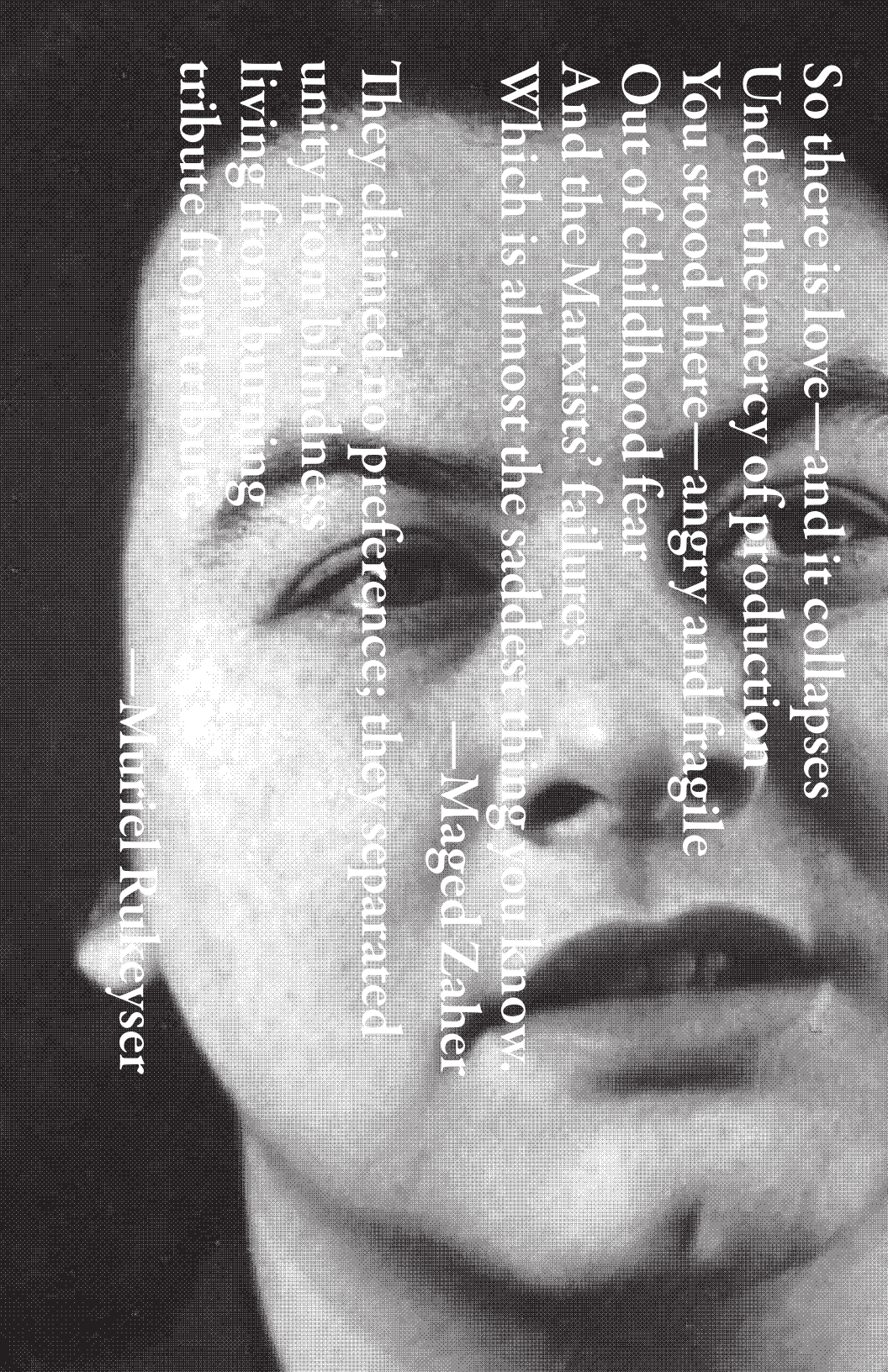


# Young Americans

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**Jackqueline  
Frost**





So there is love—and it collapses  
Under the mercy of production  
You stood there—angry and fragile  
Out of childhood fear  
And the Marxists' failures  
Which is almost the saddest thing you know.

—Maged Zaher

They claimed no preference; they separated  
unity from blindness  
living from burning  
tribute from tribute.

