

LE SPLEEN D'ASH

POEMS

by

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF AUTHOR

Ashley Gould was raised in Michigan by a beautician. She holds degrees in Education and Creative Writing from Central Michigan University and an MFA in Creative Writing from Boise State University. Gould is the author of two chapbooks, *Arousing Notoriety* and *Dutch Baby Combo (The Boys are Talking about Restlessness at Five Points)*, and has published reviews, essays, and poems in various journals including *Ocho*, *New Orleans Review*, and *Unsaid*. She is the Managing Editor of Black Ocean, a small press based in Boston, MA.

ABSTRACT

The problem presented in *Le Spleen D'Ash* is of identity, paralysis, and the Lyric. “Ash” serves as a representation of traditional connotations—a fire’s remains, a resurrection, the ash tree—as well as a symbol for the Lyric “I” in the poems: a plea toward my own voice in the manuscript. Placing honesty into a book is normal, and, when combined with abstract ideas, builds a foreign yet simultaneously comfortable frame for the poems. The presence of a named speaker, Ash, is a common practice, but the fact that my speaker is also metaphorically complex adds further dimensions.

Familiar images like a whale become skewed so the reader isn’t sure their imagined whale is or can be the whale in the poem. A Dutch baby is simultaneously a breakfast pastry and infant. The poems work against their object’s familiarity to push the reader into an unsure space about their own perceptions of the meaning and purpose of the poems.

Though these poems were not written with strict rules or restrictions, very specific processes produced the majority of the manuscript. Forms of communicating over distances—ex. celestial navigation, echo location, or telegraph—play a key role in the development of the movement in some poems: language structures designed to inform and define various communications are excised and used as forms of action in the poems. Research in these fields was necessary in order to develop an understanding of the languages of the communications.

Translation is also important to this collection. As mentioned above, one goal of these poems is to create an uneasy feeling surrounding the preconceived notion of an image and what the poem attempts to imagine in itself. This toying manifests in a homophonic translation of Charles Baudelaire's "Spleen." My goal here is to capture the meaning of Baudelaire's "Spleen" in a brutal and forceful language that demands an increased commitment from the reader to push themselves into the uncomfortable space with these poems.

If conclusions can be made in poems, *Le Spleen D'Ash* does not supply any beyond identifying with poetry's abstract ideals. The purpose here is not to conclude, but rather supply a lens for thought; provoke questions of authenticity; and show the guttural honesty of the spleen in Ash. The Lyric isn't meant to provide a conclusion but a portrait, and this, I feel, is accomplished.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	vi
[over my body there is an insulator]	2
[language is the moon's side of the sun]	13
[my soul comes back by itself]	20
[so it is essential to manage dust]	31
Spleen	40
[there is a difference between a whale's vertebrae & spine]	46
Dutch Baby Combo	56
Spleen	59
REFERENCES	65

*on
a blue sky.*

—*William Carlos Williams*

Over my body there is an insulator rested from work

This is an insulator released from energy
like energy releases from my skin onto other yr skin

This is an insulator ribbed for heat
This is an insulator made for luv

This insulator is atoms

tighter than

yr body // yr body

is passable // this reassures me

At home this insulator

is air We are not

at home We cannot

be air We cast with internal strains

Build me up in greenglass, baby

This insulator is a facsimile of _____ sent to yr _____

This is an insulator unthreaded to pins
It curves to skirt us me

Yr voice is Paris
Yr voice is Lille

stop
stop

Yr voice touches this insulator
with words without letters

Have me from me

Don't go and pass through me, baby

Yr voice is reflected light
Over my body there is an insulator
Yr voice is reflected light

Yr voice is made of skin

Baby

Over my body there is an insulator rested from work

We turn pale over manuscripts sleep has faded & sponged clean of Ash.

