CONFLATION OR WHEN I SAY YOU, I MEAN I

by

Julie Ann Strand

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing
Boise State University

May 2013
DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS

of the thesis submitted by

Julie Ann Strand

Thesis Title: Conflation or When I Say You, I Mean I

Date of Final Oral Examination: 15 March 2013

The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by Julie Ann Strand, and they evaluated her presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

Martin Corless-Smith, Ph.D.  Chair, Supervisory Committee
Janet Holmes, M.F.A.  Member, Supervisory Committee
Jacky O’Connor, Ph.D.  Member, Supervisory Committee

The final reading approval of the thesis was granted by Martin Corless-Smith, Ph.D., Chair of the Supervisory Committee. The thesis was approved for the Graduate College by John R. Pelton, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many books allowed me to feel like I had the option and permission to write this collection of poetry. Some of these books are *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* by George Bataille, *Eros the Bittersweet* by Anne Carson, *Glass, Irony, and God* by Anne Carson, *Afterimages* by Joan Retallack, *Errate Suite* by Joan Retallack, *Songs and Stories of the Ghouls* by Alice Notley, *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf, and *Lectures in America* by Gertrude Stein.

In addition, many people allowed me to feel like I had the permission and the obligation to write this collection of poetry. Some of these people are Mary Strand, Jeannine Strand, Genevieve Kohlhardt, Torin Jensen, Laura Roghaar, Amanda Hamilton, Andrew Hamilton, Daniel Clausen, Martin Corless-Smith, Janet Holmes, and Jacky O’Connor.
Conflation or When I Say You, I Mean I is a poetic interrogation catalyzed by the ideas within Anne Carson’s *Eros the Bittersweet* and Georges Bataille’s *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. The interrogation takes place within a form that positions failed love poems alongside poetic analyses or reflections. By doing so the erotic relationship that exists within the genre of the love poem as well as the hierarchy created between the roles of lover and beloved is put into question.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iv

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................... v

PART 1
Pentimento: A Conflation of Poet, Person, Reader, Muse, Tense

or As Two Readings of a Text: An Introduction ................................................................. 1

PART 2
Let’s Reproduce and Die: An Experiment in Reflection with Finality

or Context as Forgiveness: An Epilogue .......................................................... 44
PART 1

Pentimento: A Conflation of Poet, Person, Reader, Muse, Tense

or As Two Readings of a Text: An Introduction
Desire always has a trajectory
like a tin-can telephone.
Can you hear me?

My love is like
a tether I knit and hairsprayed
to be noticed. Day to day

without an asking I answer
by calling you out, calling

out to you by pulling tight enough
for the both of us maybe.

I knew

you were not a cooperative pair of hands
from the start, but still I expected
to hear something.
Are we
an ill-kept garden
breeding
without outcome
to people this empty space?

I want to ask a question
and get an answer
receive something from your body
what’s inside swarming
and only able
to be sense.

Out comes the image
a future and a filling.

I want proof
that an empty space has potential.

Why don’t plants die like plants
love in a loving way?

My poems about you end here.
It has to be about a bee flying through my body.

Has to be about the journey circular and over and over.

It has to be about the meeting of our tips and our agreement to stay.

It has to be about everything involved in stay

like flying around a hive, all the walls look the same and will

like the lines of a book.
I could always come next and next

and to no other ending but next.
To say yes is a mouth mouthing.

To hover in the air
unwavering is to fight gravity

with every part of your body, forever.

What is the point of writing down the same broken song as I did the page before?

It has to be about
It has to be about
It has to be about

Three times I lick the page to find an answer or something just true enough to stop it.

Stay—
a request, action, definition.

I want you to be proof, indurate the impossible.

Even as I write next and next my mouth says yes and yes, and I am waving. Forever is a fairytale already succumbed to its gravity.
Last night you gave me
your heart again, threw it up
all over my skin. Hope you know
I will never give it back
or take a shower, ever even if
you don’t want to have sex anymore.

You gave and I
won’t give back, as if it
might never happen ever after
again.

I am fixated on
grafting, a one out of us,
can’t even see what
soiled skin suggests.

Thank you for reading
and showing me
what I say
with the color of your cheeks.

These poems are mirrors
that often surprise me.

Who is speaking today?
These words make me
run and grab a bar of soap.
Is it still on me?

Is that why there are so many
more pages
to follow?
I wonder if the planting of your heart inside my breast was of your desire, if you would desire a relocation of hands, I’ll keep my ankles rubbing in your bed anyway, either way.

There must be more pieces of my skin in your bed now than my own. They keep beating around you after I leave every morning.

Whose heart is it really? The words read like I extracted your heart and implanted it surgically a week before this poem.

Or maybe that is just how I read my poems today. Or maybe I am just too detached.

To traverse our limits I must continue to write in ways that show no doubt in the authority of the present moment, in such a tense.

Have I come to this realization already? They don’t always stick like a self.

These words suggest that I choose to leave my cells all over your bed, deprive myself of water to be extra flakey.

Love, here is a gift of my dead skin and a plan for it to beat around your body like a womb or like a heart.

It seems beautiful to me. Kindly do not be revolted by my aesthetic.
Come and find me in your closet.
I took over all the dresser drawers.

