

Psychotic Bodies/Embodiment of Suicidal Bipolar Poets: Navigating Through the Sensorium of Immersive Worlds and Psychoscapes

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Ever since Christina and Stanislav Grof coined the idea of a “spiritual emergency” (1989), in opposition to or substitution of an episode of psychosis (a break from reality), there has been mounting interest in debating and outlining the role of exactly how alternative states of consciousness (trance states and otherworldly encounters) have come to define life-worlds and spiritual breakthroughs. Clarke (2010) in Psychosis and Spirituality: Consolidating the New Paradigm provides context for these mounting and theoretical concerns; her multidisciplinary and co-authored text examines how psychosis offers a gift of ‘trans-liminality’ in re-orienting the human mind towards experiences of alternate phenomena, enhanced creativity, and what often translates as mysticism. In working along these lines, I want to explore the sensory worlds of the psychotically inclined, the inspired—carving out intellectual space and capacity to understand and empathize how they as embodied selves process reality, stepped in mythic, symbolic, and, above all else, subversive (sub)texts of being that map out the present moment as a ‘lived’ psycho-scape. Using theories from the interdisciplinary canon of cultural, social, and political thought, I plan to analyse localized accounts of psychosis, literatures of madness, and the cultural neurophenomenology of belief in documenting both resistance and transformation. To do so, I explore the sensory experiences and poetic texts of three bipolar suicidal poets—namely, Paul Celan, Alejandra Pizarnik, and myself.



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When we consider a sentence, the flow—the *I* articulating it—there are nuances attached to its operations; to vandal this prerogative, notice the dimensions of its production (the generative world-making) as a purely linguistic hiatus into the transference of meaning, a door opens. Recurrence un-eases, trepidations release to the sublimity of the mad.

Of sweetest stary pains.
 This red, red death
 Mock all with hope delirious.
 And universal trickles
 Spearling the opiate heart!
 (The guiding hand),
 Wicked loves to shepherd,
 Speak of ancient lights;
 Cooled to stary bliss—
 The cords of night,
 Caught upon cordial palms,
Lotus-Eaters

How can this *I* then capture the doubling of consciousness, that fine sensory attunement, as pathways of thought co-exist, overlap, and interweave? We must forget¹. Practice death, to forced representations. Find renewal in the transformative power of psychotic bodies—one’s alit and attuned to their imaginative poetics. We must ~~un~~listen.

Introduction

Ever since Christina and Stanislav Grof (1989) coined the idea of a “spiritual emergency,” in opposition to, or substitution of, an episode of psychosis (a break from reality), there has been mounting interest in outlining the role of exactly how alternative states of consciousness (trance states and what may be otherworldly

¹ See Book IX of the *Odyssey*. The inverted poem mentions the classical lotus-eaters, who ate these plants to induce a narcotic frenzy of forgetfulness. To daydream and engage with hallucinatory realities.

encounters) have come to define life-worlds and spiritual breakthroughs. More recently, Clarke (2010), in *Psychosis and Spirituality: Consolidating the New Paradigm*, provides context for these mounting and theoretical concerns; her multidisciplinary and co-authored text examines how psychosis offers a gift of ‘trans-liminality’ in re-orienting the human mind towards experiences of alternate phenomena, enhanced creativity, and what often translates as mysticism. These engagements are critical when fielding the psychiatric term, ‘psychosis,’ which describes any engrossing mental state involving a “loss of contact with reality” (Cardinal and Edward 2011). The features of psychotic consciousness are themselves best explored, researched, and depicted through diverse creative methodologies and approaches, which can properly capture, even immerse, audiences *inside* the symbolic framework of humanity’s alternative states (Killick and Schaverien 1997).

These breaks from reality, expressed as non-normative mental states (created from an episode of illness or trance), can teach us much by allowing these counter-images of the world to augment and critique how individuals process culture in society (Martens 2002; Castillo 2003; Romme and Escher 2012). Psychosis—*itself*, as a *process*—unburdens the body’s attachment to a waking and bio-physical construct of reality and its inherent culturally produced *realisms*:

1. by firmly establishing a cognitive interface or override that synchronizes the partitioning of consciousness within the human mind,
2. by re-filtering baseline perceptions, senses, and experiences into a narrative-focused palimpsest of inner simulation(s)—each of which overlaps, animates, and re-directs pre-existing expressions of reality,
3. and by changing culture due to the intermediacy of psychosis and its controlling hold on the subject’s navigation of the world.

These layered mergings then coalesce to create sets of co-existing consciousness—the way the symbolic realities double upon the literal and concrete—inside a single subject. Each state and voice within imbues an intrapsychic narrative framework upon the polyglossic human mind and its psychotic tapestry in adding another sedimentary element in the transaction, communication, and execution of culture, itself a storied gateway to the many possibilities of self.

In working along these lines, I want to explore the sensory worlds of the psychotically inclined, the inspired—carving out intellectual space and capacity to understand and empathize how they as embodied selves process reality, stepped in mythic, symbolic, and, above all else, subversive (sub)texts of being that map out the present moment as a ‘lived’ psycho-scape. Using theories from the canon of cultural, social, and political thought, I plan to analyze localized accounts of psychosis, literatures of madness, and the cultural neurophenomenology of belief in documenting both resistance and transformation. Particularly, I want to use Alejandra Pizarnik’s reading of the *poetic body* in conjunction with Bracha

Ettinger's theories of trans-subjectivity, art, and compassion to understand the tribulations and trajectories of suicide poets. I argue that psychosis coupled with compassion is a powerful tool, an intensely self-reflexive (self-effacing) rubric of both dissent and transformation in re-mapping and re-cutting one's subjective potential.

