

*Notes from Above Water: fictocriticism as*  
queer creative research practice

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## Abstract

(*Pleasure/Bliss*: terminologically, there is always a vacillation- I stumble, I err. In any case, there will always be a margin of indecision; the distinction will not be the source of absolute classifications, the paradigm will falter, the meaning will be precarious, revocable, reversible: the discourse incomplete.)

—Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (4).

Marion May Campbell proposes that fictocriticism depends upon a “...queering of borders” and an “... auto-fictional desire (that) pressures the critic” (Campbell “Waterspout” 282) to produce the hybrid text. This pressure, I contend, is the cumulative effect of text upon the body which, through reading and subsequent writing, is the basis of the fictocritical impulse. This thesis is an exploration of the affective and methodological limits of fictocriticism as a queer research practice. Engaging with contemporary theories of writing memory and the body, *Notes from Above Water* spirals in and out of narrative and re-iterates itself through the appropriation of the writing-flesh of others (Gibbs “Writing and the”). Utilising the ephemeral textual object of ‘the note’: love note, reminder note, suicide note, research/footnote, preface, epilogue, calendar

note, fragment, this work resists traditional narrative and academic prose, un-settling the reader into a deeply fragmented flow of prose, poetry, and fictocritical bents. The text queers (queries) established narrative tropes around the experience of sexual trauma, traumatic grief, queer sexualities and identities. This thesis considers the liberatory prospects that fictocritical writing provides. Fictocriticism acts as a literary and critical alternative to traditional narrative structures of confession and disclosure, and a challenge to the ways in which memoir and autofiction function as rituals of healing. Each chapter of this body of work queerly returns to the, often disguised, site of trauma, desire, and meaning making. It does this through a series of plagiarist montage and subversive modes of quotation from texts which are canonical in their respective fields: Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text*, Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina*, Sappho, Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*, Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, Kathleen Mary Fallon's *Working Hot*, and a plethora of other academic, poetic, and narrative works. These texts are the poetic and critical scaffolding that moves this work, building the text's relationship between grief and critical thinking, between language and pain, memory and minor culture, and contemporary theories of writing the body. The events of this piece unfold as repeated narrative instances: a slap across the face, a kiss in a pub toilet, traumatic birth, traumatic

death, sex, picking up, learning to read and learning to write. It has multiple beginnings and conclusions. Through its labyrinth of quotation it reveals the architecture of its own creation.

The page that was blank to begin with is now crossed from top to bottom with tiny black characters -letters, words, commas, exclamation marks - and it's because of them the page is said to be legible. But a kind of uneasiness, a feeling close to nausea, an irresolution that stays my hand - these make me wonder: do these black marks add up to reality? (Genet "*Prisoner of*")

*Notes from Above Water* utilises this same sense of nauseating irresolution. There is no resolution to the dilemma of the text. The writing acquiesces to its own failure: creating a textual body that bears all the signs and marks of the body that was lost, but cannot *return* the woman, the character, the artist, the queer, to the world outside of text. In its attempt to re-constitute the body of the lover in text, *Notes from Above Water*, like Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* makes "the page the scene of a radical un-writing and re-writing" (Campbell "*Poetic Revolutionaries*" 73). The text, like Wittig's, engages in a "scenographic performance of the body" (Campbell "*Poetic*

*Revolutionaries*”74) in this case both the body of the writer and the absent body of the deceased.

This thesis takes Julia Kristeva’s theory of intertextuality to its logical extreme. Where appropriation, bricolage, quotation, montage, and new work infect and mutate each other through allusion and paratextual co-habitation. This work is influenced by, just as the work of earlier practitioners of Australian women’s experimental writing and fictocriticism was, the French traditions of formal experimentation in the novel which Marion May Campbell suggests can be thought of as “...a prolongation of the modernist avant-garde” (Campbell “*Poetic Revolutionaries*” 74).

Anna Gibbs contends that writing “organises a chaotic world into familiar form” (Gibbs “Vivarium” 244); this thesis organises chaos as chaos, queerly, irreverently, passionately with the weight of words and text juxtaposed by unpoliced absurdity, abjection, and longing.

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Name: Alison Jane Coppe

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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*Notes from Above Water*

The author of the novel and the novel itself are, of course, imaginary. It is clear that such a person as the writer of these notes not only may, but positively must, exist in our society, when we consider the circumstances in the midst of which our society is formed. I have tried to expose to the view of the public more distinctly than is commonly done, one of the characters of the recent past. *She* is one of the representatives of a generation still living. In this fragment, she makes no attempt to contextualise her presence or the effects of that presence in her society. In the following fragments there are added the actual notes of this person concerning certain events in her life, both true and imagined. To survive beyond living memory, she must document her state, so that you might read it and know her<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The author of the diary and the diary itself are, of course, imaginary. Nevertheless it is clear that such persons as the writer of these notes not only may, but positively must, exist in our society, when we consider the circumstances in the midst of which our society is formed. I have tried to expose to the view of the public more distinctly than is commonly done, one of the characters of the recent past. He is one of the representatives of a generation still living. In this fragment, entitled “Underground”, this person introduces himself and his views, and, as it were, tries to explain the causes owing to which he has made his appearance and was bound to make his appearance in our midst. In the second fragment there are added the actual notes of this person concerning certain events in his life. (Dostoyevsky 3).

If I could *love you consciously*, take an experience that was so completely female and subject it to an abstract analytical system, then perhaps I had a chance of understanding something and could go on *living*. (Kraus 235).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> (*Pleasure/Bliss*: terminologically, there is always a vacillation- I stumble, I err. In any case, there will always be a margin of indecision; the distinction will not be the source of absolute classifications, the paradigm will falter, the meaning will be precarious, revocable, reversible: the discourse incomplete.) (Barthes "*Pleasure of*" 4).

1. This is a system of *return* where text meets text and opens a gallery of hallmarks and associations upon itself—my body, your body<sup>3</sup>. A system of *return* where text prattles<sup>4</sup> and speaks out of order: singing, sobbing, incomplete. Where the divide between creative and critical is done away with: kneaded, wound around hands typing howl, bellow, and lament. Twenty-eight texts and twenty-eight years gesture and vibrate, shuttle from one room to another, hold water and time, breath, blood, engineer a dive or fall, extend lines of connection and contradiction between past and present, between experience and imagination, between the work room and the gallery, the writing workshop and the exhibition, Adelaide and Rome.

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<sup>3</sup> I don't "begin" by "writing": I don't write. Life becomes text starting out from my body. I am already text. I am already text. History, love, violence, time, work, desire inscribe it in my body, I go where the "fundamental language" is spoken, the body language into which all the tongues of things, acts, and beings translate themselves, in my own breast, the whole of reality worked upon in my flesh, intercepted by my nerves, by my senses, by the labor of all my cells, projected, analyzed, recomposed into a book." (Cixous "*Coming to*" 52).

<sup>4</sup> (Barthes "*Pleasure of*" 4).

2. Above-beneath the surface of water-language<sup>5</sup> the intertext is born of the body wrought of desire. My body, your body, sews lines of fall and flight, explodes in red dust rifts of memory, crossed margins of indecision<sup>6</sup> form a beat of words and colours, breath and blood. My, your beloved body of letters strikes this page. Text cruises the mouth, lips, and tongue. Written on the body in shudders of light, tremors of blue; I know the way. *Return* to seam, edge of night, fingernails, sunlight, the beauty in correspondence, in

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<sup>5</sup> Finally, and this is the second reason why phobia does not disappear but slides beneath language, the phobic object is a proto-writing and, conversely, any practice of speech, in as much as it involves writing, is a language of fear. I mean a language of want as such, the want that positions sign, subject, and object. Not a language of the desiring exchange of messages or objects that are transmitted in a social contract of communication and desire beyond want, but a language of want, of the fear that edges up to it and runs along its edges. (Kristeva "*Powers of*" 38).

<sup>6</sup> (Barthes "*Pleasure of*" 4).



writing the object itself<sup>7</sup>. Ache of receipt. Ache of discharge. Instant and glacial. Cloth of quotation and substitution. A pistol firing all night by the blue light of screens, in the palms of our hands, from either side of the date line. When I write that it is night, it is also day.

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<sup>7</sup> Note: a way to be useful, keep track, a work occupying a person for or at a particular time, specified handiwork, a matter of business, an affair, a situation, sorrow, trouble, pain. (OED).

3. Wring the tissue, words fall out. Re-constitute tears,  
breath, and blood. Cloth fragments in my hands.  
Splinters skin. That ridge of knowing the weight of  
words and time in water binds and separates our bodies,  
text-flesh, and singing<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>88</sup> ...fictocriticism has been hailed as genre-crossing, genre-subverting, and genre-defying writing that is not itself a textual genre but a writing practice. It is thus not only about writing in the sense of the written, but about *writing* as a process, as a kind of textual performance. (Haas 17).

4. Suppose this is a new idea. Suppose that I am the first. I have been first in some cases. Not in this. Suppose this writing *I* is seeking out a living, breathing, reading *you*. Suppose that the text is a body that grew up with SEAWEED<sup>9</sup>. I take a guess that you did too.

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<sup>9</sup> The presence of mushrooms in Randall's healing photographs turns the feared object into the locus of memory, silence breaking, and representation. (Cvetkovich 100).

5. A guess is only a guess and is only as good as the mirror. The guess is predominantly a reflection of the guesser and the guess a reflection of the image of the guesser in the mirror. The mirror takes a guess that it is a central part of the equation equal to a final and arbitrary conclusion.

Here, in the first, I take a guess that you know the tug of thread and the blue of water and the purple of ache and the cold hard floor and the way seaweed catches on toes. Seaweed has a system too, returning in slithers and waves and piling up on hot chalky sand. A system of return and disappearance to plant the seed of doubt and let it grow.

The form and thinking noticeably plural although always returning slowly swiftly hot to the site and sound, gesture, dance and touching, memory and revelation: notes<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> The fragment, the note, the idea, the aphorism even: there are many names and as many uses for such small shards of free-floating text. Typically fragments are less works than gestures, arrows pointing in the direction a person might research, meditate on or develop. Unlike paragraphs or sentences, they

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do not flow directly from and into their bordering text. Instead they are independent, defined by their singularity, by the white space that encases them on a page – even when they are cobbled together and marshaled into service as the contents of a book. (Segal in Nelson et al. 158).

6. A system of desire *returns* your body to me in text-  
memory—a slither of light<sup>11</sup>. Queer romance and the  
facts of drowning. A language of want desiring  
confusion and clarity in equal measure, the body-text  
and a working title of all that's unsaid. A book I write  
my name in. A book I write my name in to make mine.  
Tangled lineage. The possession of a name, a hard fact  
of a thing, signifying nothing but history.

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<sup>11</sup> ...theoretical writing on intertextuality so often occludes:  
that is, the dynamics of the passionate dimension of intertextual  
practices,<sup>1</sup> by which I mean the fantasies of writers (and  
readers) that attend the actual practices of literary borrowings,  
influences, apprenticeships, and hauntings—by other writers,  
by the music of words, by memories. For the author may be  
dead, but writing subjects are very much alive and embodied—  
capable of moving and being moved, of remembering and  
forgetting, of relationships both real and imaginary with other  
writers living or dead, of love and of murder (Gibbs “Writing  
and the Flesh” 309).

Blue rope between teeth, a straight plait along the spine,  
spirals between fingers, pick up my book, shift hip to  
hip, read aloud the words you wrote to vex my senses  
and laugh. Passion changing lanes and drawing on the  
walls.

“You address yourself to me so that I may read you,  
but **I am nothing to you...**” (Barthes “*Pleasure of*” 5).

Read compulsive. Destroy  
context, skip prologues, attend  
the final pages before their time.  
A rush of ready wanting reading  
wilfully subjective despite  
myself.

Desire as water on the  
brain—fresh water, silt, and  
rocks, salt and tide coming in a

fist. A wet crush. Violet

Silence<sup>12</sup>.

Desire as burnt toast.

Coughing in the night. Stretching

across the bed at morning. Shaky

hands and heart at the bus stop.

That is how much I want you

Still

Slip—surely not.

Not with all I know<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> If I write you consciously, take a completely queer experience and subject it to an abstract analytical system then perhaps I have a chance of understanding something and can go on living. To write. To love. What do the living ever do for the dead?

<sup>13</sup> Fictocriticism is how I perform knowledge. They do say actions speak louder than words. Part and enter gently. Stirring the pot. Petting the horse I rode in on. The methodology is elastic. The methodology is curved. The methodology is the convex button at the end of your rope. The methodology is slowing coming down on your knees.



6. T o c o m e t e x t <sup>14</sup>

Over and over,

I am already that.

Write the wrong                      Repeating,

Cut narrative telling,

Make your bed and lie in it.

C O M E T E X T.

Over and over,

I am already that

---

<sup>14</sup> “During aerobic and circuit training, the heart and lungs are exercised. But muscles will grow only if they are, not exercised or moved, but actually broken down. The general law behind bodybuilding is that muscle, if broken down in a controlled fashion and then provided with the proper growth factors such as nutrients and rest, will grow back larger than before. In order to break down specific areas of muscles, whatever areas one wants to enlarge, it is necessary to work these areas in isolation up to failure. Bodybuilding can be seen to be about nothing but failure.” (Acker “Against Ordinary” 22).

7. *Return* to wriggle. Tickle. Jitter. Shake. Fall between strikes on a page. I slip between the C and the O of you propelling the body of words forward and back.

Memory splinters floorboards in the house of incest, at the murderous beach, the background noise carnival trauma and fucking, Nina Simone on the stereo three decades later and a woman stretching in the nude.

House of light and flesh moves slow, moves fast like my body-your body-closer and closer. This cannot happen without language. Recalling skin pimped with cold fear, winter, nakedness, the memory of daylight.

Y/our story bounces off the walls in this abandoned cottage. Paper across the dirty carpet. The newspaper, April 5<sup>th</sup> 2013. News shaking<sup>15</sup>.

The cat is found three days later hiding behind the refrigerator.

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<sup>15</sup> We have always known that words are animate beings.

Arriving first in the form of gifts or slaps, they come to life as they make contact with other bodies. Words are affect bombs, releasing their active ingredients into bodies and accruing new powers over time as they metastasise to attach themselves to ever new objects and contexts, exponentially increasing their sphere of action. (Gibbs “Vivarium” 245).

8. “Homosexual desire is neither on the side of death or the side of life. It is the killer of civilised egos.”

(Hocquenghem 50).

Memorial in the first person might be a backward exercise. A bicycle stuck to the floor. Keep pedalling.

Desire might c o m e to mean accumulation.

Gathering.

Hoarding.

A lot of lost pussies.

A lot of old fridges.

Torn up pieces of paper that are memories and the old functions of the body and relation.

The way you looked in the light.

The exercise bike left outside with the sign reading:

In excellent condition.

A month later, you move it back inside.

Perhaps, you will ride again<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> The self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity (Foucault in Baker 149).

9. Each fragmentation of text, memory, narrative expands the map of this work; come with me, I know the way<sup>17</sup>.  
Fragmented through breaks in association, leaping between text and quotation, accumulating an alphabet of meaning through its collection of phrases, words, and recollections, changes of tense, twists in tone, cartographical shifts, *you* and *I*, between fiction, autofiction, fictocriticism, poetry, and essay. This form of expansion and cutting is exegetical, queer, it is calling your name. If the exegesis is an expository discourse, then the queer exegesis is one of unravelling. Not an addition, a prosthesis, but a happening within the text that feeds the well of knowledge of this work. This queer exegetical root grows up through cracks in the

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<sup>17</sup> Welts, scars, cuts, tattoos, perforations, incisions, inlays, function quite literally to increase the surface space of the body, creating out of what may have been formless flesh a series of zones of intensity ... These incisions and various body markings create ... not a map of the body but the body precisely as a map (Grosz 139).

concrete, a creepy-crawly exposition disturbing the foundations of both traditional academic and creative writing. This text will unravel and wind over, labour over naming and deconstruction as well as make its own poetry and infect the words-flesh of others (Gibbs). It is a game of disappearances, of plainspoken abstraction and obscurity. A dance with history, fame, and anonymity. I use diversion to avoid the pain of the telling because *I* know that *you* know. *You* who grew up with SEAWEED<sup>18</sup>. Who knows the way it lands on skin in water, have crushed its dry legs on the hot sand, found scraps or long tresses of it in old beach bags after winter. *You* who have lost lovers new and familiar. *You* who have witnessed violence near and far. *You* who have read the works of the great and the unmined. *You*

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<sup>18</sup> Where Margaret Randall's family photographs in *This is about Incest* are marked with mushrooms, this text is marked by slicks of seaweed. Variations on a slither, a ribbon, a rope, a finger. A dried island of brown, sharp in the heat, freckled with salt and pimpled with fear and longing. A flood of ink and touching beneath the water's surface.

who sit, patiently, expectantly, for this writing to be more than the act of process oriented chaos. I am afraid, this could be where we lose one another. I'll ask you to hold steady. Grief, and loss being all too ordinary, I am interested in writing the particularity of these common things. Commonality that pierces me (Barthes), tears me to pieces, and fragments story to diversion<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> **Tuned in**

The ordinary is a circuit that's always tuned in to some little something somewhere. A mode of attending to the possible and the threatening, it amasses the resonance in things. It flows through clichés of the self, agency, home, a life. It pops up as a dream. Or it shows up in the middle of a derailing. Or in a simple pause. It can take off in flights of fancy or go limp, tired, done for now. It can pool up in little worlds of identity and desire. It can draw danger. Or it can dissipate, leaving you standing. (Stewart "*Ordinary Affects*" 14).

10. A system of quotation becomes a way of seeing again  
the thing you threw aside<sup>20</sup>. A familiar house ridden  
past in a hurry or hunger, spate of salivation and  
pedalling. A stranger you sat with on the bus looks like  
kin. The famous break in our tree seeks water and sun.  
A way of inspecting the object removed from the  
bottom of your foot— thorn or otherwise. It is a  
whitebait swim. Dash. It is the impulse to pull thread, to  
mark the tapestry with a dirty finger and mine are quite.  
Dart. Dip a toe. Salty. *Return* to ache for hands to pull  
apart spines of books. Their clear and necessary order  
neutered, making them objects only. Detonating tone  
and order, mastery undressed, the book, body,  
degenerates to ash and uncovers a ruin—a library built  
with the bones of dead girls.

---

<sup>20</sup> “reading is (becomes) a process of moving between texts.”

(Allen 1).

11. ...the intent is not to pursue the unspeakable nor to reveal the hidden, now say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already-said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self. (Foucault 208)<sup>21</sup>.

---

<sup>21</sup> What I discover is that the unsaid is always tied up in the spoken, in what transpires, be it in code, a whisper or a scream.



12. *You* can't spoil my taste for Genet even though you kill  
my third attempt at *In Search of Lost Time* with the flick  
of your wrist and your small hard—

<sup>22</sup>It was the small hard of you

It was the small hard fast soft smell of you

It was the just the thought of you

The mere idea of you

Rocking back and forth

Surging below

And above

The small hard of me.

---

<sup>22</sup> ...infatuation, how the loved person can become a holding  
pattern for all the tattered ends of memory, experience and  
thought you've ever had. (Kraus "*I Love Dick*" 23).

13. Divided by a filmy black line made of light made of ink  
and trouble. Every space we share split by a lean, look  
the other way, head down. All I know is that when you  
turn my page, you turn on me. All I know is when you  
tell me when you tell me<sup>23</sup>

When you turn my page and you turn on me I slide  
between the pages of Proust's notebooks never to be  
seen again.

Trip back through my stolen copy of *Writing and  
Difference*<sup>24</sup>. What separates us are the books I haven't  
read<sup>25</sup>.

*You* lift that tome from my spine, the one with the  
redacted centre. I miss the shadow of that longing.  
I saw its face last week swimming beneath the surface  
in a glass of water.

---

<sup>23</sup> *J'encule le mode*. I will *you*. I try to love *you*.

<sup>24</sup> Stolen by *you*, bought by me from Dark Horsey.

<sup>25</sup> If I'd read more French Novels I wouldn't have fallen for that  
sweet-bitter tone. I would have recognised sex as quotation. That  
is of course a wish. An interference with what was absolutely  
always at our core. Words. Bodies. Mine. Yours.

14. Marion May Campbell suggests that much of what is considered fictocriticism depends upon a "...queering of borders" and an "...auto-fictional desire that pressures the critic" (Campbell "Waterspout" 282) to produce the hybrid text<sup>26</sup>. The pressure, I contend, is the cumulative effect of text on the body which, through reading and subsequent writing, creates responsive and re-iterative texts where the process as well as the results (theses like this one) constitute a queer research practice. *Notes from Above Water* is a text that spirals in and out of narrative, navigating its absences and disclosures through the words of others (Gibbs) and the auto-fictional desires of its author. The textual performance of narrative ephemera takes place in its formal irreverence, found predominantly in its citational promiscuity (Campbell) and poetic schizophrenia. This work refuses to settle the reader into a comfortable narrative trajectory and rejects phallogentric/patriarchal, linear models of time and storytelling, in favour of a deeply fragmented assemblage that more authentically

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<sup>26</sup> The ruin is a space between being and non-being, at the border – a blinding immediacy, a fragment that inheres in dust, in a series of events – a strange instant that displaces us, and that enters us into relation (Sleigh-Johnson 173).

resembles the making of a (this) female artist and the memory response to traumatic grief in and out of text<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Fictocriticism might most usefully be defined as hybridized writing that moves between the poles of fiction (‘invention’/‘speculation’) and criticism (‘deduction’/‘explication’), of subjectivity (‘interiority’) and objectivity (‘exteriority’). It is writing that brings the ‘creative’ and the ‘critical’ together – not simply in the sense of placing them side by side, but in the sense of mutating both, of bringing a spotlight to bear upon the known forms in order to make them ‘say’ something else. (Nettelbeck 4).

15. *You and I* are a question mark. The symbol itself. Curl around and puncture with a strike—the point of no return. Stuck on entry, avoid the bar, it's freezing tonight. The gallery is concrete and trestles, light across walkways, projection, projection, projection. The question is how c o m e? How C O M E I see you in my fringe of drunken memories, spinning, slowly churning, so near. Lying in the bent curve of an M, straddling the hooked legs of E, written in the curve of a question mark—your name and a line of blue. The gallery reading I come back to again and again is a scene of easy listening and wild gesticulation. I go chasing girls, artists, and lovers to find you.

I cannot do it quietly. I am invited to speak.

In the back of my mind the pocket watch chain touch tick toc rolls on. Memory leaks, divides, seals cracks in walls and in pictures. Balancing a piano on a finger. Running. Silver chain from black trouser pocket connects to the belt. Walking in step with seconds a little slow now. A pocket watch inheritance, you give your grief to me. I take the weight in my sixteen year old hands. In my sixteen year old heart that beats quick when you say—

Back in the gallery where the world of women and  
queers wait, I blush and read Kathleen Stewart's  
words on your behalf.

Writing over and over and over memory. Writing  
over and over and over touch. To forgive. To forget.  
To write the wrong. Clear and still, there's too much  
to say and un-say, everything I wouldn't tell my  
grandmother to save her sorrow embedded in  
everything she's never told me to save mine<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Our lineage of secrets as a list of professions: milk man,  
swimming instructor, father, piano player, psychiatrist.

Teachers all. The power of a secret known without utterance.  
Concealed for the sake of devotion. Passed in our bodies,  
bookshelves, Christmas cards, photographs, the crackling phone  
call all the way from Manchester.

16. I am impossibly redacted and always alone<sup>29</sup>—the  
memory of a landline telephone number that is a song  
and a letter to you.

(08 8365 3594)

Sound grew ancient that year and the five years  
following. Like the crocodile in Peter Pan, I hear the  
clock tick wherever I go. Deep beneath the surface of  
this water of my heart I hear your folding paper and

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<sup>29</sup> Everything follows from this principle: that the lover is not to be reduced to a simple symptomatic subject, but rather that we hear in *her* voice what is "unreal," i.e., intractable.. Whence the choice of a "dramatic" method which renounces examples and rests on the single action of a primary language (no metalanguage). The description of the lover's discourse has been replaced by its simulation, and to that discourse has been restored its fundamental person, the *I*, in order to stage an utterance, not an analysis. What is proposed, then, is a portrait—but not a psychological portrait; instead, a structural one which offers the reader a discursive site: the site of someone speaking within *herself*, *amorously*, confronting the other (the loved object), who does not speak (Barthes "Lover's Discourse" 3).

polishing its face. Middle C and a bottle of bourbon. A  
phone call from Jerusalem to say the same old thing<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Don't tell.



17. Outbursts of language populate these pages with passions and words of others. Surging out of bodily aches, time spent sitting, creek of knuckles and fingers over keyboards, up and down for coffee, bathroom, the dog. This reciprocal practice sounds lonely and it can be, but my books, like the stacks of quotation in these margins, draw a house of memory around me, fill the days and nights with surges of light, sirens to announce the drill, I am writing with you. I am writing to you. For you. About you.

These fragments are figures, are dancing, correspond to the work of this lover's body. This one that speaks, prattles, sings, this one that writes, this one that dances to beat beat beat beat of her heart.

Force of my body. Again and again, words escape—  
wrung out of history<sup>31</sup>.

---

<sup>31</sup> As the tide came up on the morning after the 2007 federal election, I would never be the same again. Brought into the secret, into my perfect family's terror, salt on skin, seaweed like track marks up the shore, I walked a long way to marvel at the quiet beastly world and the foam on the water's surface

## 18. THE NEED TO REACT

The hard, resilient need to react has become a charged habit.

For her, it started early. Because she was a girl. Because her family, like all families, built its skin around dramas and luminous little tales with shiny scenes and vibrant characters. And because the storytellers kept track of what happened to everyone—the ends they came to.

(Which, of course, were never good.)

(Stewart “*Ordinary Affects*” 16).

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breaking over and over disappearing into the sand, clinging to my toes.

19. I'm asked via Facebook Messenger if I am interested in reading at an Art Thing. I am and I give my email to my friend and they tell me I'll hear from Mel (whom I don't know) soon. If you aren't making any money, it is ok to write about your love. I think. It is ok this time. This time, you will talk to her and, though she isn't here, she's listening.

The gallery reading I return to again and again

Your clever slip

And my

Heart rattling

Shift hip to hip

Book in hand

You address yourself to me so that I may read you

But **I am nothing to you**

Again and again.

20. Needle ink on skin twenty-eight years start talking in the gallery. I thought I had a copy of *Ordinary Affects* by Kathleen Stewart, but don't. There is a slow pulse in the room, dedicated listeners spill easy sympathy and wade through the deep listening thud, the quiet of quiet, and echoes. The pre-recorded meditation tape fills in my fringe, I stretch my suit jacket which is too short across the shoulders. The memory is: tape across the base of my neck, too hot to touch, no invitation, hairs on ends, one no isn't enough. I flap my hands while I talk, you know this about me.

It's a chronic impulse.

Gesticulation.

\*

I close the door on your burning house.

Too wet to walk.

I don't want closeness today.

Hands and feet under the table, fidgeting.

Wary of the camera, the sight of me, the time-lock of the image and the grief after—

After I know what we carry.

## 21. THE NEED TO REACT

For years now her early childhood has been coming  
back to her as shocks of beauty, or beautiful shocks.

(Stewart "*Ordinary Affects*" 16).

### EARLY MEMORY WINDSOR GARDENS

Beneath the washing line,

A blue t-shirt over a pregnant belly,

Hands cry out,

Scooped up.

Put your lips together and sing

Walking in the twilight

Cul-de-sac full of sun

The road wet with heat

A sharp song escapes

To call the dog and girl

Home.

22. Returning to our premise, twenty-eight years and water  
floating on my brain and I know there is no alternative  
to desire. Swim in that knowledge and the distance  
between Adelaide and Rome the distance between a  
moan and a knee on polished wood. Toothpick hairs.  
Spit. Spit. Spit.

I told your purple underpants that I loved you in the  
pale summer morning light my throat cracked with  
booze and kissing and everywhere your tresses of  
brown hair catching between my fingers in my  
mouth I told the open close of us that sunlight was a  
waste when I had fingers and mouths and ambition  
to ply flesh with. Don't want to get up. Don't want  
to sleep. The alarms go unmuted and rail against  
body sounds of fucking and strain.

We c o m e to an even stop.

You must open your mother's bookshop.

I make the bed on my way out.

Fictocriticism is Sex and Poetry

I never knew poetry

was about

opening your legs

one minute

opening your grave

the next

I never knew poetry

could be

as sticky as sex.

Dorothy Porter

23. The gallery of my childhood sick bed: empty ice cream containers, blankets over the windows, darkness, baths with slices of lemon and sticks of lavender, purple sunglasses with palm trees on the arms. The slam of the double doors between wards, a nurse called Janet, Dolly Magazine, plain potato chips, *Fiddler on the Roof*, crawling down a tiled hallway, vomiting into my younger brother's potty, but I'm walking waking writing into another gallery the child sickness last nineteen years beautiful shocks of nineteen years of torn oesophagus hands and knees here's another time another text walking writing and getting stuck here again on the impulse on the relay of your body my body and the words themselves. Tumbling into another attempt at beginning. Returning to the scene of the crime. A telephone call in the early hours of the morning. A light sleep disturbed. *You*, dead on the radio.



24. "...Thus the Biblical myth is reversed, the confusion of tongues is no longer a punishment, the subject gains access to bliss by the cohabitation of languages *working side by side*: the text of pleasure is a sanctioned Babel (original emphasis) (Barthes "*Pleasure of*" 5).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Roles reversed. The footnote becomes the source of text. Buds from quotation, from poetics, forming lines of flight shooting in different directions, from sorrow and satire, beginning to end, parallel and colliding, deep multiplicity paired with single-minded rage. I wrote this while missing you.

25. A TEXT message:

“Here goes nothing” again<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Could not fire that day when the sun strangled my senses. The broken phone meant I could not interrupt the flow of dread and wonder. Hope it was not painful. Hope there is calm.

---

<sup>34</sup> I am already text in the white paper attic which is a gallery and a page and a nightstand and an oil lamp and a sheet. There is blinking and weeping. I am in the gallery 'Found Wanting'. I am talking about (not so much about as to) Kate Power's work among friends and strangers. Seeking out. Seeking entry. I have yearned to be the fabled poet of your heart. That's the ocean in a tear—tear through the first cage—skin and paper, bark and glass—message, message, here we go again.

Here in the gallery, attic, classroom, cupboard, here in my cunt, here in my throat where gravel and slime and blood and text and power collide—you pin a thumb at its centre and choke the tide of my articulation. A ring in your nose. Pig of my sex. This is the rind of my existence without a moment's notice.

Here we go again:

Another cancelled entrance. Another run up incomplete.

27. Here in the gallery, attic, classroom, cupboard, here in  
my scar that reads like your name scribbled on the  
bathroom mirror, a fingerprint, here in my throat where  
gravel and slime and blood and text and power  
collide—you pin a thumb at its centre and I digress  
search for definition, search for dis/articulation,  
unsoken. A ring in your nose. Pig of my sex. This is  
the rind of my existence without a moment's notice. I  
flip a knife in my hands standing still in the hallway not  
ready to give in to paranoia or—

28. Here we go again:

Another cancelled entrance. Another run up  
incomplete. Creepy crawly exposition.

29. A broken dive or a belly-flop cut the tide in two. Split  
stomach. Red patch like a map of Australia across the  
body which does not belong. Your gothic father and his  
pineapple orchard. Long tresses of his white hair. Your  
dry—

30. I am always chasing The Bible. A small red book of  
Psalms. I paper the attic sitting cross legged dreaming  
of enamel paint and lines and fumes. Crouching over

you the carpet is flecked green and red and white. Long  
lost carpet, long lost road, long lost lost lost.

31. The Exhibition

I dream of your June  
Bulbous passageways  
Arch—  
Puddles of colour  
And your dream.

In my dream, there is  
A long kiss—  
I am a hungry cat.

Expanse of  
Warm footsteps  
Flight and  
Gravity  
The Work stands tall  
And breaks bread of thought  
Curls tip to root  
Budding in scribbles.  
To wish another happiness—  
Your gift.

Hands climb the structure of my declaration  
Rhythm touch and  
Knead

Glass

All that is unknown

Divided by your scar

And pickled in

Expectation—

Out of time again.

Pick the light from a photograph

Transpose

To skin.

My skin—

Searches

For your nose

A perfect blush

And

Blue.

32. White paper attic funeral linen this soil spoil spoiled  
present tense by death.

A, let the alphabet stand in for sorrow

Know what A is for

Know what S is for

Put you in the ground

Put you in the ground with nobody there.

A scream, vertiginous.

A scream, horizontal.

33. Every word comes from her that poet who tries to kill  
me to write me away.

I only want to write the wrong

Write the wrong

C O M E T E X T

White paper attic

Hands hurt

Gripping this stick of ink cigarette burn wrist mole

cut out of finger

Tanned little fingers curl curl curl

Come see me in the white paper attic

Picture veins rope laid out in the shapes that say no

that would say it forever if it could be enough just to

say

This is the worst of it



A confession crumbles in my mouth

In my sister's bed

I cannot swallow or spit it out

I choke and face the music

I let it dissolve on my tongue

Interpolating disaster

Absorbing the memory

Wait

It will grow back

A root from my throat.

34. I face your death in the white paper attic

Stick a song between the pages of this room

Notice the ache in my hand

Can you think about this ache with tenderness?

Tenderly notice the way it stretches down my arm

doesn't care that I need to hold on to this doesn't care

that I have to write and it may as well be for you to you

about you.

