

CONFLATION OR WHEN I SAY YOU, I MEAN I

by

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The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by Julie Ann Strand, and they evaluated her presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

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ABSTRACT

Conflation or When I Say You, I Mean I is a poetic interrogation catalyzed by the ideas within Anne Carson's *Eros the Bittersweet* and Georges Bataille's *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. The interrogation takes place within a form that positions failed love poems alongside poetic analyses or reflections. By doing so the erotic relationship that exists within the genre of the love poem as well as the hierarchy created between the roles of lover and beloved is put into question.

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PART 1

Pentimento: A Conflation of Poet, Person, Reader, Muse, Tense

or As Two Readings of a Text: An Introduction

Desire always has a trajectory
like a tin-can telephone.
Can you hear me?

*My love is like
a tether I knit and hairsprayed
to be noticed. Day to day*

*without an asking I answer
by calling you out, calling*

*out to you by pulling tight enough
for the both of us maybe.*

I knew

*you were not a cooperative pair of hands
from the start, but still I expected
to hear something.*

Are we
an ill-kept garden
breeding
without outcome
to people this empty
space?

*I want to ask a question
and get an answer
receive something from your body
what's inside swarming
and only able
to be sense.*

*Out comes the image
a future and a filling.*

*I want proof
that an empty space has potential.*

*Why don't plants die like plants
love in a loving way?*

My poems about you end here.

It has to be about a bee flying
through my body.

Has to be about the journey
circular and over and over.

It has to be about the meeting
of our tips and our agreement to stay.

It has to be about everything
involved in stay

like flying around a hive, all the walls
look the same and will

like the lines of a book.
I could always come next and next

and to no other ending but next.
To say yes is a mouth mouthing.

To hover in the air
unwavering is to fight gravity

with every part of your body,
forever.

*What is the point of writing down
the same broken song as I did
the page before?*

*It has to be about
It has to be about
It has to be about*

*Three times I lick the page
to find an answer
or something just true enough to stop it.*

*Stay—
a request, action, definition.*

*I want you to be proof, indurate
the impossible.*

*Even as I write next and next
my mouth says yes and yes,
and I am waving. Forever
is a fairytale already succumbed
to its gravity.*

Last night you gave me
your heart again, threw it up

all over my skin. Hope you know
I will never give it back

or take a shower, ever even if
you don't want to have sex anymore.

*You gave and I
won't give back, as if it
might never happen ever after
again.*

*I am fixated on
grafting, a one out of us,
can't even see what
soiled skin suggests.*

*Thank you for reading
and showing me
what I say
with the color of your cheeks.*

*These poems are mirrors
that often surprise me.*

*Who is speaking today?
These words make me*

*run and grab a bar of soap.
Is it still on me?*

*Is that why there are so many
more pages
to follow?*

I wonder if the planting
of your heart inside my breast
was of your desire,
if you would desire
a relocation of hands, I'll keep
my ankles rubbing in your bed
anyway, either way.

There must be more pieces
of my skin in your bed now
than my own. They keep
beating around you after I leave
every morning.

*Whose heart is it really? The words
read like I extracted your heart*

*and implanted it surgically
a week before this poem.*

*Or maybe that is just how I read
my poems today. Or maybe I am just
too detached.*

*To traverse our limits I must
continue to write in ways that show
no doubt
in the authority of the present moment,*

in such a tense.

*Have I come to this realization already?
They don't always stick like a self.*

*These words suggest that I choose
to leave my cells all over
your bed, deprive myself of water
to be extra flakey.*

*Love, here is a gift of my dead skin
and a plan for it to beat around
your body like a womb or like
a heart.*

*It seems beautiful
to me. Kindly do not be revolted
by my aesthetic.*

Come and find me in your closet.
I took over all the dresser drawers.

Chopped my body into pieces
and placed them neatly into each.

Slide open the bottom and see
my feet and ankles.

Above are my calves and knees,
above my thighs and waist,

above my ribcage and shoulders,
above my neck and head.

Can't remember
where my arms and hands went.

They did all the folding away
and go such a length of my body.

It was confusing. Please try to find them
for me swift, so I can sing of you again.

*Reading today, I want to fill in
the space between book a and book b,
myself and my other.*

*And I write furious, as if words can
color in distance.*

*All it accomplished was an outline
or what that represents.*

*I can't really tell you
it's confusing
and I am unsure*

*of loving. It goes
such a length of my body.*

*Notice how
I just gave up
there? Funny
how this poem feels more violent.*

Scratch my heart and tell me
you love me, you need some nails

to do this. Don't cut them or bite them
off from now on. I beg and lay

on my back waiting. Some day this
position will push my ass into my back

and it will disappear. Some day
my breasts will fall to the sides

and stay there. Some day my stomach
will stay in one place and not sway

in the space in front of my feet. Always
leaning forward, my toes bear the weight

of me, of my heart hardy
and leading the way. On my back

I wait for the difference
for something to be written

into new, like eggs become birds
like rocks become castles, wings

become feathers apart.

