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## Those Other Flowers To Come: A Poetry Collection

Sophie Patricia Strand  
*Bard College*, [sophiestrand@gmail.com](mailto:sophiestrand@gmail.com)

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*Those Other Flowers To Come*

*A Poetry Collection*

*Senior Project submitted to*

*The Division of Language and Literature of Bard College*

*by*

*Sophie Strand*

*Annandale-on-Hudson, New York*

*May 2016*

**Those Other Flowers To Come**

*for Ann for everything and every other thing*

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## *Table of Contents*

### *This World*

4 - Very Specifically Here

6 - The Vacant Sense

8 - Obscure Births

9 - The Substitution

10 - Contra Abraham

12 - Before Me, I Enter

13 - from, to / Nouns, Lost to Me, Returned In Emerson's "Love"

22 - The Word for Going is a Way

### *This Other World*

26 - Those Other Flowers To Come

28 - The Scrape

29 - Adrift, Reading Eliot's *Little Gidding*

31 - Epitaph

32 - The Debris of a Shape

33 - If, In The Seventh Seal, I Entered

34 - Most Stars Are Dead

35 - Anagnorisis

36 - The Summons

38 - First Ode: The Problem of Setting

40 - Afterword

*I am imbued with the notion that a Muse is necessarily a dead woman, inaccessible or absent; that the poetic structure – like the canon, which is only a hole surrounded by steel – can be based only on what one does not have; and that ultimately one can write only to fill a void or at the least to situate, in relation to the most lucid part of ourselves, the place where this incommensurable abyss yawns within us. – Michel Leiris, Manhood*

*Our bodies communicate. This is my calling. This is my world. All is decided and ready; the servants, standing there, and again here, take my name, my fresh, my unknown name, and toss it before me. I enter. – Virginia Woolf, The Waves*

*This World*

*The partaker partakes of that which changes him.  
The child that touches takes character from the thing,  
The body, it touches. The captain and his men*

*Are one and the sailor and the sea are one.  
Follow after, O my companion, my fellow, my self,  
Sister and solace, brother and delight.*

- Wallace Stevens "Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction"

*Very Specifically Here*

My land is not the land of the tiger,  
the watermelon, the lemon, the tea leaf.

My land is not the land of the aqueduct or the turret.

A man called me a rose and a thing. He said  
women were typical and I was not. With his help I could  
escape my typical difference and enjoy  
what refined sugar he could carry through fields  
I replied that he grew in an alien climate and did not understand  
my genus.

His land subtracts an ocean, an old-growth oak, all the sumac's blood,  
in order to find me and name me.

I read hell, apologies, cities, dander, resurrection  
and it did not explain why this year  
there are markedly less banded woolly bears in the fallen leaves  
at the sides of the streets; the farmer's almanac still holds that this is a mild omen:  
the winter going to slush and honey sunsets.

Two hawks punctuated my afternoon  
walk: red-tailed and a stranger variety with a bone-colored head.

My land is not the land of the screen,  
the subdivision, the wire, the vaccination.  
Guidebooks honor these specifics by excluding all other nouns  
made elsewhere, not grown here three miles from here, very specifically here,  
where I live and walk daily.

My land is not the land of days, or progress.

Land can turn or continue. It never escalates itself or becomes other.

Time continues, water bows, then shrugs off its surface  
under a thinner moon; nothing is added but another tree  
to take the place of the one that broke open in a hurricane.

My land is not the land of the language.

Certainly, those who live here have mouths;  
 the mouths are used for hunger and clamor.

Words have a difficult time attaching to our noise.

My land can say. But it does not say *things*. The sound itself

is beautiful

and conforms to no typical sense. The beauty is about itself.

Our open mouths produce tones that restore the earth its elements:  
 a high pitch turns Styrofoam liquid  
 and electricity slows into yellow rope that falls  
 in tired lines across the absence of a landscape.

My land is not a landscape. Hard as I try,

a line cannot be fixed

between the fir trees and the mountain: no horizon adheres

to the vegetative tides turning each blurred tree into a smoke  
 that hides even the idea of an edge.

A man called me a rose, a thing. I said the soil here knows no roses;

a thing, if planted, will not grow.

*The Vacant Sense*

Propofal to dull the words, something like  
blizzard  
but I forget it and sevoflurane

so that the words, blizzard or the flakes of the whole, fragment;  
enamel, eiderdown, the snow attack  
on the hill like blood cells  
without blood inside.

