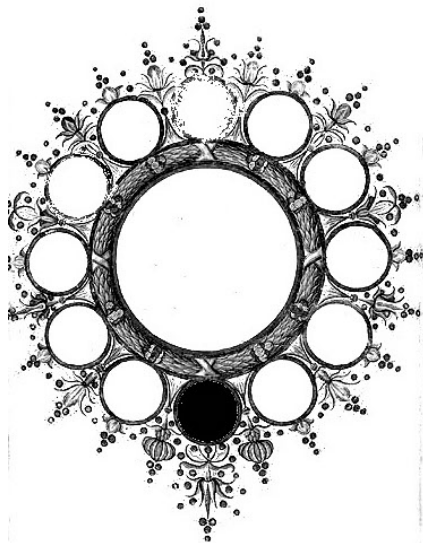
The Chorus of Children Running Through the Tall Grass, Terrified of Snakes but Exhilarated by  
the Perceived Beauty of Danger

The grass brushed against their knees  
Like paintbrush horsehair into fresh canvas  
Pushing thin paint into freshly stretched white  
Dyeing the unreflecting mirror  
With colors of crushed earth  
Overturned by the bare feet  
Running in cycles of pitterpat  
Frenzy over the soft-packed soul,  
Still moist from yesterday's rain.  
They ran like thunder,  
Like horses spooked by a sudden  
Glint of the sun against gunmetal;  
Like fireflies burning with the leftover  
Sparks of the faded sun,  
They fluttered around the field,  
Harried but free.  
Joy filled their footfalls,  
Resounded from their soles  
Like laughter,  
Their song of motion,  
Of effortless, natural dance.



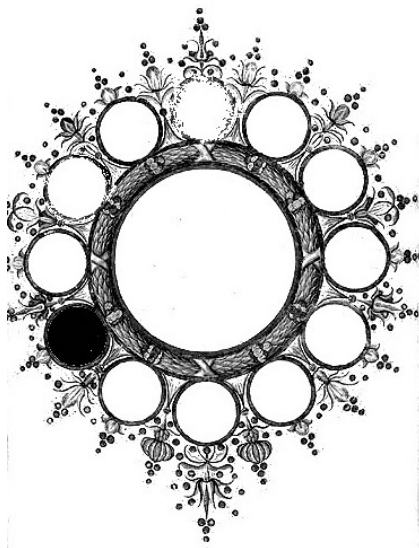
## The Old Woman Wading in the Creek

The snails and salamanders curled around her feet  
Like whirlpools of living matter  
Suckling from skin of toe and ankle.  
She has seen life ebb and fade like  
The swirling waters, has seen  
Friends sink into grave like tadpoles  
Into hollows of mud and stone,  
Has seen breath cease as the wind picks up  
And blows frail bodies, or ashes,  
Into the oblivion of the far-off distance,  
The beyond-sight,  
Sunk behind the broken masts of the sun's failing ship  
As it dives under the horizon,  
Plummeting downwards to plumb depths  
Of earth we cannot fathom,  
Apollo says,  
Although he is sometimes called a liar.  
And Apollo now seems present  
In the great billowing chimneystack of fire  
And smoke that flings itself upwards  
Towards the heavens  
(Not down, eyes averted, like self-sacrificing sun),  
Unafraid,  
Unrelenting,  
Hurling toward what it claims unrepentantly as its own,  
Destiny of cloud and cinder.



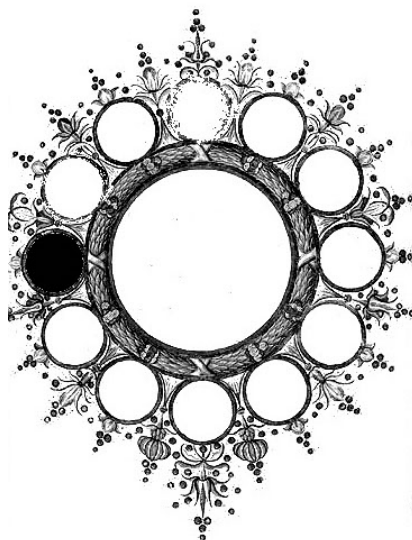
## The Song of the Trees, Voiced by Wind and Leaves