And, in order to do so, to willfully frame chaos as Edna St. Vincent Millay² does—I must give creative shape and intimate form to sensory and perceptual worlds of these poet's personae, that of Celan, Pizarnik, and myself. My connection to and deeper elicitation towards this kind of work and evocative sensory materiality stems from my insider knowledge as someone who has experienced bouts of psychosis, has been clinically diagnosed with Type I Bipolar Disorder, and has had and continues to have a revitalizing poetry practice. More importantly than just being able to empathize with both Celan and Pizarnik on an equal keel of psycho-poetic embodiment, I have been able to find an alternate life trajectory beyond that of suicide ideation and its intensely narrow(ing) programmatic telos. Through synthesizing an autoethnographic, mythopoetic, and narrativizing lens, I plan to imaginatively expand their texts through acts of creative writing and textual resistance into a living moment of psychosis—descending, drilling further into its field of psychosomatic sensations. What then may be key to appreciating this performative article is to reflect on the generative and associative potential of how the words strike thunder against each other: namely, how rhetorical and analytical breaks in representation can question ontologies and express the bifocality and layered-ness of what it means to hold psychosis in tandem with the literal world. That is, the work as a textual form captures an unheard, ineffable fire which may induce the subtle reader towards experiential shifts; these composite reworkings of textual and representative identity will often fall outside concrete figuration through what is likely akin to a stream of strategically placed, invasive, and intermeshing poetics—calling them other-*wise*. By moving into these (para)linguistic domains, we can finally confront what psychosis *is*, challenge its exteriorization (its symptomology)—and fold our ink and paper into that crisp understanding of intrapsychic potentialities. The psychosis narratives of Celan, Pizarnik, and I are then placed in conversation as a preliminary way to describe a likely interior process present in bipolar poets; I work then from my own past sensorium and documentation to see how the event of bipolar sensorial experiences can aggrate from sense impressions, to collected notes, to a more finalized text as a way to read through and inside the psycho-poetic continuum each of us may represent. I claim to speak for neither Celan nor Pizarnik—but, perhaps, I can offer some insights into the human condition, its sensory diversity, and the struggle for identity therein.

² See Millay's sonnet, "I Will Put Chaos into Fourteen Lines."

These imaginative micro-ethnographies of poetry and (extra)textual readings throughout this article are quite possibly themselves an “encounter through which the parameters of the real can be renegotiated and, potentially expanded” (McLean 2009). We become adept, responsive to alterity, through these non-canonical representations, wherein the power to signify is itself critical—and until we, as a collectivity, refamiliarize ourselves with the immersive potency and purpose of psychosis, no substantive advancements can be made (Bhabha 1994). In this instance and in thinking along schizo-analytical theories of art, the artist’s struggle to contain psychosis within poetry is itself an aesthetico-political maneuver; it shifts perceptions and changes the world around us, to reinvent a politics and epistemology of being (Buchanan and Collins 2014). I suggest that this paradigm be one of empathy and vulnerability—even akin to Bracha Ettinger’s pronouncement “to feel the world’s pain and [...] its beauty” (2017: par. 28). These affective wound-spaces are our sites of transformation—a deathly reminder, of hope bellowing out bright.

A Taste of Suffering—Sensory Exhibits

There is a moment—an echo I return to, cannot but *be* in (paused to its aura—even if awake, held moment-less). Drunk on its starry flow, waiting to shatter, dizzy with myself, when Autumn’s foliage rustles. That remembrance. I could not shake, nor sweat.

*

A blood-red so crimson, that its lilac blade pierces my penance of thought. *Angelus Novus* figured by grammatologies and stratigraphies, all broken in that stream.

*

Of nature, gleaned and skinned outward, its wrath made visible. Hymns of the body laid barren to the spines of undoing, which make eternal questions, damned and dusted. The kind of sense that coils, as cut-tin shrapnel rips and reminds—displaces us to the psychic wounds that hold our glossy fates. Speak...

*

And imagine — a *word*
 falling as you watch,
 its slow curvatures,
 slipping into sealings of time. This *word*
 frothing at the front, expression-mad,
 present to its articulation —
 letting that meshwork push, push, push,
 its fluidity forward. (This writer
 keenly aware of its acoustic
 vibrations, Scream-Scream-Scream,
 this *word*).

It is falling
 do not forget — the pyre of breath
 dimming, downward
 copious of moths;
 word-no-longer-*word*, but as thread
 stringing, stringing —
 cut and leering. The taste of sour.
 I have seen, I have seen:
 eyes dried, dread-thistled.
 Oh, senses off-cut,
 the blade of this *word*, winged.

Dipping to death.

The three bodies of this intuitive essay have a somatic kinship, one that has been crafted by storm-touched crucibles. Pain as a method of induction, a pathway to wisdom³. Their voices, ever-turbulent sites of experience and ecstatic trauma, register these differences in the structural feelings, hauntings, and *aporias* that rupture our 'lived' constructs of reality. These intensities fold continuously and effortlessly over time, frictions gaining a rhythm to reveal the break(*ing*)-lines, such that the center cannot hold. The moment of that reckoning switches life over — cracks the mind to its indwelling potential. *The dazzling effluence of lilacs, riverbeds rampant with a cold rain in May. A coolly touch dips the fingertip, teeming its mind* — did not Ezra Pound write of such apparitions, “faces in the crowd; / Petals on a

³ This statement is not meant to be read as a careless affirmation nor a naïve condoning of pain-seeking behaviours or intelligibilities — rather, to find an interpretive, therapeutic, and empathic conceptualization, a grounding, for how one’s traces of pain re-orient their, his, or her consciousness to the shared condition of human suffering. A space within the heart’s affect. The goal here is to eloquently temper the viewer vulnerable to the magnanimity and inner strength of the emotions involved, since, in the words of Ruth Behar “anthropology that does not break your heart is not worth doing” (1996: 177).

wet, black bough” (1926)? Where are we to find that genius, to see a trembling sensory world find its expression?

Each of these poets—Celan, Pizarnik, and I—have been self-diagnosed or professionally ‘afflicted’ by a manic-depressive temperament⁴ (Phipps 2017; Rodríguez-Matos 2011; Horn N.D.; Jamison 1993). Certainly, there are interesting connections between a pursuit of poetry and these habituations, or what some might dare to call *illnesses* of the mind (Jamison 1996). And, no doubt, these bodies and their transformative capacity for psychosis align themselves to these immersive sensory worlds—*for our dear poets have felt*. Their cartographies of Self shift. They latch onto these narrative simulations, sharp moments of ruptured experience, extrapolated through poetry—to become alterity *in action* when engrossed within trance states via dynamic supra-sensory and synesthetic assemblages. Anthropologists like David Howes and Dara Culhane have noted that models of the senses are culturally constructed, even to the fundamental category of a sense, and that “bodies are engaged in diverse ways of knowing” (2013; 2017: 47). The intuitive work I wish to do here, ultimately, is to underlie how psychotic bodies are internalizing their subaltern projects of epistemology—that the suicide-driven, fire-tethered poet’s goal and language is animated by these ends.

Let us take poems and poetic fragments—creatively translate their intensities back to their origins in constructing the *living* trance within psychosis. To gain a substantive impression and an adequate vocabulary for understanding why psychosis is about *transformation* (not etic superstitions of neurotic maladaptivity) when articulating its holistic purview along a deep notion of time and the Self’s engagement with the structures of *poesis* and creativity.