—Muriel Rukeyser

for Lara Weibgen | Erin Morrill | Elana Chavez | Sepand Mashiahof | Lindsey Peltier

# Young Americans

*Jackqueline  
Frost*



It began when I remembered that as girls we sold our blood. Its plasma had value—even ours. Unless we were underweight, anemic, or our identification was suspect. They gave us the red blood cells back. And we'd take our fees and wait for weeks, often without sleep, until our plasma had replenished itself inside and we could sell our blood again.

Turning bathos on itself to show the seriousness of being common, this requisite solemnity. We asked what style captures our short sticks, the bad signs we were born under, our wet electric fear of being young and of getting old, saying, we lived these thirty years, what will we do for the forty more? Why all this finds exposition in the limit case of Young Americans, who exited dread for dread, and dreadfully returned to the inarticulate coincidence of living, now barely revealed, despite the perfectly legible skin of us, the very sudden changes in feeling, its structure.

This wrought way to sever the familiar from estrangement there, so our own epic terms come at us like a dark horse, as we are ready now to tell of storms and to formalize that time as a limit of ourselves: domestic scenes, languages of process, the sub-political tally of working days, our certainty of crime, how provisions were bought, and how laws were despised. What we could see of civilization from the edge of our enclosures, and how treason being foul to itself made ruffians.

As it was in that time I came to believe that every woman had made up her mind to live; that I was not the only one, and not the last.



THIS IS THE SOUL AND BODY OF MURIEL RUKEYSER—  
as something broke through the academic sadness—mastering dew as  
weak messianic things, germane and lowly and partisan. Words with  
knobby meanings leaving now forever separate, these little Goethes and  
their parochial ethos, the ruse of which has been clarified through the  
nonexistence of love in acts.

Ever subwinter, these Molina lyrics—the way I wanted my poems to move like them: Drehr street, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. So close to the big river. Our organs and humors adolescence there. Cocaine as deep background, but later. Of Wallace playing ‘Fame’ in a rabbit coat. And Bennett would say, ‘I believe every woman has made up her mind to win.’ But how much can any of us win. Heaven knows I’d have taken anything.

Near the refinery, at the bottleneck, where often Devin was detained by functionaries, depositing his name into the bank of names, where marsh becomes gulf—one’s inability to locate desire; if being raised a girl is to be acclimated to this immanent compromise, how saying yes or no means so little.

Waking up then from a dream of her former life in the country where god lives. Waking now from the crime of settling a city. How the song of it is coming through, clear and absolute.

THESE ARE THE ROADS TO TAKE WHEN YOU THINK OF YOUR COUNTRY. Say clover buds on the median of Elysian Fields, upriver from the Bywater, where we learned as animals we're Eden-surplus, opened in whippings, each shock of flood. We would try by any means to let go of the means. For the end is our living on, in this century, inside its special, purposeful cruelty. Sean asked if we are just music for dead bureaucrats, or of their children who live among us, at this moment without fear, at this moment unawares of us, our plans, or the trials by which we came to understand that for them, we are the justifiable remainder.

I put down my black hood making copper. With quaint or cavalier physicality.

I pulled down my cheeks to show green eyes white and my white throat white because danger is white on white, its unbecoming inconsistent weather. All myths are without eyes, all positions in reference to changing. Oliver's voice is quiet among the pines all the screaming blue and Muriel is a part of these new meanings, choices, that our poems could see and know that passage through, what we call brutal, forms born in and through that passage, and everything golden whose burning paper altar agonizingly proves America. Better or any futures tucked between the ribs of policemen. I said, 'Let those who consider a nameless way of living and call for a new language first learn violence.'

the central image is the white Corolla / with the matte black left side panel / Wallace's / at night we'd drive through quite streets / each with a pack of artillery shells / mortars / and light them from the car seat / tossing them up into the street behind us / and watch them falling / then bouncing / sometimes twice / just at eyelevel they'd detonate / forcing peals of color and heat / so final / and one time Lee Parrot / hit the rim of the window twice before his exploded / burning the upholstery / his back side / I remember him saying / can someone just give me a fucking cigarette / we could spend whole nights / driving through the open open / no seams / to cut against / just for the feeling of taking these explosives to the stupid stillness of everything / and how this game we played with the nights we lived through / was a sign / the relevancy of which continues to descend on me / because in those days / our boys / the boys that were a part of me / of my life / were the ones who went to the slaughter / to slaughter and be slaughter / the smallest most forgettable generation of us / or who came back from the war like Paul Hidalgo / and drove his red Chevy truck one too many times into the cane / and was chased by state troopers / and dogs / barefoot / through it / his name tattooed across his back / and because nothing else took place / besides being made for the war / or being broken by it later / or being made for someone who's made for the war or who comes back mangled by it later / it's as if / the lengths we went to / to make anything else HAPPEN / conditioned us to fear little more than death / and death too / seemed worth that / or at least was common enough /