*I conflate the idea of affection
and violence. Scratch me, cut me.*

*Oh my banal tone indicates, that I think
they are the same or of equal value.*

*My removed voice
clinical and monotone is hard to escape*

*even in the moment of joy even when
fleeting I love you. It could be*

*a defense mechanism.
It could just be how I run*

my fingers through the air in this world.

*Shit happens
and I will wait for a future.*

*This poem reads like an Adele song
and I am sorry if that gives you no new
understanding. Its wants are
inconsistent.*

*I will disappear, my breast will sag,
but somehow my stomach will tighten?
Birds birth, rocks build, pieces
transform into something more than they
were?*

*I wish I knew the point
and could tell it to you here,
but poems they are slippery things.*

*For now, being here will have to be
the cause for you to keep reading.*

I see
that your hair parts

on the left side
but for you it's the right.

Time can't make hair grow.
You can wear

all the flannel in the west
but men don't change.

Looking at the blank spaces
on ourselves doesn't cover them

or write a new narrative, but the lamp
in my spine is on now

and I don't know
if you want to catch up.

*The dynamics of us force me
to show possibility as doubt.*

*But why is showing even necessary?
Why can't I just tell?*

*Too much poetry
classes, maybe. Look at yourself, I know*

*your hair will never grow
that certain blanks can never be filled*

*but I write in couplets still to
pull disparate parts together.*

*The lamp in my spine
is a stolen line
and so are the dynamics.*

*I am trying
to make us in a similar way.*

Your lids will never be
fully open, like clams before the stew.

When a worm is winged like an eagle
you know something has gone wrong

in the waking. Every morning
I say to you waking up

is a moral choice and you kiss me
like this goodbye.

*Those clams were stolen.
I saw myself in the line.*

*To see yourself in someone else's words
to place yourself in someone else*

is love. I felt entitled.

*In fact, I plucked and planted
the first two lines of this poem*

*with maybe one word change. It is just
another instance of low self esteem*

*and this is just another attempt
at pulling back the page to reveal.*

Some things are not true.

*Every morning you
say waking up is a moral choice,*

*and this experience of selfhood
seems extremely coherent.*

Pick me up and sit me
on your handle
bars. Steer us home.

I can be a compass,
brass tarnish needle slightly
right, but always reliable
once you know the lop.

Like breasts, the soft hanging
never round enough, and you
never straight enough. Finger
me softly and looking for.

*Do this
and do that, I organize
my sentences like I am in charge
of all yours in the world.*

*Washing my face with the coldest water
in your bathroom, you always ask why.*

*As I pat my face with my assigned towel
I don't know. Like breasts, this story*

*goes from edge to edge.
What proceeded this poem*

*was a looming potential,
fear of failure and all I can do.*

Make

*meaning and meaningless
requests. This will be followed by
five blank pages.*

I have enough energy to touch you
through your thin briefs. Just about,
but beyond that, any deeper might
break my tarsal in half.

I never thought you might
be empty of desire. My eyes dilated
too slowly to see time pass
and this is my way of mouthing
information to your side of the bed.

Our skins are not equal membranes
and my efforts only go outward so far.
Some days, some nights all I can manage
is to lay my hands slightly
on your back. This is that
what you get, when time is no longer
held in clocks but in calendars.

*It is easy to state what is had
what is wanted
what is not possible.*

*Claims of fact
or claims of evaluation.*

*An articulation of how and why
my limp hands and your underwear
are interacting.*

*Maybe it is injury prevention.
These are the facts
hidden under so many collectors of time.*

*Sheets
dirty from our skin cells, alarm clocks*

*caked with smudges of
my sweaty fingers
and your snotty eyes.*

*The second hand is broken as
our hands hold the calendar still.*

*I guess all I can manage here
is a déjà vu poem*

*a revenge that is not
really.*

Pieces of the sky are on the ground.
Get in the house with me.

Agree to take your squeals out
of sex next time. It is snowy

out and I don't like all the mess.
Let's talk to each other in riddles

and not search for their answers tonight
like swallowing seedless watermelon.

West is the day and I don't need to look
for you always, leaving flakes of

your borders on my carpet, in my skin
holes. The nuance is gone now

the fuck you cliché. The action, and I
will always be jealous

of your scarless back. My bra
needs washing and I can't always reach

the dirt to clean it away. When my acne

itches the roof of my mouth
put your tongue there

and move it from soft palate to hard.

