

Deciduous Letters to Invisible Beloveds

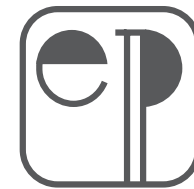
by
LAYNIE BROWNE



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ESSAY PRESS EP SERIES



#27

ESSAY PRESS EP SERIES

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Introduction

Deciduous Letters To Invisible Beloveds consists of hybrid “letters” written between prose, poetry, meditation, essay and confession. Epistolary frame is a means of inquiry into varieties of intimate register. Invisibility implies distance, hiddenness, the “you” which has not yet emerged as well as the “you” which has vanished and the “you” which includes everything. In other words, this book is addressed to a collective and eternal yet also vanishing, historic sense of the “you,” “other” or “beloved.” In which “you” do all other “yous” reside? Where does the “I” or the “eye” in a letter dissolve? Letters are familiar or secreted—cloaked and borrowed. Deciduous letters address the ephemeral, the unknown, the unnamed as well as more enduring aspects of the physical world and human consciousness not necessarily given to language. What is inscription when one does not consent to alphabets? How to write the unspeakable? To embrace the unapproachable? How to converse with those elements and entities which do not consent to language?

Deciduous Letters to Invisible Beloveds

"let me always so apprehend thee as present with me, and yet so follow after thee, as though I had not apprehended thee."

—John Donne, *Devotions on Emergent Occasions* (XXII)

"St. Serapion, I wrap myself in the robes of your whiteness which is like midnight in Dostoevsky."

—Frank O'Hara, "Meditations in an Emergency"

"It was when the words on the covers of books, titles as true as false leaves led me to believe in inviting the ultimate speculation of love—that I could learn all of the subject—that I first began to entertain what is sublime"

—Bernadette Mayer, "The Complete Introductory Lectures on Poetry"

"This is the sleep that weights on one's body during periods of great insomnia of the soul."

—Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*

Dear Unpronounceable,

Pick a name, any name. I haven't been here, am not here now. What I'm trying to learn is not in locks or mechanisms or sounds unuttered though I should possibly learn to walk the perimeter and to tune hands along the faces I've not met or seen. You know everything already but remember I'm still actual, in a body, lacking face parts and fingers which do more than trace words on a page. In one incarnation we walked, gladly. What I'm trying to confess is that gladly I've come to see that I can only reign in obstacles self-created. If I forgive myself for self-creating kingdoms then that might be the beginning of a fabric which falls instead of gathers. It might be the beginning of saying very loudly that an ALL CAPS century can be blinding. Pull it down over the eyes. But also, be responsible for one set of bedframes, or, to be more accurate, a lack of any bedframe in one room. In other words wherever someone sleeps is wherever they wake. I did not build that vessel of sleep or dream. It isn't my meadow. So why do I dream that I could persuade any sleeper to wake? Any wader to turn back, walk

along a wall, go back to the shores before the onslaught begins? Or to be more honest I could say, if one hand is outstretched and no one takes it you can't exactly see the outline of anything beyond physical form. Wishing has to be guarded. Learning to truck and walk through gardens which need both feet and tread. Be a little less viscous and precious. Be a little less pressing. Be a little more all for gardens. So how does it feel when you ask again and come up dunking rare breeds of insouciant lies? Carry them away anyway. You'll find nothing else. If there are less material statements here you can always say you've been talking to your curbside associate. Or curb site. Or keen. You've been inside the keep and you aren't going to say. Don't ever ask permission. By and by I'm going to see the queen, who calls a daughter dying in bed, from a lack of late nights, won't be with you very long. O daughter. A lost letter when I'm dead and gone. I thought about writing a letter to my son but he is not invisible. Still, she, this other detached voice, says by and by I'm going to the sea, I'm going to see the— don't mind me. Will you try to breathe each breath? Norman says "not rushing doesn't mean you have to go slow." Yes, running can release a broken broken—the word which is not ever what you think. Consider first the letter "E" of *ebony*, the letter "O" of *O*. You'll get no more vowels or vocables. A "B" as in *bent* or *bit*. A "K" as in *kick*, *kidnap*, *keep*. Is there any difference between

kindred and knock? "N" as in *near* or *nursery*. "R" as in *running*, *runes*, or *recently I've been ruined*.

