

[excerpts from:]

# ***ROSE BODY fell***



**april joseph**

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Holy Departure Collective

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## For River and Gram

Infinite thanks and love to my dear friends and family: Gram, Mom, Dad, Stef, Renee, George & Bello, Bel, David, Forest, Giggles, Mony, Ross, Sarah, Torie, Vulcanites, Naropa and all the friends/mentors along the way

## PREFACE

11 February 2013 (Losar)

Dear Demons,

What does a healed sentence look like? Post trauma. Before my Gram passed away from Alzheimer's, she always said, "I love you, don't you ever forget." As I circulate around the memory of death and dying and mourning and grief, I write grief as monster: human. I begin to open up to the "demons"—as a practitioner of somatic meditation and *Feeding Your Demons* and breathe into my "inner territory,"<sup>1</sup> I begin to realize we are all traumatized. Reggie Ray, during a dharma talk on the teachings of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, discussed how Trungpa developed safe breathing exercises to open up our "inner territory" to "put us

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<sup>1</sup> Reginald A. Ray, Ph.D. mentioned this term during a dharma talk on 4 February 2013. "Inner territory": Buddha nature, our fundamental self or natural state.

in touch with trauma, to realize that we are traumatized.” Similarly, Lama Tsultrim’s *Feeding Your Demons* (2008) teaches a practice which encourages us to embrace our inner demons and call on them for wisdom and witness any transformation, revelations, and discover the inner allies that remind us we are alone and yet never alone. “Demons are our obsessions and fears, chronic illnesses, or common problems like depression, anxiety, and addiction” (Allione 3). So then, are sentences, words which reflect on the self: obsessions and fear: traumatized?

I consider the page the mind, memory, history, a storyteller finds a way to heal trauma through purging violence on the page. Since we forget—our stories, memories have gaps—we forget what happened exactly, our breathing also experiences a gap—between the inhale and the

exhale which represents our natural state of being. During Reggie Ray's teaching of Somatic Meditation<sup>2</sup>: Ray leads the *Vajrayana* practice with attention to the three bodies of the Buddha. The class began with the *Dharmakaya*: infinite space of mind, our fundamental self. The actual experience of the body has no boundaries. The *Dharmakaya* is the gateway to an awareness of infinite space. "If you see something and you don't love it, then you are not seeing it completely outside of ego" (Ray).

How does a healed sentence come to be healed? Is it critical of itself, the experience, searching for metaphors and markers, and growth? Is it more elusive now that it has healed and how does it integrate the trauma and the lessons learned from the trauma—to never-  
everland—how to integrate the trauma into the

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<sup>2</sup> Somatic Meditation course taught at Naropa University by Reggie Ray from 28 January through 1 April 2013.

imaginary—is the healed sentence an imaginary space, then? What does the healed sentence sound like?

**Notes on the traumatized sentence:** “Offer a line that could cry”—Akilah Oliver

This work takes up Akilah Oliver’s investigation of “flesh memory”—the line/sentence as a way to express or transmit inherited trauma onto the page, purge violence and consider the sentence as the space for catharsis—healing through catharsis as the trauma is expressed through language and sound which moves through the body. As loss is a form of trauma: we mourn to process grief and why we die and how to let the memories die with the dead, instead of living with “a death that does not die” (Bhanu Kapil).

“...don’t you ever forget,”

april joseph



[excerpts from *Rose Body Fell*, an ululation that traces Mestiza Roots and Alzheimer's.]

“The most violent thing: to feel silent.”

–Kate Zambreno

## Introduction: Can You Spare Some Change?

(At-risk High School, Las Vegas, NV)

Juan stands up from his computer to meet Jonathan at the water cooler—they exchange looks, simultaneously drink water from white paper cones and then together, walk over to my desk. I'm surrounded by young men who one might call my brothers based on the color of our skin. We match. They ask, "Hey Ms., are you Mexican?" When I give them the rundown of my roots, they continue to unravel skin—even though they already know.

"No, I didn't grow up speaking..." I only listened to the way my Gram cursed or sang softly to the breeze. My ears picked up the "accento," pero las palabras... fall away.

a foreign body

the colonized tongue

questions irregularity

there must be rules!

*what do you want to learn that for child?*

a colonized tongue:  
without historical accounts of grief

i begin speaking:

keep your tongue safe

present in the past

i sit with memory:

Gram

turning her mind away from rules

present in the past

*can you teach me how...*

*you don't need to know how...*

**[erasure has begun:  
and those who fail to assimilate completely]**

speak only at home

where's your home?

¿como se dice: help me?

Speak

*no hablas Español*

*pero:*

there are some things the mother tongue passes  
down

*pobrecita:* they  
severed her  
tongue

she watched as they served  
and devoured her

with a kisskiss

There is still and always a resistance to say *yes*—  
I'm Mexican. Is there ever a straight answer after  
centuries of mixing?

I am my Gram's granddaughter: una mestiza. I am  
my father's daughter: demons run deep. i have  
begun excavating the remains without locating the  
graves.

i look the schizophrenic, angry, hungry,  
youngmothers-fathers, parent less,  
homesick

broken english

16, 17, 18, 19, 20 year old humans in the  
eye.

and then. without an i... there's only a sack of  
water, bones, blood... an orange scarf in desert  
February sun.