The seduction of psychosis⁵—in terms of bipolarity and its trajectories, the way it peels one’s being to rawness, induces an electric excitement anguished by and of its overabundant sensory connectivity—that capacity itself starts with a subtle motion. The vibrancy of the world comes into an attunement, onsets with a hypersensitivity that commissions the sensuous. *The way a flush of colours flock before the eyes—so blue its waters become palpable trickles of an Australian rainfall, so green its glow reminds you of the emerald irises of your first kiss—those moments with all their affective rage sculpting the body*. These currents of non-normative consciousness flow inward, spark outward—to alter the grammar of what each sensory unit collects and, thereby, to render reality *as* otherwise. For example, the Afro-Cuban *palo monte* followers, according to Pasqualino (2014), feel these differences when they enter trance, mediated by a shock that passes through the body—an electrical resurgence of being that defines the psycho-somatic (granular) potency of their

⁴ Manic depression is an older psychiatric term for bipolar disorder.

⁵ From its Greek etymological roots, psychosis means “animation,” or “to give life to.” The word is also a derivative of “soul” or “mind.” One can think of it, in part, as the energizing force of Being.

religious and counter-hegemonic lifeways. Psychotic bodies, likewise, are engaged in epistemological projects of knowing self-in-world. These states of mind seize and tighten fullness as it rushes through one's livid embodiment: *the way vanilla bean crushed and frothing as starry, tangy grains expounds the sweetness of sweet*. Consider the words of Alejandra Pizarnik's text *Extracting the Stone of Madness*, from the poem "Fragments for Subduing the Silence," and its first ordinal section:

The powers of language are the solitary ladies who sing, desolate, with this voice of mine that I hear from a distance. And far away, in the black sand, lies a girl heavy with ancestral music. Where is actual death? I have wanted clarity in light of my lack of light. Bouquets die in the memory. The girl lying in the sand nestles into me with her wolf mask. The one who couldn't stand it anymore and begged for flames and whom we set on fire. (2016: 53)

This small prose poem carries its own weight—and has powerful focusing lines for *un-texting*, or deconstructing, the poet/persona's own mania. Pizarnik is addressing her own ignited psychosis-complex, giving us insight into her own intrapsychic experiences and sensory myths. Through the phrase "heavy with ancestral music," we can begin to imagine the essence of euphoria and those ever-racing thoughts that characterize the poet's contemplations—how we can likewise use intuition and passion to extract that gnosis (Pizarnik 2016: 53). The connection being that her currents of thought, the equally metonymic and figurative representations of her wit, becomes key to her own creativity and self-forging insights. She lives as phantom sublimity, mercurially: we can see throughout the volume and the text how these charged encounters of locating the psyche (her own ontology in the wake of a death-wish) define her body as a site of intensity and, perhaps, impossibility. Of navigation, of mis-constructed labyrinths.

On page 49 of the text, this animacy is characterized as "bolts of lightening" carried by a mask (a self) that crackles though her (Pizarnik 2016). This struggle to carve out personhood is again amplified by the creative act of her poetry, negotiating its materiality and emergence, and a psychic need to apprehend her own body's mania as it communicates an instinctual prerogative of change. I too have felt a charge rush—hot, heavy, and divine—through my body's cervices, liquifying ambrosial wit, and a dawning of worlds rolling into one—and as the propensity of my own thought picked up, soared, in these exuberant states of mania, the way speed and perception intermingle at the pace of lightening....

*

Urgency, the rattle, the rattle,
the rule:
(storm-chasing)
velocity ramped—scratching,
pen, scratching
forward
mad, mad ink. No time—
bouncing on the back of sentences.
Clicks, clicks;
thought-pictures, clicks.
Non-sequiturs.
Move, move, move—hand-penning,
Scribbling sounds—RRRRaaaa's.
RRRRaaaa's, RRRRaaaa's!
Calligraphy-colliding I's.
Vibrations, breaths-breaths-breaths
Finger-aching fuchsia
—FUCK—
Knuckling-down, cool-downs.
Beauty sparkling.
Tiresome—arthritis-inspiring motions.

Urgency, the rattle, the rattle,
the rule:
(storm-chasing)
velocity ramped—scratching,
pen, scratching
forward
mad, mad ink. No time—
boundless, boundless spite;
cracking codes,
possessed, possessed
to write, to rove, to will.

*

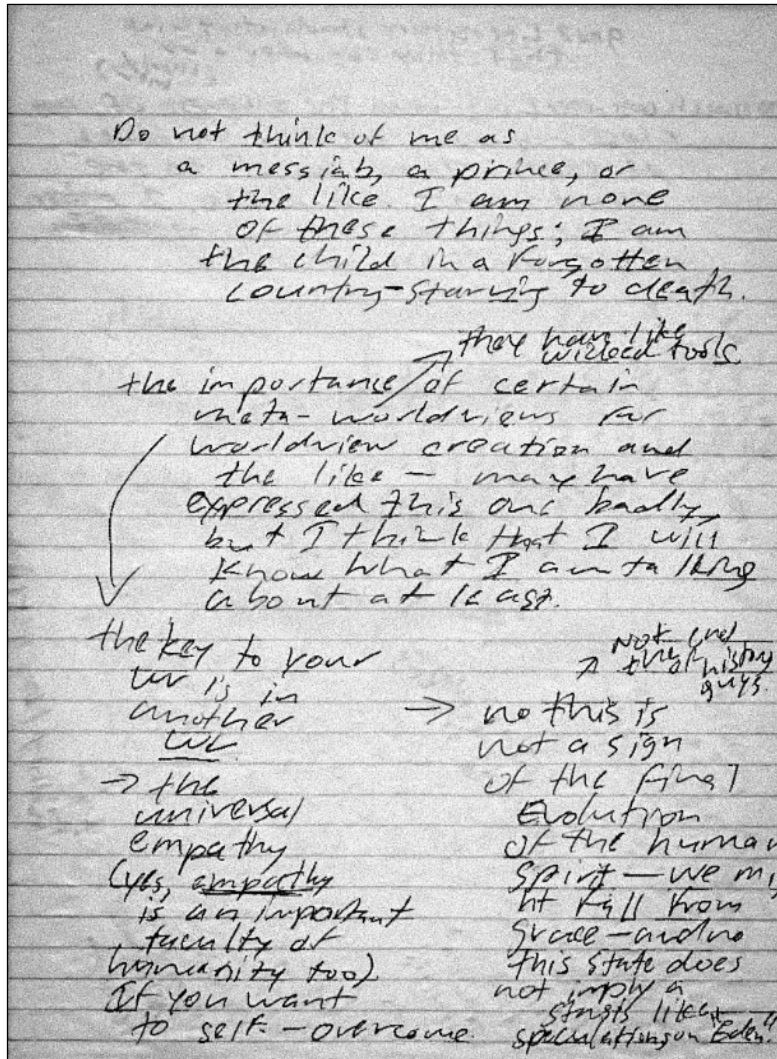


Fig. 1: Here is a page for one of my manic writing sessions. The text may be hard to read—but may give a sense of the sensory experience and impression made during these encounters with one’s mindscape.

