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Oracular

Helen Zisimatos

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

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ABSTRACT

Oracular

Helen Zisimatos

This thesis explores the difficulties and fragilities of relationships between, in this case, men and women. It reflects on larger issues of alienation, identity, subjectivity, while at the same time referencing possibilities of life beyond death. It is structured by interchanging poem and prose sections, the latter in footnotes. The identities of the main characters, Angela and Dahl, are woven in the poem sections, and are seen to be unstable. Self-sacrifice, madness and blindness, with respect to issues of love, are classic references throughout.

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Love of beauty is the fourth and highest
type of divine madness. When he that
loves beauty is touched by such madness
he is called a lover.

(Plato, *Phaedrus*)

But no one can deceive a lover.

(Virgil, *The Aeneid*)

EXCAVATION I

- I.
running into you makes me understand everything.
understanding everything makes me run into you. arrows in the dark.
missing pieces still connected.
you and you and you. everything.

2.

when i turned new. my hands bleached, old stains crept under my eyelids
certain of white turning into every cell.
one place to the next, you loved me.

recipe for madness, this love, uncertain, confirmed.
the enemy, exposed. laughter in incomprehensible bursts. you knew
how close i came. the edge, the fine line, certain.

when you understood the left side of my body, you looked for the right.
right into the exuviae of my frame, left me, windowless.

3.
directions not easy in the space of words, jangle, eclipsed.
you love and you love, hyphenate – shadow
of ellipse, my body formed around memory, your touch.
you decide you are half-human. read
not more than you know, nothing centred, all dark
and darker still. i hate your energy
this time i lose track of who you are, how you look at me
as if you loved me.
for the first time i realize you love someone else, those pictures dense
cloud that fogs my light.

SPENDING FIVE YEARS & NOTHING

the animal that roams and tears skin into parts, piece here, piece there
lions of Oz, the mix of young and old, how old is devalued
like faded cloth. wipe the eyes, never new.

but you insist, we are of one loin, cloth tied into a rope, we hang
and though you love her, you never say it
i ask you, *would you leave if she came back,*
news, you are ten years older, not
that you needed me.

listening to voice, stream projectile comes from the gut,
presence of body, i tease your bones, frame of your perfect jaw
curls and amorphous eyes.

you tell me everything. you love me and you love me and you love me.

ENDINGS

a part of me, you know
when i am sad and you say nothing
when we feel for the end of day
grey and shaky as it is
know about this emptiness

how hollow our sentient lives
mirrors, spill this silver
edge, knife its way through
fail to hide everything

you were a scavenger and wanted no one
selfless, you insist that you were selfless.

love and love and love. chorus.

fingers point to me, turn around and look into my eyes
19 and the mirror, you reflect
leaving you this morning, difficult.

the first time never means anything, you say
the first time hurts.¹

1

RUNNING INTO YOU MAKES ME UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING. part one:

They met one day outside the elevator, going down. Her name was Angela, his name was Dahl. He found her number on the stairs, where she'd left it. He thought it could work.

Dahl lived in a small apartment with a large mattress on the ground. Dust balls collected around it, the window was partly covered by a huge flag of the USA. In the small kitchen, he had a cappuccino maker and a couple of blemished pots. His life revolved around business books and accounting. He was going into his father's business.

NEWS FROM THE UNDERGROUND II

i, myself, my destination, marked. no return.

two eyes, always set in place
seeing only in front, never behind
never denied the truth, only hid it
never next to him, never show
the shape of his heart, never know what it really is
even or odd, never know about crimson
never next to him, never show
how, how can i turn around
and say, i am something without you

but fitting of necessity, you love her, and i am a fiction
really. though you never say, you say, you say
irrational thought. rage.

i unearth the necessary backdrop to the myth
you lie in place, as if i was see-through, you miss me
when i am not around, token, love.

i uncover small particles of truth, you call me by my name, Angela
an angel, so i have become something to you
i never would have guessed, quiet apparel, mask.

neurons in the brain pulse, rhythm of two
coupled, now connected now severed, the plane of dual lives.
you mirror, now that I reveal
i know about her.