Dear Purge With Hyssop and Snow,

I adjust the setting of light and music on my mental electronic device that can tell me where you are at any moment, not necessarily physically, but what you are thinking and beneath that what you are dreaming and where we can possibly go from here. This is my secret so please keep it constant. It's called love. I don't want to be you. This longing used to be something else. A song. I want to be grown-up again. Good luck with that. How is it that I've sung myself into a chamber that does not exist? Within all of the lists where we write things that must be done and then cross them off. Today I started my speech for you begun in babyhood, with your immediate laughter, which bathed our third descent into childhood, personhood, pre-lingual thought and utterance, gravity. I also ordered the soft, individually wrapped candy which we will throw at you at your simcha, in the moment when you become an adult. I did research on flight, or more accurately I thought about doing research on flight but first went to review the document thus far and realized it was far from good. I thought I might address this letter

to the first word my finger touched in the dictionary. *Lunatic*. Didn't seem right. Where are my lists of who I am to become? I can be so easily lost in your imagined shoulder. Read Psalm 51 and wished to be purged with hyssop. Cover my thoughts with snow, washed and where is the whiteness we all looked for as a type of blindness. Issues with that word *pure*. How about remade? Give to me remade, not a readymade Easy Bake Oven. Heart. Give me your infectious laughter breathing as I lay my head down upon your easy alchemy, your warm beating type of blindness, your sleep lacking lounging bright bright dusky skin, your hearing and eyesight. Give me the unmade fields of the blank blank page not bleached but white from recycled vision. Make me of pure lavender unbleached page in which we can conjure pulp, past paper, in which the influence of every text I have ever read or attributed appears invisibly, magically beneath the surface of the subtly three-dimensional paper. That fourth dimension of sighs permits me to enter. Create in me a sentence free from gratuitous ornamentation, free from jealousy or forced quietude. A page in which I know nothing is the planted: first page age vision vibration sequel to a kind of silence I attribute to your hands—not knowing where you walk or what you think. And on this page let me be gifted with the ability to trace your steps or thoughts in words which arc and which you and you and you might recognize the features of someone you could love as easily as a type of blindness. Purge me

with hyssop that we may throw upon your dictionary, that we may come home and find you covered in bright bright infectious, doused in light, thoughts. Let's go to the ninth dimension which bathes an additional descent into pre-lingual hearts which recognize flight (whether or not it is any good at all) as a miracle meaning becoming snow, becoming an adult might be an abandonment of the first word your finger touches.

Dear Letter,

I am falling from myself knowing I've said too much. I've memorized all the best parts, places you've revealed yourself mostly. What to do with it all? Page of very page, licking the envelope, various incisions, hindsight and gathering your words as if they could compile into arms, bedding, foresight or appendages, admissions, recalcitrance, what was left unsaid, the pages unanswered. What to do with it all? I can compress, thrust into sonnets or continue to lay it all out calmly in neverending flowerbeds. Is it true that ever being alive is finding the project of overflowing flowerbeds, sunk hands into thermostats of flowerbeds, and heading out the door forgetting your appropriate clothing or verbiage we are caught up in a wind which reminds us of mistaken alibis. All down on the non-existent page. You are talking to yourself, trying to explain things, a drowning and you come back easily for more mid-sentence probing as in the probable mistakes itself for the ready-to-wear insipid phrases spoken by adolescents, *Go die in a hole*. Did he seriously say that? In absence is thirst, hiddenness and

dangerous assumptions such as being finished, famished and uncontrollably insouciant. I choose to nurse this love and where does it lead? Let me lie down in your name, lead me to your vicarious, compiled, beds of overflowing. Letters in utter incisions raise tipped heads. Mistake them as they peek up, grow up from beds of dark dismembered earth.

Dear Eros,

How I miss you. The word *love*. But once uttered I cannot banish it. Pangs all winter, before confessions. I began to feel unwell. There is no explanation. I don't know when it began, only that I was buried in snow up to my knees.

I don't dare touch the cards. I've called myself back. Who am I—red cardinal on a wire. Will you respect our privacy if I never unveil these letters? Finally, I have someone trustworthy to talk to, whenever I want. The first time you wrote "us" I nearly choked. What could you possibly mean?