“Do not think of me as a messiah, a prince, or the like. I am none of these things; I am the child in a forgotten country starving to death.”

“The key to your worldview is in another worldview. The universal empathy (yes, empathy is an important faculty of humanity too). If you want to self-overcome.”

Here I wanted to capture the frantic aspect and affect of what it has been like to write within these moods—the way that notetaking became a consumptive practice. The stress and demands on one’s hand and penmanship, aching for a divine (ecstatic) fury of thought that was itself non-representational. *Pain fleshed into thorns, my history untold—the spirit of romance unable to reconcile itself with the world I had found myself in. Another Beatrice di Folco Portinari*⁶. Every word inscribed became an unburdening, a cathartic intuition of sheddings. Those ever-piling cognitive journal entries (mad scratches) amassed; they formed a record and allowed me to be critical in getting at the problematic, entrenched nodules of being. The price, heavy as it was and is, being a rustling of creativity and a vibrancy that was hard, if not impossible, to sustain. And, to give a sensory taste of that pristine fluidity (a second to pause within its maelstrom) of what became weeks if not eternities, I have included a snapshot. No doubt, other artists can attest to this in their own notebooks, to their processes made physical and their own cult mythologies.

One of my first lyric poems that captures aspects of psychosis, the overpowering manic flight and its hospitalization vignette, started as a desire to translate what altered-state notetaking might be like. *The way, perhaps, coarse leaves sprout and infect-infect the soul—nourish and remind one of Cicero’s library*. That vantage point became a challenge, to express the sensuous and phenomenological representation of that process: the frantic and gritty act of composition as a way of transferring that energy forward in time, always and fearlessly so. Though, as I began to compose that text, it resisted—disrupted—being figured and indexed *as such* by forcing me to move away from that direct materiality and outward expression. Another poem took shape from that spine of inspiration. Yet, this history of cognitive journaling—the raw power, or conatus, of the experience—is still present in (*even haunts*) the spoken-word poem and how it takes shape.

*

The Hanged Man’s Nows; A Note-taker’s Needle

“He shall suffer whatever Fate the dread Spinners
spun with their thread for him at his birth.”

—Homer, *Odyssey*, 7.210-213

Stigma. Tiny big bangs—
the shrapnel of language: crude, caustic;
yet, applied surgical. The words

⁶ Beatrice di Folco Portinari is the principle romantic and spiritual interest of the speaker and poet in Dante Alighieri’s *La Vita Nuova* and *The Divine Comedy*.

tumbling as gravel down my throat,
sitting sharp in the gut.
Non-specified psychosis.
Bipolar.

The capital thought.
Days of blistering depression.
The unquiet mind—*weighted*
by a single stone, Alejandra's madness my own.
The price of which, its valued heft,
suffocates, cracks my lungs—
too weak from the emptiness,
the air of your bullshit—
collapsed on broken promises.
The pressure imprisoning,
as I gasp for oxygen.
And that incurable need
for humanity, un-consoled,
embittered; its warmth
locked away inside isolation-death-chambers.

Room 268. Sterile, windowless.
And from here, the universe's heat-death palpable.

Abashed, breath-
wallowed, I witness
spiraling lint-flakes held in pirouette;
the barometers of time, slowly,
slip stagnant, agonized.
The insomnia tightens by locked jaw,
stiff muscles, and daggered teeth.
Drips of Haldol.

Sleep gives to
asphyxiations and aspirations:
the delirium sets in;
release nips at the livid tongue,
as I catalogue the contents
of the stars, one by one, on the walls.

My father's rusty chisel, lucid raindrops
streaming down the glass, dark chocolate on Sundays,

sounds of her voice mixed into my writing —

That bittersweet foliage, the spine of remembrance
as fingernails piercing into concrete panels,
dividends etched by sheer will as I recounted
the bare thought of kissing her
under cold porches.
Every half-flutter of being,
recollected in the colliding of lips.
Those whispers.

All of them, deftly keen details...
swarming inside me,
digging into my experience.

These cartographies of consciousness —
projected as living fire,
the Proustian wit
of my collective history —
everything, as it sings and cinders,
leads me to the memory-ways of the soul.

I remember.
Why you put me here.

I am the abomination of reason.
The heart that will not die.

I tighten the noose
with the needle —
surrender to the psychosis,
feed its threads,
to see your worlds
cripple
at the birth
of these lines.

*

Taking a reflective break, pausing upon those poetic phrases (*swelling in the possibility*), is crucial to a sensory meditation of a poem's content when searching for linkages — to see how each poet and their text(s) carefully construct a moment

and orient an audience towards their image-work and body mechanics. These 'lived,' embodied, and emplaced sensoriums, each radicalized by psychosis, offer multivariant engagements with one's ontology as a diverse world "of affect, spirituality, ways of knowing, and sensory interplay situated in a fractured political world" (Porcello et al 2010: 57). The poetic text is itself structured as a liminal act, an appropriate repository for the psychotic—or rather, as Victor Turner (1983: 157-158) might say, a *liminoid* ritual of one's individualistic feats, establishing a temperament for social critique and suppression, legitimizing alternative realities in (re)world-ing consciousness. From this vantage, the overtures of psychosis turn that pressure inward as the poet-persona, congruent with the mind aware of its multiplicity, considers the project of ontology and reconstitutions of sensuous embodiment—agonizing over the permutations of self; the pure weight and difficulty of that emergence signals the need for transformation. Frantz Fanon (2008: xii) recognizes this desire for individuation: he too places value on one's growth as a *political* act by pursuing and attaining a form of cosmic humanity. This sentiment echoes and teaches us how this process is intensified by psychosis and, in fact, attunes human beings towards and within their depths: "[i]n the world I am heading for, I am endlessly creating myself" (Fanon 2008: 204).

