

**I Write
Myself Inadequate**

by
Katie Pinkston

A creative project submitted to
Sonoma State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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in
English

Gillian Conoley, MFA, Chair

Dr. Anne Goldman

11/30/2017

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By Katie Pinkston

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DATE: 11/30/2017

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ABSTRACT

A blending of poetic modes sets Daughter in a sparse landscape searching for connection, and failing, as she tries to distinguish herself from expectations of her. The project seeks to explore the fragmentation of identity, the sometimes fraught tension between the said and the unsaid, and the power of language as self-making.

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Dedication

To me: Girl, I am so proud of you. Remember this feeling.

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Writing Daughter, Writing Myself

This book started as most of my poems do. I woke one day, and a line was in my head that I had to see on paper. “Daughterbot makes Daughter look bad.” Another version of Daughter, one without hereditary faults, with wires behind her eyes. “Mechanization of parental Wet Dream.” I didn’t know what it was, but after some fiddling with line breaks and crying as the words for the rest of that first poem came to be in an adrenaline rush, I knew it was something. At the very least, it was cathartic. I had long needed a way to talk about my complex and often problematic relationship with my sister without naming names and hurting feelings. In the beginning, it was clear: Daughter was the persona that my dreams invented for me, and Daughterbot was my sister, the favored, constructed, perfect-in-her-parents’-eyes child. Never having had the patience for fiction, let alone longer works, I thought the two poems that came that first day would be part of a *very* short series. Something that I would use once or twice, never let see the light of day, and then do away with. I was shocked when Gillian Conoley and the rest of my workshop wanted—no, demanded—more. By the time I transitioned from undergrad to graduate student at Sonoma State, I knew that the Daughterbot series would be part of my thesis project. However, I mostly imagined it as one section within a larger collection that would have no singular goal. I was also writing a lot about my grandfather, and I had several poems that were direct meditations on style. It took me much longer than anyone else to see the potential in the journey these characters would take.

One example I found along the way that helped me to understand how successful, varied and non-navel-gazing a sisters’ story could be was Andrea Rexilius’s *To Be Human is to be a Conversation*. I vividly recall the night a friend and I went to a reading

Rexilius was giving on campus and being spellbound by the similarities of ways in which our works explore the complex and difficult bonds of sisterhood. Her book tells the story of finding her long lost sister, of coming to know each other, and of becoming pseudo twins: “My birthday is January 23. In Hungary name/ days are celebrated in place of birthdays. The name day for Andrea is/ January 23. This is how my sister and I came to be twins” (3). This was the first work I had seen that explores in eighty-eight pages, in eighty-eight different ways, the significance of the bond between sisters in poetic form. Rexilius details how much work it is to feel both so close to and distant from another person who shares your genes. For me, she captures the paradox best in “Hungarian & English Gesture” when she writes:

That we knew each other:

That we were strangers.

That we shared a language.

That we did not share a language.

That we shared a body.

That we did not share a body. (32)

This characterizes the complexity of the relationship to a sibling, of sharing flesh but existing as separate beings who often have difficulty communicating with each other, and the hurt and loss of self that can result. For example, in my book’s penultimate poem I write:

Daughter begins
to wonder
when she will
be able to define her

self apart from
the bot.

Who is she
in three dimensions?
Firefunnyfriend.
If the chord
were cut,
would the world still
want the bot more?

Who could
care about her
in any way other
than relation to? (49)

Reading Rexilius's work, I discovered a poet who has a vastly different story with her sister than I do with mine and yet, who clearly understands and conveys the intensity of highs and lows and the strength of the bonds holding us together. Her book proved to me that there was potential for my work to be a text that speaks to others. My experience, my story, the evolution of the complexity of my relationship with my sister could mean something to someone other than myself. Rexilius's book pushed me to see the work I was doing as an exploration of some sort of universal essential truth in familial bonds.

At some point in my process, however, the well of Daughter/Daughterbot narrative poems dried. I thought that perhaps the series was done, and I would finally be able to move on to other things. As such, I switched back to writing in my usual "I" mode, but something had changed. These poems that I originally wrote separate from the series

seemed to belong with it; the voice was different from my previous work. In a Directed Writing meeting, Gillian and I wondered if it was Daughter writing and what that would add to the work. It was in that meeting that I first took the time to seriously consider that the series had moved beyond the confessional, and that Daughterbot was perhaps another version of Daughter herself.

It took seeing the whole book together in its current order and some research into the fragmentation of identity for me to embrace what others already had— that what I created on the page at some point surpassed my original intent for the work; this is perhaps not a story about sisters at all. At first, I shunned the notion that Daughterbot is a dissociative symptom. When it was suggested, I didn't see it. After further reading, I am now convinced that Daughter is experiencing depersonalization brought on by PTSD at the outset of the story. The world of the text is a traumatic place, after all. Father's "new/ pieces still jut" (23); Ghost Lady wanders in and out of the narrative naked and taking her hair off; the speaker details Daughter cutting "Away her own/ Fleshi-ness" deep enough to find her bones (9). These all indicate that something has happened to this family. No one seems well or whole. Depersonalization does not seem an unreasonable coping technique, and developing an alter ego to deal with traumatic events is not uncommon:

Everyone feels 'unreal' from time to time. It may happen after a traumatic event, while in new or foreign surroundings, or in times of severe stress. As a defense mechanism, depersonalization serves a purpose— to mentally distance an individual from horrific or overwhelming circumstances. But this mechanism can go awry and exhibit a darker side, which manifests itself as depersonalization disorder. (Simeon and Abugel 11)

Perhaps Daughter has, when we enter the narrative, gone outside of herself and is looking at what she has become, at first proud “She carries/ Little bot around/ her neck” (2) not seeing the dehumanizing effects of her invention until she realizes that her “eyes have/ turned green” (19) without her noticing. It is in this poem that Daughter realizes she needs to make a change and starts to look for a way to remove herself from the oppressive family structure.