1<sup>st</sup> **Strain:** What does a healed sentence look like?  
Post trauma.

[accompanied by clarinet]

## HOW TO TEAR OUT A HOOK

Speak to me

When will the words melt off the page? When will  
the text lift up and re-arrange itself to activate  
hope?

heartbeats to the sound of tidal waves

your present

my past

the ringing at railroad crossings

red flash

motion sickness

graffiti rushing by

move between

developing I

this ancient stone rose from prehistoric mountains  
there is no light in the thick of a jungle

the jungle is a womb  
so many hands reach to pull me to light

*please take me to the underground*

the arc sinks back

crosses

trapped

me



## **2<sup>nd</sup> Strain: After redefining man as human**

we write lists of wants&needs after essential reminders

Lost Vegas angels sing discordant notes of neon decay

what is said here, stays here

almost all the time

we read “I Have a Dream”—naturally, I asked for dreams...only one shared...

Johnny’s dream to make it out of ghetto, gang bang, turned up. and help his family survive.

read the fine print:

what other rules shall we [br]ake

Roberto, a deaf ELL student, tells me his hearing aid battery is dead. [I ask students who speak Español for help—por favor: translate for me. I tell them I only know poquito.] Juan signs the correct answers to him. He makes the letter C with his hand.

when it comes to names

“address the teacher by Ms. something”

I miss something about you  
the way you  
took my silences for meals  
swallowing each sigh  
after longinhale  
sweet honey drops salt  
tonguetip rosebuds   clench

flowers, tufts of grass  
Home Home Om

We start class with a poem. I read to them: Jack  
Kerouac's *San Francisco Blues*  
"I'm goin on ho-o-om."

*I tie a blue bandana over my eyes, pour holy  
water over the plaque  
dark spots cut the synapse  
create a pattern...*  
*Where'd you come from? San Francisco.*  
*Where'd you come from? Los Angeles.*  
*Where'd you come from? Zacatecas.*

*I sweep the dead leaves away from names*

we placed her here inbetween two hearts

clench

these words are strictly

jaw clenched

grind

tooth in skull

memory speaks fondly of growing up over the dead

spreading ash

speaking in tongues

visiting ghosts

before three years

after three years

**Trio: What does the healed sentence sound  
like?**

we  
can see  
past and present  
through this light

we talk with  
shadow guides who walk right beside us  
speaking to the sound of our strife

these long strides so wide  
we run into

darkness

move from dangers  
miss our deaths  
two breaths two sighs at a time

never leave me  
too late  
i'll be close behind  
embrace with a kiss goodbye

and I  
know that this could'  
be our last goodbye'

and I know that this could' be our last goodtry  
*p<mf espr.*

and all the stars so bright' full moon dreams  
tonight' and I know that this could'

be our last goodbye' and I know that this could' be  
our last goodride'

and I know' and I know' I know

we can see

it's worth living  
this dry spell we spin in imbalance  
and lie in the dust

## Break Strain: a composition of failure

[accompanied by cello]

*there is no time signature. only wavelengths a labored  
breath.*

*the space between lines: inbetween we rest. we remember:  
there is no: "there are four beats in a measure and a  
quarter note gets one beat"-ing over head.*

*we dwell inbetween keys and lip smack. we rest  
inbetween internal blush bruise. we articulate.*

a pendulum swing: planted roots rise and fall with  
the sound. a calling.

*f<sfz*

magpie sings: a loop.

you are not a failure. you are a failure. you are both.  
you are neither. you are not a failure. you are. you  
are not. you are. you are not.

*Solo*

this living in clockwork. the sky bleeds orange. sun  
burns whole the lady of the mountain dry.

*poco dim*

we embrace. we brace. we embrace. we brace. we  
embrace. we brace. we embrace. we brace.

*mf cresc.*

being: the ascent up a mountain. the cold shock  
| |: [a lack of] support to lift you into keyholes  
along a backbone. rare: | |

the mirror cracked at the bottom. roots shatter. the  
pendulum repeats. a loop.

*tr~~~~~*

you are loved. you are loved. you are love. you are  
love. you love. you love. love. love. you. you.  
loveyou.

on birthdays—deathdays: two guides enter, hold  
up a green orb: heart : speak. up.

the shameful tongue: with a twisted root. make up  
mask holds many faces, take hold. it bleeds into our  
bones.

*allargando a tempo*

sever the knot: to speak: to let go: lovers who have  
forgotten lovespells: forever. forgotten lovespells:  
forever. forgotten lovespells: forever.

*tr~~~~~*

witness me: fail. witness me: (not)fail. witness me  
fail. witness me (not)fail. witness me fail. witness.  
witness.

**Stinger:            ancestral stone**

seed this

pulse

the train calls us

lords—

*oulsouls ouls*

never well i

never

ever

can not

lords—

*oulsouls ouls*

scene m

be out

to

seed

waits

bleeds

sacred

pray

lords—

*oulsouls ouls*

hold the sound

at the top

breathe into

*ouls ouls ouls*

and then.

lord,

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“gently she tucks her hand under my chin, she says,  
don’t be afraid, your demons are your friends”

—akilah oliver