It is hard to realize when the ability  
to realize is made  
into pink matter, relaxed and mute.

On the fifth dawn after the Cold Moon, early December,  
I am unmedicated and still cannot  
for the life of me  
remember how I got inside and outside an eight-hour sleep;

where is the port hole? venipuncture?

No purpose for the bandaid on the inside of an elbow and  
yet it keeps quiet the place where the joints show  
I am not a unity.

Dreamless night, by virtue of contrast, shows  
how the narrative keeps me mortal:  
if the story starts with golden hair  
it must end in a glimmer of milkweed  
buoyed by air, unattached to the head.

Eight lost hours do not  
happen and neither do I; the duration is a nullity:

my skin stays this size, the stomach does not  
empty, my full  
brain holds undigested comrades, intimacies, I thought to  
make into a facet of my older self  
only yesterday.

If there is a void where story  
should rest, missing  
kidney, word for my mother's odor,  
is there a girl afterwards?

I can't place a before I fell  
asleep, into the brine, into open hands. The morning  
seems unlike itself

without the evening, book reading, wolf hour,  
behind it.

Is there a morning to wake  
into? Or is stagnant water  
the same hour?

If something has been  
surgically  
removed, then  
it is the nucleus of a history I cannot use,

refuse to name.

*Obscure Births*

At what point did the holiday become exile?  
 Maps detailing the escape route cannot show the point  
 from which I began; was it my mother? or before?

Lucidity strikes for a wolf hour and then I am  
 fast asleep again, forgetting things known  
 briefly: my original animal, the shape of the world's first country.

The beginning is off stage, or in another life. In the wings,  
 invisibly, a birds signs about the tough work it was  
 breaking through egg shell. What kind

of bird? A sign? Wings up or down? Or was the bird singing  
 and this overheard is a way of sensing what is now life was once  
 a word for somewhere else  
 entirely. Personally, I find the water like tar, the lack of purpose  
 widespread, disheartening, the ability of

the poem to support an emotion

almost impossible. And yet was there not a moment  
 when this alien climate seemed a superior version  
 of my hometown? The plants grew taller than expected and the men

noticed my body each time I brought it outside.

The wings of the birds were so wide they occurred offstage.  
 In time, the word for bird meant something else entirely. A visible  
 wedge of the original coming to stand for the whole.

Are the limits of the wings,  
 absent in recent years, a fiction?

The language here, although similar to the one spoken

by my mother, has no room for the fricatives of color

I believe occurred daily in the world of my birth.

Grown now, a loss accumulates, and the whiteness blooms unseen in me:

a hemorrhage behind a lovely face,  
 somehow spared the worst of the car accident. And if the bird,  
 never witnessed, dies, how will we know the end of the song?

The sign agitates.

Is it a silence? a pause?

*The Substitution*

Relief in the festival: smoke somehow  
 avoiding the white flags, the chants  
 conforming to the memory of their sound  
 from last year, men stripped  
 to the waist, engaging in petty combat. Survival,  
 although difficult, is possible, we think and

believe, if the right words can be located  
 for sacrifice. Life is blood and life's blood is  
 a word for it. The girl

is bathed, protected from  
 the threat of inclusion in a system  
 of meaning. She must remain separate:  
 her body, the only word.

Our abundance,  
 muskrat fur, oven smoke, oil,  
 dirt depend on our  
 ability to keep her unaware  
 that the world exists  
 and can touch the skin.

After her work, the language, almost overfull,

is unburdened enough to mean

for another year. The crops can be their seeds. There is room  
 enough to say *my mother, my father*.

What of it? She is like grace before a meal.

Afterwards, the world, dull and resisting touch for so many months,  
 sheds its dry season. We eat again. And again each year

she appears, under the flags,

free of ornament, and is one day my own

relief in the festival. The distance between us closes.

Already the wind lifts.

A young girl can cure the land.

Let her, unflinching, with the traditional instruments  
 demonstrate

a way of speaking.

*Contra Abraham*

I'm no closer to understanding  
 the whale song or the nature of what  
 I desire, what it looks like, but  
 I can't help but give physical

body to my suspicion that I have been called

into use: pewter in his beard, a father, stranger, brother, lamplight, anything  
 attempting

a secret. Scripture  
 informs me,

although he is smooth as a vegetable, uncomplicated

form, he carries more words than I.