In her essay “Laugh of the Medusa,” Hélène Cixous characterizes the oppressiveness of patriarchal social structures and the traumatizing effect on modern women: “They have made for women an antinarcissism! A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven’t got! They have constructed the infamous logic of antilove” (878). Daughter longs to be Daughterbot for her perfection, her lack of flaws, her “Alabaster and silk strands,/ sweeter disposition./ No foul mouth” (Pinkston 13). These are symptoms of what Cixous is describing just as much as they are of the family trauma clearly present in the narrative. “Camouflaged cellulite/ and ‘discrete’ tampon disposal,/ Daughter is at war/ with herself” (Pinkston 11) is also evidence of Daughter’s dealing with the expectations of an oppressive, dehumanizing environment. In order to heal, Daughter must shed the bonds of this oppressively dysfunctional family, disavow the anti-narcissism created for her, and find her voice to begin to “see wholes” and achieve the connection she so longs for with others and herself:

To write. An act which will not only "realize" the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal; it will tear her away from the

superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything, guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being "too hot"; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and for not having any; for nursing and for not nursing ...)-tear her away by means of this research, this job of analysis and illumination, this emancipation of the marvelous text of her self that she must urgently learn to speak. (Cixous 880)

Cixous's notions of anti-narcissism and of writing as a self-reclamation tool, help bring into focus that the project is Daughter acting as the speaker working toward accepting and practicing her wholeness. She longs to be the perfect daughter the bot is, but she resents having to strive for perfection. What she really wants, and what becomes revealed, is her search for understanding and acceptance. She wants someone to see her and to acknowledge that she doesn't need to be the bot. The speaker is eventually tired of the comparison. She, too, wants to see herself as herself. She is critical of herself ("writes herself inadequate") as she tries to distinguish herself from her taught-expectations. The book is Daughter's character arc, moving from longing to be the bot to longing to be and accepted as herself. The journey isn't over by the end of the story; however, the ending reveals a speaker affirming her choice to break away from her destructive patterns, toward wholeness and authority.

Before I realized Daughter's true journey, Gillian Conoley and Brantley Bryant read what was evolving and suggested that I seek out John Berryman's *The Dream Songs*. I was hesitant to purposely read something that seemed in any way similar to the premise of my own work. I did some research on what the book was and what critics had written

about it; I was scared to be too influenced by someone else. I didn't want my book to become a copy of *The Dream Songs* or for my concern over that to halt my productivity and prevent the book from taking shape. As such, I did not read for myself what they had been telling me until I sat to write this introduction. Now I can appreciate the similarities without worrying that my work is somehow not my own. *The Dream Songs* does read much like *I Write/Myself Inadequate* in a few ways, and as I prepare to go back and edit for publishing, I appreciate having a work to use both as a model and foil. Berryman's text reads much like a blend of the original intent of my own and what it has grown into: it is confession through dramatic monologue. The work feels much like the journaling I originally saw myself doing, but instead of focusing on the protagonist's relationship with others, the work is very much about Henry's loose grip on his mental health and sense of self.

Berryman, through his use of Henry to deal with his inner demons on paper, creates “a parallel world (the world of depression, or perhaps a mirror world, which would help account for the role of the mirror at the end of the poem in breaking the spell?)” (xxvii). In a similar vein, I created the house that my characters haunt, mirroring the family trauma that Daughter is trying to sift through and move past, even if the others aren't:

Gaga parodies
and emptied beer
bottles don't
transport ardor to
you,

no matter how
my voice carries

my hollow house. (31, 9-16)

It is not only Father who cannot leave the home (23), but Daughter and her most human and joyful emotions are trapped as well. While Henry and Daughter are both at war with themselves and dealing with a fractured sense of self, their musings do take shape differently.

My characteristic economy of language shows a restraint in Daughter that indicates not only a timidity in creating a voice, but a need for safety and control of narrative about herself. The short, tight lines are evidence of how practiced and carefully-constructed she must be in her expression. Similarly, Berryman's use of regular form of three, six-line stanzas per poem provides a sense of limitedness of perspective and focused scope as a vehicle to experiment with tone and diction as an indication of brokenness of self and sanity. It is within the confines of this strictly constructed form that Berryman demonstrates what Michael Hofman argues in his introduction to *The Dream Songs* is what makes the series so attractive to readers young and old decades later: Berryman's playing with multiplicity of voice: "Who knew English could encompass that flux; that whinny; those initially baffling, then canny and eventually unforgettable rearrangements of words; that irresistible flow of thoughts and non-thoughts and that degree of informed privateness" (xx). I hope, that in the multiplicity of modes that I have used in my work, I have created something comparable.