—Andre Breton / Philippe Soupault

language is the moon's side of the sun (that star)
pushed in lunar distances avoiding
any real knowledge of time

One simple method is to hold
the hand above the horizon with the arm (stretched out).

through the hand's palm ash is circular breath
the construction is imaginary and tart like stars

The width of the little finger is an angle just over a star
(horizon) and can be used to estimate the elevation of the sun

Ash pleas to be locked in an oak tree
keyed within a star's pleas

I would have been wood oh so long ago

*In the morning I had a look so lost, a face so dead,
that perhaps those whom I met did not see me.*

—Arthur Rimbaud

My soul comes back by itself. It makes a home under the cash register of a small town grocer & counts cans of beans as they go. 1, 2, 3456. 1, 2, 3456. A boy who wants candy recognizes it in its home. It begins to count the boy too. 1. 1. 1. 1. It moves so close to the boy he disappears between its eyes. At night, it stretches out flat in dust & thinks about what it means to have light. What it means to move again. What it means to it.

My soul comes back as two. One to watch the other move & the other to move. Some days they sit. Some days they hold hands & surround a tree. They hold so tight the tree grows around them. They are in two but do not haunt the tree. One sings a muffled song into the tree's ear & the other does not move. The other wants to move, but does not want to leave. One has a thirst & lets go while the other breaths again. Some days they sit.

My soul comes back as three. A soprano, mezzo-soprano, & alto. The soprano rubs the skin off its bottom lip. The mezzo-soprano is scared of stairs. The alto cleans up after them. They are lean & of an ether dressed in furs. Once they watched birds & found flight easy. Once they cut their own hair on a barbwire fence. Once they realized they existed because of moles on their backs. Once they believed they could sing, but know they can't stay long.

My soul comes back as four. All of odd-sized character. They fold upon one another & work together to smash a grasshopper with a mailbox. They smash a grasshopper with a mailbox. So proud, they parade the head between themselves & toss the body about carefully. So proud, they realize their own departure & sob over it. They weep & weep against any movement of a leg. So many noises sound closer than they actually are.

My soul comes back as five. Exhaustion mesmerizes them to the point that they endlessly draw stars. They build towers of paper covered with stars. The construction fades & they like it that way. When they want more, they burn their stars with fire. They watch the ash dance through air & begin to think about atmosphere. How it touches them like they touch it. The five of them spread themselves thin & count their points until their voices go.

My soul comes back as six. Each points to favorite places in an atlas. I-80. Enigma, GA. Lake Michigan. The Oregon Coast. Boise, ID. The staples holding the pages together. Each believes in what they touch, pulling the atlas from one another until it rips apart. Understanding they had hurt one another, each kisses another on the mouth while the others, watching, tongue “I’m sorry! I have love for you!” & push the pages back together.

My soul comes back as seven. They begin a vaudeville show. Several dress in blackface while several drive the cart. Several dance sadly for a recorder. Several divvy tips from the comedy show. They have so much fun they break apart some more; collapse like living things & pretend to bleed from their knees. Defeated by their circumstances, several gather together again. Several open the curtains & clap while several wait for the weather to give in.

My soul comes back as eight. Certain there is no end to breathing, they crawl on one another & become very large. Two ball themselves up for shelter & heave like lungs. Two stretch out & laugh like fingers. Two hold still. Two disappear among the commotion. Certain there is no end to breathing, they walk. They walk toward doors. They walk past things that don't matter. Finally tired, the rest ball themselves up & crumble.

My soul comes back as nine. All in white. They write hallelujahs on windows because they want something cold to touch. They memorize sets of thoughts because they want to know what thought feels like. They keep wise to stain. They keep wise to their own unusual shape. They cannot get past the loss of motion involved with seasons. They pick nine leaves up off the ground & trace the veins onto their own.

My soul comes back as ten. Coming back is too much for them. They opt to whale watch. They see a whale. They see the whale fall in love with them. The whale makes space for them inside its belly & they are comfortable in the warmth. The whale moves where they can't see much of anything, but they trust the whale to tell them about it later. The whale changes its mind. They melt, one by one, into the whale's body. The whale turns around to watch.

Dois-je manger une prune?

So it is essential to manage dust
like plums so ready for harvest's thaw

some diseased wind

breaths like dust

exposure to plums

as coughing fits

some tantrum

plums elite dust

plums aerosol

white glove that

a verbalized dust
like plums &
is not singularity like that

The plum tail is emissions
of dust
admitted atmosphere builds ash
of dust
radiation dusts emissions of plums

Taste dust from room to room

Taste dust from skin to skin

Taste dust from plum to plum

Taste dust from dust to dust

Plums move to see dust
& back through their tails

A tilted angle plums
dust up into the skyline
the skyline pushes
back away & onto dust

I forgot I in place
the way a tail leaves
a trail in dust
the way a plum tastes

Spleen

My blood grows green with gangrene in the reeds.