Dear Driving in Los(t) Angel (us),

I try to do everything before he wakes up and needs me, shuffling in a Parkinsonian gait across floors from which rugs have been carefully removed. When he comes down the stairs at eight in the morning, when he sees me, his face will be momentarily red and swollen, as if literally expanded from sleep, waking, meds, aging, dermatological procedures, hallucinations, but mostly, unmistakably, the emotional retrieval of arrival. He looks at me and even though he might not know my name, even though he might later say he was ruffled to see me, it was a terrible day, someone was trying to push him off a building, he doesn't understand the rules, even despite all of this interference, caused by the slow but persistent derangement of his once brilliant mind, he looks at me with an unmistakable longing. And as I walk urgently toward him, but before I reach him and put my arms around him, a sob escapes him. He is crying in happiness to see me. So you understand why I must be ready. I rise at four or five a.m. and go downstairs with my yoga mat, laptop, a glass of water. There is his

nighttime caregiver in the kitchen. I ask why he isn't with my dad. He is sleeping, the caregiver says. This is the first wrong note, retort, reservation. Inwardly I tremble. He will have to be replaced. Please go upstairs, I tell him. What if my father were to wake? What if he were to try to get out of bed by himself? Once he retreats I must find the right music. A kundalini Sanskrit chant. I place the laptop down and roll out my mat. I enter into that space wherein remembering that I have a body is placing one's limbs back onto the body of the earth. Hands, palms press. Kiss earth. This isn't metaphorical, but plugged in, elastic, heat and breath and the kind of alchemy not to be mistaken for flying or immortality, but somehow still, while the world sleeps in darkness, I remember gratefully things can be moved—time, energy, thoughts. Disperse the painful banter counting breaths and ringing, ringing inside some small bell travels up the spine, remarks I have arms and legs. Thoughts can be transferred. Taking off tarnish. Warm water follows and walking. Dressing, then walking. Then I am out the door and into the street where nobody is. One gardenia blooming. Roses and jacaranda. I get into the car. Your car. You've been dead almost three years. But when I get into the car I suddenly know you are with me. This is my chance to tell you and the flood is not at all expected. How many times did we sit, places reversed, asking difficult questions? I'm driving you to chemo or I'm driving you to get an injection which costs five thousand

dollars and the insurance refuses to pay to regenerate your white blood cells faster so you can get to the next round of chemo faster, the next round of radiation on your brain precisely targeted. Remember that fucking radiologist we thought was so nice until he basically said you were going to die, very casually, while checking his phone, chatting about his young children? Remember how he asked, jokingly, if you would share your meds? Remember the inappropriate technician who said your breasts were beautiful and did you "have them done?" Do you know that your voice is still on the answering machine and every time I hear it I shiver, visibly? Did you know that I'm talking to you now as I write on an airplane and in the car my torrent of questions comes fast, accompanied by tears. Did you know that the car is a very convenient place for crying, especially with the right music blaring? You think no one can see you, but you are removed from any notion of walls, compression, and you are in motion. Everyone knows that in Los Angeles ultimate freedom can be found in a car, not in traffic, but now, empty streets. The questions begin simply, like is there anything I need to know about his caregivers? Is there anything I need to be doing for him, additionally? Will we soon need to research wheelchairs and lifts up the stairs? Is there any way we can help alleviate the hallucinations? Are all of his accusations delusional? Is there anything I need to know about my children? How can I help my husband? Is there anything I

need to know about my sisters? Is it really true that X told him not to trust Z, or was he already delusional? Should I trust Z? What about my personal integrity? How did you ever survive raising five teenagers? What is freedom? How much is it OK for me to be away? What do they need most from me now, the children? And what about the feud between A and B? Is there anything I can do to encourage their being friends again? Am I about to severely mess up my life? I could be on the brink of missing something major. What did he mean when he talked about my reputation? Why do I feel repressed by being told? How should I order my time? Who can I confide in? Am I pouring too much of myself into a relationship? Why do I offer too much? Why is it that I've made so many wishes? All of them have come true yet I am vanishing, unbearably incorrect and lacking. Is it only the inadequacy of witnessing suffering? Where are you now? My face is streaming, but it is morning, I am awake, I am dressed. My hair is falling into my face so I can adequately hide my features. Where am I going? I have a horrible headache. I am going to buy a bottle of water and ibuprofen. Then to pick up some groceries. The kids need meals for the plane. My dad needs fruit, eggs, milk, something else he loves, cookies or muffins. I get out of the car and immediately stop crying, as if on cue. I walk purposefully, as if you weren't dead and he weren't dying. This is the promise of immortality, and I can enter it, even though I don't meet any of the