We are not in the right system.

*I do look for you always, in the mirror
too. What makes me think I can see*

*you in my eyes? Love is over
in this house and I will only
lie on my back until we move
out. We are not in the right system.*

*I write of you instead of telling.
I write of me instead of failing*

and ask passively for your invasion.

Lie to my palate and name it agency.

It feels like I hit my head
on your wall last night, momentum

for momentum's sake. Red marks
on the pits of my elbows, signs

of unrest in my sweat, under my skin.
Maybe I'm allergic to something here

or only my elbows are. I'm not quite
willing to end this trajectory.

If I don't stare straight
at the problem it doesn't matter.

*What comes to the surface
is never the whole story.*

*The white space between
this poem and that will remain*

*unsaid, but you Reader
already know that.*

*These sentences are propagating error
always asking for answers*

*that will never surface. Please,
don't assume this iceberg works*

the same as Sigmund's.

Everything was supposed
to be better today. I showed you
everything in my bra
the night before, separated
the cleavage lifted it to my hanging
chin, everything I was hiding
but when we woke, the blankets
stolen and warm, nothing was.

How do you
sincerely say it isn't you it is my chest?
I look in my shirt and ask, the air inside
thick and tiresome.

*In the presence of another attempt
to love one another, I cannot*

*say anything outright. My bra is really
my heart, as is my shirt. It isn't you
it is my chest, is really me, but who
is the victim anyway?*

That doesn't seem like the right word.

*I don't believe the ambiguity
was intentional. So much of a love poem*

*can't come from the passionate moments
of silence and scratches.*

*These
are secret pages, only telling one side.
Love is not what it is, but how it is felt*

*and declaration of fact based on feeling
depicts my heart, and my mouth's*

following after

*as an extremely old woman
living in a cave
delivering prophesy in frenzy.*

*Please love,
from now on just call me Sybil.
Everything I am veiling will appear.*

Your head is bald now
and we both know why.

Some times for days, I wait
in the soft places of your room

shove too many dresses
into my drawer and see

that the sky above me
is different than you.

I'm sorry I can't be the bad guy.

Tonight I will try.
Why don't you give me your leg?

I can break it compoundly
or tonight show off your ear lobe.

I will bite it off your averted eyes.

*I can't wait or I don't want to
hold my breath any longer.*

*I cannot break my own code
anymore. Do I expect that you might?*

I am laying down a foundation.

*Our faces coordinate
so many times in a day, it feels like*

*there is something
beneath the surface of our skies*

something same.

You've always wanted to feel
all the bones in a body, dig your fingers

into your own skin in search,
lines crinkling into your face. It hurts

enough to make you pull back, but
your stiff knuckles tell your need for
answers.

I am more concerned with the wet
strands that come from your soft spots

what can spoil at some point,
a cliff collapsing into sea

spray the clear winner every time.
I want to be a winner and want you

even if my knuckles and face
must dig ditches like yours.

*These poems are silent
pressings into page, this one even softer
a conversation before this one.*

*I write this in the car.
Some song lyric is in it.*

*I can't remember the singer or song.
I guess I won't be able to credit her
in the back.*

*Right now, I am more concerned
with the outline by our bodies,*

*what is want
(ed)
tense and no longer sense.*

*Sometimes I say you when I mean I.
and I think the you and the I are really
me in this poem.*

*I guess this is as good a place as any.
I bury us, and these poems*

here.

When your skin is worked
it feels of dough. There is no solid

to hold. I want handles but you refuse
my need for mirroring and run in the
day.

With inadequate boundaries
I admit I am an edge-dwelling species

and hold onto you.

*Resurrection is a bitch
and to bury is different than to make*

*die. You are a skinny man and I
am the pant size always missing.*

*Just by you existing on sheets next to me
I compare us and feel too much.*

*This happens every time I finish a poem.
I turn the page and there we are
the same pronouns again.*

*Hopefully, I can figure out how
to make them stop
before the end of all of this.*

Your skin seems unceasing
and I ask you

to rub up against my boundary
bodily. You object

say, the written word negates
the effort. Enraged, I tear off

my glasses, your book
into pieces, proceed.

I rake my fingers
through you hair, intertwine

our toes, scratch off your cells
open up your pores

with hot water and sweat
into your skin. I wait

but a blur never comes.
I sigh, please rub up

against me, dry me off
then with your boundaries

show me they can be good
for something.

