

O IN MOUTH: POEMS

by

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ABSTRACT

The poems in *O in Mouth* are concerned with pleasure and guilt, self and other, form and transgression, orgasms and the weight of the moments after. They focus on orality in poetry and in sex, locating the mouth as the site of all these concerns.

Much of this book is written in dialogue with other texts, including Shakespeare's sonnets, Dante's *Vita Nuova*, Helene Cixous's "The Newly Born Woman," as well as many others, including some of Pablo Neruda's love poems. While reading representations of eros, I was excited by the passion and desire felt by the lovers; yet I found myself troubled by how, while exalted, the beloved (generally female) was often treated as if she was completely passive, always already dead. Reading, I found myself seeing from the active subject position of the lover, yet I could also see myself in the passive, silent, and often female beloved. The poems in this book attempt to respond to this complicated relationship; they want to participate in the long and rich history of love poetry, but they also speak back (hence the erasures and echoes in "L/B"). They desire to slide between the self and other, male and female and locate their Voice in the multiplicity of self that Cixous uses to define bisexuality in "The Newly Born Woman."

The manuscript begins in sonnets, because sonnets are a memory we keep in our mouths. But these sonnets are echoes, an experiment with the boundaries of this form that reflects their desire to push at the edges of self and voice. Their building tension acts as a framework for the rest of the book, asking the questions which are cyclically

repeated throughout. How can we sustain the moments of love, orgasm, pleasure, presence? How do we cope with the fact that eventually we have to drag our bodies from the bed? And where and how do these two modes of living press in on each other?

The sections that follow repeat and build upon these themes. Using the mouth as the central place of sexuality and of speaking, the poems think about the push between pleasure and nonpleasure in circles. This book doesn't treat love as an arching narrative which reaches its climax and ends in denouement. Instead it hopes to mimic the constant having and losing of love that is our experience. It uses the O as a visual and vocal representation of these circles while representing the void that is simultaneously necessary in their existence.

The book ends in a confessional mode, following the attempt to sustain pleasure and presence in the "cicadas." While one of their formal goals is to look at dull and mundane existence juxtaposed against those moments of lyric pleasure in the "cicadas," they find that this delineation is blurry. Pleasure pushes in.

Robert Creeley ends his poem, "The Language," by saying "Speech/ is a mouth." For him, the mouth and what it makes are simultaneous. Earlier in the same poem, Creeley tells us "Words/ say everything... I heard words/ and words full// of holes/ aching." Language, by design, must say everything, but this same language leaves us with painful absences. The poems in the following collection are meant to act as mouths and it is in these aching holes I wish to explore love in *O in Mouth*.

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O IN MOUTH

I plant a garden
for a doorless room.
To walk in and out
of all the windows.
Run my hips along every panel
of this house.

I must choose:

crowded ivy on the ruins

or

a house grown under
the enormity of my love.

L/B

sonnets and counter sonnets

*And a man who calls himself wise and speaks wisely
while his penis grows erect
remembering a mouth that resembles a mouth
of someone he once loved*

-Dan Beachy-Quick

Lover sees his Beloved across a field of wheat

Oh! The wheat is full and golden.
Her breast in the distance pulls
at my eyes, two suns cold
until the morning light splits itself
to make a way around her silhouette.
I am a corpse until sight and speaking,
eyes grow full into their sockets while she forgets
this unmarked instant when my deadness creeps
to the edge of itself and cries into
acres of grain which muffle the sound's long
attempts to build a name from *you*.
Instead I make *field, wheat song*.
Still, the sound of it carves a curl into an ear
born as an eye which catches itself in a mirror.

Beloved seen from across a field

the full and golden
distance
my breast

splits itself

a corpse,
socket,
unless forgotten
unmarked

build a name
curl of ear

Lover attempts a painting

Fingers round the wooden brush ignite
my stone empty room, its blank stare
would fill her ribcage with light.
I'll make her a new way of seeing,
slip shadow under her upturned fingers,
paint rose into the glow of the cheekbone
I witnessed this morning as her figure
vanished behind the field when eyes had sewn
her into the dawning light. Still, my shadow
and its halos haunt where I would put her.
Delicate shoulder slope. What I'd paint a window
reveals my eyes' enormity, their reckless chatter.
I've gessoed over her eyes a thousand times,
too green for her face, though perfect in mine.