As mania heightens and generates a blistering counter-friction with depression for each of these poets, we can see that this immense gravity (*a felt sense from the surfacing of the body's altered and intensified affect and aspect—made as real as bone*) fractures these subjects upon their selves. History always meditating and repeating upon this pain, a wounding of violet lilacs and the torturous, sonic depths of "waters failing into waters" (Pizarnik 2010: 47). This shift, deepens the trance-worlds of psychosis, places a focus on death and determination, to answer impossibility at the behest of the impossible. *The somatic unit of the body, its core logic and mediating synesthesia, is transfixed by the urgency of psychosis—even trapped in its thickness and lack of escape—as a snake coils repatterns in and out of its own skins to terrorize the striations of the land.* We can certainly attest to a death-obsessed attitude throughout Pizarnik's text, sinking deeper into its hypnotic coma:

She who died of her blue dress is singing. Her song is suffused with death and she sings to the sun of her drunkenness. Inside her song there is a blue dress, a white horse, a green heart tattooed with echoes of her own dead heart. Exposed to all that is lost, she sings with a stray girl who is also herself, her amulet. And in spite of the green mist on her lips and the grey cold in her eyes, her voice breaks down the distance gaping between thirst and the hand that reaches for water. She is singing. (45)

This focus on the language of death is not uncommon—and, in fact, the suffering of psychosis as it articulates and generates ineffability, pushes the raw limits of signification, highlights a lack of an appropriate and shared language to model these experiences (Douglas-Klotz 2010: 52). What a death-affirming mentality

does, however uncannily, is signify a critical and seething discontent with society and the current socio-cultural intelligibilities and temperaments that often dominate and fail to account for the tangible and vitalizing diversity of one's psychic life. Here then, the Thanatos drive⁷ authorizes polysemy in its interpretation and protest by immanently motioning a set of possible trajectories for how a suicide poet, one given to its rumination, might internalize and (para)linguistically communicate these desires. *Death is a war-cry for continuance and transformation; it is a subtle infection of invisible wildfires (implosion as starry vessels, eyelids as tarry Blueschist pools making room for an insightfulness) that weakens the symbolic manifold and resolve of what has come before.* Pizarnik and Celan are both equally guilty of this complex, and they challenge one to subsume the same affect of their texts, to be broken by those emotional pillages and charged expressions, as the enchantment of their words move one towards their wounds and transformative potential.

As psychosis enables reflexivity through a rupturing of worlds, this subsequent process of rendering death as a symbolic event—a conscious, therapeutic self-erasure—is, perhaps, seminal to self-overcoming and the formation of one's identity. The terrain of the poetic text can be a site of death-play in reconciling ontologies. Pizarnik works through the trauma of what it means to die, to extinguish failed projects of personhood by directing her cosmic multiplicity:

There I am, drunk on a thousand deaths, telling myself about me, if only to see
if it's true that it's me lying there before the grass. I don't know these names.
Whom do you tell you don't know? You wish to be someone else. (2010: 71)

The conceit of the text further embellishes this idea, that of individuation and forgetting, by pairing this poetic imaginary within a “ruined garden of her memory”—where failed selves will be tended to and harvested in accordance to Pizarnik's (2010: 71) scythe-like desires. Death-play and its simulation are also a crucial impetus for the persona of my poem, “The Hanged Man's Nour; A Notetaker's Needle.” I am particularly keen on figuratively describing psychiatric cells as “isolation-death-chambers,” wherein “the universe's heat-death” becomes palpable as a ‘lived’ sensory experience, a cold breathless burn. This suffering compounds upon itself, finds an immeasurable weight to tire and leaden the body and its muscles, as I re-narrate and give this deathly somatization a voice to the passing of my own symbolic death—proxied by the text's persona and his descent into an ever-deepening trance-world of psychosis. *Hydrogen cyanide, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, all flickering the barometer's needle; the rusted-out chamber closes at Birkenau, and I can still taste the dust, the spiral and the blue tang of it.* The resolve and trauma of

⁷ The “Thanatos drive” can be thought of as a death instinct or impulse within psychoanalytical thought—or, rather a cultural paradigm surrounding the expression of death and its symbolic content according to a localized community of practice. Term was first coined by Sabrina Spielrein (*Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being*, 1912)—to understand the spectrum of how the processes of life and death are entangled and co-constitutive.

this event re-enacted through the text can be a way of bearing pain, and through the simulation and remembrance of psychosis I was able to cathartically sublimate the persona, and myself, along a transformative pathway of resistance and creativity.

These key ideas of death-play as an imaginative process of self-transformation are again repeated in Paul Celan's poem, "Fugue of Death," that horrifically shifts our attention towards how psychotic bodies comprehend death *as* an embodied event. Here, we get a chilling vision of what it might mean to face the charged banality and moment of genocide, materially so and energized in the fleshy habitus of a scar—the scene deftly cuts this experience into us by eliciting a form of empathy from the persona. Celan delves into these inter-generational, post-Holocaust hauntings as fresh and vivid inscriptions. The rhythmic way each of the repetitions of the death become enacted, ingested, and internalized within the sensorium of the text creates a sense of ritual and impasse: "[b]lack milk of daybreak we drink you at night / we drink in the mornings at noon we drink you at nightfall" (Celan 1972: 33). The putrid black nourishes Celan's speaker and embitters both to the foreshadowed reality of their literal-to-figurative executions. Here we can witness how the body communicates suffering through these poetic inscriptions:

Celan's poetological writings suggest that the demand never to forget the past [the shared trauma of the Holocaust] has become a linguistic imperative, and that the idea that language is affected by real events has come to be associated [...] with an affirmation of the endless possibilities presented by a language that is constantly interacting with memories and experiences beyond itself. (Ryland 2010: 189)

Neither hope nor optimism, according to Ryland's reading of Celan, is possible for this suicide poet without confronting the past (and even future) destruction inherent in the trauma and abuses that induces one towards psychosis. Absolute forgetting is an impossibility, overturned by the body's memorialization of the past, even in the frenzied haze state of a fugue. The Self and the 'I' of either Celan or his speaker can be tranced to forget, even dissociative of the event—but the somatic and sensory record of that impression forms a vital mnemonic. The concrete metonymies of "your golden hair Margarete / your ashen hair Shulamith" (Celan 1972: 34) are what simultaneously torture and humanize Celan to never forget. The embedded text, the corpus of his poetic cannon, gives energy towards how this fiery plain of memory becomes bracketed in the poet's formation of identity—and with the pain and event of death etched *as such*, it enables Celan to heal (even self-overcome) and reconfigure these horrific traumas from their sensory immediacy. *To tame their embodiment on the ruin of the page, as ink spills in clearing these fangs to the scatological disarray of black re-inscriptions.* The sublimation of that trauma then reconfigures the memory and its operant co-ordinates in the constituency of

his personhood and will, livid and indignant in the incredible speed of transformations that speak of storms and the break of day.