*In the face of separation
I take on a persona
a sexy librarian
gone wild, as they do, not that I'd
ever do that outside a poem.*

*Glasses are glued to my face,
effort is not creation, and as usual
I resign myself before the end.*

*If you have to be other to me
then you might as well be a towel.*

*Placing remnants of me
in your home*

*broken glasses, books
with bent pages,
pots of used water
and towels to sop them up*

*I wish for their nearness to produce
a context and clarity.*

The fleshy
 boundary between
 you and me is
 really plural flesh(s).
 I collide into you in a protest.
 Create soft and blue
 spots on our bodies
 nightly and ask you
 to whisper with me
 our eyes squeezing, *body*.

*This is more like a fantasy than anything
 else like the librarian, a little lie to you*

*Reader. Maybe every fantasy's omission
 is its own falseness, but my allegiance*

*to self surfaces on this page
 rather than an allegiance to truth*

or fairness. We do collide

*over and over, but I don't really deem
 the blue spots as residue of meaning,*

more my plurality problem.

*Separated by the presence of each other
 we only know love with absence,
 the images it creates*

*and to assume that can be solved
 should make you laugh, right now
 it makes me.*

My body displays
the changes into fall.
No longer am I smooth.

Look at my curtain of hair.
My face, the tributaries of lines
don't spell out your name.

Everyone can see
the elasticity of you
and how my breast

hangs out of luring.

*My curtain points to my face, around it
but really you are thinking of everything
I should have been shaving. I was*

*pointing there too. The might be's
must be pushed aside for these poems
to continue.*

These images must be clarified

*completely and I will keep pointing
until my fingers or breasts or lips grow*

too weary and fall off.

Some actions
aren't as important
as their auras.

A gulf
is more interesting
than a bridge.

They always break
leaving my fingernails
to drown last.

The birds and the bees
I envy, their bodies
are made to avoid this
sinking in.

I just like

*the sound of the first line
don't really knowing its meaning.*

*Reader, you know how that is
enough so often. The sound
reminds me of Gertrude.
I listen to her operas in my car,
and remember what she said.*

*A person should not be judged
by her actions, they are not real*

*indicators of essence.
And essence is what matters*

*like an engine running in a car.
Where it takes the car has no bearing
on its worth.*

*I turn my head, the bridge
between us is broken
isn't it?*

*Water water
my instinct is to keep swimming to
the beginning, as if it can erase
mistakes.*

*Are these words empty then, if I know
their futility?*

I built myself into
 a full anatomy,

 a child with a mouth
 full of bees. You pulled them

 out with the cup
 of your hand and threw them

 like a mouth full of sand.
 Blood flowed, tendons sinewed

 just like the past. I
 was a hole now, again

 gaping and ladled of
 wings and stingers, pollen

 and honey, and all I
 wanted to fill it with was you

 fingers and palms lifelines
 and jagged nails. I lowered

 my jaw, looked at you and you hid
 your hands behind your back.

 From where I sat, doe eyes angry.
 It looked like you were armless

 an anatomy incomplete. I
 loved you more then

 I love you more without your arms.

*Wrapped in loving, my poems veil
 and I don't even know if I
 am the I in totality.*

*That isn't even a half-truth.
 But lies are easier to swallow.*

*Reader, they avoid the red pain of
 stingers.*

*Time does not heal, but it does help
 your eyes, what keeps us together.*

*Through them I can empty of self
 and try to fill up with you.*

*My feminist membership card
 should be revoked.*

*The exact math of it all made me
 resort to equal violence, and it is true.*

I do love you more without your arms.

Cut my hollow neck open and fill
it with bees. Pour them down

so the pile starts at my echoing toes
and fills all the vasiform appendages

of me. Make them water in.
I can stand the thought

of stingers revolting, building
honey combs, homing in my cavities

'til they have no room to hang or swing.
Pick out all the queens before.

I don't want any more girlish
bossiness floating around.

Filled to the rim already, I
have no idea how to rid skin of it.

Only male bees please,
wings tucked in with honey.

Hope you don't mind all the leg work.
Hope it will be worth it for your fingers.

Whenever I'll see you
now I feel bees like boiling
inside me, again.

*A friend told me a story once
about him and his brother as children.*

*He walked out of the house one day
to find his brother on the ground,
swarmed by hiveless bees.*

*Vengeful for their ruined home,
they made his mouth their new hive.
He lived, but I can't get the image out.*

A mouthful of bees, as if I understand

*the feeling, angry insects repurposing
my mouth, as if it has always felt*

*uninhabited and waiting
or as if I am the bees.*

*Whenever I see you now I hear an echo
I hope*

*it was
it is
it will be*

still.

