

This Poem Is Not About You

Confessional

On daytime TV, there's a woman trapped in a man's body.
Who is this man? How can she give him back his body?

When my ex came out of the closet, she lost her moustache
and glasses. The trench coat fell from her body.

The incredible human mind! It leaps a cathedral,
soars over a sonata—and stumbles on the hillocks of the body.

I love my voice, which sings out to other women.
Is that enough? Or must I also love my body?

You can't box up your sex and demand a refund. They'll call security.
Security will ask where you buried the body.

God will smite me for my lies: girl, boi, straight, queer.
I want an indulgence, but who sells them these days? Nobody.

Forget Rachael. I'd rather be Rae, or Ray:
a brass flourish that could announce anybody.

Romantic Comedies Give Me the Screaming Meemies

Don't give me the moon. I'm not scared of outer space,
but I can't face the pressure suit, or the tiny titanium space.

The heart is a bitter apple. Bruised, it scowls behind its skin.
Bitten, it puckers around the dark space.

Poor gecko! The kookaburra is all nervous cackles.
The strangler fig weeps, its spine an empty space.

I sprint by the river, stomp concrete, swallow gnats.
The treadmill offers more speed, but less space.

Bowerbird, keep your trinkets. I'll dive
for dollar coins, a cormorant in an endless blue space.

I'm ravenous for dictionaries, donuts, disco balls.
Can you handle a woman who takes up space?

Knock yourself out, Rachael. Fill the page with chatter.
The challenge

is the use

of white space.

My Enemy

grabbed my wrists and poured sticky stuff over my mind.
Bruises wash out; there is no scrub brush for the mind.

My only souvenir is the acid scent of ants.
Were they crawling up my arm, or up my mind?

Our friends encircle him, beating their wings and cooing.
I tiptoe past. They shriek: *Have you lost your mind?*

Don't eat the fruit! He dips the peaches in antifreeze,
stuffs nails into the plums. The pomegranate seeds are mined.

Embrace me and I'll bristle. Stroke my back; I'll jangle like an alarm.
No one can unsnarl them, these nerves that used to be mine.

I smile smooth as lychees, cool as iced margaritas,
but I'm nursing a fireball in my mind.

Shh, Rachael. Chill out and grab a beer. Embrace the drum circle.
No thanks. I'll keep watch from the porch, if you don't mind.

Bypass

Sax, bass, keyboard: Uncle Pete beats syncopated time.
Some idiot kicked over the drum set. It's leaking time.

In my dreams, you splutter through a lake of anaesthetic,
fingernails lilac. The nurse shoves you under for the third
time.

The surgeon drums a steel melody with clamp and scalpel,
rearranges your signature from common time to cut time.

Open your heart. Squeeze out another accordion tune for
me.

Open your watch. Dig between the gear teeth for extra time.

Florescent light sucks the juice from my uncle's face,
preserves him like a violet between evening and nighttime.

Showdown at dawn: Pete with his smoker's heart
vs. Death on rocket-powered rollerblades. Who's got the
faster mile time?

It's me, Rachael, shouting from the sidelines. I'm waving
a white banner, hoping Superman will show up in time.

Gnostic

To sprint, first compress the world
to a point, then hurl your body at the world.

In each eye, I carry a leaky bucket
with enough mud to gild and stain the world.

The air sings a million mosquitoes,
all modes of the one dumb world.

*Cheer up, love. What more could you want?
A pretty balloon? Tickets to Sea World?*

Everything tastes like the same lousy pizza topping—
pineapple and onion. Who ordered this world?

Someday, I'll step out of my blankets into a cold noplac,
swallow a glass of nothing, watch the snowflakes whirl.

More wine, Rachael? Go ahead and pour. I'll dive
down the stem of my glass to some redder, better world.

Pushpin

Forget strip shows. They say the highest pleasure
is to unlace the stays of pain and pleasure.

I know the quill that pricks the sick lung,
but what species of porcupine is pleasure?

He stumbles into her bedroom, grabs for the lube,
topples a lamp. The stings we tolerate for pleasure!

I once swallowed a time-release capsule
to melt bone and vapourise pleasure.

Press your ear to a volume of Aurelius—
hear his spine vibrate with stoic pleasure—

I'll plunk myself on the verandah to gape at galahs:
mouthful of mango, pitcherful of pleasure.

Given the choice of cake, a fuck, or a book
Ray gropes for them all, muttering *my pleasure*.

The Kingdom of Ends Ain't All It's Cracked Up to Be

You miss her breath, her alto tone. What, will
your sorry heartbeat snare the tune? What will?

She offered you her Lem novels, her lipstick,
her love forever? Yeah right. In what will?

The dog's all shaky knees and funky breath.
Some Blu-tack binds him to his skin—what? Will.

The mynahs shout. If sleep won't shut them out
(or pillows, earplugs, hip-hop, gin) what will?

The last five Ks. I launch into the wall.
Hundred-watt engine with a ten-watt will.

She'll bring me lilies, plums, champagne—or else
I've just confused *what ought to* and *what will*.

I'll pin a grin on, wrench my spine upright.
“That Rae,” she'll marvel. “What élan. What will.”

Logic Lectures

Eristic

We pad through the agora,
waving bright bottles and shouting.
Varicoloured essences, five chalkoi apiece!
An obolus buys you an entire quiddity!
Bring home a box of syllogisms
for little Barbara, Celarent, and Felapton.

For you, we will prove the most shocking of propositions:
Csteppius is the son of a dog,
Zeno is the opposite of Theon,
no one can tell a lie,
Socrates knows everything,
truth and falsehood are one.

