

## I Am You

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# I Am You

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CAMBRIDGE

PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING  
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham, Cambridge CB21 5JX United Kingdom

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First published 2008

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Biddles Ltd, Kings Lynn, Norfolk

Typeset in Swift 9.5 / 13

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ISBN 978 1 84471 442 1 paperback

Salt Publishing Ltd gratefully acknowledges  
the financial assistance of Arts Council England



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*To Jackson Mac Low*



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## Acknowledgements

Michael Byron's support and encouragement were key. I thank him. And I thank Bradford Morrow, editor of *Conjunctions* #48, for publishing "The Aim of All Nature Is Beauty"; Tracy Grinnell, editor of *Aufgabe* #5, for publishing "The Nature of this Lecture Is by John Beauty"; and Marie Buck and Brad Flis, editors of *Model Homes* #1, for publishing excerpts from "Letting Go."

Special thanks to Susan Wheeler for her uncomplicated and powerful support, and thanks to Christina Strong for her openness to new ideas. John Kinsella's eye for poetry and Chris Hamilton-Emery's hand in turning the book into reality are to be thanked and admired.



## Introduction

I've always found Anne Tardos's work thrilling. While there is much to be fascinated with, Tardos's treatment of poetry's 'I,' both here and in her earlier volumes, is strange, transformative, completely unnerving. The neologisms and non-normative syntax of Tardos's *Uxudo* and *The Dik-dik's Solitude* ask me to read without referring to a lyric 'I'—without allowing me to identify with an author-figure or a character. While *I Am You* retains some neologistic and asyntactic elements, it also introduces meditative and talky speaking subjects that haven't appeared in Tardos's earlier work. Through these speakers, *I Am You* both forefronts subjectivity and picks it apart. As elegy, this book must necessarily take up the question of autobiography. And in taking up autobiography, Tardos uses commonplace phrases and a flagging of form's contortions to move through and rupture those ideas associated with autobiography: that a person's life follows a linear narrative, that a person is in fact the same person from one moment or year to the next, that one must "let go" of people and the past throughout one's life. "It should really be called 'selves.' There are so many of us assembled/here," writes Tardos, and *I Am You* really does feel like an elegy written by a plurality of subjects.

One of the fixations in the poem "Letting Go" is monstrosity. If one is not really the same person from one moment to the next, there is indeed something monstrous about the forcing of self into the particular rigid forms allowed by language. If the narratives by which an 'I' changes are unfamiliar (or defamiliarized), what might be described in some contexts as 'evolution' or 'progress,' instead appears as monstrosity or distortion. So the 'I' becomes monstrous

in the tension of its having the appearance of a stable, specific subject, and always being in a state of change. One can never fit exactly, must always be figured as outside of the bounds of what's considered 'human.' A monster, just like the monster of any horror movie: the changing self in a rage as it realizes its own 'disfigurement,' its inability to fit into grammatical forms of self and thus its status as cast out from everyday discourse.

*I Am You* is chatty and colloquial, frequently reiterating and altering bits of thought and conversation. In correspondence about her work, Tardos wrote that these poems are "pop," and these poems' attention to popular language brings up questions: how does a reader account for the monstrosity of language, the misfitting 'I' in her everyday speech? How do you acknowledge the shifting nature of your self in the loaded and worn-out language you're limited to in describing grief, morphing, alteration? Once you recognize the monstrosity of using a single, static letter 'I' to stand in for such a diversity of versions of yourself, what might you say? *I Am You* gives you characters able to critique the notion of character, pop phrases used to explain what's reductive about pop phrases, elegy attacking elegiac conventions so that this elegy might be written.

"The Aim of All Nature Is Beauty" contains images of Colette and her dog Toby Chien posed for a photo with similarly dour looks on their faces. Artistic media can create formal equivalence where previously there was none; just as the word 'I' that I use to identify myself may refer to a quite different person from one moment or year to the next, the subject of a portrait may vary (from dog to human, for instance) yet retain certain qualities simply because of the medium or the style. The animal imagery in *I Am You* provides both a backdrop against which the human speaker's voice may be read and, through the eerie resemblance of animal expression to human expression in Tardos's work, allows for permeation between what we normally think of as natural—and all the strange meanings that accrue to the word—and what we think of as 'man-made.'

Such images are similar to the linguistic off-rhymes and morphings that occur throughout this book. Such morphings suggest that the way we conceive of agency, and thus the way we interact socially and politically, is largely formally determined. Our interactions are, by Tardos's account, a linguistic game, both totally crucial and comically playful: "I'm easily moved to tears./I'm tearily moved to ease./Eerily moved to tease."

If the phrase "to let go," to move on after a trauma, or give up after some sort of struggle, is a cliché, it is both something that the voices in these poems critique with such lines as "How can there be a universe in an ever-changing truth?" and, quite literally, the very occasion of these voices' existence. The "bloodbath" referred to in "The Letter: A Bloodbath" must be both the voices in the poem, as they critique the terms of their own existence, and a visceral thing. "The great surgery is underway and the patient is bleeding profusely," writes Tardos. The bleeding patient may be language as it is dismantled, but the 'patient' must also be people—particularly those who experience harm as a result of discourses that claim to help, heal, fix. Whether the president is able to coherently describe war using the same language that announcers use to describe baseball games, or whether we think of "misguided statesmen" or "statespeople" are questions of language-play with dire and bloody consequences.