If now my ribs are nothing but a hive
for your almost vacant, almost present

tickling love then what of me
do I house? If these wings are you

what of the rest, honey, comb, propolis?
Harvest me and rub it on your shoes

the ones you wear to interview
the ones you wear to dress

for the life that you want to have.
If I had the option, I'd house birds

inside my ribs, suffer their beaks
able to hole ways out if they want.

I'd home animals with their own agency.
Yet, past my ribs I am no longer able

to make my own decisions like
fingers chubby and tangled

into a church.

*These commands are not
they are pleas,
prayers,
please*

*fill in the empty space
I feel when I am near your skin.*

*Look at us, we create the two edges
of a space, what is absent of each of us,*

*but only visible when both around.
Maybe that is where, why I dwell*

*just to be nearer, to breathe you in
and breathe these words back out. I feel*

*my body slipping from will, a body freely
failing at staying a self.*

*How much is too much
to take in, to give away?*

*The image I come to
I send back to you.*

*Hold my hand around my heart
tighter and tighter. Maybe I do want you*

*to kill me. Who am I kidding? Take over
and make this hive all your own.*

*Let us hold hands,
our fingernails dirty identically.*

What if I birth
right onto this floor?

What if it comes out
as a swarm of bees?

Disappointment is sometimes a creation,
and the hive my mind belongs to now.

You watch too much television
glorifying decorum.

Well I birth bees all over it
or I might, if you'd ever love me

enough. Like a pollinated plant
always already never in need of.

I am so very in need of your eyes,
spectacles are all I have

on days like today,
sitting in the bathroom,

linoleum sticky to my cheeks.
I cannot make the unbelievable
believable

to you. You already walked
past the field of flowers, leaped over

my body like a log bridging.
Bees don't always make a difference

not even in swarm and all the parts
of my body are already known to you.

*A mothering swarm to get your attention
is my planned spectacle.*

*A dare
to get you to pay attention.*

*I sewed my mouth shut to try and make
us a family, but a closed mouth*

*just forces a heart to break through
an alternate opening in the body*

and here it is.

*I accuse you, blame
being such an easy way to transition*

*in a poem, and sometimes
it looks like a key*

to opening the closed holes in your body.

But

*is also a good way to make a transition,
a log bridging
what went on before the end*

to the end.

But

Shave off the hairs that reach down
my legs and back. I don't want
to miss anything tonight.

They'll turn into
bee wings as they fall
onto the floor of your closet.

I will sweep them
into your shoes in the morning
gifts you can walk with,
a flutter of me on your toes
all day long.

*When I started
to write love poems about us
ordering you around happened often.*

*My poems were the site
of my full voice.*

*Now that I've been writing these poems
for what I can call a long time,*

*I've become sloppy, watched it happen
chimed in
"who wants more complication
anyway?"*

Reader, I don't want to miss anything

*on some nights. On others
I want to rub you with strange gestures
that I know you won't enjoy.*

What is removed from me
turns into the bodies of bees.

Does this mean you now will
when unfolding from my form?

*I visualize the first line as shaving
my legs, long blonde hairs fluttering dry
and mixed with cells of skin
to the hard wood floor.*

*The image is rather enchanting, rather
like pouring out a cup full of translucent
wings.*

*It doesn't mean much of anything
it is just the same image as before.
I should probably be more concerned
than I am.*

*Maybe I can interpret something
I haven't already. It means...*

*I want you to be as beautiful
and a part of me,
contain the same essential matters.*

*Please fold this page over to return
and interpret it on your own. Or tear it
into many little pieces and loose them
from your fingers,*

like little bee wings in memory.

The sun is setting
it smoothes down your hair.
You don't notice

and a bee suffocates
in an attempt to get out of my body
and point.

*Pages are never as satisfying as lips
breathing, their words dead
and unchanging.*

*You can't ever see yourself
being worked upon by the sky
because your eyes are not mine.*

Resigned, I write to you, dig words

*of evocation, of change. A bee. An image
of what can fly between, leave my lips*

*to sew a small pain in you,
maybe a red bump, or even a letter-like
black mark.*

*I hope what it carries
in its improbable body can do more*

than my hollow abstract voice.

I watch you
because I am weighed
down by a hive of bees.
I write of you
because I can't rid myself
of flickering, sink into it
like wings are a kind of sand.
What if I ask you
to dismember me
like a useful tree?
Questions always
have to come from me.
I try to sit on you
like a suitcase, but you
remain unlatched.

*When reading an image
it represents but does not hand over
the whole.*

*A suitcase,
unlatched in my mind. It is somewhere
between olive and avocado green
with tarnished latches and brown
cracked trim.*

*Silly poet self, stop bloating your mouth
with image it isn't enough.*

Plug your ears
with bees wax
I am about to sing
a song, honey-
sweet.