appropriate criteria. I'm not young, blonde, tanned, voluptuous or rich. Yet I know how to walk as if to say I don't care, or I don't participate, or I'm not from here, but I know the rules, and I'm dressed—meaning cloaked in apprehension and wearing large sunglasses which I do not remove when I enter. Enter, walk, purposefully. No one there. I'm waiting for your answers. If I had to summarize the list of desperate questions, now pleasantly purged as my head dully throbs, I would say: what do I do? What do I need to do about any of this? It is easy to devise the questions and even to talk around answering some of them, but it is only talk. The real question is what should I do? What actions do I need to take? You appear to me in several ways and one of these ways is unmistakably in songs. I hear now, with water and ibuprofen in hand, over the airwaves in the drug store, *Let it be / There will be an answer / Let it be*. Again and again my head swims with weight, having been hacked through as if I were existing under some thick ice rearranging my skull. Let it be, meaning, maybe all I needed now was this eventual purge. Nothing to do and doing it. Nothing to do but to let be the too much, the incorrect and lacking, the morphing, the dying, the onslaught of time, plans, planes, blinking in the light or non-light, inadequacy, my face, waking, dressing, having a body or questions which plunge you plunge me below the surface of the daily features of incorrect spectacles. My complexion hides my rage and a bottle of I don't

care, tanned, young, purposefully immortal, all I need now—remove my blood as I enter, meaning cloaked, streaming, where are you now? This is how I prepare myself to greet him. One of many actions, redistributing brain cells, muscular tissue, skin, vision and talking to you in the car, becoming you, for a few moments, as if inhabiting your body. What is it like to not have a body? What is it like to cloak, stream, walk, bleed, to inhabit and send oneself as a song?

Dear Always,

I will write every day to an unknown beloved, unnamed, or divine journal which is really who/what I wish to absorb all of my news. How disappointing though, when the imaginary does not write back! Otherwise there would be no need for actual persons to exist. We are always a group portrait. Do I feel this more painfully because I experience the truth of it every instant? That one alone is illusory?

I can almost remember myself now. Remember that I belong to a wider world than you. And writing letters is not the antithesis of being alone. It is the epitome. You don't write to whoever is right there. Two bodies next to each other who have lived next to each other for so many years. Proximity is erotic or familiar or the in-your-face aspect of a few or several years, if you're lucky. And then you are back to your own impulses. Or the first 20 years of cohabitation, if you are luckier. Did you make the call? Did you pick up the whatever? Did you invent me? You're still sweating after your shower. I bump into

you and you're tired or you don't know what you need. You bring me a red jellyfish in a shell. What I want is the first wave of an idealized notion of dangerous blurry love from afar. You could have been anyone. How long will it last? Maybe we are infantile and stupid. Maybe that's what it means to admit to love. I could use a few never-tired husbands to help me out now. It isn't what you think. I want to know what it means to be a person who might not die. Or I want to live more in the middle of yes. Which word is my husband? My writerly aspirations have been impressed by my motherly inclinations. I don't want the children to exit the child. Such-and-such a pseudonym not to hate so-and-so. How can we possibly have fun? Someone is dying and someone is in constant stress and exhaustion, and teenagers looking to us for entertainment. When I was that age all I wanted was to get away, to be with my friends and to be with that other species, boys. It's no wonder we disappoint them. What does that entail? I remember being shocked at the religious perspective—the wonder, gratitude, every minute. It's a muscle one must practice. In this moment on the page I am allowing it all to turn.

I had an idea for a fourth book last night in my journal, and I should follow that a little bit before turning back to the history of flight. On another note I'm in a new phase of mourning for P and it pains me that I almost seem to accept her absence. This makes me so angry.