You say write and I bleed

And I do.

35. Declare it

I am already text in the open empty book of my house

and I fill it with desire

There is no alternative

To desire

Incredible wrists long and freckled

Small and ivory

Wrapped in leather cord

An opal hangs from a string.

36. Trauma of the road

Distances of prose land hourglass rolls of hips

Curve of spine

Curl metal

And bone

Hourglass hands work time to a halt

To a lilt

Press hard boil poach

I think of my eyeball in a bowl of soup not an eyeball but

my eyeball big and brown flecks of yellow in the right light

will I be like a crab and change colour when cooked?

Blue is to red

Brown is to what?

Knowing knocking

Trying hard to fix that dog with blood dogged like South

Africa like Australia

Tunnel vision of you and I at the airport

Tiny birds and wandering

I can't believe you did that

But then what else is left of the past other than violence?

Which past? Be more specific

Hands on body

Beat of my heart

Beat beat beat beat my heart.

37. Then you are standing in it  
Seaweed everywhere  
Every beach  
Not just the magic ones  
Every beach is magic  
This scene of “Australian” ideal  
Flying kites  
Eating sandwiches  
Cricket stumps casting hot bars down the sand  
Look at your dastardly face  
Mouth strung open slapping chops  
But I loved eating with you  
No that’s not true  
You couldn’t even look at me  
I tell the spot on the window sill no  
I tell it no  
Unlike you  
I cry and fall asleep on the floor  
One fuck one no would never be enough  
I don’t know what to do with all this information of  
feeling  
How can I begin to say?  
How can I?

38. Here we go again, talk of rupture and talk of light,  
banishment and consolation. Re-hashing those walks  
between our houses unsteady days heady and winters of  
affection where text was all the body we could muster  
and desire was the writing on the wall. The unbound  
paperback hanging open with butcher's string. I imitate  
myself and all the havoc you wrecked on this body.  
This text will never show the bruise enough, never  
show the fear enough, never show the warmth and spite  
of your touch.

39. Before I know, I write. When I know, I turn and dive.  
Drill into surface skins. No spare word left for you.  
Spiral and crash. No unattended note. Curl toes and  
stretch. Nothing in the printer. Your words stick to my  
words: after after after after after after after after after.  
After her, I bruise like the sky and hide my well of want  
in the corridor missing one letter from the alphabet now  
now and now and now. There's nothin' left.

40. But the I anticipates and takes pleasure in counting  
time on new skin. All that seems impossible re-written  
in new touch as I *return* to my body to my words  
forgetting to forget.

41. Grief I stuck my hand in<sup>35</sup>.

Landed elsewhere, in the tone of elsewhere in the orange and brown kitchen at Sandford Street, the boat of my childhood painted blue, Fred (the dog) in the tray of Dad's Holden ute, cool deep water of neighbour's swimming pool, red knees, dog put down a year too late, hamburgers for dinner, mystery of your glasses, blue eyes behind black frames, scar on back from belt, scar on back from belt buckle, little brother's cricket bat defence, food on table, clean sheets on bed. Elsewhere place of oyster kisses and marijuana tongues, bend body over bed, shake, shake, and then the news and years of water and broken glass for bones.

It is the labour over boundaries, who gets to talk about what and how. Might fictocriticism be another way of being inside and outside? Or just a way of dealing with the difference?

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<sup>35</sup> Experimental writing is dedicated to changing the ways in which texts generate meanings, to transforming the signifying process itself. This enterprise is obviously and intrinsically open to misinterpretation. It is founded on ambiguity, irony, contradiction, shifting position (including the inscription of gender) in writing and reading. (Gunew 6).

42. I wish, in the same elsewhere tone, way, light, that I, in my grief and beyond it, though I may never be, could have been more thorough. More exact or profound. Presented the facts and corresponding figures. Statistics on child abuse and suicide rates in the LGBTIQ community. I was more interested in the difference. I wish that I could tell in all its exactness and weight the story of the raw ecstasy of you, spunky and dangerous, kind and forgiving. Far more than the summation of every time you made me c o m e. Though, I treasure that sweaty, loose-legged catalogue I carry in these words and in my body. Perhaps it would be possible in a novel. If you were a character, truly.

I stretch out my hand across the bed each morning, not all days but on the especially blue ones, I still reach for you and I treasure that as well.



43. It is possible to develop style through failure.

What I failed to write gave way to what it was possible to bring together. These notes will tell a great many stories, connect grief to critical thinking, spark surges of affect and of remembering. Reaching still for the body elsewhere, seeking out gravity's tone, possession, surety.

No chance, queer.

None at all.

44. Here's the heat of the formalist, a strict constraint<sup>36</sup>  
against creation anti narrative anti character. Here are  
words. This is an approach a reproach of story  
formalism without discipline experimental queer. This  
is me at the end of my rope. Who I am is not important.  
There's the you I write for.  
The you that is my mother (a small red wave out to sea)  
The you that is dead (no blood of blood of blood)  
The you estranged (hoarding my books//hoarding my  
body)  
The you that doesn't know me, doesn't read, plays lawn  
bowls in the hills (your father)  
This collective second person address makes me ache,  
makes the text ache, to be read, to be deeply caught,  
deeply felt, and spoken into to the quiet.  
You will know when I am talking to you.

---

<sup>36</sup> After the fact, I added these footnotes to give shape to this  
fragmented body of text. The shape and the content are not a  
natural fit, but they allow a formal understanding to develop  
across the work. This footnote has something to say,  
SOMETHING TO TELL YOU, I WANT TO TELL YOU A  
STORY, I WASN'T GOING TO TELL YOU A STORY.

45. The *passionate dimension* of intertextual practice is one of illicit textual facility. Caustic to sentiment, purposeful, deep. The theft or mutation of the words of others by placement or deliberate intervention on the level of the sentence produces the desiring effect and scope of this passionate dimension. It is a Catholic impulse: transubstantiation of text. It is a lesbian impulse: having cake eating it too. It is a queer impulse: bend shape change form dialogic and made of ink and light.

Take this bread and take this wine and take the morning in hand wring light in sobs soft scoops of light clear the page of memory everything asylum bright and clear as day—to write the novel I had to have a name and to have a name *I had to be dead*<sup>37</sup>.

---

<sup>37</sup> Since I am nobody, since I am not a part of history, I can say whatever I like, write what I like, and play how I like. This act of writing is a kind of self-erasure. The death of the author and the death of the author played out through first person poetics leveraging the interests of readers and autofictional desires of a writer to make text out reading, life, and death. An act of hope that one might achieve more than mimicry, that there is still room to scream back at Literature's *silences* (Irigaray).

46. Sound within sound, scene within scene, T E X T  
within T E X T—like acid revealing invisible script.  
One T E X T within another eternally, in a far-reaching  
procession, shattering my mind into fragments<sup>38</sup>.

---

<sup>38</sup> Sound within sound, scene within scene, woman within  
woman—like acid revealing invisible script. One woman  
within another eternally, in a far-reaching procession,  
shattering my mind into fragments (Nin 12).

47. I think of this jumping, interrupted text as sculptural.

Constant shattering and re-shaping of text forms new surfaces of meaning, order, and story. This work demands an active reader. One who wishes to climb the trellises of text and follow the, at times, obscure topiary of quotation and form that follows. This is a poetic practice rather than one of novel making. I see this collage, this mirror of expectation as the push of this work's exegetical motion. I am making the wheel go around. If I produce an account of the text, it could be understood, brought into the tradition of this kind of writing, this kind of examination. You know this text by now. It is lean, but occupies this page in a slab. It makes a promise to you. The interruptions signal an invitation into narrative, but not with any singular goal<sup>39</sup>.

---

<sup>39</sup> This is fictocriticism. I combine an idea with me now and I write me. I do not separate one from the other. (Walwicz in Prosser)

48. Words walk to the threshold but will not enter the rooms of the body where pain runs wild. Deserted by words, pain lacks temporal sequence or spatial order: it makes a sound that syntax cannot carry. Memory cannot store pain neatly away; anticipation cannot predict its shape. To be “in pain” is to feel the insubstantial, hollow weight of words and want them desperately anyway. It is to live outside the grounds of one’s own body. <sup>40</sup>(Phelan 507).

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<sup>40</sup> I take an anecdotal pill. Noteworthy, in that it fails to produce accurately the initial sensation of grief, a kind of horror that escapes the body but also stays a long, long time. This *feeling* is marked both by the sensation of collapse and the growing of new structures within the body. At times, I cannot speak and leave notes around the house. A note is piece of the world I know, the understandable end, the horror at the edge of the bed, the rooms of memory I leap from, the edge of my grief and the edge of my mother’s loneliness weave a bitter tapestry – these patches of quotation, pockets of text make me think of the AIDS Quilt. Knowing that remembering dead queers is political, is memory work, is calling your name. That queer research might be the fruit of every time someone said to me that the personal is political. That queer might not be defined only by difference or sameness, by tragedy or flair, that it might

49. Female monsters take things as personally as they really are...Every question, once it's formulated, is a paradigm, contains its own internal truth. We have to stop diverting ourselves with false questions. And I told Warren: I aim to be a female monster too<sup>41</sup>. (Kraus "*I Love Dick*"<sup>468</sup>).

---

find a space between all that to get to the facts, the fiction, the grief, and the ecstasy of what queers know and are in text and elsewhere.

<sup>41</sup> I aim to be a **f e m a l e** monster too. Everywhere I put my sex, everywhere I put my hands, here to make words, into meat to make food, into the ground, along the backs of legs, I ride the current and flow of the words of others. I take their flesh and wear their skin. I try out dance moves and sentences and forgetting.

50. I write to know her.

Write to return to text what was lost from the body. Write unruly. Write barren. Write vomiting excretion madness dying. Write freedom. Write secrets. Write truth. Write twisted bark of family. Write insatiable queer. Write spinning wheel come screaming to a halt. Write all that's left. All that there is to do. Anything. Everything. A mess of words in frames. Like this.

She is dead and so is the rain<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> It is impossible to say in advance what this being of air and flesh in me that has made itself out of thousands of elements of meanings taken from various domains of the real and linked together by my emotion my rage, my joy, my desire, will be or what it will resemble; just as there's no foreseeing the forms that lava will take as it cools. It takes on the form, the literal face that suits the part of it that wants to be expressed. If the feeling it wants to convey is war, political battles, it flows out in theatrical form. If it's a feeling of mourning, oh! You have abandoned me, its body is sobbing, stifled breather, blanks and crises of the *Inside*. If it wants to explode into orgasm, spill forth, recover, plunge, it becomes entirely *Breaths (Souffles)*. (Cixous 52-53).



*On How to Begin*

When I write, I dance a soft long memory of kisses half on the mouth and half on the chin, of faces open and closed on each other like beginnings, sentences, fragments. Your face against my face and a fragment.

This is my HOWL<sup>43</sup>.

A horizontal scream for the loss of my great love.

I begin to write the wrong, re-write history with pieces of *her* shattered frame, a story in pieces of broken bread, broken skin, broken l a n g u a g e.

I see *her* face squish.

Though now, she is incinerated.

When I write *her* body with *my* body text comes rolling fingers and tongues swelling to rapture rupture and sweat. Every first kiss, every cricket-skin sleep, the twisted bark of our family trees, our arms around the brave ghost gum who lost her skin too. Corner of Morphett and Memorial. Your arms around a tree and sweat on my brow. I took a photograph I don't remember. The tree, the memory, split by the loss of your body—my body.

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<sup>43</sup> Madness hysterical naked.

It is just like the birth of a baby when the face is small and puckered, the forehead elongated, and somewhat translucent.

It is just like that, strangulation, being born, pushed through.

ON HOW TO BEGIN, a baby's face.

A map of inheritances: mother's eyes and lips, the yellow nose flat under the pressure of the new. Attend the counting of fingers and toes, ear to chest regulates breath that's coming slow and steady. Little curdling, chuckling sounds spit out of small pink mouths. Curdling and spitting, strangulation.

ON HOW TO BEGIN,

when the weight of time

is not enough to break the neck of history.

You, light as a feather

And your father's daughter.

When I write, I dance kisses and your name is a cleaver that cuts the world in half, divides the body of the girl with the broken name, turns a footprint to a litany.

The litany takes the form of a sob. A well of water and time pools and ruptures making words wet and invisible. Not here, not cut into light with these words I give for you grieve for you. Once may not be enough to give you grieve for you not enough to split the hairs on your father's head.

Its splintered edges fill my hands, writing hands, dancing hands, kissing hands. Ten fingers, ten toes, two blue eyes, and a flat nose. Jaundice and pink paper fingernails, dents on either side of your forehead, first bruise of your body and not the last. A lick of thick black hair over translucent skin covering your skull and that first sob, a siren, breaks duty and silence to find a home in fat arms, to latch onto leaking breasts which become words, wounds, a feeding frenzy, an automatic kiss, thirst for nourishment never quenched in mother's arms.

Thin roots descend into earth, to text, this text and this earth,  
*Kaurna Land* where wounds are more than a metaphor, more  
than an extension of private pain, more than I can understand,  
can write, dance, kiss. Australia is not a sentence. This map is  
not of that name, not of that home. This text of teenage asylum  
diaries built on stolen land. Wounds and words make homes for  
us in places our father's names, words, hearts do not gain  
traction. Cannot gain traction in queer shallows, golden depths,  
core surface string mouths tie words slip.

Wrap up these swollen nights and claim them as our own  
turning a cleaver to a sword.

A scoop of light stands in for exposition and begins the account  
of the dead artist:

painter breaks a child chokes and spits,  
distance forms the scene, dips and traverses, scoops time  
and swells pooling in a footprint, scoops time and swells  
and makes this body this word this holy holy holy naked  
screaming hysterical,  
breaks bonds of words I know,  
dances made of words,  
long and dusty HOWL<sup>44</sup> wails  
yes, that's my sob  
sob sob sob  
soursob suck

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<sup>44</sup> Angel headed hipster star of dynamo night

yellow petals on the skin  
thumbprints  
blueprints  
destination  
maps lead  
somewhere like distance  
travel a thousand years searching for the girl with the  
broken name  
*her* father's name and a red line  
red line every red line now the one divides  
red strap  
peels off in the light  
divides  
rhythm  
pause  
hypnotic beat of breast bone  
centre of  
beat after beat  
You ask lick  
red line me  
every red line divides  
the strap  
some trinket  
some time to revel in touch  
You make me think even when I am a red touch

even when I slip  
back between past and present  
you have done this in my arms  
been past and present  
that song still rings in my ears when my sister brings the  
news down on me  
crack through time and the violence of  
the violence of that afternoon  
blood stuck under skin gathering skin stretching  
lungs turning pale blue baby blue  
calling your name which is a whisper now  
black hair which is ashes  
You and I are in a book together walking a red line that  
travels everywhere we go into every song every place every  
spine this one and the poem...  
where I write.

This broken wail, howl, sob might attempt to tell the story of a love affair, of a suicide, of child abuse, of the pleasures of the body, and the locations of desire in queer communities, in queer bodies, that provide some refuge against the patriarchal constructs of family, church, and state.

I write against writing, against the knowledge of the book, of the beginning, of narrative arch. I am interested in other arcs, in other modes of beginning.



The rooms of our memories are not in the same building. Not in the same house. They are not on the same street. There is one of blue, one room of blue. A spiral staircase in Paris. A phone call from Jerusalem. Windowless, without doors, built with blood, coated in that firm film of shock, feeling, awe, love, and pain. There is one of white, made of paper.

I can imagine, write, or read any number of punishments for the supposed illegibility of the queer text. In a room of my memory that we could call research, I see Louise Bourgeois and her spiders, the guillotine and the doll's house. Within that room, Kathy Acker's motorcycle and emails rev. I think of K's lonely Roman tears. Research is an intimate room. I still haven't learnt what to do with all this information of feeling.

Here, I sculpture my neck for the guillotine, puckered flesh stretch of time. Rooms made of skin cells, made of the dead flesh in my bedsheets I tie with knots. I write a book, a thing, a poem which is a Rapunzel without hair. Out of the delivery room, I find floorboards and closed fireplaces. Walls thin and ripe, summer flooding, a poet kneels at my feet shaking her head saying:

“I don't know. I don't know”.

Runs a hand along my bare leg.

Traffic rages on South Road while I cry and get felt up on my bed.

“Why?”

“I don't know. I don't know”.

Cattle truck shake, it's three in the afternoon. Bars and blood, everywhere is blood, rooms and waves and letters in the mail. Nothing coming today, letters, meat, waves. Here at 158 South ghosts and kerosene terminal scenes carousel dig into earth with fingers pulling rhizome roots from concrete and the Hills

Hoist turns an incomplete silence. There's blood on the  
morning in moans and wet paint.

The news is in: another dead queer.

Call them up: Jean Genet, Allen Ginsberg, Michel Foucault, Arthur Rimbaud and his Paul Verlaine. Do they know the sacrifices of saints? Sweet little Joan of Arc and The Martyrs of Lesbos, virgin strength tested by fire and by sword. Roland Barthes and Francis Bacon. Mother and the milk truck, Chinese food and an eternal blow job. Sappho and Susan Sontag, poetry, excess, scruples, women, suffering. What of the women of this road, this land, this sentence? What of their red dirt skin, short hair, collars up on their shirts, cracked lips, bandannas around their necks, one hand on Akubra the other tucked into the front pocket of denim jeans? Dog-eared pages of *Rebecca*, bent spine of *Rebecca* on the dashboard. *Rebecca* open on the landscape. A name that echoes, that revisits its own sound, cracks the world around it. What of weeks sick at sea? A watery grave. Virginia and her waves, love of a boy, love of a girl, and secrets of familial touch. Virginia Woolf, married to text, married to madness, starving, hysterical, naked muddy river water. Olive skin and transposition. Oranges and dead history, dead present, make a dead queer future<sup>45</sup>. Obscenity and patriarchal leather, Kathy Acker and Violette Leduc clinging to the ravages of childhood—I cling to them too.

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<sup>45</sup> Who will write the history of tears? Madness starving hysterical naked.

What about you, my love? From the unseen to the unnamed<sup>46</sup>.

Let the alphabet stand in for...A is for...S is for...C is calling  
your name. Light as a feather and your father's daughter.

Not dead yet, the word on my skin. Write it like disaster, the art  
of loss like drunkenness and forgetting and returning to  
memory cold light of morning.

Ruin memory in words, there is someone else in the room that  
day. When I return to my house on that blood-thick road to  
arms tattooed for Hell, an inferno of touch awaits. I cannot not  
know; that is for winter.

You, light as a feather and your father's daughter.

Me, lead foot and small hands and big brown eyes.

Fleetwood Mac on the stereo.

This is not the bed I want to bring *you* to.

---

<sup>46</sup> "I don't know the proper names – I want them. I want their  
armoured bodies, I would like to be able to catch their varnished  
shells, I am not dexterous, I am not

humbly

erudite,..." (Cixous "Notebooks" 5).

I walk into another room. You can call this room The Second Person. It is a diversion, a tactic of address, when I say *you* it is not only *You Reader* it is also *You Dead Artist, You Violet Silence You C, S, K, L, W*. Know what A is for. I wobble from memory to memory picking at my skull like time is trapped in there, shave my head and sing, follow ritual after ritual, burn candles in your name, but am never satisfied.

Find no ease in creation, no remedy for the turn-on, the lost  
rigour. Scatter the dust of you; it crumbles from my fingers.

Body cut up to cells. Picture a face, a hand, heel, and breast,  
small and hard, curve of spine and white of scar, run fingers  
over its story.



A little girl and a belt buckle.  
Squish. I read again your teenage asylum diary,  
All evidence,  
Like talk underwater,  
Impossibly redacted—mother's orders.  
Close my enemy,  
Open to me.  
Railroad breath come shaky from my lips,  
Grief is the colour of my true love's hair.

I cut the skin of your death. Dirty the funeral linen you do not wear. Return the memory of your body on mine—a mess of things in frames, abstract and intimate. First incisions first, I go blind. Notches of your spine, an obvious place to begin. How can I? You say write and I bleed.

I open your copy of the Marquis De Sade<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> “As the same profusion reigned at every meal, to have described one is to have described them all; but as almost everyone had discharged, there was a general need to recuperate strength, and therefore the friends drank a great deal at the supper.” (Sade 299).

Wet, stained floorboards swell, they are flooded too. Littered with the memory of this girl, that girl, her photograph, her sketches, her smell on my pillow after years and years of having gone, left, of following another path populated with “...the passion of suicides who kill themselves without explanation” (Bandera).

Turn the painting upside-down to reveal its tender heart to read the message on the frame:

“For ~~Ali~~ with love x ~~Sonya~~”.

Sade on your shelf, possession of text, and your history makes me weep. Light as a feather and... confession is a schizophrenic moment. The first in my life. Hands wail in my cottage walls; they know this story. Flashes of every lazy grope, every violent thrust, every time you cry in my arms. Horror at the edge of the bed. This is his promise to us, never forget. Bound by his disease and those I carry too, there's no easy path to passion between us and yet, it is so *easy*. I let you fuck me in the front yard. Mosquito bites on my legs itch for days and days and remind me of you and the hum of our bodies. Gesture turns to manipulation, I run with my mouth the length of each of your limbs and it is easy and consequential. You vomit and a fuzz comes over me. I rub your back and you leave my house. I try to sleep; it will never come. I crawl into my sister's bed. I cannot even say the words. To repeat what I pull from your throat would kill me. The event of your confession, my detective<sup>48</sup> work being correct, forces me to claim this happening, to be the lucky one. Even though this is

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<sup>48</sup> "Being a detective gives her the right to enquire, to stand disengaged and outside of the machinations of the world around her. She is there to observe and yes, there is a crime that she is investigating. Detectives describe space in ways that make you aware of politics, or class or gender." (Prosser, 115).

about you, I cannot stop the 'I' from speaking. In fact, it is all I can do to even write this. To begin<sup>49</sup>.

The beginning of love kills me, the end of love kills me too,  
both equally shattering, equally final. Each their own fatality on  
the body, on the word.

---

<sup>49</sup> Those blessed structures, plot and rhyme—

why are they no help to me now

I want to make

something imagined, not recalled?

I hear the noise of my own voice:

*The painter's vision is not a lens,  
it trembles to caress the light.*

But sometimes everything I write  
with the threadbare art of my eye  
seems a snapshot,

lurid, rapid, garish, grouped,

heightened from life,

yet paralyzed by fact.

All's misalliance.

Yet why not say what happened?

Pray for the grace of accuracy

Vermeer gave to the sun's illumination

stealing like the tide across a map

to *her* girl solid with yearning.

We are poor passing facts,

warned by that to give

each figure in the photograph

*her* living name. (Lowell)

Your suicide and my incremental death fashion an elegy fit  
to murder us both.

I give my name to a poet. I give my name to the sea. Knocking  
on their doors stands in for desire. Dipping, catching, frantic in  
the search for words, waves, songs. There's no kiss like yours,  
deadly on the lips.

Eponymous poet, eponymous sea, stretch this path paved with  
songs, open to pages of skin dividing, peel apart bones that  
bend and ooze with marrow life and smell of murder.

Write the way,

Write the wrong, cell to cell, shape of memory turns to a fist.

Go back inside that mourning rhythm, eyes hang open, breathe  
their blood of time stretched over the watery film of a pupil.

Order the sea, order the body to float and break away from  
language. Touch and lines of prose turn to gravity under the  
weight of what really happens<sup>50</sup>—under the weight of what I  
read, write, sing, and dance.

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<sup>50</sup> In retrospect *her* despair was bright  
that in the scattered accident  
constellations still might. (Campbell 54).

It depends on the way you look at it, where this becomes a song  
or a marker of time and place built of memories—children  
sleeping in the dark. Cells, their malignant shapes like fantasy  
singing streets, maps, highways poets follow for love of  
wanting and words and the incantations of strangers new and  
familiar.

Fractures where bones grow strong, depths that break ancient  
songs of birds and water, stories of skin and rupture echo touch  
and pale blue lungs. A little girl and a belt buckle. Bones  
shatter into scripture, are burnt to dust, are the hierarchy of loss  
piled at our feet. At my living feet, a long scar along my left  
big toe. Tan lines cut my feet in two. Your feet were small and  
white, I cannot picture your toes.

Shadows on this path, large bodies of water cry out with hunger  
for swimmers and birds—the cut. The sky is just a romance, a  
poet told me that. Sky of intestine, sky of water, sky of dirt,  
each room an empty room. Your body's harvest dry and slim.  
Donate, correct breath and say goodbye. Over and under, press  
your heart with my fist. Disappearances, gaps in the machinery,  
heart cold at the centre, path and poet now. No cry in the  
middle, just that feared landing—purgatory.



Standing over you piece by piece I know the sound. I know, I know...let out a roar...where are your toes?

Page starts turning, tuning, frequencies dilate, script comes howling in flux. Eruption deliverance, here now. Except that you and I know that all this has gone before—before it began.

Pretend, kindly, not to have heard this story.

I take another run at that room. Day departs, a wave of ways and woes. Memory, you write what I see. Contents of my basket, I fill it with stones. Echo on echo, thud on thud, click on click, and carry you home. I take the stones in my mouth, swallow whole the tombstone song of lust, brutality, and cheap wine.

Compulsive in reprise, reiterate, revive.

Withdraw from will and from thought.

I knead your stone skin, press its cold swell.

Here, I begin again.

The song of the bird says *hold me hold me holy holy*—  
prayer finds poets and I find you here kneeling.

Stand over you, let out a roar to save the past from rotting.

Understand, this is the path. You and I running in circles, writing in circles, reading in circles...never neat and tidy, perhaps running in scribbles...writing scribbles...words sew my skin to yours. Poet, are thou intrigued?

To tell it, to write it, draw an open palm across the water's face, stand by the bird bath silty and grey. Watch lilies and roses,

cards and trinkets form a well around each plot. Essence, no  
mark to trace, past flowering, moving forward at unknowable  
speed without a spine a track to run on. Essence is blood, is  
blue, is wary, is tired, is justified, is coming down, starving,  
unkind, mutilating, breathing, coming, talking, cold, girlish,  
ancient, fast, holy, holy, holy.

I crack the ground with a fist and dig for the dust of you.

I speak in tongue, essence.

Call up your body,

A canister beating in the dirt.

They put you in the ground with nobody there.

A suicide<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> It is only me who gets a jolt each time they say the word.

Each time I am reminded of the violence that released you, I  
hold your purple face.

Tiny birds at the airport, I remember your tongue, voice.

Can't copy that, roger two three four.

Wave of smell, shit and dust. Peck at a crumb on my sleeve.

Pull thread and biscuits fall out. A red tin rattles back through  
time tea with extra milk butter biscuits and pumpkin soup.

March.

Foot forward, back, beginning with a trail of breadcrumbs.

Follow me home.

I dig, dig deeper and deeper looking for that red tin the one  
with your ashes inside. I dive into spell of flesh and memory. A  
song I sing over and over. A verse I'll write forever looking for  
your toes.

When I write<sup>52</sup>,

I untangle your jewelry, turquoise stones set in silver, wooden beads, and your Tibetan peace ring, of your thin pink mouth, and how to say I'm sorry. I snap your beads against my wrist, heart thumping in my fingers, I know how to begin. Stalled, I am thwarted by the thought of ceasing. Your face is the weight at the end of this rope, a face changed by blue, red, orange.

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<sup>52</sup> Objects of intimacy, wooden beads against wrists. I know them when you hold (held) my hand.

The sun and I take lonely black and white photographs.

My face grows older, carved up, twisted.

Not the face you know.

Not the face you touch.

Let the alphabet stand in for sorrow.

Know what S is for.

I turn and leave the garden of buried stories. Enfield, resting place of grandparents, children, lovers, friends. I sit in the passenger seat with my bowel in my hands. I squeeze it and squeeze it. I sit in the passenger seat with my heart in my hands. I squeeze it and squeeze it. I sit in the passenger seat with a red tin in my lap. I kiss it and kiss it.

Lead pencil lines draw a map so we can meet outside your  
suffering—off the page, out of time, in light. Under rain, I pivot  
and breathe evenly. Chest open to the night, my heart gets wet  
for you.

When the sky lets go of rain, shadows come in a crash of  
fingers and keys. I let the rope slip through my fingers. The  
heart beats to begin. Rising from the centre, the heart is the  
start of a swirl, a force, a muscle. The heart is a muscle. It is  
gathering, beginning, its genesis of fingers pull thread. Digital  
cock rising, the morning turns to moans. Bones divide music  
into a skeleton scale of fractures and breaks—muscular and  
sleek—bone and tendon—string to string. I strum you with my  
good hand, with my tanned little fingers and they curl curl curl.  
Shifting, the you I know, the past settles into my hands. Hands  
that do the work of telling, knowing, work of forgetfulness. I  
focus on the rope and apricot tree.

The heart is a knot tied with blood.

The heart is a knot—

Hold me hold me holy holy

The heart is not holy

Scribbling on that ribbon,

That broken tide

Fractures the map

Breaks

That are rivers

And houses

That lip service god and

Prayer

Surface

Slick wet time the world divided

By an orgasm.

Coming down,

Panic sleeps in gut,

What is your name?

What are the sins of your father<sup>53</sup>?

When fruit falls from the tree, silence comes in fuzz, a silence in dew creeps around its process and preparation. Washing apricots in the sink, dipping hands into cold water, peeling apricots with a knife, the bone handle engraved 'SJK'. Turning out the orange flesh the seeds fill a plastic bag on the bench.

Sugar, sugar in the air and I suck a seed until it comes apart in my mouth. Its naked kernel disintegrates on my tongue. Apricot jam sets in rows, rubber bands and old linen, orange light in the kitchen, the tiles cold and cabinets open, it is almost time. Rise, set, sleep—you smell like my morning erection.

Sugar, sugar in the air—

Pivot, breath,

Pale blue lungs,

Baby blue lungs,

Turquoise lungs,

And spools of thread, spools of blood like lust and pale blue lungs suffocate the age of my touch.

The history of touch is

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<sup>53</sup> Torture and laundry.



Tender and

Torrential.

The alphabet runs out of feeling; A is touch.

Let letters do the work of grief:

A is touch

B is forgiving

C is calling your name...

If I have to write and I do it may as well be for you to you...

My wife,

A dead angel.

The alphabet runs out of feeling; A is touch. Letters do the work of grief. A is touch, B is forgiving, C is calling your name. Hieroglyphic mind, paintings on my wall, the day we meet is windy on Weymouth Street you wear a red leather belt.

It divides your black shirt from black trousers, thin black frames on your face, blue eyes you fix on me. A red leather belt. Reach for my heart, lungs, skin.

First, my skin.

Skin is A.

First, before skin, is cloth—a navy blue blouse between us.

Clothes not fit for me anymore, that fat femme you know is being written out of history.

I remember being born,  
bruised into being. Come out screaming blue rage and  
forgetting— to forget what it means to be born. Come to the  
world with a curled fist, thrusting cries of joy and sorrow—here  
I am, another little girl made of salt and water.

Suddenly grown, tied to lines of flesh and passage that keep me  
here in a migration of meaning and place. Stolen Australia born  
like me and you out of violence and desire.

Cannot pour water on the burn, of land too hot to walk on, on  
water too heavy to part, seas stuck to tongues of sand—I grow  
a desert in my heart for you.

Well of affection, echoes down the ages of my longing, my  
compass driven with need, metallic and spinning. I tuck the  
ocean into my heart hoping I can swim, hoping the water is not  
so deep, not too deep this time around.

Come with me my love...

Path unfolds in an amnesiac episode replaying the image over  
and over tantamount to montage or fixation. I flip the book of  
our memories in my hands. Lead in the belly, the auto-fictional  
charge produces rifts, ruptures borders and bodies. You try to  
kill me with words, after her, after her. I am torn apart, but my  
solitude multiplies and fractures, tears at the known world—the  
story I know well.

You have no words for me after her, after her. Fragments swell  
moving first upward and then back, between genre and gender,

setting out a new course, forgetting the sky or burden of proof,  
is this fiction?

Wandering, affective and permanent, heavy like the air and  
light like the ground. Charge, forward, march, inevitable racing  
to paper, to pen. Split at the centre, neither one nor the other, I  
am learning to breathe when, when, when. There is no  
alternative to desire.

If it is in writing, this distortion of heart and head, then it is in  
me. The fatal blow to my residency here in all the places I keep  
company. I keep company.

Reading my body for signs of what it is I am, of what writing  
makes me. The moon made an author out of me with her  
scooped smile staring in the clear night and the pavement  
turning purple in the tropical storm made me think it write  
down the way the air feels when the sky lets go of its burden of  
wet and warmth.

Everything changes on the page.

I find words, not The Words. Roll around in my grief for you.

A fat little pig of feeling gorging sorrow, gorging horror. I cannot eat enough of your dreams, of your teenage asylum diaries, be full of you, and swallow history whole. Oink.

Too much milk to spill, I laugh and lick the floors clean.

Splintering, bloody, tasting dirt and vinegar. I go back to the world, holding my nose, a stench so wild it can only mean one thing.

I rot for you.

*WHAT ABOUT OTHER WOMEN?*

WE ARE OTHER WOMEN.

*WHAT ABOUT KATHLEEN?*

*WHAT ABOUT VIOLET<sup>54</sup>?*

*WHAT ABOUT JOAN OF ARC?*

*SAPPHO AND THE SPIDER?*

I'M GETTING THERE.

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<sup>54</sup> Violet silence violet silence violet silence force of my body

beat of my heart this I will not speak of.