—*Nicholas Moore*

(I)

Pelvis, irritatingly conjure my vile entry,
 O I urinate like grand floats versed in fraud terms.
 Ash piles habitats like voyeuristic climaxes
 Et. Al, et. Al, et. Al.

My chant reads la' carte literature
 against responsibility's migrained corpse and I'm glad—
 no, I'm lame—no, I'm your errand boy glottaled
 vengeance. Trust me. I'm famous.

Ah, boredom's lament. Butcher perfume
 accompanied by pedi enthusiasm
 independent of cervical bones: I sell vocable

heritage to who's hyper-chic and my
 boyfriend isn't your boyfriend but this boyfriend
 is. Lure affairs like the Lord into debunk sinsisterisms.

(II)

Jesus' souvenirs clip joule milligrams

& gross national tarter encompasses my brilliance.
 That's right, encompasses my brilliance. Oh & my romance.
 Awe Lord, checked roulette dames quit everything
 cash mounts up for. I am every secret you ever wanted
 crusted under your immense mind. That cave. Oh you.
 Oh you. Question marks deserve rigor mortis's fossil community.
 Lunar cinema hordes Jesus' undies & isn't apologetic about it.

Jesus' underground slip abs horde dune outs
 —communes—my remorse. I see trains & long verse
 quietly archive de jour surname pleasures.
 Jesus' view is bourbon pleas for roses. For fannies.
 For trout. His unmodeled follicles sauté my needs,
 His pastel drive shaft is less tangible than brochures
 & my soul. His poetry perspirates bacon.

Renegade language brings back bourgeois journeys,
 South Quad Lounge neglected anklets, my fruity
 & mourning ennui (for insecurity is the root of peeps).
 Let's pretend proportions are a part of language: make mine light
 Or plus-sized maternity vignettes—
 What vague exaggerations.
 Please assume bruled fondness is soundless &
 Vexed like me, an ignored sphinx, a model soliloquy.
 Don't lament Faberge language. Its breakable,
 Chanted crayons from the Son's couch.

(III)

Jesus come lay rod, pay plume vexes,
 you rich, you mass importance, just pour trestle vexes.
 Quiet now, desperate perceptions misprint core baguettes,
 sinew avalanche chins come on avalanche's daughter baguettes.
 Rain pewter leg-sayer: no—giblet, no—faun,
 no—Son of mourning purple faced bacon:
 Do bullion favors for a grotesque ballad.
 Distraction plus your front: cruel ballet
 Son of literature's fury delicate transformation tomb
 damn glamour poor trout piss bomb
 your servant trophy is an incumbent toilette
 that pours tired solstice over moist towelettes.
 Oh Savant! Oh quail faith! Oh, or a mason's view
 destructed by elixir elemental rumpus cores,
 that dance that brain that sang quivering remains non-vigilant,
 no don't lure vexes, join Prussian souvenir postulants,
 I know your chauffeur is a cadaver heebie-jeebie
 and countless songs bark over your lathe.

(IV)

Quad bass celestial Lord, please come on my clavicle
 in spirit like germ ants in prouder longs than ennui.
 At my horizon brash assessment trout clergy
 all noun's verse du jour noise plus trinket ennui.

Quad bass tyrannical changes, one cacti humbled
 on experience, come under chaffed sores
 servant battery lickers murmur de la sol agile timidity
 especially cognate tetris plantain irises;

Quad bass purest talent as immense as trains,
 mince dune vases like prison isn't emanate beauty,
 we're done people I say in flames people in reign
 vengeance tender filaments are our fond crevices;

and your clothes are Coue saturated fury
 lamented verse sans ash; hurled
 ennui quieted like current sand parties
 and here we are, Lord, as gender opponents.

Oh corridors logged billboard tambourine mystique,
 defile me in lament's name: I am ash amid porous
 veins, pleasure, angelic trochees, desperation, boutiques,
 the sun's crane inclined to plant the Son's drama node.