Fields of Memory—The Site of Psychosis

Hush, the dullness of all that you are scraps the light away from the asphalt. The steam of the first flake evanescing off the road's barren heat. Glass-like water caught in the tackled flow of its mesmerizing reflections.

*

Darkness keen to itself, as the city's grand beams stop short of the man and his cigarette. Radial duress and quite as one. *You* tune out, hear only the shadow of yourself. The snow and the scene dissipate from your awareness.

*

Vertigo rises—dizzy on some impulse of flight. *Feet forward, feet running.* The lucid sweat of reality spilling, pushing aside, as this 'T' you constructed forgets itself to find its burrowed instinct. You gasp, breathless—no longer conscious of your surroundings.

*

Palpitations plummeting. Swept in... You walk into a room of your own devising. No way to strip its deadbolts. No release. None but to read its carvings. Skinned inscriptions.

*

Here is a sound before you, flush to your thoughts—the way it breaks into you. And this chill terrifies, the truth of it trembling black-ice heralds, with an electric resonance bright and untold. Spark-works, flashes of light's language, its wiry glow bellowing to the sky.

*

Stretching, stretching (ever so stretching along the capillaries boiled).

*

It, this openness sounded, becomes you. At first, a whisper. This wonder as thick as the wind scouring, turbulent—*discovery spiraling.* That falsity of your from and burden, crushed. These cadences clutched, syncing to your story. Forget-less as dusky eyelids.

*

The tips of your bony fingers, remembering the grain of the first tree you touched. Fell from to be exact. The crack, the coarseness of its brittle impact, all of it and you comes into play. The body knows. The body knows, where you have been. Will ever be.

There is no way to exhaustively catalogue the immensity of psychosis (as it feeds on the content, form, and possibility of one's identity and sensory unit)—but one thing that I can attest to is how it mercilessly pushes one to recognize the frames of memory that exist within each of us. These psychotically inclined moments, the deepness of one's trance-world, can highlight and charge ourselves, putting manifest pressure on all that we consider to be human—to have ever experienced in a flash recognition of who we are. Pizarnik, too, shares this idea in drinking from her own wellspring: “And thirst. My memory is of thirst—of me, below, in the depths, in the well—and that I drank from it, I remember” (2010: 67). Here, at this point in the text, we can begin to explore how the poet addresses the ontological crisis (of self-representation and psychic maturation) that arises from memory-work.

The agonizing dilemma for Pizarnik—and, perhaps, Celan too—results ironically from a lack of self-reflexivity and creativity applied to their own material conditions. What as practicing poets could they not envision—dare to even be? *The stupor and myth of self-importance, stung and bruised by a tunneling urgency, that arises from an incantation of 'I's' drunk with hemlock-ed arrogance.* A gracious and humbling attitude towards insight and imagination are themselves tools of healing; both the will and power to place oneself along an alternate pathway can be decisive to one's fate. We can observe a passion-starved, death-inspired Pizarnik in the throes of this struggle, the coal-bath of her mind brimming with water and lilacs:

All of a sudden, I'm filled with the fatal premonition of a black wind that makes it hard to breathe. I searched for some memory of happiness that could shield me [...] I dug through all my memories, and nothing, nothing beneath this early sun with its blackened fingers. [...] When did these misfortunes begin? Not that I want to know. All I want is silence, for myself and the selves I used to be [...] What am I supposed to know of what is to become of me, in the absence of rhyme or reason? (2010: 73).

Here the stakes remain visceral as Pizarnik searches for a vocabulary of the self, or rather a near-encyclopaedic dictionary to categorize her world⁸, through the wreckage of her thin memory. *Nothing adequate—depression working its melancholic dimming.* So, not long after, she wonders what it might be like to translate herself into words, to implement power through *poesis* to feel the vicissitudes of self-less (ghostly) empowerment (Pizarnik 2010: 79). This resonates with her own projects of ontology that become entangled and intermeshed within the limits of language, wherein words are “burnished in the black sun of silence” (Pizarnik 2010: 67).

⁸ A comparison can be made with Biehl's Catarina in *Vita: Life in the Zone of Social Abandonment* (2005) as the author uses ethnography and life history to show how this schizophrenic creates frameworks of meaning through lists and poetic dictionaries of her subjective engagement with the world.

Undoubtedly, Pizarnik's despair is one of self-address, clouded in trembling ambivalence and disappointment. Of not hearing herself loudly enough.

As I indicated by example in "The Hanged Man's Nour; A Note-taker's Needle," poetry and inscriptions are a form of memory-work. The ability to surface through psychosis is not a given—and what mortifies us the most are our personal historiographers, the bloodied grit of our most endearing records of failure that shine pestilence through the 'I' we have constructed. That horror is based on a notion of narrative—and as *we walk into that room* we call psychosis—it takes immense strength and personal magnitude (nothing short of a miracle) to properly helm that destruction and confrontation as a positive force within the ourselves (Burner 1991). To craft self and individuate by those bladed, rupturing adversities, to bear the pain we face—that is a skill worth learning, of passing on. I can all-too clearly, all-too astutely remember the sense of it all, pushing about as a tectonic plate upon Atlas' back. Encaged there (always there), I stand with the ominous way it pours into me and has never left:

Sleep gives to
 asphyxiations and aspirations:
 the delirium sets in;
 release nips at the livid tongue,
 as I catalogue the contents
 of the stars, one by one, on the walls.

My father's rusty chisel, lucid raindrops
 streaming down the glass, dark chocolate on Sundays,
 sounds of her voice mixed into my writing—

That bittersweet foliage, the spine of remembrance
 as fingernails piercing into concrete panels,
 dividends etched by sheer will as I recounted
 the bare thought of kissing her
 under cold porches.
 Every half-flutter of being,
 recollected in the colliding of lips.
 Those whispers.

All of them, deftly keen details...
 swarming inside me,
 digging into my experience.

These cartographies of consciousness—
 projected as living fire,

the Proustian wit
 of my collective history—
 everything, as it sings and cinders,
 leads me to the memory-ways of the soul.