MARRIED AT 19

she was called into the room, advised. she was called, priority. she was numbered as one of the many who fit the description: girl ajar.

she loved movement, the turn and twist of the body.
slow-motion dance, face idle, hands loose.

even if she had known, she could not have prevented it.

Titles. the first time, he said, *let the guy come to you.* she didn't understand.
Priority.

he pressed the message into her skull. no explanations. he said to himself, you are nothing, but to me you are useful. and perhaps there is a certain kind of love that could work. the authority of his eyes, laugh, led her to believe in permanence.

love and love and love. chorus.

NO ANSWER

there was no answer the night
you gave yourself up
spurious, doubtful
sensed that i was tentative
your secret voice and the natural way
to say, wait my life is not so simple now

the elevated hills, green-spaced
your wavering arm as you walk away
something not quite right
we want more than just now
wanting and not receiving

the colour of dusk is my mind
red, orange sky as we separate
the terms of exile and remorse
we started young, this tedious game
never saying what we thought
we are alone and more alone.

misery anthropomorphized into derelict eyes
i lapse into metaphor

i see that which is not
i see hundreds of eyes missing.

there is a point where love means giving up. fall into blank
night, this means everything.

there is a point where two lines cross and choices are made.

there is a point where lies no longer stick and they turn
onto themselves.

illusion and dream stake this night, they stand silent and still.

follow the trajectory of bodies. meaning slips past
and meaning slips past.

only the attempted dialogue with angels is left.

EXCAVATION II

1.

i began to perceive the specks of light on my skin as coming from a distance.
the tracks left by erroneous touch, touch that didn't belong there.

twelve steps into the earth, i am now truly underground.
i reach into the dirt to find what i lost.

i am a light under his skin. this is from my perspective.²

2

Dahl didn't really find Angela attractive, but was impressed by her gentleness. He didn't really think that he could be "in love" because she was not really his type. What kept him there, next to her, was a sense of obligation and safety. He loved the way she understood him.

Angela knew right away that they were compatible. Year of the Rabbit and year of the Boar. Synchrony. She had not a doubt in her mind that Dahl was in love with her, because she was very attractive. She had had so many boyfriends that she had lost count. She was certain that she would marry Dahl. In fact, she spent all her money on items for their future house.

2.

ground becomes soft. illusions come.
impenetrable the scar, i try to remove.

i am cast in-between, a place i know
& a place i don't want to know.

in-between, i hear his voice.

3.

pulling out the statue, his inviolate eyes.
nothing happened from the beginning. not knowing,
not perceiving the end of things.

underground, i feel exhausted, i feel tight, without air.
the voice i grow accustomed to is my own. i look
for the road to surface.

no one told me about beginnings, how they fool you.³
incontestable.

3

Dahl was surprised to find out that Angela had moved in one weekend when he was away. His friend at school shook his head and warned him about things "getting serious." If only she was a blonde, Dahl thought to himself. And skin. If only she would get a golden tan, like blondes do. But Dahl internalized this ideal love, the one he had lost because of his need to travel North America. Dahl simply believed he could get over it.

4.

moving becomes impossible after 24 hours. i have no
one to help. this is my own creation. living.

he left in a hurry, not having quite finished packing.
he left without perceiving the stone of his feet. directionless,
he expected miracles.

sound.

5.

i don't hear motion or sound. these are part of two.
around me I am bound by delicate lace. one sharp turn and
i will die.⁴

precise words hurt.

⁴

Angela came home after shopping for food and a new tablecloth. she was going to civilize the apartment. She was going to make real curtains. She didn't know how to use a sewing machine, and so took up needle and thread. Living with Dahl was a new experience. She found it pleasing. She enjoyed taking care of him, even doing the laundry. She thought she loved him.

