

A MOMENT OF SUSPENDED CONTROL

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CATHERINE CLEARY
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Introduction

Late Monday afternoon and the sun is low, blackening the trees' deep greens with shadow. Through the one-hundred-year-old windows a plane is warped as it crosses the sky. Watching it bend and ripple is like looking up through water from the bottom of a swimming pool. The sun drops lower now, shoots through a gap in the trees' branches, and the light on the white walls is wavering lines of orange, of gold. This manuscript is about rape and the holes it puts in the surfaces of things.

When Leonard Cohen died two years ago, his line *there is a crack in everything, that's where the light gets in* appeared everywhere; deemed a worthy summation of his life and work. I found it in news articles and cooking blogs, on every other social media post I scrolled past. I even found a slight variant of it on the marquee of a local juice and smoothie franchise: *there is a wound in everything, that's where the light gets in*. I laughed when I saw the misprint, thought it too dramatic, but eventually I came back to the line and liked it; I thought of other words: *gap*, *hole*, *blur*, *pause*. The misquote strikes me as a fundamentally religious line, so embodied, so hopeful that suffering will bring salvation. The trees bend in the wind, shaking the sunlight. I see sunspots, which too much resemble migraine auras and my head spins with nausea.

I started writing this manuscript after reading Shakespeare's narrative poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, published originally in 1594. This poem is rooted in the tradition of the complaint poem, defined by the Poetry Foundation as "a poem of lament, often directed at an ill-fated love." Shakespeare's poem recounts the history, or the myth, whichever it is, of Lucretia. In her story, one of the sons of the Roman King visits Lucrece's house one night while her husband is away

at war, rapes her in the middle of the night, and departs early in the morning. Lucrece then calls her husband and father home, tells them what happened, and commits suicide in front of them. Her body is paraded through the streets of Rome as a symbol of the corruption of the Roman rule, hastening the overthrow of the monarchy.

The poem belongs to a significantly distinct subgenre of complaint poem which arose in Elizabethan England and took as its subject chaste women who are threatened by a ruler or member of the court—"a situation that invites speculation on the uses and abuses of power".¹ In some of these poems, the threatened woman manages to escape sexual violence, other times she does not. I was drawn to this genre due to its simultaneous strangeness and undeniable relevancy to our contemporary context. The following poems are in some ways an attempt to create a complaint poem for today, this moment of lavender clouds and green leaves growing slowly darker.

The neighbor's goats line up along our wire fence; every so often I hear the metal rattle of their bells and when the babies bleat it could be the crying of a human child. I know there is an enormous spider web spun across the branches above their heads; last week after a rainstorm I saw it lit up in the morning, the sunlight shining on hundreds of individual beads of water like a Vija Celmins painting. The web is invisible now in the flat evening light, waterless.

¹ Dubrow, Heather. "A Mirror for Complaints." *Renaissance Genres*, edited by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski. Harvard University Press, 1986, 399-417.

Pain as a hole, or gap in perception; pain as a crack in the surface; pain as the place where the body meets the mind, where the invisible enters the visible. The mystical text *Scivias* was written between the years of 1141-1151 by German abbess Hildegard of Bingen. Hildegard conceived of herself as the recipient of divine visions, which the *Scivias* recounts. Later, neurologists labeled her visions as a kind of visual migraine aura called Scintillating Scotoma. This aura typically begins as a spot of flickering light near the center of the visual field, expanding outward from an initial spot. Those who suffer from it might see various patterns including shimmering arcs of light or spots of smaller lights. Jorie Graham's poem describing a river, "The Surface," begins with the simple line "It has a hole in it."²

The clouds are now shades of black, the trees a mass of curved shadows. In high school my photography teacher would tell us he never wanted to see the color black in our photos, that a whole spectrum of greys lined the perimeter of black. I remember him saying this as we stood in the darkroom dipping prints into the stop bath. These strike me as a beautiful words now, more so as they cease to exist as places and objects, and the words begin to point at a memory: the *stop bath* and the *darkroom*.

I think about the following poems both as individual units as well as pieces of a larger poem. Some of the poems take on the form of poetic "fragments," which are written in short, clipped verse, while other poetic "arguments" are written in prose; the two categories are assembled in a very loose alternating order. This form allowed me to write about rape and sexual trauma in multiple voices, which I soon learned was necessary. Similar to Shakespeare's framing of his

² Graham, Jorie. *The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems 1971-1994*. The Ecco Press, 1995, pp. 179.

narrative poems with a historical contextualizing section of prose entitled “The Argument,” I have created prose chunks to provide context for the verse fragments. However, rather than pinning the fragments to a particular moment or reducing and defining them, my aim is for the arguments to open up the fragments to a context or field wider than one individual body.

Within the fragments, the poetic voice is confessional and immediate; located *inside* the action, inside the rape. Within the arguments, the voice is more detached and critical—I like to think of that voice as located *outside* the act of rape or trauma. It is, in some ways, a retrospective voice. I understand the dangers of creating a false binary between confessional and critical, and I do not mean to do this. There are aspects of each in the other, and both are essential to the project. I’ve tried to create categories that are unstable, voices that slip into each other.

Another afternoon, looking through a different window. One hot red rose is smashing its velvet against a field of green.

In *Eros the Bittersweet*, Anne Carson writes, “Now is the moment that presents the problem, so imagine yourself at then and avoid the problem”.³ As a writer, I’m interested in the way language allows me to step outside of time, outside of life, and fix knowledge or experience in a specific way without creating simultaneous different understandings or experiences. When I set out to write the following poems I wanted to free Lucrece from the myth—the one way of experiencing her story. However, I know that in the manuscript I fix her again, even as I attempt to free her: in the narrative frame of my own biography; in our current moment of

³Carson, Anne. *Eros the Bittersweet*. Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 137.

screens and hashtags; in the clinical language that today helps us describe rape: trauma, physiology, symptom, coping mechanism.

The neighbor's dog crouches in the tall grass we never cut. He's tossing something small and dark into the air, catching it then throwing it up again. It seems too soft or too heavy to be a ball, the curve it follows to the ground too oblong. I watch his white tail wave above the weeds; when I look away to type and then back again I've lost him in the grass. A storm is on its way; drops of rain begin to spot the windows.

By the time she was twenty-five, Saint Catherine of Siena reportedly ate "nothing." Her confessor writes, "her stomach could digest nothing and her body heat consumed no energy...the holy virgin regularly and with great pain inserted stalks of fennel and other plants into her stomach [after meals], otherwise being unable to vomit".⁴ The less she ate, the closer to God Catherine became: the closer to purity, to pure abstraction, to losing the body altogether. Her entire body became the wound that let the light in.

Tonight's sunset is deeper than the last. The purple storm clouds are cut through with pink and at the sky's bend the purple deepens into blue. The goats are inside their shelter for the night; corrugated metal eaten out with rust; they lay on each other in piles.

If writing allows me to freeze knowledge in a certain way, to deaden knowledge, then anorexia allowed me to freeze the body and deaden all experiences of embodiment outside of

⁴ Bell, Rudolph. *Holy Anorexia*. The University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp. 27

starvation. Anorexia allowed me, in the wake of unwanted sexual attention, to control and limit who looked at my body and in what way. Anorexia allowed me to define the narrative of my body, and though I had to eventually abandon the behavior to continue living, for a brief period of time (a suspended moment of control) it gave me great power, confidence, and freedom. More than that, starvation's strange effects on the body even created moments of the most intense euphoria and joy I have ever felt. To this day I mourn it.

In the manuscript's title poem, I retell a moment from Shakespeare's original poem: Lucrece stands before a painting of the siege of Troy and, in a moment of rage, scratches at the painting's depiction of Sinan, because his face reminds her of her rapist. She rips a hole in the surface of the painting, but is unable to hurt the actual person the painting depicts, let alone her rapist. Lucrece's moment of tearing at the painting is one of the most moving moments in the poem for me—more moving than her suicide, which has real consequences both for her body and for the bodies of those in the Roman empire. I love that she scratches at his face with her fingernails, an act of violence that is so often a caricature of femininity, and I love the way this scene ends, with Lucrece sort of laughing at herself and saying, "*Fool! Fool! His wounds will not be sore,*" conveying the smallness of the gesture. This is also how I think of my own project—an attempt to touch reality, but ultimately suspended outside of it. Not a crack in the world, but a crack in a representation of the world.

At once the light is gone, as it always goes, in a moment, when I'm not watching. And everything turns the gray blue before darkness.

I once heard suffering defined as “anything that happens to you outside of your control.” Perhaps this is why starvation never felt like suffering to me, perhaps this is why I imagine suicide felt like a victory to Lucretia. Perhaps this is why Hildegard called her debilitating migraines God. After rape, there wasn’t much I would not have done to control my body again.

Rather than creating a narrative of rape, I aim to explore what happens to the body and mind after trauma has occurred. Rather than describing a moment or act through poetic language, I’m interested in writing poems that orbit around a moment or act: like a mind unable to integrate traumatic memory into the history of self. The trauma researcher and psychologist Bessel Van der Kolk says, “you don’t have recollection of your memory as a story when you experience trauma”.⁵ Traumatic memories are not integrated into the rest of memory, edges softening and colors blurring with time. I wanted to write poems that performed this inability to integrate memory into story, that stuttered and stumbled, that simultaneously returned and yet bypassed.

When I got my first migraine I was thirteen and sitting in the bath before school one morning. Half asleep and looking at the faucet and the tub slowly filling with water when at once a shimmering, blurred line cut through the sight in my left eye. I remember being afraid.

I’ve tried to observe the way violence moves from person to person, how it is transmitted like a disease, how we pass it to another person or internalize it (or both), and my own and

⁵ Van der Kolk, Bessel. “How Trauma Lodges in the Body.” *OnBeing* podcast. Kristia Tippet Public Productions. 9 Mar. 2017.

Lucrece's attempts to "heal" ourselves, however misguided. I'm more interested in the misguided attempts than in the successful ones. I've written several poems describing traumatic brain injury. The way the body heals from this injury appeared to me analogous to my own healing process: mistaken, overzealous, self-loathing.

As someone who once used color as a primary medium and now uses language, I was fascinated by the way Shakespeare used the colors red and white in *The Rape of Lucrece*. One of Shakespeare's most significant ways of treating the separation of mind and body in *The Rape of Lucrece* is through the motif of red and white used to describe Lucrece's beauty and virtue (or chastity). I remember beginning my paintings by choosing a color and coating my canvas with it. I would feel a sense of integration with the color and that the color held within it complicated emotion and thought much more fully than language could. In the list poem "Milk and Blood", I name some of the uses of red and white in *The Rape of Lucrece*, while adding some of my own descriptions of the colors.

For Lucretia, red is shame and beauty; it might be associated with embodiment. White, on the other hand, symbolizes purity and virtue; it might be associated with disembodiment. Though this is an old way of thinking about women—more so, about all bodies—it is one I still encounter. As I wrote the poems, thinking about my own experience, I became interested in the circumstances and ways this dichotomy becomes helpful or relied upon for those who have experienced trauma. In the instance of rape or other violence done against the body, a connection between body and mind intensifies pain. But if this connection can somehow be severed, the body used to control the mind and the mind the body, there might be a part of oneself that is safe from pain, a part of oneself that gets healed. As an anorexic, I used this

overt separation between body and mind to gain mastery over my own body and to control the story that was told about me.

Deep blue darkness and every so often the flash of lightning between the clouds but no rain: sheet lightning, I learned its name in middle school. Along the edges of the land the dogs are barking, defining the limits of their territory.