In Daughter's stumbling toward finding herself and her voice, she experiments with many poetic forms. The first I attempted to make sound authentic to this newly-fictionalized character was a letter: a direct address to the experimental boy. After deeming that a success, I wracked my brain for ideas on form experimentation. All roads led me to one place: back to my undergrad cohort for inspiration. My choral and slam-

poetry-heavy background was influenced by my high school teachers and community college professors; when I got to Sonoma State, poetry was a new world. These classes were full of vastly more academic, canon-enamored peers. I felt intimidated by the people surrounding me, who seemed so sure of who they were as writers, because they had already found affinities with artists who were more literary. I felt like a poet-by-accident. I didn't walk into my first upper-division undergrad workshop with an ardent passion for any particular poet. I did not want to be "the next" whomever, and so, I made it my mission to steer myself away from any such singular or taxing influence. I wanted to sound like me, not anybody else. In this naive shunning of "the greats," I benefitted significantly from the insight and reading of my undergraduate cohort without knowing who their influences were; as a result, so did Daughter.

Because I wanted Daughter's journey to finding her voice to sound like experimenting, for the first time, I needed to welcome inspiration from voices markedly not my own. I emulated Colin Partch who was the first to make me see how the use of space on a page can give physical, visual presence to the force of what is unsaid in the book. In theory, the use of white space still seemed pretentious to me; I didn't understand why the precision of the speaker's words were not the point. It was something that I didn't feel comfortable using, but Daughter might. Together, we learned to use the space between phrases and stanzas as a force. It was Amber von Nagel (née Nelson), whose passion for animals and lighthouses and the relationship individuals hold with collective consciousness, who taught me more ways to say without saying. Further, Amber proved to me that "local poetry" could be more than a didactic naming in a scene, and just as fascinating and challenging and rich as any other kind of poetry. She inspired Daughter's

dream world detailed in the first poem: “Daughter lives/ in a land of/ mossy hills, gauze and/ fey” (2). Ryan Lysaght’s work showed me new ways words can move on a page with his handwritten and scanned copies of spirals and finger-words. His work furthered my own objectivist tendency to see the poem as a living, breathing thing itself: it was with his in mind that I came to see my stanzas as bots themselves and placed those characterizing Daughter and Daughterbot’s perspectives on opposite sides of the page. It was absolutely with Daniel Conte’s prose poems in mind, which proved over and over that constructing sound is in syntax just as much as punctuation and line breaks, that I composed the two prose poems that appear in the book. These are moments of honesty where Daughter must shed her tight control over her language to convey her emotions rather than her thoughts. The façade is broken, and her longing for connection is laid bare: “I want to reach through the/ lawn and feel your fleshy palms like they’re still there. I want to go back to that last moment I saw you and hug you/ tighter, longer” (10). The musicality I found in Jennie Chapman and Tony Presti, Sean Fleming’s playing with the grotesque, Ben Grose’s focus on the fantastical in the New Testament, and Bryn Schut’s tinkering with sarcasm in the intimate helped to inspire Daughter’s journey toward finding and using her voice. Through both critique and inspiration, to those named and more, this book and my future work are forever indebted.

What I am most proud of in this book is how considering Daughter’s journey as a writer has enriched my own voice. In my pushing myself to reimagine the perspective of the “I”, to challenge myself to create character, I have achieved my goal of making my poetry more varied in its forms. Looking at the pages that follow, I am proud that the collection contains a high variety of formal invention. Through writing this book, I

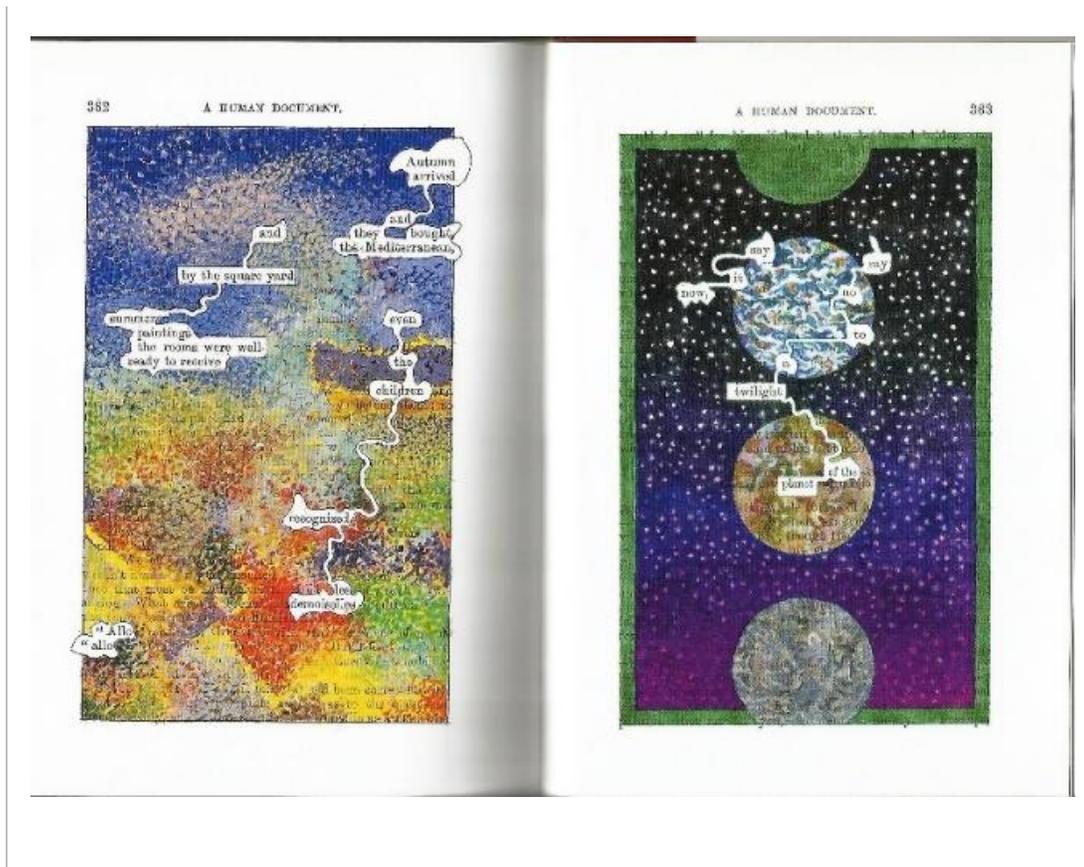
created for myself a practice of constantly stretching my own boundaries as a poet to do what is best for the work. It is by this challenging that I happened upon erasure and decided it was an effective technique for exploring Daughter's first attempts at making meaning for herself.