We are swayed and sing and bow down  
Beneath the bucking whiplash of the winds  
That brush through us like ghosts,  
Like phantasms of force and fury,  
That pry us open and pluck us from the festoons of forests  
For purposes unknown, molded by the whims of heaven.  
We are feted by the galing skies,  
Lifted up by the thin arms of heaven  
And laid on the breast of our mother,  
The altar of the earth,  
To suckle the milk of her unity, her peace.  
Until the light remains  
As the only thing standing  
In the ruins of a world once  
Sunken into darkness,  
We will sing to sustain it—  
To breathe life where  
There is would only be stillness,  
Or sorrow.



## The Song of Roots, Strings Strummed by Fingers of Soil and Worm

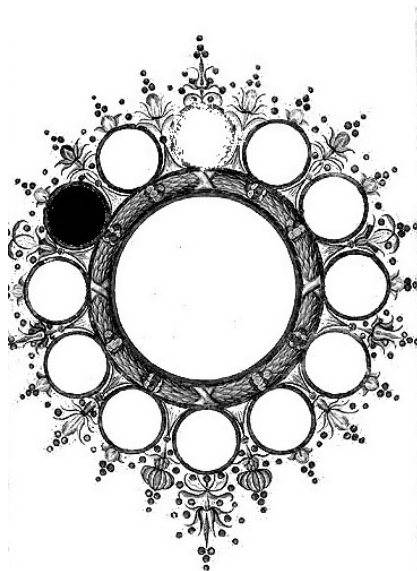
Crawling beneath soot-soaked earth  
The motion, ceaseless motion  
Of the life unspooling  
In ragged pools of flesh,  
Intertwining with roots and stones  
The troubled shake of limbless worm  
And the sticky-brittle contortions of beetles' spiked legs,  
sickly sweet In their grace and violence like an  
Ice cream cone full of blood.  
Feeding trunks of ancient brood,  
Spitting nutrients up into their hallowed wood,  
The dirt gives life and eats the dead,  
Swallows sallow corpses like  
Clouds sucked into the sky:  
Empty, but filling,  
And free.





## The Woman in the Sun, Melancholic with Mercy and Compassion

She cannot help but weep for her children,  
Arrayed in the golden thorns of the sun  
Bleeding light onto the earth like  
Waves of luminous rise and looping over  
Crashing downwards into sea,  
Light into light,  
Ocean into ocean,  
The salt of the sun spilled into  
Pool of effulgent sky.  
They run in circles,  
Look up at her face imploringly,  
Cover eyes and avert gaze downwards,  
Raise calloused hands in desperate  
Appeals to heaven.  
The pillar of smoke rises  
To the firmament like a letter  
Penned by hands of flame and ash,  
Missive shooting missile  
In tower of stillness and conflagration.



The Silent Walker, Observing But Not Acting, Strolling Solitary Through the Thickets of Experience

The stillness of the wind and trees  
And birds did not startled him.  
He had come to expect the unusual  
And unexpected in the woods  
That he waded through like a prayer  
Through the wilds of spiritual being,  
Wandering and wafting toward its intended target like an invisible letter of love and devotion,  
Want and need,  
Unease and calm,  
Communication and silence.

The smoke rose above him first—  
Then he saw the flames flickering up  
Towards the base of the blast,  
Peeking fiery heads above the tree line—  
Then the shockwave of bursting boom  
Hit him in the chest and froze bones temporarily into reverberating tremors of startled silence.  
But he continued to walk,  
Even through the shaking boom—  
His legs seemed to carry him forward of their own accord.

Eventually the birdsong and fluttering of wings  
And flittering flights from nest to protruding worm resumed,  
And the springs again gurgled and the squirrels leapt and played and chattered  
And the spiders wove nests like tapestries of living art,  
Their lives inseparable from their creation.  
And the walker strode on,  
Content to be moving,  
Moving into a present that was ever-unfolding into itself,  
Into him and others and the trees and birds and air and soil,  
That was at once all and nothing,  
An eternal symphony without an end.