The words
out of my mouth
understand themselves better
than I do, but I say
them still.

Come, tell
me what you
think that means
my ears are open.

Accidents
don't detach
themselves
from their makers
and I make this accident
on purpose.

Did you see it?
Of course you did.

What a bee makes
is more than needed
for opposition, and a siren
never says
you never listen
anymore.

Them, them,

*words that cup meaning
in their creased hands. I splatter them*

*on white rectangles to see what
kind of pictures they make
fortunes they tell*

*as if spilling out all the fortune sticks
recklessly is okay.*

*Show me what you think, fill my mouth
and lace around my breath.
I am listening. I thought if I said
anything aloud, it would be too much.*

*This accident, you would have avoided
being the attentive one of us two.*

*I am the careless one
so am here standing*

*in the middle of the world
a voiceless mouth parted.*

Some days the ribs of my cage
aren't a good hive to hold this middle.

Sometimes I think it is
to rid my bones of your horrible tickle.

Sometimes I know, none of the fingers
of my hand mean much alone.

*I desire your actions be influenced,
but the bees do not seem to impress you.*

*Maybe they don't carry enough weight,
their image too small to puncture
your skin.*

*Before I rid my bones of you, I will try
something more considerable.*

My pores hold breath independent
of my mouth. Little lives,
they have their own agendas, like bees
to separate us into pieces.

Often when they're gaping
they are staring too,
like empty wells at your face,
neither back or not
and tickle of edges.

Needing
to leave the bees by the wayside, I turn
to my skin with its so many little holes

for help. Yet, asking has already proven
to be the wrong approach, poetry
a faulty venue, and digressions
momentary foolishness.

My skin's image,
doesn't even have wings and cannot
transcend anything.

The voice I am
now
is right here. Assertion,

as if that is the solution
as if that might rid me of our problem
as if it is the alchemy to tap.

Oh poetry, won't you ever stop
fooling me into believing in power?

I need to hear you
to know I'm not the only
swinging pendulum
in this birdcage.

*A birdcage is much stronger
than a hive, metal it must*

hold

potential.

An image weighty and just

enough, in mouth and air and ear.

A bird's ears
so small and hidden
under the plumage
you often forget they exist.

*I tend
to choose the same words across time,
loving you doesn't change that.*

*When I write the word plumage, I feel it
familiar in my knuckles and think
that means I made a right choice.*

*Of course this all led to a bird. Poets are
always led to a bird.*

*How many times
can you make a right choice
before it turns wrong?*

*Every time I will forget, its phantom
dormant in my mouth until
every time.*

*Maybe some songs will never
become wrong.*

What would I write if your body wasn't
next to mine to show me

the space between us?
I try to fill it with words

everyday, dead or alive, they never work
faulty pigeons with broken beaks

they fly back and forth
land on your shoulder then mine

but can't say anything once perched.
Their claws draw blood, their stains

impossible to wash out.
Scrubbing doesn't turn time back

or make words work. I blow my breath
at your skin and you pretend to swallow.

*What would I write if your body wasn't
here?*

*You are so much more interesting
to my mouth, a betrayal.*

*I know, hence the broken image, the
blood and its remains.*

At least I am leaving a mark on the page.

*It makes leaning on you seem useful
makes our actions
however uneven and feckless*

seem steps to

*and seem enough to
keep going.*

This member between
you and me

is tight enough to roost
a weight of birds

maybe all three of your chickens
even, heavy with the suggestion of eggs.

I have tendered the hair
of your beard, curly wires

that deny an attachment to me.
What if I want to be a bearded lady?

Some days, I weigh more than
a chicken does and wonder if

love can hold me up, if your body can
sacrifice for my benefit.

*Your beard in my fingers feels like
a scion. Its curls come out
in between, in the pen that wrote this
poem and I*

can't stop wanting

*the gap between you and I
to be just a gap between you and I.*

*I claim ownership of your body,
your yard, the chickens within
that look heavy enough.*

*They know I am using their image
and peck my fingers*

when we meet outside a poem.

Do you love
the woman you are sitting on?

The chivalry of reassuring words
is nothing but four and twenty blackbirds
baked in a pie.

*An interval between
my and your*

*I make you sit on me
in the poem, but really
you are so far away, still. A space
ponderous like a Chinese ghost*

I wake and feel it sitting on my chest.

*I image persistent, as if it can point out
problems clearly, as if it hasn't failed me
already.*

*Reader, something I know
words do offer lulling.*

Our bodies toward each other
branch, mine heavy with birds
sweet and sour with them.