What do you call a woman?  
 Sacrifice? Provision?

I think you call a woman Isaac.  
 Abraham isn't silent or

Silence. He speaks for me

everyday when he claims

I stay mute the whole way up the mountain.

No revelation required from faith's object itself

or is the secret a kind of ignorance against my

loud thought that I know the tender cuts of use. I knew you

called me many names, Rachel, burnt  
 offering, mother, son, lamb.

I know the blade is an extension of your ability  
 to be. In order  
 for the knight of faith, to transcend his body,

blunt instrument, he must have

his love  
 to carry uphill.

I'm no closer to understanding a song, a whale song, the depth of it, the oceans of what

tragedy or my name.  
 Is my name his love?  
 I felt my body begin to symbolize. It was painless  
 but I was quite aware as we rose up the side of Moriah  
 like sun following steam.  
 Clearly, I am the thing you call names other than mine. I am the thing carried,  
 surrogate of the lamb, a son,  
 the unspoken knowledge that the firstborn of your seed is  
 just a frame for spilt blood.  
 The instant is always punctual.  
 Death is not a deed done  
 but a shadow cast beforehand. I am done in  
 beforehand. Before I realized I could not call myself, I was already without  
 a tongue.  
 The knife rests above my mountain and your hand is stayed by the arrival of  
 any voice other  
 than mine. I do not speak.  
 Is my name  
 under your hand? Is it your love?



*from, to / Nouns, Lost to Me, Returned In Emerson's "Love"*

i.

That which is *a love*, may be trusted to the end. I thought

*and found* it

blended with what is more, the book, the word, clouds, more and forever.

“The statue is then beautiful when it begins to be incomprehensible, when it is passing out of criticism and can no longer be defined by compass or measuring wand... The god or hero of the sculptor is always represented in a transition *from* that which is representable to the senses, *to* that which is not. Then first it ceases to be a stone.”

ii.

When it begins,  
it begins

to be, god or hero, or sculptor, or first stone.  
It begins to be, when it is passing out of

sabbaths and jubilees:  
twenty, thirty, eighty

years and years. Every *thing*

is beautiful;  
details are always melancholy:

time and place and canker and care.

The rose of joy

is grief.

All mankind

love  
a lover. Dearer than

a lover is  
a skein of silk or a sheet of paper,  
or dancing-school, singing-school.

Scholars, great men

are  
a parcel of accidental and trivial circumstances.

What I want to portray is

the experience of mere pictures as

a lover, dearer than

every *thing*.

iii.

Be our experience in particulars

what it may:

dawn, music,

poetry and art, purple

light;

our experience is still

a parcel of

a window,

a glove, a veil,

ribbons, wheels of the carriage.

The figures, the motions, the words betray themselves  
as themselves

in transition from the sign

to the beloved.

Object are images, are like other images, are

water, fire, the study of midnight.

Stars were, are, letters,

flowers ciphers coins air,

and song

men and women,

and the streets mere pictures.

Almost the notes

are articulate.

iv.

Bird, bough, tree, cloud, faces, waving grass, flowers

green dear.

Dearer

the wood and a fine madman, sweet sounds

grass, trees, blood, violet, clover, lily, vein, brook, foot.

The causes have sharpened the perceptions of  
 a new man, new perceptions, new purposes and a religious  
 somewhat person, soul.

v.

The cause of

*a man and a woman,*

of all select things and virtues  
 summer diamond the song of the ancients,  
 land, roses, violets, dove's neck, the plastic arts, gets perceived as

the same fact. The same fact is a new man and  
 may be observed and measured as a mere picture,

statue and  
 god or hero ,

transitioning *from*  
*to* that which is

not  
 stone, painting,  
 poetry, fire,  
 visions, high  
 shadows of real things.

vi.

What was lost articulates

almost as the purpose of

the man,  
 a person,  
 the female sex,  
 the form, movement. The persons resign each other

as standing for the details. For love

a book, the same book.

The cause of  
*the world* gets lost and

*is*

old; new is

Pluto, Plutarch, Apuleius                      and Petrarch      and Angelo and Milton.

Pluto, Plutarch, Apuleius                      and Petrarch      and Angelo and Milton

always represent a transition *from* that which is,      *to* that which

is not.

Then first

it, the man, a person, the female sex, ceases to be

a stone,  
upper world,  
cellars, powdering-tubs, marriage  
thrift,

and that              life.

vii.