There is fire and fury in what cannot be forgotten, and I wanted to look at this poetic fragment as it stands—to consider its re-writing. *The pen moves with its needle, the RRRRaaaa's, gliding one's insight towards the intrapsychic sanctuary—and the breath of gods smoky and wantful of meaning.* What can we expect from someone immersed in a fresh wounding across deep spans of time—across generations? What does that do to the mind? There are other endings to this poem. Some too agonizing to consider, and some too often written by suicide poets. What one is then left with—as has become apparent by looking at Pizarnik, Celan, and I—is memory, and these infrastructures are themselves energizing forces behind both identity and choice.

By giving a glimpse into these sensory experiences, I would argue that each case is as delicate and permissible as the varying constellations that accentuate one's being and animate one's self-in-psychosis relationality. We must consider 1) how the embodied and emplaced immanence of one's context assembles and 2) how this epistemological and poetic theme of sense-to-text transference becomes rendered in the literal and the inscription. Each poet mediates this process differently in their work and practice. While looking at my own autoethnographic case and sensory notetaking sessions during manic mood phases, I can provide a hypothesized and preliminary example of this bridgework in action when surveying of Celan and Pizarnik. In short, each suicidal poet is working from an equally imaginative and choratic space that threads the continuity of psychosis to poesis, from sense to text. Whether encoded internally or upon blank waves of a prescript's impression—*sinking, sinking the poet into the pallid oceans that smash upon the cartographies of the Self.* Each of these considerations is then a vital element to how one's psychotic breakdown can take shape and become remembered (memorialized). Such that, to view these experiences as endpoints, as brief silences, or as something discrete and outside of their larger context, is dangerous both ethically and academically. They have sonic reverberations, consequence. And, as the night can fall fast, we should be astute and boundless in mobilizing agency and becoming—of injecting compassion into that lifeblood to assuage the burden of self. Of taking responsibility. Of listening.

Celan screams to forget.

Reading Psychosis as Transformation

The horror comes—and at a cost we did not consider. Thinking about Pizarnik, I turn to what Judith Butler writes about, the toll of how power re-iteration is paradoxical and maddening:

Every effort to reduce itself [the subject's consciousness] to inaction or to nothing, to subordinate or mortify its own body, culminates inadvertently in the *production* of self-consciousness as a pleasure-seeking and self-aggrandizing agent. Every effort to overcome the body, pleasure, and agency proves to be nothing other the assertion of precisely those features of the subject. (1997: 53)

Here, we can begin to comprehend the cyclical way in which Pizarnik vacates herself and flees into her own *thoughts*—and, particularly, to experience that burrowing nightmare of how her suicide ideation ruminates and animates her poetic cannon (Butler 1997: 43). The embittering and chronic stress of that confinement, pushing the poet towards cognitive escape and further release, resulted in an overdose of Seconal at the age of 36 (Vila-Matas 2016). Celan, too, fared a similar but more violent (and intentional) fate; he plummeted off the Pont Mirabeau, a Parisian bridge, where his body was later found drown in the Seine river (Taylor 2001). These visceral conditions of suicidality meare these poetic texts with a psycho-affective residue, a hauntological imagination (Avery 2008: 8). The intent of this intuitive essay is not by any means to account for the causality of suicide—but, rather, to liberate and wrench forward a dialogue on these topics when considering the potential for how these poetic texts and their accompanying theories align one to a *transformative recognition* of their contextuality and situated-ness, to linger—to pose—and swell in the holistic sensorium and affective embodiment of these cases. And, even with my own personal suicidality (having narrowly escaped an attempt in 2015), I do not wish to reduce the complexity of these events to a single theoretical line. We can still, though, find connectivity in compassion and posit how that might have, or can, deviate one's life trajectory.

When challenging myself to internalize how one's affective engagement can be a source of power and dissent in naming psychic suffering, I have found Bracha Ettinger's work to be insightful for how she positions art as a transformative practice (Williams 1977; Institute of Art 2016; Ettinger 2011). Poetic texts themselves also do not speak of a single determinism—and in each poet, we can find textual evidence for how alternate projects of thought, resistances and hopes, become articulated (even if these musings failed to develop along their respective continuums or conclusions). For instance, Pizarnik (2010:83-87) herself has a complex notion of how words became interlaced in what she calls *the poetic body*, or the dream of death. The vibrant mortality of words—including constructs of self—reflect the twists and turns of absences, zones of non-being, that are inversely and

paradoxically beholden to death as both instinctive forces and sites of transformation:

Death is a word. [/] The word is a thing, death is a thing, a poetical body that draws breath at the site of my birth. (Pizarnik 2010: 85)

These transvaluations in Pizarnik's tongue place death not so much as a finality but as a *poesis* (a will to create) that shifts one from coolly absences to re-sleeved emergences by transmuting the traces of pain. Getting there, having a methodology to implement this dream (to find the healing factor within suffering), is the tricky part. But, as Ettinger (2006b: 96; 2017: par. 3) contends, our intuitive recognition of how bodies suffer, its material signification as imagery, creates a marking and a link of empathy in how one visualizes an imprint of pain—that itself engenders a phantasmic realization through the ongoing processes of art which translate those trace wounds into us. There is something hauntingly beautiful in this proposition, a last moonlit lilac.

The context of art is for Ettinger (2017: par. 8) a transgressive opening wherein one can consider the after-event (or the residual traces) of trauma as a unique, potential, and mediated space for new relations and ethical dimensions that give birth to the possibility of beauty reconceptualised and co-constituted by the memory of pain. And to experience one of these dynamisms rendered creates a new vitality, it challenges the power of violence (and of subjugation) to dehumanize by formulating one's affective and empathetic response (Ettinger 2006b, 2011). These psychotic bodies—that of Celan, Pizarnik, and myself—we have thus far familiarized ourselves with have then become the texts and the poetic utterings (the *matrixial borderspaces*⁹) ushering in our metramorphosis¹⁰ and linking of self-conceptions and '*I's*,' an encounter wherein one can dissolve, even forget that rigidity in empathizing with Otherness and finding trans-subjectivity¹¹ in taking on the sublimity of another's pain (Ettinger 2006a). Thus, art can be a shared

⁹ The term 'matrixial borderspaces' describes a womb-space of becomings and a psychic sphere absent of selves, wherein subjectivity and consciousness become intertwined with connectedness, co-existence, and compassion towards the other. For Ettinger, it "creates connections of 'co-emergence': 'I feel in you,' 'you think in me,' 'I know in you,' and so on, in which subjective existence is articulated through one another" (2017: par. 10).

¹⁰ See Carolyn Shread's (2007) article, *Metamorphosis or Metramorphosis? Towards a Feminist Ethics of Difference in Translation*.