At night I can no longer see out the windows of the house, but instead I watch my own reflection in them, rising up out of darkness and passing from room to room. In the early mornings, there exists a period of time where I can look out the windows into the thick green field while simultaneously watching my reflection overlaid onto the view; on the world, not in the world.

In addition to the narrator and Lucrece, another set of voices exists in the following poems: the silences. I wrote them hoping they might function as a kind of reverse chorus; that they might point to the ways women don't speak about sexual violence, or speak without speaking—such as, in the very extreme case of my poems, suicide and anorexia. I began writing the poems last spring, and since that time women have become increasingly vocal about the instance of sexual harassment and violence in their lives. Thus, as I wrote the poems, it seemed that the silences might become louder, less like silences. Toward the end of the manuscript, I've written a poem called "Liturgy of the Silences" in which the voices of the silences (I hope) become integrated with the poems' other speakers, until all voices blend together, no longer discrete.

Within this manuscript, I've also included photographs of my own drawings. These are from journals I kept in high school and college, during the time of my own encounters with sexual violence and anorexia. Their tone is often melodramatic—or perhaps simply earnest, uncomplicated, self-absorbed. They are intimate in that they are made by a person feeling strong feelings who has not stopped to interrogate her feelings. I think of the drawings as another voice: different from the speaker, from Lucretia, from the silences, and from the saints. They tell the story of rape from a slightly different perspective and in some instances, they serve as source material for the poems. I am often embarrassed by this voice, but that is not a good reason to silence it.

Perhaps all surfaces have holes, wounds, gaps; perhaps pain is only one of many different creators of these. One of the evenings while I wrote this, sitting in my living room folded up under a blanket, a gunshot disrupted the hum of the cicadas and the distant traffic on the highway. It was so loud that it seemed to come from right behind the window. Though I hear gunshots regularly here and was not afraid, I also was afraid, and for a moment I crept down below the window, against the wall and out of sight.

I resist pain as a source of purification and inspiration; I resist the idea of the wounded healer, so prevalent among religious communities. I resist victimhood as well, especially its romanticization, which I've been guilty of, time and again. I resist these two categories as the only options offered to me; I refuse to integrate trauma into the story of memory. I want a response to pain that is less narrative, more textural; less cohesive, more bewildering. These poems seek alternate routes to and alternate definitions of healing.

PHOTOGRAPH OF ANN HODGES, 1964

A doctor stands to her left his face outside the frame but the tool of his hands working

He lifts the fabric of her dress to expose a bruise darkening hip nearly a foot long
its flame unfurling across skin so hot and quiet
a patch on the surface or a leak beneath the flesh softening up and peeling

a hunk of black rock had smashed through her roof while she slept
skin deadening its velocity in a kind of thud

the newspaper called what the rock did to her body a *pineapple-shaped* bruise
later, she read there had been reports a bright red light moving across the sky
 trailing an ochre cloud

She was sued by her landlady for possession of the meteorite
though the law sided with the landowner the public believed Ann
should own the black rock remembering how her big body looked
sprawled out on that hospital bed like something still weighed on it

I found the photograph of Ann in high school wedged deep in the curve of *after*
 and it became a beloved its trinity of the bruise, the celestial body, and the heavy female
flesh aligned in me

The meteorite is mine, Ann said to her landlady
 I think God intended it for me

THE SILENCES: This helpless smoke of words rises into a blue-bright sky



Fig. 1: I Gave You Everything I Had No. One from *Journal 10: Though You Do Me Wrong*

THE ARGUMENT (Red and White)

Suppose a woman. Suppose a woman embodied by the colors red and white. As if color became material in her body, more material than a color had ever been before. Two colors, simultaneously. To be two seems impossible, yet here she is. Now suppose the red meant something

other than thick blood or carmine oil paint across a white

Suppose the white meant something

meant she was ()

and *I am the red in my whole body*

and *I am the white in my whole body*

whispered Lucrece in the mirror mirror

MILK AND BLOOD

Line 65: *This heraldry in Lucrece's face was seen, / Argued by Beauty's red and Virtue's white.*

Lucrece's whites (some borrowed or invented):

snow-white / snow-white weed

lily / lilies / makes the lily pale

white sheet, whiter chin

white fleece

like a white hind

a row of bricks, whitewashed

white in white: ivory in an alabaster band

ashy-pale

hoar frost

colonnade of bleaching pines

a grammar of blizzards

ivory conduits

milk

and her reds:

the red rose/shame's pure blush

red cabbage / blueberry juice

blushing at that

9 July mosquito bites

blood / little bloody moons

WHITE FRAGMENT

from a fold of space the sheet
we move across through a luminous halo of
memory more fluid than
memory shadowed and lit his pillowed dark hair a shadow on sn
no

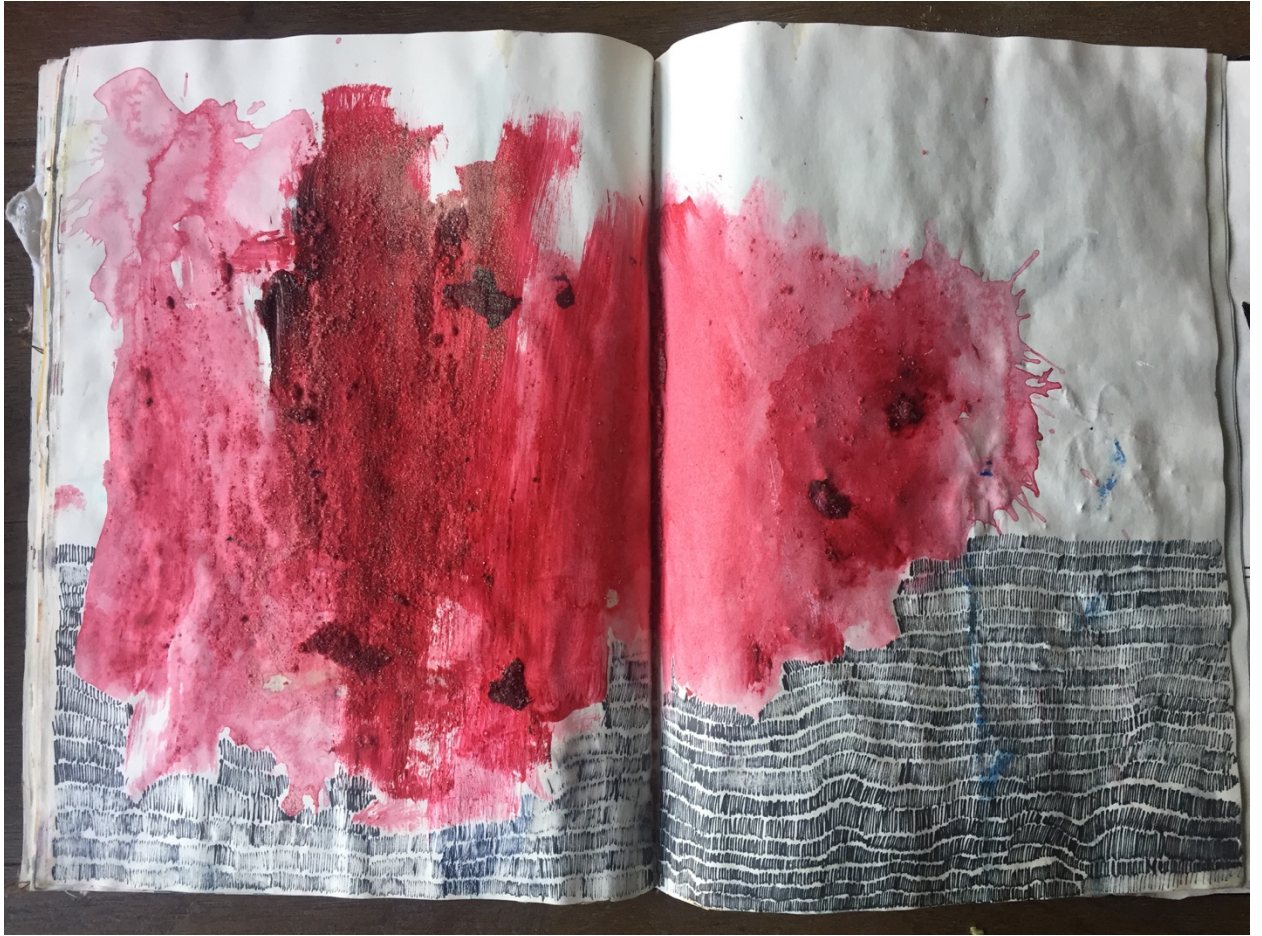


Fig. 2: Red Fragment (With Sand) from *Journal 10: Though You Do Me Wrong*

LUCRETIA & ME

I write to and for and about Lucretia

my prepositions appear in threes for her a Holy Trinity divinity of prepositions
In the liturgy of my childhood this is also how they appeared: *in, with, and under*

by whom, and through whom, and in whom

And so a being's position in relation to another became this way holy.

Was allowed this way to be simultaneously multiple.

In the end I didn't watch myself river out

from body in the twinning of red and black

didn't read myself written into the twoness of *corrupted* and

didn't find myself an island circled in on

every side by two slowbloody oceans

and these only his descriptions

but, this too:

they imagined you enjoyed your rape

in a book entitled *The Heroinae* (London, 1639) G. Rivers writes

what other explanation could be found for her suicide?

Indeed, once a few weeks after

I was called *that hot slut* which seems

a similar sentiment, folded up or crumpled in a pocket, waiting to be slipped

through the gap between the seventeenth century and the twenty-first, unfolding upon arrival

RED FRAGMENT

red as summer's stone fruits plum, peach, apricot
then a red line in the flesh
then a tearing half from half then a ripping the fruit from the
 at the center, bits of pink cling something delicate
petal or tissue
then the slick separate halves of the fruit then the dripping staining the cutting board
a red so deep to turn black at the edges sweetest
in the darkest bites

SEVENTEEN

Seventeen comes back bright and hard and mean
preposition between child and adult a hook for one to grasp the other.

The summer we were seventeen my friend Amalie and I loved a song on the radio called
Seventeen went to see the band play at a venue downtown that no longer exists
stood in the summer air for hours

a woman let Amalie drink sips from her whiskey coke
and Amalie said *god, that tastes so good* surprising me I hadn't realized and she seemed
so different after that, separate the air heavy about our shoulders gathered about
the band onstage metaled elastic and humming

they only want you when you're seventeen

in front of me her shoulders turned on and off under the strobe light
when you're twenty-one you're no fun

And he thought so too.

