



# THE MERCURY

THE STUDENT ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE OF GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

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Year 2014

Article 23

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5-2-2014

## On Language

Emily A. Francisco

Gettysburg College, [emily.a.francisco@gmail.com](mailto:emily.a.francisco@gmail.com)

Class of 2014

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Francisco, Emily A. (2014) "On Language," *The Mercury*: Year 2014, Article 23.

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# On Language

**Keywords**

creative writing, poetry

**Author Bio**

Emily Francisco is a senior, Art History and English with a Writing Concentration double major.

# On Language

Emily Francisco

It's the exhaustion of words  
that kills the body,

every salt-tipped consonant  
and bulleted vowel

a struggle to wield,  
weapons given to an ignorant youth,

the gun of syntax more  
likely to be turned inward

than outward to an opponent.  
Lessons can only do so much—

walking to the immigration office,  
my brain mixes translations

together like a stew of leftovers,  
every Italian syllable a soft, mushy carrot

and every French article  
a bone of frozen *poulet*,

the flavors slipping together  
in a broth so murky

that the thought of conversing—  
forming sentences, making dialogue—

is repulsive, nauseating to my weak senses,  
fragile in their new environment.

One sip of the broth,  
and it is already rising in my throat

like bile, the phrases coming out  
in jumbled fragments, chunks

of knowledge I knew yesterday  
in a classroom of seven,

now expelled from my esophagus  
in frantic sprays of, “*Est-ce que vous parli—*

*parli inglese?*”

Drowning in the prose,

lost on the way to the *questura*,  
my romantic *Firenze* disappears,

and I see only a city of acrid yellow  
and sordidly brown buildings,

monotonous shapes taunting  
my American eyes with the blunt honesty

of reality, that I am alone  
in this place called *Italia*,

mute and stranded  
as a migrant pigeon,

so eager to flock to a new metropolis,  
flying abroad to seek fresh

pickings from the rabble,  
to feel foreign rain

graze my wings as I bathe,  
but instead, I find myself desperately

nipping at the shoes of strangers,

hoping, begging, pleading for a single  
crumb of guidance  
for my foreign tongue to swallow.