When Dahl came home, dinner was ready and the new tablecloth didn't escape his notice. This looks very nice, he said.

6. without being certain, i talk to someone who happens to look like me.
he is doubled in my consciousness.
- moving from beginning to end. which way to go. end like the beginning.
i feel restless.⁵
- i dig with my hands and open up the gap. the walls leak, there is
no advantage to being alone.

5

They ate together in semi-bliss. Angela was in bliss, Dahl was semi. He enjoyed the light in his partner's eyes, but he could not get the image of Rachel out of his mind. There he sat, eating some exquisite seafood pasta that Angela had prepared, and imagining her long blonde hair. Do you like it? Angela finally asked. The recipe was from a new cook book and she needed approbation. Dahl snapped out of it. Delicious, Sweetie.

7.

i forgive him since there is nothing else i can do. mortar, silt.
particles of connection, destitute.

this is not forgiveness, but punishment. he feels nothing.°

intricate. voice is a remainder. subtle image in the mind, a particular
detail.

6

In the mornings, Angela jumped out of bed and ran to the kitchen. She had an abundance of youthful energy. She plucked out the frying pan, whipped out the bacon and eggs and fried up the perfect breakfast, which she delivered to Dahl on a tray, in bed, with a small flower in a small vase. She had read an article in *Woman Today* on "How to please your Man: ten top secrets." It seemed to be working.

Dahl was always pleasantly surprised and grateful. He enjoyed not having to get out of bed to fend for himself. He enjoyed Angela's desire to make him happy. He ate his food with a smile, genuinely loving Angela's short messed up hair. It was too early to start dreaming about Rachel.

8.

loose fibre let loose. sponge-like. pulls in every debris,
snaps like a dry branch.

one day, innocence wrapped carefully. next, plummet
into ice, lost in absolute zero, cold.

cold. is a word, meaning everything. my bones move, i see
the skeleton, shake.

i have been robbed.⁷ my infinite sky has turned.

7

Angela cleaned up the dishes, washed the frying pan. She was now going to go for a jog. She jogged miles every day to keep thin and look good for Dahl. She also researched sugar substitutes and made chocolate chip cookies with aspartame. As she walked down the hall, she met Dahl's friend, who lived on the second floor. He was going to meet Dahl for a game of baseball. Angela couldn't put her finger on it but it seemed to her that Tom always looked at her with pity. She couldn't understand why. Of course, Tom knew about Rachel, and Angela did not.

9.
the statue is finally unearthed.⁸ bones are excavated,
introspection. hard earth transformed into soft clay,
and then there is forgiveness.

my hand turns around. i see the flesh now. the living thing.

8

At night they curled up together, sometimes made love. Sometimes they went dancing. They were a good couple. Angela couldn't picture herself with anyone else. She switched into Business so she could work with Dahl in his soon-to-be company. She kissed her other life good-bye and started to live Dahl's. Dahl would appreciate handmade socks.

NEWS FROM THE UNDERGROUND III

moving in time
space as the end of all things
left hollow, now

eclipse you think
of someone else
cluster, what
things happen together

RECOGNIZING THE LION

here you are, and the state of things
raw still yet

you move quietly, stealthily
around and over my circular
system of time³

you are the point in the centre
things happen around you

now time shifts and i stand
precipitous, hill-like
look over my shoulder at the cloud of dust
you realize that i am not random
there are parts of me worth noting

parts that are relevant

for the lion in my den
i give skin and bones
pieces of past lives, hunted down
i am relief for those
claws, too tired now to fight

i am consumed and this beast
looks at me in fragments
eyes in triplicate like flies

all my enemies sink
and then there is you
standing aloof as i watch
feel the dismemberment
it is for you

we said it was over and you closed the metal door
as if you had always dreamed of it.