Details are always melancholy:

time and place              and canker and care.

The rose of any *thing*

is grief  
and canker and care.

The rose of                      all mankind  
*is*. Love a lover.

All mankind dreams a detail  
of                      the pond, or the light or,  
from an orb,      the rays,  
every utensil, toy, the house and yard      and passengers of

politics geography              history. The detail may be

observed as the              time and place of

what was lost

when the sign became necessary.

“by the necessity of our constitution  
things are ever grouping  
themselves according to

higher or more interior laws”.

viii.

Neighborhood, size, numbers,  
habits, persons, degrees, powers  
higher to the lower, all the particulars  
the house and the yard

are becoming more

impersonal every day.

Every day the necessity of

things *is*

according to *themselves*.

Things, every love, rose, grief, act

according to a higher

transition *from* , *to* . Our experience,

that of a man and a woman,

is accidental particulars: dawn seen by hero or god, music heard by

Plutarch, Apuleius, the man, a person, the female sex

sharpens the cause

only by its own design.

The necessity of our transmutation

is a trivial circumstance.

ix.

I lost,  
and lost *I*, but found

the precious fruit of the long hereafter. This new,  
quite new

vegetation,  
the bark and leaf-buds  
glances, acted

*to*

wholly embody  
the body.

And the body is wholly little stars, heaven fine, night, day, studies

*from*

talents and kingdoms

religion.

The details are

melancholy, exactly the whole web of relations

in a list of years, years.

This form is full of

this which is  
all form.

x.

Beginning with

the remembered image of *the other*, I

wonder does *that other*

see cloud, the same book, the same now and delight?

The body is  
found wholly

to

be the beautiful, the beloved, the beloved head, one hair, these children,

danger, sorrow. Love prays

a new value to every  
atom in nature. The love is the form

of a new, quite new,  
man and woman.

It transmutes the whole

web of relation in

*to* golden, new, sweeter elements, pearls and poetry and  
the remembered image of

that other  
*from*  
the beginning.

xi.

What is more?

Home/heart.

A parcel of accidental and trivial circumstances.

The causes have sharpened

the purpose of the form: to  
transition *from* somewhat

a person *to*

signs, purposes and a religion.

Everyday, the necessity of *signs*

begins and so on;

signs appear and reappear and continue to attract,

but *the* changes.

*The* whole, known, texture of man, of  
woman

changes. The statue is then in a transition. It ceases to be  
that which it is *not*.

What is  
more?

A stone. The god or hero  
in transition.

A rose of

the world, all the angels,  
the windows, the vices,  
all the schools, all the  
homes

breast violence.

The remembered image is

what begins to be wholly embodied: the beloved, cloud, the same book. Form is

fully  
what it gains. What it

gains *to*, it becomes *from*.

xii.

They resign each other without complaint. They re *sign* each other,

now man,  
now woman, now cheerful or object or  
each *other's* design.

They de *sign* each other.

xiii.

That which is *a love*, may be trusted to the end.

I thought

*and found* it

blended with

sacred, magical play, charms, years, years.

It is there as form, as body wholly

embodied:

a man and a woman, so variously

forty or fifty, early infancy, deck, bower, and nature, and intellect, and art, and the melody, and the  
epithalamium.

It is a rose

of each other's design.

All mankind.

Love a lover.

xiv.

Thus we are put in  
for *a love*, not a *sign* for  
nature, tents of nights, moments.

The man and his  
is and woman and hers.

They are for each other

a statue, ceasing to be  
stone.

Clouds blend.  
We can lose any *thing*.

In the end, these relations are

planted by                      what    *is*

*what is more*  
and so on.

*The Word for Going is a Way*

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which  
leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. – Matthew 7:14

The way, a word that extends, gets projected thoughtfully or  
retracted, curved  
according to where I believe  
I am going. Yesterday the Maidenhair sent

up a seedling. Today it snows. I walk

under a tree and then, when branches throw out varicose  
ribbons, unwind their inner white, orange, coral blooms, into the wind,

I decide to take another approach, lower my head and push under.

The way under does not  
lead to aquifers thick with runoff  
medication, blood pressure  
stabilizers. Other things have run off under: me,

an implausible conference of American chestnut trees, dead to the world above,

and biding time beneath, all the forsaken

seeds, catalogued  
in the stone as fossil but still with their genetic kernel intact, still possible.