For a handsome enough fee, you can even uncork
the stone jug of Truth
and watch the secrets pour from its mouth like olive oil.
No warrior or statesman has ever dared
grasp its neck.
Even we, keepers of the deepest and most dazzling wisdom,
are not entirely sure what's inside.

Free Logic

Last week, we learned the logic of
the gap-toothed pond, the rotting log
the flip-foot tadpole, halfway frog,
the muddy, half-unknitted glove,
the grackle neither black nor green
but somewhere in between.

Today, it's things that don't exist.
We'll ease in slow with Santa Claus,
or Saint Bernards with purple paws.
Although the things that don't exist
peel off like paint from those that do,
they have a logic too.

A few of them are solid as
the marathon you might have run,
the ache, the way your sneakers spun
heel over heel, true love, the jazz
guitar you might have learned to pluck,
or else your winning luck.

They breed beneath the grackle-glow, where
aspen leaf and ostrich frond
knit sweaters for the gap-toothed pond.
The tadpole tail swims off to nowhere.
The wood falls off in barky bits;
the glove unknits.

Possible Dragons

for Ruth Barcan Marcus

A possible dragon has no claws,
won't use you to pumice its pointy paws,
won't crush or roast or maul you.
A possible dragon won't haul you
away to the cave where it smokes and gnaws

(or would, if it could) the saucy sirrahs
who thought they could slay it. No, thank the laws
of logic, this won't befall you.
A possible dragon,

however, can echo its corvid caws
in a voiceless voice through its toothless jaws
to coax and curse and call you.
And he will draw closer to death, who draws
a possible dragon.

Zeno's Paradoxes

for José Benardete

The tortoise ladled up silverbeet
with half a spring of parsley:
half to save and half to eat
and we'll never reach the end.

Achilles raced me on a dare
with half a mile of gravel.
Never got more than halfway there
and he'll never reach the end.

Achilles ran another race
with a shoe half-full of blisters
and every mile he doubled his pace
and I don't know where he'll end.

I sliced a sausage very thin
with a half a half a half a half
 a half a half a sausage—
I opened up its gutsy skin,
but I couldn't find the end.

I'd like to hunt the kangaroo
with a quiver half-full of arrows
but my feather ain't got no follow-through,
so what good's the pointy end?

I promise I'll repeat this song
with a half a mind to do it,
but honesty takes far too long,
so I guess it's time to end.

Truth

A question that will bother me until I am a rheumy old philosopher, and has bothered me since I was a moony youth is: What is truth?

At first, I thought that Aristotle had got it when he said that you speak truly when, if something is the case, you say it, and if something is not the case, you say not-it.

But then I ran across puzzling sentences like “This sentence is false” and puzzling pairs of sentences like “Sentence One: Sentence Two is false” and “Sentence Two: Sentence One is true.”

Or worse, “If this sentence is true, then you’ll eat your hat, feather and all”, the gist of which is that in order to avoid paradox, you have to horrify both your milliner and your gastroenterologist.

So then I decided I shouldn’t ramble on, since all this talk about truth was probably incoherent, and what is incoherent is nonsense.

But I can’t seem to stop. Maybe if nothing else will help me, this’ll. It is something Frank Ramsey said: what you can’t say, you can’t say, and you sure as hell can’t whistle it.

The Phenomenal Paint Emporium

Stroll into the lobby,
where sample chips shimmer with pigments
that exist only in the mind.
Press a swatch of phosphene green against your eyeball;
stare at the impossible pink til you pass out.

When you come to,
gaze at our stains and glazes:
visual purple to blackout black.
Enjoy a double serve of the two-for-one cross-eyed special,
or sprinkle the force-and-vivacity blend over one of your fantasies
to watch it bloom into florid memory.

Grab a complimentary plastic spoon in Aisle Six
and dip into a tub of burnt tongue, hunger sauce,
last peach before winter.
In Aisle Seven, you can huff
the all-natural essence of puppy,
the smoke of birch bark burning.
Suck down a long drag of durian
seasoned with superhighway skunk.

Ah. Not many people inquire about the basement.
Duck through the low doorway
and grope your way down the stairs.
Pull the chain overhead to illuminate
the buckets
with no labels.
Each comes with its own utensil:

A fine point for bee stings,
a broad wire brush for poison ivy.
Stipple pins and needles over your sleeping foot.
Carve out a jumbo scoop of ice cream headache.

That one in the back?
Oh, I wouldn't dip my thumb in there if I were you.

Waiting for David K. Lewis

Since the day was starting to stink like old cheese,
Billy and I put it through the automatic slicer
and ate it before it could rot.
We're serving seconds on crackers.
You're still not here.

Who cares if your skull is packed with sprockets
and your pockets laden with model trains?
Though you always turn up three minutes early,
all snorts and stares, a question mark tangled in your beard,
we know you belong with us
in Wagga Wagga.

Come, shuffle into the dusty tea room,
where all of us—
Steffi, Biggles, Armo, the broad-eared dormouse,
even Bruce the cat
who purrs reflected heat at the teapot
and meows poetry in another possible world—
await you.

Hedges loom:
has the callistemon come to devour us?
Come, scrape your blazing blade of negation through the
dialetheist thicket.

You will find us waiting by the billabong
with Billy boiling.
The bikkies taste like Marmite,
but they're made from pure *je ne sais quoi*.
If we sing loud enough, will you hear?

Bruce has caught an Indonesian gecko;
his pointed teeth show beneath its skin.
I am nibbling the last half-minute.