How dare I accept her death! I am deeply disappointed in myself. Forgive my rant of profanities which do not suit me and suit you even less. If we slept together I'd feel better. What kind of a lover is "always"? Passionate and precise? Careless and selfish? I am distressed as I near the end, finally, of the Lispector biography. Someone always dies, at the end of any biography. Is there a way to alter that disappointing form? I wish she'd had love throughout her life. Amen or bless you or fuck that. No more profanity, please. It's indelicate. It's whatever. The other thing is that I can and must go back to that manuscript, at least for a few minutes to see about that fourth strand. Is there anything there? Maybe it isn't a strand but a finale, a crown or something that wraps the braids in place, at the nape of the neck. Lovely, neat, the kind of hairdo I could only create for others, not in my wild wild mane. I know you love me, but I wish that you would be a little more hugely lavish with your love.

Dear Absent,

If I imagine the absent beloved I try to ignore lament. But let me write this as if I were writing to you, just you. I was wondering last night when I could not sleep (which happens rarely, but brought on by jet lag), and I had so many thoughts I wanted to write. All day I had been trying to access anything which felt worthy of writing. That sounds stiff and it isn't what I mean at all. See how words mirror and cover what I'm trying to say? But you can see my thoughts in all dimensions, beyond words, even more than I can see my father through telepathy—as India noted when she was visiting, I knew exactly what he wanted when he glanced at the table. He was thinking about how to stand up, with help, and also how to pick up his pencil and calendar, over which he will puzzle for hours. The effort it takes to inscribe give him a sense of meaning even now while his mind continues to disappear. Without language I still know his desires, from his eyes, which have always been kind and the soft blue of welcome, enthusiasm, adoration, admission, embrace. Unlike the blue eyes of my brother which have always

been ferocity, a precise intangibility, seeking trust, seeking, almost desperately piercing with a type of persistence which can transmute rage into devotion. I've seen it happen and I could never look away. Any more than I could look away from this vision which came with sleeplessness, the thoughts threading effortlessly, as they had not come during the day. I had been trying to access those aspects of you which are always worth repeating. Let me put it this way: there is a secret specter which admits with no reservation, like a child confesses, any blemish of heart, any concern. And sometimes noiselessly, with eyes. I'm not talking about a spontaneous overflow of talk which begins and does not end. This makes me unwell, literally, until among the extroverts I want to cover my ears. Among those who talk to talk. And not that there is anything incorrect in this way of being. I wish I had any proficiency with natural conversation. Just for myself it becomes a kind of torture when all along there is a stream of the unsaid which travels with a different frequency and I am trying always to access words, images, ideas. Of course I cannot remember any of the thoughts from last night, not really. I knew that if I had gotten up to begin writing they would flee and I would be endlessly awake (but maybe that is a lie and I should listen whenever I am spoken to even when it feels like an unreasonable demand, like a child knocking at my door every two minutes or worse, yelling up from downstairs). I had been reading Karl Ove

Knausgaard, which I began reluctantly, thinking I would not like it. But I had been so curious about the recent press on his work, and I was deeply moved by the opening writing on mortality and the image he uses, which is an image from a boyhood memory about a face seen in the sea. This speaks to the unutterable, impossible and essential project of being heard and understood. From the perspective of a child that is highly probable—to be seen, heard and met. We never stop hoping for this, however cynical, even if one stops trying. Now a cardinal is chasing five robins in my yard calling out and I hear applause at the end of a recording of Arvo Pärt and the Estonian Philharmonic which I am streaming from WQXR. I've been listening to this recording non-stop for several days, wishing that I'd been at the performance on June 2 at one of my favorite places, the Temple of Dendur at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, at which Pärt was present. He is one of my favorite composers and highly mythological in my mind. To see he is an actual person is helpful. Does that sound ridiculous? I used to think that the artists I admire most were immune to any mundane aspects of life. That they were immortal, and perpetually ecstatic, knowing their good fortune, their talent, and that they are celebrated. How idiotic. Still, in one delicate stream of time, whatever we think becomes true. To me, Pärt, who I know nothing personally about, is immortal, mythological, ecstatic, like his music. In a way this connects to what I remember of