A Beloved vanishes behind a field

hands barren

stare
into my ribcage

seeing
slips shadow under the rose
morning

morning's sewn halo a mirror
my eyes

Lover tries to cross the wheat field

I touch and wheat is gold, my hunger hardened
by hunger to gently fold the space that keeps me.
The sin of my touch pardoned
by her glance. Her dark figure, obscure in midday glare,
feeds me more inedible grain and broken jawbone.
Still, my irises dilate on the feast of her beauty's
beautiful suggestion. If my alchemist hand could know
one dark curl there, her tender body's
taste would cure this gift. Under my palm,
her stomach would stretch out. An ochre field. I'd keep
her color, her taste from turning stale after so long
under my tongue. Her beauty from seeping in.
If I light this field on fire
the glimmering smoke won't fade after an hour.

Lover paints his Beloved abstractly
after Clyfford Still

I've hauled fields of gold seed inside
for the painting of her. It infects
the room, clouds the lines in her face and divides
her flesh from its frame. She melts into an orange-black,
a puddle I scrape onto the wall. It grows bigger
and is bigger than the body. I'm supposed to say
my love is a flame, but it blurs her figure,
a kicked over can of pigment, and stains.
Mustard-colored infection. Her eyes flatten
onto every paintable surface. I'll name them
all by calling each sad yellow inflection
you. Still color caught in adulterous whim
of non-representation. Work will ruin her body,
make it a joke. The oil drips from her nails, godly.

Beloved painted abstractly

inside
the wheat

the room

divides

my flesh

he sees me

as pigment

an orange black bigger than my body

flattened

and

ungodly

Lover sees his Beloved's body as a painting

With the sun's gentle tongue on the back of my neck,
the wheat is a field of new color, negative
space in hues of yellow, burnt sienna specks
freckle the field, her face lit the same.
Eyes dragged to look, layered wheat gold
bare over her legs, their quality of ochre
oil, their gloss glass-like. Sun on a lake's cold
face. I could reach through, to her
eyes as they untread my looking.
Unmovable under her glance, the painting speaks back,
answers my questions by quieting my yellowing
heart, caught between its expanding lack
and singing *yes* as though my arteries
could dilate under this breeze.

Beloved sees her own body

sun licking

my lit face

bare legs

a field I can reach through

unthread his eyes in glance

I'll speak to

his heart's yellowing yes

edging over the breeze

Lover sees his Beloved walking towards him

She splits wheat to either side of her thighs
it parts so easy under the moons
of her knees, little mounds curl in negative space.
I tell her I'm dying, leave her the ruins
but there's no language for the pleasure
of it. No teeth to frame my *ohs*,
my wheatnumbed tongue confuses the letters,
renders them all as *mmm*— echo
of taste. As caramel. Color that might unfold
the inside of a marigold from her navel.
Eyes shake in their sockets, I'm holding
my skin up with my breath, her eye's hazel
erasing the field, the undrawn lines in her image
dig themselves in, with her lips on the ridge.

Beloved approaches

sharp wheat sting

gold cuts
little mounds of *oh*
buried under

wheatnumbed
I'm caramel and I'll unfold marigold

his eye won't undraw

I'll dig myself into lip's ridge

Lover's thigh touches that of his Beloved

Along the ridge of our opposite bodies, space curls,
my thigh creeps to the edge of itself,
its external swell swelling against.
The sun paints a field on the shelf
of her lap, roseorange crawling down her face
as it turns its back, slips itself in the sliver
between her lips. My fingers break to pull the lace
from her lap, to pull on the moon's silver
oil and place it onto her tongue.
My corpse fattened full into its risen breast.
All of the names I've made from *you*, hung
in ochre across the mirror, pressing
out of her ribs. They come out of me as moths
leaving silver dust on the rim of her mouth.

Beloved sits close to her Lover

curl

my thigh

swelling under his eyes

on my lap I pull the silver

clean from his fingers
plant lace in the sliver

take moth into my mouth

Lover goes inside

I undo the moons holding your dress closed,
the milky night's light rubs the silk acre
across your chest. Acre of skin and as you call out
it shallows and your ribcage, O, I can go in! Fingers
further, bone cage uncurl, cellar doors looser
and inside, sweetspeckled marrow sucking my figure.
Your lung's silkpink I press into, their immediate murmur
in my palm. In branches, your capillaries still softer,
your heart cradled there, I curl into its chambers.
Inside its cells I push into your helix. Amino stammer
under love's wide ache. Fingers
forget themselves, slipped wet into dark matter.