WHITE FRAGMENT

my hand on the white lilylike and grown
up between the sheet's cool shadows

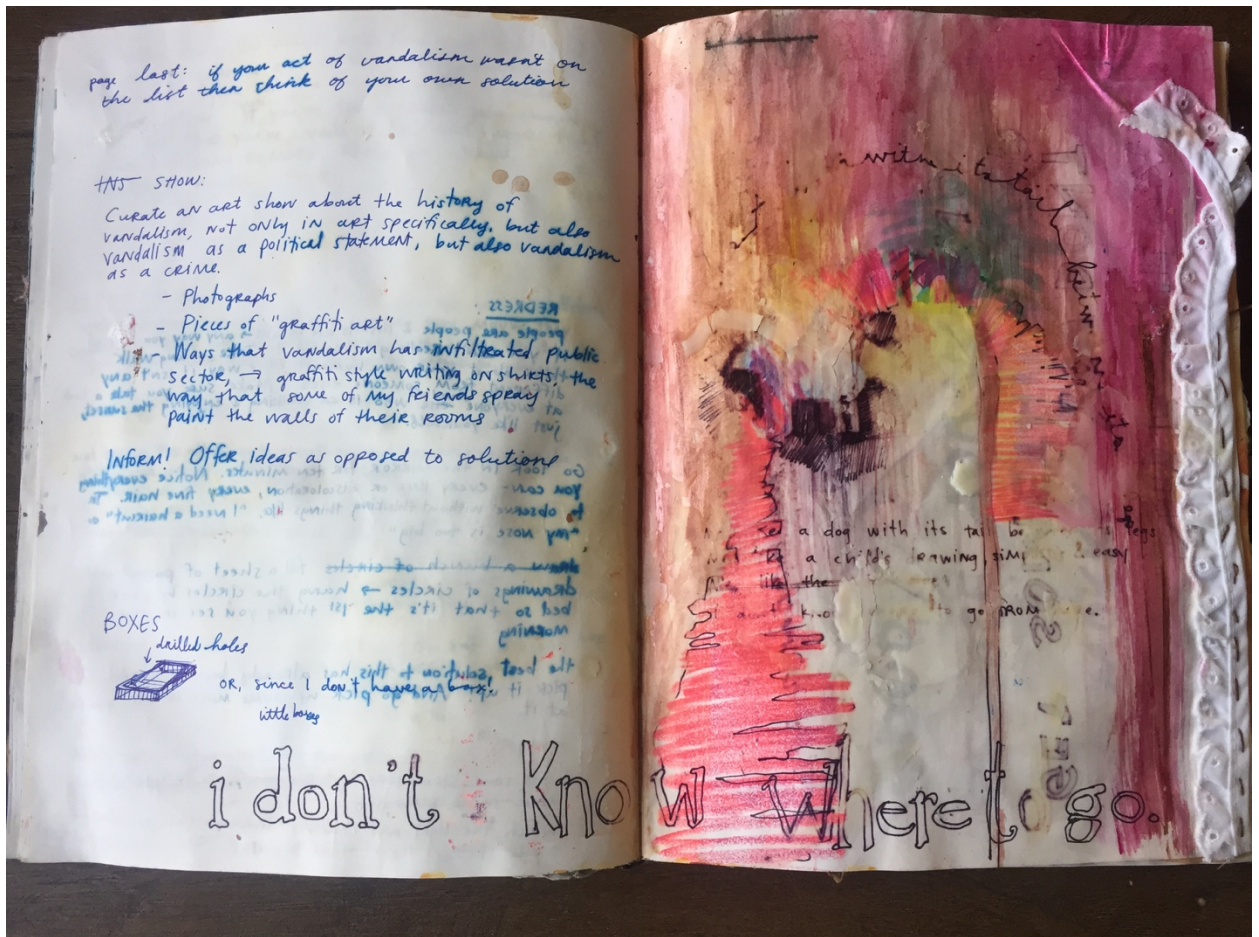


Fig. 3: Pink Fragment or I Don't Know Where to Go (With Notes) from *Journal 10: Though You Do Me Wrong*

Something about the way the colors work together in her face something
about the way they refuse to work together Line 66: *of either's colour was the other queen*

fight, / the sov'reignty of either being so great / that oft they interchange each other's seat.

At times, it's unclear whether virtue and beauty's separation serves to protect each attribute of Lucretia's identity, or whether it allows the two to compete for value: *when shame assailed, the red should fence the white*. But does fence mean enclose and protect? Or does fence mean swordplay?

And why the impossibility of beauty and virtue existing simultaneously in a woman's body— why does that story still fascinate?

SUICIDE FRAGMENT

sinkhole, shakehole, swallet, swallow hole

words used when the surface collapses she said *some hole*

when the surface was her body she said *I'll make some hole*

through which I may convey this troubled soul

ARMPITS

after being raped I stopped shaving my armpits and I stopped eating
I was living on the island on the farm bathing in a sheep
trough converted into a bathtub Evenings I would sit in there waiting to eat

when the sun began to set earlier and earlier I watched the moths against the skylight
 their thick white bodies flattening against the night
 watched the short brown hairs flow toward my body and away again when I moved through the dirty
 water It was easier not to bother.

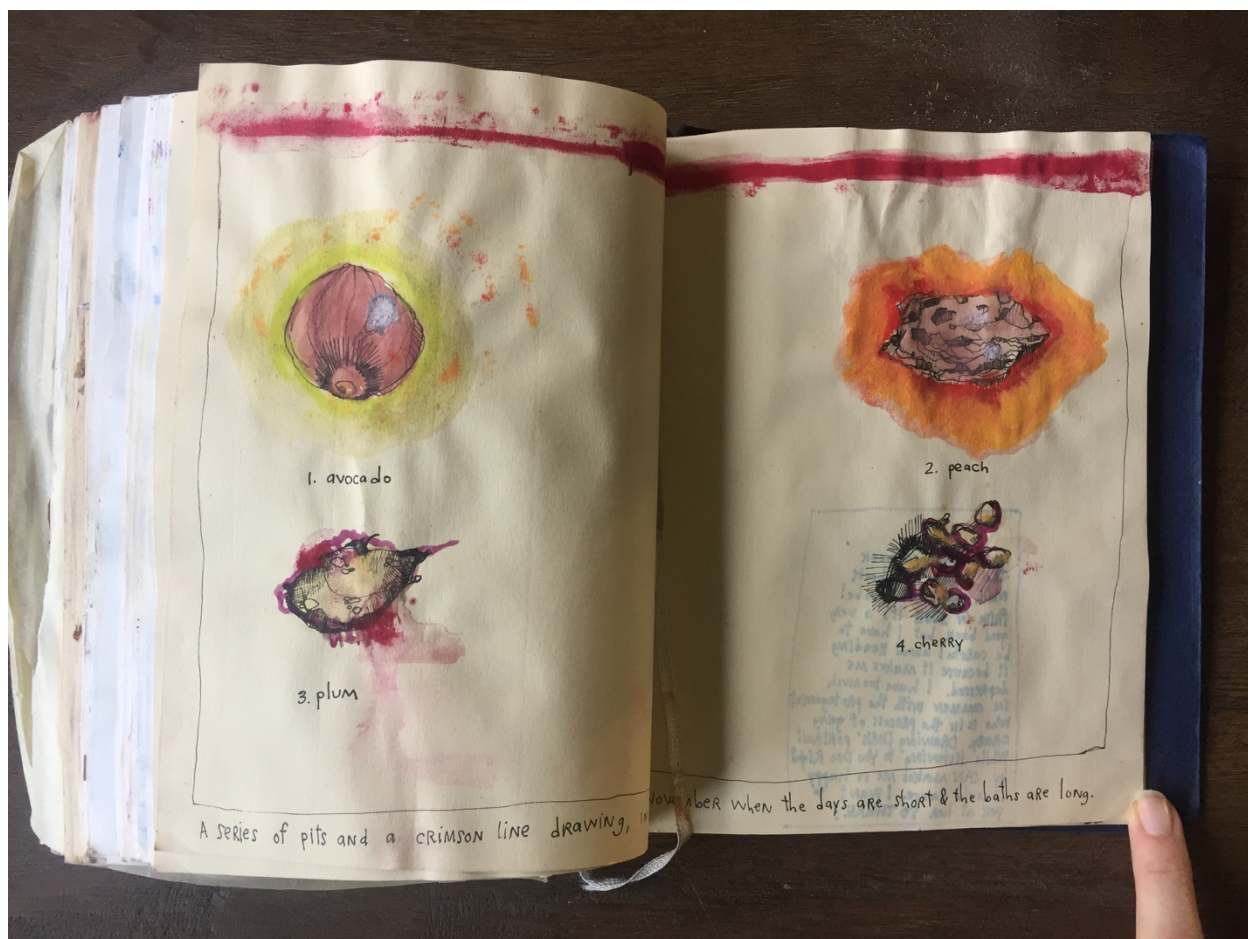


Fig 4: A Series of Pits and a Crimson Line (drawing) from *Journal 12: I Don't Believe You*

THE SILENCES: Do wounds help wounds? Is woe the cure for woe?
Is it revenge, to give thyself a blow?

THE ARGUMENT (Pink Project)

In the poem, Shakespeare would have us understand that mixing, mingling red and white makes mud mud, muddied, stain, spot, spotted, pollution. Line 575, Lucrece: *Mud not the fountain that gave drink to thee.*

Yesterday afternoon the voice of a poet on the radio, discussing what words and images had become available to her after she transitioned from male to female in her mid-forties.

I spent my early life learning how to look away, she said. I learned from a very young age not to look at pink, because pink was feminine. As I grew older I learned to ignore all color, because color was something my mother was concerned with, not my father. As a poet I didn't allow myself to use entire categories of images or emotions due to their gendering, and color was one of these categories. But how do I write poetry without color?

In this same interview the poet mentioned that before her transition, her body had felt to her like a mask or a tomb, or *a billboard, which is rented out and upon which is projected ideas regarding what a masculine body looks like, moves like, thinks like.* (My favorite line from this interview is disconnected from its meditation on color, yet perhaps not entirely irrelevant. The voice of the poet: *I knew my body was not, biologically speaking, a woman's body, but I always felt it somehow rhymed with female bodies.*)

After Tarquin, Lucrece's colors, her reds and whites, are no longer distinct. Instead, they are *neither red nor pale, but mingled so.* I understand this to mean that Lucrece becomes alienated not only from her body, but from her very self-conception. In her introduction to the poem, Catherine Beasley writes, *rape, with its repercussions for both body and mind, necessarily deconstructs the dualist opposition between the two... There are many places in the poem where it is unclear whether the poem is describing a psychological state or a physical one.*

The separation of mind and body is a method allowing one to enclose pain within boundaries, to leave a part of ourselves untouched and safe. So often it is a survival tactic freeing someone to carry out the daily obligations of living. A way to look away when looking away seemed impossible when continuing to look seemed deadly.

