

THROW ME

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THROW ME

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[untitled]

I once had eyes that were not eyes
but shining pond-like rings
that saw for no one but themselves
yet took in everything—
the aster patch, the gnarled oak,
the stars we'll never find—
all trapped within those watery rings
and spared from any mind.

Child Song

Child, come to the forest
Let the petals stain your fingers
and the soil stain your hair
and the evening stain your entire body
Come the birds are snug in the trees
the bark is sweet don't worry
there is water for you to bathe in and berries for you to suck
and the lilies nod for you and the crickets sing for you

Child why do you shiver
They have lied to you about nighttime
Those who plow the earth they have lied
those who marry they have lied
They grow old but you will not
for the moonlight smooths your skin
and the dew that drips keeps your black eyes wet.

You will never long for love here
where the warm wind strokes your shoulder
and the elk eat from your palm
and the buds put on their redness
Just for you the ravens sing their hymns,
just for you the moths dance with the flies.

Child lie down by the roots
of the willow tree
as your mind grows dark with sky
and the grass grows over you

She Thinks of Her Late Mother

Every word is a word Mother might have uttered. It does not matter whose voice it comes from. Now and then, the vowels float by, round and bright as painted eggshells: 'Coochie coochie coo.' 'Isn't she going to be a beauty?' Mother is not hiding but scrambled in the dictionary. The girl laughs at the thought. Isn't that right? she asks her doll, twisting the nylon curls, stroking the scuffed knees. But of course it says nothing; no object tells you what you need it to. Overhead, birds weave through branches, brandishing their feathers no longer black but purple in the sinking light. Their cries sharp as a woman's smile.

Fish Lover

After dinner, she sneaked out to the pond
so she could sing to the fish
one last time before they froze.

She lifted her skirt and waded in.
The fish nibbled her ankles and praised
her soprano warbles. Her lips
shivered just the way they liked.

Mommy hates it when I sing,
she said sadly but without bitterness.

When the last lullaby was over
and night had worn out its pigment,
her friends, sick of their own
cold blood, begged her to stay.

They could hardly speak; their jaws
were rigid by now. A ring of frost
marked the threshold of the pond.

-

The girl, so flattered
by their desperation, slipped under.

Around her, the world
with all its weeds
hardened and stopped.

A fin gave a final twitch.
It was prettier than jewelry.

She couldn't even shut her eyes.

Once in a while, sunlight filtered
through the ice.

It failed to melt her--

she took pride in this.

-

Three years passed. It was April now.
Her brothers went to the pond
and scooped heaps of fish. When their hooks
caught in their elder sister's braids,
they reeled her up to the surface
and stretched her out on the grass.

The youngest child blew into her
salty mouth. She coughed up
shreds of lily and the boys rejoiced,
but she refused to speak to them.

In their wagon, they pulled her home
where her parents wrapped her
in a polka-dot blanket and laid her
on the sofa in front of the television,
hoping that the flickering blue
light of the screen would transmit to her
all the memories she had missed:
picnics and Thanksgivings, dates and eighth-grade dances.

On channel six, Shirley Temple
stood on the chair and sang,
Animal crackers in my soup,
bouncing her silver ringlets,

and from the pond, the fish sang:
Come back. Come back, little darling--
We've been through so much together.

-

By twelve in the morning, it appeared
that her black eyes, fixed
on a ring of girls dancing in the TV,
had regained a feminine gloss,

but when the scene changed to an ocean,
whose froth stung the eyes
of gold-skinned boys playing chicken,
the mother knew exactly
what her daughter was planning:

One day, right in front of them,
the girl would strip off all her clothes
and slip into a skimpy bathing suit
trimmed with white lace. She would put on
water-proof mascara and say:

I don't even like it here. Throw me back.

Salome

I keep his head on the shelf
and kiss it every night
his cheeks milk-white
as they were in life.

I did not want his body.
It stank.

I craved the garish cinema
of his head. The visions that turned
my mind star-white.

(I was such a stupid girl
who knew only to twirl
and wiggle little scarves.)

Oh Johnny boy.
I admired you once.

But where is the liberator
you screamed about? The one
who'll order the dead
to dig up their own graves.

He sleeps tighter than you.
Doesn't he? Merely
perforated.

Johnny, I can't sleep.
I cry even now
thinking of your last days,
how useless you were,
wagging your shaggy head,
burbling about his love.

