

5-2-2014

Ode to My Tattooed Skin

Emily J. Cranfill

Gettysburg College, cranem01@gettysburg.edu

Class of 2015

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury>

 Part of the [Poetry Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Cranfill, Emily J. (2014) "Ode to My Tattooed Skin," *The Mercury*: Year 2014, Article 28.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2014/iss1/28>

This open access poetry is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Ode to My Tattooed Skin

Keywords

creative writing, poetry, tattoo

Author Bio

Emily Cranfill is a History major with a Writing minor, who would like to dedicate this piece to everyone who said her tattoos would keep her from being successful.

Ode to My Tattooed Skin

Emily Cranfill

You're a clean sheet of paper,
my round robin.
Like the back-alley friend
we were all warned against,
you enable the rebellion
that once shamed my mother.

It's not mutiny to us, is it?
You've always embraced
the lessons I want to remember,
displaying them proudly
the way my seventh-grade best friend
would tape our projects to her fridge;

you and I celebrate together
all I've learned since the first time,
lying on the carpeted floor
in my best friend's mother's house,
shirt pulled up and needle poised,
dripping black calligraphy ink

that would soon be thrust deep
beneath several layers of skin.
You're the whisper that reminds me
of the darkness of that night,
and I sometimes think defiance
was the first word from my lips.

At first, you preached the reminder –
the importance of really living and being alive.
The sudden breathlessness I felt,
the surface tension breaking at needle's point,
meant I never can forget the ankh,
the little "life" beneath my right breast.

It was three years before I realized,
the only way to remember the hope
I was learning to find in losing control
was to find someone to scar you again;
the only way to heal my heart's wounds
was the anchor across the ribs that protected it.

For Christmas, just a few months later,
Daddy gave the gift of a permanent word,
which fit perfectly on the inside of my right wrist.
You and I waited longest for the visible "Legacy"
that I hope mirrors the one I've been building
since he first spoke the word to my child-heart.

Few hands have touched you and meant something
the way that Jonathan's small palms have.
Across my left shoulder blade, you speak
the words he and I have said for years,
the words I had to choose to really mean:
"I love you, to infinity and beyond, forever and ever."

With the mix of ink and blood, you have a voice
to speak the words that need to be repeated.
"The story can resume..." you now say,
a reminder that my past is just that,
made to tell the good and the bad,
its only power that which I choose to give.

My quiet confidante, secret keeper,
over the course of four years and two states,
you've held them close to my heart,
and always at your surface,
a reminder of the journey I'm making
from hopeless rebel to joy-seeker.

A selfless martyr,
you repeatedly endure the abuse,
the necessary pain that marks us both.
The way you heal, so eager to accept these words –
they were a part of you all along,
weren't they?