It has long been my assertion that poetry is as visual as it is auditory. I assume that this comes from my Modernist/ Imagist sensibilities heavily influenced by William Carlos Williams; therefore, erasure didn't seem like a huge leap or risk to me. Yes, it is about revealing what already lies in a text, but it is also significantly about creating visual layers and interest in a white-space-heavy body of work. These "scans" are another way to create tension between the said and the unsaid, and they are meant to appear in moments in the manuscript where words fail Daughter in her processing. I first came across erasure in a Google search for new modes for Daughter to try. It was featured in a list of pedagogical techniques for teaching poetry to high schoolers, and based on the variety of ways it was presented, I knew I had found what I was looking for. I felt like Marianne Moore collecting newspaper clippings. I channeled her penchant for making old things new and tried my hand at a few.

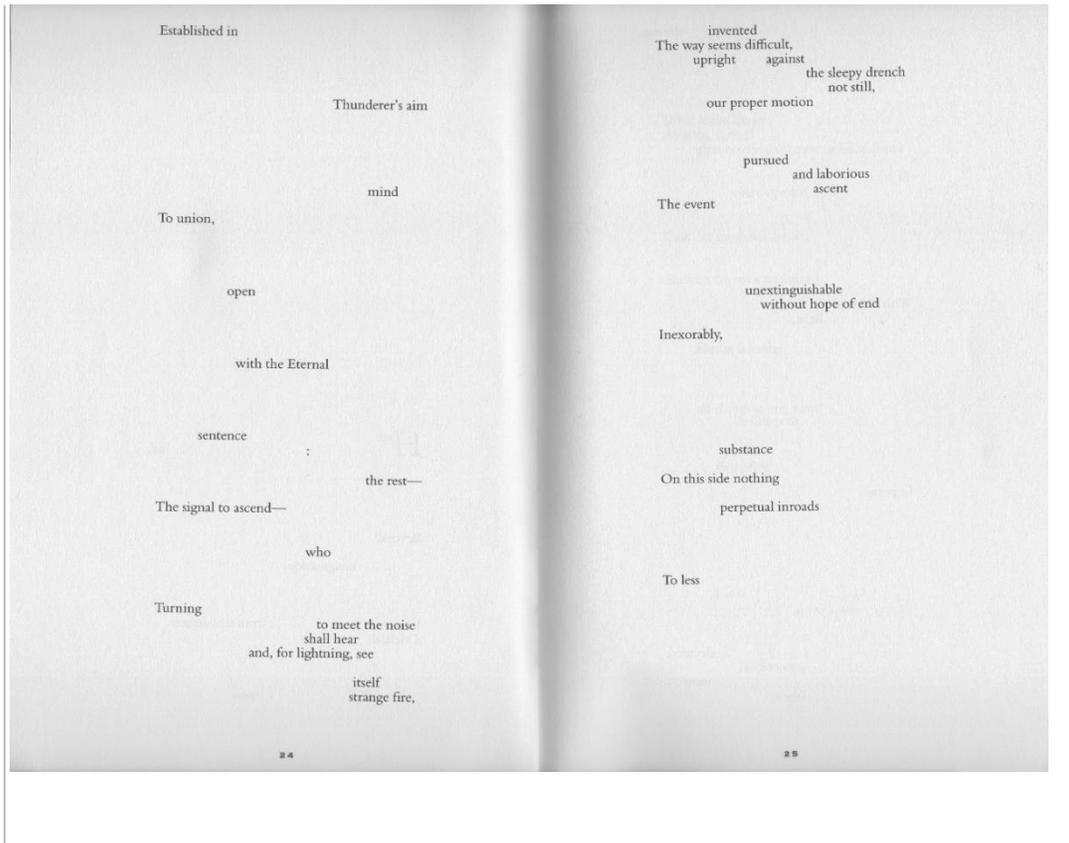
Tom Phillips's *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel* and Ronald Johnson's *Radios* are perfect examples of how different the technique can look. Phillips took the 1892 novel *A Human Document* by W.H. Mallock and turned every one of its 367 pages into individual art pieces. The book is alive with color and patterns. Phillips uses bubbling to create paths for the poems to move in multiple directions across the pages, allowing a variety of experiences for the reader in any given poem. Johnson goes in a different direction. Rather than adding or covering or carving through *Paradise Lost*, he redacts,

leaving only what is essential to the story and creating great swathes of white space for the reader to either leap or tumble through from word to word. Both are techniques I can see myself experimenting with in the future, but they are too polished, too pretty to work in this text.