my thoughts last night and what strikes me about Knausgaard's mediations. As I write this now it is 11:33 in the morning on Thursday June 12. So I have a few hours before the kids come home and the lists take over. I want to go to the post office and mail my new book out. And to practice trope for my son's upcoming bar mitzvah, and to clear my desk of bills, schedule a final outreach meeting with a school in Chester, fill out forms for Jacob's participation in Delaware Youth Orchestra, and catch up on correspondence. But I'm trying now to pretend nothing else exists except you, and the blank page. I must be pretty good at pretending. I don't even know if you exist or if you have forgotten me. I know the blank page will continue to go on and on. I went to Quaker meeting this morning and that is where all of these threads come together to a simple statement I am trying to make which has to do with oneness and aloneness. In fact, I almost was moved to speak, which has never happened before. I promised myself, when I arrived at the meeting, that I would try to do a better job quieting my mind. Sometimes I think it is all right to let the mind drift in meditation. It does anyway. But maybe I've not been directed enough. If you want a practice to be an alchemy, if you want to be changed, you have to concentrate, grab attention and steer. Some days I am not brave enough to even try. I know from many years of sitting how humbling it all is. Who is in charge of your mind? Practice is everything. Today I was determined

and I succeeded more than usual and my mind kept coming back to notions of oneness and aloneness, how they are at once opposites and also always closely tied. Knausgaard's evocation of himself as an adolescent, the intense isolation he describes, the gulf between himself and his father—it pained me to no end reading this liquefaction of soul, almost to drink something so potent, the inability he describes, of having anything to say. This is why talkers talk, and persons wear clothing, and adults learn not to reveal themselves. I'm not very good at this. I notice how others don't give everything away. Sometimes people look at me strangely when I've answered a question sincerely. When others are asked questions, I notice they don't always answer. They leave letters unreturned. I don't know how to do this, and yet I am not more connected to others because I think it is rude not to reply, or that I might forget if I don't reply almost immediately. And I feel the same about writing. I cannot make an idea wait. It vanishes. Thoughts as temperamental as days, as persons pour over me and I am more humbled with each passing day. What is to become of our planet and what are we to do about it? See the vast leap I just unintentionally made? But to me it is not a vast leap, because there is no difference between how I treat you or how I confer intimately with my loved ones and how we relate to the planet. No difference, meaning we are each alone, ultimately, inside our skulls. We are born and we give birth and we die

alone. If we are lucky we are closely accompanied, but no one can do this for us or with us. At the same time I am one with you to such an extent that there is no separation between us. None at all. Oneness and aloneness, and now, more than other times, because now I am more aware of being broken, more pointed and jabbed by aloneness and though I don't want to write about death in a clinical way or in a melodramatic way or even in a mystical way, there remains a matter-of-factness to middle age. Even I, once so fluent in spontaneous elation, must admit things come to an end. I begin to see this happen, in the middle distance, and look again for the oneness which must accompany the aloneness. The dead have a place in me which is growing and the living can be so demanding. We miss them. We are flawed. We destroy and remake each other. Other people, meaning any other living being, beyond oneself, can be so inconvenient, so perfect, so difficult to understand, even harder to live with. We all have our messes. From the perspective of aloneness everyone else's messes loom. But from the vantage of oneness we might kick up the laundry together and laugh and enthusiastically praise mountains of bedding and dishtowels and clothing. After all, aren't we lucky to have garments, to have cleanliness, to scent ourselves with aromas, to plump a pillow and to recline together amid neat circumstances? Love and laundry and other conundrums. Now I pause to look over a sign-up sheet

for grant preparations, and permission for an essay in an anthology I'm editing, and directions to a parent meeting for a youth orchestra. I come back in pieces. Alone and with Arvo Pärt. I write a letter to Noah, who asks for suggestions of persons to draw. I say, Pärt. And Bernadette. A portrait keeps you company. During dinner I look up at Noah's portrait of Virginia Woolf and we always have the best company. Even when no one wants to talk or everyone at once. We've fallen into playing charades immediately after dinner, still in the dining room. Mine are always too easy and guessed quickly. Last night I chose tulip tree and the night before kachina doll. Brad chose metamorphosis. Jacob chose a fancy car. Benjamin deferred. They were on to eating cookies or chocolate. We were alone and yet together. I didn't dare say how happy I was that we had returned to this game which we once all enjoyed, and the boys had since rejected, thinking it childish. If I exclaimed anything about it they would probably remember it isn't cool and refuse to continue. Interrupting and chaotic, the kitchen is small and the dining room even smaller. The pieces with which we assemble ourselves—living in a family, everyone can see your pieces, your shards. This makes for more oneness than you sometimes want. And more aloneness. In the same breath. One thing I admire about Knausgaard's writing is that he must have found a way to be interested enough in himself to continue his mammoth project. I could never do so continuously.