you believe in closure in a very serious way
with the thought of new beginnings
but to close the deal is something you know about
determined, in mixed media
those different forms you take
all other possibilities
you look at lions knowing they can never touch you

you say and you do not say
you mean and you do not mean

suddenly you want flowers from a grave

suddenly you turn around

REDUNDANT ABOUT MIRRORS¹⁰

often i look in the mirror and see through
 to another "i"
 this is not me but you; you have transgressed
 sunk into my other self
 those secrets i no longer keep

10

RUNNING INTO YOU MAKES ME UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING. part two:

When Dahl came home, dinner was ready and the new tablecloth didn't escape his notice. This looks very nice, he said. They ate together in semi-bliss. Angela was in bliss, Dahl was semi. He enjoyed the light in his partner's eyes, but he could not get the image of Rachel out of his mind. There he sat, eating some exquisite seafood pasta that Angela had prepared, and imagining her long blonde hair. Do you like it? Angela finally asked. The recipe was from a new cookbook and she need approbation. Dahl snapped out of it. Delicious. Sweetie.

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At night they curled up together, sometimes made love. Sometimes, and to various pubs around town. They were a good couple. Angela couldn't picture herself with anyone else. She switched into Business so she could work with Dahl in his soon-to-be company. She kissed her other life good-bye and started to live Dahl's. Dahl would appreciate handmade socks.

doorways are like mirrors they
swing both ways, no matter what side
blank lines pull you in
and you digress
the figment of your own mind
the carousel of years
memory begins to rattle

linear you say,
linear and causal
i can see the dots connect
i can move back and forth

you are a lover at point A
forgotten at point D

my hands will pick up this mirror
and will smash it,
but i don't look in mirrors anymore

you are an afterthought

gone from my circular logic
clusters of medicinal probabilities

you sketch me from a different place¹¹

11

RUNNING INTO YOU MAKES ME UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING. part three:

Dahl smoked his fifth cigarette as Angela folded the laundry. She had to carry it three flights of stairs, but she never complained. Their blue laundry bag looked like a sail, light blue, promise of other skies.

Dinner was bubbling quietly in the oven. Angela worked hard at keeping the place in order.

Going through the photo albums, Angela found the nude pictures of Rachel and stood aghast. There was no explanation for them, but Dahl tried to blow it off. She means nothing to me.

But Angela's brain contorted and out of the sequence of thoughts came the inevitable conclusion, the thing she had always repressed. Dahl was not there. He belonged to a different time.

Time references. She wondered how she could go back and shred the cobwebs, tear down the construction, the other. She knew of nothing. She cried.

Dahl imagined he knew Angela in a different life. He wanted to know her in a different life. He wanted to forget the past.

Angela prepared dinner in silence. Distractedly, as if she was now living in another world. The reality of the situation. But nothing worked. Nothing further was said. Dinner was eaten.

It wasn't that Dahl didn't love her. It was a matter of degree. The face of it, the reality, was that he loved her a little. The brief passage of blonde and golden skin left an impenetrable image through which Angela could not pass. He loved her. He loved her less.

Children played ball in the street. Enemies embraced just to exchange baseball cards. There was activity. Dahl went to play ball. Angela thought about fire.

EXCAVATION III

sound of innocence transmuted. inside-cut
and there is nothing she can do. Angela's
absence fills the distance. she becomes thin
like Giacometti's sculptures. empty.

*

In Carthage, Dido
"mounts in madness that high pyre
unsheathes the Dardan sword."

(Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Transl. A. Mandelbaum)

Last words:

this mirror holds four eyes
and the perfect square is
the reflection where my
foot steps and disappears.

turning substanceless
 ether in the grey sky
 last rites, i span in
 and against a new frontier
 life becomes mirage
 through the pleated day
 i see him
 my body floats like
 air¹²

12

RUNNING INTO YOU MAKES ME UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING. part four:

When Angela's body was found, they realized they did not know the time of death. The inspector made a report and they approximated. Suicide, one of them says. They nod. All too common.