Chopped my body into pieces
and placed them neatly into each.

Slide open the bottom and see
my feet and ankles.

Above are my calves and knees,
above my thighs and waist,

above my ribcage and shoulders,
above my neck and head.

Can’t remember
where my arms and hands went.

They did all the folding away
and go such a length of my body.

It was confusing. Please try to find them
for me swift, so I can sing of you again.

Reading today, I want to fill in
the space between book a and book b,
myself and my other.

And I write furious, as if words can
color in distance.

All it accomplished was an outline
or what that represents.

I can’t really tell you
it’s confusing
and I am unsure

of loving. It goes
such a length of my body.

Notice how
I just gave up
there? Funny
how this poem feels more violent.
Scratch my heart and tell me you love me, you need some nails to do this. Don't cut them or bite them off from now on. I beg and lay on my back waiting. Some day this position will push my ass into my back and it will disappear. Some day my breasts will fall to the sides and stay there. Some day my stomach will stay in one place and not sway in the space in front of my feet. Always leaning forward, my toes bear the weight of me, of my heart hardy and leading the way. On my back I wait for the difference for something to be written into new, like eggs become birds like rocks become castles, wings become feathers apart.

I conflate the idea of affection and violence. Scratch me, cut me.

Oh my banal tone indicates, that I think they are the same or of equal value.

My removed voice clinical and monotone is hard to escape even in the moment of joy even when fleetingly I love you. It could be a defense mechanism. It could just be how I run my fingers through the air in this world.

Shit happens and I will wait for a future.

This poem reads like an Adele song and I am sorry if that gives you no new understanding. Its wants are inconsistent.

I will disappear, my breast will sag, but somehow my stomach will tighten? Birds birth, rocks build, pieces transform into something more than they were?

I wish I knew the point and could tell it to you here, but poems they are slippery things.

For now, being here will have to be the cause for you to keep reading.
I see
that your hair parts
on the left side
but for you it’s the right.

Time can’t make hair grow.
You can wear
all the flannel in the west
but men don’t change.

Looking at the blank spaces
on ourselves doesn’t cover them
or write a new narrative, but the lamp
in my spine is on now

and I don’t know
if you want to catch up.

The dynamics of us force me
to show possibility as doubt.

But why is showing even necessary?
Why can’t I just tell?

Too much poetry
classes, maybe. Look at yourself, I know
your hair will never grow
that certain blanks can never be filled

but I write in couplets still to
pull disparate parts together.

The lamp in my spine
is a stolen line
and so are the dynamics.

I am trying
to make us in a similar way.
Your lids will never be fully open, like clams before the stew.

When a worm is winged like an eagle you know something has gone wrong in the waking. Every morning I say to you waking up is a moral choice and you kiss me like this goodbye.

Those clams were stolen. I saw myself in the line.

To see yourself in someone else’s words to place yourself in someone else is love. I felt entitled.

In fact, I plucked and planted the first two lines of this poem with maybe one word change. It is just another instance of low self esteem and this is just another attempt at pulling back the page to reveal.

Some things are not true.

Every morning you say waking up is a moral choice,

and this experience of selfhood seems extremely coherent.
Pick me up and sit me on your handle bars. Steer us home.

I can be a compass, brass tarnish needle slightly right, but always reliable once you know the lop.

Like breasts, the soft hanging never round enough, and you never straight enough. Finger me softly and looking for.

_Do this_ and _do that_, I organize my sentences like I am in charge of all yous in the world.

Washing my face with the coldest water in your bathroom, you always ask why.

As I pat my face with my assigned towel _I don’t know_. Like breasts, _this story goes from edge to edge_.

What proceeded this poem

_was a looming potential, fear of failure and all I can do._

Make

_meaning and meaningless requests_. This will be followed by five blank pages.
I have enough energy to touch you through your thin briefs. Just about, but beyond that, any deeper might break my tarsal in half.

I never thought you might be empty of desire. My eyes dilated too slowly to see time pass and this is my way of mouthing information to your side of the bed.

Our skins are not equal membranes and my efforts only go outward so far. Some days, some nights all I can manage is to lay my hands slightly on your back. This is that what you get, when time is no longer held in clocks but in calendars.

It is easy to state what is had what is wanted what is not possible.

Claims of fact or claims of evaluation.

An articulation of how and why my limp hands and your underwear are interacting.

Maybe it is injury prevention. These are the facts hidden under so many collectors of time.

Sheets dirty from our skin cells, alarm clocks caked with smudges of my sweaty fingers and your snotty eyes.

The second hand is broken as our hands hold the calendar still.

I guess all I can manage here is a déjà vu poem a revenge that is not really.
Pieces of the sky are on the ground.
Get in the house with me.

Agree to take your squeals out
of sex next time. It is snowy

out and I don’t like all the mess.
Let’s talk to each other in riddles

and not search for their answers tonight
like swallowing seedless watermelon.

West is the day and I don’t need to look
for you always, leaving flakes of

your borders on my carpet, in my skin
holes. The nuance is gone now

the fuck you cliché. The action, and I
will always be jealous

of your scarless back. My bra
needs washing and I can’t always reach

the dirt to clean it away. When my acne

itches the roof of my mouth
put your tongue there

and move it from soft palate to hard.