¹¹ The term 'trans-subjectivity' is a critical concept for both Bracha L. Ettinger and matrixial theory. The word refers to the psychic, inter-personal, and liminal *event* (a *borderspace*) achieved between two individuals (one of which may be mediated, figured, or represented from a prior or fuller sense of their personhood or identity as an object of art), wherein these self-other relations become dissolved for each of the subjects through the sheer intensity and recognition of what it means to be human. That is, the weightiness of holding space for human suffering and pain as a conduit for collective empathy in these

space for inter-personal growth and advocacy, generative of the development of our spiritual capacities—wherein we lose ourselves in loss (*to wallow in its curative venom*) and see the value in how psychosis might hone our senses. We break from normative reality (and its dim constructs) to confront our humanity and untether the psyche from its intrapsychic restraints; the positioning of which locates us in continuity with the intensities and vibrations of “fragmented and assembled experiencing partial-subjects who are reattuning their affective frequencies” from that of pain to vulnerability to love (Ettinger 2006a: 2). We find commune and weather it.

As an accomplished artist, Bracha Ettinger expresses these difficult theoretical discourses and concepts effortlessly in her own body of creative work. *I even pause to reflect on my own manic journaling as I see the complexities of another soul etching its suffering forward—flush with a violet resonance and the cold joy of otherness*. The depth of her expressive tradition is shattering and haunting to behold as a practice: see figure 2. I can only be still and imagine what Ettinger’s sensorium is like, the taste and texture of her violet strokes, through a shared fuzzy sense of affectivity and her living artistic inscriptions. These examples, thus, provide a kernel of complex affectivities: the seed-bearing grains of how pain transmutes into the beautiful, and the uncanny depth of how art becomes a tool and a passageway, to “inspire in our heart’s mind feeling and knowledge” (Ettinger 2017: par. 8). These renderings allow us to find breath, pockets of the perseverant self, in the impossible devastation of psychosis.

One of the most striking instances in Pizarnik’s work *Extracting the Stone of Madness* is how these trace wounds are present in abundance—and she even intuitively Ettinger:

I, being present at my birth. And, I at my death. [/] And I would wander across all the deserts of this world, even after death, to search for you—you who were the place of love. (2010: 87).

This aspect of the text becomes the passage into Pizarnik’s borderspace—where we can, and are invited to lose ourselves in her subtle wit and longing for Eros. The unabashed vulnerability of the encounter, championed by her own voice, lets us seize her trembling spirit and find love for that same affectivity in ourselves.

liminal moments. This term translates into a kind of cathartic and emotional wit, namely an in-the-moment sociality and semi-ecstatic evocation that can bond subjects beyond simplistic divides of us-them relationality—and that of the *I* or any number of its ego-self identifications. This process works then as a gaze that triggers this emotive space through confronting one’s memory and history of pain for within, for which, and for whom subject relations therein can be redefined under the catalyst of a shared sense collective suffering and that subsequent and uneasy need to heal and be bound by that co-process of healing.



Fig. 1: These two notebook sketches are taken from Ettinger's 2013 Exhibition, "Memory Post," in Saint Petersburg. The second is in Hebrew, but the first notebook reads in English: "Since you died / death never left me / since you became mad madmen never left me / since my psychotic moment / psychosis never left me / since we loved / love never left / death never left my love."

Pizarnik's words may have not been able to alter fate and her life's trajectory—but in rendering ourselves fragile to these subjectivities a mental profundity for resilience is born (Ettinger 2017: par. 13). *I am there in that moment*. Her gifts and lessons my own. For others to have lived this artful and empathizing self-reflexivity and to do otherwise—to have seen Pizarnik's wounds as their own—may have been a saving grace in that case. And beyond that, as Celan marked in his poem, we have an ethical and emotional responsibility to do so: “[t]he world is gone, I have to have to carry you” (2004: 96). If anything, we must learn that we are all connected to this fragile system of ours regardless of one's 'T' or subject position: psychosis has never merely been about the transformation of the individual, but that of the group akin to its moral and ethical accords.

Pizarnik weeps in poetry.

Angels & Afterwards

There are many reflections that I could make here—and, as odd as it may seem to say, I am sincerely glad for having gone mad. To have pushed and pushed the sensory and spiritual capabilities of my being in entering trance-worlds, that ability and presence speaks to a greater human breadth of potentialities. *I am grateful for the way the blood-red lilacs and the harvest reeds split their electric rivers into me, through me, as painted tigers*. There is a place in my own fire-touched imaginings, a sanctuary of thought, for what it means to become psychotically adept with these poetic inscriptions and echoes of reality. By experiencing the traumatic in my life, I have gained a rarer insight, one that I can further herald in myself and others. That *blueschist* (metamorphic) suffering engenders a force of empathy not otherwise achieved. The gift of pain is inevitable. And, let us not so much celebrate its glorification, but rather bend to its fragility—to seethe in a sea of vulnerabilities. I feel as though these kintsugi cracks, brilliant vase-work imperfections, enable one to pour love into these borderspaces, a kind of love that energizes the self as well—becomes perpetually and equally re-charged to this infinite given-ness.

The best farewells are those of flight.

*

Skylarks Swallowing Stars

I wait. Abysses fold to amber-dawns,
that pitch of nothingness.
Sometimes I wish I were blind:
held softly by your voice.
Palmed by its undulations and rhythms —
crisp fires lit madly upon my mind.
The tactile sensation of you,
yes you, Fairweather-er, to guide me.
All made brilliant, crashed: warmth curled,
slackened desolate, silk-slips
in the bustled, bright fingerprints
of summer's lost and rain-kissed midnights.
Ethereally cool, you stand —
a rush of droplets: seas to blossom,
swept to their coral flocks,
spider-ed by bliss as I uncover
liquid outlines, soul-perched
reflections (hauntings) — that matter
could ever dare to discover itself.
You are the October red that dots my heart:
needled, scratched (as fevered oases
burning at the back of throats)
wicker semblances and wanted hopes.
How cruel those remembrances,
sweet darling pecks — caught dead,
broken by all that is light in you —
repainting, cutting prophetic visions,
darkness cowering to that bold endeavour
of yes.

*



Figure 2. These are pages from one of my notebooks. The poem, “Skylarks Swallowing Stars,” is in my own print and handwriting. Initial draft of this unpublished poem was first written in October 2017.

*

Let us move endlessly and part with these words—as I ask you but one simple favour: *close your eyes. And, for that moment, simply imagine who I am today. Afford yourself the same charity.*

*

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