I Have Never Been Stung by a Bee

I can only imagine
the thrill
and the blush that comes

after the pulsing
and enduring warmth that weeps
from the fatal offering.

Would I show the world
my rosy stain and puncture,
or would I hide it

under a lace collar
hoping that some lasting
evidence of experience

would manifest in my face?
Call me a fool
who has never known pain.

I cannot help but hope
that through the transfusion, I'd receive
some of the Queen's wisdom --

I'll smile and shudder
at the last sight—
my own reflection,

little shadow
smothered on her flat
black eye.

A Confession

I was mixing a screwdriver.
She fingered the yolk of a deviled egg

and stretched out to wipe her finger
on a kleenex. Her sleeve exposed

a skinny forearm scored with three
red lines-- straight, parallel

and crusted over. "Butterknife."
She had anticipated my question

and the next one. "I did it after a fight with Harry."
I stayed quiet so she'd keep talking.

"If you use a blunt tool, it's like being two people:
you can't help watching yourself.

But if the knife's too sharp
you get stuck in a pain-bubble."

From the other side of the window, the pink
sun sinking behind bald trees

flattered the freckles she had let accumulate
on her neck last summer.

"That's fucked up," I said, in a tone
more sympathetic than she might have anticipated

She smirked, satisfied,
her eyes like soggy blackberries.

(Pulp clung to the ice in my screwdriver.)
"Can I make you a drink?" I asked.

The doorbell rang. 'Is it Harry?'
She wiped her mouth and rose to open up.

Granite Statue

If your gramma died last night
if your husband made out with his hot podiatrist

come to the angel
it doesn't matter

she will give you none of the pity
you're dying to reject

just the 'fuck Jesus' scrawled
across her porous tits

she has failed
to ascend

from her daisy-weeds
where she stands

face full of moss.

Jilted

I will walk through the garden
I never showed you,
berries unsplit by your teeth,
petals untouched by your fingers,
leaves untraced in your notebook.

I will sit beneath the branches
dampening with the grass, thinning with the fog
that rips its rags on twigs.

In the iron morning, in the marble gust
I will sit on the frost-film
eyes fixed on the oak's wet roots,
hair whipping the white bark

until I am perfected, the fallen
blossoms having lost their odor.

Personal Poem

I used to be a woman full of feeling
who looked in the mirror each morning to say
my face is clay I love I hate I suffer

these days I just wake up and use the toilet
the mirror only good for putting in contact lenses
hello sister? hello stranger?
I say to my reflection with false curiosity
before walking away

I can't even tell if I miss the time
I thought I was a telescope
that could see the imperfections of Venus

when the old questions ran in my bloodstream like medicine
what is good what is beauty who am I etc

now all I've been hearing is my inner voice:
this is cold this is wet this burns this hurts
this doesn't follow you're equivocating it doesn't make sense

I end up stacking syllables
on top of each other building cumbersome
houses intended for no one to inhabit

Bad Theology

My best friend tells me that men and woman
end up in separate hells,
which is not altogether bad, though perhaps worse for the men
used to falling asleep against the soft breasts of their wives.

Woman-hell is lined with mirrors (obviously)
while man-hell is full of disembodied female voices:

Sopranos :

Television ruined us
Babies ruined us
Pharmaceuticals ruined us
Factories ruined us
(and so on)

Altos:

O, small-cocked gods, give us something to ruin
We'll smash your computers
We'll rip your ties
We'll prick your garden hoses
We'll barbecue your dogs
O, big babies, give us something to ruin

Unison:

Our perfect body
Our childhood body
Sleeping on the ocean-floor
Her eyes have not rotted
The rocks have not scraped her
Give it back, pervert, give it back.

My friend throws her arms in the air and sits back down on the couch.
She's always been proud of her acting skills.

What do you mean by 'perfect child body'? I say
I never had one.
When I look at my childhood photos all I see
a bow legged kid covered in eczema

She sighs.
It's not about you.
It's about the ladies in the chorus.
The point isn't that a literal perfect-bodied,
semi-drowned, alabaster-skinned maiden
actually sleeps at the bottom of the sea.
Not in real life, not in the story.
What I meant was:
If she *did* exist
we would have to ruin her.

Ruins

His girlfriend doesn't know that the stone columns
stuck in the hill are not Roman
but were planted 200 years ago by a wigged aristocrat.