They take her body away, and say a few consoling words to the parents. Not how we would want it to end. Bury her in a watery grave, so young, so innocent.

By the time Dahl is informed, the funeral is over and he is left speechless. He turns over and hugs Rachel, who mumbles something in her sleep. Dahl suddenly can't close his eyes. Fear has seized him. He gets up and goes to the kitchen. They live in a new house now, the floors are perfect and there are no cracks in the wall. There is no crud in the corners or scum on the tiles of the bathroom.

Dahl looks into the fridge for something to drink. He is thirsty, perspiring. He takes the jug of ice water and swallows in enormous, painful gulps. Then he goes into the study where he pulls out his old photo albums. Rachel never said anything to him about keeping Angela's pictures. Rachel is not threatened by this.

He opens the cover with a trembling hand. There she is smiling outside their first place, holding a hose and covered in water. Her smile is so familiar. He sits there fixated on her face for over 20 minutes. No other picture is necessary. This one fills him with all that he needs. He starts to cry.

Not wanting to interrupt Dahl in the midst of his wandering around, Rachel rolls over. She is used to Dahl not being able to sleep. But something unusual is going on. She hears him deep in the background. Was that sniffing? She yawns, pulls the covers and goes back to sleep.

noise, then emptiness like space
meaning that you take from me
your calculating eyes as you progress
meet me under a rainbow
say that you meant everything
that really you are not calculating
that you miss the pull of me
ascended now somewhere like peace, no
now it is blurred
the commas of our words mean nothing

RELIC¹³

the earth spins
you love a memory
you drop from arrogance
to humble prayer
you love me now
so suddenly
so what do you want me to do
now, can you hear me?

13

As Dahl tries to stand, his legs suddenly give and he falls to the ground. The album crashes along with him. He starts to perspire again, and this time he sees her in front of him, wavering in the yellowy backdrop. She is not smiling. She is trying to say something. He can see her mouth opening and closing, but no sound. She is trying to say that she was murdered, but Dahl cannot understand. He takes it upon himself to believe that she is out to destroy him, to haunt him till he goes mad. Till he breaks down and pays for leaving her. Dahl suddenly realizes that he never loved anyone else but Angela. Her beauty. That she was all he ever wanted, all that he prized. This realization is so intense that he passes out, smashing his head on the side of the chair. He would stay there till morning, when Rachel would pass by and ask him, So, how did you sleep?

NEWS FROM THE UNDERGROUND IV

i look up into the slant
of this corner
i barely fit in this tomb
and the mirror is still there

how close he came to this end
though he keeps quiet now

words rise like hot air
he will join the ephemeral

all this time
we knew nothing about each other
now the warning

now this formless capture.¹⁴

14

RUNNING INTO YOU MAKES ME UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING. part five:

The days went by effortlessly, mostly because Dahl lived in a dream. His relationship with Rachel was far from perfect. He didn't relate to her. Rachel would make fun of him, how he ate, the mess he made.

Dahl saw Angela's ghost one night. It took him three weeks before he could sleep through the night. Yet he didn't see her again. Fear plagued him. He worried that Rachel might see her and then what?

As the days passed he wondered if maybe he had hallucinated. He filed away some legal documents and wandered over to the huge window of his office. Yes. That was it. He had dreamed the whole thing. He turned around and went back to his desk. This too would pass.

That night, Rachel ordered Thai food and they ate silently. Dahl no longer worshiped her blonde hair. He began comparing it to hay.

After scraping his plate and shoving it in the dishwasher, Dahl couldn't breathe. He had to go out for air. He walked into the night like a trapped animal that had somehow escaped. He looked up at the sky and was startled by the giant moon looming low. If only I had known better, he said. No excuses though. He knew the rules of the game. He picked up a stone and threw it across the road to the open field ahead. The wind made him shiver. He longed to see Angela. He could feel her presence.

Rachel was standing by the window observing Dahl. She had noticed many weird things about him lately. Calmly, she picked up the phone and called the police. Dahl is a danger to himself; I think he's thinking of suicide.