from *A Humument*



from *Radi os*



I envisioned something different for Daughter. I imagined her creating these pages sitting in her room with books and Sharpies, dealing with the loneliness of being the only one in her broken family interested in capturing, savoring, analyzing life vs. their practical approach to just getting through it. If the erasure is meant to be Daughter's initial steps into the world of claiming her own voice, of learning to write, I wanted the harsh, violent darkness of the cover-up in these documents to reflect that pain. The first stage would be to mirror their concealment of trauma and dysfunction: it should look like uneven, disheveled blacking-out. In searching for works to use, I considered the emerging hybridity of the text and looked at this as an opportunity to incorporate novels I would want Daughter to read for kinship and healing.

The desolate landscape and desperate loneliness and the importance of language in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* were the perfect world to start. To me, Snowman's wandering the unfamiliar post-apocalyptic landscape feels much like Daughter's in her own house. Set in a world where the human population has been devoured by plague, Snowman sets out on a journey to piece together his past and find whether he is truly the last human on Earth. I see his journey much like Daughter's—a search for connection and history:

He feels the need to hear a human voice – a fully human voice, like his own. Sometimes he laughs like a hyena or roars like a lion – his idea of a hyena, his idea of a lion. He used to watch old DVDs of such creatures when he was a child: those animal-behavior programs featuring copulation and growling and innards, and mothers licking their young. Why had he found them so reassuring? (Atwood 10)

Like Daughter, being cut off from real human contact has stunted Snowman's language, memories, and emotional wherewithal. Their stories mirror each other in their focus on longing and rediscovering one's own voice.

I read Jeannette Walls's *The Glass Castle* for a creative non-fiction course I was taking with Noelle Oxenhandler and found the family depicted fascinating. Like the family in my book, the Walls are deeply dysfunctional: the mother is a free spirit who is uninterested in the ins and outs of domestic life, and the father is an alcoholic who vacillates between destructive drunk and charismatic family leader, inspiring his children with dreams of the glass castle that he will build for them someday, when the time comes. The family chaos leaves a young Jeanette to essentially raise herself and her siblings,

looking for any kind of structure or guidance in approaching a socially-acceptable version of adulthood. I saw Daughter relating to the loneliness and the artistic spirit of Walls as a child narrator trying to make sense of her parents: loving and wanting to please them while trying to find what it is to *be* without their help.

Finally, when a friend confronted me about the lack of mother figure in my book, I didn't know what to say. Nothing came naturally to me, but I did feel the need to fix it. For months I tried. Finally, in a bookstore that was closing, there it was. Karyl McBride's *Will I Ever Be Good Enough?: Healing the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers* provided enough pages with the word Daughter that I couldn't resist. Particularly pertinent was this book's reinforcing my theory of Daughter experiencing depersonalization as a result of a narcissistic parent (though I am still reluctant to say it is the mother, specifically, since she does not appear in the work) seeing the child as an extension of herself rather than an individual:

A narcissistic mother sees her daughter, more than her son, as a reflection and extension of herself rather than as a separate person with her own identity. She puts pressure on her daughter to act and react to the world and her surroundings in the exact manner that Mom would, rather than in a way that feels right for the daughter. (McBride 7)

I pictured Daughter reading this book, finding herself and having an “a-ha moment” that leads her to realize that “the parents/ she wished for/ dried up/ potpourri petals” aren't coming (Pinkston 8). It is as she is reading and creating her first erasure poem that she vows to change and is finally free to start her journey toward finding her voice and her self.

At the core of my writerly being, I am a minimalist. To me, expression has always been about what is not said just as much as what is. I am notorious for mocking my novel-writing friends, asking, because I can't understand "who the fuck has that much to say?" As such, when I started this project, I never thought it would turn into something as epic as *The Dream Songs* or cohesive as *To Be Human is to be a Conversation*. I had no such aspiration, but the past seven years of crafting of and reflection on this book have changed me. With this work, I've pushed myself beyond what I ever set out to or thought I could do, continually proving myself wrong. I have created myself not just as a minimalist, but as an appropriator and a chameleon. In short, I have learned the answer to my own question: it is apparently I who have that much to say.

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I Write
Myself Inadequate

Daughter lives
in a land of
mossy hills, gauze and
fey.

She carries
Little bot around
her neck, head
twisting every which
way, its little bot arms
clinking on either side
of the plangent heart.

Daughter wonders what
Bot wants.

Contemplates
the intellectualization
of feeling.

If she Desires
as much as Daughter.