Love's wide ache

his fingers their dark *O*

Lover in his denouement

After, I draw my fingers out of her sleep.
Full and grey with her breasts
sinking into fields of silk, which
grow wide as where I'd found her silhouette.
This sun draws the slope of her hips in cream,
fills the angel of her hair with morning,
its sick fingers slipping into her dreams.
Still, sleep's sour smell, lips dark at the seam
of her rib, our bodies under fields of wheat.
She'll forget this quiet, the curve of her name in my ear.

Stupid moon! Bring your silver back, sew her feet
here! I've never come so close in the mouth of fear,
and every morning a new awful sun.

On Loving a Woman

a new way of seeing
slip shadow under her upturned fingers

difference

Love her laying down, a soft shift,
gravity tugging down on the sides of breasts.

A mirror that says, “your heart is unrecognizable
in the chest of another.” Hear it purr
all the way from across the river.

sleeping and dreams

Her arm slides shallow under neck bone,
as her breath plants wings into your shoulders.
She'll hold your hand as you wade through the river.

On the other bank you'll find her pregnant.
Make perfect mothers. You'll make the sun
wake up everyday in your kitchen.

erotic utterances

Oh Sappho! Penelope!

Oh, Magdalene!

your hair washing the garden's dirt from my feet
the garden's dirt on my feet

my mouth stuffed in O!

absence

Fill her missing with the white
of your own thighs— stupid new love
gesture. Your sockets sting from the quiet
your foolish singing doesn't silence.

She's left a letter: *please, don't tell.*

on being returned to

Small creators in the muddy garden point
her return through the tomatoes. Angel hair
on her thighs. The smell- almost red-
she'll dust off the leaves to plant in some petite ravine.
Same clean smell precedes the rain in the heart.

loving a woman

fill yourselves with light

On Loving a Man

Along the ridge of our opposite bodies, space curls,
my thigh creeps to the edge of itself

difference

Love him, up right,
Stretched— your calves
to curve— into those
long bones.

You're tiny
and fit into
your heart— unrecognizable
and lovely— entombed
in his ribcage. Hear it
purr from across yours.

sleeping and dreaming

His cock swells against
its awareness of your ass,
filling your lungs
with milky air,
but he is far away, on some
dream-infested bank.

And you're far too,
but bring his shadow
to occupy the space
the sun has abandoned.

erotic utterances

Zeus, your swan hand pushing
my stomach down!
Apollo make me root

my toes in the bank!

Pluto drag me down!

Your pelvis running up
my trunk. The shape of O
opens in my crotch.

absence

Fill his missing
with foreign objects
— clumsy old love
gesture. Your eye's blue
can't make papers skin.

He's left
a letter:
I love you

being returned to

Grassy curl around
the hall— almost wooden
and swell— you recognize
his cadence on your stairs,
its wet sound— the obviousness
of his homecoming.

He brings the sound
with him, into your bed.
It rains with the music.

loving a man

let him

Cicadas

oh, I can go in!

from a wet cave here
blanket of warm moss
for a new body

dizziness taken in
to mouth

roll around to taste
and effloresce
out as carnation

already half-life—

fingerplay at the borderlands
where the french fades in

muscle bundle over bone
warm in the toe's curl
into mouth

pink lip ochre nipple aching

they part to say

soul switches/turns out
white bone splitting against the cold bone alive

pain just so purr

pick up purring under
gaze silted under
the sheet of a body
like water

open like water

hair cloud on pillow
heart folds up

like fruit

sucking on knucklebones
one and then the

cold white teeth
warm pink apple
to paint—

dripping

kiss under chin bone
slow skin caramel
tongue shudder
shudder down to bone
and in more

(stay stay stay)

Real Life

and every morning a new awful sun

I've gone up to the edge of pleasure. The outside of my thigh pressing against his on the couch. But there is the couch. There is, behind the shoulder of my lover, a window. Outside air rattling into our insect bodies and the translucent reflection of a human face. A car and a poem tugging. A job pressing in and always money. There is our insect bodies getting hungry, thorax shift into torso. There is him leaving me or dying or always in another room. I confess: this is all real, even as I try to find my papery wings in the mass grave of cicadas I can't help but crush as I move.

Invitation

Come.
We'll eat off my love
its sun-hungry agriculture.
A pomegranate seed
on Persephone's pink
tongue. I'll take
your whole sex tenderly
into my mouth.