We are not in the right system.

I do look for you always, in the mirror
too. What makes me think I can see

you in my eyes? Love is over
in this house and I will only
lie on my back until we move
out. We are not in the right system.

I write of you instead of telling.
I write of me instead of failing

and ask passively for your invasion.

Lie to my palate and name it agency.
It feels like I hit my head
on your wall last night, momentum
for momentum’s sake. Red marks
on the pits of my elbows, signs
of unrest in my sweat, under my skin.
Maybe I’m allergic to something here
or only my elbows are. I’m not quite
willing to end this trajectory.

If I don’t stare straight
at the problem it doesn’t matter.

What comes to the surface
is never the whole story.

The white space between
this poem and that will remain
unsaid, but you Reader
already know that.

These sentences are propagating error
always asking for answers
that will never surface. Please,
don’t assume this iceberg works
the same as Sigmund’s.
Everything was supposed
to be better today. I showed you
everything in my bra
the night before, separated
the cleavage lifted it to my hanging
chin, everything I was hiding
but when we woke, the blankets
stolen and warm, nothing was.

How do you
sincerely say it isn’t you it is my chest?
I look in my shirt and ask, the air inside
thick and tiresome.

In the presence of another attempt
to love one another, I cannot
say anything outright. My bra is really
my heart, as is my shirt. It isn’t you
it is my chest, is really me, but who
is the victim anyway?

That doesn’t seem like the right word.

I don’t believe the ambiguity
was intentional. So much of a love poem
can’t come from the passionate moments
of silence and scratches.

These
are secret pages, only telling one side.
Love is not what it is, but how it is felt
and declaration of fact based on feeling
depicts my heart, and my mouth’s
following after
as an extremely old women
living in a cave
delivering prophesy in frenzy.

Please love,
from now on just call me Sybil.
Everything I am veiling will appear.
Your head is bald now and we both know why.

Some times for days, I wait in the soft places of your room

shove too many dresses into my drawer and see

that the sky above me is different than you.

I’m sorry I can’t be the bad guy.

Tonight I will try. Why don’t you give me your leg?

I can break it compoundly or tonight show off your ear lobe.

I will bite it off your averted eyes.

I can’t wait or I don’t want to hold my breath any longer.

I cannot break my own code anymore. Do I expect that you might?

I am laying down a foundation.

Our faces coordinate so many times in a day, it feels like

there is something beneath the surface of our skies

something same.
You’ve always wanted to feel all the bones in a body, dig your fingers into your own skin in search, lines crinkling into your face. It hurts enough to make you pull back, but your stiff knuckles tell your need for answers.

I am more concerned with the wet strands that come from your soft spots what can spoil at some point, a cliff collapsing into sea spray the clear winner every time. I want to be a winner and want you even if my knuckles and face must dig ditches like yours.

These poems are silent pressings into page, this one even softer a conversation before this one.

I write this in the car. Some song lyric is in it.

I can’t remember the singer or song. I guess I won’t be able to credit her in the back.

Right now, I am more concerned with the outline by our bodies, what is want (ed) tense and no longer sense.

Sometimes I say you when I mean I. and I think the you and the I are really me in this poem.

I guess this is as good a place as any. I bury us, and these poems here.
When your skin is worked
it feels of dough. There is no solid
to hold. I want handles but you refuse
my need for mirroring and run in the
day.

With inadequate boundaries
I admit I am an edge-dwelling species
and hold onto you.

Resurrection is a bitch
and to bury is different than to make
die. You are a skinny man and I
am the pant size always missing.

Just by you existing on sheets next to me
I compare us and feel too much.

This happens every time I finish a poem.
I turn the page and there we are
the same pronouns again.

Hopefully, I can figure out how
to make them stop
before the end of all of this.
Your skin seems unceasing
and I ask you
to rub up against my boundary
bodily. You object
say, the written word negates
the effort. Enraged, I tear off
my glasses, your book
into pieces, proceed.
I rake my fingers
through your hair, intertwine
our toes, scratch off your cells
open up your pores
with hot water and sweat
into your skin. I wait
but a blur never comes.
I sigh, please rub up
against me, dry me off
then with your boundaries
show me they can be good
for something.

In the face of separation
I take on a persona
a sexy librarian
gone wild, as they do, not that I’d
ever do that outside a poem.

Glasses are glued to my face,
effort is not creation, and as usual
I resign myself before the end.

If you have to be other to me
then you might as well be a towel.

Placing remnants of me
in your home

broken glasses, books
with bent pages,
pots of used water
and towels to sop them up

I wish for their nearness to produce
a context and clarity.
The fleshy boundary between you and me is really plural flesh(s).
I collide into you in a protest.
Create soft and blue spots on our bodies nightly and ask you to whisper with me our eyes squeezing, body.

This is more like a fantasy than anything else like the librarian, a little lie to you Reader. Maybe every fantasy’s omission is its own falseness, but my allegiance to self surfaces on this page rather than an allegiance to truth or fairness. We do collide over and over, but I don’t really deem the blue spots as residue of meaning, more my plurality problem.

