



Internal Embers

Senior Project

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The Esther G. Maynor Honors College
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

By

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English, Theatre, and Foreign Languages
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chester Batterton".

Chester Batterton
Honors College Scholar

5/5/2020

Date

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Zachary S. Laminack".

Dr. Zachary Laminack
Faculty Mentor

5/6/2020

Date

Joshua Kalin Busman, Ph.D.
Senior Project Coordinator

Date

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Finally, I would like to thank all the experiences that enabled me to create such a chapbook. Without being forced to acknowledge my own actions and thought processes, the very purpose behind *Internal Embers* would not have existed.

Abstract

Internal Embers is a poetry chapbook made up of 29 poems of varying length. The poems narrate my personal journey of acknowledging unfavorable aspects of my personality and how I deal with these emotions and reactions. *Internal Embers* highlights how you must be aware of your own actions and how these impact not only yourself, but those around you. The poems show that this process is not linear. This means that there will be setbacks and you cannot fix such deeply ingrained issues within a short amount of time or without effort. *Internal Embers* was a true exercise in analyzing my own thoughts and actions, which I hope can be relatable or helpful to its readers.

You are a fever I am learning to live with, and everything is happening
at the wrong end of a very long tunnel.

- Richard Siken, "Straw House, Straw Dog"

your skin doesn't seem to
fit quite right,
it's too tight in all the
wrong places and too loose in others.
anxious fingers tug, stretch, bleed.
maybe something within you is
shifted two inches too far to the left.
maybe something within you is
on fire –
hot to the touch.
maybe this something within you is
waiting for the right (wrong) moment to make itself known.

there's a pulse at the back of your throat,
an itch that nothing can quite reach.
your fingers are restless (desperate) –
peeling skin from your lips until they bleed.
there's always shock at the red and grey smear.
you comfort yourself with a false sense of control.
but your nails always reach.
(but isn't this better than biting my fingernails, mama?)

you are on edge,
your teeth grind and your shoulders ache.
you seek implications in simple words
and breathe fire.
maybe you can't see clearly through the smoke that you create.
maybe you burn out in self-containment.
you form anger from other's passivity,
yet outbursts of anger disgust you.

you burn. the acrid smell of burned hair, singed flesh.
you cry.
my pulse thrums. i cry.
i apologize.
i should finally let you go –
let your burns heal.
but maybe you'll end up dead in a ditch,
watching vultures lazily circle.
i will not be responsible.

i'll burn it into my flesh.

smoke furls from my nostrils, from my mouth
i would like for you to tell me that
there is some way –
a way through the impossible.
but it would be a lie.
i want the truth.
that is a lie.
i want everything.
that is the truth.
an ember is carried into the sky.

“you need to manipulate others before you can be manipulated”
your father tells you this.
he is serious. he burns.
you refuse. you burn.
where your heart is charred, his is corroded.

“ [REDACTED] ”
[REDACTED] tells [REDACTED] .
[REDACTED] burns.
you [REDACTED] .
where [REDACTED] .

“i will not be like them, i refuse, i will not, i will not, i will not”
your voice tells you this.
far away, a light burns.
you watch as it grows.
where the light touches you, your skin curls.

you are your parents.
you are branded. you can see it.
you can still feel it,
the discomfort that makes you want to tear your skin from your bones.
you never healed properly from this burn and you can't seem to center yourself.
 you burn.

you ache to tear yourself apart,
to find where it wrong.

hate begets hate
and you want to burn.

you tell
yourself, you tell (me)
that you
feel something inside, that you love
this moment, this
second. you tell
yourself (me)
this in harsh whispers. you're
not quite sure if it's the truth, not
quite sure that you're not just miserable.

your fists clench, knuckles white-hot
you relax, fingers stiff, and it falls
you open your mouth to speak, but -

(rash)
(ash)
(sh)

you reach within yourself,
hoping to right what went wrong.
maybe you can fix it –
maybe it is not too late.
you hope it is not too late.
your fingers are seeking,
hoping, reaching, promising,
but flames slip from your mouth
and your fingerprints are still intact.

your fingers are rough, bandaged
from building the city that surrounds you.
the walls are high
the sky is blue
but there is the smoke curling from the highest tower.

everything you grasp
slips through your fingers.
everything you grasp
comes away with claw marks.
you don't know how to
let things go.

you grasp, red-hot.
smoke escapes
through clenched teeth.
your fingers bleed
from the effort
to rebuild.

steam rises, your eyes
burn.
your fingers close over
nothing.
you yearn to give up,
to allow nature to
reclaim the rubble.
but you cannot
allow yourself to be
vulnerable.

you can see it
you can see it twisting
you can see it contorting to something
you can see it morphing to something outside of your control

you tear it apart

scratching pulling itching

you tear it apart

that misshapen part of yourself

you tear it apart

that monument inside of yourself

you tear it apart

their strings attached to your hands

you tear it apart

those tower walls you built

you tear it apart

that resentment you allowed to fester

you tear it apart

that loose thread hanging

you tear it apart

nails rake your skin,
ache replacing ache.

you yearn for tranquility,
for something to change.

maybe you're not worth it,
maybe you'll get what you deserve.

you hold your skin in your hands,
yet nothing has changed.

something within you
is still
uncentered.

maybe you will always be
off-
balance.

you can hear them –
lingering and
whispering. you
scratch and claw and
the voices don't
(maybe they can't)
leave you alone.
maybe they will
not fully leave.

you clutch and scream at the shadows.
your nails begin to crack and bleed –
it feels like something inside you.
you are not sure what to pick up:
a match, a knife, maybe the shards.

can you see it – past your outstretched fingers
can you see it – that future you can make yours
can you see it – that new you you can create
can you see it – the breakdown of those divides
do you see it – can you allow yourself it?

there is a pulsing –
it's at your fingertips.
a regrowth itching,
yearning as it rips.

your fingers ache
as you yearn,
as you strain to make
everything right in turn.

you itch to grow,
to see a far-flung future –
one that is aglow
one that you can nearly picture.

but can you allow yourself that luxury,
you are never quite that lucky.

all your fingers ache
they start to tense up
as you try to make
sense of this blow-up.

you can picture it –
a brand-new castle.
where's your place to fit?
it's such a hassle,

this unending doubt,
this unending fear.
will you be ruled out?
it is yet unclear.

you want to be good,
you said that you would.

you poke and prod
 at the aching hole
 in your chest.
 it burns like failure
 and stings like
 an open wound.
 yet you can't stop
 touching it, as if
 you're trying to find
 where it ends and
 exactly where it begins.
 there's a low hum,
 only noticeable when
 all else is silent. you
 can never seem to
 drown it out completely,
 no matter how hoarse
 your voice becomes.
 all too often, you
 reach into it –
 even though you are
 afraid of what you might
 find inside. you can hear
 the hum, now indistinguishable
 voices you're just like your
 dad why are you so nasty to
 me you're too naïve do you
 even know what's going on
 it's hard for me she's in her
 room your birth changed
 my life it all went downhill
 from there you need to try
 harder next time why can't
 the voices dull to a
 murmur with distance
 and with discipline.
 you're on a tightrope
 and you burn from the
 strain. there is a yearning,
 a burning within you to
 be better

Works Cited

Siken, Richard. *Crush*. Yale University Press, 2005.