"Letting Go" is dedicated "For M," and this dedication points up that the nature of generosity—of dedicating one's time and one's work—to a person or cause is circumscribed completely by the "ForM": by the formal practices and habits of one's speech or writing. The poems in this book tend to describe their own forms. One knows from the outset that "Letting Go" is a poem in 100 parts, and one is given ahead of time some patterns and themes to keep in mind. Just as this book describes itself as it moves along, it bears witness to your reading paths and habits as well. The voices in these poems issue their challenges ("On what terms am I the person I

am?”), and as I read, my own responses seems to be continually echoed and recorded as the voices of the poems reflect on themselves. Think of *I Am You* as a public challenge to you as a subject, you as an ‘I’ and as a constant autobiographer: can ‘I’ conceive of myself as a monster, shifting and morphing through poetry, pop, politics, grief?

MARIE BUCK, Co-Editor, *Model Homes*

# The Aim of All Nature Is Beauty

“My religion is to live—and die—without regret”

Tibetan poet saint Milarepa

*In Memory of Jackson Mac Low*



# I. Introduction

I DO THE dishes  
I double-click  
I stand clear of the closing doors  
Bottom-dollar gorgonzola

Bigelow jumping gigolo bump  
An adventure.

The ganglionated arch of  
Johann Gottlieb von Goodgirl,  
who is really a very bad girl,  
an angry girl, whose  
almond-cake seduction via her  
bocca, her thumbsucking bocca,  
such a furious, pissed-off girl.



Her sibilant juicy sister, left alone amid all the senseless debris,  
contemplates the schmerz of her lorgnette, her effortlessly  
lovelorn fairy-tale suicide as she is pedaling in the darkness  
that amplifies her task.

“Has she not made a scene?”  
“No, she is not scenic.”

Filial duties, artery cloggers.

You’re right I’m wrong Whatever

Are you sure you’re warm enough?  
Try this visor if that one’s too loose.  
Please let me read my book in peace.  
No, I’m not hungry today. I’ll never be hungry again.  
What’s that smell? Is it food?

How come your feet are so big?  
I can't stand it anymore.

Poor lonesome loon out on the lake, singing that mournful  
tune. All this rain is making me crazy. I would much  
prefer being lazy in the sun.

Motorists see more tourists see more hair

A certain pride a certain dignity  
A certain above-it-all that is genuine

Above the bickering the petty dusty petty lowly nasty little  
small-minded little beneath and little beneath

The agriculture of it all!  
And the interactiveness of it all!

Topographically speaking a genuine representation of a  
human sentiment

The universe I inhabit versus the one that inhabits me

The voice in the morning  
The first one to speak

Down a precipice

Off course

We need oblivion to escape oblivion  
We need plants around us, and large pockets of time  
wherein nothing much happens

Then maybe something can happen



## II. Now That You're Gone

NOW THAT YOU'RE gone

I can't read what I've written  
I can't see it  
I lost the ability to write  
I can barely say my own name

What happens now

What happens now can only be the result of everything  
that has preceded this moment

This moment, the present, can only be seen as something  
that's very close to what has just been happening

The immediate memory of the just elapsed moment  
is the closest we come to experiencing the elusive present

Immediate memory allows us to notice what our mental  
processes have just been, and thus, becoming includes being

Now that you're gone

Unrelenting-yearning-and-grief-consistently-benefitting-  
evidence-of-mental-reality-theorizing-small-pedestals-  
with-a-growing-and-grueling-exertion-facilitated-briefly

Now that you're gone

Libertine gigolo vis-à-vis  
Have a madeleine, it's good for the memory

Sedimentation fiber organism bedrock intensity lingo  
formidable network realization flipside stratification data  
delinquency meditation

Gotta be careful always

We're in the midst of an explosion and think it's just  
everyday life



### III. Intermezzo by a Lake

WE WERE HEADED for a cabin by a lake in a pine forest that  
I had found on the Internet  
All around us clockwork resolution happiness and conflict

We were headed for a cabin by the Internet of the lake  
without a key to our consciousness

Headed as we were into an organizing notion of conflict and  
happiness

We are sitting by a lake along the Internet, holding hands and  
playing cards without a key

We are sitting at the window of a pine forest  
Sitting in the lake of our happiness  
Playing cards that we were given  
holding keys in our hands  
sitting on the notion of our minds within the years of  
consciousness without a card  
Holding hands

Headed to a cabin by a lake in a pine forest where we find each  
other's happiness

## IV. Going Away

MY LIFE TAKES time.

I realize that my life takes up a certain amount of time, which is the only reason I can refer to this particular state of being, as life.

He may go away.