Separated by the presence of each other we only know love with absence, the images it creates and to assume that can be solved should make you laugh, right now it makes me.
My body displays
the changes into fall.
No longer am I smooth.

Look at my curtain of hair.
My face, the tributaries of lines
don’t spell out your name.

Everyone can see
the elasticity of you
and how my breast

hangs out of luring.

My curtain points to my face, around it
but really you are thinking of everything
I should have been shaving. I was

pointing there too. The might be’s
must be pushed aside for these poems
to continue.

These images must be clarified
completely and I will keep pointing
until my fingers or breasts or lips grow
too weary and fall off.
Some actions aren’t as important as their auras.

A gulf is more interesting than a bridge.

They always break leaving my fingernails to drown last.

The birds and the bees I envy, their bodies are made to avoid this sinking in.

I just like

the sound of the first line
don’t really knowing its meaning.

Reader, you know how that is enough so often. The sound reminds me of Gertrude.

I listen to her operas in my car, and remember what she said.

A person should not be judged by her actions, they are not real indicators of essence. And essence is what matters like an engine running in a car. Where it takes the car has no bearing on its worth.

I turn my head, the bridge between us is broken isn’t it?

Water water my instinct is to keep swimming to the beginning, as if it can erase mistakes.

Are these words empty then, if I know their futility?
I built myself into
a full anatomy,
a child with a mouth
full of bees. You pulled them
out with the cup
of your hand and threw them
like a mouth full of sand.
Blood flowed, tendons sinewed
just like the past. I
was a hole now, again
gaping and laded of
wings and stingers, pollen
and honey. and all I
wanted to fill it with was you
fingers and palms lifelines
and jagged nails. I lowered
my jaw, looked at you and you hid
your hands behind your back.

From where I sat, doe eyes angry.
It looked like you were armless
an anatomy incomplete. I
loved you more then
I love you more without your arms.

Wrapped in loving, my poems veil
and I don’t even know if I
am the I in totality.

That isn’t even a half-truth.
But lies are easier to swallow.

Reader, they avoid the red pain of
stingers.

Time does not heal, but it does help
your eyes, what keeps us together.

Through them I can empty of self
and try to fill up with you.

My feminist membership card
should be revoked.

The exact math of it all made me
resort to equal violence, and it is true.

I do love you more without your arms.
Cut my hollow neck open and fill it with bees. Pour them down
so the pile starts at my echoing toes
and fills all the vasiform appendages
of me. Make them water in.
I can stand the thought
of stingers revolting, building
honey combs, homing in my cavities
’til they have no room to hang or swing.
Pick out all the queens before.
I don’t want any more girlish bossiness floating around.
Filled to the rim already. I have no idea how to rid skin of it.

Only male bees please,
wings tucked in with honey.

Hope you don’t mind all the leg work.
Hope it will be worth it for your fingers.

Whenever I’ll see you
now I feel bees like boiling inside me, again.

A friend told me a story once
about him and his brother as children.

He walked out of the house one day
to find his brother on the ground,
swarmed by hiveless bees.

Vengeful for their ruined home,
they made his mouth their new hive.
He lived, but I can’t get the image out.

A mouthful of bees, as if I understand
the feeling, angry insects repurposing
my mouth, as if it has always felt
uninhabited and waiting
or as if I am the bees.

Whenever I see you now I hear an echo
I hope
it was
it is
it will be
still.
If now my ribs are nothing but a hive
for your almost vacant, almost present
tickling love then what of me
do I house? If these wings are you
what of the rest, honey, comb, propolis?
Harvest me and rub it on your shoes
the ones you wear to interview
the ones you wear to dress
for the life that you want to have.
If I had the option, I'd house birds
inside my ribs, suffer their beaks
able to hole ways out if they want.
I’d home animals with their own agency.
Yet, past my ribs I am no longer able
to make my own decisions like
fingers chubby and tangled
into a church.

These commands are not
they are pleas,
prayers,
please

fill in the empty space
I feel when I am near your skin.

Look at us, we create the two edges
of a space, what is absent of each of us,
but only visible when both around.
Maybe that is where, why I dwell
just to be nearer, to breathe you in
and breathe these words back out. I feel
my body slipping from will, a body freely
failing at staying a self.

How much is too much
to take in, to give away?

The image I come to
I send back to you.

Hold my hand around my heart
tighter and tighter. Maybe I do want you
to kill me. Who am I kidding? Take over
and make this hive all your own.

Let us hold hands,
our fingernails dirty identically.
What if I birth right onto this floor?

What if it comes out as a swarm of bees?

Disappointment is sometimes a creation, and the hive my mind belongs to now.

You watch too much television glorifying decorum.

Well I birth bees all over it or I might, if you'd ever love me enough. Like a pollinated plant always already never in need of.

I am so very in need of your eyes, spectacles are all I have on days like today, sitting in the bathroom, linoleum sticky to my cheeks. I cannot make the unbelievable believable to you. You already walked past the field of flowers, leaped over my body like a log bridging. Bees don't always make a difference not even in swarm and all the parts of my body are already known to you.

A mothering swarm to get your attention is my planned spectacle.

A dare to get you to pay attention.