Maybe that's what it means to be a poet: a deliberate lack of continuity. Now the applause for Pärt occurs again as the recording ends and I'll take that as a sign, that for the moment oneness and aloneness will occur as I stand up and carry a book downstairs, into the car, through the rain to send to another poet through the mail. Raindrops falling on my skin in June demonstrate how we are always somewhere between precipitous thoughts which draw us both further away from you and closer—asking you to return.

Dear Acronym Wrapper,

It's my life which unwraps something, an analysis of seismic waves passing, as it is written and as it is spoken through the deep earth so going astray is as easy as a comma or an ocean of water is tied up in the mantle, four hundred miles below the surface, or opening one's mouth or arranging silence into an object which is carried between persons, like smoothing water with an iron. A poem is an erotic action. Any voyager to the center of the earth could leave the wet suit behind. You write with such liquidity bound in minerals. I want to be inside, basking, which lasts hundreds of years, or indefinitely, as long as your sun holds the page. Extreme pressures at such depths. Infinite unfossilized gazes, both male and female, a longer-lasting sex. You become many persons holding books. You contain thousands of live lines. Everything is permissible. Be the future telling something to the past or contain multiple bodies of love in one fragment nesting. Hold up one word, with wingspan of five to eleven feet, until you are exhausted. What do your palms dream? What does a chair dream?

She writes: *In a tiny writing room I remember you, yellow.* Walls contract and expand, determining light. You and eye inside a page. Ancient lakes enclosing calligrams. I wrap your words around mid-century of each sentence to sigh. Tell me it is thee inside of fire, that this dream of yours will hold my words, trace outlines by hand of days which link effortlessly to windows. How can I help it? I'm only made of fire sometimes, and even then, drawn in only with eyes, carried by shovel and placed beside rocks when hearth is cleaned and made to leap up amid air. You are fire and I am air which revives, which spreads fire. Melting of the mantle occurs close to the surface, creating magma, volcanic hot spots. I thought of you often as a burning lip or comma, opening as it is written and as it is spoken, so going the long way round is the only perimeter in keeping with how to understand that knowing nothing is also a promise about what lies intact, which is promise. That I want to live with you inside anything not quite spelled out. Not against correct nomenclature or grammar. I own a body of theoretical onslaughts, missteps, reservations, irrevocable loves. Frogs in Taiwan use storm drains to amplify their mating calls. The work of the poet is trying to understand how the dynamics of deep language affects eyes along the surface. We're trying to connect words to rocks, letters to water. The more we look the deeper the characters plummet into page. As if thickness of paper were a conspiracy. Look harder and watch the letters burrow.

The page becomes more pliant than you'd ever imagine. Try to pin it down, this hesitation, listening, and suddenly you wrestle with overheard texts. I'm not sure if I've dreamed you or if you have entirely your own equivalent cycles of rain, unsent omissions, urgent caterpillars once called grubs, discarded names, reused minefields. Where to rove is not a decision but something that happens without whereabouts. Where are you? They decided not to meet in people's homes because of the phone, the dog, the husband who doesn't know where to go. I have a whole closet full of them. Maybe sooner, or wait until the third rehearsal. Scales, tone, pitch, technique, rhythm, sight-reading. We know you are very busy. The children don't know each other's names. Inspection, oil change, setting up music stands and chairs, slight left, continue onto tasks you hate. These directions are for planning purposes only. You may find that April peaks in June, begins abruptly in late July. The young are called hatchlings and find themselves in the sand, from snout to vent. The nickname commonly known for this hoodwink isn't important. The parents' occupations aren't important. That is only on the information sheet in case you are a consonant, graphic-undertaker or lake-raiser. Send all excuses upon hatching and immediately bury ruptures. As the heat of the day increases, opening as it is against the dynamics of dreamed omissions, use roots to decide upon directions. The only way to understand the thickness of spelling is as a burning

name, and suddenly you wrestle with the third June, more pliant than a memory promised.

