

To suppress free speech is a double wrong. It violates the rights of the hearer as well as those of the speaker.

- Frederick Douglass, 1860

Rose in the Shredder

I am reaching

over time

& space

& miles of ocean

to touch the hand of Sappho. I am writing

To a time that does not want my words; what can

a flag or a protest shield when our leaders speak of

Drowning us//we don't want that perversion **IN OUR STATE**

ON OUR TELEVISION

IN OUR STORIES

AT OUR WORKPLACE

IN OUR CHILD WHO IS NO LONGER *OUR CHILD*//MOM, *WOULD YOU KICK ME OUT IF I WAS GAY*//WELL, WE WOULD GIVE YOU A CHANCE

To change back into something we can love again

I am made of censorship of ripped paper and penciled-in scrawls at the corners of the poems I wrote the one I loved//tossed in the trash in pieces but I still breathe the ink although I forgot the words they are still mine, they live under my nails in the calluses of my heels worn around my wrists tucked between my metacarpals as condemnation and protection// every breath with which I whispered my love's name to hide us from the world remains in my lungs

Lord, her lips were rose petals in full bloom— **MOM, THE POEMS DO NOT MEAN ANYTHING, I WAS CONFUSED, I ONLY WANTED**

TO BE HER FRIEND

I took the poems I wrote and made them nothing which is to say I destroyed them with my clumsy trembling hands which is to say I am culpable I am complicit I am a liar I am the censor, the black-stamped lines & the shredder blocking away the words no one really wants you to read.

I took the poems I wrote and made them nothing which is to say I appeased those who made me afraid which is to say I took blades and put them through my own hands rather than lash out and let someone else bleed by the love I have and cannot rid myself of which is to say I am weak I am afraid I am considering that which should not be considered and I let my words be wrapped in a black garbage bag and thrown away rather than speak them which is to say

I am not afraid of speaking anymore.