There was an incubation. After the storm, I strayed—grace favored over decay—but those dreams of drowning blue lipped in the flooded street, on Dauphine, or Saint-Philippe. I was always with a grip of dykes in the sub tropic wetting of night. That was Ursuline, where the nuns lived. I was a tatter in a boat. Please, not now, I'm building a prayer to live in, against this white portability. To be something more than a gamine in exile identified with platonic concepts, predicated on mistaken blessedness. Something indecent about this story of Young Americans set to burning, a field of sleeping cows. We cradled shotguns near the dredging, as light fails to be tense, and unconfessing. We engage with the reality it produces in order to name—

Evangeline, a parish of, given as what we mean to say in the proletarian night, although often only a sigh. As for what we split, gamble and suffer by crease of lip. No made up country to be loosed unto, and in the way she wanders, things are hotly folded, hero hearted. Even in white surrenders they do not covet me, or take and return me. All tracks back as scrap for the war, but would sell for locomotion some tender things to the crippled machinist. So from wing to reddening, where Muriel wanders toward a louder love, as I toward and offer mercy sung like something sleeping sung and swell as with and am as if asundering—

And by caught in the longer legs of someone's catholic daughter I mean  
I loved her or rather, latin water, to and in tall grasses, in the dark field lit  
by cattle belly and so went soundly soundless as all my losses were mostly  
terrestrial. Might wait for words to say what of your brother's body is  
left—



The central structuring principle, for now, is ethical life. From its literature we read, 'Simple substance of spirit is consciousness in parts. The ethical element is intrinsically universal. It is greater than or equal to love. Self-consciousness is consciousness returning to itself. Ethical moments are individual and universal, are spirit. Absolute spirit is in itself (preserved) & for itself.'

We read, that 'The community of manhood, of men, is concrete (vs. unreal); is upper law, light of day. Is Apollo. Women are unreal; infernal. Citizenry is substance; non-citizenry is shadow; women. That this is diagnostic and prescriptive. Human law is self-conscious activity; human right is actual ethical substance. Life of laws: in stages and distinctions. Exists as first conscious then, unconscious. Individuals, men, are cultivated for universality. The familiar particular is a negative unity: immediate essential being of the ethical order.'

We read that 'The dead are members of the community, thus, concrete individuals. Blood relation interrupts nature, that is, injects universal sphere of death with self-consciousness. The ethical element of the family is its entire family life. Simple universality is death. Death is immediate. Immediate is natural. Natural is mere being.'

In Oakland, the helicopters' perpetuity is like an ornament, the being in being with good people, and the good in it. Ash vocation among the species. Blood in the mouths of friends. When I cried during sentencing—it was for a certain terror, with the same small cans of paint, a scandal now at the hour of our hanging suns. We are fit for lambency and individually unsalvageable. Let each deliver themselves from this helial place, with filth among love, love among machination.

It's told we raised the one true thing in a world of untrue things—so endowed. Came for history and passed through sapped utopias. Read 'banished,' and was channeled by their order. Kept the word destroyer embroidered there.

We've concocted a language with no word for exit. Or any essential force. In this language alliances can be exchanged at value for conviction, as conviction. I remember how we cast our own names down, as egress. And they watched, with no pity for bathers in the desert. Our empathy served only us—this distilled, intoxicating thing.

We say there is a bouquet of tendencies being partial but indeterminate.  
We say well who is worth losing. We say the men are always getting better.  
Against thirst, me and my friends at the vomitorium, much inglorious.  
No one is unaware of what takes place here. It has no name as yet.

The stage is lace slip of cargo crane and the Pacific. What is actual  
grace? This extraction. How often events congeal into image with no  
social aggression. Though all this should be transfigured as contact and  
endurance, I will continue to speak of hunger and brevity, those notions  
that stayed when others were lost, until they too take their grease and  
walk.