A word extends from the underworld  
and gets interpreted  
as the way, in spring,  
finally growing visible again. Yellow nubs of leaf

decorate the plastic trail markers. A mark from deer feet  
in melting ice shows another way  
to go.

Here are the dandelion lines, beads from a lost rosary, crumbs  
that look as if they tell a life: spring leads to summer and forever onwards,

the way leading expertly between heat and its opposite, never losing track. The heat does  
not disappear; all winter, declivities press

in the white plains and hidden steam  
directs seasons from the underground.

If this winter comes completely, and the snow collects,  
then spring, blowsy with snowmelt will exceed all expected  
celebrations; the birds, overeager, break their V  
on the way home. The sky disorganizes.

*If then* clipped to the clotheslines like pins, trying to keep

what is spoken, from me to you, or to another,  
seeming to be a line or a way. If the stone shows up  
in my path, then I will turn and walk another.

If this world runs out, then I am reassured the word extends beyond.  
If *then* can be spoken, the woods, water, will part and show  
that another earth with renewed wood, water  
arrives. *Then* there is no opposite or underground. In the next world,  
I'll do better at meaning; the spring will conform to warmth and I will walk

straight. What I can say about this prediction points,

not necessarily ahead, and, tugging on impossible branches  
as momentary leverage, I continue to follow myself to where

I am going.

*This Other World*

*The profoundly 'atomic' character of the universe is visible in everyday experience, in raindrops and grains of sand, in the hosts of the living, and the multitude of stars; even in the ashes of the dead...Like the tiny diatom shells whose markings, however magnified, change almost indefinitely into new patterns, so each particle of matter, ever smaller and smaller, under the physicist's analysis tends to reduce itself into something yet more finely granulated. And at each new step in this progressive approach to the infinitely small the whole configuration of the world is for a moment blurred and then renewed.*

-Pierre Teilhard de Chardin The Phenomenon of Man

*Those Other Flowers To Come**The Book*

There is no such thing, and yet  
 it gets written. In nature, everything  
 recurs, sometimes similarly, but is slightly  
 different by number of thorns, buds, or the patina of color  
 in the fruit's skin. The lupine is always on the hill but  
 each occurrence is higher or lower according to the way  
 wind happened all year.  
 If there is a repetition, it exists only  
 in the book you write about my simple life. You said I was the next rose, reified.  
 The book seems to have come  
 straight from the dirt's coil. But I know you transplanted the words  
 into the wild, under cover of a dead season. Inside the front page,  
 an image explains the author's first world: seeds scattered  
 like static in the low wind and one rose imprinting the idea  
 of all those other flowers to come in the middle of another  
 yellow page. The words replicate  
 in the flat spaces of grange. Am I a thing?  
 If I was, would I even know?

*The Portrait*

Through the light box, the flower is seen, abstracted, and then  
 pinned by a seeing brush, made many.  
 A bouquet is a still of one rose,  
 flesh blended, attenuated stem,  
 made a plural. The artist can't find so many beautiful things  
 outside; he paints from the one that strikes him most complete. I am the still life, living variously  
 with each blink. A single model of myself approaches  
 the outer orbit of your eye and asks, do I lessen when seen?  
 Have the subtle parts of my real body  
 become trapped in the tomb of a bright color?  
 In the bouquet, one rose turns its head, smudges, and rejects  
 reification. Someday, I will appear singular again: a thing hardly  
 moving, my stem uncut: a green needle extending underground. Hardly even a thing.

*The Mirror*

I woke and slept to find myself on the other side  
 of the mirror. In the real world, I can see a glass vase with cut flowers  
 on a table in a dim room. A woman reaches a hand towards

the limits of my glass. Slowly, I feel an eye replacing my eye.  
 Is there a repetition? I appear daily, for a few minutes, as I see myself,

always a replicate of the last time. If there is a rose, then I am the next  
 rose, flattened gaze of the flower's extension.

What ends here is a fingertip touching the image  
 of it's own sensation.

Still, life continues  
 and light fades on the room, the portrait of the room,  
 the room's book. I stand in the dark unseen by glass, untouched by words,  
 the first version of a self.

*The Scrape*

Every blocked river was recently, called a “dam”.  
And the man too begins to fade  
under the pressure of my description,

*He is handsome, strong. His eyes are blue.*

He had no name, no letter for one. Only sticks that could  
scrape earth, disturb how years of dust and snowmelt settled.  
What a surprise, I call him *world*.