The ambulance came and took him to the hospital. Dahl, by that time, was chanting Angela's name in regular beats. He could feel her there beside him and he began to speak, as if she was closely listening. Rachel signed the papers and he was committed. I will write poetry to you, Dahl said to his invisible lover.

ASYLUM I

NATURAL SELECTION I

Dahl.

to hospitalize, this, certain.
love and love and love.

no exit: image turned around to face
him. eyes stuck open, round and round

PROCEDURE: TO SURVIVE

1.

nurse, span of left brow, frown
pills injected into my system

how many times does angel rhyme with angle
i count every beat of my heart¹⁵

15

Dahl is not sane enough to realize he is alone. The psychiatrists want to say something to him, to save him from himself. To help him realize that he is in a descriptive world, without God, suffice it to say. Dahl always gets up and screams when they approach the subject. He becomes wild when they tell him that Angela is not real. Being literate, Dahl spends hours in his room, with the curtain drawn, writing volumes in response to death. He claims that it has no substance. He claims it can be transcended. He did not see Angela's dead body at the funeral. He claims he sees her now, clear as day.

2.
real life for me is like film
i hold it in my hands
reel after reel, look at every square image
how i project it against the hospital wall

how i see faces, and time
stretch on, as i curl it
around my arms
becomes part of my body¹⁶
reel after reel

i am left here, outside

16

Dahl is on medication. He paces the hallways and wonders why he can't have caffeine. He listens to the other patients, waiting for someone to speak out the things that he sees. But he doesn't see all that much, only Angela, and he wishes someone else could see her. Sometimes he sees her walking towards him and not stopping, so that she ends up walking right through him. It is an interesting sensation, as if all his breath is sucked out of him for that brief interval, as if breath and breath commune, hers and his. His eyes then lose her, no matter how quickly he turns around. And he is left with only a feeling, sometimes the trailing scent of her skin.

3.

and there is no other now
 that my voice synchronizes with yours
 i hear you in my sleep

errands, i walk and walk
 in my dreams to
 where we made love
 and you knew nothing about me

nothing but my eager wish
 to go
 when the wild thing
 had taken over¹⁷

 17

Rachel visits every so often, mostly because she still has his things and doesn't feel like calling his parents. They always take so much energy. But eventually she will. She walks confidently down the hall, relatively certain that no one will recognize her. She feels nauseated watching all the patients wandering around. She was always too good for Dahl, she thinks, even though he was remarkably beautiful. She suspects this is why she still makes the trip here. Even in his condition he looks good. But the journeys are taking a lot out of her. This may be the last time. She finally finds his room and walks in. There is no answer. She looks behind the curtain and Dahl is resting with his back to her. Dahl, it's me! she exclaims happily. Dahl turns over and looks at her. She looks a lot like Angela! Angela, is it you? Rachel can't believe her ears. She whacks him with her purse and scowls furiously. Still thinking about *HER!* Dahl turns his back to her again, and she storms out of the room, out of the hospital, out of his life.

4.
mirror where she looked at me¹⁸
feather in my hand where she wrote
about me

missing pieces that only angels can find
how much i loved you

how necessary to be loved
like it was heaven
how much i want it to be true
why else would i be rising here
and looking past the iron fence
trying to find you?

18

They have taken all dangerous objects away, including Angela's little mirror, which for some reason he had snuck in with. But they found it. He can no longer look at her face secretly at night. The only mirror on his floor is in the bathroom and there he can only see his hideous features. His eyes are red. He feels trapped. He wants to be free. He wants to feel.