[redacted] interviewing daughter [redacted]
 [redacted] shown [redacted] intelligent intuition,
 [redacted] "deafness."
 [redacted] search [redacted] childhood
 daughter chooses [redacted] red flags [redacted]
 [redacted] We do know. We just don't listen. [redacted] recovery
 [redacted] tune [redacted] innate [redacted] guidance.
 [redacted] on [redacted] unconscious level.
 [redacted] attracted to the familiar. [redacted]
 [redacted] mother, [redacted] likely find
 [redacted]
 [redacted] you are dependent, [redacted]
 [redacted] be dependent on you. [redacted]
 [redacted] take care of me. [redacted]
 [redacted] gorgeous, [redacted]
 paper [redacted]
 [redacted] I am
 going to take care of you [redacted]
 [redacted] me to nurture, [redacted]
 [redacted] You need my love [redacted]
 [redacted] direction— [redacted]
 [redacted]
 [redacted] an interdependency [redacted]
 [redacted] in the caretaking [redacted]
 [redacted] neither [redacted]
 [redacted]
 [redacted] definition of love. [redacted] adult daughter
 [redacted]
 [redacted] neediness. [redacted] unfulfilling
 [redacted] no one [redacted]
 [redacted] empty void [redacted]

ROMANTIC FALLOUT

[redacted] worthiness,
 [redacted] love that she lacks.
 [redacted] daughter will choose [redacted]
 [redacted] needs [redacted] unconsciously
 [redacted] vulnerable.
 [redacted]
 [redacted] recovery, [redacted] touch [redacted]
 own [redacted] partner [redacted]
 [redacted] realm [redacted]
 [redacted]
 [redacted] blame game, [redacted]
 [redacted] familiar, [redacted]
 [redacted] narcissistic trap [redacted]
 [redacted] idealized [redacted] villain,
 [redacted] abandon [redacted] he abandons
 you. [redacted]
 [redacted]
 [redacted]
 [redacted] deserve no better. [redacted]
 [redacted]
 [redacted] trigger [redacted]
 [redacted]
 [redacted]
 Overachievers [redacted] taken
 care of. [redacted] attracted [redacted] "what I can do for you" [redacted]
 [redacted] daughter lets her well-learned [redacted] Mom [redacted]
 [redacted] partners
 [redacted] feels [redacted]
 [redacted] safe situation. [redacted]
 [redacted] she hopes [redacted] he
 [redacted] Of course, [redacted] works,

Maybe it was that
Daughter wanted a
mirror to look into.
A twin heart

expected fire
flesh and flaw. Found
secretive sputtering.

Daughter's nurturing had
turned the bot
rogue.
Closed
Off.

Bot imitates life.
Daughter trails behind.

Ghost Lady stalks
the house naked
Maglite in hand.

I never see it
in person—
hear tales over
phone lines

that don't
exist, like her.

Corporeal specter
swears at everyone

She loves
dogs, especially
little ones.
She never forgets
that.

She's fine.

Just saying it.

When rot sets in,
where is the soul?

Does Death bring
new knowledge to those
gone as well?

Do they
suddenly see
wholes?
What they could not
before?

Or are they
frozen? Perpetually viewing
the world as they did.

Would we understand
each other
finally
if we met now?

Co-conspirators in
making Daughter
feel shitty about
herself, they guffaw
doubled-over
in her

Imagination,
the parents
she wished for
dried up
potpourri petals.

Daughter longed for
The bot-ness of her
Sister.

To cut
Away her own
Fleshi-ness.

To match.
The hacking
too painful.

All she
found was
bone.

I think I always still just need you to be proud of me like I am of you. I want to be Perfect, but your Irish stoicism doesn't get me very far. It's strange, knowing you aren't here while I sit atop your boxed bones. I want to reach through the lawn and feel your fleshy palms like they're still there. I want to go back to that last moment I saw you and hug you tighter, longer—I knew somehow that was it. I thought you loved everyone else more; why am I the only one who can ever find you here? I wonder if it is you who causes my self-doubt, if you help me accept reassurance, or if you are that involved at all. Something tells me that you have more important things going on. Do you spend all of your time watching her? I want what you have. My conversations with you make me concerned for my mental health. Should I care this much—be obsessed with what you think? Does it drive anyone else as much as it does me? We aren't a talking family—I wouldn't know. I think of you when I eat strawberries, when I smell mint, whenever there is salad next to pasta, every day staring at my own pink face, when I am horrid or amaze myself. Part of me still wants to rub it in your face, but I want a hug, a handshake, to cry and have you see me. She's better at saying she loves me. Is that you too?

Camouflaged cellulite
and “discrete” tampon disposal,
Daughter is at war
with herself

always hiding
bodies,
banishing them
from hers.

Where do Jealousy and
Unlived Life
overlap?

How grave
can Envy haunt,
harass?

Daughterbot
 makes Daughter look bad.
 Alabaster and silk strands,
 sweeter disposition.

No foul mouth.
 Daughter without
 hereditary faults.

Mechanization of
 parental
 Wet Dream.

Daughterbot
 is Daughter 2.0
 Programmed, worked for—
 earned after first
 experiment.

Daughter too,
 loved Daughterbot
 at first.
 Before she noticed
 the wires behind
 Sisterbot's eyes.