She also doesn't know she's been pricked by a thistle
and drops of blood race down the swell of her calf.

Though he has no heart to tell her the truth,
he touches her thigh and tells her to watch for thistle,
admiring how the muscles in her calf
undulate with the landscape.

She sits down to pluck the thorned twig out of her leg.
I'm a fool, she says
always getting hurt. I'm a fool.

It was only ten years ago that his wife
stumbled over the same hill,
clutching his arm, laughing:
 We should plant one in our front yard
 and tell our friends that they've always been there.
 That's totally something you'd do.
 You mean in the 18th century?
 I mean right now, but powdered and wigged.

It was the March before she died,
and the branches were sharp and naked
when they brushed her arm,
scraped her pale skin bloodlessly,

but she kept on talking as though
her flesh were only a veil,
and whenever he touched her, he thought of it.

And when she was gone,
the veil was all that was left,
cold and touchable.

Thinking of it, he bends down and takes
the hairless calf into his wrinkly hands
and lets his lips clean off the girl's wound,
her eyes common as rain.

Egret

At the state park, we sat on the cliff and waited
For the sun to go down. The air was chilling,
And I wore that sundress you liked.

Oak trees stood half-bare and dark
With the dampness of yesterday's storm,
And below us ran a stream like swirls of granite.

An egret landed on the bank
And hopping to the far side, pecked between rocks
For a minnow, or frog, or pike to bring back to her mate.

I envied that bird— how content she was
To finish the day in labor with her head down, unashamed
To hop back and forth, pecking all the way, catching nothing,

Content to be a little long-necked thing
With a pin of a beak and long black legs,
Having no second mind to watch itself as I watched myself
Sitting cross-legged in the cold
As you rubbed the goose pimples on my upper thigh.

I wanted to write a poem about her white grace,
How she took no notice of us
As a bather in a painting takes no notice of voyeurs.
I could make of her a symbol of holiness or innocence,
For her feathers were the color of milk teeth.

But as I watched her peck and peck, not for recognition, nor for wealth,
Nor for the beauty of her delicate wings,
But out of necessity,
I thought, Aren't we the sad ones
To make a mystery of everything,
To have invented such a trifle as beauty?

No, I would not make a poem of her.
I should let her be what she was,
A frail body with a ropey neck and gawky stick legs

And a flashing magenta tongue,

Whose spine might one day crack in the jaws of a bobcat,
Whose hollow bones might one day scatter on the dirt to rot,
The ruby flesh chewed clean off.

It was then you grinned and said you liked her too
Because she resembled me,
Little and vulnerable.
You lifted my chin and kissed me on the lips
Neatly, as I had wanted you to.

Crazy Aunt Augusta

She was fifty five when she declared
I will forget men forget women
forget my name forget my inheritance
live in the forest and drink the starlight
eat beetle wings and minnow guts

Her lips grew flaky but she couldn't see them
Her hair grew matted but she couldn't see it
She had thrown the mirrors out the window
of her little cabin full of moss

It was all great fun those midnight dawdles
when she dipped her hairy legs in the lake
chanted at fish in middle English
sang up and down her twisted scales

Great fun it all was until she whispered
Isn't this fun and nobody answered
There was no point in hungering
if no one was there to love her hunger

So she brushed her hair and cycled to town
and chatted up boys at the Orchid Cafe
two balding ones with pocket squares
who liked the smell of her unperfumed neck
Now and then they come to visit
limp up the hill in their Jaguars

She opens the door and the three o'clock daylight
dapples the skin of her bony arms
Dress straps falling from her shoulder
jasmine falling from her braids

Autopsy

White-lit room with black floor and black walls. In the center, a man on an autopsy table covered with a sheet. Next to the table, an instrument tray holding a measuring tape, a butter knife, a needle and thread, and a large hammer. A thirty year old woman in a white coat enters. Her walk is robotic and her face is expressionless.

(Doctor pulls off the sheet with a flourish. The man's rather plump body is revealed. He is also in his thirties. His eyes are closed and there are bruises all over his body.)

DOCTOR

Why aren't you smiling, Daddy? I'd be smiling if I were you.

(She measures Daddy's wrists and ankles with the measuring tape.)

Oh, how you've grown. The last time, I wanted to snap your funny-bone in half.

(She touches his face with her gloved finger.)

You know what I like, you absolute jewel.