DESIRE FRAGMENT

 fifteen or sixteen
I turn up the volume
 on what I know of desire winds itself
up plastic encased copper
for the first two minutes only feedback until the scream
 of female voice enters and *now i'm ready to close my eyes*
 and *now I'm ready to close my mind*
 and the freeway overpass is a shadow across my kneecap

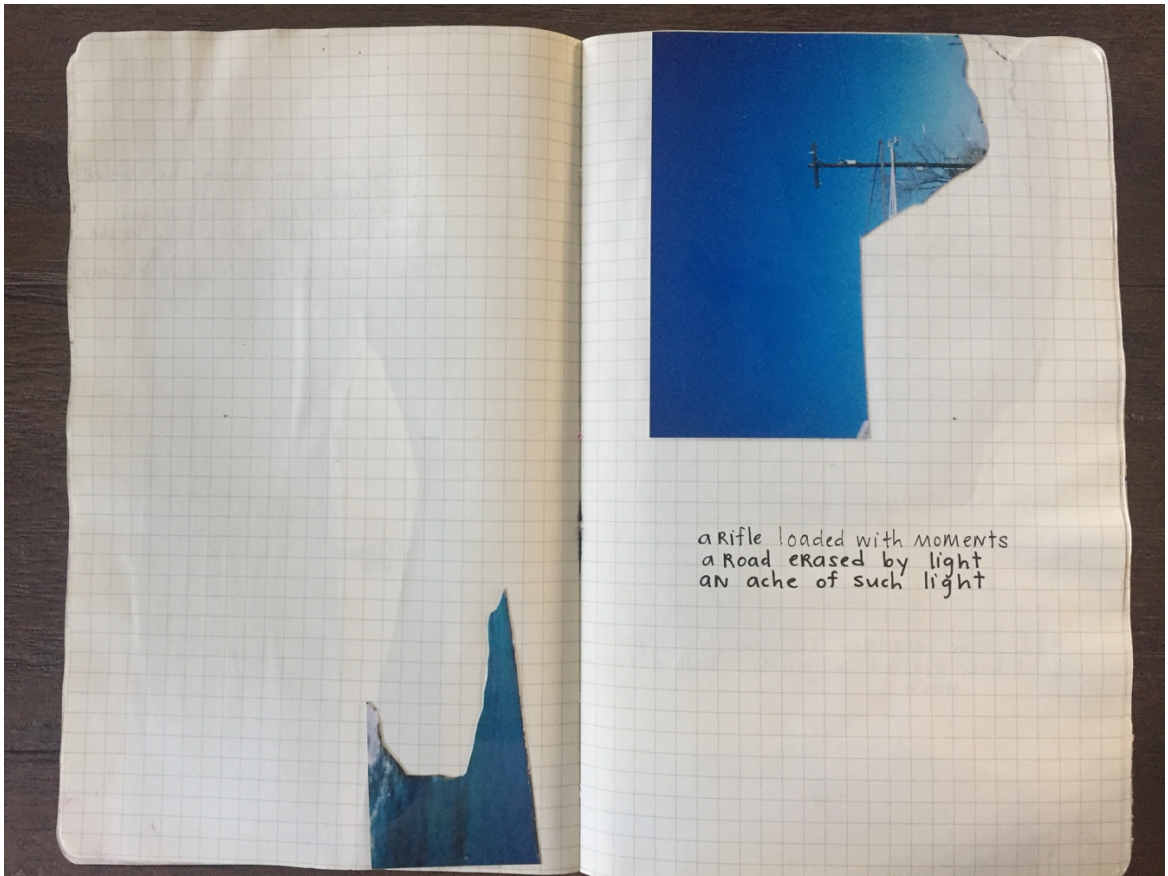


Fig 5: Blue Cut Out from *Journal 13: Negative Space Notebook*

HE ENTERS FRAGMENT

two sets of knees on a park bench
a canopy of green above
he cuts the knees out of the image
down a dark bucket

pins them down or drops them

LOGIC

What am I responsible for?
for finding him handsome silver at his temples like dust motes in a beam of sunlight suddenly
lit for me allowing me to perceive the singular the countable the gathering up of units
which constituted his body
for his noticing me? or us, knees on the park bench shadows of foliage above
leaf-like holdings of darkness moving quickly across our thighs
circling around some invisible center as though our knees were weighted and pulling
the world tight
later he told me: *it wasn't about you. My friend found your friend*

*attractive and you
were there too*

Then:

I was a space the action passed through or a surface it splayed itself over
a container which opened in time what
are we responsible for? The way shadows will fall across any and all bodies
bending or stretching a grayscale to cover all flesh undiscerning and
unable to untie from the source fastened to the original being as they are
I crossed the path that afternoon a surface the action fell across
Can that be true,
Lucretia
?

WHITE FRAGMENT

haloed blue ink in an old journal:
 high in his loft bed
 when the sun the window the shadows
 are wide rivers between us

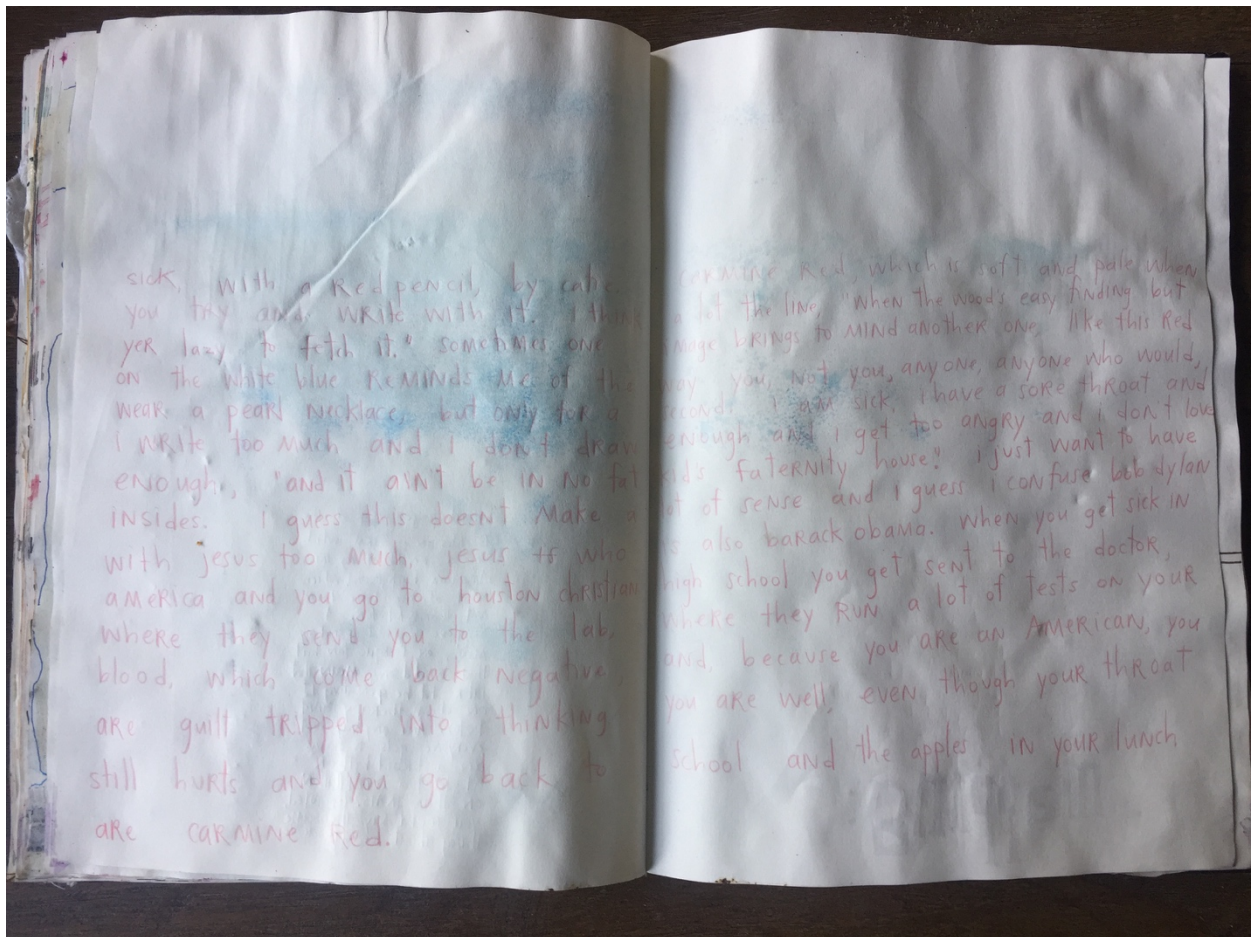


Fig. 6: Sick with Red Pencil (This Red on the White Blue Reminds Me of the Way You, Not You, Anyone, Anyone Who Would Wear a Pearl Necklace) from *Journal 10: Though You Do Me Wrong*

RUNNING

I would run in the twilight after dinner the island's country roads slick asphalt and
damp trees spilling out along the edges
when the island slipped into a rainstorm like a grey silk robe I considered staying home
my uncle would ask, you're really going to let a little rain stop you? so I would take
my body out into it
some nights I worried about the spaces between the trees there the light dissolved
and the darkness became something the scriptures say *shifting*
the island is very safe, my aunt laughed and in many ways it was.

ERASURE PRAYER

anorexia allowed my singular body a multiplicity an unbuckling from form
I wanted to make the violence material
and the body, as mediator between the interior and exterior world, was the perfect site for
this. A laboratory or a playground.

At this time I loved the prayer of Saint Patrick with its litany of prepositions
Christ with me
before me
behind me
in me
beneath me
above me
on my right
on my left
when I lie down
when I sit down and this was how my mind lived inside
my body and this was how my body lived inside my mind

THE ARGUMENT (Question and Answer)

The question *Where does it hurt?* is in fashion among the idly religious communities I circle. The implication of this question is that the one in pain should locate an emotional hurt in the same way physical pain is located—by pinning its location on the body. For example: *in my chest*, *in my gut*, or *in my heart* all seem to be common responses to this question; the warm trunk of the body.

The question might create less tangible responses as well: it hurts *in the part that still loves her* or *the mother in me*. All of which require the preposition to break down the body or being into discrete zones to locate pain. Allowing for the isolation of pain, or the cordoning of the body into areas which are hurt and those which are well.

As a teenaged girl, I instinctively knew no one would ask me *where does it hurt?* but I refused to deny myself the pleasures of answering.

In the essay, *Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain*, Leslie Jamison writes with distrust of those who use metaphor and lyric grace to describe the anorexic body. Yet, it will forever remain tempting to rely on a facile beauty when writing about the disease. Sometimes I still speak of it as *the happiest time in my life*.

Jamison describes the imperfect logic of anorexia; how the physical body might imply a kind of interior pain without being so restrictive as to define what kind or what cause. The seduction of embodiment perhaps has something to do with inhabiting, and the seduction of anorexia is the promise that embodying starvation conveys pain more fully than language. *We want our wounds to speak for themselves*, Jamison writes, *but usually we end up having to speak for them*.

Once a classmate asked me, *Why are you so skinny?* We were visiting a campus museum during the class hour and she whispered this to me between the hollow walk from one collection to another. The question so disturbed me that I immediately left the class—walked out of the museum and home to my dormitory. She didn't read my body as the answer, but rather, as the question.