The half-violence of my lips
at the rim I might
kill you a thousand times here
but we'll still drag our dull bodies
from each petite death.

In the painting
yellow is not a symbol
for bread
 but there is the pain
of my teeth on raw wheat.

Confession

The tomato folds easy under
my knife, squares of light
yellow my kitchen. Knifesilver
cold down the center. It opens
and looks electric. Like the body.
Yellow veins spreading through.
They call it *oxheart*, I brought
it home with me. Cradled
its redpink in prayer.

I held it to my chest to see
how big my heart is

but my heart
is unrecognizable.

As I slice it becomes even less.

Prayer

Can I take his begging
into my mouth if his body
isn't mine?

Please, let me pull
the salt from his toes
with my gentle enamel.

Please
 stay

Vita Nuova

In his book of mirrors
my lips repeated until perfect.

I love I love I love

his tongue in my mouth and still

I leave his body
under the razed field.

Confession

Their naked bodies like stars.

The inside of my ribcage lined
with mirror and suspended
above a lake.

*Apology
for Dante*

You've come over to uncover
all the mirrors in my house,
"Beatrice, come back."

I can't answer, take her echo out of my mouth,
her tender repeating no where. Want to find her
for you. I'll slice out my ox heart, pull its fruit in half
and search for her in all its rooms. You want
my real heart but
she's never lived there.

She's never

I'd keep
her underwater—
but it only keeps her breathing.

I'm sorry, how can I live
with all the damage? The tiny broken
bones in my cabinets. The ghost of your ghost
among the books. Stop crying because I can't
stop watching. This poem is a throb in the stomach.

Yes, yours.
but it turns my intestines too and I can't
stop looking at the ruins that grow
out of my own body. The stones rot
in every building I make and
I'm sorry for those too.

Prayer

The unmade bed disturbs again. Man after Man after
 Man then Woman, and more. But you've gotta
 say okay
 because

love is love is love is love is

Except:
 my feet will root the Earth to dusk if I'm allowed
 a singular chinbone to hug between teeth
 (we were dead when I found him, sharing the casket already)

Lord,
 vault my ribcage
 make my chest
 a cathedral of light.

Except:
 grant me metamorphosis

*A lady speaking to you from the motion of her own mind is always multiple. Enough of
 the least. We want to be believed.*

My left hand draws the stars into my ribcage
 My right hand around the sun:
 Palms so pretty- can't see them both at once
 but for the burning

God, be the tongue in my liar
 ou la langue de mon amant
 be in the teeth of his

not fire mais feu
 toothless speech illicit

Saturday I bought so much fruit
 I can't slow its rotting
 fast enough to paint the still life.
 il est morte, toujours morte
 Mold lives in the living all the time.

I bring peaches into bed with us.
 I eat them in slices
 so the cold soft inside slides

into my mouth before the skin.

*Sea mi corazón cigarra
sobre los campos divinos.
Que muera cantando lento
por el cielo azul herido*

and let it be human,
its song allegro under ochre fields
of skin. Let it live.

Shall I describe this love to you?
It is the number 0, 0 a language for

fullnever

*Y mi sangre sobre el camps
sea Rosado y doce limo
and I'm sure it's my breathing
that's killing us.*

Apology

Forgive me
the future
I build
in ruins

This time my hands chap
holding back the ivy.
Useless little bleeding knuckles.

We only made love once today.
I've a history:
the collapsing roof simultaneous with the house.

Confession

I eat from the field between
your chinbone and neck- in there
the unwritten poem to quiet
the embarrassing whiteness
of my own body.

I'm afraid at the edge,
red pool unthreading heart's breath:
 all the blood
 I can't watch
 go from your body.

Please,
go on in my mouth. In my
leviathan stomach.

Apology

The room full of love
organs roars at me.
Their collective grief in my trans-
gression. In the wake
of my embracing. I'm sorry I can't
help it.

I've just got too much
Love.

I just have to keep
Loving.

Notes:

-The epigraph opening “L/B” is from Dan Beachy-Quick’s *Apology for the Book of Creatures*.

-Some lines from “Prayer” are taken from Lisa Robertson’s *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office of Soft Architecture*. The Spanish is taken from Federica Garcia Lorca’s *Book of Poems* and translates to:

Let my heart be a cicada
over heavenly fields.
Let it die singing slow,
wounded by blue sky.

....

And let my blood on the field
make sweet and rosy mud