Each time we connect
a bird dies off of me.
The eroticism tears

their little hearts in two
and in the halves they fall
away from me. Two less

breast-beats feather
my body now as we lay
in the aftermath.

I am lighter I am less.
All the foreplay in the world
is what I ask of you.

A noun as a verb

*I thought I shed that before this book,
but here we branch
and suddenly are trees.*

*I write to you
using illogical descriptions.*

*Birds don't taste sweet or sour
without a cook. They are just adjectives*

*that could embody
how birds, our love*

*heft my arms toward my feet.
Their image slips slowly out*

*of my body every time I
we, every time I*

*write a poem.
In their absence I might raise my arms.*

*Always, I grant you the power in poems.
Desperately I am trying to image us into
something different, but somehow
I can't help but give it up to you
in the end. As if*

*I offer you images because
they will fail, choose them over
and again because
of their necessary dependence on you
Reader, their leaded center.*

Our bodies branches, I
think of my dissolve.

Your birds roll off
your body, and you assume
that I don't notice
you are vanishing a few bones

at a time. Each time I
do see less of you, blink
and care less than for me.
We are not waves connected in sea we

are trees on either side
of the park. My glasses

are broken on the bedside,
what's the point in squinting

to see you anyways? At some point
we'll both be blind to each other.

From now on, let's just reproduce
with our eyes closed, the blur
inconsequential.

*You are being destroyed as well.
I do notice.*

*I need to describe us before you
can though and I can't give up
on what was*

yet.

*My glasses are broken,
and are an image from our real life*

they seem more persuasive.

*These birds are becoming
too leaden to hold.*

When I saw that all my birds had fallen
off, I began to avoid mirrors.
Cover them, break them,
avoid bathrooms all together.
Reflections were too near.
All I wanted was to see something
else, and I started to uncomfort at you.

*Reflections are too near
and these poems are starting to reek
of a historical document.*

You walk up to them with an expectation.

If only I never thought of reciprocation.

I

In a burst of pure reason
I fly towards the sun.

*I wasn't honest with you in last poem.
I can't even write a poem with any hope*

II

I substitute heat for you,
flap not north, but straight up
drink it in through my eyes.
I am a storage unit and I can be
good at it.

*now. This poem is just another fingering
toward unfulfilling love. Really four,
four ways of looking for an answer
through some kind of faulty bird-like*

*action. I want your there
to be in relation to my here,
but how many lies will I have to believe*

III

Be ready for my fall and bounce
off your windshield.
My need for your warmth
my beak in your beak open.

*to find that? Maybe I should just stop
valuing myself. All it leads to is standing
on pages lids shut tight, mouth wide
believing.*

IV

A falling body does not fall straight
down. In my lack of wing I hope
to find my bird-ness, the ness of me,
the power finally to make an impression.

*I wasn't honest with you
for the last few pages.*

*These poems were never written
to change you.*

*How could they have been,
when your hands are touching
them for the first time?*

One day we'll be divine like birds
high enough to be without want.

Heads full of feathers, beaks full
of worm. Let's be full together

then fall no longer interested.

*I invested in images and description
like currency, the more on the page
the richer the poem, and the more
you might roll over and love me.*

*If only we could
rid ourselves of want.*

*You would think by now I had found
something to set the sun with me.
You would think by now I knew
once love lives inside a poem it is dead
outside of it. Dear Reader, in the future
I hope this will all read differently.*

PART 2

Let's Reproduce and Die: An Experiment in Reflection with Finality

or Context as Forgiveness: An Epilogue

I read texts
 little lines that send me

in flutter or, is this a message
 to forgive?

Insert profanity here. Contextualize
 the hands that wrote

this. Contextualize your mouth,
 and throw it over to me

like a piece of gold
 you unearthed using only your cheeks

or dripped over in a lab.
 Alchemize away

the steps I took, heels so high
 they kicked my ass, to accept

these words are still worth
 meeting. The hold murder

has on my senses in these moments
 is nostalgic. Forget your body parts

the ones that ebb and swell, and raise
 up the cleaver with me. Let us sacrifice

this author do away
 in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love
 my ribcage covered in mirrors.

Yes

*this is just another fucking tool
 but we need to do away with this author
 disseminate the blame,*

let's do it together.

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Let us hold hands clammy my love
 my ribcage covered in mirrors.

*Through these pages
 will I find the nugget of gold*

that is your contextualized mouth?

*If I find it, will it be a mouth
 I understand better?*

*For there to be another book
 I will need such a currency*

what might glitter my eyes wider.