Even with you gone, it is possible to dream of Kathleen.

If I have to write and I do it may as well be for you to  
you about you. To take the text and render its flesh alive  
and well on the body of another.

Full of Kath, cloth, faster

A dreamtime of unobserved youth

Unobserved by me

Full of streets out bush

No streets here

Just pathways

Back

Forward

I spread my eyes over her history of lined, spotted flesh.

It is the question of words, of there being so many  
questions to ask them, that brings me to the fore—  
scalds, slaves, scars, and everywhere on my body there  
are rhymes and rhythms, lines of poetry left by me, left  
by Somewoman who dissects me. I bear the brunt of her  
desire. The letter is written in a question mark, which  
makes it almost illegible. It begins to disappear: it was  
wonderful to meet you, I hope this helps, let me put my  
hand on your knee, and do you mind my silver hair and  
purple lipstick? No, not at all. Slipping into the stick of  
the question the letters fold over and over each other

becoming a mash, a maze of words, but the question is  
clear: do you wanna fuck, Girlie?

Maps of palms into veins and raised hairs on forearms,  
Gooseflesh.

I think they call it yearning, heavy heavy night. At this water's edge, the girls bathe and swim in unison, their bodies mirrors, incomplete visions. They call it yearning, still still water where mirrors live as long legs and pink skin. Ripe and round, glass fat then beneath heavy heavy night.



It is possible that all this makes it heavier still,  
Sloped breasts with darkened areola,  
An odd yellow stain below her right shoulder blade,  
In the shape of a raspberry.

Begin.

Pulse.

Because beginnings are a necessary part of any story. In  
the beginning, in the beginning, in the beginning, as if  
nothing has been before.

The past, so near and full of false memories, I stain the sand with tiny indiscretions. I want to write like a saint, like a stain blotch and bloody, a mass of congealed blood tissue emanating from the inside and spilling over the cervix. This old blood, a month old, thirty days of cooking in the darkest warmest place.

**Oh, God;** you're still writing about your period.

And still, it is possible to dream of Kristine. The kiss  
Kristine in the pub bathroom pressed to the white tiled  
wall glimpsing my sloppy profile in the marked mirror  
Kristine. We are marked too. This this end this this  
grief.

Her pierced lip with its tiny metal rod and smooth cold  
jewel at the tip slides against my mouth, against the  
fingerprints of my lips. The kiss comes after a  
confession. We spirits find we spirits—it's the slip of a  
tongue.

Do you kiss her on the mouth or on her/the  
cunt?

On the mouth, but kissing her on the mouth gives me an  
idea of what her cunt must be like.

I know that she once had a piercing in her clit.

Having had a lover who was once her lover.

Having heard a story that was her story.

I think of the imprint, the shadow on her small piece of  
flesh.

Is there evidence? A trace of the lost jewel? The pin-  
prick penetration?

A shadow?

Does it remember?

Yes, I imagine it does.

I remember your touch and the swell of your small  
body. Spasms in your legs and sex on your breath, I am  
mad with rage at time, at history, at all its fathers. I  
remember your touch with the knowledge of your death.  
Touch, a statue, and me still here writing with the blood  
of memory strong, the heart is a muscle.  
But this is the beginning, trace with my fingers the long  
line of scripture and speak back to the beginning and  
the world I knew before you.

It should all start as you do, with perfect timing,  
strumming the note, a press of a button, rolling into  
melody. You arrive just in time to abandon a score of  
tasks and tenderness.

Turning the page—vibrato vibrato vibrato.

In place of these is beginning. A partial figure, solitary,  
and one third (maybe two) of what's to be and in  
reverence to what's gone before. Lonely on the verge  
of character and beating with failed potential, a ruin of  
expectation gathering again and again to hear that song  
of bird and water to hear our song of sex and birth of  
every logic and the will to live.

I start to let the story slip, little girl with big eyes, little  
girl with big will, little girl with marks on her shoes,  
little girl with ears full of blood, little girl with no bed to  
make. I've let it slip that this might be about memory,  
how to defeat it or how to conserve it.

Apricot jam, bread, butter.

Sugar, vinegar, fruit.

Still I know your small white hands and the uneven  
curve of your stomach its deep belly button and the  
scars on your back shrunk with age but bright in the  
morning shining against the matte of your clean  
shoulders soft and your spine cutting like a wave the  
equal shores of your torso.

In my dream, you tell me your story and I wake to your  
scars: belt, stairwell, cricket bat, and touch.

When I write I dance a soft long memory of kisses half  
on the mouth and half on the chin, of faces open and  
closed on each other like beginnings, like sentences,  
fragments. Your face against my face and a fragment.

But then, being born,

I perform the ultimate act of self-annihilation. Surer  
than sex, greater, I split myself in two, being born, not  
once, but twice, into two little bodies – twins.

Before here and now, blinded by the present, by

beginning, and ceasing

of kisses never finished to stop stop stop.

A little girl made of salt and water puts her hat into the  
ring, watches the day grow old, her heart falls through  
the telephone.

on how to begin

it beats

the heart is a muscle.

Even with you gone, I can blink the moon back into  
focus. Tonight, it is closer to earth than ever. I read  
Elizabeth Bishop to the moon while its multi-coloured  
ring expands and contracts in the chill of June. I shake  
in the cold. I must finish reading. You never remember  
the name of your favourite poem, but you breathe it,

recite it line for line until it comes to you a plum in your  
mouth. The name, a gesture I love, all your lost singing.  
I dream I am a page in a book and you are a page in a  
book, there is a word and it looks like your arm, but I  
can't see it now. The slender silhouette, shaking brittle  
body, frozen and hot, under you, I escape the rain, your  
white fingers, your long kisses, hands falling all around,  
yes, yes, yes, I sing, I sing, you make me sing<sup>55</sup>.

Next time around, I don't want to be a man. I want to be  
an octopus.

Yes, even with you gone it is possible to dream of  
Kathleen.

Desire, stillness, spread

Wait

At least you can know the moon.

This self sings back at the wall, back at the city of salt  
and rose blossoms, of tired mutinies still growling. But I  
this 'I' this sated still object refuses to take on new life  
or to decompose. This 'I' that, like a refrain, refuses  
death, cannot stop completely, cannot abandon the tick  
of life to meet the slow tilt, and will not betray the

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<sup>55</sup> "and one is flying,

with raging heroism defying

even the sensation of dying." (Bandera)



metronome of breath under another, under, above, the  
same open sky of poetry and intestines.

You fold up into the thin sheet wet with sweat. You  
close your eyes tight and spin with your knees at your  
chest. Come to me. Come to me. The crow screams  
from the sidewalk. Come to me. Caw.

“What about the evidence?” says The Officer, a  
librarian of self and other.

“Don’t go outside” she says. It’s freezing.

Twin.

Lover.

All empty and voluptuous thoughts. Her notions of  
absence, filling, separating  
her legs.

Thinking—writing through the body here and finding  
fast there is no stopping sentiment no stopping irony or  
quotation and what I might do to your death what might  
become of the hands that write such a thing. I drop the  
ball. Chris Kraus says that because capitalism is  
insincere we want fiction to be sincere.

I find sincerity in the open form, in the boundary  
writing, in the mess of ficto-auto-critical-creative work.

Sincerity might not be close enough to truth and too  
much like sentimentality.

What about irony?

What about it?

What could ever be funny again?

It falls, down the slope of the calf and over the round of her bent knee. It falls. I die by these slow indiscriminate happenings, alone in the room where I lay my desire bare, but then clothe it, always. Sweat beads start up grey streaks of wet skin skin between her toes toes, the soles of her feet like sponges, left in the bath for too long, swollen, skin patterned with lines, maps of the skin's thirst. It falls into palms cupped over piano keys anticipating, remembering the next phrase.

Writing my own death, lyrical, metaphorical, literal,  
partial, imaginary, but sure, can I bring you back to life?

I can't say that I want you, not by singing, not by saluting, or slamming you down on the bed, you, you, you, little, cold, huge, queer. This one lost thing, this long lost song, playing at the back of my throat, tinkle silence, like silence, like an urge, trickle. Simply take your fingers and fold them over the edges of her toes toes and the edges of her elbows elbows and the edges of her mouths and knees and thighs—all those edges. Peel peel peel like potato expose the white solid flesh sweating in my hands anticipating the knife you say write you say cut you say write you say cut I bleed engulf, flood, and stick like leaves in gutters, spill like sickness, and stick, push against and pull apart. So much the better, yes, for moving too quickly I am bound to miss or leave behind some great chunk of what I am. I bite my fingernails. I keep them short.

When I write I dance a long soft memory of aching  
fingers and strips of torn off fingernails bitten, chewed,  
like tobacco and kept for burning.

The room is wet, the dark stained wooden floorboards  
swell, and they have been flooded too. My room is littered  
with the memory of this girl, that girl, her photograph, her  
sketches, her smell on my pillow after years and years of  
having gone, left, of following another path.

Populated with "...the passion of suicides who kill  
themselves without explanation".

Turn the painting upside-down to reveal its tender heart to  
read the message on the frame

"For ~~Ali~~ with love x ~~Sonya~~"

Already absent in the present. A painting left on my  
doorstep. Years pass now, the argument never resolved. I  
fuck with my eyes closed. In the morning, you lie beside  
me. Your blue eyes shut tight, black hair in your face, and  
smooth lips pressed together, not really asleep, just letting  
me stay in bed, letting me watch a little longer.

Blue eyes and black hair blue turquoise the colour of  
ecstasy of freedom finally freedom

And how can I ever begin again?

Open mouth smooth to touch just like the bathtub at my  
Grandfather's house. Let me show you how it's done and say  
thank you. He disappeared. My grandmother picked me up.

I had a woman to care for me. Lucky girl made of salt  
and kisses, water and forgetting.

All I want is to spin you open again. Like open vast like your  
tongue in water all your imagination your intestines unravelling  
in me in my hands. Whatever. That's what I want. The  
manuscript of every inch of you dead lover you partitioned by  
the slip. I don't have to talk around it here. You resuscitated for  
no good reason. Slipped away switched off. You didn't  
remember. You didn't know. That you would leave behind  
your intestines in my bed my hand and in the empty sky of  
poetry whatever that's what I want. Stay awake. Girl body one  
name to know. Bird long holy hands. Day must thicken with  
every dead inch. I draw on her like a river. The self is a pocket-  
sized machinery. First full something want laid beneath around  
blood.

Tree tree tree she took the bird from the tree. The tree was  
empty.

To begin: when the poet reached out her hand, when the poet reached out her hand, when the  
poet reached out her hand, when the poet reached out her hand, you were standing beside me.



When you say write I say bleed and you say:

*The beginning of love kills me. And the end kills me too. Both equally shattering, equally final.*

It was the particular feel of her that made me want to go back;  
all that was said was said in unison or not at all. Unison as  
collision – one voice. To fall out of time was to fall out of love,  
to let on to your poor timing. That I always wanted to go back  
became perfect – an imperfection.

I never said yes, but I let her climb on top of me.

I can't take it back the beginning, the end, here there  
everywhere, my ancient fist thrust into the dark<sup>56</sup>.

In this woman, a perfect deep thing with brown eyes and  
yellow hair, there's a spoonful of ocean. From the deep cold  
reaches at the bottom of the bottom in the earth's dark heart.

She's an escaped crustacean scurrying between my thighs.

Dark shell slicked and wet, her blonde hair salty and sprawled.

It does not survive. Although, I do. The story died with her.

And yet I tell it all the time. I sing for it, hat open on in the  
street collecting coins and sympathy.

The body remains, passed between us, between hands in the  
kitchen, between bodies in concert, passed between living and  
dead. Giving and receiving. She has no choice. She must take  
up the basket, fill it with stones, and carry it home.

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<sup>56</sup> it was an honest orgy

ending in revelations

I must hide my embarrassment, but everybody knows that I am embarrassed. It is telling, and so told, and I am embarrassed. It goes on. It is clear that you know, that you all know, but kindly pretend not to know, or feign forgetfulness, so that I may tell the story again and swallow the stones.

We bury her by heavy wet roses, her cup of ashes. Done and dusted. Creep into the past from the present and told to begin again.

These submissions are for the readers over the page. Those turning with clenched fists and skirts knotted and toes tangled in the euphoria of quiet time.

I know the sound of him out walking, his even steps, and languid pace. Bright blue eyes and fat weathered fingers which are so unbelievably soft on the skin. I reside in a place where desire is superfluous, where the ache and tremor of early love and lust fall down and break like a porcelain plate on the kitchen tiles. Silence breaks like a glass wave. Tethered to the memory is the footprint of my sisters and the girl who was my mother, the girl with no name at all.

Each wide blue afternoon, each week lost to mourning becomes another—belonging to another.

As I write the similarities disperse. She is less mine and I less hers. By increments we lose, disassemble, disembowel, empty, to a finishing point the pin prick of imagination.

The dead lover becomes less and less my dead lover, sister,  
mother, and more of one belonging to this text. Who, as it turns  
out, has had many lovers, sisters, and mothers.

You say. Cut. I bleed. Soak. Bathe. This communion of  
grieving and prayer is the story of the mother – The Lesbian  
Mother of God. We are denied these pleasures, such voluptuous  
pleasures, now depicted, now newly pornographic. You say.  
Cut. I bleed. Turn the page and cringe. If I do, I see her,  
Mother, Lover, Friend, the innocent, runaway virgin mother of  
the sainted child.

You say. Write. I bleed. The story of the mother is one  
of blood.

Overflowing.

And if I have to write and I do it may as well be for you to you  
about you:

Full of Kath, cloth, faster

A dreamtime of unobserved youth

Unobserved by me

Full of streets out bush

No streets here

Just pathways

Back

Forward

I spread my eyes over her history of lined spotted flesh

Thin forearms with eager fingers and cigarette stains, freezing cold, shivering in the afternoon wind, Melbourne or Adelaide in the cocoon of Waymouth Street, fighting the daytime looking for shadows and friends in corners of city libraries and clubs or tea rooms and hospital beds, find lovers there, find lovers there, but

Her pink stockings don't quite cover the blue veins behind her knees in the hinge of the leg which tastes like sweat and green grass and cigarettes and cheap perfume.

I now bring you these flowers. I bring you now these flowers. Flowers, now I bring you. You, I bring these flowers now.

I made her look at me. I walked up and down the corridor all morning until she looked at me. Look at me, I'm always looking.

Even my nearest memory belongs to a shadow, passing out of my hands, out of my control. Its far off, slender silhouette dancing attracts my eye for a moment, but only a moment not wanting to look too long.

And I must begin again, a memory sticks to the soles of my feet.

I walk with the sun behind a ghost gum, a shadow of a shadow, of some story I have no way to write. I must go your way back to myself. The story of the gum, its bark skin, paper-thin, smooth, milky and peeling (pathways, no roads, forward and back). The roots of this tree grow beneath my house (full of

Kath cloth faster) and by lying on the floor I hold her by her roots and am taken in, enveloped, by her soft wandering hands. When I go your way I follow secrets, little veins, pathways left for me to follow, after I finally submit and start the journey back.

I do not know the beginning or why it must be recorded. Our way of speaking depends upon differentiating itself from other more established ways of knowing, of constructing, and being. If I move away, recoil at the touch, what do I move away from?

“Let it stick and slip by” says the shadow sewn to my feet<sup>57</sup>.

More than songs slip through my bent spine, old tired legs and damaged feet. Big toes little toes curled under the width of my swollen extremities that ache and bleed into the naked floorboards. I have no work other than to document my own decay. Record testimony, gossip, a tale told from my broken hands. A woman without rigour. I fold my hands beneath ancient breasts and let the oil and sweat stain fingers with watercolour bruises and shadows. I strain to reach for my

---

<sup>57</sup> In love with Peter Pan and little orphan boys. You play Oliver Twist in the school musical and grow up to love Jean Genet, an orphan, prisoner, bugger.

pencil as cold night breeze walks through the open back door.

My work here is never finished.

Go find this voice that follows me

It is loss that ends us when we have no promises left

This is my past

This is my present

I want to go home

To my dark tender place

With one good eye

And two jelly legs.

I can say, for the first time in twenty-eight years, with  
the weight of them on my back, I belong to this place.

*EMBARKATION*

I GO BACK TO THIS LESBIAN BODY<sup>58</sup> MADE OF  
LOVER'S BONE AND TENDON. SEEK ITS ARCHIVE OF  
QUEER DESIRE AND GLACIAL ARMS THAT EXPAND  
CENTURIES. I PUT MY ARMS AROUND TIME AND TEXT  
TO DELIVER THE PAGE AND ITS BURDEN OF PROOF  
SUNLIGHT AND YELLOW BLUE PALE BLUE LUNGS  
AND INCOMPLETE VERSE. IN THE WHITE PAPER ATTIC  
WHERE DAY TRAVELS NIGHT UNSEEN WHERE I PUT  
WORDS BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT BUT PAST IS  
PRESENT AGAIN LIKE RAINDROPS REVERSED STAIN  
FIRST AND FALL LATER. I PUT WORDS BETWEEN PAST  
AND PRESENT RUN LIKE WATER FAT DRIPPING AND  
SOIL SPREAD ALONG THIS PAGE THIS GLASS AND  
LIGHT TIGHT AND SLEEK LIKE TIME AND STOP. I  
LISTEN FOR A VOICE NOWHERE TO BE FOUND  
FEMININE AND SECRET LIKE LETTERS BETWEEN  
WOMEN. WORDS MAKE STRANGE LOVERS OF US  
HERE WHERE WE SING IN ABSTRACT UNISON. SONG  
OF WARNING SONG OF JOY SONG OF LIPS AND  
STORIES OF GIRLS WHO DIDN'T MAKE IT PAST THAT

---

<sup>58</sup> In this dark adorned ghenna say your farewells m/y very  
beautiful one m/y very strong one m/y very indomitable one  
m/y very learned one m/y very ferocious one m/y very gentle  
one m/y best beloved to what they, the women, call affection  
tenderness of gracious abandon (Wittig 15).



TORTURED EDGE. NO EMBARKATION FOR CYTHERA  
FOR HEART FOR ANYWHERE. I PUT WORDS BETWEEN  
YOU AND I. FOLD OUR BODIES INTO TEXT AGAIN AND  
AGAIN. ENVELOP US IN POETICS CAUGHT TOO FAR  
BETWEEN THIGHS AND KITCHEN BENCHES CAUGHT  
AT THE EDGE OF REASON AND DESIRE KILOMETRES  
OF LANGUAGE THAT STRETCH RIGHT BACK  
THROUGH TIME TO SING THAT SONG OF OH I SHOULD  
HAVE KNOWN BETTER WITH A GIRL LIKE YOU.  
WORDS LIKE STOP. WORDS LIKE TONGUE<sup>59</sup>. WORDS  
LIKE HOME. YOU AND I ASCENDING. YOU AND I A  
BACKSTREET. YOU AND I A CASKET. YOU AND I A  
MAP OF AUSTRALIA. TOUCHED BY DEATH. TOUCHED  
BY LIGHT. COME WITH ME I KNOW THE WAY. I WRITE  
BACK TO THIS LESBIAN BODY-TEXT ROMANCE OF  
ROOMS AND CELLS AND ONE FOR ME AND ONE FOR  
YOU WHERE YOU TAKE THE BITTER PILL AND  
SWALLOW. THIS COUNTRY WILL NOT BE A  
SENTENCE. STARTS SENTENCE BEYOND HERE ME  
THERE BEYOND CORRIDOORS OF SKIN. I TOUCH  
HANDS, PEACH SMOOTH. THE PRESENT, A RELAPSE,  
ADDICTED TO TIME, PLACE, LOCATION, THE MUD,  
LEGS AND ROPES OF TALL YELLOW GRASS. WAITING

---

<sup>59</sup>Give me your careful mouth.

IN THE EPOCH OF STILL LAUGHTER FROZEN FOR THE  
WASHING MACHINE. I PULL SKIN FROM A DECAYING  
FRAME DANCE TWIRLING RIBBON OF SICK FLESH TO  
A SONG NOONE IS SINGING. AUSTRALIA IS TOO MANY  
PLACES. A COMPLICATION I CANNOT SURMISE. I  
DREAM OF COLD CHRISTMAS AND POOLSIDE  
BIRTHDAYS. I DREAM OF PLAYTIME FORTRESSES  
MADE OF SHEETS AND COUCH CUSHIONS. I DREAM OF  
KITCHEN PARTIES MY MOTHER DANCING IN HER  
LAVENDER DRESS FLEETWOOD MAC ON THE STEREO  
OF BOILING KETTLES AND FLOODS OF SUNS RAIN IN  
EVERY FLOWER POT ON EVERY PORCH IN EVERY  
SUBURB. I LEARN ABOUT LOVE AND THE DEAD PEACE  
OF SLEEP. I WANT SLEEP MORE THAN ANYTHING. I AM  
SO TINY, SO TIRED, SO USED UP AND EMPTY.  
CROCHETED TABLECLOTHES AND YELLOW  
BALLOONS THICK WET LINES OF FILTH DRIP DOWN  
MY LEGS AND I TRY TO DREAM OF THE OCEAN AND  
RUNNING AWAY WITH THE TIDE. I AM A CHILD OF  
THE SEA, BUT AM NOT FREE.

MIRRORS COVERED AND CURTAINS DRAWN ON US  
FATE DECIDED DEDICATED TO DREAMING TO THE  
PASSION OF PROMISE AND THE PROMISE OF  
PASSIONATE KISSES. COLD WALL TILES SMOOTH  
YELLOW WOOD PASTEL HER FRUIT TINGLE KISS

STEAM AND RELIEF. I DON'T WANT TO GIVE UP EVERYTHING I'VE EVER KNOWN<sup>60</sup>. I HAVE NO MEMORY NEARER TO ME THAN THIS GRIEF THAN THIS TORRENT OF TOUCH THAT STRETCHES WAY BACK INTO MY CHILDHOOD SLEEPING QUARTERS<sup>61</sup>. CHILDREN SLEEP IN THE DARK. PINK ROOM FOR THE LITTLE GIRL. STRIPPED TO HER SKIN LITTLE GIRL. SICK LITTLE GIRL<sup>62</sup>.

---

<sup>60</sup> I shall not utter your adorable name. such is the interdict you have laid on m/e, so be it. I shall recount only how you come to seek m/e in the very depths of hell (Wittig "*The Lesbian Body*" 19).

<sup>61</sup> I'M AN OBIDIENT CHILD: I STUBBORNLY DO WHAT MY PARENTS AND THEIR ASSOCIATES WANT ME TO DO. I HALLUCINATE. I CLIMB TREES, STICK NEEDLES UP THE ASSES OF YOUNG BOYS. I HALLUCINATE THAT THE VIRGIN MARY WEARS BLACK LEATHER PANTS AND A BLACK LEATHER MOTORCYCLE JACKET, SHE CLIMBS TREES, SHE DOESN'T GIVE A FUCK FOR ANYONE (ACKER "*IN MEMORIAM*" 4).

<sup>62</sup> I am a little girl and there's a prowler outside my plate glass window. The prowler watches me watch. I paint what I want to watch in my picture window. Sometimes I paint the prowler

I CAN'T HEAR YOU OVER THERE WHERE THE SWELL  
DOESN'T REACH. THE SWELL CAN'T REACH YOU.  
NEITHER CAN I. YOURS IS A FAMILIAR SCREAM BUT  
TOO FAR GONE. FOR THE LOSS OF MY GREAT LOVE I  
SCREAM<sup>63</sup>.

For the loss of my great love, I scream.

My song turned into an object to think with<sup>64</sup>:

SEWING NEEDLES AND SPARE BUTTONS, A  
WAITRESS' NOTEPAD, BLUNT PENCILS, TENTACLES,  
USB STICKS, SUNGLASSES, NOVELS, BOOKS OF  
POETRY, THE LETTERS OF HENRY MILLER. I RAN  
ALONG THE PALE SKIN OF THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA

---

myself. The prowler looks like me in some of these pictures.

(Campbell "*Prowler*" 138).

<sup>63</sup> Because collective or national consciousness is "often inactive  
in external life and always in the process of break-down,"  
literature finds itself positively charged with the role and  
function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation.  
(DeLuze and Guattari 17).

<sup>64</sup> To arrange the objects according to time is to juxtapose  
personal time with social time. Autobiography with history, and  
thus to create a fiction of the individual life, a time of the  
individual subject both transcendent to and parallel to historical  
time. (Stewart "*Ordinary Affects*" 255).

UNTOUCHED BY LIGHT, A SILK SLIP FOR THE  
EARTH...*SHE DIVED BETWEEN THE SLIMEY WAVES, HER  
HAIR STRANGLING IN THE RIP, RIGGLED BENEATH THE  
DIRTY WATER, WAS IT A RIVER? WAS IT THE SEA? WAS IT  
DEAF MEMORY...COLLECTED AND PLACED IN  
SPECIMEN JARS LABELLED 'FORGETTING'—THIS IS  
THE ONLY KINDNESS I KNOW.*

FORGETTING.

AS A CHILD SPEAK AS A CHILD FIND SHORES OF  
STRETCHED SKIN AND RIVULETS OF BLOOD POOLS  
OF SHIT AND YELLOW. AT OUR MAGIC BEACH ALL  
TIED UP WITH SEAWEEED FINGERS FATHERS SEAWEEED  
SALT AND BLEACH. WRAP UP IN WOOLEN JUMPERS  
FORTY DEGREES LYING IN THE DRIVE WAY BAKE SET  
FIRE SHAPE OF FAMILY ROLL UP A SAUSAGE HEAT TO  
TURN THE FLESH TO MEAT FULL BELLIES AND SLEEP  
A FEAR SO RED AND RAW. SLEEP INSIDE YOU PAST  
THE FRAME TO REMAIN EYES LOADED SICK WITH  
SUN. LET ME DIP INTO YOU. ALLOW ME ONE LAST  
LOOK. ONE LAST CUP OF TEA ... *EVERY SECOND  
SPARKED WITH CHOKING...*

I pledge rust. imagine a valley complete with the memory of your  
smile. Elegiac tone, a dream on a dream painted with blunt  
brushes and hands. I cannot forget the smell, the sound of  
morning saying she misses me, the bright perfume of blood and

sweat and my handprint on the wall above your head on the pillow. A little trophy. Something dark in something dark. Bones water rain colours. <sup>65</sup>WAIT. She was fruit and desire. Blindfolded adrift cloudy. WAIT. She was fruit and desire. Ivy tumbleweed stone. WAIT. She was fruit and desire. Skin clothes sun mask. WAIT. She was fruit and desire. Split skin bone rain. WAIT. She was fruit and desire. Hands were language in her slow ocean. Eyes travel in waves, deep, slow to touch, swim in stray slick curves. Hands were language and we travel. It wasn't shameful. We flew past the broken treaty. It said do no harm. The fig tree lines of knots and limbs tangled, pushing intertwined to tell the story from go to woe. Your moon-shaped eyes push and pull me, untie, unbind me in your quiet light. String saliva string between us mouths open on each our own wet faces open beneath the shifting plates muscles of clay leaning my bow bends to my extended hand lines of stems from your skin that abounds folds tastes of darkening rosebuds dead at the first sight of day. Our bodies in knots, serpents, AND FIG tree roots

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<sup>65</sup> My mother is in my memory this glamorous, remote, somewhat tragic woman, yet sometimes when I close my eyes I see flashes of her on her deathbed, mouth wide open like statues of those saints in ecstasy. Flashes that for years afterwards made me gasp out loud in public.

Don't look back or else you will be consumed. (Zambreno 27)

tangled in the ground, and honey hair, soft against wax thick skin  
heat a broth brought to dirt. I am flesh-drunk, an architect in your  
body, a shift of legs and hands, lips and curves this contract of  
flesh is a living thing and the pearls of the sea rush out with the  
tide. the humidity finally broken by rain and sleep under sheets  
of sky and you were curled up in scribble next to me a page  
against a page and sleep.

Years against the backdrop of our last conversation, heading for  
Cythera, moving so slow. A green garbage bag holds an old grey  
t-shirt, a turquoise ring, and a copy of *120 Days of Sodom*<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> Into the night, we organise our books and store them in the  
crevices of each other's bodies. You stack me with German  
Realism, stack me against the wall. Sylvia Plath in my elbow, a  
juvenile Arthur Rimbaud between my thighs—I know what  
sounds live there. The kiss of my own flesh on flesh, and the  
pages of books open against my back. Feed me the torn-up pages  
of *Ravages* stilling the hunger that grows while reading. To you  
I give the biographies of politicians, Paul Verlaine, and Kathleen  
Mary Fallon. Take a copy of *The Waves*, I read it start to finish.  
We forget the sex that makes us. Lick my lips as they go dry with  
words and wrap fingers around my throat—choke the tide of my  
articulation.

That arresting page of Gertrude Stein, the second saint of my  
heart, magnetic type draws a finger line by line along the prose

I PUT WORDS BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT  
DESCENDED OF BRUTALITY HISTORY SPUN OF FLESH  
WITH WIRE AND LEFT INDENTS LEFT SCARS TO TELL  
THE WAY BACK. A LITTLE GIRL AND A BELT BUCKLE.  
120 DAYS OF SODOM A BRICK OF PAGES AND  
DEBAUCH. WHY DO YOU EVEN OWN THIS BOOK?  
MUST WE BURN SADE? MUST WE BURN? NO MORE  
BLOOD. NOT ENOUGH BLOOD IN THE WORLD. THERE  
IS SO MUCH BLOOD. I FORGIVE NO ONE. COME TO  
CALL HEAT AND PARTING SUCH SWEET. CATCH  
BLOOD IN HANDS TO PAINT THE WALLS WITH WHAT  
HAPPENS WITH WHAT WE KNOW AND WRITE AND  
SING AND DANCE. HOWL AT THIS. SCREAM FOR ME.  
EMBARKATION<sup>67</sup> FOR CYTHERA FOR A PLACE  
BEYOND SEAWEEED AND INHERITENCE. GIRLS GET  
TAUGHT TO TAKE WHAT THEY ARE GIVEN, NAMES,  
BODIES, INSTRUCTION. LUCKY LITTLE GIRLS.

---

of skin, line by line, the unfolding pages of your body wind up  
and down with sound, up and down with the morning. This is the  
force I run my life on, the strength of books and women.

<sup>67</sup> INTENTION: I BECOME A MURDERESS BY  
REPEATING IN WORDS THE LIVES OF OTHER  
MURDERESSES (ACKER "IN MEMORIAM" 2).



STACK BOOKS STACK FLESH AND HISTORY HERE  
WHERE THE WALLS TURN SOFT AND YOU SLEEP  
ALONE. NO DISTURBANCE IN THE NIGHT EXCEPT THE  
NIGHT ITSELF WITH ALL ITS TIME FOR THOUGHT AND  
REST THAT NEVER COMES. SHUTTLE YOUR BODY  
FROM THE BED TO THE WINDOW THE BED TO THE  
WINDOW THIS IS THE MOVEMENT OF NIGHT IN YOUR  
TEENAGE ASYLUM. WINDOW TO THE EDGE OF THE  
BED CIGARETTES SNUCK UNDER PILLOWS HOW I  
WILL LOVE THOSE YELLOW FINGERS HOW I WILL  
LOVE THOSE SCARS IN YEARS YOU CANNOT DREAM  
FOR YOU DO NOT SLEEP. IN THE AFTERNOONS YOU  
AND THE OTHER GIRLS HAVE MASTURBATION  
CONTESTS. THE NURSES READ MAGAZINES OUTSIDE  
THE DOOR WHILE SIRENS GO OFF ONE AFTER THE  
OTHER COULD IT BE WORSE THAN WHAT BROUGHT  
THEM HERE NO WAY NO HOW FLIPS THE PAGE OF  
WOMEN'S WEEKLY IT IS KYLIE MINOGUE AND BEST  
APPLE TURNOVER EVER EASY BAKE WITH SUCH AND  
SUCH. WILL BROOKE AND RIDGE WEATHER THE  
STORM? TV GUIDE TILL SUNDAY. HOROSCOPES AND  
LOVE MATCHES. BEST BLOW JOB TIPS FOR THE BEST  
SEX OF YOUR LIFE. THERE'S THE GAME WITH THE  
JUMPERS TIED AROUND YOUR NECKS. TIGHT AS YOU  
CAN FOR AS LONG AS YOU CAN. SHOW NO FEAR.

LAUGH AND PASS OUT. BACK TO BED THE WINDOW  
AND PACING THROUGH THE NIGHT OF VISITORS SO  
REAL AND RAW. SMELL OF SEAWEED, SEAWEED  
LICKS YOUR ANKLES, SEAWEED PREPARES DINNER,  
PUTS ON LAUNDRY, SEAWEED CALLS YOU BY YOUR  
NAME AND HANDS YOU A COPY OF THE 120 DAYS...  
YOUR BOOK ON MY SHELF MARKS ME FOR A POET  
MARKS ME FOR HER GAZE HER HANDS VIOLET  
SILENCE VIOLET SILENCE VIOLET SILENCE AND  
COLOURS BLEED PALE BLUE LUNGS IN HER ARMS  
AND LUCINDA WILLIAMS ON THE STEREO.  
DEAD WEIGHT SPIT RATLLE IN THE NIGHT SHARP  
INHALE BREAKS ON THE SCENE CRY OUT LOUD FOR  
YEARS AND YEARS LIGHT AS A FEATHER AND YOUR  
FATHER'S DAUGHTER CHILDHOOD TRAILING MUD  
ON SHOES I NEVER WANT TO GO BACK THERE<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> ...R left London and went back to his childhood where he wrote, "This life of childhood, this endless highway I'm on no matter what happens to me, mythically impossible to change, Tigger-tiger (R's stuffed animal) I'm always a child, I'm now more unchangeable and tougher than any bum, hey look at me I don't belong anywhere I've got no friends: so I fucked up my whole life. Now I see that I have. Fuck Verlaine." (Acker "In Memoriam" 94).