Salt dries on my thighs. Here, the tide has marked several  
different versions of itself. My legs disappear under the waves  
of what happens to them

when they grasp the centaur, the ocean, the other body,  
riding towards another way of naming.

*Adrift, Reading Eliot's Little Gidding*

Between two waves of the sea,  
 where we were standing,  
 you questioned,  
 "And where were you before?"  
 I did not know. Do not now. Before? Before? The gate is the zero  
 of summer, as you said.

And I  
 passed through thoughtlessly. I  
 cannot tell  
 the way for it did not happen in  
 a way that can be told. The staff holds  
 the waves apart, and the lips parch in conditioned air. That is how

I came to be among the waters. A word harbors  
 a list of words. Water is not more of itself by being  
 said again. By the time  
 over, over, over, over, finishes,  
 the word  
 cannot mean an ending. When  
 this moment is over,

it will be

a rose. Or whatever you said I was like. Was I like a thing?  
 The thing I am  
 like, closes its open petals.

Then the ocean eats the Egyptians.

Across the river, into my hometown, along the pavement  
 illumined by the streetlamp

where love always stands with a timetable in his hands (is he  
 timely?) handsome as

a linden tree

lit by the square windows of a building behind.

I try

to utter and find my mouth  
 cannot happen, closed skin  
 of the petal. The rose I am is closed. I am the ocean  
 also and can close. The ocean before

it is      tapped open  
to provide  
a way through, looks

like a landscape

you could step across.

The ocean of here

and                      now

is like *a thing*, a rose.

*Epitaph*

Details are always melancholy: gray  
 clots of mushroom on the hill mean some  
 thing rots below, a rose  
 affixed to my breast is a way  
 of showing that my name often bleeds through.

Pavement darkened as if stung by rain stays dark  
 even though the days pass and the sun sucks up all other

water; a human shadow stains  
 the world permanently in order to preserve the bomb's time.

Bundled iris of the pyre, fresh cut twigs  
 shiver with premonition. The fire's spine looks red

but is a woman. A word ramifies. Surprised by impact, the world  
 pretending solidity, reveals for an instant

its brute vacuum. A signature was supposed to validate  
 this document, but the hand counterfeits.

The sign soaks through. At the end

of the ritual, which is a living duration,  
 will it be covered over? What flowers erupt? The bones revive  
 slowly as dew, moss, fungi, although there is no stone  
 to hold my figure down. Did you know scattered ash still falls and stays?  
 This piece of dust on the ground is not a seed

but a thing blooms there. If I am

scattered it is because

I refuse my object, do not recognize how it will remain  
 while I go. I'll sign  
*her or here* there, but the pen withholds, my hand imitates  
 another hand.

Here dig, where only crossed twigs mark the place:  
 no name, but a presence.

*The Debris of a Shape*

Like the muscles of Magritte's sky, ether churning within walls,  
like breath cornered in a lung buoys up although the mouth is shut,

or as the mountain pass is so misted that it becomes its own weather,  
like so, and words roll from their objects, press the ground, bruised.

Inconceivably, although the ancient calendars assure us,  
the subject of the poem threatens, but does not arrive.

We walk blind, one foot in and one out. Of what? The *what*  
is propositioned somewhere beyond the cliff's lip.

And the entirety snowballs, white accumulating white  
as, in the dawn, the memory of the dream erases the dream.

Things rip apart. The animals are flayed; the jaguar is torn.  
Furless, the parts work without touching. A clause is surprised

that it depends on absence. Like a murder without its  
woman, the victim is the bloodied floor inside a closed line.

This vibrates within the debris of a shape.  
Neruda loses the pulley and it remains itself.

Magritte's clouds stay clouds, overflow the center.  
This is the poet's duty: to shake the word roughly so that the joints

dislocate, and bones collide within a fixed space; and yet  
retains its letters: animal, form, finally, injured within bounds.

*If, In The Seventh Seal, I Entered*

The knight, reunited with his wife, lets his mind's grip  
on strawberries relax and where is the squire?

Or my own beloved? The end  
of a long journey and a meal, hot with water and salt,  
cannot slake my desire for another. Or the dream  
shifts and Max Von Sydow is younger, freckled, the same  
age as my father at the time of my birth; I am satisfied by the unexpected  
consolation of a familiar  
face in a new body.