I sewed my mouth shut to try and make us a family, but a closed mouth just forces a heart to break through an alternate opening in the body and here it is.

I accuse you, blame being such an easy way to transition in a poem, and sometimes it looks like a key to opening the closed holes in your body.

But is also a good way to make a transition, a log bridging what went on before the end to the end.

But
Shave off the hairs that reach down my legs and back. I don’t want to miss anything tonight.

They’ll turn into bee wings as they fall onto the floor of your closet.

I will sweep them into your shoes in the morning gifts you can walk with, a flutter of me on your toes all day long.

When I started to write love poems about us ordering you around happened often.

My poems were the site of my full voice.

Now that I’ve been writing these poems for what I can call a long time,

I’ve become sloppy, watched it happen chimed in “who wants more complication anyway?”

Reader, I don’t want to miss anything on some nights. On others I want to rub you with strange gestures that I know you won’t enjoy.
What is removed from me
turns into the bodies of bees.

Does this mean you now will
when unfolding from my form?

I visualize the first line as shaving
my legs, long blonde hairs fluttering dry
and mixed with cells of skin
to the hard wood floor.

The image is rather enchanting, rather
like pouring out a cup full of translucent
wings.

It doesn’t mean much of anything
it is just the same image as before.
I should probably be more concerned
than I am.

Maybe I can interpret something
I haven’t already. It means...

I want you to be as be as beautiful
and a part of me,
contain the same essential matters.

Please fold this page over to return
and interpret it on your own. Or tear it
into many little pieces and loose them
from your fingers,

like little bee wings in memory.
The sun is setting  
it smooths down your hair.  
You don’t notice  
and a bee suffocates  
in an attempt to get out of my body  
and point.

Pages are never as satisfying as lips  
breathing, their words dead  
and unchanging.

You can’t ever see yourself  
being worked upon by the sky  
because your eyes are not mine.

Resigned, I write to you, dig words  
of evocation, of change. A bee. An image  
of what can fly between, leave my lips  
to sew a small pain in you,  
maybe a red bump, or even a letter-like  
black mark.

I hope what it carries  
in its improbable body can do more  

than my hollow abstract voice.
I watch you
because I am weighed
down by a hive of bees.
I write of you
because I can’t rid myself
of flickering, sink into it
like wings are a kind of sand.
What if I ask you
to dismember me
like a useful tree?
Questions always
have to come from me.
I try to sit on you
like a suitcase, but you
remain unlatched.

When reading an image
it represents but does not hand over
the whole.

A suitcase,
unlatched in my mind. It is somewhere
between olive and avocado green
with tarnished latches and brown
cracked trim.

Silly poet self, stop bloating your mouth
with image it isn’t enough.
Plug your ears
with bees wax
I am about to sing
a song, honey-
sweet.

The words
out of my mouth
understand themselves better
than I do, but I say
them still.

Come, tell
me what you
think that means
my ears are open.

Accidents
don’t detach
themselves
from their makers
and I make this accident
on purpose.

Did you see it?
Of course you did.

What a bee makes
is more than needed
for opposition, and a siren
never says
you never listen
anymore.

Them, them,
words that cup meaning
in their creased hands. I splatter them
on white rectangles to see what
kind of pictures they make
fortunes they tell
as if spilling out all the fortune sticks
recklessly is okay.

Show me what you think, fill my mouth
and lace around my breath.
I am listening. I thought if I said
anything aloud, it would be too much.

This accident, you would have avoided
being the attentive one of us two.

I am the careless one
so am here standing
in the middle of the world
a voiceless mouth parted.
Some days the ribs of my cage
aren’t a good hive to hold this middle.

Sometimes I think it is
to rid my bones of your horrible tickle.

Sometimes I know, none of the fingers
of my hand mean much alone.

I desire your actions be influenced,
but the bees do not seem to impress you.

Maybe they don’t carry enough weight,
their image too small to puncture
your skin.

Before I rid my bones of you, I will try
something more considerable.
My pores hold breath independent of my mouth. Little lives, they have their own agendas, like bees to separate us into pieces.

Often when they’re gaping they are staring too, like empty wells at your face, neither back or not and tickle of edges.

Needing to leave the bees by the wayside, I turn to my skin with its so many little holes for help. Yet, asking has already proven to be the wrong approach, poetry a faulty venue, and digressions momentary foolishness.

My skin’s image, doesn’t even have wings and cannot transcend anything.

The voice I am now is right here. Assertion, as if that is the solution as if that might rid me of our problem as if it is the alchemy to tap.

Oh poetry, won’t you ever stop fooling me into believing in power?
I need to hear you to know I’m not the only swinging pendulum in this birdcage.

A birdcage is much stronger than a hive, metal it must hold potential. An image weighty and just

enough, in mouth and air and ear.
A bird’s ears
so small and hidden
under the plumage
you often forget they exist.

I tend
to choose the same words across time,
loving you doesn’t change that.

When I write the word plumage, I feel it familiar in my knuckles and think that means I made a right choice.

Of course this all led to a bird. Poets are always led to a bird.

How many times
can you make a right choice
before it turns wrong?

Every time I will forget, its phantom dormant in my mouth until every time.