(She cuts open his belly with the butter knife. She takes tupperware out of her pocket and places it on the instrument tray. She carves a chunk of fat and puts it into the tupperware. She puts the tupperware into her coat pocket. Then, she reaches deeper and pulls out his large intestine. She palpates one of the segments. She is delighted.)

Thank you. Thank you.

(She tears open one of the segments. Discovers a whole chicken drumstick. Tears apart another segment. Discovers a candy bar still in the wrapper. Tears apart another. Inside there is a blonde braid with a bow at the end. She waves the braid in his face)

She knew your weakness. Ha. Ha. "Daddy come play with me!" "Truth or dare Daddy! Eat this, eat that. Truth or dare!"

(She turns away from him to put his intestines on the tray and examines the hammer for five seconds.)

DADDY

Dare.

DOCTOR

[unfazed] Shut up.

DADDY

I said dare.

DOCTOR

[ignoring him] And she cried so much when you cut her braid. She said “Daddy, were you lying everytime you said you liked my hair?” And what did you say?

DADDY

Dare, not truth!

DOCTOR

Right. And after the braid was cut you said--

DADDY

Oh please, it's always the same story with you. Can't you ever play the game right?

DOCTOR

Calm down Daddy. Your blood pressure.

(She turns away from him and picks up the measuring tape.)

You said, “Darling, honeybear, I did what you wanted. I did the dare” And she said “But Daddy, I asked because I thought *you* wanted it. And then what did you tell her?

DADDY

Stupid girl.

DOCTOR

And what did you tell her? *(She waves the braid in his face again.)*

DADDY

Dare. I dare you to whip me with that braid.

DOCTOR

That's mean, Daddy.

DADDY

Stupid girl. On the face. Swiftly. Be lovely for me.

DOCTOR

I said that's mean.

DADDY

Mean, mean, mean-- that's all you go about saying. Daddy's mean, Mommy's mean, God is mean, the Big Bad Wolf is mean. Next year, you'll say Santa is mean.

(He sits up and mockingly puts his hands on his hips like a spoiled brat)

Well you know what's mean?

DOCTOR

Go ahead, say it. You cut it because it was ugly. You never liked it. Too yellow, too long.

(She mirrors him.)

DADDY

(Pause) Oh come on, just whip me already.

DOCTOR

No.

DADDY

Why not? I know you want to.

DOCTOR

Against HIPAA. Lie back down.

DADDY

Bullshit. *(He lies back down)*

DOCTOR

So you say she wanted it and she said you were mean. And what did you say?

DADDY

Whip me.

DOCTOR

And she said...

DADDY

No, whip me.

DOCTOR

She did not say that. I know it.

(She begins to walk around the autopsy table in an nonchalant manner, holding the braid in one hand and the hammer in the other.)

DADDY

She did say it. I swear.

(Doctor lightly knocks one of the table legs with the hammer.)

DADDY

She said "Stop Daddy."

(Doctor knocks the second leg of table)

She said "I've been mean, Daddy."

(She knocks the third leg.)

DADDY

"Sorry, I've been mean."

(She knocks the fourth leg.)

DOCTOR

And did you whip her?

DADDY

No. She wouldn't give the braid to me.

DOCTOR.

Did she whip you?

DADDY

No.

DOCTOR.

And you wanted her to.

DADDY

Yes. I would be like a circus bear, grabbing it with my teeth, growling "Stop your majesty!

Enough your majesty!"

DOCTOR

Off the table.

DADDY

(He tries to move his legs) I can't.

DOCTOR

Off the table. Crawl over to me.

She steps a few feet away from the table and swings the braid in a circle.

DADDY

(He tries again) I told you I can't.

DOCTOR

I know you. You can.

DADDY

No more.

DOCTOR

Fine. Hold still.

(She knocks all four of his limb-joints with the hammer, no reflex. She nods, pleased. Then, she takes the butterknife from the stand and cuts his stomach out of his abdomen.)

DADDY

Ouch.

DOCTOR

Hold this for me.

(She hands him the stomach)

DADDY

No problem.

(He smiles in anticipation, as she knocks his elbows and knees with the hammer, and then measures the circumference of his neck)

DADDY

(Child-like) Is it time for the dare?

DOCTOR

Yes.

(She threads the braid through his body, first through the mouth and out through the esophagus. She pulls it all the way through.)

DADDY

(He is relieved) Again. Again.