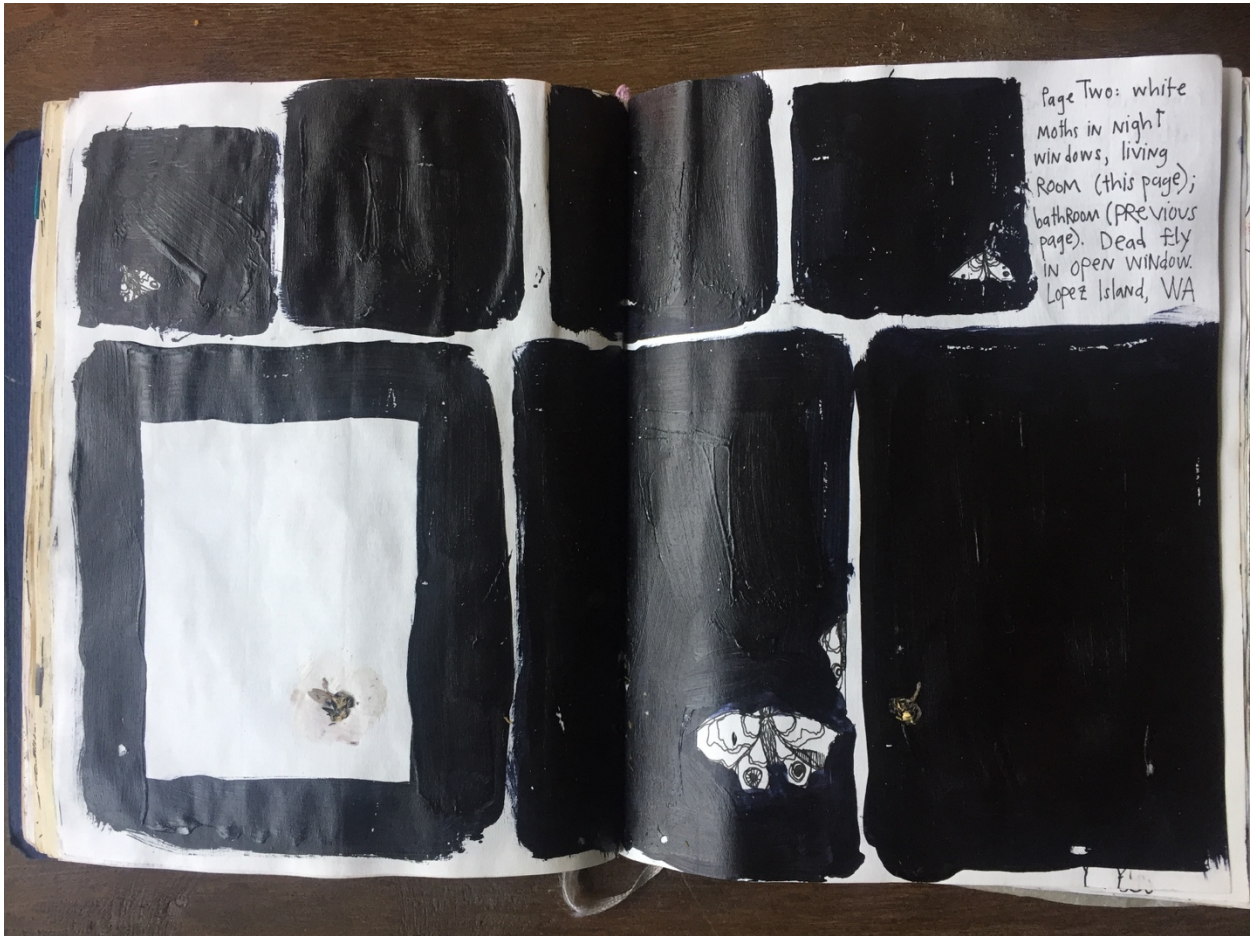


Fig. 7: White Moths in Night Windows from *Journal 12: I Don't Believe You*

BEAUTIFUL MOMS

During dinner she stands in the bathroom's mirror
watches her bones blooming beneath the surface
the mantle of skin disturbed names the ones she knows:
clavicle, sternum, ribs sweet clottings of tissue

when she left the table and her great aunt was telling a story
about her own mother the great-great
who arrived late to church one morning
suffered stares during a long walk down the aisle
(dragging her children behind)
when the service ended a male congregant spoke to the great aunt
(at this time a young girl) regarding her mother saying
Now that's a woman and all this time
the great aunt has not forgotten

as though the story needed safekeeping
the great aunt had looked her in the eye
and said, *I'm sure you know how that feels,*
having a beautiful mother she isn't quite sure
what her great aunt means by this or exactly
how it feels but she likes this invitation
into what seems to be a small family
inside the family inhabited by
those who watch beauty understand how it works
And though she doesn't yet she nods saying
I know and asks to be excused
It is after this that she begins paying attention

THE SILENCES: Our bodies held something we didn't want to look at. We called them our spoiled pantries, our haunted attics. We called them our poisoned closets.



Fig. 8: Sketch of Legs on Bench from *Journal 11: Don't Call This the Milky Way*

MICRO

Fifteen tadpoles swim in a large petri dish each a few centimeters long and translucent
 black eyes wide dumb mouths
brains visible through skin and hovering cloud-like between the transition from head to tail
breath on a cold morning
they are subjects in a lab study on traumatic brain injury isolated and held in a clay mold then
placed under a machine from which a metal peg descends and
the graduate student says *thunks* them on the head asked me on the first day:
did I want to see the thinking? her study defined by the sound of this violence

afterward, the tadpoles swim back and forth in a series of *s* curves a few turn circles or
flip onto their backs
the graduate student explains: *After we've hit them they'll swim differently: upside down or*
on their sides Only one doesn't move its tail crumpled beneath it
This one was hit particularly hard, she says a few red spots visible
through its clear skin
I ask if the tadpoles ever recover to swim normally again She shrugs and says, *Mostly*

THE ARGUMENT (Traumatic Brain Injury)

Within it, two kinds of injury The first we name the primary insult
the *thunk* a result of blunt force or the quick and violent change in direction of the head
In this phase *sbearing* occurs breaking the neurons

During the secondary injury the body consumes itself This is what interests the graduate student
She studies astrocytes, which signal to immune cells telling them to travel to the damaged neurons
consume injured tissue
Often the astrocytes will continue signaling long after the damaged tissue has been fully eaten
resulting in the exaggeration of the primary injury

The graduate student thinks frog brains then scans them under a microscope
the images explode out of the screen's black static in wide bands of neon she points out the
astrocytes to me and I pretend to see them she's looking for a way to turn them off to stop
their crying out

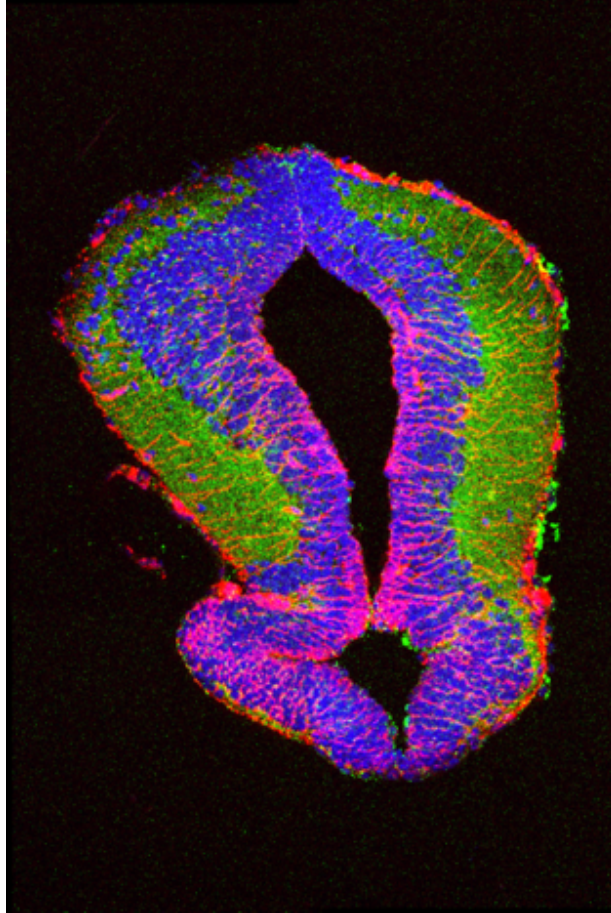


Fig. 9: Tadpole Brainbow After the Thunk

RED FRAGMENT

a series of primary thunks
a smooth hand on a dark doorknob
his foot smashed the lightbulb into line 654
black lust

AFTERWARD HE PROMISED MARRIAGE

Many men painted her (Titian and Boticelli among them) Lucretia, naked in all these paintings despite her suicide's occurrence before an audience of men, despite this audience including her husband and father

the only female painter to attempt her was Artemisia Gentileschi
Gentileschi is less famous for her paintings more so for a rape case brought against her teacher Agostino Tassi, in 1612.

The trial lasted seven months and at its end Tassi was fully acquitted
the transcripts, available today, report Gentileschi was tortured with a thumb-screw during cross-examination cried out to Tassi: *This is the ring you gave me these are your promises*

SAINTHOOD

In 1363 Catherine of Siena was brought by her mother to Vignoni, Italy to bathe in the hot springs her mother thought the waters might reduce Catherine's melancholy
her mother thought what happened to the body might also happen to the mind

Catherine left the safety of the pools and swam to where the boiling water entered
submerged her body until it blistered returned and returned bathed in the early morning or
late evening so she wouldn't be stopped the stink of sulfur and
water licking the whole line of the body water surrounding the perimeter
pushing up into the line water twisting up into its bends and hooks the line turning red then
redder the line turning white, blistering warping Catherine into someone else
golden and divine and gone

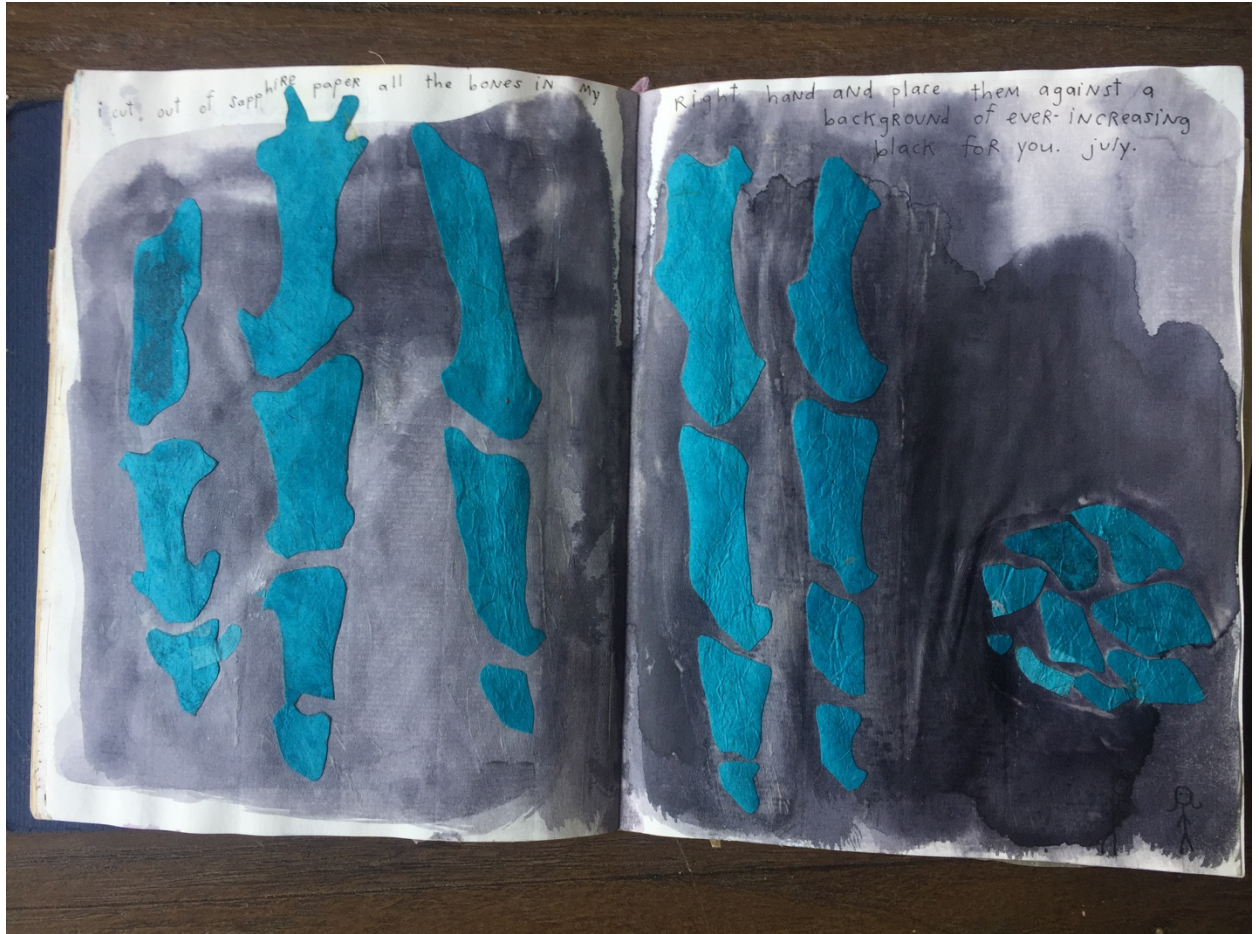


Fig. 10: I Cut Out of Sapphire Paper All the Bones in My Hands and Place Them Against a Background of Ever-Increasing Black for You from *Journal 12: I Don't Believe You*