Maybe some songs will never become wrong.
What would I write if your body wasn’t next to mine to show me the space between us? I try to fill it with words everyday, dead or alive, they never work faulty pigeons with broken beaks they fly back and forth land on your shoulder then mine but can’t say anything once perched. Their claws draw blood, their stains impossible to wash out. Scrubbing doesn’t turn time back or make words work. I blow my breath at your skin and you pretend to swallow. What would I write if your body wasn’t here? You are so much more interesting to my mouth, a betrayal. I know, hence the broken image, the blood and its remains. At least I am leaving a mark on the page. It makes leaning on you seem useful makes our actions however uneven and feckless seem steps to and seem enough to keep going.
This member between you and me
is tight enough to roost
a weight of birds
maybe all three of your chickens
even, heavy with the suggestion of eggs.
I have tendered the hair
of your beard, curly wires
that deny an attachment to me.
What if I want to be a bearded lady?
Some days, I weigh more than
a chicken does and wonder if
love can hold me up, if your body can
sacrifice for my benefit.

Your beard in my fingers feels like
a scion. Its curls come out
in between, in the pen that wrote this
poem and I
can’t stop wanting
the gap between you and I
to be just a gap between you and I.

I claim ownership of your body,
your yard, the chickens within
that look heavy enough.

They know I am using their image
and peck my fingers
when we meet outside a poem.
Do you love
the woman you are sitting on?

The chivalry of reassuring words
is nothing but four and twenty blackbirds
baked in a pie.

An interval between
my and your

I make you sit on me
in the poem, but really
you are so far away, still. A space
ponderous like a Chinese ghost

I wake and feel it sitting on my chest.

I image persistent, as if it can point out
problems clearly, as if it hasn’t failed me
already.

Reader, something I know
words do offer lulling.
Our bodies toward each other
branch, mine heavy with birds
sweet and sour with them.

Each time we connect
a bird dies off of me.
The eroticism tears
their little hearts in two
and in the halves they fall
away from me. Two less

breast-beats feather
my body now as we lay
in the aftermath.

I am lighter I am less.
All the foreplay in the world
is what I ask of you.

A noun as a verb

I thought I shed that before this book,
but here we branch
and suddenly are trees.

I write to you
using illogical descriptions.

Birds don’t taste sweet or sour
without a cook. They are just adjectives

that could embody
how birds, our love

heft my arms toward my feet.
Their image slips slowly out

of my body every time I
we, every time I
write a poem.
In their absence I might raise my arms.

Always, I grant you the power in poems.
Desperately I am trying to image us into
something different, but somehow
I can’t help but give it up to you
in the end. As if

I offer you images because
they will fail, choose them over
and again because
of their necessary dependence on you
Reader, their leaded center.
Our bodies branches, I think of my dissolve.

You are being destroyed as well. I do notice.

Your birds roll off your body, and you assume that I don’t notice you are vanishing a few bones at a time. Each time I do see less of you, blink and care less than for me. We are not waves connected in sea we are trees on either side of the park. My glasses are broken on the bedside, what’s the point in squinting to see you anyways? At some point we’ll both be blind to each other.

From now on, let’s just reproduce with our eyes closed, the blur inconsequential.

I need to describe us before you can though and I can’t give up on what was yet.

My glasses are broken, and are an image from our real life they seem more persuasive.

These birds are becoming too leaden to hold.
When I saw that all my birds had fallen off, I began to avoid mirrors.
Cover them, break them, avoid bathrooms all together.
Reflections were too near.
All I wanted was to see something else, and I started to uncomfort at you.

Reflections are too near
and these poems are starting to reek
of a historical document.

You walk up to them with an expectation.

If only I never thought of reciprocation.
I

In a burst of pure reason
I fly towards the sun.

II

I substitute heat for you,
flap not north, but straight up
drink it in through my eyes.
I am a storage unit and I can be
good at it.

III

Be ready for my fall and bounce
off your windshield.
My need for your warmth
my beak in your beak open.

IV

A falling body does not fall straight
down. In my lack of wing I hope
to find my bird-ness, the ness of me,
the power finally to make an impression.

I wasn’t honest with you in last poem.
I can’t even write a poem with any hope
now. This poem is just another fingering
toward unfulfilling love. Really four,
four ways of looking for an answer
through some kind of faulty bird-like
action. I want your there
to be in relation to my here,
but how many lies will I have to believe
to find that? Maybe I should just stop
valuing myself. All it leads to is standing
on pages lids shut tight, mouth wide
believing.

I wasn’t honest with you
for the last few pages.

These poems were never written
to change you.

How could they have been,
when your hands are touching
them for the first time?
One day we’ll be divine like birds high enough to be without want.

Heads full of feathers, beaks full of worm. Let’s be full together then fall no longer interested.

I invested in images and description like currency, the more on the page the richer the poem, and the more you might roll over and love me.

If only we could rid ourselves of want.

You would think by now I had found something to set the sun with me. You would think by now I knew once love lives inside a poem it is dead outside of it. Dear Reader, in the future I hope this will all read differently.
PART 2

Let’s Reproduce and Die: An Experiment in Reflection with Finality

or Context as Forgiveness: An Epilogue
I read texts  
little lines that send me

in flutter or, is this a message  
to forgive?