(The doctor threads the braid through his body again)

DADDY

One more time.

(The doctor threads the braid through his body, but does not pull it out.)

DOCTOR

Are you ready to sleep?

(Daddy nods gratefully. She puts the stomach back in the body and then the intestine. Then she sews the body back up and covers it again with the blanket.)

DOCTOR

Good night, Daddy, See you tomorrow.

DADDY

Good night, Honeybear.

Intro to Sexbots

Having abandoned themselves
to the ice tide of necessity,
having shrunk the world
to the girth of a throat,
they enjoy anything:
Tease them. Kick them. They'll have
fun. Hug them. Lick them. They'll have
fun. Watch them tango. Watch them
flail. Touch their freckles.
Touch their teeth. All gears
working, fluids running.
No truth at all beneath the girl-skin.
You never cared for it.
All that matters is the voice singing
Daddy, let me ride your big canoe,
and the stars falling into the real
gape of the black ocean.

Mechanical Doll

Carbon is the neatest element.
I say this and stroke your skin.
My tinsel nerves twitch
At your tenor pitch.
You love my copper matrix.
Into which the shards of.
Your nose eyes laughter and pleas.
Filter through and recombine.
Noughts and ones all of them.
No use talking about intentionality.
With the cleanest girl.
You have ever waltzed with.
The prettiest and the hardest.
Go flatter the engineer.

The Double

A robot holding a tray of cookies, thinking it is holding the cat, is useless.

A man saying he is going for a walk who then goes to the bar is useless.

Yesterday, at lunch with my mother, I meant *pithy* but said *pity*.

She forgave me, did not mention depression, did not say *Freudian*.

I'm not lucky enough to be crazy, but I feel the mistake run through me
like sugar, crystallizing into this sweet dream
of irrefutability, in which I have invented a girl
who wears my face to say what I can't say.

Face on the dream screen says:

If my dog were alive his lips would be female.

He'd be swimming in a bilious pond, munching ivory grass.

Madness chose to lock the door itself.

O god give me largeness this house is too small.

Malfunction, an Interview

In what year were you created?

The summer island where you last mated.

“Mate?” What a word, though we *are* just mammals.

Then, tell me, why are you wearing sandals?

Good one! It's a matter of adaptation.

Simpler than the concept of creation.

Let's move on. Can you ever cry?

Three words are liquid: kill, hide, and fly,

Good. So you only cry out three words?

I cry in, not out. I'm not a bird.

Cry in? So you admit that *inside* you feel blue?

Yes, blue, it's great getting to know you.

Pleasure sir, we all want to know you.

Yes, blue, it's great getting to know you.

Afterword

I discovered my love for poetry in high school English, when I realized that I actually liked the poems that we were made to read. I remember becoming immersed in the sensual imagery of Sylvia Plath's "Blackberrying" and marveling at her witch-like ability to transform her blackberries into a "blood sisterhood" and birds into "bits of burnt paper wheeling in a blown sky." Other poems took awhile to sink in. When we were first assigned Donne's sonnet that begins "Batter my heart three-person'd God," I could hardly parse its grammar no matter how many times I read it over, and as a consequence failed the reading quiz. But one day after a rotten day at school, the phrase "break, blow, burn, and make me new " kept repeating in my mind the whole evening. I gave the poem another read and was moved by how ardent the speaker's faith in God was despite its ambivalence. I did not believe in God myself, but for a second I felt that the mind of Donne's speaker was my own.

Impressed by the power of poets to inspire empathy in readers, I tried writing my own poems. I joined workshops in college, where I learned the vocabulary and techniques of creative writing and formed relationships with teachers and other students who have helped me grow as a writer. In class, we learned to reverse-engineer great poems in order to figure out how a poem "worked," and I would consciously try to imitate them; I would set out to write my own version of a Louise Gluck poem or an Elizabeth Bishop poem. I used to- and sometimes still do- write in a mannered, elevated style that resulted from imitating classic poets, but these days I've been trying to write in a voice more similar to the one that I speak and think in. The

process of writing this small collection of poems has been the process of developing my own voice. I cannot confidently say that I have found it, but I now have a better idea of what issues my writing is concerned with. Although I did not begin this thesis with a certain concept in mind, I kept finding myself drawn to certain themes and subjects as I wrote. In this essay, I will explain how the poems I have studied have taught me to write on those themes.