Without the concept of time, I'd be like the animal that does not concern itself with labeling its life 'life.' It concerns itself with food and shelter and survival. This is good, it feels good, that, on the other paw, is bad. Not good. Don't go there.

He may be going away.

Temporal organization is of no conscious concern to the animal, although a cat will follow a very strict routine during the day, by preference.

He is going away.

But without a hierarchical agreement on temporal units and their applications, we could not have assembled here today.

He avoids going away.

Temporary eunuchs are an impossibility. The operation that produces a eunuch is irreversible. Did Greer, when coining the phrase "the female eunuch" imply that women's situation was hopeless?

He wants to go away.

From temporal units to temporary eunuchs. Sorry.

He may have gone away.

One question in writing could be: when do you hit the Enter key and when do you not? When do you open a new document? What do you call your file when you save it? One option is to leave it Untitled<sub>1</sub>, Untitled<sub>2</sub>, etc., as in emailing, when nothing is entered into the Subject field, and the program volunteers the theme: “No Subject.” But such evasiveness has no virtue. When given an opportunity to say something, say something!

He may be going away.

The difficulty can lie in integrating oneself into the surrounding environment, for fear of losing one’s identity or individuality. And yet, of such a non-assimilation, of a failure to accept being an integral and vital part of the entire universe, nothing good will come.

He may avoid going away.

As usual, I return to myself with a sigh of relief.

He may want to go away.

My face needs to be animated by expression. My gaze should be colorful, my smile defiant. I need to take a bath. What am I waiting for? I’m used to my life. I talk to myself out of a need to formulate my thoughts. A woman presses her forehead against a mirror.

He has been going away.

To write. To face the blank page. Une feuille blanche, where blanc does not equal blank. A white page, or a blank document page on a screen, staring back at you blankly.

He has avoided going away.

The periodic need to note, to paint . . . to find that flexible, glistening, and fleeting adjective. It's an urge.

He has wanted to go away.

To be hungry and see oranges flung about.

He is avoiding going away.

We're OK together here, aren't we? Nothing to think about for years, just let life take care of everything. To think of nothing.

He is wanting to go away.

I recognize his impeccable looks and perfect pronunciation. Where will they lead me to? No one knows anything. I might as well be sitting on the moon.

He avoided wanting to go away.

To suffer, to regret, to prolong the night by insomnia, by solitary wanderings into the deepest, darkest hours of the night. I see it coming, yet I march bravely toward it. I hide my fears and tears with a dark eyeliner.

He may have been going away.



Nobody is waiting for me. I have no glory, no love, no money.  
No birds sing in the deep forest. How puzzling.

He may have avoided going away.

Years of marriage. A good chunk of my existence spent with a  
man who paints portraits of women, specializing in  
showing their velvety flesh. A scoundrel of the worst  
kind.

He may have wanted to go away.

My friends would say: well what did you expect, dear child,  
what did you expect?

He may be avoiding going away.

I had enough. The next day I didn't return and neither did I the next, or the one after that. And this is where my story ends, or rather begins.

He may be wanting to go away.

I won't dwell on the brief and morose period of transition that followed. There were consolations and felicitations. In any case I cut myself off and chose complete isolation, give or take a few close friends. My solitude is my freedom, which allows me to work hard.

He has been avoiding going away.

Sunday again. And how cold it is. My dog and I took our constitutional in the park after lunch. This animal will be my ruin. I spend more on her than on myself. But it's worth it just to be near her shiny coat glistening in the sun.

He has been wanting to go away.

Beautiful Sunday in a beautiful park. My dog and I think of this park as our own forest. She runs faster than I do, but then I walk faster than she does. A thin, pink haze filters the sun, a defanged sun you can actually look at. Flowers and mushrooms and violets in the grass on a bright winter day. I surge forward, feeling an elastic exhilaration and animalistic joy.



He is avoiding wanting to go away.

She is a born theatrical dog. She loves to run up on stage. I'm telling you all this so you understand her better. This is a dog who doesn't care about money, and who's been living in the garden—and in my heart—for a long time.

He may have been avoiding going away.

Extensive success and artistic ambition lead to silence, as does failure.

He may have been wanting to go away.

Nellie, a performing dog, drops by my dressing room. She seems to say to me, yes I know, you love me, you pet me, yes, you have a box of cookies waiting for me, but tomorrow or the day after, we're leaving and I probably won't see you again. So don't ask anything of me. The luxury of tenderness, peace, and security, is not available to the likes of me. Adieu then Nellie, adieu.

He may have been avoiding to go away.

Gertrude Stein: A vegetable garden in the beginning looks so promising and then after all little by little it grows nothing but vegetables, nothing, nothing but vegetables.

He may have wanted to go away.

So many things could go wrong, I'm afraid to ask. But a good day can sneak up on you as unexpectedly as a bad one. Silence in the garden.

He may go away.

My friends, the real ones, the faithful ones, are tied to me by their solidarity. But I can hardly believe it. Friendship should not be a ring through anyone's nose. Stripped by some, hit on by others, you might want to imprison yourself inside a gloomy serenity, made of incurable goodness and silent contempt. Do not form that habit.



He has gone away.