*This epilogue's action is like a sweeping
 to sides. Help me with it*

*like the broom you bought
 for my new apartment was an omen
 hanging stalwart on a nail in my kitchen
 how I always want images to be.*

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Let us hold hands clammy my love
 my ribcage covered in mirrors.

*Flutter, a state
 like that of religious experience.*

*I've said it before; you have to have
 believed in god
 at least once, to believe in art*

*in this way. A pretension.
 I believed too hard in all that feeling
 too intense to be reasonable.*

*Are these words still worth meeting now
 that I know they're just from me?*

*It is so easy to say no
 they are not, crumple the paper
 and make a fire warm. But maybe this
 is the time and we will see*

*that as a sign.
 That might bring back everything
 that never made it
 into these poems, might resurrect.*

*Start the fire with me.
 You have kindling in your hands
 and neither of us are alone right now.
 Let's start a fire
 and watch the effigy.*

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Let us hold hands clammy my love
my ribcage covered in mirrors.

*Reading was the catalyst
what launches or at least*

*that is what I'll say. In flutter,
is an attempt to put into words
a connection that wasn't*

and I use

or

*to turn
to another unsolvable
what. I wake and daily try to forgive this.*

*Insert profanity here, insert blame.
I blame your words, I blame my hands,
where they come from.*

*I ask you to expel what could be
originary, what escaped context.*

*Isn't claiming something
as originary building context,
making it a piece of gold
just another crafty exhumation?*

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 my ribcage covered in mirrors.

*Context is
 the circumstances that form
 the setting for an event, statement or
 idea,*

and in terms of which

*can be fully understood
 assessed, is one person's definition.*

*In context or considered together
 with the surrounding words
 or circumstances this has been
 tailored to say what I wanted.*

*Put all this in the context of
 the fact that
 it has all been taken out.*

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Let us hold hands clammy my love
 my ribcage covered in mirrors.

*What motivates someone to write
 a love poem? A regrettable past, idyllic*

*future seen
 behind my closed eye
 then dashing
 when they opened to yours.*

Kick my ass

*and I will accept that I was reading too
 much into these poems
 murdering anything else that was there*

*closer to the edges
 right at that border
 between white and black.*

*Who knew that the color of an eye
 what ebbs from the dark spots
 could hold so much. Insert your mouth
 there, and forgive me for leaving out
 so much.*

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Let us hold hands clammy my love
 my ribcage covered in mirrors.

*Again I pray to the mystical
 god of conversion, keep turning*

*away from what I knelt on
 as my knees were soft and small.*

I actually kicked my ass by choice

*at that age, a cheerleader lifting
 and looking up skirts
 to prove strength
 to erase
 to accept.*

*I ask you to help murder
 these pieces of me. Yes maybe
 the ones that make you swell,
 but please dear, a mutual sacrifice.*

*And I ask that we do it together
 see what is in our hearts
 still, really, what is missing*

all the while.

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this author do away
 in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love
 my ribcage covered in mirrors.

*Was this really
 the ultimate way to erase you
 to reveal my ego overwhelming
 your cheeks?*

*That simile over there
 was inserted out of self-consciousness.
 I always have to make sure
 I am writing a poem, alchemizing away*

direction, keeping ambiguity.

*Mystery keeps it interesting and I can't
 totally let go of the world I live in.*

*This, any murder, needs an accomplice
 and I don't want to be talking to a void
 that can't talk back.*

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 this author do away
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Let us hold hands clammy my love
 my ribcage covered in mirrors.

*Conceivable, it is
 that no muse ever spoke to me
 poems hold no might, no magic exists
 and these pages are mulch for my
 garden*

I sent myself in flutter.

*You reader, you muse, you lover
 who left me standing
 on the chasm's edge, never existed
 outside my head.*

*The context is: I really am myself
 talking to myself and I must
 smash all these mirrors in order*

to truly see anyone else.

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 little lines that send me
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Let us hold hands clammy my love
 my ribcage covered in mirrors.

*When is a poem, a memory
 ever translated
 into what actually happened?*

*Reader, you
 are not the you in these poems.*

*But I couldn't separate
 the yous after a while.*

*There is no hand to hold, ear to hear
 that isn't a projection of my own.*

*If there is,
 I don't have the hands to recognize it.*

*If this is not true
 skip to the end of this book*

*Reader, and tell me
 something
 I couldn't have made up on my own.*

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this author do away
 in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love
 my ribcage covered in mirrors.

*Thank you for being here
 making it so far.*

Here I will finally say

*what you have been waiting for.
 The context is within the white space*

*the space that was between us. I saw
 what I wanted, and context can't be*

*made by one person, swallowed whole
 by another.*

*No matter how much water you drink
 no matter how many times you drown.*

