

apophasis







by Mikaela Rallonza





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Poetry by Mikaela Rallonza

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Preface

In this poetry collection, I engage with themes around God and wounds through the imagery of emptiness. The title of this collection, *Apophasis*, describes this poetic procedure and its outcomes.

The word "apophasis" has two main definitions in the dictionary. The first definition is that apophasis refers to "the raising of an issue by claiming not to mention it." In this first definition, it is simply a rhetorical device that uses implication as a method to refer to something. In other words, it is to say or imply something without mentioning it. For instance, "I will not speak about my experiences of woundedness."

The second definition is a bit more complicated, interestingly because it incorporates more layered concepts of theological theory, and by extension the concept of ineffability and impossibility:

the practice of describing something (such as God) by stating which characteristics it does not have especially because human thought or language is believed to be insufficient to describe it fully or accurately.²

¹ "Apophasis," in *Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary*, n.d., https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apophasis.

² "Apophasis."

In this definition on the other hand, "apophasis" functions more as a linguistic practice that describes something impossible or ineffable through a technique of negating its existing qualities—what the thing is not, or what it does not have. In this case, an example would be, "God is unknowable" or "God is not knowable."

These two definitions differ in the kind of negation that is happening. In the first definition, the thing itself is said to not be mentioned. In the second definition, the thing itself is described through its non-existent qualities. Either way, through apophasis, whether it be through denying the thing, or denying its qualities, what inevitably arises is some recognition of the failure, or at least the difficulty of language or thought itself to grasp what the thing encompasses.

The etymology of "apophasis" itself dates to Ancient Greece, where it originally meant a "denial;" where it combined a verb for 'to say' (phanai) with a prefix denoting 'away from, down from, far from' (apo).³ In this way, apophasis can literally be translated as a "saying away (from)." Apophasis then, as I will define it for the sake of this chapbook, is a process of utilizing a negative sensibility to reference or imply a positive sensibility—so, in my not mentioning the thing, I imply the very thing itself. Instead of an erasure, the negation is a representation or a signification of

.

³ Reginald Gibbons, "On Apophatic Poetics," *The American Poetry Review* 86, no. 6 (December 2007): 19, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20683697.

the thing itself. It is through this kind of process that I can indirectly engage with subjects like God and wounds—that I perceive to be impossible or at least challenging to explain in a linear manner.

By utilizing empty space, I aim to exercise the apophatic sensibility through a "denial" to say the thing itself. In this way, I lean more towards the execution of the first definition. However, it is through the outcomes of this procedure that the second definition began to arise. As I used this procedure throughout my poetry in different ways, I was able to engage with my own conceptions of God and wounds. In other words, it was impossible for me to say these experiences, so instead I chose a different manner of expressing them, through a process of "saying away."

So, from here on forth, an empty space will be used to represent the word "God" in this chapbook (ex. That would be the last time is written). Secondly, "[...]" will be used to signify ", if the word is mentioned in the title of a poem (ex. how to meet [...]).

in the beginning

the bird the egg struggles to be borne by 's word, has sworn it must shatter through its own shell slam its head against the swell of a belly of no more room to mourn

the death of an inner child torn out at the paradise worn from hell, the bird

desperate to fly toward dawn rages upon the world's womb, knowing full-well it cannot tell the difference between the mother or the egg nostalgia is the softest illusion, of all the faith i have left until i notice the light within the rain, that could only be my own false exit, the inevitable conclusion that fate could not kill me—was i allowed to think of you so far away from me, just to consider myself, and what i could not say? that it was a split second decision, that maybe i do not want to talk about , i would rather talk about the childhood, or the silence

Origin of Life

there is a collective understanding that the study of the Origin of Life is a pursuit to capture the singular points of an entity that is otherwise inherently divergent4 such a pursuit has given birth to the theory of abiogenesis: the hypothesis that something living can materialize from something nonliving.⁵ This is no new idea; simply a modern iteration of the "spontaneous generation" theory prevalent in the 19th century6: the common knowledge that maggots came from raw meat bees from dead cow, fungi from cold soup.⁷ John Needham tested this theory with boiled chicken broth only to be disproven by