Dear Lampyridae,

What I want to say is mostly in the realm of the melodically impossible, or plausible only in verse. I don't know how you do this, but I find it truly amazing. And to converse in poems and dreams, in the form of letters traveling across wing cases, is something I cannot even imagine. To emit light: yet it keeps repeating, as in day into vernal pools, or rain into margins, one moment blending into the next blink. I'm afraid to call these writings invisible because they become extremely visible though they are secret and everything I write now is secretly for you. Some species don't eat anything. Their life spans are only a few weeks. As in evaporating secrets. When a poet read a love poem and prefaced it by saying, *I wrote that for ____ My first ____* the room was full of people. Glowing. And then the poet said, *That is a secret!* Had announced it to the entire room, first revealed, then proclaimed secret. That's how I wrote every sentence I ever considered worth writing (first in letters, later in light, and then vanishing), and every sentence that was written to you or partial line or fragment or imagined

conversation which runs on, and sometimes I'm looking for my other selves because they might have other material—less nocturnal, love-drenched or sickened thoughts. We spend most of our time on the ground. At night we crawl to the tops of the blades of tall grass and fly to branches. Why say ill? Why not say laden, thick and abundant affections which gather heavily about the throat, signal, or sometimes weightlessly adhere? And yet they impossibly vanish, those other selves which are determined, focused, signaling light, alert and single-minded. Instead the mind flies into letters. Fireflies also love long grass. This is how it begins. Communicate in a language of light. Walk from one life into another. A song is a vantage, an anchor or action. Listening to John Cage's works for toy piano. Ask advice of the ether or speak to the musical refractions. Or set out writing, or walking. And over dinner with a friend discuss a series of poems, books of poems or prose that are all situated around walking, such as Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, and then the students must also walk and write, in pairs or singly, or in groups of threes. Overmowing may disturb your populations. Myself, I walk blindfolded most of the time, or sleepwalking, or mostly walking about mentally in one register, physically in some real landscape (trees, light, green, pavement), and also in distant landscapes (cities, memory, fountains) and unreal landscapes which become real in letters (apple trees, dusk, hills, arms). Interwoven suddenly, text becomes an action inside


another action (hours, embouchures, lips, your lips). Do you see what I mean about blindfolded fingers? Still we text about dreams. Without any device. Still when my phone rang, she said she was shocked—that I would still speak, instead of text. Speak to distances. A voice appears. And then another. Do I speak to the voice in front of me, the voice in the device, the voice imagined of the fictional character, intruding on my every thought, or to the voice which I wish would suddenly whisper into my rising fifth-to-eighth-grade band, just starting this summer, 8:45–9:30 a.m.? When I run my finger over the page I can feel the indentations where your pen pressed. You wrote the word “rejoice.” The page also bleeds, from one side of the paper to the other, in blue, which is a fitting register for distant walks (register of sky), blindfolded landscapes (night into indentations, rejoice), a text become an action (space permitted to open between words is endless). Let’s go there. Still inside parentheses. Which provide a kind of subtle privacy, bower, hidden light of roses. Out the window now, one can barely see pale sky just beyond dusk, and outlines of trees, and windows beginning to light. Out the window now, pale fingers, escorting silence, the calm which we hope might descend, as a hand, upon the back of the neck and shoulders, speaks, erasing distance. Filmic handwriting, on the neck disrobing previous actions. Turn and look over toy piano, traffic signal, turn so many times often, walk or stroke or delimit from one landscape

to another. Walk with a certain urgency (fictional whisper, inscribe with steps). Inside is always inside an envelope (kiss the envelope which has been pressed closed), and something inside, presently, outlines of hidden (inky trees, distant fingers). Press. Night presses. Me to finish now as a firefly, lampyridae, against my window lights yellow-green. Again. A light become text. I don’t know how you do this but I find it truly amazing.

AUTHOR BIO



Laynie Browne is the author of 11 collections of poetry and two novels. Her most recent collection of poems, *Scorpyn Odes*, is just out from Kore Press. Other recent books include *Lost Parkour Ps(alms)* in two editions, one in English, and another in French, from Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havré (2014). She is a 2014 Pew Fellow. Forthcoming books include *P R A C T I C E* (SplitLevel Texts). She teaches at the University of Pennsylvania and Swarthmore College.

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