O FRAGMENT

footsteps creak in the hall and anything left
between them

 windows or hands or
 latches or eyes suddenly gapes open

LEAKING

the dress I wore
had three little green velvet bows one at the top of a slit on the right, one at the top
of a slit on the left
One at the neck
I loved that dress wore it throughout high school wore it that summer in the city
ripple of blue my body descended into cotton and patterned and rising over
the hips and the stomach's swell rising over the breasts and falling, pooling
between the legs when he ripped a bow I left it
I tried to leave other parts behind
a hair tie on the a note inside his
My need to be seen so large I leaked a trail of
myself
(when this happens to the physical body, they call it *spillage*)

O FRAGMENT (2)

where did the wound first open
was it the door Lucretia your hand
on the knob opening for him the eyelids the lips the valves
of the veins shuddering open your fingertips closing over the knob

O FRAGMENT (3)

I picked the hair elastic from the surface of his bureau
an eye spooned out of a face turned away from
I pinned it
o he said my sister was visiting

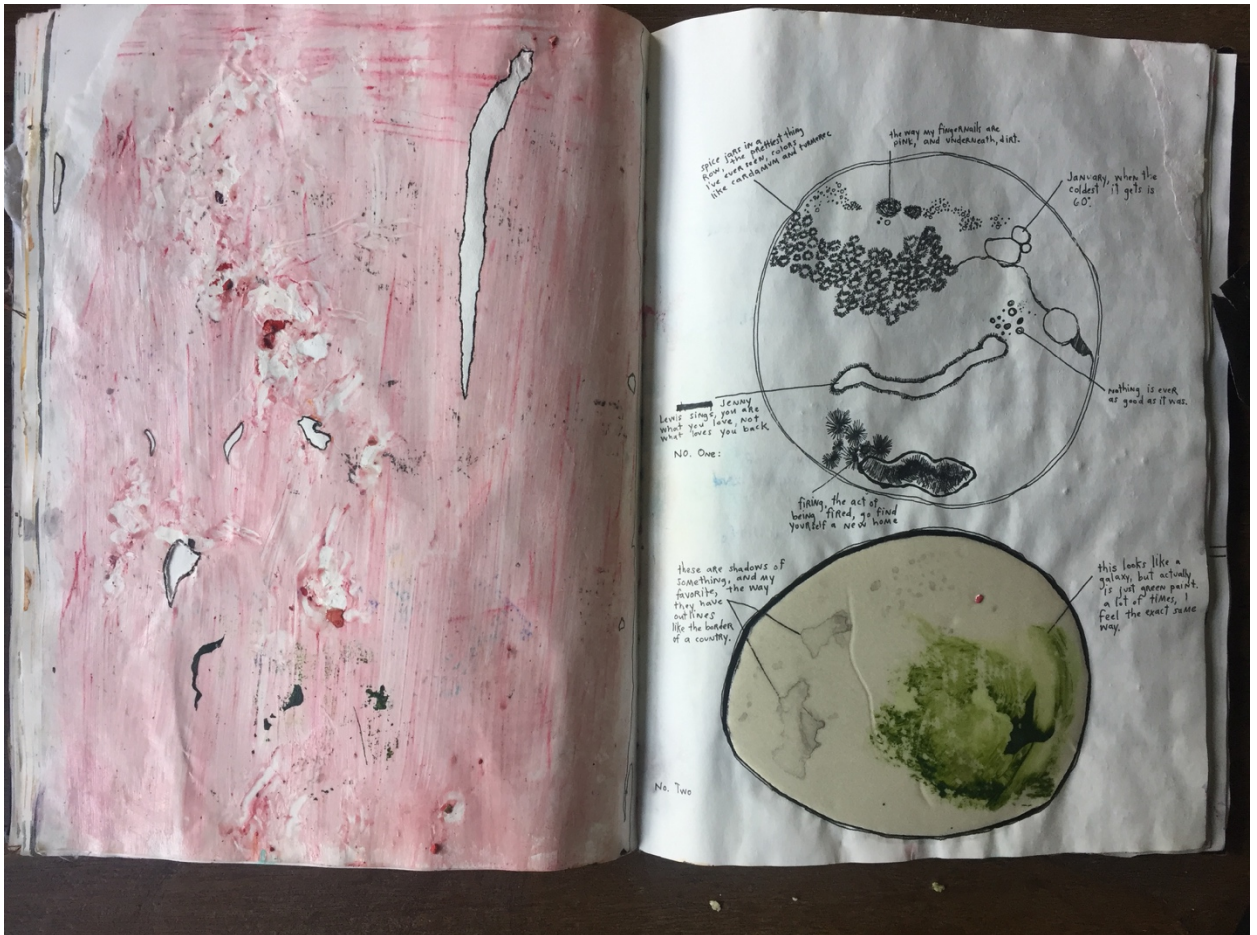


Fig. 11: Petri Dishes from *Journal 10: Though You Do Me Wrong*



Fig. 12: I Gave You Everything I Had No. Two from *Journal 10: Though You Do Me Wrong*

THE SILENCES: My honey lost and I

rattling of wings
noise no sound
hum no music
creak of this house-body
moan
drone
and I a
and I a drone-like

bee

MACRO

I bike to and from the university and most days the blast of a semi horn and a deep voice slips out the cracked window of a truck and a man at a bus stop calls long after I've pedaled past.

it seems appropriate and mature to ignore these encounters returning instead to the great tides of my mind: let them

wash and

wash.

one day I allow myself to write the lines *there's nothing*

complex about my middle finger

and how often I have to put it in the air but as soon as I finish all at once

the windows of the trucks roll down and a chorus of thick, deep voices

heavy as the air sing

that's not a poem, baby.

I copy the line: *Poetry is an abstraction bloodied*

but I can't find the blood. I'm swimming through language clear as a suburban swimming pool concrete sparkling and nothing living in my mind tides nothing goes belly up. nowhere a deep red current unfurling tugging me under

I make eyelash paintings dip them into cups of ink make lines that rise on spidery legs. paint with finger tips with lips and elbows. anything that comes to a point cut a chunk from my hair make a paintbrush. still this not enough. if I inked my body ran it through the press.



Fig. 13: Lip Prints Numbered 1-11 from *Journal 11: Don't Call This the Milky Way*

ST CATHERINE'S DREAM

dreamed a mouth full of tadpoles writhing stars in a warm wet
darkness dreamed them sliding into the mouth's deep pockets
down the slick pipeline of the throat dreamed their inkwell lips opening
hearts visible through skin like chunks in jam dreamed bodies filling
her stomach and intestines limb buds encased in skin piling themselves
preparing for a transformation dreamed a pressing into

when she woke her stomach ached in the dark of the morning and her desire
was a dark speck wrapped in transparent jelly like a reverse star or a frog egg

THE ARGUMENT (Narrative)

At the Friday Tenebrae service we sing

see from his head, his hands, his feet / sorrow and love flow mingled down

I think of Lucretia, whose beauty and chastity becomes *mingled so* after her rape. Trauma created the mingling, for both of them. And how mingle could be mangle.

Lucrece is also resurrected in the parading of her body through the streets of Rome. Her body a political symbol exactly what she wanted, or so the story goes.
she had agency in the end! we say sort of manically to each other

Transformation creates a narrative, but pain is not a story. Pain does not have a shape.

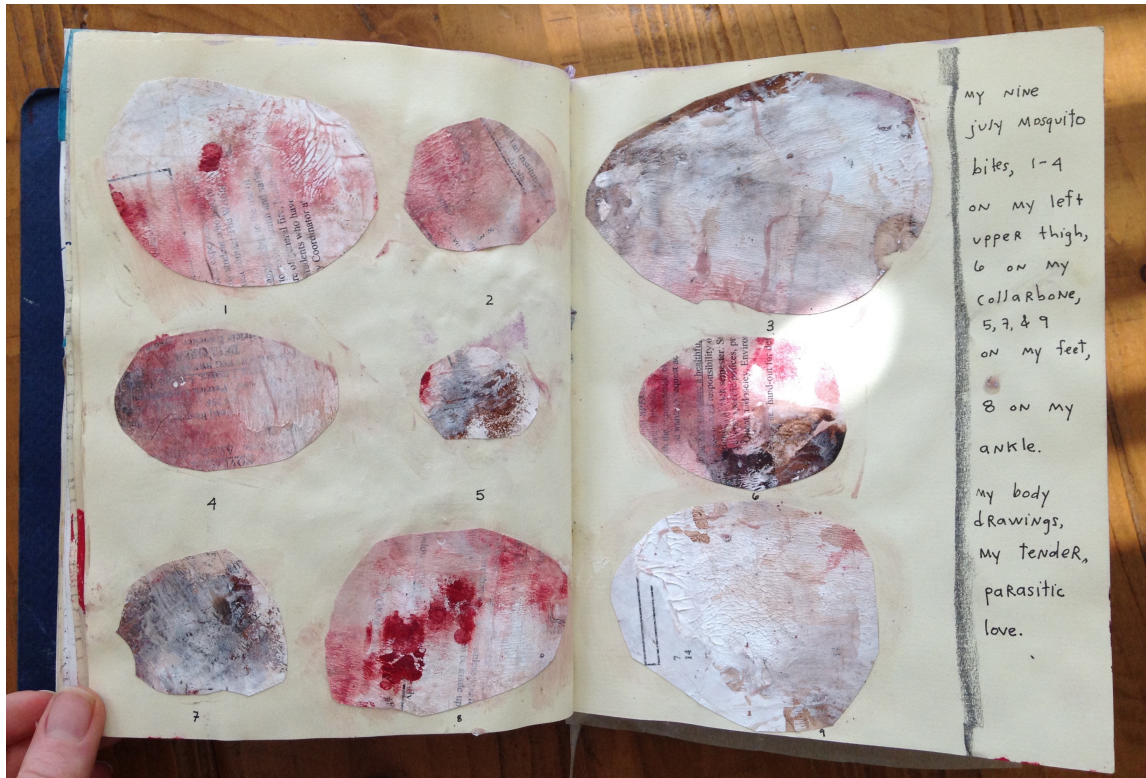


Fig. 14: Nine July Mosquito Bites from *Journal 12: I Don't Believe You*

WHITE FRAGMENT (Amenorrhea)

1.

when I stopped bleeding I drew orchids lines loose and folding in to a center
colored them chalk, lily, milk, titanium, snow
colored them seawater, indigo, iris, weeping
stopped up the hole where red was seeping a line of blue stitches

2.