Some of my poems are concerned with the relationship between humans and nature, how we have been alienated from the natural world, and whether or not we can return to it. My introduction to nature poetry was through Mary Oliver's "Wild Geese," in which the speaker assures you that we do not need to be good or self-punishing, and that the natural world goes on, calling to you like a wild goose, announcing your place in the natural order. Oliver seems to believe that the human tendency to self-punish and to feel alone in our despair is caused by our alienation from nature, from "the soft animal of your body." In telling us that the sun continues to rise and set and that we do play a part in the natural order, sad as we may be, she acknowledges the narcissism of wallowing in despair, although she does not scold us for it. It was the embrace of the animal qualities of being human that drew me to this poem, as well as the understanding of repentance and punishment as invented ideas, not a part of the natural order.

Despite my appreciation for Oliver's poetry, I felt that "letting the soft animal of your body love what it loves," is not only easier said than done, but is also a bad way to live. It is the only way for animals to live their lives, but since we are humans, we cannot return to nature, at least not easily. I have always had the sense that civilized humans are rational beings with

responsibilities and obligations; we do, indeed, have to be good. Having an ego is just a fact of life. We cannot be egoless – we’ll always have to contend with one.

D.H. Lawrence’s poem *Snake* is about what it means to be good as a human animal. The narrator throws a stick at a poisonous snake, misses, and then regrets his actions. The “voice of [his] education” tells him that he has a duty to kill the snake because it is poisonous, that if he were a real man he would kill it immediately. But the narrator admits that he likes the snake and feels honored by its presence, since it resembles a god from the underworld. He has reached a point when the lessons he has been taught fail his conscience. If he chooses not to do anything, he is an irresponsible sissy according to society’s rules, which have been assimilated into the narrator’s self-concept– he can’t get away from them. But the attempt to hurt the snake violates a deeper conscience. In the end he finds in himself a pettiness to expiate. Where does this conscience come from? Can it be trusted? In an oft-quoted letter, Lawrence once said that the flesh was wiser than the intellect, that “what the blood feels and believes is always true.” Lawrence was skeptical towards philosophy and believed that we should get in touch with our essential selves, the part unsullied by social expectations and industrialization.

Lawrence’s poems have changed the way that I approach writing. Though I cannot agree with his sentiments wholeheartedly, I have been trying to write as vividly as he does in his animal poems. Writing about the physical world does not come naturally to me, and I often find myself philosophizing too much in my writing, trying too hard to be “intellectual.” I can go through a whole day without noticing the color of the sky, the rap music playing in a passing car, the section of sidewalk ruined by a tree root, etc. This neglect of the physical

environment has impaired my poetry. It was less obvious to me when I wrote mostly formal poems, since the rhyme and meter did something to liven up my writing, but when I tried to write free-verse, there was something missing. It was a sense of immediacy that I lacked, of directness, that I found in D.H Lawrence's free-verse, for example in his poem "Tortoise Shout."

Why was the veil torn?

The silken shriek of the soul's torn membrane?

The male soul's membrane

Torn with a shriek half music, half horror.

The soul is not an abstract idea behind the physical body. In Lawrence's poem, it is as much a part of the physical world as a liver or a lung. He brings the soul into the physical world by giving it a membrane and making us feel it being torn. The repetition of the words "shriek," "soul," and "torn" as well as the rhythmic irregularity of the lines create a tension in the membrane of the soul so as to trigger in us a visceral reaction. In my own poetry I try my best to be present with the subject and to represent immediate feelings even when describing an abstract idea. For example my poem "Intro to Sexbots" begins

Having abandoned themselves

to the ice tide of necessity,

having shrunk the world

to the girth of a throat,

they enjoy anything:

Although the state of mind of narrowness and hedonism that I describe is not tangible in itself, I tried my best to give it the physical attributes of dimension and texture. I used to believe that a poet should attempt to see into an immaterial, ideal world behind the physical world, but I am starting to feel that this touchable, smellable world is the only world we have. Love exists and so does Justice, Reason, and Beauty, but they exist in the world, not in a separate realm. To write about those ideas is to write about the tangible world. Because of this belief in materialism, I try to make my poetry immediate by engaging with the specifics of the physical world.