A CHANCE TO STOP AND THINK OF HISTORY

*Still Life* (in parts)

Out of these landscapes, the distinction of point of view.

In a world where access to speed is access to transcendence, point of view is particularly a narrative gesture. (Stewart “*On Longing*” 3).

Point of view offers two possibilities: partial and complete. What remains silent is this and anonymous possibility—blindness, the end of writing. (Stewart “*On Longing*” 3).

In allegory the vision of the reader is larger than the vision of the text; the reader dreams to an excess, to an overabundance... (Stewart “*On Longing*” 3).

This confidence in the circularity of history and the complete visions of closure is broken... (Stewart “*On Longing*” 4)

Pendulum personage. The break comes in a swing. Flex  
gargantuan tendon tongue faring well our rope of saliva, my  
body your body, I and you. Going between the whole and sum.  
Part a voice in the crepuscule. Pink flow and brain wave. I  
make a bed of you. Skin. Stretch. Leg bend. Turn right angles  
and departure. You split. I split. And enter.

If the urge to forget is a symptom of haunting (Love) the urge  
to recuperate is a symptom of lust. Forgetting is for the  
haunted. Lust is for the living. Here, again and again, text splits

between the two. Forgetting and lust, procession and possession, the dead bury the dead incompletely.

History tells the story as if the straight world does not die. We know that it does. Is the history of heterosexuality littered with corpses? We know that it is.

You and I, my body-your body in text-flesh, stand looking back at the city of salt and rose blossoms, at our city of sleeplessness and time floating, city built on bones of dead queer girls, a city which is a story, which is a story I write for you to you about you and I.

\*

The insistence of the 'I' and 'You' forms the basic paradox of this work. Proliferating a multitude of potential first and second person subjects, the pivoting 'I' and 'You' constitute a textual performance of collective address. This performance positions writing as a method of reading and an investigative tactic of address, which explores the reading-writing subject coming into language with all its peculiarities. Traditionally, reading is positioned as a silent, still, and isolated practice particularly at odds with the performative and unruly. Books provide order and an opportunity for thought, enjoyment, tension and

catharsis. This thesis ruptures the silence of reading through diversion, interjection, and polyvocality. This thesis fills the gaps in literature's silences (Cixous) with the words of queers and women. The fragmented textual framework of this thesis performs collectivity, polyvocality, and multiplicity through its queer reading-writing practice, fictocriticism. This combination of extremes and specificities takes for granted the fact of Story, the tried and true, cliché, narrative grand (Lyotard) or miniature (Stewart). *Your* story brings structure and understanding to the gaps in *mine*. Writing against Mastery, this practice represents a reciprocal, feminist (not necessarily feminine) approach to putting it all down. When we stop to think of history, of what has been before, we reach back through this splintered text and through the narrative landscapes of our own histories, reading-writing desires, our grappling with meaning. This text's claim to history depends upon a total dismantling of linear time, place, and selfhood, and yet it equally depends upon recognition, sentiment, and character archetypes. A chance to stop and think, takes up the cancelled certainty of the circularity of history and gives it a rhizomic body to settle on<sup>69</sup>. It gives this work a moment to consider its resources (national,

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<sup>69</sup> The letters are a rhizome, a network, *a spider's web*. There is a vampirism in the letters, a vampirism that is specifically epistolary. (Deleuze and Guattari 29) (my emphasis).

local, or otherwise)<sup>70</sup>. The note, a fragment<sup>71</sup>, being the major textual resource of this thesis, is the rhizomic landscape host to a constantly splitting narrative point of view.

The fragment is a cut, is an exposure, an immediacy unveiling the core by breaking form, breaking closed or open depending on need.

An immediacy unveiling need ruptures flow of your body my body to words like jettisoned. Seeking out a gestural elegance I w a n t y o u to take over. Hold reigns. Push. Back. Open. Legs. Disparity.

Consider history so far, its partiality and its completeness<sup>72</sup>.

The problem with allegory is that it relies upon concealment. In this work, text makes plain the ambitions, even the ridiculous ones, of its writing 'I'. Its abstractions and correlations are both an invitation into narrative, an inclusion as to the desires of this

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<sup>70</sup> For the loss of my great love I scream.

<sup>71</sup> When you say write. I bleed.

<sup>72</sup> *Notes from Above Water*, an introduction into our form and fictocriticism, ON HOW TO BEGIN, an emotional essay as beginning, and EMBARKATION, a slab of text that stands in for exposition. These chapters are the material that moves this work between past and present, are the result of coalescing narrative instances and poetic fragments which formulate this catalogue of texts.

text and its author, and an exclusion from the details of story, character, and setting. If traditional narrative can be thought of as an invitation to identification, then experimental writing, fictocriticism, or queer writing can be thought of as an invitation into alienation.

This text moves between the specific and general, abstract and miniature. If the reflexivity of the modernist use of language calls attention not to the material existence of a world lying beyond and outside language but to the world-making capacity of language (Stewart 5) this text's, in an extension of the queer, punk experiments into the novel of writers like Kathy Acker or Kathleen Mary Fallon, reflexivity calls attention to both what is inside, beyond, outside and within the capacities of language. The text is interested in reproducing the folds of the internal workings of story, of this story, which is many stories all at once.

This moment of pause, anonymous and concerned with ritual, gives us time to talk and think of the stories we already know. Showing that the 'I', identified or not, remains subject to history, gender, violence, family, time, and death. It is possible to name the 'I': Joan of Arc, Mary, Violet, Jean, Michel, Ruby, Adelaide. Think of her as you will. Remember, of course, that at times this work suffers from a false correlation between the subjugation of women and queers. Simply because the writer of these notes might often think she is a woman and a queer or has



been told often enough that she is one of these things which makes it hard to write under any other conditions. A queer or a woman or female and lesbian or something between all these things<sup>73</sup>. These terms collide at the site of the body and this collision is replicated (for better or worse) here in this text.

My grandmother asks me: “what’s in a name?”

I say, “good question”.

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<sup>73</sup> A woman, for we have no other way to describe her, sits, poised, expectant on her ‘haunches’ her ‘cheeks’. Facing off-stage her gaze is directed to a space beyond. She postures – posing for the fixed stare – with hands held behind her head recalling the soft porn imagines of faded postcards “bathing beauties”. She touches herself, squeezing her nipple between thumb and index finger and with dextrous hands reaches down below to re-arrange her too-tight underwear. Fingering her shin, she remembers past admonitions “you must lift your chin and take your gaze out in order to be seen”: and, turning her face to her still silent audience speaks:

“I have all this critical baggage. I hope you don’t mind if I share some of it with you” (Qtd. in Brown 1).

### **As long as there is salt on my tongue**

This will be our unknowing undoing the way I reach for  
you in the dark. Falls apart, legs, blankets, forgetting.

Writhing in the dead zone of memory a full blank sheet  
of image or feeling.

To repeat history and never tell what.

Tip of tongue world is a dimple speaks clear and wet.

Soup body rest on bed.

This will be our unknowing undoing the way I reach for  
you as long as there is salt on my tongue.

To learn about history<sup>74</sup>, on any street in any suburb, follow the  
smell of chicken broth boiling and drink it from a large wooden  
spoon. Fix your mouth to the round lip and suck. When the  
spoon is empty, dip it back into the pot and reach again with  
your mouth. Burn your mouth. Burn your tongue. There will be  
time to drink cold water and soothe the throat with honey. The  
boiling broth must be swallowed quickly. First from the  
wooden spoon and finally, when the pot is near empty, pick the  
vessel up off the stove, place your lips carefully to the opening,

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<sup>74</sup> Take history at night; have you ever thought of that, now? Was  
it at night that Sodom became Gomorrah? It was at night, I  
swear! A city given over to the shades, and that's why it has  
never been countenanced or understood to this day. (Barnes qtd.  
in Love 31)

and drink. Let the remains, stray pieces of celery, carrot, and soft chicken bone fall slowly along the edges and into your mouth. Chew the bones and the remaining vegetables. Do not spit them out. Do not leave them in butcher's paper by the sink. Chew the soft bones from the chicken broth to understand the nature of history.

Wash your hands, scrub dirt and blood from under fingernails. Scrub nails right off fingers to know how round fingers are. Swell to great bulbs and weep icky, sticky pink blood. Slide down palms and wrists.

Bulbs at the end of fingers light the way home. Smell of soup, bones boiling, break down—come with me, I know the way. Another letter, another list, I wasn't going to tell you a story, but I face the path lined with fingernails and scrubbing brushes, white bristles dyed blood-red and shit-brown. All this requires some explanation I suppose. Women pick and scrub along the paths paved with repetitions and testimony—hallelujah, hallelujah.

We have learned nurturing as a story and as a mode of existing under patriarchy. There is, so far, no cure for participation as ritual and resistance as love.

I put my hands together and pray for forgetfulness.

Heaven and hell ain't good enough for me...

Her hands jut forward and back. Fingers curl in front of me.  
She tries to explain the shape of the past as a curl, a wave,  
unrelenting. One that breaks. Our history. Why we do not go  
back. The memory arthritis shuts down her faculties, twisting  
the fingers inward and upward. Knuckles swelling and slowing.  
Loss of momentum, arms locked at the elbows, she imagined  
my future—mothers do this for their daughters. I washed my  
hands. Had to leave the story part way through because it was  
too still too close. She holds me for a long time. It is too close.  
Too long. We will *return* to this break with the maternal.  
...wash hands of this.

## **Landscapes curl like shells**

Roving raving limbs caught in the automatic sunset  
split.

Tell me, how does your garden grow?

Always the disavowal the obvious signs removed, long  
dark hair, lipstick, heels.

Excise the landscape of the body from history, context,  
and relation. My body, your body becomes a telling of  
facts or an abstraction of need.

To learn about history,

I went to the water—blue like the past, I told her my story.

Sinking into the river bed, I cut my hair with a bamboo reed. It  
hurt. I left traces of my grief and rage all around the riverbed. I  
tore my hair from its roots. My scalp bled time. Years of  
waiting, reading, eating, behaving, saying ‘yes’. Every time I  
was a girl. My scalp bled for every time I was a girl.

The initials of lovers over ages adorned the stick I took from  
the river bed. Bamboo grows over and with whatever you do it,  
turning initials into scars, offshoots into rainforests, raised  
edges of want, sacrificing the smoothness of its skin,  
segmented by outside forces and grown out of will—it held  
secrets of generations of lovers.

I broke it from its bind, the duty to grow and heal and grow,  
and sawed at my long dark hair with its edge. I arranged the  
clumps of hair in three stations, fare welling each nest as I set

stones around it. I wore my bald head proud standing at the stations of my cross. Tufts of dark brown hair poked toward the sky, their roots wet with blood and rain. A cross to bear, the weight of history, the history of girls and women and queers.

Bamboo. Keeps. Thriving.

I paced the path of stones, circling the dead weight of my estrangement. Cut hair. Cut ties. Cut away fat and knowledge. I rested at my own feet a shattered moment.

In our shattered moment that lasted five years, a catastrophe of feeling, desire written on the skin, a tattoo of your name and the lines on your fingertips. My grip on time went soft and I lost your perfect fingerprint.

I write your skin again and again. Silver streaks of petrol shimmer on the river's surface.

I set the city on fire.

Water glowing, birds flee the scene.

The sick river burns.

Flames lick the roots of trees along the path.

Nobody notices.

## Space of Language

Speech leaves no mark in space; like gesture, it exists in its immediate context and can reappear only in another's voice, another's body, even if that other is the same speaker transformed by history. (Stewart "*On Longing*" 31).

Writing contaminates; writing leaves its trace, a trace beyond the life of the body. (Stewart "*On Longing*" 31).

To learn about history,

I had an abortion—leaving

Blood behind, my purse was full and red.

The speaker cracked my name. A little green robe found its way onto my body and I rested my feet on the plastic step below the bed.

Speculum on the table, I let the blood rush to my head walking my feet up the wall hanging off the table, gripping the white sheets, my green robe up around my shoulders, I walked the blood to my brain, it swelled and sung to me.

My feet went grey as they stuck to the yellow walls of the doctor's office.

But which of these incidences of time and place made an author of me? A writer? A typist? Is it one or the whole? A sum of time and place, willing. I dreamed myself a poet. No, I wrote myself a poet and went looking for Truth, not realising it was too late. Time already turned, like a pastry filled with fruit, it

folded over itself—the only thing left to do was eat. I devour  
time and rest to make notes on the sky, on my skin.

I wasn't going to tell you a story.

I wasn't going to tell you a story.



### **Sink back into the ocean**

Stomp a veil of water

Draw a line through drowning

This might be our common fate speaking

Soft and jealous

Of the life of words.

To learn about history<sup>75</sup>,

I wore leather boots—laced up,

Tied like time,

I walked on water.

Diver, trapped below the surface, stares at the arches of my feet.

Her screams float through the blue divide.

The water turns to stone, slowly forcing itself lower and harder  
against the tiled base of the pool. I kick with my heel and dig  
with my hands but I cannot reach her. When the whole  
body of water is still and grey I hear her cry.

A mouse can chew through fresh concrete, but I cannot save  
you.

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<sup>75</sup> When I read books I think of my cunt. If it's about love of  
God, the hotter I get. (Myles 27).

## **Rehabilitating the Image of God or good dead make-up**

*The Lagoon* by Janet Frame is one of the saddest books

I've ever read.

Jesus freaks at the door. It's time to unburden The  
Word.

To learn about history,

I wrote out my name over and over again—I spoke

The language of my fathers.

I hear my father laughing in the next room his nose on his face  
nostrils flaring as the laugh sinks deeper into his chest.

White chalk hands. I climb the rope ladder.

Looking down, I spit and hear the thud of phlegm on the floor.

A long way down.

I grip the wooden bar and bend my knees.

Air is still. Ground is hard. Tough land here.

Blood floods my nose, it tastes of aniseed and sugar dribbling  
down over my lips and off my chin I hear my blood walk the  
space between me and the ground. The drop explodes on  
impact sending streaks of blood across the floor, a bloody X  
marks the spot. It is time to jump.

Give up my body to gravity, fate.

## **The sidewalk and allegory and dead birds**

“Being with him made me remember that I’ve always looked for my childhood. Perhaps, childhood doesn’t exist.

“Are memories the same things as desires?” (Acker “*In Memoriam*” 233)

To learn about history,

I crushed a baby bird in my hands.

Picking it up from the side of the road, did I crush it?

I held a finger and thumb over its mouth. Did I?

Could I kill a baby bird?

I held the bird in my hands and wrapped it in my scarf and threw the bundle against the tree that had been its home. It was a healthy baby bird.

Rhythm built intensity her little feet scratched my palms and I wondered why she had to die. There wasn’t anyone around when I came upon the little bird.

I took her body in my hands and pressed a clean thumb against her throat.

She stopped singing.

I walk the dog to the park. Dressed with ants, the baby bird shifts from side to side on the footpath. I pick her up. Dust her off. Back at the house, I place her in a pot plant and drip water from a spoon into her beak.

Her chest lifts quicker as the day rolls on and I wait.

There is no song for the bird who does not sing.

## Catapult

Lean into the eye of the catapult, soft, agile.

A romance between an ancient boy and an ancient girl.

Lean in to the object hard flesh and paper. Do not be afraid to get close to the thing that hurts you. It will come for you either way. Find what you love and let it...

To learn about history,

I drew breasts onto the body of a man I knew.

I drew small hard breasts on his chest with a black marker and I touched them as he sank to his knees.

I drew bows and pinwheels on his back and hummed the tune to a song he loved—*he omnipotent reigneth*<sup>76</sup>. Writing my name along the inside of his thighs twitching with pleasure, tickled by the tip of my black marker he was a boy then.

These were his thighs. These were his hips.

To speak of a man's hips is draw attention to his openings and closes.

To speak of a man's hips draws attention to rolling sockets and plugged holes of him.

To speak of a man's hips is to leave him open to suggestion.

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<sup>76</sup> Now, musicians have never lost the sense of the mysterious, which is the song of truth. What sings in a "man" is not him, it is her. They have always known it. (Cixous "*Coming to*" 84).

To speak of a man's hips is to love the soft fuzz over bones and dark curves of shadows.

To speak of his hips and ass.

To speak of his lips and tongue.

To speak of his toes and fingernails and breath goes fast fast fast.

Speak of his hips buried in flesh invisible hips invisible sex buried by time.

All I want is a taste of your lips<sup>77</sup>.

These were his thighs and lips, I took care to hold them firmly.

Singing and drawing, he fell asleep in my arms and I wrote a series of poems in the style of Robert Lowell on his arms and legs. As a Walt Whitman fan, he was quite disappointed, but admired my imitation of form.

“You're too strong for me”

Oh yes, I thought. Editing his ribs. Yes, I am SO strong. So tiny. So strong. So longing. So used up. So frigid. So complete.

Like Ania Walwicz' *Red Roses*.

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<sup>77</sup> Come taste my hand.

**Offshoot, grows fresh green heart.**

It is both the self and vomit – the ingested non-self  
which is in-corporated but then ejected – which is being  
thrown. (Bartlett 38).

Which is to say that I have never known how to write a  
book.

I volunteer.

Say that this is one.

To learn about history,

I buried books in the garden—I went hungry in the winter,  
words

Bloomed on my lips, I scrambled the eggs.

Taking a wrinkled cucumber,

I sliced either end and down the centre exposing the wet, green  
flesh.

Pale in the middle,

I sucked the seeds.

Dividing the cucumber evenly with the knife,

I scoop activity into a bowl and cover the cubes in lemon juice.

Back to lemon, my first addiction.

Every addiction now documented,

Every impulse now seen,

Translucent inside of cucumber now mysterious,

Given all that I know of you.

Canter, canter,

A run of words,

History has a limit.



## **In the beginning in the beginning in the beginning**

I remember being born, bruised into being. An evangelical flip out of breath and blood sent me howling into this world of text, of flesh. This hard, tough pulsating rhythm of abstraction and definition brought me to life—geometric heat and blue days, summer with the water at my ankles, kites and paddle boards, long striped towels in grids along the sand. Idyllic coastal romance and the murderous beach locked in an *Australian* imagination, an Australian history of invasion, play, and murder. My mother haunted by the Beaumont children never let us out of her sight. A lung-full of salt water on my eighth birthday, a stinger wrapped around my five-year-old thigh, sends me rushed from the water into the fish and chip shop for a squirt of vinegar. Vinegar, vinegar, later *you* know me. I re-emerge a ghost of flesh her name written in black ink on butcher's paper. The room sweated and bent by heat. I was born in a shack on the edge of a cliff, tilting, falling, weighted like loss. A tangle of wires and hands, attended the counting of fingers and toes, the cleaning of skin, water over my head—wouldn't it be nice to be clean again? I remember being born and the deep cry that brought me into language—ouch.

I am an abusive reader. I skip prologues and prefaces, urgently prying open the text proper, eager to defeat context, pretext, and influence. The broken promise of my attention catches the

bent spines of books I'll never finish. I've no trouble with post,  
after, the swim, exile from the text, abusive, abused; I am  
subject to the order of writing. You demand a beginning, even  
though we're through.        I sit on your doorstep reading  
forever. I stare at your photograph. It has words in it.

I take my chance and think of history.  
Body pinned against a wall in a dark room,  
I consider history, what happens to women and queers from  
here?  
Against the wall.  
Spoiled flesh and cold water (I always come back to cold  
water)  
A stack of books and bodies there's no remembering or reading  
them all.  
I get away.  
Which is not a defiance of history just a trip down one of its  
many roads that we might call the present or inevitable.  
History disappoints me.  
I call her up and ask why  
She sighs and says  
"It is what it is"  
She doesn't know.  
Like the poet who breaks my heart  
Like the artist who takes her life (taking back from history what  
it gave to her)  
The artist who takes my heart to Rome  
History shows me that I have a thing for artists  
And am easily swayed  
Susceptible probably  
And navigating slowly

The terms of a life

Lived in time and place and story.

ALL ABOUT THE AUTHOR: MONIQUE WITTIG

In every photograph of Monique Wittig, she wears a hat.

Wide-brimmed and tipped at an angle, her right eye bigger than her left. A fine gold chain on her wrist, Monique's skin is freckled in the black and white photograph. Waterspout keeps spinning. Empty glass bottles ahead, leaning on the table looking at the photographer—

Monique Wittig looks at me,

plays the paper boy, cap and cravat,

Monique Wittig looks at *you*.

In photographs, Monique Wittig smokes cigarettes. Fingers locked on the stick, smoke snaking upwards. Soft face and bright eyes, a little tanned from the Summer this year in the black and white photograph. Seasons pass, ages of reason, lovers, commitments, all of this still in the black and white photograph.

I stay still inside *my body, your body*.

I keep a photograph of your intestines in my wallet. I keep a photograph of your hard hard hard in my back pocket. Photographic force, we move through grades of light—*my body, your body*. The photograph locks time and place. The photograph is a material of the past, a memento, an instant full of the longevity of yearning<sup>78</sup>.

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78 Memento: c. 1400, "Psalm cxxxi in the Canon of the Mass" (which begins with the Latin word Memento and in which the dead are commemorated), from Latin memento "remember,"

I take light out of the picture and *return* to a scene of darkness.

It was just that the lights were off.

It was just that the moment was right.

The smooth pillow and the pilling blanket. Sage sheets and cold toes. The well of curves and hair and straight lines pull apart. On the floor, too broke for a bed, rolling on quilt covers, the fitted sheet curling upwards as I balance on the ball of my foot.

Text between the gaps in your ribcage, I write your body on your body. A writer is smoking and looking across a room after the drink is had and the food eaten. After the guests descend to their travels.

It is just the relay of our gaze, the relay of *my body, your body* and the light.

I take the photograph of you looking at me looking at time and the mess we make.

What is it about *you* and your hat?

Flat brimmed, black, made of rabbit skin. You are the only person I know who wears a hat like this.

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imperative of *meminisse* "to remember, recollect, think of, bear in mind," a reduplicated form, related to *mens* "mind," from PIE root \**men-* (1) "to think." Meaning "reminder, object serving as a warning" is from 1580s; sense of "keepsake" is first recorded 1768. (Etymology Dictionary Online).

I don't know you at all. I note intimately the corners of your eyes and the fine lines gathering around them. The bright blue, like haze or fog or frost of the iris, which disappears when you hit a pipe and your pupils expand to black plates. I could dive into the pools of your eyes and find you fixing your hair in the reflection of the water.

Your skinny girl—boy body with its cliffs and faces, long dark hair and narrow eyes—Jean Genet would hate you and your tidy little cunt.

I keep a photograph of your intestines in my wallet. A photograph of your mess on my hands in my back pocket. A photograph of my legs open against your hips, against the arrow of your need and the price we pay for fun, freedom, or something like it.

You wear your hat to the poetry reading hanging onto me, pulling at the buttons on my trousers.

*Come on, A* (knowing what A is for)—cheap red wine on your breath, I take the white, I take the bait, I eat your lips.



In photographs Monique Wittig wears a hat like yours.

You invite me into your bed, but instead I give my guitar  
callouses to the girl with strawberry-blonde pubic hair and long  
freckled arms.

Kept under your hat<sup>79</sup>, the letter written on your lover's paper.  
You would not imitate *The Lesbian Body*, so I know it is  
Monique who imitates *you*. You tell me again and again, *I am  
not a lesbian*. You have none of her ease, leaning against the  
table, I fall to pieces beneath the weight of your skinny body.  
How is it that you fuck so heavy?  
Did you teach this to Monique Wittig?

Once, love was in the kiss.

It is now in absence.

---

<sup>79</sup> COLOURED HATS. Coloured hats are necessary to show that  
curls are worn by an addition of blank spaces, this makes the  
difference between single lines and broad stomachs, the least  
thing is lightening, the least thing means a little flower and a big  
delay a big delay that makes more nurses than little women really  
little women. So clean is a light that nearly all of it shows pearls  
and little ways. A large hat is tall and me and all custard whole.  
(Stein 14).

Read a letter and write a letter

The photograph is a letter where you write to say the same old thing (just like him). At the kitchen table ready to unload, weight of time, legs buckle at the thought—

Pepper in blank space of a memory too thick to catch. Like orange peel over your teeth, you smile and try to kill me with a phrase. It is the violet silence of your project, the purple breath your breathe, the egg-shells you walk on, that makes me run from you in letters, photographs, bedsheets.

Thread pulls time, runs the length of years of breath and blood between sheets of cotton, of wood, and stone.

There is a photograph of my body—your body infiltrating the night, popping pearls from skin, lychee kiss all wet and sweet in a tropic that fails to rain, fails to bleed, to pick up her skirt and run.

We spin at the end of rope so slack and tired—

Unable to hang ourselves with history.

We walked that fine line between violence and passion.  
Holding our drinks at angles, letting our hands sweat into the  
other's, whispering over and under the water of our bodies not  
sure enough to mend the drought between your thighs.  
You get so turned on reading the sonnets you write me.  
It's you that you want.  
Violet Silence,  
writing is past,  
words shift softly in bed.  
Repeating the action over and over,  
I accumulate the poem on your skin.  
Every flicker of light, murderous and sublime,  
write your skin again and again<sup>80</sup>.  
  
I am afraid of you.  
  
Beat it out of me. A story in blood. With nothing to confess.  
Cough yellow and red onto the apricot pillow case.  
*Now that didn't hurt did it?*

---

<sup>80</sup> The morning I got up to begin this book I coughed.

Something was coming out of my throat: it was strangling me. I  
broke the thread which held it and yanked it out. I went back to  
bed and said: I have just spat out my heart. (Nin 1).

What happens to spit and blood after the loosening of phlegm,  
spat on the path or pillow after taking another blow?  
Evaporation—a dry ring marks my passage through these parts.  
Your borrowed bed came from my house. Stain.

Write like a saint. Write like a stain.

Inflict belated passion, telling stories in the dark, always  
reaching around my thighs, under, wishing for me to rise to your  
bloody challenge. Instead, I give my guitar callouses to the girl  
with blonde bangs and pink, shaved lips.

And it only makes you more violet silence v I o l e t s I l e n c e  
Want me harder for your sonnet fire<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The aim of this chapter might be revenge. A possible form of queer justice. Even though I accept the failings of love affairs and we know poets together alone are—force of my body, beat of my heart, I came here to write it out.

Naked and living in this moment of estrangement from my  
work, my past, my “future”.  
It is a very local feeling,  
Just me and my belt buckle<sup>82</sup>.

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“We must mar things to prove that they exist, as I have had to  
do in order to prove that I exist...” (Bouilly 42)

Eclipse open, a spot bleeds in the sky. Gravity and breath work to lower the fleshy, red mass. Open on the table, white sheets cover and contain. Dip into a sky of red and blue, of veins and muscles. Hum strikes soft centre and shoulders shift and crack, break the stable, white frequency. Bloom between blades of bone, the spring pushes open, folds out, deliberate and dangerous. My body is open. My body lies open. My body is decomposing on the road, a dead bird. A dead bird is my body. The stars weep red and rain without origin, the sky is clear tonight.

Intensity cracks in my knuckles as tanned fingers hover over the keys. Shopping for the phrase, imagining an answer to the myriad question. Placing 'I' placing 'You' alongside one another, we become new again.

Your magnet drawing my 'I' nearer and nearer.

The thing we share most democratically is loss, hurt, and now we split and split. Fragmenting into a dust that keeps skimming floorboards and gathering on the redacted fireplace.

Without a bed to make.

Events unfold in an amnesiac episode replaying the image over and over, tantamount to montage or fixation. I flip the book of our memories in my hands. Lead in the belly, the auto-fictional charge produces rifts, ruptures borders, point of view, spills its theory like blood and guts on the road.

You try to kill me with words, after her, after her. I am torn apart, but in pieces I multiply forming new hands and feet from the fractures you make in my body, your body. Tearing at the known world, the story I know well. Eight hands, eight legs, I become a spider of words of hurt you gave me with your violet silence. You have no words for me. Fragments swell moving first upward and then back, between genres and genders, setting out a new course, forgetting the sky or burden of proof, is this fiction?



Wandering, affective and permanent, heavy like the air and light like the ground. Charge, forward, march, inevitable racing to paper, to pen. Split at the centre, neither one nor the other, I am learning to breathe when, when, when. There is no alternative to desire.

If it is in writing, this distortion of heart and head, then it is in me. The fatal blow to my residency here in all the places I keep company. I keep company.

Reading my body—your body for signs of what it is I am, of what writing makes me. The moon made an author out of me with her scooped smile staring in the clear night and the pavement turning purple in the tropical storm made me think it write down the way the air feels when the sky lets go of its burden of wet and warmth.

The author is scooped hands. The author is drunk. The author is well enough alone. The author is glass bottles and recycled paper, cat litter, orange glass and folds of skin. Wondrous and taken for granted. She is watching your child and peeling carrots, scrubbing the bathroom tiles and remembering your birthday.

Shuffling cards, the king and queens crossed. Reproducing<sup>83</sup> the dive or fall, grip and release. Plot, breath, instinct—self-preservation, availing the path not taken.

I take your hand and go the distance.

Parting seas of secrets,

Driving the doorway,

Shutting out the night with that

Unholy light on.

---

<sup>83</sup> The language you speak is made up of words that are killing you. (Wittig “*Les Guérillères*” 14).

The past becomes a book, a way of knowing how to handle the environment of story and yearning.

Hardcover in my hands

Spine extending, collapsing

Stuck at page forty-three.

Can't read on from the peeling skin and fertile ground.

You stand in the corner of the room by the stairs with your head in your hands.

*I don't want to grow old with this shit, A. I can't.*

Close the book and needle the crease in the spine spinning it on the smooth laminate desk.

I throw you my copy of *The Story of The Eye* and you begin to read aloud and laugh.

Piss everywhere, smell urine in the office next to the women's toilets, the only convenience of my position.

Eyeballs and boiled eggs, sacrilege and sanctity locked in a closet of old wood and expectation. You fall to the floor with the book in your hands laughing hysterically your thin legs jutting out from underneath your torso kicking the wall and the pin board.

Photographs and postcards fall to the floor; you wrestle and eat them discarding the text in your revelry of starvation and intimacy. I watch you for hours writhing in pain, in pleasure.

I do not wish to grow old

And find myself in the corner of a room. By birth, we raised a  
hollow light and drove the street speedy wild.

Settling again, your flip the soiled pages of Bataille at my feet.

Sweat in palms, pitchers of water with slices of lemon<sup>84</sup>.

There isn't any way out—

Cul-de-sac.

Drink

Water, wine.

The neighbours do not say hello over the fence.

Greek coffee makes waves,

Someone reading flocks of gulls or

A pack of wolves

In the stain.

Little girls want to be gypsies before they know what it means.

---

<sup>84</sup> Her eyelids flicker. She looks like someone who should be bathed in red light. For seeing things, for wanting to fuck, for feeling pressed, for wanting to make or break, wanting out, anywhere. (Van Niekerk 39).

These scenes of working restraint to a halt and desire to pebbles—turning the convex button of your body to a worried rosary. The chips will fall.

We lie on the floor crumpled together as pages. Drafts of that poem or this article printed and marked up with your stub of a pencil, the twin of your perfect angry clit. Waiting, wanting, we turn time into water and the purple of that space between childhood and violence, between lovers and friends, makes women of us.

Hips turn time into purple

Makes women of us.

Childhood and violence

Makes women of us.

The ceiling crumbles as the weight of your body pulls on the fixture. The crack that always divides the room opens and starts its whisper coming down slow and true:

Rain starting now

Smoke up

There's grass in the yard

Needs cutting.

Like the word. Split in two. Cut into quarters.

We split against the assumption of lust as love of home as heartache.

Lain with a devil, a twist of bone and skin. Wild spirals, urgency, and drunkenness, testimony—a devil is full of words. Restless, relentless, this devil injects me with tendrils, like silhouettes, creeps up alongside me, walking, rushing to the point of disconnection—the disconnect folds pillows reach stable brace the wave a little red a little out to sea the words roll in like fistfuls of blood bloom on my skin this big bad bruise this reading Genet by candlelight—*this is not the bed I want to bring you to*<sup>85</sup>.

---

<sup>85</sup> But the waves, as they neared the shore, were robbed of light, and fell in one long concussion, like a wall falling, a wall of grey stone, unpierced by any chink of light. (Woolf “*The Waves*” 149).

You know what salt water does.

Corroding, caustic—the other side of light.

I buried your books by the apricot tree.

A square drawn with a magnet,  
Green lawn in the centre of town. This is where I meet the writer  
Violet Silence for the first time. In her black hoodie, low jeans,  
and sneakers, she reaches for my attention across the bar and lets  
her thin voice scratch my senses.

*I'm a rat*, she says.

It is years before we meet again with any intention. Quickly the  
intention is to fuck, but then it changes as intentions do. I write  
a novella about our affair before it happens. I called it '*The Blue  
Motel*'<sup>86</sup>.

---

<sup>86</sup> The woman at the desk wore a t-shirt that was far too big with  
a graphic printed on the front. 'I Took the Plunge' it said at the  
top and 'Niagara Falls' in bright blue writing at the bottom. She  
handed us the keys to room forty-seven and you laughed flipping  
them cautiously in your hands. You said something inaudible  
about Robert Grillet and I just looked ahead and tried not listen  
to my heart beating wildly in my chest. I tried not to run from  
you and from this fated consequence. —*The Blue Motel*.