PROCEDURE: TO SURVIVE

i begin to look for clues. Angela
swings by and looks uncomfortable

as if i'm pulling her in, inch by inch
sucking in her amorphous air

inch by inch, her amorphous hair
scent swelled in my nostrils

i know she is there.¹⁹

19

Angela tries to help Dahl, to show him that she forgives. But she slips out of his reach. He slowly begins to sink back to the material world.

holding a match. i see tiny reflections
like pieces of glass
on the floor, i step crunching
the parts

of her soul in my grasp
she can feel me breathe, i'm certain²⁰

20

The monster that engulfs Dahl is Chaos. He is afraid of sinking down below all rational thought. He is afraid of amorphousness. He dreams of Angela, regrets Angela, regrets Rachel. What he sees is a mirror of himself, uncertain and incomplete.

NEWS FROM THE UNDERGROUND V

arranging the parts, necessary

voice intricate how
two join

Dahl became message
he became digression
all the thoughts he could not contain

in this state,
asylum finding out too late
the necessary arrangement of parts.²¹

21

Dahl wants to repeat. He would not make the same mistakes. Dahl is certain of this. Certainty, in fact, has become central in Dahl's life. He doesn't know what or whom to trust.

RELIC II

Angela swerves,
she is afraid²² of noise,
loud noise like the heart
of a lover cracked.

her own heart erodes
Dahl becomes distant
she can feel him closing,
closed.

²²

Angela begs for protection. She feels danger below. Dahl is turning away.

An angel comes and tells her to remember the past. What had happened on earth, why? Didn't he know? She recounts the story. The angel blows tiny, white smoke rings. Was she also to blame? You figure it out, he tells her.

ASYLUM II

NATURAL SELECTION II

how i came to love one and then another
leaves me full of blanks
one right arm, switched for a left
then none

i dream now like wild animals
restless howls, restless
agons with myself
indisputable wish, to call her back

but i say nothing to those distant stars

I.
i select this relationship.
Rachel on the outside
Angela, 1 2 3 4
numbers of the universe
in my head, we connect.

we connect.²²

22

Dahl misses morning session. Stays in the pool room. No one will find him there. So he thinks. He thinks. One way or another, he will find her. This obsession is bad. He paces.

Next to him is a typewriter. He sits down and begins to type. There is no paper in the typewriter. What if he could really write love letters? Love poems. He resolves to write love poems.

Dahl stays in the pool room all morning. He has typed out ten pages of poems. The nurse finds him and scolds him for missing session. He shows her his poems, then realizes it is a mistake. He quickly shoves them behind his back. The nurse smiles.

It is lunch time and he can't distinguish the smell of food from human waste. He goes and lines up. He'll at least have a carton of milk, or toast. In the line-up, Dahl sees a girl who looks exactly like Angela. She has just appeared out of nowhere. He walks hurriedly up to her and hugs her. But it isn't Angela.

2.

we meet again in this nightmare,
visions open into barren streets,
mistakes ravage me,
i am soulless, i write and do not write

i am this not that
that not this
i am fitfully blind,²³ *you*
cannot exist.

23

Dahl is locked up in the emergency ward after insisting that his dead girlfriend has been reborn in the hospital. The girl he had thought was Angela peeks in through the window. He can see now that it isn't Angela. He looks away. He no longer has perfect sight. Angela seems too far away. The medication is kicking in. He feels his body slowing down. Everything.

3.

you i forgive. i forgive you
do you forgive me?

fragments of my life, bits, parts
fragmentary tangents
staccato breath, agonized remains

all my life i dreamt of flight
and Angela had wings.²⁴

24

The sky is clear. They let him out for a cigarette. He looks at the lights of the city and at the faded light of the stars. He wonders where Rachel is. He wonders if Angela can see him. But she is too far from him now. He is grounded.

I don't understand! he yells. It is a sharp moment. He can see his breath. He drops the cigarette and scrambles to pick it up. Cigarettes are hard to come by. He wonders where his parents are. He hasn't seen them in years. He wonders, for an excruciating moment, what he is doing in the world. He is utterly alone. Nothing is so complete in him as this realization. Alone.