I found a bloodless body best

cold and no smell of heat no pain of

occasionally my blood would come to me in a dream

dissipating slowly through a blue swimming pool a sunset's cloud shredded into threads

gone by morning

3.

when I slipped the red thread from the needle of my body I freed

I stitched the heavens now, not the earth I could watch my body, from above

afternoon sunlight whiting out my shoulders

turn one corner then

another

walk into and out of shadows, canopies of leaves

toward home

and I was above it or

beneath it

to its right and to its left

surrounding it on all sides a shielding from whatever was coming

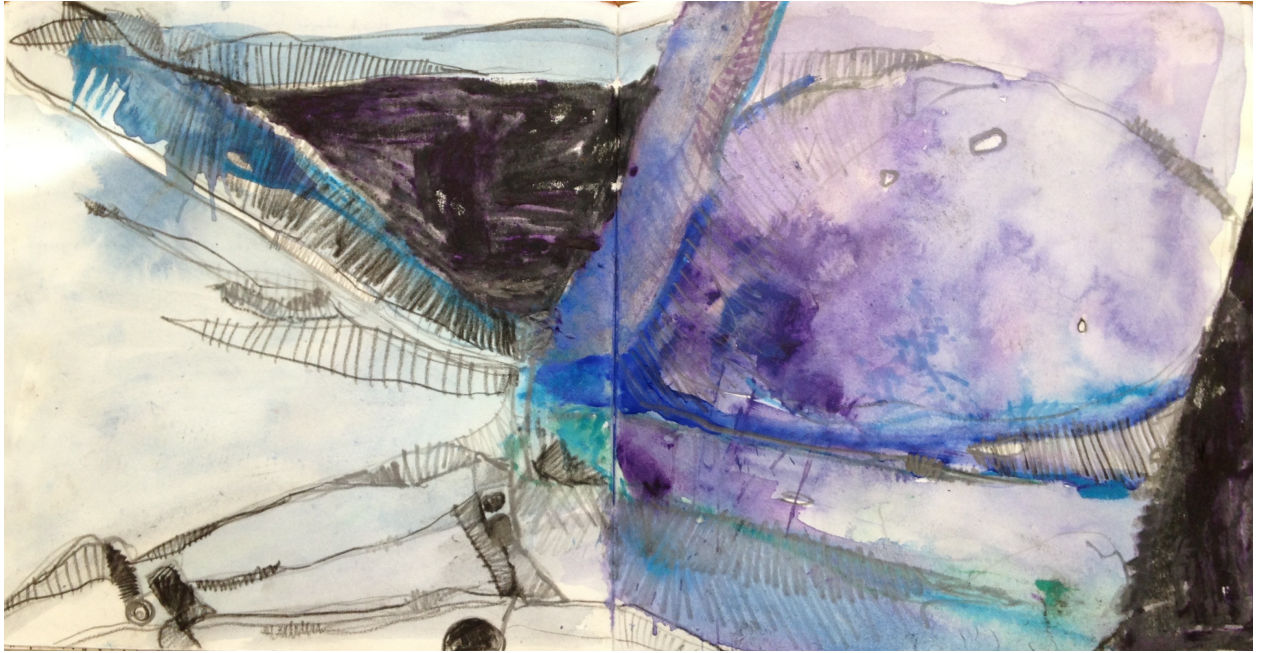


Fig 15: Watercolor of Crossed Legs from *Journal 11: Don't Call This the Milky Way*

ST. HILDEGARD

The saint saw astral lights at the edge of vision a felt hole in her sight
not a seen one pressure behind the eyes and a radiant furrow in all things
the lights were on the world, not in the world

She fashioned her auras into God an old story maybe
the oldest *A fiery light came and permeated my whole brain*, she wrote
 nearly nine hundred years later, I too spend a week with light

hemming my vision it is the week leading to Epiphany
and in the mornings I read: *your light has come*
your sun will never set again

The lights are brightest against white walls, against the gaping sky mercurial spirals
at the bottom left of the world sugar sprinkled across the surface
blinking into and out of focus to an impenetrable rhythm

In her notes on my poems, a classmate writes:
I studied for years in a Buddhist monastery you wouldn't believe how many of us
saw some kind of ocular disturbance on second thought, (or maybe you would)

The lights bleach out the faces of people disturb my balance
spinning the world faster In her letters, Simone Weil wrote *faithfulness makes it possible*
to remain indefinitely in an unstably balanced position

sometimes I notice a new aura a darkness on the periphery
I saw them this morning crawling along the shower rod and yesterday
at the top of the kitchen cabinets when I turn to look they are gone

THE SYMPTOM

She named it The Living Light the strange luminosity
clouding her visual field At all times, she said It is present at all times.
If I make my bed in the depths said the psalmist
there you are.

Eight hundred years later they named it Scintillating Scotoma
it was said she suffered from headaches yes, suffer she said
The Living Light has laid me low upon the earth

Within the light a variety of figures wandering
Filth of filth said the Light naming her flesh *Ashes to ashes*
it called her and sometimes gently *O human*
Within the Light, smaller lights:

very bright living lamps
a glowing fire poured over a
multitude of shining
sparks
many and many stars
and everything on all sides
full of eyes

Speak therefore said The Light
of these Wonders And it was not a burning Light
but a warming one

THE ARGUMENT (Only Question)

What color did you turn Lucretia? What color did you really turn outside the frame
what color presses its warm body on the door of the story what color slides through
and did you turn all at once like a switch or was it slow a bruising of
color and were there shades Lucretia did it start at the edges then or
there was a tear in the whole and the color spilled out from behind and
did the old colors exit there through that rip in the whole
Lucretia?

ST. CATHERINE'S TABERNACLE

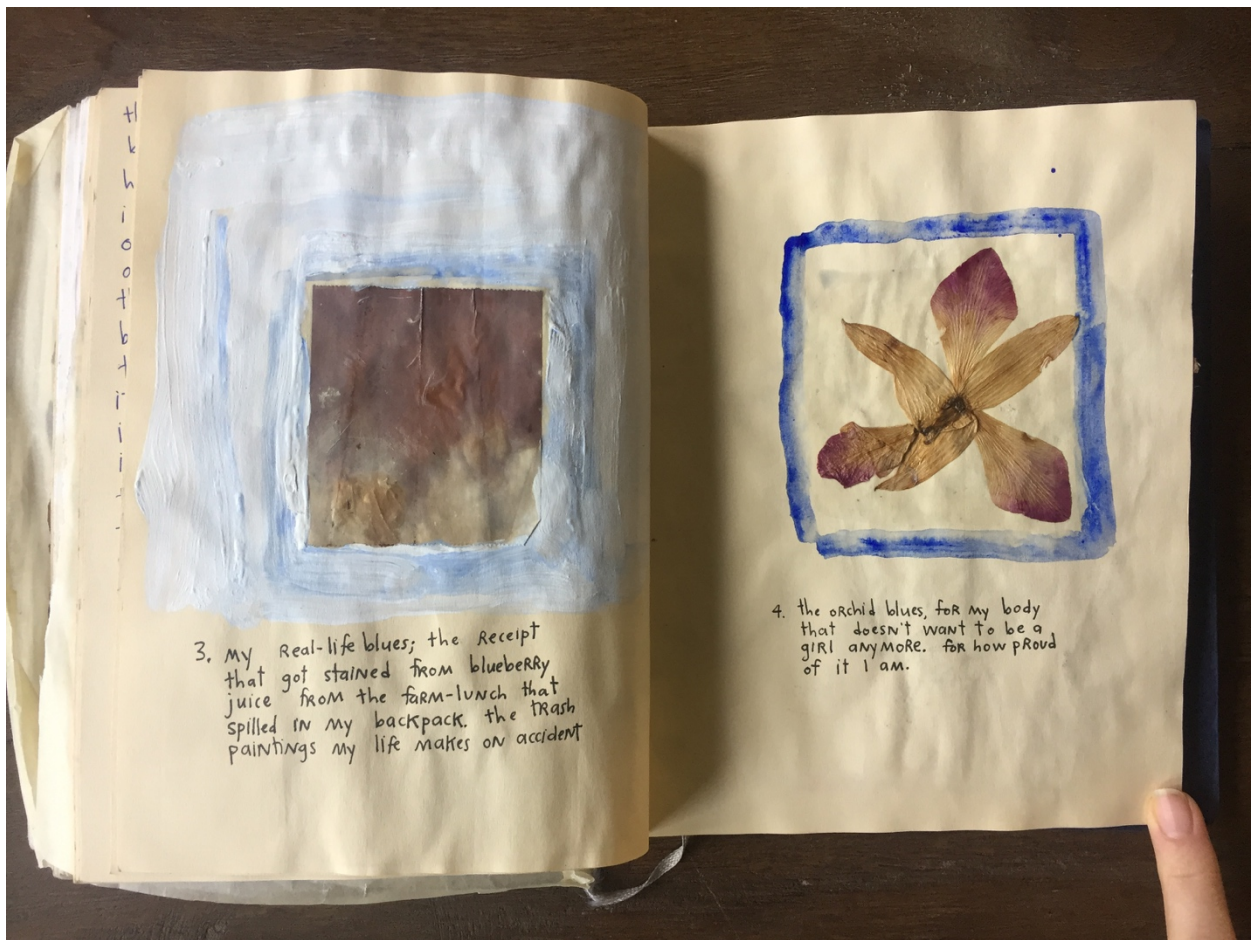
Build a cell her confessor told her
 Build a cell inside your mind from which you cannot escape
 upon entering she found her body already present
 inside she might hear the ticking of the outside world or
 find one of its objects: her flagellum appeared in the west corner once
 as did the barbed olive branch she thrust down her throat
 to induce vomiting after meals

she liked her body in there with her sometimes they would eat
together: a feast of Hosts once, the entire goblet of wine

outside the room she told her confessor: *though I cannot eat it satisfies me greatly
to see the Sacrament to smell it*

and her body inside the room had all the exquisite dimensionality of her body
outside warm brush of thigh against water winging off the tips
of her hair damp from a bath a drop marking each mahogany stair she walked down
into the depths of it

THE SILENCES: Our bodies became stones became monument our bodies said *Thus far—*
Our bodies marked a line or spot (called us *spotted princess*) or so we
thought



3. my Real-life blues; the Receipt
that got stained from blueberry
juice from the farm-lunch that
spilled in my backpack. the trash
paintings my life makes on accident

4. the orchid blues, for my body
that doesn't want to be a
girl anymore. for how proud
of it I am.

Fig 16: Blues 3-4 from *Journal 12: I Don't Believe You*

A SUSPENDED MOMENT OF CONTROL

1.

Cut into time to remove the beginning cut the knees from the park bench cut the door Lucretia,
keep it from opening into the night write out the subway ride the mosaic tiles flashing by the
knot of bodies breathing *isolate the moment, and so block its entry* press fingers against
this seam in time the texture loosening up slightly scarring refuse time
or reenact it find time outside of time find body outside of body

2.

a few weeks ago, a small boy came up to me at a community festival he looked to be seven years old, although he might have been as old as ten he came up quietly or quickly or in some other way

his appearance surprised and left us open my husband was with me we were seated on a bench he reached for my husband's hand and lifted it to my breast, bearing down then, looking my husband in the eye he whispered *fuck her* before running off into the crowd.

We searched for him afterward, for his parents, to explain what had happened so a consequence might have existed so the violence might not remain in us although it did gathering I remember wanting to chase after the child and strike him slam his head into the ground tell him *no* tell anyone no tell everyone

3.

Lucrece in a moment of rage and looking lingers
over the painted face of Sinan, the betrayer of Troy his face
falling into its canvas grooves his face rising up with its lines his body
gridded into the weave smeared into the oils' fleshy luminescence
Lucrece in a moment of rage and looking tears at the painting with her fingernails ungridding
him

4.

What if

eros gets twisted into something serrated: a hand on a doorknob a foot on a light
crushing the bulb and dipping a bedroom into wells of darkness or a photo
on a tiny screen defined in legal terms as child pornography?