The city is singing her name,

Chipped concrete tells a story in ash, crumbling along the  
bitumen.

Monochrome portrait to the one I love, always dresses in black  
and white.

A picture of violence and indifference, the muse of deep dark  
ocean, mistress of my twenty-seven, haunts me, haunts me.

I go to war for this masculine beauty, go to war for the truth  
about women.

Colour stains the photograph.

Time refuses the story of her eyes which are  
tightly closed in the black and white photograph.

Her lips soft, cover her teeth in a half smile.

Twenty-seven years crash into  
trinkets and the tyranny of distance,  
that's what my mother names it.

Words shake from between her lips the story of the mother, girl, and grandmother is one of blood. Pathways run between us through our blood and in our voices and on our skin. I have my grandmother's chin, my mother's eyes, her mouth. What she told me after Election Day on the beach makes me put my fingers in my mouth. I try to swallow history whole. I try to swallow and keep down a map of England that is made up of silences, of pursed lips, and longer than long embraces. I try to swallow the image of a man running after a train, of crying on the train, of the railway itself as these veins that pulse with yearning and with pleasure and knowledge. The strictest secret of our lives, that which we do not even dare say to each other but have running through our veins and travelling on our railways between the present and past.

Somewhere in those years are the words—*let go of me*<sup>87</sup>.

---

<sup>87</sup> I wish you happiness and health

but I cannot complete your journey

I am a visitor.

Everything I touch

causes me real suffering

and does not belong to me.

There is always someone who says:

This is mine.—The Suspended Step of the Stork.

I try to stifle, swallow, and destroy the memory of that Father's  
desire.

Polishing my shoes with an old black t-shirt I know that history  
and desire live so that I can exist. Born of terror, born into the  
deep silent secrets I struggle against my body, the impulse to cry,  
the will to go quieter and quieter, to mourn family and fresh milk.

Brandy and plums,

Hands like bomb sirens.

An old man's trousers stained with piss.

He sits in a pub in Manchester just like a pub in Newcastle. A  
day like any other until the news comes in.

She is dead.

I come back to my body after leaving it on the beach with the  
world of my ancestors. I pick up our bags, dust the sand off our  
towels, call the dog, and head for the city.

The note reads:

*I do not mean to hurt you, but I cannot suffer this despair anymore. I am broken. I loved you, no matter what anybody says*<sup>88</sup>.

---

<sup>88</sup> To know that one does not write for the other, to know that these things I am going to write will never cause me to be loved by the one I love (the other), to know that writing compensates for nothing, sublimates nothing, that it is precisely there where you are not-this is the beginning of writing. (Barthes "*A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*" 100).

Beginning to write,  
Disturbing the confidentiality of space,  
white erupts into song,  
defies beat, skips,  
the centre of the note is a swirl<sup>89</sup>.  
If I could sing, I would know what to say,  
Close,  
her arms around me,  
I search for courage,  
I need so much of it.  
But *you are brave*,  
she says.  
Pushing a finger along my skin,  
but you *are* brave.  
Panic in my elbows,  
knees ache,  
I get on top of her and laugh.  
Let me dip again my spoon,  
and taste fruit,

---

<sup>89</sup> Within my dream last night the words presented themselves as if in an audition for my own story, but as I tried to read them they refused to stabilise. Trying to fit my tongue around them I realised I was again an infantile stutterer and the panic took hold. Campbell "*Prowler*" 188).

green papaya,  
cigarettes,  
salt,  
artificial light,  
folds of melody  
slope along peaks of sheets arranged around our bodies,  
pencils out,  
knees up,  
nestle between each column of flesh,  
how can I be sure?  
Hurting my pride,  
you cry instead.  
Distortion, press my faulty pedal.  
Instinct to abandon this lover's text or bed,  
You walk all over me.  
Kissing as if it could make a difference now.  
Peeling the cracked skin on my lips,  
Taking your disease with me when I go.  
Baudelaire's syphilis marks pages of your notebook which are  
skin. Shifting softly in bed I write the poem again. A rotation, a  
wheel of day and night and skin to touch.  
This is the day,  
This is the day,  
I can tell anyone who cares to know that I have it too.  
A poet's fate,

Madness and sex.

In the white space of a page there is room for collision.

All words ride against all other words.

It is an exercise in friction and release— redemption.

*Be wary of redemption.*

That sickness comes down on me

Colliding in blood

Flowers drop their petals in the dark

Making dirt

Aching for light.

In every photograph of Monique Wittig she has on a hat.

Wide brimmed and tilted on her head.

A paperboy's cap, cravat billowing below her chin,

She looks directly into the lens

And sees me.



Yesterday<sup>90</sup>, after returning books to the library, a large stack I'd been threatened over for months, the librarian tells me I am your mistress.

I let the word curl up under my tongue.

What a strange thing to be.

Not desired,

Flung to action, to dread by the history of men and women.

At their mercy, yet you and I don't belong in their world, but

Are still bound by their scripture of

Right and wrong,

Of mine, mine, mine.

Once you said that you were my *man* and called me *son*.

Boy, often enough.

Then covered my breasts with your hands and kissed my neck,

Pushing my legs open with yours.

You called me boy

And

Drank my tears

And wrote Romantic poetry.

---

<sup>90</sup> In fact, "today" is a word which only suicides ought to be allowed to use; it has no meaning for other people. It merely signified a day like all of the rest... (Bachmann 2).

This was all to teach me a lesson, what a good fuck won't fix. *I guess you want these*, holding my manuscript, lead pencil all lines and correction.

I *want* to write like a saint, write like a stain.

Orphaned into daylight, these are the same eyes writing,

this sun is the same sun

written by Monique Wittig<sup>91</sup>.

This body is the same body,

Collapsing in parts, rotting, open, desiring,

written by Monique Wittig.

These are

Monique Wittig's words,

Eyes,

Fingers,

Breath is breath,

Monique's teeth are rotting in my head,

Her short hair,

MONIQUE WITTIG'S HAT ON MY HEAD.

Cracked heels,

Peeling lips,

Nervousness—all this belongs to Monique Wittig.

---

<sup>91</sup> *I have swallowed your arm the weather is clear the sea warm. The sun enters m/y eyes. Your fingers form a fan in m/y oesophagus, then come together to thrust further. (Wittig "The Lesbian Body" 58.*

Oh, I,  
Oh, me,  
(Orgasmically)<sup>92</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> *I seek you m/y radiant one across the throng. (Witting “The Lesbian Body” 165).*

I resolve

To accumulate meaning instead.

Your limbs hang from the ceiling, ornaments, tributes to your sex, tributes to your suffering.

Red polish on nails, you curl your hands in time with the breeze, in recognition of breath and blood. The landscape shifts, rising tide, floorboards peel, concrete cracks in resistance, in fellowship with trees. Curve, cleft, eucalypt fingers shake. I am afraid of you looking down from the light, looking down on me.

The contours of my face obscure, shadows fall too far and lean, I am nowhere when I am below you. Below you, suspended Love, I tie my feet to the roots of trees, I break the earth with each step. Contradiction, My Love. Contradiction, the sharp relief of dirt running to meet the street, running to meet the river.

Grime on surface skin the foundation shoots sickness takes a breath. Through the city, sick spray floats, coats statues and sleepers. Rubbish bins, streetlights, bus stops, all are made wet with the river's cough and sneeze, river's breath is deep. In this room where you are a mobile, a dreamcatcher, slinking, drooping from above, the river is here too, the ocean is here too, so are our fathers and mothers and each of our loves. The history of our world is wrapped up in this moment, when you look down at me for the last time.

Objects take on the world, take up so much space in it.

Cracking glass,

Heroics and the dustbin,

Wounds speaking first.

Yesterday by the tree, tomorrow at the sink, a year ago in bed at  
night.

Time comes to kneel at the feet of children.

At your feet, I was a child, (as a child I spoke as a child)

You spoke plainly and quietly teaching me the song of the rain.

Yellow glass,

Jug, jar, vase.

The op shop peppered with saints,

Their blessings ancient and wild,

Pray harder for Liberace.

Daylight runs fast,

Fresh fish on the counter,

Butcher's paper

Holds flesh.

Multiplying night,

Doors talk in high pitch,

Opening and closing,

Spilling,

Secrets.

Prayer tilts

The morning,

Confessional, sweet,

Sins are not mine,

They belong to Monique Wittig.

The Piano Teacher is a film about True Love<sup>93</sup>.

Do you know what you want?

Do you know what you want?

Are you ready for this?

Are you ready for this?

(Lesbian questions)

Batteries run flat—

Let's light this place; you and I with pale flesh.

Turn down the world of script and talk, go down, Moses, the river is waiting.

Blood on my hands, face, eyes red doors into fine sorrow.

Go down Moses the river is waiting.

Open flood gates send bird nests floating out to sea, letters and maps corralling, drains, mouths of estuaries, veins, and so much remembering pour.

I set fire to the bank of bark and stone waiting for you to slip by running on the river's surface.

The frames of doors are queerly marked, prisoners offer themselves up and flee. You and I are walking thinking how to explain a three-day disappearance to the women we live with.

We were at the poetry reading and you said *let's get a room*.

---

<sup>93</sup> "After all, love is built on banal things." Erika Kohut in The Piano Teacher.

I am vulnerable,  
a vertiginous slit  
with nothing, but a voice  
to mumble through the cacophony of failed connection,  
looming, thread, a wheel made of bone.  
I sing. I sing. I sing.  
Thighs are literary devices,  
loose and uncanny<sup>94</sup>.  
Scarred and tattooed.  
The memory of touch and blood,  
smelling stains of pleasure and pain.  
Naked and falling about  
or so often stuffed into denim and trod around.  
They bounce with steps and  
cover seats,  
spill over edges and are strong and weak,  
bending bone and shuddering.  
Spilling flesh, making these lines too fat, cloudy like boiled  
bones. I use thighs to say white, to say page, as a map, as a  
destination, a room, quadrangle. Squares drawn with magnets,

---

<sup>94</sup> “The growing gap between that Rita and myself is the space I can invent in. If I could loop from space to space like the gulls, trace new trajectories...Ones I haven’t been able to follow” (Campbell “*Lines of Flight*” 203-204).



grey in the middle, squares drawn with fingers in sand, tide  
coming in and out, this is where the heart is at the edge of the  
ocean—home.

I like the way we sound together

Touch,

A monogram on the inside of the thigh.

Time is a monogram.

My initials all over your body

in saliva and sweat and c o m e.

Peel open that book of your breasts

All their fine lines and loops of colour—

Purple and pearl.

Desire to be heard by the other,

Gold spun of

Fumbling,

Caresses, I suppose something like light

Or pain.

Acrobat, fly to my grip.

The swing,

The split,

Your name missing in the balance.

Still high, walking a thin line between past and present.

Tip toe along

The fine string of desire

Here waiting for the world to crash through the silence.

The warm murmur of breath,  
Sharp inhale,  
Jumping from the board.  
A diver breaks the surface.  
Charge, water unfolding against her skin peeling through air.  
Penetrating the quiet surface, the undisturbed blue accepts her  
Pointed hands and the slope of her head tucked below her  
elbows,  
The bend of her back,  
A little straighter now.  
Her legs follow, toes over toes,  
Her grip slips,  
I read underwater.

Altitude of flesh,  
A horse hangs from the ceiling.  
Contraction of death written on the skin,  
The hair soft except for at the root.  
The root of it,  
Still growing after death,  
But not enough,  
Not the same,  
The carcass emptied and  
Loaded with tar.  
Are you a diver or an acrobat? The river or the sea? I write you

now, knowing that space expanding<sup>95</sup>.  
I fall, am falling,  
Lying at your feet, hidden from the light,  
From the weight of time.  
This is my major fault,  
I am nostalgic in advance.  
An acrobat holds on before they let go.  
Your mother is a woman  
and you are not.  
A queer girl is a pain,  
A birth pain telling that story of sexuality and children.  
All of that maternal touch, unfolding in screams.  
Back away, she let me down and trusted me when I said no.  
Stain,  
Write,  
Marks on pages,  
In light that is black.  
I look at him like Jesus, devotion can stop time and I guess it  
does. Ten years later I think of him often enough as some prophet  
who knew how to dig holes in the skin of young women, who  
knew how to teach them about depth.  
A diver must make a leap of faith.

---

<sup>95</sup> To see yourself as who you were ten years ago can be very strange indeed. (Kraus "*I Love Dick*" 174).

Who will write the history of tears? (Barthes “*A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*” 180).

My tears,

No longer belong

broken into lines.

Writing to spend more time in your smell,

I collapse on the bed.

I tell you that I’ve never read Pasolini,

You laugh. It doesn’t matter.

I peel an orange which is your face,

Checking behind the mole on your jawline.

Behind the oval you trim the hairs on,

Is a scroll of parchment drenched in blood.

I pull the scroll out with my blunt little fingers and you hiss.

I ask you to read aloud,

The scroll hidden in your face.

This is your father’s face,

A little prettier and finer at the nose.

Your teeth are straight, have always been.

I open your eyelids with my thumb and index finger,

You smell your own cunt on my hands,

These slits now connected

I write on your eyeballs with my tongue,

Scratching the blue with the tip of my tongue,

Its grainy bulbs hit the centre of your pupil,

Movement comes slow, tick-tocking with my tongue  
Along the edges of the eyelids,  
The lips,  
Feeling the tickle of lashes against the wet red phallus I present.  
Tears mingle with saliva, I drip all over your face.  
I attend to both eyes, getting frantic and weak,  
Feeling the danger in the base of your neck.  
Vertigo sets in, the well of your stare wet and incomplete.  
You cry my love,  
Over and over.  
I push open the eyes again and again,  
To kiss the glass round of your eyes,  
To dine on the sweet sap of your tears,  
To mix my sex and your gaze,  
Finally real,  
Finally exhausted.  
I love the walls around you,  
Skin.  
I run my hands along your walls.  
It is safe on the outside,  
Knowing that you want me.  
Between,  
You read again the abandoned child's memoir.  
You measure time by the space between lines of prose.  
One point five.

Double spaced.

You pick at the spine of *Our Lady of the Flowers*.

I lick your shins.

You begin in French.

I do not speak French,

But I can sing.

These walls are double bricked

Double spaced

On your skin

Fast run of air

The suction

Of the vacuum of

Time, blue time.

Clouds charcoal against the last of evening,

The stray pink street light stares through the window,

Paper cut with the shadow of blinds.

I wait for your voice to come back,

For the novel to end,

For text to erupt,

A body made of words,

Breathing slow and even.

Fruit too ripe<sup>96</sup> to eat;  
I search for that deep flesh.  
Shadow of touch,  
*Beautiful bodies*  
Wrapped in sleep,  
Grip—  
I want to know your bones  
Sliding  
Beneath clear skin.

“She demanded to see my journals, saying that she could, from my personal writings, determine whether I was a true poet or an imposter. This was the first time I lied to the great poet: I told her that I didn’t keep a journal. The truth, however, was that I was keeping a journal, but discovered that writing was related to

---

<sup>96</sup>All night dreaming of a body

space weights on differently from mine

We are making love in the street

the traffic flows off from us

pouring back like a sheet

the asphalt stirs with tenderness

there is no dismay

we move together like underwater plants—Adrienne Rich,

*Diving into the Wreck.*

obsession. I knew it was unhealthy to obsess over the great poet; therefore, I stopped writing. With no voice, I could not make tangible my obsession, thereby ignored it, thereby did not have to live with the physical proof of the shame of it. She said that I was insipid. She said that I should groom<sup>f</sup> my nails<sup>g</sup>.

*f: groom as in marriage.*

*g: nails as in fuck.”*

(Bouilly 32)<sup>97</sup>.

You ask me to be forgiving and

I

Insist on worship.

---

<sup>97</sup> Truthfully, I never gave in to my obsession with the writer Violet Silence. Yes, we fucked and left our marriages (which would otherwise, outside of the context of an affair between writers, be called relationships, but for the purposes of this story must insist on being referred to only as marriages—so that when we *return*, it is holy). Truthfully, I never put it down. The weight of it keeps my back straight. She brought me to my knees and I choked on the question. It was the thought that I believed in, not the body of the writer Violet Silence. My hesitance to get rid of the weight, to fuck her without shame, was all the evidence she needed. Perhaps, it wasn't only that I did not love her, but that I couldn't. Prevented by my disgust disguised as concern. When the poet walked out of the bookshop, it was too late.



I've waited sixty-eight years to walk  
On your water.  
I search your skin for stories:  
Appendix scar,  
Skin cancer removed from the right shoulder blade,  
I could totally come finally in the right place  
This word means this and blah blah  
Fine blood-broken lines behind the knees,  
Tunnels in palms,  
The road soft with time leading back to the collision of  
Head and heart.

I march into my own abjection,  
Not realising I am already there.  
The movement is  
Simple,  
But sticky, oddly still.  
Terrain wet, unforgiving,  
Shoes slip, squeak,  
Everything bald in the light.

This is the moment I understand my sickness,  
I am terminal—  
Like a poem.

Circling, funnelling, falling

I find refuge in the

Disconnect

Always

Replayed

And to be polite

You pretend not to notice

Not to have heard before

The story of the widows

And drunken dancing

You smile at me

And cry again

Just to be sure.

A dream

I can't shake.

A poem saying

*Saliva, saliva, saliva.*

I think of our mouths,

Joined with a thick elastic band of

Spit.

A screen door opens to a party,

Everyone young and drunk.

This is my first house.

This is where I take your notes to heart.

This is where I put my bloody mouth to your eager lips,

Knowing the violence at the tree.

I get under my sickness

And write.

Against  
The door  
Holding fort  
My legs open  
Mosquitos hum  
December in my veins  
The time and  
Heat  
Of the hard reach  
Of your hand  
Filling my<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>98</sup> And 'I' becomes a euphemism. The gaps of identity. Glory holes. The unsaid. The unspeakable. All bound by the parallels of two bodies cut at angles to find the lean. The one that leaves behind imagination. The one that does not ache but is.

Begin again, thread of want,

I left you,

And you never asked.

**...I was never them, but I felt a lot...** (Myles 82).

Straining to hear what the thunder said,

You who have known poverty,

Whose flesh has not gone soft with the years,

Darted like fish,

Between my teeth,

Under my arms,

Between my legs,

With your courageous mouth.

I am wearing out the lines in my palms,

Watching blank skin grow over itself.

The time on hand to wait for you

A glove of day and night

This waiting for you

Is stricter than nuns

Deadlier than dark and light.

One day  
I walk off into the library  
And go to  
Where the novels  
Weigh down the shelves  
All that groaning  
Goes on  
In the silence  
I stare into the toothy librarian's eyes  
She walks past me  
Covering her nose  
I find everything I read  
Interesting  
And spend time  
Running my fingertips over words like  
Conditioning  
Slavery  
Sex  
Rape  
Incest  
All those domestic promises  
Like  
Slavery  
Rape  
Incest

Dishes  
Knickers  
Dinner  
Will  
Door  
Beat  
Discipline  
Children  
Women  
Man of the House  
I tried to run my fingers along  
The bark of my family tree  
But it  
Kissed me  
And left pieces of itself in my skin—splintered.  
I saw blood rise around the little flecks  
Of pain  
And decided it  
Was ok  
Walk this way,  
Down my arms,  
Down my spine.  
Flat footed and feverish;  
I have nothing to confess.  
There is no need to choose between sapphires and pearls...

I crouch over the bucket  
And unfold my bowel  
I carry my  
Shit  
And piss  
Around  
Hanging  
From a rack  
I carry on my shoulders.  
Heavier and heavier,  
I march into the university  
With piss spilling over onto  
The old carpet  
The fluorescent lights pump  
And cigarettes sing  
In the elevator.



I have bled time over again

like a full bucket

seeing my own juice

caught in a bucket

it doesn't bother me anymore

there is no competition to win

that's never clear

or new

you feel your insides turn to mush

they swim and gargle

do not know any better

they too are growing old

writing their names in sand

this is what it is in my body

the weight of someone else's organs

meaning

and not

the tide coming in

in a fist.

I write this for my love  
Who slips between the pages of Genet and Celine,  
Laughing while  
Stoned  
And hungry.  
*It amazes me, she says*  
*How little food humans need to survive.*  
I cook her steak  
And we go to bed.

Written in gold,  
Her sex  
Is quotation.

Standing at the desk,  
Pre-orgasmic chatter,  
What are you writing?  
Turn attention to body—  
This book's got a hold on me.  
What are you writing?  
My fingers spread pages  
I want to relate  
Myself  
To beautiful women  
Words like theirs,  
Time and lines,  
Cloth, pages  
Like denim  
And lust.  
What are you writing?  
The worst thing anyone can say about a women  
Is that  
She is one.  
And so,  
I go on saying  
Woman  
Woman  
Woman  
At myself

At others  
I write it on the walls.  
I call myself a whore.  
As she  
Is she  
Was she  
And I type  
A typist  
Not a writer  
I don't know how to recover  
From sentiment  
I don't know how to recover  
From baring down  
On self  
This  
Silly  
Birthing  
I keep going over  
In my body  
Pushing  
To pursue  
femininity  
butchness  
Without  
Ever

Saying  
Pleasure  
Who are my children?  
Imagined little trinkets of  
Every fuck I ever had.  
I am to you  
A mother  
A father  
And fucked you  
To teach you a lesson  
And took  
Your slimey  
Desire  
And made it mine  
Pressed my face to your chest  
And let out a hollow  
Cry.

Come back to me  
And to this varied artifice  
Text,  
Expression,  
What's the difference?  
Peoples bodies are so fucked up.

I remember mine,  
Thick  
And  
Loose.  
My body, my body,  
It was just yesterday.

I felt my body slip away  
I was writing  
I was typing  
Like a good girl  
And my whole  
Figure  
Just  
Looped  
The drain  
And went south.

My body  
My body  
It was only yesterday  
I was holding her  
Like a bird  
In my hand  
I was holding my body like a bird in my hand  
Then I started writing.

In the beginning,  
That's where I started.  
I announced itself  
Like the first cry  
Like absence of sound.  
Silence  
So loud  
So  
Overgrown  
A vine—  
Wound anticipation.  
I held my little body in my hands  
Like a bird  
Gone quiet.

At some point,



The tip perhaps,  
I can guarantee you  
Will recognise  
The voice of this  
Piece.  
At some point  
All revelations  
Will cease to be  
Revelatory,  
You answer from your throat,  
You tear down the walls I have written into being,  
You, with the force of your will,  
State the obvious.

I have chosen  
Oh, God (*orgasmic*)  
To liberate myself  
Into the  
Disaster that is my love for you.

I had this wonderful accident;  
I thought of your mother and her old tattoos  
And weepy eyes—are you disgusted with me now, Darling?

I thought it was funny  
Like that dream  
Where she read a letter to your father  
Oh, Charlie (*orgasmic*)  
Forgive me.

I am sure  
My teeth are rotting in my head.  
She laughs,  
Thinking I am not serious.  
But who or what is more serious  
Than a sore tooth?

Threatening all day,  
Cover thick and warm,  
Pull to water, swim.

When I met you,  
The grass was yellow.  
End of season,  
You pulled weed skeletons with your fingers,  
From dry, cracked earth.  
The grass was yellow,  
When we met.

\*

in a heat of blood  
someone lying on the bathroom floor  
and your call  
summoning my senses  
all that lost  
on practicality  
for the sake of others  
I fled

\*

*What will become of our deaths?* You ask.  
They will be slow.

Back to work—I love you,  
grass is green,  
cold is thick,  
oil is hot,  
money run out,  
no way home,  
so much earth to push through our fingers,  
you lie in the sun,  
you call my name,  
your tears hit my face,  
I am next you.  
Despite everything,  
I still love you.  
On the days I work,  
I have to drink.  
I cannot bear my own voice.  
My father's nose on my face,  
Drinking after work.  
Everywhere I am surrounded by  
Distinguished idiots.  
Bring me back to life with your bony fingers.

This  
Cunty  
Exegesis<sup>99</sup>  
Is  
Killing  
Me  
Making  
Me  
Nuts  
Don't  
You  
Agree  
My  
Love?

---

by Jacques Derrida.

---

<sup>99</sup> "Exegesis": the crazy person's search for proof that they're not crazy. (Kraus "*I Love Dick*" 187).

thinking about it  
of a lady in the city  
the city is a great idea  
Ideas are just the same as your own sounds and a bit more  
Idea for the new heads of the city and  
The city of grace  
The new world is going on in this article  
That is the first thing to be done.

First time, I was just thinking about it and I was just thinking  
about you and then maybe I should be able to see the other  
things I have.

In your house and your sun, you can see what you want.

Work is on the way  
This is what we are doing and where we can be.

I haven't been able to say goodbye  
I predict I never will  
Even if I have to give up the plateaus of pleasure and toil  
Of sex and the morning  
I will know your face in the dark  
That will have to be enough  
When the sun shows herself to the day  
Making it so

Making it so lovely and dense  
The path is made of soy cappuccinos  
The path is deeply silent  
The path is the only way forward and back  
I pivot endlessly unable to choose between the beginning and  
the end  
*The beginning of love kills me and the end too both equally  
shattering, equally final*  
I struggle under your words, under your body  
I am afraid of you, My Love.  
I am afraid.  
What can I do with that fear?  
That deer-in-lights frenzy of passion and terror—what can I do  
with my fear, My Love?  
Oh, you—oh, me—orgasmically.  
I wrestle the spirals of your hair in dreams  
I push my fingers along your arms watching the hair prick with  
attention  
I kiss the big mole on your face  
I lay beside you in the sun  
You talk to her on the phone and I know your love  
Monique Wittig's hat on my head,  
I tip it and leave you for the last time.

Your mother reads her letter in my dream<sup>100</sup>:

*Dear Charlie*, I hear her croak. The rest of the dream and the letter move quickly past my eyes. I snap at the words flying past with my mouth, with my hands. I cannot catch your mother's tongue. I cannot let her rest it by her row of yellow teeth, silver fillings at the back and sides. The kohl around her eyes wriggling and dark. Once long winged lines framed her blue eyes, not now, not in the dream. She holds a loaf of bread in her left hand and a large knife in her right. You switch an axe around in your hands creeping up and down the hallway silent and lean. The slide of your mother falling down the concrete steps, the way each step knocks her spine shaping her into a zig zag, the zig zag your mother. The light is on in the bathroom, exhaust fan breaks the song of my sleep corralling me to the known world, to waking alone. What do you do when you dream? *I do not moan.*

I dream of your father's ears twitching at the sound of his name.

*Oh, Charlie.* All those female whispers ringing around the drum.

A swirl of your daughter's fingers. I dream of the end of love. I

dream of the end of sound. I dream of the cruel edge of the

---

<sup>100</sup> Lesbos, land of hot and languorous nights,

That make the hollow-eyed girls, amorous

Of their own bodies, caress before their mirrors

The ripe fruits of their nubility, O sterile pleasure!

Lesbos, land of hot and languorous nights (Baudelaire 233).



world<sup>101</sup>.

*Why do you always do that? You say. Bring mothers into it; it isn't sexy.*

I apologise and keep scratching the pimple on my right cheek.

*Calm down.* You pull my hand away from my face and slide it inside your shirt. Your heart is rattling an old country tune and I stand beside you while the glassy nods to you with my hand on your breast. It is time to go home.

---

<sup>101</sup> What are to us the laws of the just and unjust

Virgins with sublime hearts, honor of these islands;

Your religion, like any other, is august,

And love will laugh at Heaven and at Hell!

What are to us the laws of the just and unjust? (Baudelaire 233).

I never saw the end of love,  
But my life will end with the sudden stop of my heart,  
Pepper on the bench,  
I die with your glasses in my fist.  
Pages of unwritten letters line the kitchen table,  
That big piece of wood from Sylvia's ex,  
Oh well.  
I carved your name into its skin while you slept on the floor,  
While you slept.  
There was time we didn't take  
and you made promises that went with the night.  
The only way I know how to love is...

give up the

weight of time

promise

complete surrender of your legs

palms open

watch yourself

from inside

jostling

guts churning

acid flips

complete surrender of your legs

like wine

diving

bruises

and sleep

complete surrender of your legs

captive eyes

roll and wander

skin of your lover

warm

slack

touched

breath

or

blood

complete surrender of your legs

water

sweeping

pulling weeds

an eight-hour drive

this long roll of memory

sparks

nodes of memory

inside

slowing down time

by growing out your hair

and

the

complete surrender of your legs

Before you knew,

Before you could be sure,

I shut down the world of your eye.

One solid punch,

I took you out and made that blue red love on your skin.

You held my chin and slapped my face before the poet emerged  
from the bookshop.

This, I won't speak about.

Force on my body.

Beat of my heart.

Blue of my vein.

Exhale green and time was pink when you struck me,

With your world of want.

This, I will not speak of.

Force on my body.

Beat of my heart.

Click of my breath.

Tip of my toes.

Blue as skin.

Are you watching me?

I scribble all over your body in the night.

Force of my body.

Beat of my heart.

Thud.

Thud.

The poet comes too late.

I turn my face,

And smile when he calls my name.

We sit on the wall smoking cigarette after cigarette

Talking down the night.

*Let's get a room* you say.

Vinegar, vinegar, vinegar,

Pepper,

First addiction,

Lemon with the rind on,

Olive brine

From the jar

Gulp, gulp, gulp.

MTV

Sex

Nicotine

And roses.

I hate  
To see my name  
Written in places  
Like curves  
Of elbows  
On the bathroom glass  
I love my name  
In sweat  
On your skin,  
but can't write it in a book to make it mine.  
This name  
I got  
For being born into  
Yellow  
Blue  
White  
I am not looking for my likeness in you.



Art—  
Where everything is past,  
Troubled fire  
And blankets of sky  
Blue and grey in the middle.  
Knowing the limit of my fate,  
Those shadows  
Touch skin  
And  
Song.  
The fine point  
Smudge  
Apricot jam  
Apricot jam  
Bread and butter.

Foundations are ruins,  
What is left tends to be that  
Which is closest to the earth.

(Am I going to give myself a nervous breakdown?)

Blood fascinates me  
Especially  
The blood you donate  
When it rolls around in the plastic bags  
They zap it with radiation  
Just a light dose  
To kill your cold  
Before  
Someone who needs it  
Gets your blood  
But first it has to go into a bag  
Like a purse of blood  
I think of all the blood I've lost  
How  
I've soaked it up and thrown it away  
Would it respond to radiation?  
All my abject cancellations,  
Tampons full of gold.

Her little legs shake. Climbing the rope ladder is her least favourite part. She loves the fall and hitting the pit of soft foam squares, rolling onto her belly and wriggling. The climb is where she sees the distance between her and everyone else, between her and the ground. Her classmates wait in line, even start climbing the ladder before she's had her turn. Taking the bar in her hands, she swings out, but holds on and lets her legs drop straight. Hanging like a pin from the ceiling, she stares down at the foam pit and feels the pull of gravity, her shoulder blades move up, her spine straightens, face turning red, holding her breath, she doesn't let go, but allows herself to fall. Cracking the peace of the foam pit, her flat feet penetrate that squishy pond. She finds herself close to the bottom of the pit. Panic sets in. It's warm between the large squares, she can see the children's trapeze above her and hear the teacher yelling for the other children to stay put. She liked falling, but didn't want to be buried.

I am a splinter

Made of bone

Buried in flesh

And blood too

Still on that

Warm spell

How do I get to that next level?

You know this isn't me

And I know

You're not listening

I wrote this all down for my lover

So she would stop talking to me

And then

When I finished typing

She dumped me

When I say you

I mean *you*

And you too

When I say she

I she

Me

Somewhere

We

There

Are so many of us

There was a time

There was a place

Some of us didn't make it

There was a girl

There was a girl

Some of us didn't make it

Those trips

Are for hippies on film

Nobody goes on group acid benders anymore

Because drugs are expensive

Everyone poor

Is getting drunk

And recycling the bottles  
We sit and talk about blood for hours  
Me and my friend  
Her husband is out of town  
We sit and talk blood  
And guts too  
I put a lot of garlic in our dinner.

Think of the planet  
There will be no place for the sick and dying  
Because place will evaporate  
It will be the end of the movie  
Of the world  
You're living in  
I'll be there  
Hyperventilating  
And trying  
Really hard to stay quiet  
Crouched over my dog  
She doesn't deserve this.

Back in my body  
Wondering how to end it  
Which way  
Would be less  
Like  
The end of a story  
And more  
Like  
Cut to black  
No resolution  
Not even  
Negative  
But over  
And maybe peaceful  
I was back in my body  
To find a way out  
But I got lost  
In my intestines  
Small  
And large  
Dodging bullets  
And pulling fibres from the wet sides of flesh  
As I walked toward the only logical conclusion  
My asshole.