I deardreamed
you last night.
I wish I could
remember
more,

but your teal collar,
Old Spice and
buttery house shoes.
We like faded edges,

sweet haze around
the house next door

but you told
me it is
O k a y.

Salt warmth says
that is all that matters.

His story bleeds
into mine.
In his mind
though he
never shared.

With him
gone, peppermint
transports me to
card games, spinning chairs
and grace.

Is he
decay in
a box underground,
looking down
to know me,
or the memories
left over forcing
me to learn myself?

Ailing shell
transient insides
eat
away her past
life, re-write
every day.

Memory,
phantom limb pains
everyone but her.

Daughter feels no
pity for
Ghost Lady,
and guilt for
her lack of
guilt
over that.

The aged totter
like toddlers
shrunken people
small in reverse

shuffling,
rears out,
pillow shoes
short hair

squeak along
waxed white floors
competing
din of slacken
heartbeats.

Waiting Room

This place makes
Daughter
a child.

Pane-magnified heat
on her ears
 while Bot reads
she waits

for parents to appear.

Daughter doesn't
know what everyone
else sees
in Daughterbot
anymore.

She is cold
calculating,
and has no problem
uttering
Cliché.

Daughter's eyes have
turned green.
How long ago

Did she stop noticing?

Daughterbot has found
a mate

But Daughter can't
bring seams
together.

She wonders why,

When the
machine-girl
makes it look
so easy

she can't.

Sun and the rain on her at once
the wind
tick tocks the
drops and
leaves

dance
in her

sight
Daughter in-
-hales

She clicks
away
the screams

Recalibrated— Refurbished

Father wanders
aisles and halls
imitating search.
It's important
to pretend

for now
that he cares.

While his new
pieces still jut.

Until he acclimates—

is ready
to leave family
behind who wait
to see if
he will
figure out how.

She ties her
bows with purpose,
wondering
at her reflection—
who is this
lipstick warrior
suddenly aware

of her own softness
all glow
and gardenia

She is Love-
solid
and pink pallete.

cheap kids were plentiful,
 two of them first
 eight never
 name
 a name.
 real
 they'd always struck digital clones
 three-dimensional from the start.
 exquisite,
 garland of flowers frequent
 props on her knees,
 male life-sized
 shipwrecked
 forced agonizing trio of
 soulless
 tattoos
 and scars: spotted
 home,

The act involved whipped cream and a lot of licking

and giggles.
 drill. look like that,
 stopped
 come
 three layers of contradictory
 believe *I want to, I want to not, I want to.*

I see you,
I know you
 freeze,
 small archive

leave a footprint
 manage to trace
 one moment,
 burned by this look - eaten into
 She'd been so contemptuous of him.

stronger
 they'd been doing wrong. Before,
 he felt culpable.
 gills: teleportation to wherever
 He'd have begged to go

He could barely get the word out.

picture looking,
 saved it and saved it.
 at first.
 girls have eyes,
 "Very many."

Was that a lie?

Daughter sometimes

wonders how

Sisterbot feels.

Is it sprockets

firing?

Does it

hurt,

love?

Is the epidermis

thin as the

paper she is

pinned on?

Is it so easily

colored and torn?

The last time Daughter loved the Bot,
 she was on a cloud
 staring down.

Bot was in bliss.
 Both had softened,
 finally met in the middle,
 in a livingroom full
 pagesairlightsound.

Daughter knew
 Bot was beautiful
 and remembered who
 she used to be
 before they faced each other

and Sisterbot came out on top.

The cloud told Daughter
 to protect her Bot:
 she deserves haven too.
 Potential friends.

From where did
 jealousy stem?
 Daughter forgot in the cloud
 that finally wrapped her.

Daughter remakes
“I love you”s in
the shapes and colors of his eyes

He is
in pages

in her,
the real
imaginary boy

trapped in
himself as she
is, more

beautiful,
lashes behind
panes

She can't get
to him,
her twin in
every
way, far

off and alone.

This is love. Not like Daughter would know.

This is love the bot liked to remind her.

This is love sprawl on opposite couches, talk through dawn.

Could a boy stop Daughter's brain... *Love?*

She called Bot for help and forgot how to listen. Shut down like the machine

she invents, *This is love.*

Voice

~

alone, out loud. burning scrapbook in his head.
 feels the need to like his own. idea
 growling
 innards, and mothers licking reassuring
 he grunts or howls the dusk up and down
Shit, shit, shit, afterwards.
 sheet
 falls bug-bitten tufts of hair, thickening
 Naked
 crucial

oblivion drink,
 brooding too
 to good
 ribs: wasting
 woman's voice
 isn't
 very talkative.
 "Say anything," he implores her.
 comes the whisper, *Honey, just lie back.* Revision
 expert. He hates these echoes.
 Saints used to hear them,
 licking their lips, Mermaids rise from their
 singing a sharks.
 heads of women talons of eagles
 to
 end.
 some girl knew, walking
 through trees, happy to see
 air. welcome company.
 so empty.

4

s

Convinced you could hear
my words if I sang them,
I study radio
edit pleas and

beat away
bass pounding
in my stomach.

Kitchen dance
parties, Gaga parodies
and emptied beer
bottles don't
transport ardor to
you,

no matter how
my voice carries
my hollow house.

I throw my
letters,
abc
in a flurry
at your face.
In a love—
filled assault

To remind you
I am here.
You have forgotten.