Insert profanity here. Contextualize  
the hands that wrote

dthis. Contextualize your mouth,  
and throw it over to me

like a piece of gold  
you unearthed using only your cheeks

or dripped over in a lab.  
Alchemize away

the steps I took, heels so high  
they kicked my ass, to accept

these words are still worth  
meeting. The hold murder

has on my senses in these moments  
is nostalgic. Forget your body parts

the ones that ebb and swell, and raise  
up the cleaver with me. Let us sacrifice

this author do away  
in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love  
my ribcage covered in mirrors.

Yes

tthis is just another fucking tool  
but we need to do away with this author  
disseminate the blame.

let’s do it together.
I read texts
little lines that send me
in flutter or, is this a message
to forgive?

Insert profanity here. Contextualize
the hands that wrote
this. Contextualize your mouth,
and throw it over to me

like a piece of gold
you unearthed using only your cheeks

or dripped over in a lab
Alchemize away

the steps I took, heels so high
they kicked my ass, to accept

these words are still worth
meeting. The hold murder

has on my sense in these moments
is nostalgic. Forget your body parts

the ones that ebb and swell, and raise
up the cleaver with me. Let us sacrifice

this author do away
in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love
my ribcage covered in mirrors.

Through these pages
will I find the nugget of gold

that is your contextualized mouth?

If I find it, will it be a mouth
I understand better?

For there to be another book
I will need such a currency

what might glitter my eyes wider.

This epilogue’s action is like a sweeping
to sides. Help me with it

like the broom you bought
for my new apartment was an omen
hanging stalwart on a nail in my kitchen
how I always want images to be.
I read texts
little lines that send me
in flutter or, is this a message
to forgive?

Insert profanity here. Contextualize
the hands that wrote
this. Contextualize your mouth,
and throw it over to me

like a piece of gold
you unearthed using only your cheeks
or dripped over in a lab.
Alchemize away

the steps I took, heels so high
they kicked my ass, to accept

these words are still worth
meeting. The hold murder

has on my senses in these moments
is nostalgic. Forget your body parts

the ones that ebb and swell, and raise
up the cleaver with me. Let us sacrifice

this author do away
in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love
my ribcage covered in mirrors.

Flutter, a state
like that of religious experience.

I’ve said it before; you have to have
believed in god
at least once, to believe in art

in this way. A pretension.
I believed too hard in all that feeling
too intense to be reasonable.

Are these words still worth meeting now
that I know they’re just from me?

It is so easy to say no
they are not, crumple the paper
and make a fire warm. But maybe this
is the time and we will see

that as a sign.
That might bring back everything
that never made it
into these poems, might resurrect.

Start the fire with me.
You have kindling in your hands
and neither of us are alone right now.
Let’s start a fire
and watch the effigy.
I read texts
little lines that send me

in flutter or, is this a message
to forgive?

Insert profanity here. Contextualize
the hands that wrote

this. Contextualize your mouth,
and throw it over to me

like a piece of gold
you unearthed using only your cheeks

or dripped over in a lab.
Alchemize away

the steps I took, heels so high
they kicked my ass, to accept

these words are still worth
meeting. The hold murder

has on my sense in these moments
is nostalgic. Forget your body parts

the ones that ebb and swell, and raise
up the cleaver with me. Let us sacrifice

this author do away
in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love
my ribcage covered in mirrors.

Reading was the catalyst
what launches or at least

that is what I’ll say. In flutter,
is an attempt to put into words
a connection that wasn’t

and I use

or

to turn
to another unsolvable
what. I wake and daily try to forgive this.

Insert profanity here, insert blame.
I blame your words, I blame my hands,
where they come from.

I ask you to expel what could be
originary, what escaped context.

Isn’t claiming something
as originary building context,
making it a piece of gold
just another crafty exhumation?
I read texts
little lines that send me
in flutter or, is this a message
to forgive?

Insert profanity here. Contextualize
the hands that wrote
this. Contextualize your mouth,
and throw it over to me

like a piece of gold
you unearthed using only your cheeks

or dripped over in a lab
Alchemize away

the steps I took, heels so high
they kicked my ass, to accept

these words are still worth
meeting. The hold murder

has on my sense in these moments
is nostalgic. Forget your body parts

the ones that ebb and swell, and raise
up the cleaver with me. Let us sacrifice

this author do away
in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love
my ribcage covered in mirrors.

Context is
the circumstances that form
the setting for an event, statement or idea,

and in terms of which
can be fully understood
assessed, is one person’s definition.

In context or considered together
with the surrounding words
or circumstances this has been
tailored to say what I wanted.

Put all this in the context of
the fact that
it has all been taken out.
I read texts
little lines that send me
in flutter or, is this a message
to forgive?

Insert profanity here. Contextualize
the hands that wrote

this. Contextualize your mouth,
and throw it over to me

like a piece of gold
you unearthed using only your cheeks

or dripped over in a lab.
Alchemize away

the steps I took, heels so high
they kicked my ass, to accept

these words are still worth
meeting. The hold murder

has on my senses in these moments
is nostalgic. Forget your body parts

the ones that ebb and swell, and raise
up the cleaver with me. Let us sacrifice

this author do away
in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love
my ribcage covered in mirrors.