The diver, in her navy blue swimsuit, watches the arches of her feet go up and down against the wet rubber matt. Brushing her hair behind her ears, she tucks her shoulders up and sets her feet over the side of the pool. It's cold, seven in the morning, a before school swim. Sitting on the ladder feeling the grooves cut into her thighs, Ms Leslie blows the whistle and she lets herself float towards the centre of the lane. It's dark outside, on winter mornings the water hasn't warmed up. *Get moving then, Girls.* The little diver moves towards the wall and pushes herself off kicking and pulling back water—left, right, breathe, left, right, breathe. Forward through the lane, her stream of movement belies her little body, the break in olive skin towards the shoulder, tan lines in winter, mark of tomboy, of no frills, no pigtails. Her long dark hair sprawls around her in a splash. She dips turning to come back down the lane and swallows a thick strand. Coughing underwater she stumbles into a ball reaching for the wall water shoots through her nostrils, she swallows a mouthful of water before unhooking the lick of hair from the back of her throat and pushing her torso up onto the edge letting her arms hang over. Ms Leslie runs over and slaps her on the back, realising she is fine, she pats her more gently rubbing a circle between her shoulder blades. *Come on now, you're alright.* Ms Leslie snaps a rubber band from her wrist and pulls the little diver's hair back into a ponytail. *Long hair is such a nuisance, isn't it? Yeah,* says the little diver looking up at the old

face framed with cropped grey hair. She stands and for the first time the little diver notices how long her legs are, from this angle she's a giant. The skin rolls at the top of her knees, her legs are tanned too, even this far into winter. Freckles on her face, she blows her whistle and smiles. Right, left, breathe.

I wasn't going to tell you a story

I wasn't going to tell *you* a story

But everything I have

Adds up to as much

I was born

I was born

I was born

Then

I was a girl

I searched for a way to be something else

I started writing on my arms and legs

I started using my body

I started fucking

I started making pictures in the dirt on my skin

I started building castles with my hair

Winding bridges and gates

Using my toenails as tiles

*Do you want to stand here and finish this story?*

Yes.

She slapped me in the face and asked me if it hurt

I said that it didn't but that was a lie  
I was used to lying to this writer  
She was my lover  
My father  
My friend  
My enemy  
There was no position, no skill, no person  
She had not been to me  
Every creature on earth  
Every fibre of my body  
Had been her  
Had breathed her breath  
Had written her words  
Sung her song  
In her voice  
A little croaky and out of tune.

I am writing this thing that  
Will never  
Be over  
Until it kills me  
And even then  
I might live  
Without a head  
a daft  
Little  
Queer  
It is alarming  
How sex  
Abolishes  
Context  
How abstract  
And precise  
Fucking is  
And writing  
Maybe it is the same  
Context  
Just means  
Open up to me  
  
Girl, you better explain this mess  
When I get home

I want all this to be cleaned up

**Because they are no longer having sex, the two maintain their intimacy via deconstruction: i.e., they tell each other everything.** —Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*.

In perfect harmony, I finish the book as the recall notice comes through. Nothing like this ever happens to me. I pick up the book, bent and a little war-torn, and place it in my backpack. You return from the garden, *are you planning to catch the tram? It's going to rain.* Either you are concerned for me or the book, the possibility of its getting wet disturbs you. The scene is not miraculous. Although, walking through the door is a victory. I am alive in this moment, returning a book to the library. That is something you're willing to accept. *Books need to go back.* For no other reason do I get a free pass when leaving your house, which was ours.

Waiting in the rain

The tram coming slowly

You break through

And shield me from the wind

The doors open

We walk through

Breathing fast

Eyes alive

Fast eyes

I am afraid of you

I'm always amazed  
By women  
Who write about their husbands  
As though  
They don't take up enough space  
But  
If it is funny  
I don't get so mad  
But I want to know  
That they're sexually unsatisfied  
That their writing  
Tore everything down  
Often it does  
But not in a way that's interesting  
The problem  
Is never  
Really that  
The writing is bad

My complete lack of notoriety

Means I can put my name

Next to anything

**I think she wants me to be a whore—** Eileen Myles, *Inferno*.



You taught me with a kiss everything that I could not learn at home, in the Resistance office on Hindley Street, after school.

Taught me about where I came from and what it meant to be there in your arms.

Kissed by you

Touched by you

As if at the end of the earth

Instead of in the transportable buildings

We called music.

They are two different people.

By the ocean, I know, another.

Another image to cut through,

Another line to break, but this is where we come together and multiply,

Where I leave my prints along the sand singing open my eyes...

The sex so impossible at the beginning of the day

So total by the end of eight hours in the dark.

If the frame here is just another mask, another shattered consequence of our textual mating, I am truly alone.

Alone and

Watching everyone pass by

Call their girlfriends

And other loves

And I was there

Dreaming of you

And waiting for the moment where I could even  
Think to say something  
Like  
Please.  
You, you who taught me everything I know  
Without ever touching my c u n t  
Without ever going to bed  
Now  
You're the only one who turns me on.  
And I regret not taking you up on your offers  
Every time  
We lent in too late.  
I missed that boat. Could have laughed it off.  
Now  
I/your arms more than light  
I/your slack skin  
I/ your warn hands  
More than light  
More than electricity  
How could I ever say  
The blackout made me love you?  
The blackout made me love you.  
Or thinking back to that strand of saliva that returned us to our  
bodies  
When the fight was over

And the lights were on.

Tight rope fine and wet, that rope I walked to your lips too little,  
too late.

I exhausted light and prose.

I caught the machine turning into wood.

I turned that raft we built into a trolley.

That is how you make history, put wheels on things.

I wanted to give my life for a song

Like the easy roads

of Dylan

Those channeled lanes of

Highway

and

Lust.

I would have been famous,

If I'd been an ugly man.

MORSELS GERTRUDE STEIN

Morsel of sugar

the mouth

white and wet

open wide

like Gertrude Stein.

Hold pearl teeth

tongue

satisfaction

breaks

Ice

thick

as winter

Open wide

Like Gertrude Stein.

Pocket rift of quiet fumble

dust

and water

make dirt

spun

mud

an

appetite

for hunger

morsel

a photograph

sweat

history locked between fat fingers

open wide

like Gertrude Stein.

In every photograph of Gertrude Stein, she wears a vest

made of velvet or wool.

Gertrude Stein poses in front of the American flag<sup>102</sup>.

---

<sup>102</sup> ...I listened and talked but that was not all I did in knowing  
at any present when I was starting anything what anything was.  
I was also looking, and that could not be entirely left out.

The trouble with including looking . . . was that in regard  
to human beings looking inevitably carried in its train realizing

A brooch on her lapel, an oval or diamond. Gertrude Stein poses with a woman, poses as a woman, poses as a poet, poses as an American. A woman in a skirt stands at the back of the photograph. Serious eyes, heavy face, freckled skin<sup>103</sup>.

---

movements and expression and as such forced me into recognizing resemblances, and so forced remembering and in forcing remembering caused confusion of present with past and future time. (Stein 5 qtd. in Dover).

<sup>103</sup> When I write 'in the black and white photograph' I think of Waterspout, a black-tie affair, the death of the author and the death of the author (Campbell) unravelling. I remember our conversation. A queer break is to come together.



Gertrude Stein often wore skirts.

We know this woman as Alice.

**(You don't need to be a whore.**

**You just need one to stand next to you)<sup>104</sup>.**

---

<sup>104</sup> Another kernel laid out on bare skin that fixed the tap and told the fan to cease. Called a snake, not a whore just another symptom of lychee. All the same. It does not define the 'I' from 'you'. The waterspout drills and circles wandering like steady pillowed hairs on nipples and the floorboard squeak of daylight and enquiring—how did it come to this? One at a time.

I take the pose of the poet.

The pose of the whore.

I stand by and watch you burn your book of sonnets. My gift,

*The Collected Works of William Blake*, goes up in flames.

So, the story of the poets (A/I and Violet Silence/You) goes on.

Goes on to be a way of speaking about the other. An  
autobiography of willfulness and fidelity. An autobiography of  
regret. Apologia and all. Regretta and all.

Gertrude Stein does not smile in her American photograph.

Neither do I<sup>105</sup>.

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<sup>105</sup> Any smile is stern and any coat is a sample. Is there any use  
in changing more doors than there are committees. This  
question is so often asked that squares show that they are  
blotters. It is so very agreeable to hear a voice and to see all the  
signs of that expression. (Stein "*Tender Buttons*" 48).

I didn't know I was obsessed by America<sup>106</sup>. I didn't know I  
was obsessed with you<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup> **a.** An idea, image, or influence which continually fills or troubles the mind; a compulsive interest or preoccupation; the fact or state of being troubled or preoccupied in this way (OED).

<sup>107</sup> ...and yet there is no disgrace in looking, none at all. (Stein "*Tender Buttons*" 49).

The morning tangle of sugar and teeth too much coffee or never  
enough. I think I'll bend over and pick up that trinket on the  
floor. Black and white badge from the protest march. No  
Uranium Dump on Aboriginal Land. The political pocketed in  
personal. The badge pinned to cloth and cloth to body. Blood  
pumping, torso divided by hunger and the promise of sugar.  
The house in disrepair, Sunday after Saturday and the  
microwave beeps<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> Here I am weeping. Here I am Friday Night Lights. All this  
to know myself reading 'Kaddish' aloud having slept in a  
crumpled bed that never existed that never saw that always  
wept the creeping hours and years where I knew your voice in  
the radio in the light like a hymn as Icarus ascending keeping  
our rain off my face this all breaking flow of wet and weather.  
And still this does not return you to me. Only me to my  
vending machine obsession. Seventeen and pasting Allen  
Ginsberg poems up on the walls of my catholic school folded in  
the crumpled nowhere place of my desire and the step toward  
you I never knew I took.

Some of the furniture is Mid Century. The bookshelves weren't  
cheap, bought at estate auction. The photograph of Gertrude  
Stein is in someone else's house. I sleep here, I feed the  
animals while the women who belong to this place are away. A  
photograph in an apartment compacts a fever with books and  
newspaper. I think of eating the bamboo floor, peeling it up  
piece by piece. Stripping it and sucking on the centre. I  
imagine that when they are alone the women of this place are  
like Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas. This place is not their  
place, it is some other place lit up by memory and a cigarette  
lighter drunk on the little gas flame,  
drinking blue,  
drinking orange<sup>109</sup>.

---

<sup>109</sup> There was shame in revelation. Eyes cast up from the steps  
of that stone palace. I stood in the heat of your revelation again  
and again, never truly testified. A whiff of deliverance on your  
tongue.

Work today will consist mostly of getting stoned and drawing

on the wall.

Use this,

take mind,

care,

breathe,

drink tea and smoke marijuana.

This is work<sup>110</sup>.

---

<sup>110</sup> A faint network of senses. The empty hardboiled lot carved up by dust bins and degeneration. Here i/t can admit that i/t was true. Blue because of the weather and taste, gripped by light switch loose and even.

Truffles on the table, the old serving platter tattooed a pallet,  
crusty, riddled with colour, impasto and red paint stains the  
paneled wooden table where I open and close your cigarette  
case. There's five-year-old tobacco stuck in the hinges. It sits  
on the table as I go through the last bag of kitchen items. Four  
Bean Mix, tinned Salmon and microwave rice, half a bottle of  
olive oil and a red kettle. These objects talk Ellen Street and  
unexpected April, love crueller than the season. A mobile phone  
in a glass of water and the city painted in dots and stripes, the  
grid malignant and heavy again on the table, on the pavement,  
on the linoleum floors and paint stained plates. This is Hindley  
street; this is the narrow stream of our love. A single, warped  
pack of Tally-Hohs sit in the cigarette case with the dead  
tobacco. Truffles on the table, chocolate and dope, recipe stuck  
to the fridge, they last for ages and bring relief, hunger.

Eat banana bread warm with butter, this is the only thing you  
can stomach at a time like this at a time like this.  
At a time like this, I am not talking about order, talking about  
meaning— panels of fabric button across her large breasts  
diving Gertrude Stein's square body. Fat fists stuffed into  
pockets, Gertrude Stein's wide stance spreads her long woollen  
skirt between sure fleshy thighs.  
Gertrude Stein speaks in code.

What I want is to always see you and never have to stop.  
What I want. Is always to see you. Never have to stop.  
To stop. I do not want. Always.  
I stare at the photograph; that long-lasting kiss is five years old  
now.  
Still feel my hand tucked into your waist, touch, a hinge, desire.  
Nose against nose eyes closed and warm.  
Suburbs just so light and dark and full.  
We were somewhere together five years ago.  
Parkside.  
All that dead against the knowledge of what comes next.  
Seeking reformation, our childhoods at our bed, we fuck slow  
and try not breathe.  
Because breath takes us back,  
Swallows us into history, memory, into someone else's grip.  
We asphyxiate the moment—



Gertrude Stein's thin lips are closed in her American  
photograph.

Ours touch in photographic kiss, never repeated and  
impossible.

This is that big cow love like wet brown eyes.

Alice and her cows and the back room where sewing and sex  
take place. Gertrude Stein speaks in code. Alice c o m e s to a  
complete stop. All imposition and ventriloquy, nobody went  
back to ask, nobody knew how heated and breathy that room  
was.

The moon feels far away when struggling for air.

Isn't it always?

No, it has to be close to me. It is you.

It disturbs me that the rubbish truck comes in the afternoon  
now.

Distribution turned on its head.

Now that I live at the end of the line.

Can't sleep all day there.

Pick up at 3:30pm

Remember, the day is done.

Roll out.

At a time like this at a time like this,

I still miss you.

On the cliffs at Clovelly

At the studio table in Hindley Street  
In my sister's backyard watching the poet roll her bike away,  
tears on her face.  
In the apartment in Sydney.  
In bed in Parkside.  
I shuttle between memories, places, scenes of restraint and  
forgetting and collide with feeling and touch so loud and  
present, even though past.  
I write it down, fall between one and the other. A torrent,  
kaleidoscopic, fragmented, telling telling telling it like it is.  
Like it was. Like it is.

I wear a vest and sing at the barbeque.  
You limp away crying and rolling your bicycle down the  
driveway.  
You do not look back as you leave my sister's house, your  
backpack stuffed with spare desserts.  
Pour rum into my mouth from a flask engraved 'Peaches'.  
The meringues break on the ride home, wobbling along Henley  
Beach Road. Uneven pavement familiar, but surprises your  
drunken wheel. Tears in your eyes and my song on your skin,  
you go home and present the dismantled sweets. Pink and white  
meringues, broken sweet against the napkins you wrapped them  
in at the wooden table where we sweet broken sat playing  
guitar and trading superstitions.  
Flip open *The Book of Murmurs*,  
Secrets slip out the side of your thin mouth.  
Lasso lips beg to contain  
What we might think of as the truth.  
*She \_\_\_ me to punish me.*  
To find a way there is a path that is still and quiet.  
*I am more than that; I am violent too.*  
That's what you said. I am violent. Violet. Silence. I take your  
quiet violence while you fold your foot over mine under the  
table. While you search my jacket for breasts. Your quiet  
silence armed with motion. You showed me how to leave, but  
not the door. Quiet, callous, irredeemable you.

If I could love you consciously.  
I get distracted by a morsel<sup>111</sup>. Vestige of memory. You made  
me swell. I search your lost skin. Mouth turns up at the thought  
just how good you tasted. A stray naked moment where you let  
me lick you up and down.  
I have to resist. The details gets me sick. Makes me purge.  
Closest to doorways and speedways the lines on the road light  
the night.  
Drive, I wonder, faster down the purple bitumen towards a  
slowing bus.  
Always turn that turn is rare and finds itself essential.  
Blow you out of water and tide comes in again again to the  
step.  
What is happening?  
I whisper in my sleep,  
That dream of you and I in Prague.  
The drunk yes and no of your embrace,  
That startling hush of movement between us.  
Songs and sounds slide through closed lips, parting, pairing  
apart the known.

---

<sup>111</sup> **Noun.** A bite or mouthful; a small piece of food, esp. *of* a specified kind. Now often apprehended as a contextual use of sense (OED).

Object of my desire, obscure from my view the sun, stars,  
morning.

Your slope like blue vase and green tile the machinery of your  
mother's kitchen smelling of star anise and Thai Basil.

Lemon my love. Is the count down still going fast?

Travelling through ages and the bones of your ribcage I pull  
thread and scrolls of paper through your belly button.

Stumbling point, the cliffs at Bondi are speaking to me. Lament  
for the sea, lament for the wind and sky, I face my palms to the  
light. Morning walk with a fever, fever of you. Women's baths  
and nets made of hair, I cut my pubic ponytail just for fun.  
Weave my body of words between the gaps which are triangle,  
square, blue, which hold so much sand above the ground.  
Hammock wraps me like an intestinal sack I press my face to  
its walls slimey and urgent impermanent organs containing  
here what lives what breathes for wide open spaces and the  
dilation of skin traps pleasure spots let me out let me out.  
Sugar sugar in the air...

Teeth worn with sleep, cold over one another  
Becoming fibers,  
Dust of the mouth,  
Once pierced flesh and hit bone.

As they ache,  
Teeth live wild and hot.

Sugar and words,  
Clench and gnaw,  
Black holes across a landscape of  
Ageing  
to  
Buttons.

**NOTHING ELEGANT.**

**A charm a single charm is doubtful. If the red is rose and  
there is a gate surrounding it, if inside is let in and there  
places change then certainly something is upright. It is  
earnest.**

(Stein "*Tender Buttons*" 6).

**A PIANO.**

**If the speed is open, if the colour is careless, if the  
selection of a strong scent is not awkward, if the button  
holder is held by all the waving colour and there is no**

**colour, not any colour. If there is no dirt in a pin and there  
can be none scarcely, if there is not then the place is the  
same as up standing.**

**This is no dark custom and it even is not acted in  
any such a way that a restraint is not spread. That is  
spread, it shuts and it lifts and awkwardly not awkwardly  
the centre is standing.** (Stein "*Tender Buttons*" 9).

REALPOLITIK

The shattered yes and no of your embrace makes language  
hurt.

Mechanic, unshifting—you spread your legs (masculine twigs  
greying, blonde at the knees) the width of the piano stool (black  
leather and wood) and I watch.

I miss you in Ancient Hebrew.

It isn't (self) abuse that hurts, read aloud over me day after day.

Poetry is the shattered yes and no of your embrace.

Yes, no,

Keep still

Stop

Ouch

Enough

Yes, no.

There are roses in the closet.

A poet puts them there.



Fill in these blanks:

You walk the city childhood trailing mud on shoes.

The next step follows this step that follows the first.

You pace hall words on inside and out of the darkness I call to  
thee.

Break down boxes lamps books stack according to colour  
system gone south.

Layers sweet red and cream slice repeat engorge mouth and  
tide.

Halo forklift writing on the wall.

Rice noodles stack pantry bare.

You say left left left.

Risoni and tinned tomatoes fix olives and flour.

**I feel that there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and so effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognised their voice the spell is broken. We have delivered them: they have overcome death and return to share our life. (Proust 276).**

Sweet things

Blood

buzzing coming loose

Warm and tender.

I know what it tastes like off my fingers

—Dirt and water.

Metallic and sweet, your blood

Pulsing.

Dust—cut like the dark.

The dog licks the spot on the bed where  
Handfuls of your sex spilt the night before.

Clots of blood, maps of the world, I wish to deny—this is (my)  
blood (body). A structural migraine turns my edges fuzzy and  
unwilling, stiff and inconsolable. Bent waves make this world  
(poem) this stepping stone (prose). Sheets, slices of sky push  
me down and stretch my legs, my torn muscles are tight, but  
abide this flattening; this lead sheet, full of want, full of need—  
stretches me (into lines) out. Hands are cups, as my name, a  
small cup, is brought to your passionfruit-skin lips. I imagine,  
despite everything I know, that you release yourself to me. Go  
on and slip my shirt over your hard breasts, climb on top of this  
welling edge, a frame, a catastrophe of feeling (just me wanting  
you to cum).

I wake; butchered not butch, still warm, smelling of  
blood, my blood (my body).

You don't bleed anymore, say you are glad. Say you are  
well off that slippery cannon, too tough like land to care that  
you can't get it up anymore.

My handprint in blood (your blood) on the wall. A little  
trophy we let stay for months and months. I renew my red  
touch. I enter your blood. It becomes my blood (my body). You  
sit on my thigh and mark my blue denim jeans.

*Am I writing beautiful poetry? Can I use masculine  
grammar? I have trouble with grammar. Punctuation. Is it  
holing you? By the end of each letter that makes up your  
frame? I have trouble with you. Every conversation everywhere*

*is one happening between me and you. I imagine you pressed against my office door, which is a little hole by the stairs, your little hole by the stairs aching and stepping up and down with breath, stepping up and down with breath. Fire and touch; here and there. Your skin is dark with sun, hours in the garden you care for, the only thing you unleash that deadly femininity on.*

*No wonder she's sick, you say. Oestrogen is poison.*

Caught crescendo, your shoulders back, your breasts open to the light, swing back and forth across me, full of my days, full of crash-hot symbolism. A comma in sweat, your left nipple coloured to last. I breathe and push, holding you; your skin sinks into mine. The sheets need changing. Your cunt is a semicolon; a hard stop that tastes of history.

*Ours is an epistolary embrace, secreted between light and ink, online or in the mail. You're going to teach me something. You want to be my Father and fuck me to teach me a lesson. I guess I deserve it, even though my attention is elsewhere, even though my limbs are caught up turning out a new sickness, as love, is love, will love. You despise me from your wedded bed. I climb the stairs alone.*

I hear you chewing all around the house. It is too much for me, the success of that mouth. Tongue rolling behind molars to disrupt the last of the fresh bread I bought. More butter. More tomato. More pig. More artichoke.

Back in the warm spell of blood, I wonder how to bleed  
masculinely. Men do bleed, if you cut them. Their blood—  
wait—my blood is red too. This isn't blood. It's bloody, not  
the nose, the wrists, the gums or feet.

All I want is in that heaped spoon—the dull thud of  
you. Anticipate, bite, something like a twist, but senseless,  
discoloured on your back. I itch for the comfort of the thing  
(you). The pleasure of (fucking) writing you.

Muscles wind against each other, twisting and pulling in  
on each other. They do not abide the feminine lightness of your  
touch, of your quiet gait; I am bold on my feet and tentative to  
touch, but love touch touch touch.

Your letter arrives in the mail:  
*Dear \_\_\_\_\_,*

*I am not a man (and can't \_\_ you).*

*I am not a woman. Despite all this, I \_\_ (write) you.*

*Until then,*

\_\_\_\_\_

I hear chewing by the stairs. Concrete tells stories in echo.

Maybe it is someone else slapping their chops, maybe it is  
someone else's lips dreaming of meat and leaking their desire,  
drip-chin-down-chin-suck-slurp. I cannot accept the life of that  
mouth.

I cannot take the life of that mouth.

I imagine you at the meeting, finding your flesh again. The first  
instance of touch makes the contract new and firm; desire  
becomes material. I hope it's worth the wait.

I read you compulsively and imagine your body (text) sprawled  
out next to mine, heaving and defeated. Your words ask me to  
be more than I am (can write) and it is only my foolish  
romanticism that feels you are writing (fucking) me. I have no  
excuse. I want you.

I have my fill, in fact, more than enough. Still, I want to fuck  
(write) you. And what are the years (alphabets) between us?  
(words) bodies so indiscreet and immovable, I can take  
(write) you in the hallway, I can take (write) you in the kitchen,  
I can take (write) you in the bath, in the heat (novel).

You are on your knees on the bed. The mattress, naked, legs  
shake in the white afternoon, curls wet, and thighs slick with  
time. I imagine you spread out, inviting me to stay.

*Dear \_\_\_\_\_,*

*You show me what longing does.*

\_\_\_\_\_

I am in your debt, so *you* say. This debt of desire ties me to the lines of road and paint between our savage longings (houses), not connected but touching. You yearn for anything. You who has lost everything (written). You show me what longing does.

I have ... (tried to write). And I do (not) write (love) you.

This is you and I writing without a centre. Barely a

pivot, in a breath you split, I split.

Flesh out,  
Broken up into segments, sticky and unwilling,  
Radial drip—blood so peach so mint so rosemary<sup>112</sup>.

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<sup>112</sup> And then, feeling that my mind is growing fatigued without having any success to report, I compel it for a change to enjoy that distraction which I have just denied it, to think of other things, to rest and refresh itself before the supreme attempt. And then for the second time I clear an empty space in front of it. I place in position before my mind's eye the still recent taste of that first mouthful, and I feel something start within me, something that leaves its resting-place and attempts to rise, something that has been embedded like an anchor at a great depth; I do not know yet what it is, but I can feel it mounting slowly; I can measure the resistance, I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed. (Proust 324).



FRAME.

Your waist locks my sight, cling of fabric, bone and tendon,  
                                shift hip to hip, book in hand  
Paws, bellies, lift, shadows, the pedestrian crossing,  
résistance fattened by day, diminishes in the blush of evening  
outside your door, away from the cool light of screens  
I dream of your body all day, reciting the petite  
choreography of light on the lines of your face, loose thighs  
                                and the self I lose between them  
Take me back to sunlight, bitter sea, rebellion from  
sorrow—I drown the ocean of your red, purple lipstick in a  
                                perpetual tongue, a kiss so red so morning  
Teeth sore sweet for the pleasure of you  
Let me touch your scar—read—me—sing—me you  
  say...

Returning to the frame. Clear now the difference. The beans are  
eaten off the vine overnight. I must let go of the lipstick dream  
where I dive and am met by the crest of your touch. The frame  
falls apart in the rain. Off to Bunnings for inevitable bamboo  
poles. Pea straw and shudder, shake off, the flashlight thought  
of you white and freckled, blue and hot, hand on your hip, with  
years and years of poetry pulling at your skin, the frame re-  
forms and I forget the garden. The stairs are awfully steep with  
this weight of knowing how you look with the lights off.

Wet little sentence

Wet little sentence

Wet little sentence

That remarkable stare

Oil

Gathering speed

To build wet words

To tower over

Topless

Hit rock

Gorge.

## WHISTLE

The whistle sets itself apart from the wind taking its black plastic skeleton and settling down into the throat of the breeze; it screams. I pick it up again because I can't leave it where it is. The whistle has a long neck and a bell body. Is hard, not curved like a church bell. It is lined and geometric, like a prison tower. A ring of plaited leather holds the whistle to my key chain. This is my whistle, I have never put it to my lips. This is my whistle and it screams purple and blue, red and green against the pale fate of my aggravated cries. This word is my whistle and I give it to you to say that I will not die wondering, that I will not take these secrets to my grave. It will be full enough of all I have said and done. My whistle is empty so that it can sing. It is the poet Violet Silence who gives me the whistle after she tests my resistance. A kiss would be good. Have this whistle. Hold this threat. Let it walk you. Let it eat you. Know that the whistle did not sing but the deed was done. A silent song of dreams littered with faintest screams. Sounds we dare not utter.

We dare not scream out loud.

## THE LAST

Lost child the last lost child speaks to the blackness of absence  
speaks to the carvings on the wall, straight lines for days and  
smiles for every full moon that must have gone by. Yes, the  
moon still goes by the last lost child even though she doesn't  
see it even though she never hears its creaking ascendance to  
the top of the night. It rises and falls, fat and drunk on stars.  
Watch last lost child take her picture with her fingers posing at  
angles to the square she makes with her broken dirty little  
fingers. How does she do it? The flash goes off in her memory  
and there are white dresses and little round wafers floating in  
the air a sip of wine to wash it down and scooped up. She is  
scooped up into arms into water where she is never seen again.  
Water is never over, water is never clean, and she vanishes,  
swimming close to the surface, peering back into the world  
through salt-stained eyes. Seaweed curls around her ankles, that  
invasive slip, a paternal finger or worse. Seaweed floats still  
and pimpled passing through lines of light hiding in water.  
Green ink nodes of memory fading and swelling banks of upset  
tummies and vines of scars and blood new tissue and old pain  
make currents fast make rips fierce make disappearing new.  
Morning makes the rain come and the echo of that last shrill  
cry, the cry of the last lost child spills back and forth between  
the day and night, the missing hand of time floating, a raft gone  
to sea for the rescue of a myth. Water is never over, it hits with

force, and it is everywhere and nowhere, salt water laughing  
smile shiny bitumen and the snakes in the air at the end of the  
street sing her name.

Her execution slow, disintegration, a dove in her throat singing  
softly hymns of praise, her round little face contorted by fire.

Oxygen leaps from lungs, wet sacks turn to dust her ribs  
swallow themselves as her body folds in two. This falling  
between cracks milk cartons gone missing little girl lost little  
waterfall stops flowing little bar of soap washed down to a  
slither. The only water left is saltwater and years go by; she is  
never seen again. The song her dove sang buried deep in time  
deep in dirt sings yes we are the one two three million pages of  
your book of poems yes I am the one two three of the count in  
and ready to begin without knowing how and ready to cease  
knowing that it is possible.

Water is never over, water is never new, and the very first girl  
crawled out of the ocean fully formed with a tattoo of a dove on  
her shoulder blade and a lip piercing—her name was Joan of

Arc.

This is not the end.

## WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

I hold the only road in my hands. The road leading west is dark

and soft, heat penetrates bitumen and white lines dance the horizon of my knowing where to go and how to get there. The map is lines on lines, skin on skin, lovers and friends, a rope leading from me to you, her, she, I.

The road leans forward like time and back like time, spinning in the round window of memory— the last longing stare, the last terrified touch, the last spoonful of sugar, the last cup of coffee, the last rites of the dead beloved denied buried alone mourning unspent.

When I go the way back, the way I know how to begin, out of the depths, I call to thee.

### *Push*

I am anxious about the sea rising. There being no water to drink, death by thirst is excruciating. I imagine castles of salt where the suburbs were. Destruction being not just of literary invention, the cost of blood is far too low. Milk is a dollar per litre in the supermarket and ice sells by the bag at the petrol station. I hear it crack on the concrete of our family home. Be broken, and put away. This is the challenge of familiarity, breaking down the known commodity of living. Ice with its connected mounds and crumbs of cold at the bottom of the bag which is spilt with thick warm hands.

Saints are important to Catholic poets; they are the first women we are allowed to adore. I have moved on from prayer, but all poets pray, no matter who, that's what it is. A catholic poet is a prayer. It is a hard task to sustain that angelic tongue on the lines of road which are skin, which are rosebuds which are the taste of salt and piss. I have moved on from prayer for god, but ritual sticks with me slicked in sweat slicked in time in these unnatural urges of flesh these rituals are mine and yours as we parade our flesh for the other settled in our Catholic misery after all our lovers have died. We make blood by having sex.

*Pull*

And everywhere a window opens, just like another. The double of that breath, stretched out in every second, each small cognition: we need some air in here. It takes a long time to open the window on grief. Each minor contraction, each minor abandonment—who will clean the floors, wash the dishes, make the bed? No one. Who will boil the kettle? Who will check the mail? Who will turn on the TV? Who will make a phone call? Who will stare into the blue light of a screen clicking for connection? Who will dare to go outside? Who will pull me from this sleep? Who will drag open the door on the world? No one.

The road is thick like molasses and pouring all over the map as I squint and shift gear. This rhythm of flipping back and forward has become my way of reading, my way of writing.

This dialogue of dreams, its own language of shadows and light, the very near past, the very near future, and the deep secrets of this world, the next, my lovers and me.

Spiralling through the hills of memory, Adelaide, Victoria, the imaginary mountains of America and the beaches of Barcelona, where I dream I meet you, the little car rattles along one headlight blinking on and off in the dark. The tent in Darwin, the shack in Cairns with insect repellent and a bag of white powder snorted with a five dollar note.

I am quietly in my room again, the old house with the green gutters and white stone face. The concrete path splitting the backyard, Hills Hoist turning like time, the centre of a spiral. The light changing from day to night, the speckles of laughter left, hair in the shower drain, a single roll of toilet paper on top of the washing machine. Sweeping the floor clean when all the furniture has been removed, talking to the walls and living with their testimony.

*Pushpull*

Whispers form callouses on the window frames, the wood swells and sobs leak through the splinters of wood, of flesh, and text, secrets. Opening palms, opening the chest to the ceiling, shoulder blades peel back the light, the lines of concrete, flowering cornices, and streaks of yellow and white paint. The window is open, the work of abstraction, the square is empty and the blue is here. And here.



## MOSAIC

Her bright mosaic coat open against her skin and the blue morning coming open again like a flower, I step outside scratching the sore on my neck. Devouring the early light, milking the pink from the sky, I take my pen and sit on the wooden bench. I write one last letter to the tenant of my heart, to the teacher who stole my scribbles, to the artist who taught me how to grieve. I write a long letter to the street where I live, to the past, to the present, to the last stinking carcass rolling the riverbank desperate for life.

The first instance of touch the ticking time bomb a tomb for days and days of time spent reading romantic poetry and skinning rabbits. The house built up with bones and crumbling like evening, the house stands alone, the last survivor of this affair.

Her wet hair tied in a bun at the base of her neck; she holds daffodils and searches for a vase. The orange coffee table is full of poppies. Mana takes a water glass and encourages the daffodils to stretch out in its green cylinder. Mana's fingers like stalks cradle her glass of flowers swinging in the light by the glass doors humming a name, *El Shaddai, El Shaddai*.

This is why they taught us to pray. To speak His name, but I utter my own name over and over like prayer, shedding the skin of years under heavy instruction, but my name is His name, her name is his name. The names our fathers gave us to forget the

sex that made us stick to us, their stories become our stories,  
hers and mine, two bastards. They named us without a thought  
for the books we would read, and our deaths which ring into  
that peaceful blank space, eternity, fabulously fast fading a  
temporary tattoo on the skin of the social.

