

When I Think of My Body as a Horse



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Wendy Pratt

smith|doorstop

the poetry business

Published by The Poetry Business
Campo House,
54 Campo Lane,
Sheffield S1 2EG
www.poetrybusiness.co.uk

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Designed & typeset by The Poetry Business.

Printed by Imprint Digital

Cover image: An écorché horse in motion, facing right and with left foreleg
flexed. Lithograph by J. Laurens after a bronze sculpture by I. Bonheur, 1860/1870
(?). Sourced from the Wellcome Collection (<https://wellcomecollection.org/>)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Smith|Doorstop is a member of Inpress

www.inpressbooks.co.uk

Distributed by NBN International, 1 Deltic Avenue,
Rooksley, Milton Keynes MK13 8LD.

ISBN 978-1-912196-40-1

The Poetry Business gratefully acknowledges the support
of Arts Council England.



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

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For Matilda, always.



*For the Bridge Beneath Which I Became a Flock
of Pigeons*

You say voluptuous, you say soft, you say
here, like this, like this, you say
stand like this

and a train hurtles by so close
the lights halo your hair.

The noise is thrilling,
The shock stink of metal,
the hot tremble of it, the people,
their books and papers
in their rectangles of solitude;
and yes, some of them must see this.

Some of them must carry this away with them
in the scream of metal on metal
which is soft and quiet as a padded cell
to them.

I am electrified by this close moment,
physically pinioned and letting the sound
drive through me, letting the scream of wheels
vibrate the very bones of me until
I start to come apart:

my hair shakes free from its roots and wafts
in strands carried away by the train,
my nails extract themselves,
embed themselves like bullets
in the rough-hewn stone of the bridge.

My cells begin to tug and pull apart;
skin cells, mucosa, muscle fibres whipping out
like electricity cables

and there is nothing to me now
but a sudden startle of feathers,
a flock of pigeons clattering out
from beneath the bridge's eaves,
train lights receding, the curve
of the track in the distance.

Broke Horse

Yesterday my body and I
played Olympic gymnasts
in the time between bed and bath.

My body's foal-form
of long legs and hot, slim energy rippled
with the joy of movement.

Today it is unexpectedly wrong.
I blame my body for breaking the rules,
though we didn't know there were rules.

Foal-body falls backwards,
stung by my punishment.
Our friendship deteriorates,
but at least she can be ridden now.

Tampon

Where are the Dalmatians, the roller boots,
the ponytail of sleek, blonde hair, the skin-tight
body suit? I expect something to emerge
other than blood. I expect a neatness
to my menstruation, not this shameful seep,
the blush each time I sneeze, the clenched thighs.

First time, hovering, one foot on the bath's white lip.
The diagram is torsoless, a line drawing, a poor man's cunt.
I struggle. I get it wrong, somehow I can't align
my body to its shape. It fishtails away to its cotton clique.
I am not the girl on roller boots. I am some sort of freak.

What I Learned from the Animals of My Childhood

I learned to love unconditionally
from the dog.

From the cat
I learned to disappear and be selfish.

From the rabbit
I learned eternal patience,
when my whole life was plywood
with a brick-wall view.

From the guinea pigs
I learned to love food without remorse.

From the goldfish I learned
that even with a fairground beginning
it is possible to exist in gold shimmers
and forget things quickly.

From the nesting house martins
I learned that spit and mud are good enough
to hold a home together.

From the frogspawn and tadpoles
I learned that change is possible.

From the roosting bats I learned
that even in a pitch-black attic
of suitcase-safe memories,
a whole dark-hearted life might erupt
pulsing from the smallest cracks.

From the sky larks in the oil-seed-rape
I learned that songs should be sung high,
in a pitch of blue. And how to run
in the opposite direction to my nest
when I meet the earth in a head-long dive.

The Lemon Trees

My dance is a slick of oil;
is the back-ridge
of a waiting crocodile,
is a too-stoned-stagger,
smoking hash
in the corner,
my dance is a mill pond
and the club is the wheel,
and the room is being annihilated.
My dance is white skin,
mouth open,
my dance is this minute only,
nineteen-ninety-two, slipped
into my brother and sister's
heavy metal obsession.
My dance makes the rules bend.
I dance and dance my dance
and go home spinning.
What a beautiful name
for a shithole club.

Love Letter to Scarborough on a Saturday Night

You are a smear of girls in high heels
and of seagulls wheeling. The castle,
with its sleeping beauty slope,
is constantly above us all
and all the lasses cling and stagger,
lads bellow like bulls down the high street.

You are burgers at Chubby's,
the mock chic of the casino,
someone fighting outside the Christian Centre.
You are a lass in a white dress sitting on the kerb,
shoes off. You are the lads tripping drunk
down the slope to the sea.

You are first light, littered streets,
runners on Marine Drive,
coffee, smudged mascara,
a hard come down, stomach hollowed,
you are nineteen-year-old me, you are
waves like a cool hand on a hungover brow,
you are the optical illusion that makes waves
into dorsal fins; always the promise
that something beautiful might swim beneath the grey.

In the Parole Office

The lads are leaf litter
blown in through
the gaps they fell through.
Cheeky laddish types,
thuggish hard man types
all of them little lads
in the orange plastic seats.
There are buckets of boys
here skittles of boys and one
girl thrown like a hand grenade
into the middle of them. Tick
tick says the girl brokenly
to the broken boys who rub
themselves against her oily
camouflage. Tick tick.

*How You Fed Me Like a Wild Animal and I Let
Myself be Tamed*

Because I couldn't eat.
Because I was sick with myself
and sick with running
but couldn't stop.

Because you didn't force me.
Because even when I tried
to make my home with you
the dark inside me couldn't stop
breaking things open, because
I was broken open.

Because you were patient
and let me run and let me buck
and kick and show my teeth
and weren't fazed by it.

Because I was always ready to fight
you, but I never needed to.

Because you are the gentlest person
I ever met, because you fascinate me.
Because you made me wonder
what it would be like to believe you
when you said you loved me.

Because I wondered what it would be like
to stop.

Because you stood for months
with your hand out flat, filled with food
and I let you feed me.



Acknowledgements

I would like to thank: Jamie McGarry and Jo Haywood for encouraging me to keep going with these poems; Ann and Peter Sansom for giving my words a home, and for their generosity and encouragement; Gary Wilshaw for being a friend when I desperately needed one; and most of all, my husband, Chris, for giving me the space and time I needed to traverse this journey.

‘What I Learned from the Animals of My Childhood’ was longlisted in the Live Canon Competition 2018 and appears in their anthology.

‘Sixth Birthday’ first appeared in *Gifts the Mole Gave Me* (Valley Press) and in the anthology *Writing Motherhood*, edited by Carolyn Jess Cooke.

‘Nan Hardwicke Turns into a Hare’ first appeared in a pamphlet of the same name published by Prolebooks.

‘The God of Small Things’ won third place in the Manchester Cathedral Poetry Competition.

‘When Rabbits Die’ was commended in the YorkMix Poetry Competition, 2017.

‘Self Portrait with Maritime Museum Mermaid, Hull’ was commended in the YorkMix Poetry Competition 2019.

‘The Circle of Sisters’ and ‘The Language of Pre-Motherhood’ first appeared in *Poetry Wales*.