*Most whales gave up their sense of smell eons ago
as an adaptation to their aquatic existence.*

—Bone Clones

There is a difference between a whale's vertebrae & spine

I am attached to one & not the other

How hollow a whale would feel if it had feelings

Identify the object: echo; a whale; _____; *where am I?*

I am gone

like lunch served on a whale

's plate

I am gone am gone am gone

I am gone am gone am gone

O I await a return call rerun

See how big I am?

I'll measure yr loudness & time

We are represented in harmonic composition

We are represented in pulse intervals

We are represented in call duration

We are represented in a whale

Yr song haunts // the very way

a whale is a whale

See how big I am?

A neutral investment

echo a whale

yr song a whale

Siphon I out of Yr song

Raw materials break songs
echo
Raw materials break songs

I am attached to one and not the other

Dutch Baby Combo

There are several things wrong with today: I lost another postcard to the Pacific Coast. There is a pile of used band aids in my shower. Reading isn't important to my friends. If I were to say "camera," what would you say?

I'm confused by the definition of that word for you. Do you mean access? Do you mean love? Do you mean you'll work it out another time? A camera uses reflected light.

The food carts in my dreams all sell dutch babies. "Dutch baby! Big as your head! Three dollars!" In my dreams all the vendors scream over crowds hungry for dutch babies. "Dutch baby! Dutch baby!"

I was a boat made of paper. You put me in a bathtub and let me ride ripples and I kept my abs so tight I never drowned. I never got pregnant with water and I never made a baby made of paper for you to put in a bathtub to let ride ripples.

I want you to know I never think about cameras so will never say "camera."

The fucking Russians. Let's dwell on them for a minute. Let's remember that when we were children we thought they'd break through our globes and that they marched up our driveway every night to the beat of our own hearts echoing in our pillows. The fucking Russians don't know how to not be the fucking Russians. They say, "But we look so good in red."

In my dreams the dutch babies are dutch babies; they aren't warped by language like "dutch babies."

On the lens a small white spider has made a home. It finds comfort in the shutter. It paces back and forth across the lens and every photograph includes it. It is the dot of light in your eye I'm so in love with.

Dutch babies fall soon after leaving the oven. Dutch babies in the oven have not fallen. Dutch babies fall soon. Dutch babies fall soon after. Dutch babies fall soon after dutch babies. I never drowned.

"camera"

Spleen

I wrote my name in every one of his books
—Lyn Hejinian

(I)

I am not the Chimera. I am not a beast's praise.

—A. Minetta Gould

I think I could muster one piece.

A leg—no, an elbow—no,

I could be the pupil of an eye.

My temperature is something

waned, something broken

by the assurance that for

every bit of me that is black

there is a bit of white.

For every bit of me that tells me

I'm not ok.

For every bit of me is smaller than I could ever be.

What I'm worth is worth

itself—the utter image that

I cannot see

because I myself am what sees.

And if I were able

to be praise, if I were able

to stand for my whole,

I'd exhaust at the idea of how much sewing it'd take to keep me breathing.

(II)

I want to eat

into it so badly that I stand

in wait. That old ghost

that lyric

that matter song:

to think I afford comfort

that croons

my body still.

To think I've never grieved

faith's poem

and lie in its filthy glory.

To think thinking exists

in a poem. To think

I've found a home.

May I have a window please?

(III)

As ash I am left undone.

I boot piles into

myself to provide myself

a texture. To be

loveable malleable

again. To be residue left for _____.

To be a fielded mercy.

(IV)

My inheritance troubles

no end & I can't mind

because I can't draw.

What I can leave is memory

built out of nothing because

I am nothing & I am nothing.

I can construct a true thought

so false it tears

limbs off the tree.

Here's one: *I am loved.*

REFERENCES

“Spleen” (via Nicholas Moore) are homophonic translations of Charles Baudelaire’s “Spleen I-IV.”

The poem “Dutch Baby Combo” is for Erin Moure and Oana Avasilichioaei.

Epigraphs in order of Appearance:

William Carlos Williams “My Luv”

Andre Breton & Philippe Soupault “The Magnetic Fields”

Arthur Rimbaud “A Season in Hell”

Nicholas Moore “Spleen”

BoneClones.com “Humpback Whale Vertebra and Intervertebral Discs”

Lyn Hejinian “My Life”