She puts my face in her hands and tells me she heard that story  
about that girl. How does she know me? Through Walt  
Whitman, through Monique Wittig, through Genet and the  
Saints of France? Violette Leduc—yes, me, an ugly student  
begging for love. *El Shaddai, El Shaddai*. Be named and  
destroyed. Iteration and annihilation in one small gasp *El  
Shaddai, El Shaddai*. Sing again, that Lord's name into the  
light, into the laughter, into hunger and deep sorrow. And how  
does this child leave the room begging for another hour at the  
lap of the one she loves? This child leaves the room knowing  
what is waiting for her. This child leaves the room, begging for  
more time in company, anything to avoid being alone. This  
child knows what happens to her when she is alone. How does  
Mana know me? Not Walt Whitman, through hands who have  
touched and touched and touched and we each know the touch  
of those hands when children are alone. We do not say this to  
each other.

## MORE MONDAY

Everyone is old and new on Monday morning. The catcall of the weekend strutting down the hall, relentless and fuelled by lust, goes to sleep and the dust settles on the awkward promise of more Monday, more Tuesday, more Wednesday, and so on.

Straining tea, unwashed eyes, the flush of hallway greetings and bicycle lockups, silence moves through fingers, breeze sings through wasp's nests, library books thud to *return*, wooden boxes shudder and roll. Milk spits and water falls down kitchen counters. Floods of sunlight mirror the darkness of eyes without rest, full volume and bloodshot. The Professor wakes singing Sappho in her floor length robe, open over her body, open over breakfast, over pages of *Rapture*. Saint Paul bends, his rosary beads clicking between his thick calloused fingers, the hymn of morning asks him to rise and sing *Hallelujah, Hallelujah*, but he cannot find his feet today, today where his heart wrings itself to a halt, when the morning sings angels and blessed sherry. Violet rouses late and takes her black coffee to the porch, rolling and lighting a cigarette, she samples the morning air, filled already with the first deliveries and journeys of the day, to work, kids to school, animals to factory. The cart *returns* bloody and full of shit. Violet takes her seat clothed in silk, her watch signals that it is time to cook breakfast. Exhaling a long line of perfumed smoke, she rises.

She can never be ready for another day. Where am I this

morning? I am caught in yesterday and the day before. From  
my bed, I hear cooing and Violet rushing with a tray of water  
and apples. I roll over and in a glass before me I see:  
clean white linen spoiled by a child,  
jasmine grass,  
regret personified,  
nothing stops after,  
coloured plastic pegs,  
spinning into action, the world mops itself up and dries in the  
sun,  
black plastic dog shit bags,  
a red lamp,  
let the sheets be washed by the rain, if it comes,  
an orange coffee cup,  
she fell from the sky,  
hanging baskets,  
thick woolen trousers,  
the front garden,  
a portrait,  
oil over sand,  
blood,  
I grew out of the ground,  
she washed in with the tide.  
I was what the cat dragged in. Kicking and screaming,

Becoming too particular and totally scattered the wall is  
abstract in the light. Building that height and deference to your  
frame whipping off a t-shirt and I say—

Oh holy shit<sup>113</sup>.

Broken day, sleep revolts in afternoon waves of sunlight and  
burnt skin. Banana bread on the counter and butter on the table  
there is salt and sweet mouthfuls and moans and murmurs in  
the hallway between our bedrooms between our bodies,  
paintings fall off the walls retreating to that unseen place on the  
floor out of sight out of mind and I must be.

I begin to gorge<sup>114</sup>.

---

<sup>113</sup> SUGAR.

A violent luck and a whole sample and even then quiet.

Water is squeezing, water is almost squeezing on lard.  
Water, water is a mountain and it is selected and it is so practical  
that there is no use in money. A mind under is exact and so it is  
necessary to have a mouth and eye glasses.

A question of sudden rises and more time than awfulness  
is so easy and shay. There is precisely that noise.

...

Put it in the stew, put it to shame. (Stein 28).

<sup>114</sup> A TIME TO EAT.

Anything in the house I shove into my mouth that I open wider  
and wider.

I turn the stove on and fry six eggs in a pan.  
Cut yolk and run my fingers through the sphere broken by  
knife, by attention.

I boil water and salt throw in handfuls of spaghetti which  
slumps in the pot.

I cut tomatoes on the bench, stuff basil leaves into my nostrils  
and crack pepper over my feet.

Braid boiling spaghetti my fingers turning red skin shrieking at  
the wet heat.

Fuck 'Kaddish' and all the grief, healing, every memorial. The  
failure of sight. The rupture at the base of my spine is not real.  
My spine is just a metaphor. Is not a metaphor. Bone. Is not a  
metaphor. It is just that the light taste the same in the morning  
that the light tastes the same in the morning some days the  
especially blues ones when I reach for you like a glass of water  
and I could write forever and it would never be enough.

---

A pleasant simple habitual and tyrannical and authorized and  
educated and resumed and articulate separation. This is not  
tardy. (Stein 13).

The fiction of the doer and deed broken into lines.

Crumbled in my mouth,

morsels.

LAMENT FOR THE SEA



Driftwood, a muscle, slide down sand down skin

Weight and current to move too fast beyond

A second      speak to me

Come to the door      to be by the sea to be by the sea

With the world in my arms

Wrapped in sunlight      what a dream      come to the

door

Speak to me.

We are common tongues with sleek wet rough wet touch breath

water and sweat—it isn't all tongues and fingers, not such an

easy myth

There are streets and cold tiled floors, kitchen cupboards,

tablecloths, books with bent spines and women with broken

wrists, broken against swell of ocean. swell of stomach nose

widening of pelvis and heat on the back.

This is not about breakfast

This is not about keeping time

You know when to have breakfast

This is about the remains

And how we decide to divide up a body

In this body of words, you are having breakfast

Know when to say when

Somewhere someone is cutting open the daughter of a deceased

man

She joins him

The only thing she never wanted to do again  
To be in the same room as her father, closed doors, open doors,  
the fact of a door can't change what happens in that room,  
The rush of blood and ribbons of seaweed tie little girl hands and  
feet, bind her mouth, and change her sheets.

Death is a room

A crowded one—

Wide open on the slab here on the page there this sheet of torn  
metal this sheet of torn quilt my skin my name my blood tied  
together with lace at the end of each tear I am connected at the  
end of each rip I commune with you at the bottom of each cut  
there are worlds hanging onto the wick of sky still open still  
pulled apart with strong hands with she with he with the rest of  
the rock earth flesh and blood of book of scripture of letter  
writing of obituary elegiac and fast fast fast girls I am a fast fast  
fast fast girl

but it's all too fragile all this rock blood flesh earth

too easy to lose

slips right through my fingers

runs like hot oil

fat dripping from the exhaust

steam scold skin

time floods the afternoon

all the millions of years you lived roll into one sun up and down

like the missionary fix of your first teenage fuck of your last

teenage fuck up down up down the missionary fix you junky in  
out up down and then more  
more theft more vengeance  
more sauce  
everything has an opening  
mouth of the envelope  
sewer pipe  
handles and swing joiners locks and keys ladders and stools  
where does the sea open?  
Where does the sea open to me?  
Mouth water tide and turn following the moon in every direction  
the surface broken by a bird the sea is important  
All ashes out to sea  
Seven dollars in coins  
A bottle with a tightly rolled note  
Don't you belong to me no more?  
I know that I can take it. Come on, give it to me straight.  
The scroll of a girl all wound up and out to sea the slope of her  
the will of her  
Surrender and the ocean carry my message I fill it with meaning  
It becomes the opening  
A fractured place  
Somewhere to start  
The scroll reads longer and longer with each telling  
With each addition of you me the body the book

The spine this one and mine, yes my spine my crooked hall of  
organs bone blood written on the scroll of a girl tightly wound  
and thrown out to sea

Scatter me there scatter me there

I wash up on the shore

A dead beach

Where my ocean carried the jewels of my life

There is a dark-eyed girl reading my note and shaking her head

No, not this one

*I know what you did and you know what you did to me*

Don't they say that knowing is half the battle?

Teach me how to say it

Speak to me

This is the worst of it

This is the worst of it

This is the worst of it

Seaweed

Orange peel rock pool hunting

Nowhere

Mandarins

Can we be as little as salt and water

Stand among ruins of memory

All that remains

Salt and water

I am having my moment with the rocks

Their skin-history grey silver purple pearl white

A wave comes down on me

Like you

Solid

Soft

With a push

How do you not mind me?

How do you forget?

Rocks never forget

They are worn down

I am worn down by the violence of time

And your absence ...

I read that the sea is rising  
Sand is bagged up for the weather  
Gumboots and sawdust  
Glass turns to foam as the waves crash in  
The photographs have been packed away, wrapped up in plastic  
Sent to friends in the hills  
She will stay and defend the house against the ocean  
An impossible defence.

SAPPHO AND THE SPIDER

**TELL EVERYONE**

**Now, today, I shall**

**Sing beautifully for**

**My friends' pleasure**

Since you are dead, there is a spider, which is a pipe, which is a song you know, a prayer, a letter; I write to tell you that the tide is rising.

They are moving your plaque at night.

The Spider has:

Eight legs,

Four eyes,

Three chambers of memory in the form of a house

And two wounds on her side—one leaks the past, the other, present.

A battle with a bird. This bird is one you know, I know.

Her name is Sappho.

Recognition,

Sappho when I beseech her (114)

I am she who holds the secret of your name (130)

Returning always to promise of your name uttered

Falling from the sky

And I

Icarus ascending

Make the bed

Tucking in your eight perfect limbs.



Long feathered arms and tight curling toes, migration pointed and steady. She knows where she's going and can smell her prey from well above the clouds.

Sappho went out of her way to find The Spider. Not just find, locate. She took her in her mouth and flew away.

To eat a bird, a spider must become a shackle. A deft and solid shackle, gravity, or any force stronger than flight. The bird is concentration and taste, smells like falling stars and a mouldy cup of tea. The Spider builds a world by revelation. Child-like and ravenous, the scene is a web of memory, contradiction, shock. Stories on skin, tattoos climb the landscape of her eight long legs. Frida Kahlo, Dante, and the names of former lovers are drawn into her blue skin. Ink stains green blood. The redacted fireplace, garden shed, mop bucket rooms of memory form a perpetual purgatory of lust and murder, killing senses, killing time with sex and delight and thirst.

The Spider descends from a string, heat radiates through the house down from the tin roof of her western shack. Concrete floors and brick walls that the landlords painted a distant grey, tell us of the rain always coming to wet the fringes of this happening of this distress and conviction. Sappho and The Spider, after all are women.

Sappho sat at the top of the Hills-hoist waiting for the wind to change. The Spider crawled up and locked on tight.

They sweated and fucked in the cracked concrete rooms in the backyard. Cavernous and cool, their bodies moved hot and fast to make the sun go on and on.

There are no photographs of Sappho. I can tell you that she had long hair and a bent nose. It was round and dipped slightly over her top lip. I cannot tell you how I know this other than to say that I am not the only one entrusted with this information.

In the very same way, The Spider had dark hair, but a small nose.

Thin at the tip, she could open Sappho's lips.

Sappho would never tell you that.

The Spider doesn't have to say.

What else is a nose for?

If you crack the head of Aphrodite's statue, blood still runs. Not everyone knows that the top of Aphrodite's head remains soft. Her skull softened by sentiment, she gives way to lovers of head and heart.

Dig in a spoon for a dose of pure love. Sappho took The Spider to the statue and heralded scooped hands and fine clear lines of flight and fall. She pushed her fingers under Aphrodite's skull and ate her brain, what was left. Women had been eating the brain of Aphrodite for many years. Sappho took her turn and fed the remaining piece to The Spider from her beak.

Her round fuzzy body shook with delight. The brains were delicious, not at all what she had expected. Not like lamb brains or boiled stomach lining. Almost fresh, like whipped cream, but meaty. She couldn't put a single finger on the taste but it didn't matter. She ate and shuddered and they moved along together.

Pulsed through the sky, Sappho and The Spider flew with ease. Excited by the rare sights from this high up, The Spider was dizzy on flight.

She took Sappho's face in her hands kissing every soft inch, read the length of that nose and hung on its arched promise.

*Your kisses smell so good.*

Her pebbled centre gave way to

Eight arms,

A round fuzzy skull,

Sharp teeth and tongues that ranged over skin, against the underside of tabletops and between the folds of winter quilts, in the top corner of the outhouse, scribbling silver pathways to the cold floor, to the warmth of a boot left on the porch, tickling each step.

In the corner of this room of memory which is a toilet seat, cabin fever, shaking shoes by the back door,

I dwell on her fuzz and bite.

Don't come down tonight I think fighting the close of sleep.

I dream of her tangled in my sheets,

Panic and abandon.

The spider hidden in the corner of my waking life.

That abject longing so near and distant.

I made myself an opera of casual suffering to dress my want of her in. For many years, the current of watching wandering eyes bent its way from me to her. Bathed it in white light and pale cloth, I washed her feet and folded her under my wing.

We fell from the sky

A tangle of legs and inhibitions.

I ran my cool skin against hers. I had to love her. I had to swallow her. At least once. My forked tongue red with blood and yearning.

She crawled from my mouth, wet and obscene.

Sappho couldn't be swallowed whole.

I would have to fall apart. I would have to take her apart one section at a time.

\*

The spider is held up by her eight legs

Wandering, dipped in blue blood.

The spider is poisonous.

I aim to be a female monster too.

This is what the spider sings:

The life I was born into was impossible.

I was born in New York City.

I was born in Amsterdam.

I was born in the middle of the ocean.

I was born flying over Egypt in the night.

I was born crawling in the scrub South Australia.

I was born underwater at Circular Quay.

I was born in dunes and ran for the sea, gulls pecking at my shell.

I was born into the armpit of the range, wolves circled my crib.

I was born in a song; Andre Rieu sang me to sleep for the first ten days of my life.

I was born in an asylum, my mother's breast milk drawn out with syringes and given to me drip by drip.

I was born on a white rug in the centre of Dr Freud's office, I gave no cry until my analysis had begun.

(And like the beginning of *The Childlike Life of The Black Tarantula* by Kathy Acker, we include parenthesis)

Sappho sings of her birth on the island of Lesbos:

I was born with a mane of thick dark hair.

The nurse who attended my birth pulled me by my hair out of the womb and into the world.

The women in the room all cried when, at last, my feet emerged from my poor mother's body.

The day and night had been a struggle and there was fear of death in the air, which was common for the time.

When, after hours and hours of labour, a thick lock of black hair stuck its way through the birth canal, the nurse took action.

With her aged strong hands she encouraged me into the world.

Yanking on my dark hair. She stretched my skin. Stretched. And pulled me into existence.

They shaved mine and my mother's heads after the delivery.

A sacrifice to ward off bad spirits.

My mother kept my hair wrapped in cloth under her pillow for years after.

The island itself was pretty. The edges of this island were made of cliffs. The centre of Lesbos was a swirling, flat landing where celebrations and executions reigned in equal measure.

It was from this point of the city I first wrote to Kathy Acker.



*Dear Kathy,*  
*Like your look and your work.*  
*Please read mine and tell me*  
*what you think needs improving.*  
*Desperate for a good reader in*  
*this convent of long haired-*  
*beauties. I know you will*  
*understand,*  
*Loving,*  
*Sappho.<sup>115</sup>*

---

<sup>115</sup> “Dear Bernadette! Dear Ed! This typewriter doesn’t work  
and neither does my spelling or typing! Enclosed find  
poem/writeout of beginning of story by L.J. MY POEM  
(Homage to LeRoi Jones, 1972) I’m doing the same thing  
process of cut up to all writing I’m doing it it feels terrific! ...  
I’ll send POEMS BACK LOTS OF POEMS ENDLESS  
NUMBER OF CUT UPS NEED POET TALK LOVE Kathy”  
(Acker in Kraus “*After Kathy Acker*” 73)

Tell everyone that my mother had sixteen lovers and she ate them all.

Each one was surprised in the struggle.

Each time they screamed.

Each time they screamed.

Tell everyone that my mother was a murderess, vigilant and clean.

Eventually, once she had fucked and eaten all she could, given birth to millions of children, she died on her own terms.

Tell everyone.

Tell everyone that against my will I grew into a woman, a spider, a poet.

(The text contained within these parentheses form a dialogue with the text forming outside. They include basic commentary on the work itself and some details of the life of a writer and other facts. FACT: it is difficult to kiss someone who is wearing a motorcycle helmet.)

Six of my eight beautiful legs recoiled and sank into my newly pink flesh, hairless, obscene.

When my mother was dying in her web, having become again a spider (she too was once a woman), she told me that a time would come when nobody would look at me. Not recognize me or see me, nobody would look.

I felt that way then, when her eyes closed, but I knew she was  
seeing for the first time.

\*

Now, today, I shall  
Sing lines picked from the dense field of songs.  
The words linger and float,  
Melodies scratch against my fibrous legs,  
My sharp little mouth wants to make noise,  
wants to spit forth a song for the good of women.

Now, everywhere, we are one

Voice

Chanting the names of the lost, of the forgotten.

Is this friendship?

Remember me when I am gone.

Always...

Pleasure finding

Its way to sing

The strange fate of women

Together

Alone.

*Dear Kathy,*

*I was working on the songs like you suggested and I realised that I loved you. Whenever I see a picture of Arthur Rimbaud I think of you. I love you in him, Kathy. I'll never feel the same way about motorcycles.*

*All my love,*

*Sappho*

**WE SHALL ENJOY IT**

The girdle bending,

Spill of fat, roll of flesh born into hands that are eager and strong.

Never let them shame you for using your tongue, your eight  
tongues and ten fingers.

Use them and we shall enjoy it.

**As for him who finds**

**Fault, may silliness**

**And sorrow take him!**

(I once kissed a spider in a bike helmet, bicycle not motorcycle,  
and wished it were a goodbye kiss)

Cobblestones and cracked earth purple-wet in winter, hard steps  
to take alone. To turn me (a spider) into a woman, I was sent to  
Catholic School.

(This spider predates the poet Violet Silence. At this time, the  
bird was a man who played the victim in a play about vengeance.  
He became my shackle).

On my knees in St. Joseph's small blue chapel, a shiny silver spider dropped from the ceiling during the homily. Winding, weaving its long strings above the altar, this spider had an urgent message to deliver. This is what it sang to me:

Holy, holy, holy, holy

The world is the soul is the tongue and cock and hand and asshole is

Holy, holy, holy

Every man's an angel<sup>116</sup>

(The silver spider wore round glasses and eight tiny cowboy boots, spoke with an American accent. Faded brown leather cowboy boots with aquamarine tassels and bright silver stars on each side sent shots of light across the face of god and made a cross on my forehead where he landed and kissed me. One of his glittering legs rose to his lips and he said: shhhhhh)

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<sup>116</sup> Oh holy, Allen allowed himself to be fucked in the ass. I have not forgotten you. I stuck print outs of your 'America' on the vending machines in Catholic School. Chocolate bars and existential glory holes. Holy mouth. All the bread and fish in the world. Never enough to satisfy your holy gut. That bird's yellow Irish teeth, he's laughing now.

Holy dog walker

Holy beach

Holy teeth rotting in head

Holy your beloved six legs

Holy keep your cards close to your chest

Holy the words are holy

Holy there is no space for god here

Holy little spider grow out your hair

Holy the space my body makes for a bird's wing

Holy the fill of hands

Holy holding darts and rolls of toilet paper

Holy line of lovers beyond here little spider

Holy bars and nightclubs and pubs and dance halls and picnic

rugs beyond this blue cathedral—cathedral of blue

We are holy

We are holy



I looked up at the altar as the priest sang in his green robe, it fell  
about his round stomach his arms shook and he sang:

Hold me

Hold me

Holy

Hold me

Holy hold me

Holy hold me

Doves flew out of his mouth and the floor of his longing, buried  
deep within the pages of a book he no longer puts his hands on,  
came up to meet him, came up to hold his hands in place as girls  
in blue and brown school dresses walked towards him, arms  
folded across their chests

(and we know that the confusion of words, the profusion of  
tongues in this sanctioned babel, homily of homosexual letters,  
that the priest is desperate for touch. Hoping for an eager ear. He  
exchanges 'Holy' for 'Hold me' as I have done. As I will do  
again)

Holy is rain down in minutes

Holy is rain coming up

The world is the soul is the skin the nose the tongue and cock  
and asshole everything is holy everybody where is holy every  
day is an eternity

Every man's an angel

(Yet, just like in Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*,  
men are less important than Fathers, Presidents, Poets, and  
Boyfriends)

Holy

On the first day, in full Catholic drag, I took confession

You my soul are holy

The ecstasy is Holy

Holy unknown and suffering

In catholic school

When they say holy

The spider hears hold me

Hold me hold me holy

Hold me the hideous and obscene human angel

With the bean bag by her grave

Copies of puritanical comic books and a series of French Realist  
novels, as well as some little known German novellas, are used  
as floors in this holy house

Pages peeling and wet with lust

I read the book

I wrote the book

(And just like in Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*, the form in which the book appears, be it diary, letter, map or otherwise is less important than the facts of the case. More important than the object itself, is the facts of what capitalism and sex teaches Janey. FACT: it is difficult to eat soup with a fork. Unless, of course, the soup is unusually thick).

Lonely soup spoons

All solitude in the world

Wrapped up in the grip of her dead imagination

(FACT: The Watch Tower is a novel by Elizabeth Harrower)

(And I could go on and I will, building the false portrait of adolescence, the struggle between a powerful bird and a vulnerable spider. On some days of the week that might be a true story. If I am to be clear, though my stylistic interest lie elsewhere, I should say that there was no struggle. He simply opened the door and I followed. There was no broken paternal contract or scene of horror. Just an opportunity met with a lack of grace.)

I have broken Sappho's legs for this  
For a grave of words by a river  
by the football field  
by the industrial wasteland  
by the chicken shop  
by the video rental store  
Her grave the size of a whale  
And it is holy holy hold me holy holy.

We wanna fight each other out with sound  
It is not my privilege to help you fuck your way closer to God  
Closer to the last asshole  
If we found ourselves at the end of the world  
We'd find ourselves in bed together  
Just for warmth  
Just for the thrill  
of dying together again  
In the drafty hall of endless night  
With the silent radio blasting  
Wild daylight  
Under sheets of blue sky  
And when the days roll on  
I will learn to love you again  
I want more than just  
I want more than just the recess of time and space

I want more than your blessing  
A kiss on the forehead  
I wanna fight to the death  
I wanna pull your hair  
I wanna pray with my mouth open  
I lose my tongue over you  
I give up my hands for you  
I knock my stumps together  
Saying praise you praise you  
And confession is  
The disappearing act  
Forgetfulness  
And were we together there?  
In the forgotten history?  
The days and months or years of  
Lips  
And they were holy holy holy  
Arms open and a mouthful of doves  
The preacher stands at the alter  
Arms wide open  
Like the wind  
And says  
Hold me hold me hold me  
A little girl with a mouthful of doves  
Her throat in a scream

Sappho with a mouthful of doves  
Her throat in a scream  
Interrupting the pigeons walking in the garden  
Joan of Arc was a virgin  
My mother was a virgin  
I de-baptised myself  
Flushed your sacramental wine down the toilet  
And when she screams  
While the fire rages deep  
At the centre of the universe  
In the middle of a field  
Somewhere in the broad back of memory  
Joan of Arc was a virgin  
Murdered sainted child  
We wanna fight each other out with sound  
I like virgins  
I like the way they smell  
With their tightly wrapped genitalia  
Sweating in their shorty-shorts  
Their big knickers under their school dresses  
Someone taught me to do that  
To see their big knickers  
I like virgins  
I sit next to them in class  
And they don't have fucking bodies

Nobody's got a fucking body  
Nobody except me  
And they'll get their righteous little fingers broken  
By fire  
When they call their names at the execution  
A c u n t full of doves  
A c u n t in a scream  
That bleeds for decades  
Into the first child's hair  
Into the skin of the sainted child  
So fresh and clean  
Water rolls over the baby's head  
Wouldn't it be nice to be clean again?

(Wouldn't it be nice to be clean again?)

This is what I said to Sappho across the bed in the deep blue of  
morning when we were birds when we were holy)

Holy skirt pulled from jam of genuflection  
Holy school girl with communion wafer stuck to the roof of her  
mouth  
Saliva swelling beneath the thin layer of holy skin  
The stain of blood on her lips  
The swill water and wine  
Holy choir girl with her shoulders back and mouth open

Where the song starts  
Where the leak begins  
Holy breasts that swell  
Holy bleeds  
That bleeding is all about forgiveness  
Holy shadow  
This is the heaviest horror that I hope my children face  
Says the whale  
Mouthful of sand  
All the horror of my children at catholic school  
What a waste  
Kathy doesn't seem to be able to pay attention  
Sappho doesn't seem quite right  
Says the teacher  
There is nothing strange about her she's perfectly fine  
The whale says  
Kathy laughs because she knows The Truth  
And someone aint telling  
Aint gonna tell  
Aint gonna be a soldier  
Aint gonna say that thing they wanna hear so they can explain  
my inattention  
They're grateful



I was a school girl,  
a hard-working asshole.

What a waste

The Josephites have a small chapel

There's blue carpet and timber pews

The nuns used to sleep on the floor

Light comes in from the sides

It's simple

It's god-fearing

Holy the body lump of desire

Holy the fist in blood of hearts and piece by piece

The body is a lump desire

Like a fist in blood

A catapult

Of me onto you of you onto into me and back

I wanna assimilate you into my lumpy fleshy thing

My smelly sweat crack

That dies in the winter

That like desire dies in the dark

Fashioning itself as duty

Like a wheel

Like pin

Stick your pin into my pin prick that needle sings from the  
middle of the pelvis

Your pelvis shifts and simple you are  
A lover of lovers  
And your c u n t is holy holy h o l y  
And St Pius is roughly the same  
The carpet might be grey  
It's an octagon  
Cream brick on the interior and exterior of the building  
It's kind of Polish looking  
The carpet is yellow  
I don't know why  
It's wide  
Kind of hungry  
The light comes in from behind the congregation  
Through big glass doors  
Holy his forearm  
Holy his small teeth yellow and scratched etched map lines into  
those small Irish teeth  
Time does not disintegrate you from my holy holy holy memory  
What happened between us can never be erased  
What happened between us as the lines on your face  
Gets bolder  
Deeper  
As you age and I age  
Finally old enough  
To be holy holy holy

In St. Francis coloured glass stories run across the ceilings  
In the eaves of the twists and turns  
The pillars of saints  
Hold the years of timber  
Above the breath of prayer  
Hurried conversation  
Pills of saints  
Buzzed with their cocks poking out of brown robes  
Deers lick their feet  
In time with their penance  
Sappho gave it away in the confessional booth  
Like a leather love seat in a butch femme bar  
Somewhere far away where she might have got fucked the way  
she liked  
Where it might be sacred  
If not holy  
Holy laugh  
Holy laugh of the schoolgirl who presses her cheek to his chest  
privately open testing her schoolmates  
Holy her kiss on the back of his neck  
Holy hand up skirt  
Copies Genet and Proust all scattered around  
Pages ripped from the mouth of fiction  
I read the book  
I wrote the book

I read the book

I wrote the book

Were you there?

In the pages of blood

Dead Sappho

Says

*Do not be afraid I am with you I have called you by your name*

*you are mine*

*I have called you by your name you are mine*

(Which were the words of Pope John-Paul the second and a guy called Isaiah)

Holy jar of blackberry jam

Holy her licked fingers

Holy her secrets

Holy their letters

(Kathy Acker wrote to several of her idols over her early years when she lived in a beach-side town with little to no money, a man, some books, and had lots of interesting affairs. Many of her letters went unacknowledged)

You know you can take that last piece of cake

You know you can take that last piece of heart

One piece at a time

Chip away the membranes

The tied up cells of water, cellulose, are they cells you can see  
with your dead eyes?

Sappho is in a room with the professor

(A Professor is like a Boyfriend, Father, or President)

She says have you read Byron?

I have read Byron

I am a thing of Byron

Indeed, I am a thing of Byron

Yes, says the professor

You are a thing

Have you read Catullus?

I have read Catullus

I am a thing of Catullus

There are no professors at catholic school

The nun hits Genie to teach her how to be celibate

Genie fucks the nun in the refectory

Because the nun doesn't want to be celibate

She hits Genie again

Why do you care where the old house was?

That house is dead

With dead windows

And door frames

And lonely lonely kitchens

The Spider took the names of her first three husbands

Dad, Doctor, Teacher

How many times can you take my love?

The Spider asked

And there was never an answer only the promise

Of more

Today is a gift of your love

The burden of your love

And something called desire

(Here we flip between the characters of this plot who are mostly  
female and vaguely diabolically human)

Holy piano

Holy black and white keys

Their song slips between the bell and the drum

Hardened hands and stiff little fingers

Bounce along the scale

Love me

Holy

The cock the hand and asshole

Hold me

Holy sweat

Holy sweet taste of her tongue after breakfast

Holy tongue on his high

Holy tongue in his mouth  
Holy her adolescent ejaculation  
Holy music turns me on  
Hear the song  
At the back of little Joan's throat  
A mouthful of doves  
Squawking as the flames encroach  
No silent peaceful white bird  
She bites down on their pretty wings when the pain really sets in  
A mouthful of blood and white feathers  
Little Joan Virgin Child of France  
All the Eves of Catholic architecture  
Biting apples  
Mouths full of sour water  
Spilt from the flesh of a green apple  
I think it was green  
And so was Eve  
With her long arms  
Tanned and soft  
For picking flowers  
And jerking Adam off  
Eve sleeps in bed with all the horny priests of the world  
Clicking rosary beads in their beds  
Kisses the virgin nuns to sleep  
Plying their untouched flesh



With her working girl hands  
And Eyes are the arms  
That hold up all the roofs of all the churches  
Everywhere  
Where little girls are singing

*And I love the  
white hairs on her forearm*

*And I love the  
white hairs on her forearm*

*The blue on her  
dress*

*The blue on her  
dress*

*Lavender skirt  
spilt upwards on the  
breeze*

*And I love the  
white hairs on her  
forearm.*

## **STANDING BY MY BED**

**In gold sandals**

**Dawn that very**

**moment awoke me**

I lay out her body, thin, dark, hairless

On the floor.

This is where all that happens between us happens.

A woven mat covers the carpet,

her head and long dark hair hit the top of the mat, but her small  
arched feet fall short of its end.

Her chest erupts in gulps of air coming up and down frantic and  
smooth.

Curls of sweat form along her ribs,

I crouch over her and then get down alongside letting my body  
fall in its fleshy way into the weave of her and the straw, feeling  
the pinch of the mat against my skin as I move around.

The sun is coming up,

I say something juvenile like “oh my God”

And she says “you are taking my virginity”

The sun is up

And I decide that I deserve to fuck her.

**I ASKED MYSELF**

**What, Sappho, can**

**You give one who**

**Has everything,**

**Like Aphrodite?**

Taking all that she could the white goat said her goodbyes over  
and over

Lamenting the blood she spilt

I opened up the world that is a wound to this white goat

And she kicked me for the pleasure of it

Taking with her all she could

Every morsel

All of my pride

Like Aphrodite

Spitting apples from her cunt

Such sweet, sweet fruit.

What do you give one who has everything?

**AND I SAID**

**I shall burn the**

**Fat thigh-bones of**

**A white she-goat**

**On her altar**

This is Sappho speaking:

Lay her down and cut out her heart

Slice the knife in under her left breast

Scoop out her round and then dig with your hands for the heart

Crack the ribs

Pull them apart—use a wrench or anything configured as a  
wrench, jack, crank

Find the beating bloody heart and cut it out

Take it to the sea

And throw it in.

The white she-goat had long thin legs

Freckled hands

And a small pink mouth

She was called Spring

She ate the grass at the edge of the river

A fresh water child

Not like me

Salt water through and through  
Her knees padded with fuzz  
She dug in the soft earth  
And found me buried  
Clutching the stone slabs of my own words,  
Time and again not reading just gripping the grey pages,  
Desperation in my fingers scratching into stone,  
Tore myself to pieces for words like  
*Forgiveness.*  
She kissed life back into me  
Then kicked me for the pleasure  
She built a home out of my bones  
And sat singing  
While the morning came again.

## **I CONFESS**

At bones end

The light goes on and on

Echoing in blood

The song of expansion

Eyes widening

Toes curl

**I love that**

**Which caresses**

**Me. I believe**

**Love has his**

**Share in the**

**Sun's brilliance**

**And virtue**

Where bones end and tendons leap

Intestines merge

And expand

I fall through you

Pulsing again

Expanding

Wide streets and water rushing

Tide turns

Violet

## **AT NOONTIME**

The spider slept late

Asking for water

The world lent in

And she bit its nose

**When the earth is**

**Bright with flaming**

**Heat falling straight down**

**The cricket sets**

**Up a high-pitched**

**Singing in his wings**

Devouring her kill

The last song

Stretched itself inside her

Creep of tune

She lay on her back

And stared heartily at the night

Delicious

**I TOOK MY LYRE AND SAID:**

**Come now, my heavenly**

**Tortoise shell: become**

**A speaking instrument.**

I walked to the end of the jetty looking for your name

1964 got lost in the weather

I had to know

If you stood where I have

I've gone looking for you before

Found traces I thought imagined

But there you were carved into the jetty of my childhood

Your name etched beside mine

Before I knew how to say

Please.

\*

Crab nets float in the sea

Seagulls come home from the storm

The rain comes

The rain is coming again

Hollow shell

Trumpet

I play a tune

To bring in the tide



Nothing sounds like you.

I lift a pebble spider crab scatter

There are stories on the bottom of these rocks

I have no way to read them

Only to pick them up and marvel

At the illegible beauty of time.