PROCEDURE: TO SURVIVE

he tears up the love poems.

i don't want to remember you,
cold lattice around my frame
i have built myself up from nothing
nothing but you can pull me apart.²⁵

25

Dahi cries and rails at the moon. He doesn't want to forget Angela but he feels he must in order to survive. He puts his letters aside, takes his medication faithfully. Love's passion subsides. Regret is the only constant that runs through him.

they burn, the forgotten.
no memory, no love.

to break the pattern, love and love and love.²⁶

Chorus.

26

Angela meets Dido in the outer reaches. Dido recounts to her the story of Aeneas. She repeats the curse she hurled at him, and which she later regretted. It was a god that urged him to leave, after all. Angela and Dido wonder if this is always a good enough excuse that men seem to come up with. They couldn't help it. Perhaps Aeneas could have argued a bit more with the god about his true love; perhaps Didi could have known that he truly loved Angela, before she killed herself. Angela and Dido walk along, trailing a mist of rose petals. Women and men often take wrong turns. Dido waves good-bye.

RE-CALL

1. New speed, sounds the dream. Director now turns
looks at the script. She is target one.

Angela enters and scans the perimeter. Script directs: to love
2. Target two: device

who is the lover. deceive page 4
go back to origins, find true knot.

Extricate life from file: device
she is calculated.
3. Missing piece: voice

Sound blanked out, remorse nothing speed
forward go, sounding sounding

nothing.
4. Coming back: directory
Names conjoined with numbers
free to dial, news

love: direction
directed

5. Gatekeeper of screams, target
Angela mistaken for Angel
lover, perhaps

6. Snapshot image, rest
chord, scream where is it
growing in the pit

love: misplaced
knowing speed, knowing
another solution

7. Character zone, tear
new catechism, prayer, promise

director: image splice
image in state, alien
two parts, unglued

8. Want: love slips,
then there is the beginning of high
low

schism of night
now, precipice, saying good bye

Re-call
director curls back, picture roll
scene unfold, paradigmatic
two blemish,

Target: over.

Revision 1: Angela

selfless, you insist that you were selfless
you were a scavenger and wanted no one

fail to hide everything
edge, knife its way through
mirrors, spill this silver
how hollow our sentient lives

know about this emptiness
grey and shaky as it is
when we feel for the end of day
a part of me, you know.

Postscript 1: Angela

you hope i'll go away, but this is the longing you have just discovered
the fear, the night of hours without hours

lattice eyes watching you
my silent eyes watching you

Postscript 2: Dahl

stone, wind pushes him back
unravels eyes, now like
an odyssey left to wander streets

Dahl lingers on the fringe

Postscript 3: Angela

tear the gentle fabric of the heart and there is nothing
 sensitive, involved
 we lost everything in the poison of an image,
 everything, in the poison of a lie.

Notes 1: Dido

Then Dido's words were done, and her companions
 can see her fallen on the sword; the blade
 is foaming with her blood, her hands are bloodstained.
 Now clamour rises to the rooftop.
 Now rumour riots through the startled city.
 The lamentations, keening, shrieks of women
 sound through the houses; heavens echo mighty
 wailings, even as if an enemy
 were entering the gates, with all Carthage
 or ancient Tyre in ruins, and angry fires
 rolling across the homes of men and gods.

(Virgil, *The Aeneid*)

Postscript 4: Angela & Dahl

Angela reviews the case
 gravestone at her feet
 Dahl, a new dimension
 he is left to wander years
 without her.

Notes 2: Dido

" ... May the savage Dardan drink
with his own eyes this fire from the deep
and take with him the omen of my death."

(Virgil, *The Aeneid*)

Postscript 5: Angela & Dido

Angela and Dido move along imagined borders
around the men they sought and loved
no news, territories left
unbound
all curves blind, all
games stopped.

Dahl drifts, drifts

Revision 2: Angela

ground becomes soft. illusions come.
impenetrable the scar, i try to remove.

i am cast in-between, a place i know
& a place i don't want to know.

in-between, i hear his voice.