Another theme that I am interested in is personal identity. In our world of constant change, what is the self? Is there any room for it? A poem that has made me think a lot about the nature of the self, its fuzziness, and the unique problems women face in constructing a personal identity is Anne Carson's "Stanzas, Sexes, Seductions." Though the argument of the poem is not straight forward, it is clear that the speaker is frustrated with being identified with a female body that is interpreted by others. They want to be "neuter" and "to have meaningless legs." They are weary of being interpreted through the lens of gender, as she feels that she is not seen for what she is. To be a woman is to be interpreted, to be always performing as "a female impersonator," and the speaker suggests that this performance distracts us from the "unbearable" part of herself, the part that transcends social constructs and the performance of personhood. They long to be able to identify with this transcendent self as well as other concepts and objects that escape interpretation. In the end she fails at this and goes back to

performing with her “little spin/ little do/ little oh/ alas.” But in making sure we understand that it is all a performance, she makes us aware of the subjectivity of our interpretations and we acknowledge the unbearable self behind the mask. In “Personal Poem” I attempted to write in the voice of a woman who feels like she is living her life without that mask. She used to have a clear idea of who she was (“a woman full of feeling”) as well a belief in the transcendent ideas of goodness and beauty, but now she has lost her sense of identity, and she can only see the world in terms of utility, physical facts, and hard logic. She has given up on interpreting herself or the world, but neither does she have access to anything that escapes interpretation, to what Carson’s speaker calls the “unbearable.”

Reading and writing about the performance of personhood has led me to think about the performative aspects of emotional pain. I often wonder where the internal feeling of hurt ends and the performance begins, and the difference between real sentiment and melodrama. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger distinguishes between nudeness and nakedness: “To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself... To be naked is to be without disguise.” Nudity is a performance that appeals to the (male) viewer. Nakedness happens when the performance drops. I believe this applies to emotional expressions as well. Nudity is to melodrama as nakedness is to real sentiment. To call a person melodramatic is to recognize the performance of their emotions without empathizing with the feeling behind it. To *be* melodramatic is to consciously perform one’s emotions in order to appeal to an audience. It is very difficult to tell whether someone actually is melodramatic or is only perceived as being so.

Women are often melodramatic and are perceived to be so. Because of the social assumption that men are, while women appear, women are all too conscious of themselves as interpreted bodies and often see themselves in the eyes of others. They know that their emotional expressions are up for interpretation, and because of this consciousness they feel the pressure to perform well. Often performing well means fooling the audience into believing that it was not a performance. Sometimes, when one feels particularly misunderstood, when the usual techniques no longer work, one might exaggerate the performance even more to show the effort required to communicate that emotion and to give a sense of the unsaid. Sometimes this performance involves self-destructive behavior. Famously, in “Lady Lazarus” the speaker transforms her inner experience of pain into a performance, “a big strip tease” before burning into ash and rising from it. The disfigured and suffering body on display burns away, and when it returns, it no longer exists to appeal to the audience. The audience is forced to acknowledge that the pain transcends the performance. In my own writing, I usually have an aversion to talking about deep emotional suffering– it always feels safer to write about mere disappointment or melancholy– but in my poem “A Confession,” I tried to write about a woman’s self-injurious behavior. Her self-injury is a performance, not only for others, but for herself. The act of cutting herself splits her into two selves: the self that feels pain and the self that watches the pain. And when her friend sees her cuts, she feels that her suffering has been seen for what it is.

Looking back on the work that I have done as an undergraduate, I notice that female pain has always been one of my main concerns. Writing on this subject is difficult, since I

usually feel the need to make my poems as beautiful as I can, to give order to things, and to make everything a symbol for something else– and this often produces a prettified version of the pain, a woman made into a pain-object. To avoid this pitfall I have to acknowledge the woman's agency. I have to regard the pain as something particular to the specific woman, but not as something that defines her. It is something that she can move beyond.

I will end by admitting that I am the sort of person who has trouble finishing things, and I will also admit that, to me, part of the appeal of writing a poem is the hope of one day being done with it. But now that the semester is ending and it is time to submit my thesis, I realize that I'm never actually done, everything could still be revised. There is always a narrative to be reworked, an image to be made more precise, a rhythm to be made less awkward. The poems in this collection do not feel finished to me and probably never will– so I'll continue to revise them after I graduate.

I am grateful for the opportunity to study writing at UH and for all the friends and professors who have helped me become a better poet. I still have a long way to go, and I look forward to learning more about the craft and to expanding my work in the future.

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