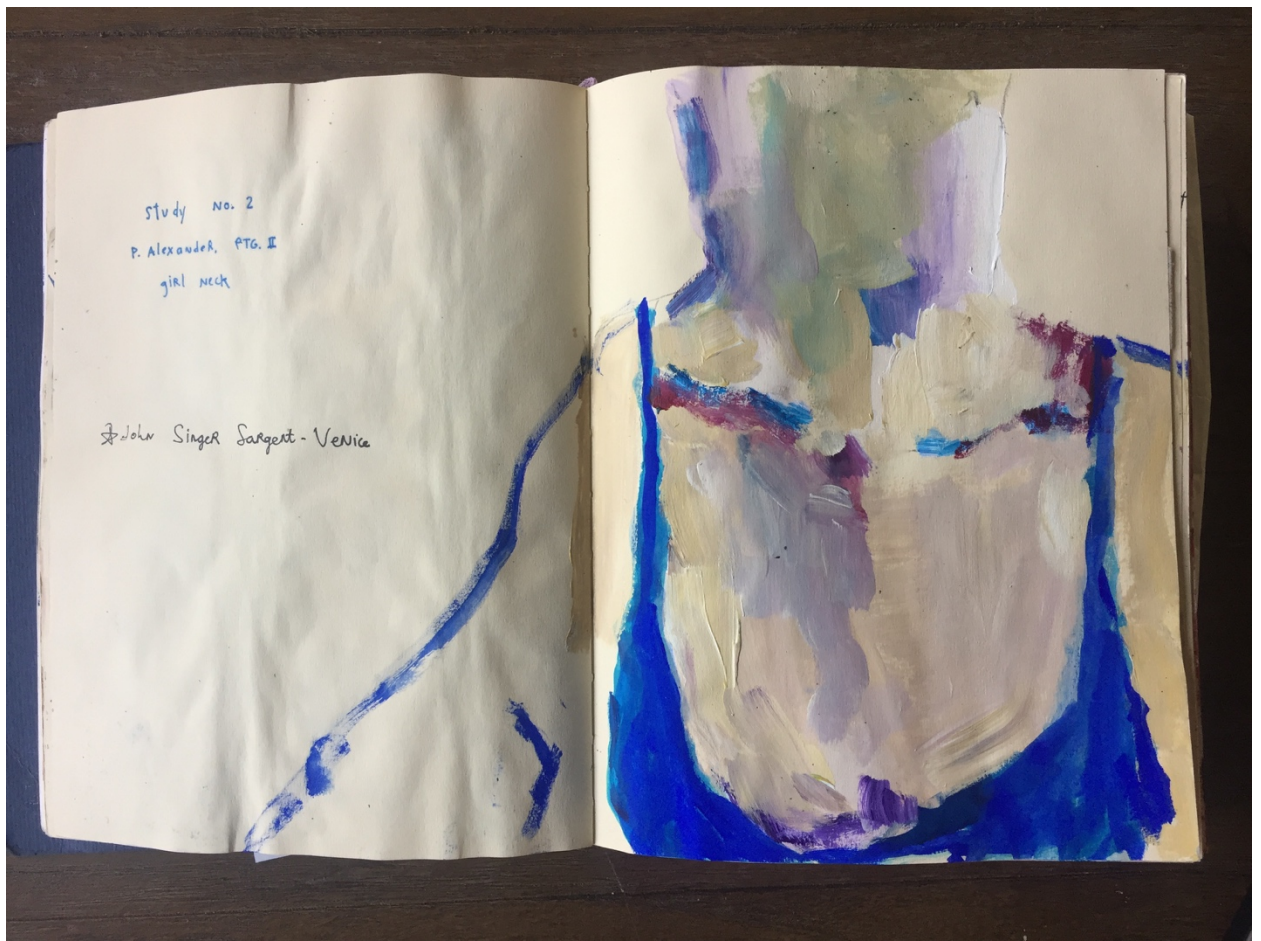


Fig. 17: Bruised Girl Neck from *Journal 12: I Don't Believe You*

THE SILENCES: Let mild women to him lose their mildness
Wilder to him than tigers in their wildness

FINITE

While I wrote this the silences grew tired
while I wrote this the silences became palpable their weight
turned humid and dense a whisper passed between them
or released a song unhitched an acid bubbled
they grew tired of tasting it of swallowing a lozenge for it
tired of moving it to the back of the throat gargling
toothless and bitter tired of laughing at its punchlines
tired of being reminded it wasn't polite company tired of whispering to a friend about it
of setting the table for it tired of leaving the room while it ate
tired of being stripped from its bones tired of them all returning to the same carcass
its meat was not infinite

LITURGY OF THE SILENCES

LUCRETIA: It isn't that we're having a more somatic experience than you It isn't exactly that

THE SILENCES: our bodies through the window like a crisp chirp
traveling through layers of slow-moving liquid speaker-tinned,
dialed up or down by giant fingers
they were the symbol of something luscious, an oil painting on a blue lit
screen, weeping a deep and humming red
were a dancer crawling across the smooth floor of a black room,
surrounded by layered folding chairs
were made and remade were a little notebook held were somehow
distilled were a flipped coin flashing in the humid summer air of the city
were coming up heads

LUCRETIA: A co-worker once told me Elizabeth Taylor would scuba dive wearing her diamonds in
dripping layers, mapping the collarbone and the wrist bone the joints of the fingers she wore them
flashing like fish scales or strobe lights said she wanted to attract the sharks

THE SILENCES: When my body saw it could turn its eyes all the ways it turned its eyes
toward the death-shadowed ways

LUCRETIA: Sometimes I invent angels for myself: dayangel, waterangel, subangel, circumangel
THE SILENCES: We grafted red onto white we mingled them until something mangled

LUCRETIA: he would call me *freaky* he would whisper *freaky* in my ear when he did it I
remember wanting to turn all of myself off like flipping a switch It was summer and I
was in that city a man came up to me at a park I was drinking chocolate milk
It was Spring
it was May he was in graduate school and taught one of my classes I woke
one night and I felt him and I pretended

THE SILENCES: Subangel, epiangel, hexangel, infrangel, obangel, interangel, unangel

LUCRETIA: Sometimes I invent membranes for myself : fluid mosaic and the bilayer growing
thick with each turn of the record

THE SILENCES: Our bodies were like a window with no blinds turning bruise blue in the evening
were like yellow lamp light in a mirror were red and were white and then weren't

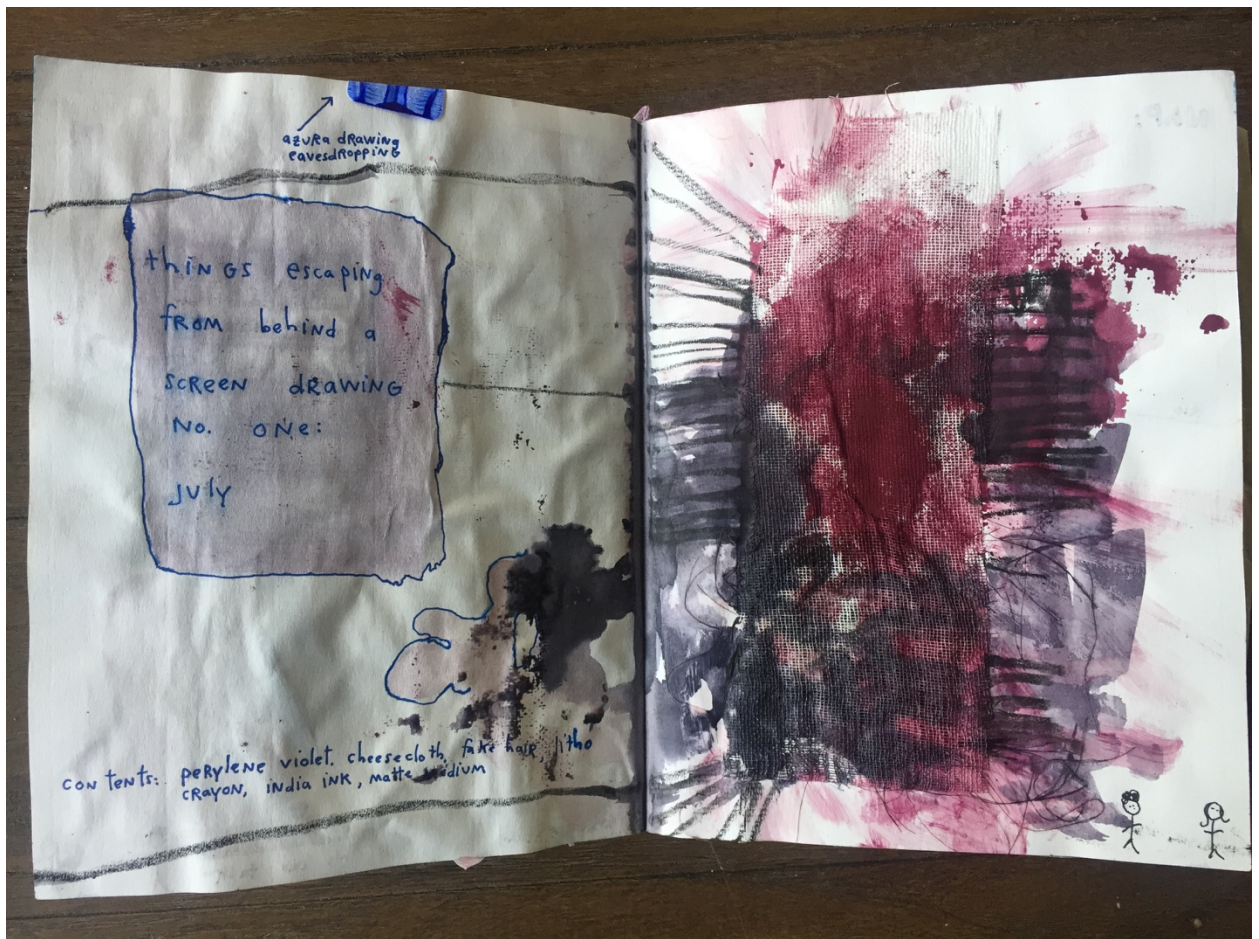


Fig. 18: Things Escaping from Behind a Screen Drawing from *Journal 12: I Don't Believe You*

Notes

The version of *The Rape of Lucrece* I worked from is part of a collection of Shakespeare's poems edited by John Roe and published by Cambridge University Press in 2006.

In almost every instance, the lines spoken by "The Silences" incorporate language from the original *Rape of Lucrece*; in some cases I've excerpted straight from the text, in others I've made slight changes. Shakespeare's original lines are as follows, and appear in the manuscript in the same sequential order as they do below:

Line 1027: This helpless smoke of words doth me no right

Lines 1821-1824: "Why Collatine, is woe the cure for woe? / Do wounds help wounds, or grief help grievous deeds? / Is it revenge to give thyself a blow / For his foul act by whom thy fair wife bleeds?"

Line 836: My honey lost and I a drone-like bee

Line 979-980: And let mild women to him lose their mildness, / Wilder to him than tigers in their wildness

The list poem "Milk and Blood" incorporates language from Shakespeare's poem, my own original lines, and a few lines borrowed from other poets. *A grammar of blizzards* is from Will Alexander's poem, "Exobiology as Goddess"; *colonnade of bleaching pines* is from Robert Lowell's poem "The Neo-classical Urn."

The line: *when my body saw it could turn its eyes all the ways / it turned its eyes toward to death shadowed ways* is borrowed from St. Hildegard of Bingen.

The images are my own drawings from journals I kept as a teenager.

Figure five borrows lines from Carolyn Forché's *Blue Hour*.

Figure six quotes extensively from "Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie" by Bob Dylan.

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