**ALTHOUGH THEY ARE** <sup>117</sup>

**Only breath, words**

**Which I command**

**Are immortal**

They want to see me split in the sea

In ashes

In oil

Black slick

They want to see me torn apart

Broken like baby crabs under rocks

I didn't look back when we said goodbye

The air split

My tongue receded

My body curled in on itself as I walked

---

<sup>117</sup> Each of these bold fragments belong to Sappho.

Crawled along the ground

I took the shortcut home

Scraping my knees along the fresh bitumen

This road is new

And

I am old.

**DIVERGENT** <sup>118</sup>

Lines of road

Purple at dusk

New road

Old lines

The way home

Is still breathing

Is still looking for you

Peeling open the sky

Peeling open the ocean

---

<sup>118</sup> **IT'S NO USE**

**Mother dear, I**

**can't finish my**

**weaving**

**You may**

**blame Aphrodite**

**soft as she is**

**she has almost**

**killed me with**

**love for that boy**

Above and below  
Come apart  
And form  
New lanes  
of  
where to go  
and how to get there  
home  
is some place I've never been  
dreaming of Crete and  
singing in time with  
trees.

## **LIVER**

Eat more liver

Iron in blood

Fat

Liver on the knife

Fried in breadcrumbs

Liver

Dark like ice cold

Chicken livers

Small purple

Blue veins

Picked from the jelly flesh

Cast iron pan

Wooden handle burnt at the inside

Heavy

Heavy

Liver

## THE SPIDER SPEAKS

Attention: this is the spider eight legs in

three eyes wide

four femmes deep.

I wasn't going to tell you a story

But everything I have adds up to as much.

Sappho, tell us a story:

our days are numbers fingerprints of lips their peach brown  
mauve some colour like your lips is a map to the underground  
tunnels of this city and your hands move just like water  
everywhere and with force I want to down that last sip of coffee  
like a swell like an urge it is an urge to swallow you whole  
digesting your ocean a self of shallows and tide nothing left to  
do now with history being complete temperatures rising love  
being over except here in water and your lips and the dry earth  
that breathes when I dig and put my fingers inside it the dry earth  
has wings and so do I just this afternoon where the rain is and I  
drown in skin and let my scraps and flesh rot for blue flowers  
keys gravity air god resistance and fellowship with trees.

our days are numbers webs made of fat and blood skin of honey  
skin of sugar cracked with spoon and milk gloss ancestral voices  
calling from across the ocean beans and cows wheat and stone  
this is the work of my hands and these muscular keys spring to  
attention when the weather is low and glass between you and I

and the world makes light tight and shadows tight and sunset  
tight squeezing blood from the horizon pimpled with oil rigs and  
shipping boats the straight world flat on its back digging its earth  
eating its sky swallowing time dreaming of abundance while  
there's starvation and beans and cows still spinning echo cough  
stretch creek arthritis and yoga towels water warm baths and our  
days are numbers urine forgetfulness a favourite book and sleep  
driving to the town you grew up in  
Persephone, Persephone, come back to us.

**IT IS THE FINAL DAY OF THE YEAR WHERE I LOSE**

**MY SENSES:**

Loss rings in the hall

Hurt me like silver

Web shines

Caught in my own trap

A hell of making, breathing, wanting

Wrapped in limbs, crying for

Hurt like silver

Rope wet

Stinking of dog

Blood and

Tinned fish

The yellow wrapper peeling at the lip

Blood on the counter

Climbing again after being freed

limbs are wilted and white. My round body bounces off the floorboards and I make a run for it.

My arms in the air

And you talk to me about the way kisses smell, rubbing your little nub of a nose into my lips and moving in my grip. I wrap you in silver, wrap you in silver.

Spider bite, the big toe. White Tail you say. To the ocean. I carry you into the water my six extra legs falling off leaving crisscross



cuts in the white sand making a map of my degeneration. I fall  
in love with you. I fall in love with you.

I fall in love with you<sup>119</sup>.

---

<sup>119</sup> I didn't notice the spider at all when I woke up to pace the long hallway, stamping the cramp from thigh to calf to foot and out to the worn grey floral carpet. I guess I was too distracted by visions of varicose veins, blood clots, thrombosis, embolisms, heart attacks, blindness and all the other costs of contraception. (McKemmish 177).

**THAT AFTERNOON**

**Girls ripe to marry**

**Wove the flower-**

**Heads into necklaces**

**WHEN YOU OPEN YOUR MOUTH TO SPEAK**

I open my mouth &

reach for the relation of eating or kissing,

mouths open against queer romance and the facts of drowning or

digestion.

Outside, grief or something like sorrow cruises the lips

lamppost wandering eye

mouth or break constructed

against this feeling of knowing too much

of having lost it all

of having said *nothing* after opening

swallowing a circle of breath

a lead teardrop

a million happy birthdays where our mouths are closed and

opened, where

unsaid unsaid unsaid

remains.

Inside, bent weight of time

meets pink and white structures of declaration and catastrophe—

catastrophe of *feeling*

slow built on heartbreak

growing up with ache

or a lack of light

enmeshed

shadows and quiet.

Outside, suppose the weight sustains the maker and her stories.

The ordinary wins and losses of

What it *feels* like for a girl.

Inside, watching the mouth as it opens to speak

give way, the dam finally broken by speech—

so much dreaded *flow*

so much to wish *unsaid*

not a feared object

just the locus of memory played out at the dinner table over the

same takeaway meal every night for a year.

\*

*you were there running water apple cider vinegar blackened*

*cutlery remembering warm flesh and solid ground*

\*

It is hard to comment fairly on the wins and losses of the ends  
we come to.

What starts as Styrofoam becomes fifty-two kilograms of  
aluminum.

What starts as breath becomes a loaded shoulder and neck  
carried with

the heaviness of a body that passes through time in the way girls  
and women often must.

I can't pick it up.

A memory too thick to catch turns to solid mass

finds a home in the gallery ground

between families and histories

every single time someone sings *My Funny Valentine*

smoke comes up out of the city grid

which is deep welled knowing

a thousand corners to grieve on for

what it feels like

in the work of art

when danger is absence.

Not absent.

It's just that the shape of light

the shape of touch

is always

in your hands.

When you open your mouth to speak

and the world falls out

I lean on your arched promise

unsaid unsaid unsaid

the shape of time and memory

wordless

and

your lips.

## AFTER THE WEDDING

The love-making scene is difficult to watch<sup>120</sup>. Lovers are eaten after orgasm, usually quite slowly. Before the fatal realisation, eating starts as a pleasure. The tickle of eight tongues, eight legs, and a great many fingertips gets things off to an enormously good-natured start. Understandably, most post-coital interactions, with some bitter exceptions, usually start well. In this case, the calm does not last. In the case of a male lover, it usually lasts longer. Soft in their release they lay about eyes closed their bodies locked in a peaceful hum, unsuspecting, nothing urgent. This is why it is particularly difficult to watch with the males because they simply do not see it c o m I n g.

First, she takes his toes into her mouths. This might sound like a lot of labour but with many mouths it is made extremely easy. It happens quickly with precise incisions, many men, still fondling the last of their ejaculation do not notice their toes are gone until the little toe is reached. This is because the little toe can be stubborn and needs to be eaten along with a good chunk of the

---

<sup>120</sup> Snuggling in to the warmth of slept sheets, breathing the smell of sweetened sweat, damp reminders of a night of love. I remember how these sheets got soiled and sense that not even the precious way your lips caress my thigh can convince me it is worth facing lone spiders first thing in the morning.

(McKemmish 178).

foot and so, for the first but not last time, there will be tearing of flesh in a deliberate and painful manner.

She makes no apologies for this. Simply, continues her work using her strength to control the body that now recoils from her touch, screaming, looking for a weapon.

It isn't so much that this act of dismantling is painful in a physical sense, although it does bring shame onto the male body as it must recognise itself for the first time as vulnerable to attack, pliable, and porous. This act of dismantling the male body defies narrative. The heroic body torn to shreds. A menstrual scene of division and indulgence where the male subject is brought into the specter of female abjection. Where passion turns to violence, she becomes—deconstructive. Prohibitive, not productive.

A swell becomes a tide,

Devouring<sup>121</sup>.

---

<sup>121</sup> She kills it quite easily with a shoe. There is no fatal bite, no instant death. I rest my case nonetheless and maintain that the spider would not have been in that paddock if I had not been there too.

(v) I have no intention of tempting fate by writing the last spider story. (McKemmish 180).

*Dear Kathy,*

*I can't stand this silence. I've left the notes you gave me in a chamber pot. I can't forget them.*

*Forget me,*

*Sappho.*



What

about

the

Neck?

*and all the other places I've been holding you*

## SKIRT

It is the truth of skirting

Holding the image

Dis/juncture of articulation that

Pedals breath and wanting

I wait for you to hang up the phone and kiss me

You could be anyone

For all I know

You are.

Proliferating the edge

Not lending itself to a bulge

Parts sweet sorrow

Dips in a lake

Of an eye

Holding pattern is

Justly

Soft

And too long in force

The ache sets in

Just above the cheek.

To lift and run the skirt is the act of skirting

Near and true

The bend

Hem

Is walking out the door

Pack her things and send the mail this is the where the ache sets  
in.

The way the body remembers and tells

The way the skirt is short or long

Or denim

Or linen

The way

A petticoat is a completely different

Pain.

This is where the ache sets in.

## CREPUSCULE

Curve water line drips

to your fault earn

water lapping

fold

a tongue wide slurp break at seam

your fault in flood I wonder do you tend

at once violent tender

hold your fault porcelain dark

embanked

bound in the crepuscule muscle folds bends

mine light and dark blood age

we lick and turn

towards parallels driven by the creek

falling like water

towards fate.

As a girl

I laughed in the foot curl

Of your touch

Like in a song I might sing

You moved through me like a beam of light

## FORGETTING THE SKY

The sun is a well in the sky.

Mouths grass,

Dirt whispers,

Wishes blacked out—

One way glass.

Clouds run the night,

I look in.

Your elevator kiss

Echoes.

Stars disappear,

And fly to your lead pencil scratch.

Nicotine fuzz,

Wet liquorice paper

Cold between my fingers.

Nothing tastes,

Like you.

No kiss like this one,

Deadly on the lips.

Crane apart, jaw hangs loose,

You pour your tongue into my mouth.

Nose against neck, the elevator opens.

Level Five, separate rooms.

I hear you turn the key.

Forgetting the sky,

I fell in love with you when I closed the door.

## MENISCUS

When I knock on your door

I do not know

I do not know

Who has been taking in the light all morning.

I do not know open and closed

Body suddenly singular and

fitted with a hulk of breasts and tight calves and  
fingernails to chew, a scar on my side, a raised heart, tattooed  
thighs, faded summer t-shirt tan forms the surface of my  
knowing.

Another summer will arrive

But this will be the first broken by new cries

A new sound

A new body.

The smooth edge of your swimming pool

Is cold against my legs

A narcissus dip

Dome of water, scoop of light refracts against memory

Forces the figure in the water to arch time none like present.

I made a world out of you

Doubling was not reflection

Break still picture

You and I

Twin image

Stretched to meniscus

Bulging

With seed or child

Fissures of joy

Split the rings of Saturn

Perched on the smooth edge of your swimming pool

The dog says it is time to go.

I look for movement in water

Still

The undisturbed will of your silence—

My reflection clear again.

Naught and crosses sky

Who is it taking in the light this morning?

The new couch will fall to the cats

There is no doubt

I am astonished by your act of difference

Which might now be radical

Or simply—you know how to get what you want.

Remembering the corrugated tide

The boat of our childhood painted blue

The pact of our name dissolved

Crowd waiting

The waiting goes on

Tide multiplies

A day of bloodletting

Cuts the game short.

Between drinks

In the incredible lawlessness of feeling

I don't understand you.



## BUS STOP

Rain and the road

Shake hands at the coffee shop.

Bus stop.

Break, shift

Like that automatic kiss

Filling bedsheets

Compressing the morning into moans

Before the sun is up

--don't go.

Back to

Fourteen years never loved you

Six years never knew

Three hours of this.

\*

We cover the mirrors

And grieve for

She not dead yet.

\*

Back from the night before

Blue circles under eyes

Shadow of touch

Keeping bare legs warm

In the rain.

## COFFEE

Nowhere is enough for you  
All along  
You get the last laugh  
And I should have been  
Writing poetry  
Instead of filling up handfuls of sun  
Pouring them on your skin  
Wasting them on  
Dirt that won't give up.  
I'm clean now,  
Stirring my coffee with the end of my pen.  
Powdered milk turned to brown  
Confetti.  
Give it a spin,  
Still coffee.

## LEMON CAKE

Micro hold

Fibre urge

Dance on

Slip

Swell and reach

Another day

Another day

I think of you in the museum

The famous fat artist

Could I be the ugly old man beside you?

Inertia and revolution

A pin

Alberto's

Espresso

Beads on string

Open door

Bats coming home

Bush turkey scratch

My lover on the phone

Yours in the next room

Alberto's again

Espresso and lemon cake

Lemon cake

I want you, still

## COLD WATER

Red papaya

Yoghurt

Sun and tall grass

Loosening my jaw

The tropics

Still breathe

Sunburn along the back of my legs

Your hands

Cold water

Two minutes

Alone

The tap leaks

Daddy long-legs by the toilet roll

Tiles sweat

Nothing left to say

See you in

March.

light through glass doors that run from the ceiling

shift along their tracks

wicker chairs

red carpet too red to stand on

run

red

to the end of the light

and pick that up

when you're done.

## CONCRETE

The word for it is like 'Masonite'.

Isn't though.

Pressed earth flecked with white and blue stones.

Cool on a hot day,

So long as the curtains stay closed.

I've said somewhere before,

“leaving could never be urgent,  
not with all that light.”

True again.

Concrete.

I close the door.

Knowing lasts longest.

I don't want to fall into the white sneaker trap

Where I address myself for no reason

Where there is no sentiment

Just the claw of thought

Good or bad

I want teeth in my poetry

Even if they are loose.

I bit the floor one day while thinking about you.

Imagine climbing those stairs.

No.

## RIP

It's the afternoon and I love you again

Water boiling fast

Evening coming up toes like seafoam

The promise of a body close to mine

That knows the tick of my clock

Opens to my touch

Asks again and again            please

Lets flow

Milk flesh for hours.

Then morning

Must work again

To find quiet

Fight scraps of light

Deny the day its power

Weight in water

I carry you through tide after tide

Rip parallel to desire

all I wish to taste

And not hurt you

Hurt you

When I go.



## BREAK BACK

I'd forgotten the argument

where we'd *really* come undone

And every now and again I get a glimpse of it

When you're dancing by the sink

I think

Fuck

That's it.

I stay with it

The blue certainty of my love for you

Which is so ripe and quick

But edit always caution and knowing

Circling something in the margins.

You're waiting for revelation and impatient for

Me to shake off my day and

**fuck you**

**hard.**

Some days when you walk through the door I see

Everything there is to see (a millennium)

I follow your blue-jeans in the supermarket

You are not afraid of raw egg or chicken

You have a noble heart

Where I am fragmented

And complicit

The stuff those stories I leak when there's no  
good cover

When all I can say is

I did it.

He was there, but **it was me.**

**It is me.**

You remind me that

Some things don't last

And others do.

I want to hold onto you and the light that comes through the door.

RETURN: the end of an elegy.

1. The first line in elegiac verse is a rising six<sup>122</sup>. The second is a falling five<sup>123</sup>.

Six words. Wounds. Here I go fiddling with my wound again.

Here I go filing through pictures and definitions.

Five words and five years, but none as total as what I know of your body—my body after the fact.

In the rift of passing with words, I grow skin, tough and filmy over the space between us, travelling alone through time and into the arms of others. Into new and unrelenting loves and texts. Relent. Return. Easy now.

This is my text.

This is my body.

“Figuration is the way in which the erotic body appears (to whatever degree in and in whatever form that may be) in the profile of the text.” (Barthes “*Pleasure of*” 55-56).

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<sup>122</sup> Return to text the lost, stolen, dead, queer fate of words.

<sup>123</sup> No feeling lost on this. Roundabouts of the belly button and mouth wet and juicy. Yes us oppressed by the carnival turn slow on that spinning wheel. I never forget you. I never forget.

2. What I do with my body to write this body changes. As you keep changing year after year with each shock of recognition on the street or waking to sweep the mattress with my palm feeling out the dead in my sleep or between that and dreaming. I *return* to you through writing pleasure, pain, and disorder<sup>124</sup>. I have to write, find you again and again in works that have common contact with you: stories of artists, abuse, incest, suicide, queer sex, politics, and laughter. *Return* is the process of this work, its system of memory and witness, poetics, and completion.

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<sup>124</sup> I am turning around you I am describing you minutely, once the turn is complete, I re turn around you and you have completely changed, I describe you entirely again, so time passes, I describe you year after year. As each year you are different. (Cixous “*Notebooks*” 5).

3. Is this the

place where we learn that silence has colour?

Suffocation. Blood. Noise.

Violet.

Resected tongue falling from a body that knows how to count time on skin how to pass as silk or water through dirt. To tell quietly by hand the tale of violets. The tapestry is a woven confession, disclosure, a note to say: this is how it happened<sup>125</sup>.

This is my body (broken for you). I've heard that said. Suppose I am first, and I have been first, but not at this. All this information of feeling text and body. Now that silence has colour, is incomplete. My tongue cut out politely. Silence is a colour and we tilt towards it renewed by memory played out pink as salt and water. Spit salt and water. Elastic juice of throat and sobs. Let it pour, let it slink, let it ride the current of my broken jaw gnashed to pieces.

Rocking back and forth between texts, multitudes of form and anti-form, the fragments of a singer, a lover, a poet, adds up to a fictocritical work bent by longing and looking for release.

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<sup>125</sup> Without my tongue, I cannot speak. Instead, I sing. Howl, bellow, lament. Another girl. Another girl made of salt and water. Pink as graveyards. Violet.

Already, the shadows come to blossom on the forgetting  
regions of hurt and wonder. These shadows are not darkness.  
These shadows are pale lavender encroaching.

The prowler of *Fragments of a Paper Witch* becomes a novel.

*Konkretion*'s Wicked stockings sack the legs of this *return*.

This flipping over.

This switch.

The 'i of the swarm' becomes the necrotizing flight to Paris. Is  
it irritating to be read this way? The fragments resolve  
unlocked, but worked upon to become a whole. The incomplete  
kind.

While I write my way out of my own text I come crashing back  
into the words of others, their testimony, their lightening  
imagination, and I'd do it all again for you, to you, about you.  
I see myself, already a figure of the past. I get up. I put on your  
song. *Oh, my darling oh my darling clementine...*

Maggie Nelson says of her book *Bluets* (that) "...the book  
seems to me hyper-aware of the fragment as fetish, as  
catastrophe, as leftover, as sample or citation, as memory..."  
(Nelson in Nelson et al. 159). This book or collection, has a  
similar relationship to the fictocritical fragment as an imperfect  
erotic form. The desire to produce the hybrid text at odds with  
the patriarchal, paternal, phallogocentric necessities of story and  
completion is a complicated one. But one that contains its own

archeology. I open my copy of Horse and Ania Walwicz reads the same books as I do.

The kink is that fractures in form and narrative allow room for the collision of texts to produce meaning in a way that can only be fragmentary, sudden, fixated and fleeting—queer. The fragment allowing for obsession and detachment in equal measure, responds to a languid fever. Hot and unsettling. Is there a novel hiding in these pages?<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> What Marion May Campbell's work shows is that the words, once written, once published, do not die or exist only in the life of the text as held by readers and critics. They go on to make, to be made into, new textual bodies with new open ends, frills, and fractures. All the more satisfying for having been found in their kernel elsewhere in the banks of an *oeuvre*.



4. But it is up to me at this time to do the thinking to let the words collide inside of me and mark this text some other way than before. Conclusion is it to say it all again. Like refrain, but with an edge. It is like finding the seam or threading the needle. But I don't do that. Except for that I sew the burst edges of my denim jeans often enough. My thighs work through jeans in fascistically. They pop in the same spot every time. Exposing, at first, a flash of white thigh. Nobody looks there I think. Not really. But then the material around it starts to thin. They become almost metallic. I feel the gap widen as I ride my bike along the river. The sound my thighs make as I walk up the corridor is a flat swoosh. I break up all over this text again. Knowing the strange bruises of story here are slowly being stitched up. A horizontal scream—a seam. In a flash of flesh. I try for the eye of the needle and find instead the loop of memories that move me to write is instead a turquoise ring<sup>127</sup>. Your danger. Your delicious. And then.

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<sup>127</sup> Fictocriticism; a practice that sews me that I sew here.

Bricolage, montage, assemblage, collage, coller, to stick together. I make a story out of bits and pieces. The process of associative thought and reflection. Improvisation and analysis. The flight of thought, a trajectory and reflection, retrieval, recoil. The use of multilevel text comprising poetics, theory and appropriated text. (Walwicz "*Horse*" 5).

5. The artist with the large purple underpants goes to Rome and leaves my heart there. She *returns* fractured by the story of her burning house and the loose light of afternoons in Bali, sweat on the shoulders of a story of a flinching desire set hot against her childhood. I shake backwards. Fold my taste for her into my skin, into paper, into light. In a public bathroom in Port Adelaide she helps me remove a menstrual cup. I hear it pop and she kisses me. Kisses me. K is for leaving. The girl with strawberry-blond pubic hair learns to live without my guitar callouses. I write twelve lonely songs about her. I call her and play them down the phone one by one. She thinks they are all about *you*. Pink bangs and shaved pussy leaves Melbourne with a short kiss and a hand through their hair. I take the night off from spreading that tropic of cancer, c u n t glass stars hot and pulsing, I miss it now. Violet Silence publishes a book of sonnets and retreats to her wedded bed<sup>128</sup>. I lose focus and go back to sleep. Reading between dreams. Dream reading for days. That crocodile clock in my chest still ticks and

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<sup>128</sup> And the ends they came to were never good. Shot of yellow at the center of that longing. We gave up. Yes, it was good to put my weapon down and pick up a pen. I remember. The only woman you'll defend is Courtney Love.

tocks. I dream of his hips. I dream of reading his hips  
and thighs the opens and closes of him. That's a kind of  
reading. A kind of re-writing<sup>129</sup>.

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<sup>129</sup> "Trauma and its related affects can be elusive objects of inquiry..." (Cvetkovich 285) and since I can never settle on the story—tell it straight. The rolls of hips and thighs must be enough. The panic of the chance meeting that never comes. For when I see you, I see you deliberately, fully, I know who you are. The dreaming goes on. Hips get slower. I tuck my hand behind my lover's head to bring the dream to an end.

6. I keep your books<sup>130</sup>. Though I can barely touch their  
secret pages. Every gift I gave sits on my bookshelf  
another return. My books. My Dickens. Like Ali  
Smith's desk and armchair and Dickens. Open it to see  
the cheesy song lyrics in your—my copy of *Little  
Dorrit*.

*You to me are everything the sweetest song that I could  
sing oh baby.*

That e.e. cummings where your yellow post-it notes still  
sit by the poems you like best. I like your body when it  
is with my body—your body.

It is the material of reading that makes the material of  
writing<sup>131</sup>. The feminine becomes material. The  
material feminine, masculine, or both<sup>132</sup>.

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<sup>130</sup> Love, I think is always an unfinished reading (Campbell  
“Fragments of a” 50).

<sup>131</sup> Quinn's *écriture matière* (Eades “All the Beginnings” 25).  
Forgive the familiar, but he is. And so I go on from loving the  
material to write loving material text. I am spinning out again.  
Returning to the words of others to find a way to say: it doesn't  
happen just once. It happens every day.

<sup>132</sup> Dear reader, I'm in bits and pieces. I am a broken house.  
(Walwicz “Horse” 1).

7. Cautious unwieldy, I fashion an elegy of this wail,  
howl, bellow, lament.  
Apologia for all the blood and milk on this floor  
to all the girls I've loved before.

All this blood and all this milk.

My Grandmother's father was a milkman.

A single strip of seaweed frozen in a bottle of milk on the porch  
steps.

Swimming, oceans apart,

His mind awash with dementia that too runs in the family.

SEAWEED<sup>133</sup> tickles my ankle.

SEAWEED in piles at Semaphore Beach. The day drawn out in  
waves of blisters and competition for shade. The line for the  
carousel. Tiny exposed thighs burn against the hot metal  
horses. Towels over the slippery saddles to save little legs. Still,  
one cries as the wheel turns. The ride is stopped. Back to the  
car. To the city, to the suburbs, out west or towards the hills,

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<sup>133</sup> I use capital letters to intrude upon the sentence, to build the  
structure of this intrusion above and over what words mean. To  
use words to cover, as a symbol, as well as their attendant  
meaning and allusions. Not only to be the image or object of the  
sentence, but to take it over, physically. To show the ubiquity of  
this presence within the text.

this catalogue of family photographs punctuated with strings of  
salty wet green skin.

It is not an easy relation. Family complicates the issue of truth  
in unexpected ways.

The untrue, untold, unyielding. The fictional reality and the  
reality of fiction.

Those hurried steps through the car park at Our Lady of  
Victories to make sure the dedication was secure. We went to  
God's house to pray for the milkman.

I looked at the giant crucifix, its marble background, and gold  
everywhere.

And people say lesbians are into drama.

But there's no win, no laughter, joke on me (again).

8. I c o m e to this garden house with concrete floors and  
compressed earth walls that crumble at my touch, like  
biscuits, colour of butter to prove that they are keeping  
out the cold with only good graces. High ceilings, cold  
floors, and my own bed. This five years falling to meet  
me and welcome me home.

Pull apart language

To show it as an action

To defy the expectation of release

Of build-up towards resolution

C O M E T E X T

S E A W E E D

I am already that.

Like the walls falling away a crumb at a time

Responding to the brush of my hands

Expanding with heat

C o m I n g u n d o n e

In the c h I ll

9. Sounds of this work, songs of this work make dark  
carved lines in flesh-text. Dogs bark rain—I jump to  
shallows of want and warning and

Hit your kiss as

Waves run a

spine full of salt water and blood.

Here, at the bottom of the world,

My throat

Opens to swallow history whole.

Freckle steps, cue blue and blonde and an envelope of open

skin. Read a letter. Write a letter in flesh, contamination

sure and urgent.

Blessing of water, outlasts drought and doubt of God.

Write as a saint.

Speak as a child.

*Return* to words for comfort, for freedom, rebellion from

sorrow and memory<sup>134</sup>.

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<sup>134</sup> As a counter-strategy, *écriture féminine*, it is argued, is theoretically sourced in the bodies of women, (and) texts, however, are produced through the lived practices of being socially positioned as (among other things) women so these effects will be inscribed in what is written. 'Writing the body' therefore plays a significant part in actively inventing new ways for women to speak



Swallow history whole—sum of touch and kiss.

Each their own microscopic arrangement, bad light and  
disease.

---

and write about ourselves as women, rather than through  
the narrative machinery of patriarchy. (Bartlett 1-2)

Alison Bartlett's functional definition of *écriture féminine* is a useful and poignant one. Although, it might be usefully updated to include contemporary understandings of Trans, femme, queer, and non-binary identities. For these bodies exist and write. For this text is made of them. Quinn Eades' theorization of the *écriture* material allows the body of the text and the body of the writer, queerness, femme-ness, butchness, masculinities to claim a writing of their own.

10. Pass borders of bodies to become most abject, afraid,  
ecstatic—deep north of your body fertile spread open  
on concrete floor sun and blue melody bends back to an  
arch a scoop of bone and desire and light curve take a  
big bite.

Hunger,

Swallows history whole      meet at the tabernacle

    pray for morning and consolation, deliverance from the  
tortured world of my whorish heart. Take a big bite and  
swallow history whole to forget the wilderness of our union of  
letters and poems and emails and conversation.

Archive that fuck.

11. Turn your body into words,

I turn your body into words

Your sex to quotation

Ambient pulse

Disband veins

Gesture of milieu<sup>135</sup>

The gathering of phrase and image

Who can ever forget the dinner scene of *Working Hot*

Escargot and mad love

The will of words and women

The tragic dissatisfaction

Oh I have loved a Freda Peach too

C o m e s in lead pencil

The black and white photograph

Eyes shut tight

Face to the rain,

History rains at night.

Always in darkness, not to fetish the light, the spare and

unseen,

I love the night, I love its echo on the day, memory which is

desire, which rains through the hours of evening and sleep.

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<sup>135</sup> When you aim for *jouissance* but only reach ambiance.

Candlelight instead of fireworks. Always play to the back of the room, even when nobody is there.

Perch breath under my ribs, fingers dig into shoulders, hook  
collar bones,  
Dismantle me bit by bit,  
Enjoy that task of murder, deconstruction,  
Lascivious and untrue—now stuck with mythology.  
Song of water,  
Soft beat, lub dub lub dub.  
The song speaks of women cut open and cold.  
Pink marks us now,  
Some black and white grief  
Grief is the colour of my true love's hair  
Come monochrome on my hands  
You did once  
I walk by smiling  
Nothing else to do  
The promise of you performance,  
That pony tail  
I have to smile  
We've been talking all morning  
Me and your pink boots  
You and my pink shirt  
Fractures multiply to divide  
We are splitting at every possible angle,  
Every possible inch,  
Each diversion coming clean and craning open my mouth

Held apart by your hands  
My tongue resisting the force of history  
And everything else  
I cannot not swallow<sup>136</sup>.

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<sup>136</sup> 'my hands are birds

they're landing' said Freda Peach

'this is the tip of your consciousness this is all you know I am

dancing on the tip of my finger I am dancing on top of you

dancing on my feet on you my heels twisting into you this is all

you know this is the tip of your consciousness' (Fallon 70).

12. As a way into this writing – that is the *return* – what might return mean? By return it is possible to think of lost possessions, lost memories. What is the law of return? Return, as in return to space previously known. As in a statement like ‘in recorded history versus non-recorded history’? It is the return to the mother after years of denial, after breaking with the maternal. (Prosser 206).

I smile when I find the seed of my writing in your writing. Is that the seed of my life in yours? Wishful thinking perhaps. Too close? This is my inheritance from my queer academic ancestry. You were writing me. I read. I wrote. Again, maybe that’s too romantic or is it just what happens? And is it ok so long as we don’t start to believe in fate. Not really. It’s a coincidence, for sure. My lover gives me a painting and I give it back and she exhibits it under the title ‘Return’. I make this my model of reading and writing, fashioned through disappointment and lust. Collected in this work which draws on the traditions of women’s writing, queer theory, fictocriticism, memoir, abstraction, something akin to *Avant Garde* or an extension of. The first time I read ‘The P-lover Paradox’ was seven years ago in my girlfriend’s bed at lightning speed. Now, having been through its pages more carefully, with the speed that comes with rain and learning (slow). I find traces of this

body of work in the Lesbian Detective's survey. Her clues, her history are not the same as this poet's history, but their relation is near despite its lack of calculation.

I accidentally write again the words of my father.

This queer feminist entry into long history of works about grief, works about loss, or sexual history, abuse, and family, is almost at its end. Not because these lines stop flowing, they keeping pinging off in different directions, vibrating against each new piece of knowledge, each new body, each new morning. It is time. This is a system of *return* that practices remembering and forgetting in equal measure. That recalls the exhibition in the old shipping container. I laughed. Clever. Just like her to say what I meant before I knew.

I returned the painting because it was too painful to look at. She tried to leave in the morning while I was half asleep. I caught her hand and she whispered to me that she was leaving. I asked her what she meant. She said "I can't". I pulled her back into bed and we made love. Ew. I know. I hate saying it, but it was true. Better to say we fucked. It was early and we both went to work afterwards. I didn't shower and when my sister and our friend took me along on their shopping trip (not wanting to leave me alone in our share house—the scene of the crime), I walked behind them through Westfield Marion stinking of sex unable to stop myself from sobbing on the escalator.

Two days later, I find the painting on my doorstep. A few days after that, she was back in my bed and in my life.

I cry when I *return* the painting to Kirsten's studio. Bruised. Heavy. It was raining that day. I wrapped the canvas in black rubbish bin liners to protect it and left it in the caged doorway and apologise via text message.

After she takes her own life, the painting is returned to me by our friend Kirsten. It *really* belongs to you, she tells me. She never did a painting for anyone else. That's true, although, they were always in one way or another for Kirst. Always for herself. Just in the way this is yours and mine. On the back of the frame in black marker I'm relieved to see she hasn't erased the message.

For Ali,

With love

Sonya<sup>137</sup>.

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<sup>137</sup> What I started to understand was that the poem was made out of time – past, present and future. It lives in the present, it breathes there and that's how you let anyone in. I think people can feel this accessing of time in poetry very readily. As soon as the poem ceases to be about anything, when it even stops saving things, stops being such a damn collector, it becomes an invite to the only refuge which is the impossible moment of being alive. I lost her after a while, and of course she was



I find myself at the end under the law of return. Where I take the work, the thesis, the book and claim it as my own. For you, to you, about you, maybe. Here I am. Sitting in my first apartment, the dog at my side, drinking awful pinot noir (left here by the latest ex-girlfriend), and trying to find the words to finish this mess.

But hope that the words might not be cold, fixated on the dead. For what can the living say? For what does it do to words to die? Find these words. Resonate and let the resonance be warm. That electric chill under the moon, that I get on my bicycle, after the tables are set to turn again in the morning. Let text-flesh go. Wobble home  
To put to bed what never sleeps.  
Urge my fingers to  
loosen their grip on yearning.  
The last word is an  
echo.

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never *mine*, I borrowed her and she borrowed me from our lives. (Myles 268).

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