Impossible to guess the train's velocity  
with the windows blacked out. Death  
could be a misfiring so immediate the sound uttered  
by the one who suffers  
is unquotable as electricity. I lap at a bowl  
offered, overflowing  
with milk, and take it to be the only sign  
adequate to tell  
what is afoot. What is

happening outside the train,  
the castle? I can see only as far as I can reach:  
friends around a wooden table, strawberries,  
the film reel turning into black fire at the peripheries.

Is the woman possessed? She falls from grace in the wings  
of this moment and I can only imagine  
her innocence or guilt. Am I  
the woman? Is she another? A better question  
awaits our situation. Cold rain

on the flagstones heard through open  
windows cannot be a melody but is, for now, enough noise.

Our hands join in grace and the grace escapes us.

In the final scene we will dance down the hillside; are we now alive,  
the only ones who

survived the crash, the plague, the bad weather?

or, holding each other in the safety  
of a room, are we the other ones, sent from our minds,  
the train having, at an unknown speed, arrived?





*The Summons**i.*

You is a distance: I address the one  
 who has not arrived with inappropriate intimacy.

What is yours? What plants  
 are green in your world? Alive? Can I imagine it as it  
 will be, and offer myself  
 as witness?

The space between pen and your described face  
 compresses. In a nucleus of bent air,  
 the shape hovers over the word I am  
 writing in order to summon

water down your back, the cup  
 you left on the table, black mouth print of moisture,  
 your hands, huge, steady as boats. On the next page,  
 I outrun the years still left between myself  
 and your impossible arrival. Years occur and nothing  
 shows. Pages thinly accumulated are still only the thickness of snow

on a warm stone. Your eyes described are found  
 lacking by you reading, in a distant hour, about your eyes.  
 Are you offended? Impossible

to articulate what will  
 only emerge in tidal pools

if the water never moves. The properties  
 of aging are denied you. I write it so, and backwards  
 your name rejuvenates what I do not

have the right to tell.

Flying ahead, always an asterisk of another  
 system, my desire detaches  
 and hides behind the particular nouns of another  
 world: another, wherever, stones, blue. I long for  
 your snow. Tell me, is it a thing that hurts to touch? Ahead,  
 the you flies.

I give chase, make the chase substantial, something that  
 can be measured and carried forward: tracteries of blood,  
 a line, thread. I can't help but believe I will

own something  
 by calling it, *you*.

ii.

You are dressed as an image:  
 good friend, innocuous suit with a bad tie. Or in another  
 version you come yellow as an icon, clothed only  
 to the waist, and not in robes, but in water.

The weather is good. Wind gets stuck in the nose  
 of my canoe. Can I claim ownership  
 of the vision if it begins to approach  
 without need of my summoning hand?

Across the deep crease of the river,  
 you travel. The stones  
 that guide your feet remain invisible.  
 The first time you occur without existing,

at least in my words or the world. I mistake  
 you for visual snow: atomized blooms caused

by a chemical issue. I ate peaches  
 without offering thanks. Perhaps this is the cause.  
 The air straightens; my boat lifts higher inside  
 white water. I would hold  
 you forever more, hold you hearing  
 the geese through an open window,  
 the milk in your face turning to blood  
 under a warm hand. Fiction can save the body  
 from which it erupts. It saves mine.

You, at first barely a nerve,  
 branch into my extremities.  
 My hand on the paddle knows the pressure of your touch,  
 rowing the water  
 with deep cuts so as to write into image,  
 the end of the river I deserve;  
 the distance between the *you* and your arrival closes.

Somewhere

beyond the hypothetical delta, where boats skid and stop,  
 the trees release the yellow atmosphere  
 they have imprisoned over years. Electrons  
 disorganize above the water, refract through solids;  
 the thinnest skinned parts of me turn the light  
 red. With each filtration  
 the idea of your face  
 comes closer to embodiment.

*First Ode: The Problem of Setting**i.*

Not a flower. Not a smell.

Not a word, although the word helps.

Not a hunch of mountain, an efflorescence  
just erupted in the bush, or weather. Not a

music with the voice threaded under  
the saxophone so that it surfaces once. Not a

tree. Not the thin spit coming from a beak  
puncture in the black maple's heart. Not a heart,

although it has one. Not a love, although it can.  
Not an it, although the word works for others. Not

an other. Not a population, precision, or  
generality; four legs in dirt or transfixed vision,

green ash on the pond surface, the heron;  
not the ability to know, although it knows to

know. Not an animal. Not a woman.  
Not a nudity or fur or texture. Not water

or anything to live by. Not a world,  
although it eats world. Not in time,

not clocks or hours, although it  
dies, by another name, according to schedule.