Issue one false night. A substrate. And cultivate a sensitivity to barrage. Pardon the trivial, and mend weak light by comfort in decreasing, by casuistry. Let it pass in bursts like bursts of music until there is some quiet after—but don't humiliate truth by soaking it in the conspicuous beauty of all these dying materials. I had to tell myself that.

The West in warehouses; carried on a freight bed. The West delivered in night to Reno—Elko—Wendover. We chased The West, its tiny sparks. All these years of spring now shelved, they are sub-merged little stalactite ruins of crises and disposition. I walked in the river of crises toward the real. The surface of the ocean I have seen it.

What are our virtues, how do they subtend? Maybe cruelty is the teeth of my pale but compassionate mouth, the whole mouth of the commonness of not rising. Maybe the tragedy of feeling was something else: this false or selfish love. Maybe the blood was metaphor. Had to find the limits of the limits of ourselves, pushed out. Had to have the arches golden, so, burning, over the accidents, over the barrier climate, where I cursed the aspect of your eyes, O god, what aspect. I had to be, burning and cursing, this pale but livid mouth.

In the twilight of this sequence, I am speaking to the anarchists, ever rehearsing the discipline of their bodies, in collective and spiritual enunciations. They sing barricades in the morning and have not grown from this worship of danger / importance / secrecy. I am asking what is it you mean by total freedom? I don't say freedom anymore. I don't know yet what I'm willing to do for it. I don't know what will happen now. Some women spit blood; pick bone; grow cautious. I commenced to make that which was not avenged, apparent. You will say, perhaps, that it is not worth your getting involved in; but in that case I can say the same. I do have my underground. I know this too is poetry, but it will not be lacunary in judgment.

Lee disappeared into a nuclear submarine, then jails. They would say, what you think you're some kind of hero. I'd say, there can be no heroes here; they don't even make them here. While I was sitting in the front row with Evan, listening to your voices, Bobby would call on his shore leave to say all he had wanted was to get out of easy-mountain-Georgia-by-the-sea. By being made for someone who's made for the war, I mean, the collective imperial voluptuary composed of all the common girls. The accidental potency. That one could have the accidental look of not dying. As innocent as selling the platelets of your blood. He'd say, I could slit your throat, any regular night, at any regular bar. It would always happen this way. Police were clearing the streets on horseback, pushing us down with our dogs and children. They breed us exactly to persist, under most circumstances. You learn to barter golden things.



We were certain of nothing except this acute resilience, and thus were diaphanous, at times teeming, and for a long time mystical. My mother tells me never to walk alone or be alone, anywhere. Maya said when she walks alone she imagines that she's already dead. I blush because I'm precisely not dead. I said, just because you feel detached from us women is no reason to act however you please. I look stupid licking the X's off my eyes. So in my thoughts I crawl on all fours, lips pursed strangely to not burst into tears—and I imagine I can feel that I am living and can make a greater gesture or my spirit can.

Where I live I will see comrades even in open fields. Our blood has tender anchors. We focus on our times, destroying daddies in the long ground. You have given strange birth to us who turn against you in your blood, needing to move in our integrity, in lands worked by the speed of darkness. And these American poems are roads between, writing at the beginning of a century built like a gothic farm-house, gutted, bodies always with snow, field of the century past, our laurels unmistakably one thing. She said, if you have felt inactivity, that is all over. Be ruthless as what prevails begins now.

Because we were sullen and misapprehended. Because camaraderie was volatile and at times broken. Because the stimmung was better set to music. Because the universal mediates truth in the ethical order. Because they tagged FAGS on the house. Because there was nothing left to fissure. Because ideology is the conversion of something contingent to something necessary. Because her face was swollen shut. Because there was farcical chicanery. Because we became acquainted with the limit of sensible risk a moment discloses. Because it is not about morality but about life. Because life is the enemy of death and will swallow it. Because I called it metahysterics, though it was the politics of heroes I wept against. Because it was about a trauma a big trauma a big rupture maybe bigger than all the other things we were doing and that changed us all later.

this raw deal is a country / aluminum ash / where the smart-ass  
children are made / no heroes / where my sister's name is my  
sleep / this is the sum of years / now arched over / now visible  
/ not greater but processed / my unfinished spirit / held up to  
a red light / read against accidental occlusions / I asked what  
was gathered / what precipitated / lungs irradant / in feeling



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