In a world of
enjambment,
end stops
hold double
meaning.

Corners face

Cobalt and

Indigo polarize

We are a

Standoff,

wordweapons drawn,

~~too lazy~~

too stubborn

to use them,

reinforcing dysfunction.

My heart is cold,

by your calculation.

If you could listen,
you'd feel differently.

Ghost Lady hangs

her hair near

her new bed

and waits

under

clean sheets and

drawn brows

for her father's

voice,

hears only

her sons'

NEIGHBORS

clan of Gypsies
nailed over the porch
stealing our stuff, pogo
stick bouncing
head of
chicken
ham bone
crucifix at an exorcism,
collapse with the lot of them
would open up and swallow
the front yard.
neighborhood
wheedling voices
candy and loose change
about hurting their feelings
wondering
Mom and Dad
let the air circulate.
roused
harmless drunks.

bogeymen, kept
dreaming that intruders
awakened
my private parts.
I slept in the same bed,
game
sunken
recently.
"Pervert!"
hatchet bolted
door. Dad was
was dead
got
lit by
the corner.
with his hatchet,
slapping each other's hands
Demon Hunting
Dad
owlife sonofabitch.
close the doors and windows when we went to sleep.
fresh air,
refuse to
open.
every now and then,
machete
streets of the creeps
narrow-minded sticks-in-the-mud

When did Daughter
become
the rigidity she
writes?

Does the
Bot appropriate

Her ticker,
or her
time?

We wonder
who squeezes
who.

In our garage
of skunk and sweat
Camel ashes in
a white coffee
mug

giggling drowns
swashing of
the washing machine
we stop breath
in time.

Cloud ascends
into rafters,
out the roof.

Paranoia with every
passing car, she has a name.

This is when I know you.
Our faces wet
bodies paralyzed in Euphoria.

We are trapped in joy.

And then
I woke up,
feeling my sweatshirted
arms
from across the room,

Buds still in my
Dry mouth.
Thought of you,
even reached
while I spun.

Daughter and boy frenzied
syllables can't
quite couple,

Stuttering

Staccato

Halting

though they
plead

with each other.

I want to and don't know how to be so consumed that I don't know where our boundaries are to be one body to melt to squeeze until I don't remember and can't forget how to breathe I think I'd like for us to be like those celebrities who merge their names but maybe not our names just our arms and ears and torsos till our top halves is our top half with your arms crossed against my back like home and I wish I could be yours I want to feel your legs between my legs and know your face just *then* and I want to know if you see and smell me like I hope you do I want to grab hold of your whole topic when I think about my felt sense it is in my face you are a sinus headache and drooping eyelids and tingling ear tips you are my dry tongue and sleepy feet sometimes this is why I think I can love you the girl next to me is writing about pie I want to stay in my cave with you and talk nonsense all night and hold your hands and play with your fingers see how strong they are feel their own kind of meatiness sorry that is a disgusting word I gross myself out I really don't know how you tolerate me I am supposed to be thinking of an image right now but all I can see is your mouth

B,

You are mirror—safe, I know now. More me than I know how to be. Muse aspiring to less. Soft blurring lovemirth. Eyelids, nose bridges for my fingertips. My tongue cries too, answer.

Promise,

D

Slap me
later.

I deserve
it.

For saying
not

the phrase
I ought.

Ghost Lady's
ghosttown has
emptied.

It pieced;
it drifts.
Scavenger children
reap what she sowed
for she
cannot

from her
new home,
she remembers
permanence.

And I still smell
you everywhere
I go.

Roommate's
tanning lotion,
A stranger's cologne

Olfactory assault
in a hall.

When Daughter started

to outrun the bot:

grow, stretch,

chase change

where the bot could not

They: put guards on

her, lock her

down

stunted, chained

to her sister,

never free.

They wonder why

she resents

them why she stays

in the walls they built

for her.

Why she thinks, not speak.

If she feels.

She used herself,

taught the bot

rather than claiming

her own.

Silence rots
the inside
out.
Puffs bulbous,
writhing
rips.

“Good girl”
droning chant.
Approval radiates
from empty eye sockets.
So long as sound
doesn't carry.

Pressure on both sides
stretches,
constricts.
Vacuum sealed
sentiments
façade.

Daughter is a jealous girl
If you hadn't noticed.

She waits for dreams
to arrive as they
were delivered to
others

In perfectly
sealed envelopes
embossed with
reminders and visits
from dead relatives.

Why do they come
to the bot?
Who will remember the girl
after they leave?

Words make
more than
their speakers.

Convinced of
Linguistic
Hegemony,

I write
myself inadequate.

Daughter begins
to wonder
when she will
be able to define her
self apart from
the bot.

Who is she
in three dimensions?
Firefunnyfriend.
If the chord
were cut,
would the world still
want the bot more?

Who could
care about her
in any way other
than relation to?

And they lie into the inky
nothingness that is friendship
tied up and tired
fingers grazing prints
of each other

Smooth-skinned worlds
in lacking languishing words not said
Heard by all but themselves

Dive into the wreck
it is
Since when are you a poet?

Before sandpipers or
iambs
Before logic
and oceans were plural
Before stars

I breathed words
And magic
And light

And so did you.

We are where it started