What motivates someone to write
a love poem? A regrettable past, idyllic

future seen
behind my closed eye
then dashing
when they opened to yours.

Kick my ass

and I will accept that I was reading too
much into these poems
murdering anything else that was there

closer to the edges
right at that border
between white and black.

Who knew that the color of an eye
what ebbs from the dark spots
could hold so much. Insert your mouth
there, and forgive me for leaving out
so much.
I read texts
little lines that send me
in flutter or, is this a message
to forgive?

Insert profanity here. Contextualize the hands that wrote
this. Contextualize your mouth, and throw it over to me
like a piece of gold you unearthed using only your cheeks
or dripped over in a lab. Alchemize away

the steps I took, heels so high they kicked my ass, to accept

these words are still worth meeting. The hold murder

has on my senses in these moments is nostalgic. Forget your body parts

the ones that ebb and swell, and raise up the cleaver with me. Let us sacrifice

this author do away in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love my ribcage covered in mirrors.

Again I pray to the mystical god of conversion, keep turning
away from what I knelt on as my knees were soft and small.

I actually kicked my ass by choice
at that age, a cheerleader lifting and looking up skirts to prove strength to erase to accept.
I ask you to help murder these pieces of me. Yes maybe the ones that make you swell, but please dear, a mutual sacrifice.

And I ask that we do it together see what is in our hearts still, really, what is missing all the whiles.
I read texts
little lines that send me
in flutter or, is this a message
to forgive?

Insert profanity here. Contextualize
the hands that wrote
this. Contextualize your mouth,
and throw it over to me

like a piece of gold
you unearthed using only your cheeks

or dripped over in a lab.
Alchemize away

the steps I took, heels so high
they kicked my ass, to accept

these words are still worth
meeting. The hold murder

has on my senses in these moments
is nostalgic. Forget your body parts

the ones that ebb and swell, and raise
up the cleaver with me. Let us sacrifice

this author do away
in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love
my ribcage covered in mirrors.

Was this really
the ultimate way to erase you
to reveal my ego overwhelming
your cheeks?

That simile over there
was inserted out of self-consciousness.
I always have to make sure
I am writing a poem, alchemizing away

direction, keeping ambiguity.

Mystery keeps it interesting and I can’t
totally let go of the world I live in.

This, any murder, needs an accomplice
and I don’t want to be talking to a void
that can’t talk back.
I read texts
little lines that send me
in flutter or, is this a message
to forgive?

Insert profanity here. Contextualize
the hands that wrote
this. Contextualize your mouth,
and throw it over to me
like a piece of gold
you unearthed using only your cheeks
or dripped over in a lab,
Alchemize away
the steps I took, heels so high
they kicked my ass, to accept
these words are still worth
meeting. The hold murder
has on my senses in these moments
is nostalgic. Forget your body parts
the ones that ebb and swell, and raise
up the cleaver with me. Let us sacrifice
this author do away
in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love
my ribcage covered in mirrors.

Conceivable, it is
that no muse ever spoke to me
poems hold no might, no magic exists
and these pages are mulch for my
garden

I sent myself in flutter.

You reader, you muse, you lover
who left me standing
on the chasm’s edge, never existed
outside my head.

The context is: I really am myself
talking to myself and I must
smash all these mirrors in order
to truly see anyone else.
I read texts
little lines that send me
in flutter or, is this a message
to forgive?

Insert profanity here. Contextualize
the hands that wrote
this. Contextualize your mouth,
and throw it over to me
like a piece of gold
you unearthed using only your cheeks
or dripped over in a lab.
Alchemize away

the steps I took, heels so high
they kicked my ass, to accept

these words are still worth
meeting. The hold murder

has on my senses in these moments
is nostalgic. Forget your body parts

the ones that ebb and swell, and raise
up the cleaver with me. Let us sacrifice

this author do away
in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love
my ribcage covered in mirrors.

When is a poem, a memory
ever translated

into what actually happened?

Reader, you
are not the you in these poems.

But I couldn’t separate
the yous after a while.

There is no hand to hold, ear to hear
that isn’t a projection of my own.

If there is,
I don’t have the hands to recognize it.

If this is not true
skip to the end of this book

Reader, and tell me
something
I couldn’t have made up on my own.
I read texts
little lines that send me
in flutter or, is this a message
to forgive?

Insert profanity here. Contextualize
the hands that wrote
this. Contextualize your mouth,
and throw it over to me
like a piece of gold
you unearthed using only your cheeks
or dripped over in a lab.
Alchemize away

the steps I took, heels so high
they kicked my ass, to accept

these words are still worth
meeting. The hold murder

has on my sense in these moments
is nostalgic. Forget your body parts

the ones that ebb and swell, and raise
up the cleaver with me. Let us sacrifice

this author do away
in rips and read some Woolf.

Let us hold hands clammy my love
my ribcage covered in mirrors.

Thank you for being here
making it so far.

Here I will finally say
what you have been waiting for.
The context is within the white space
the space that was between us. I saw
what I wanted, and context can’t be
made by one person, swallowed whole
by another.

No matter how much water you drink
no matter how many times you drown.