Not the ability to stop, to regrow, to return  
although it takes and takes. Not a home. Not a way

of saying. Not a real thing. Not mind. Not mind.

*ii.*

These are not your legs, your ways  
of saying hello. Insert birdcall, the one

that comes most easily to ear. What will my novel  
be about? Turtle dove. Your voice, impossible

to transmit reel to reel, must be symbolized.  
Through a window I see your profile opening

and closing in order to talk about abstracted

water, oil, word, word. The problem of color

is a problem of world. I say she was blue.  
You are not. The reader makes a picture

out of the love most ready to hand: bed,  
window, the morning of this hour and day,

a bird, this real bird. To explain the plot  
I will gesture with raised hands when suddenly,

from behind me, an imaginary animal yawns,  
learns to speak. The words let go of your hand,

fly to mine: paper-light, immaterial. Have you  
reached the scene where nothing happens? She is

on the edge of a field, wearing a yellow dress.  
Justice can only ever be done to a part: you,

her version of you, my eye, the field like  
crumpled parchment. The scar on the under

of your chin is unusual enough to exist,  
and yet now that I look for it, all I find is my nominal,

*scar*, but no scar. A body fits inside a word,  
one word: you. Here, insert character. Insert name.

World, by the time I begin to write,  
how far are you from my words?

*iii.*

Did you know future time constitutes this  
world? If mankind had died before Newton

named gravity, all the apples would still fall  
down. The name *time* is alien to the material

it implies. Have you ever seen morning happen  
for no one? Is there a mustard seed in the house

of a family where no one has died? Riddles  
are important; they trick the human

back into cells. The answer  
requires a different biology. But don't despair.

If you cannot, at least the stones will know.  
Although the alchemists failed, they did make gold.

*Afterword*

What is the work?

The first world of this *work* deals with the realization that my writing habits are haunted by the desire to accept, enter, and enjoy the easiness of a language and a poetry that encourages my own objectification.

I seek to question why it is easy, even pleasurable, to relinquish control and enter this primal sense.

A poet friend, a male poet friend, asked me about this project recently: “Were you seeing anyone while you wrote this? I always want to know who a poet was with when they were doing the work.”

I was alone when I wrote these poems.

I am reminded of Maria Mies’ investigations in the “Social Origins of the Sexual Division of Labor”:

“What characterizes women's object-relation to nature, to their own as well as to the external nature? First, we see that women can experience their *whole* body as productive, not only their hands or their heads. Out of their body they produce new children as well as the first food for these children... In this sense, the activity of women in bearing and rearing children has to be understood as *work*.”

It comes as easily as nature. It is rain, snow, anything that arrives with a season. I relinquish control. I cannot *do*. I am done *to*. Everything I do is an activity of nature.

What is the work?

The answer seems to come to me too easily: *I am the work*.

The first object is my own body, my first work. For a man, the first object is another body, another work.

My words are unnatural. They attach to worlds I haven't entered yet. They *effort*.

I would like my words to be effortless. The connections would appear, branch, anastomose as easily as the veins in a leaf.

Names are little efforts. Every thing reaches a hand towards *thing*.

There would be no effort in my language; there would be no object. The subject would always be on the brink of looking in the mirror and understanding the self, the body, as another. But this moment would hover deliciously and never arrive. Everything would refer, not to my body, but *through* it. The world fuses but is not confused.

When I write, the ancient conflation between the female and the natural occurs in a way that feels gentle and organic.

Why, then, when this same conflation comes from the outside, from the dominant culture, does it feel violent?

Am I a thing? A nature? Am I a Nature Thing? A rose?

How should I understand my attraction towards a kind of meaning-making that seems to reinforce my own objectification?

When I write poems am I trying to say something new or am I building an old way of making myself into an object, a flower, a thing, an image?

The other world of this *work* investigates the assumption that many in the world, and especially me, harbor the belief that we deserve something else that will occur on the next page: a better language, lover, poem, experience, world. How does the distance between this world and this other world

create a space where poetry can occur? Is the space of the poem's yearning and expectation fertile or sterile ground?

Where are my words walking?