⁴ like digging through dirt to find the shell of the seed the roots emerged from

⁵ it must be established that not all non-living things are dead but the dead are non-living things

⁶ every thought is born from another

⁷ and truthfully like flies to a slab of meat; i used to chew ravenous into myself until the bone peeked through, but when i am the one doing the rotting, time and time again i wonder, had a few flies at least become from me?

a flask with a swan neck that trapped the bacteria in the bent curves of the glass. After that, belief in spontaneous generation died away.⁸

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⁸ like the way i slowly spoiled away in my own blood as to bleed was another way to cry —and by cry i mean plead, out to whoever was listening, that I somehow be found along with this dead body. But when nobody arrives, and I am left alone with the remains, believe me when I say something living can still emerge from out from all of this; if something were to prove me wrong, i would just end up alone after my own apocalypse).

/woond/

noun

- 1. an injury to living tissue caused by a cut, blow, or other impact, typically one in which the skin is cut or broken.
- 2. "a knife wound."
- 3. the first thing associated with wounds is the pain. after it is strobe after strobe of bleeding.
- 4. it only seems like the pain is primary because it must feel as if it were the only thing occurring when it arrives.
- 5. "this hurts."
- 6. and you will attach a meaning to that because you are empty.
- 7. you will create a fiction to that because you have been silent.
- 8. similar to how an addiction is a matter of getting used to it, until it is the only thing to you. something similar to the truth but it never is.
- 9. "you are obsessed with the meaning."
- 10. and you are obsessed with the banality
- 11. or the "meaning" stripped away from the touch.
- 12. the kind of touch that induces a deep shock of loneliness, until the scarring is indelible.
- 13. i have not always felt this comfortable not being touched.
- 14. "this might just be our inevitability."
- 15. strange this kind of romance.
- 16. a haunting of the nontouch, or something that explains itself.
- 17. maybe this needs no explanation
- 18. don't taunt this. this has always been there, inflicting itself upon itself.
- 19. "when will you stop?"

Do not touch me. Come near, sit beside. But do not touch me, because I am bleeding continuously. It does not matter where you stabbed, because I am an eternal thing. It would have not been a touching then, not if it was between you and the knife. You did not intend to kill me anyhow. I am sorry I do not know how to leave. I am sorry I only know how to be a wound. To you it was always the opening of flesh that came first. Then, it was the blood, escaping from within. Until it was the beating emptiness of the skin around the cut. You do not know how to be touched, not without it shocking you. I do not know how to be touched, not without it breaking the silence. It is when you do not touch me, that we know we are the same.

kissing you kissing me

We're not watching the TV your hand is here there right now so slowly I breathe in some vivid light from the windows keeping us up falling down to the curve of our necks anyone could watch us when it's my touch to your

touch that's warmest I want to shiver grasp a loose fist ful of your sleeve sigh to the moment & for a heartbeat nothing happens only a gasp

between us it's something so infinite about you in a moment dipping forward

so I climb into your lap & tilt my head & forget what I want to say because I'm only selfish so I can't stay still but to you it's easy the way you look when I press my fingers into your chest

it tells me everything when I kiss your knuckles
this is all I know this sweet bright & secret thing that you
are how
do you want me too

col·or

/ˈkələr/

- "the property possessed by an object of producing different sensations on the eye as a result of the way the object reflects or emits light."
- 2. "red, yellow, blue."
- 3. i've read this definition over and over again and i still don't understand it. this is the issue i have with color.
- 4. it is also the same issue i have with reality.
- 5. as soon as a color becomes a noun, it becomes the adjective of itself, this makes its name the immediate truth of it—
- 6. won't it be impossible to dispute that blues are the bluest of them all?
- 7. i have yet to see a blue like this. i've only ever read about it in books before—and even then, it always felt like a blue i was never worthy to perceive; i've always been looking through the keyhole, pervert of blue and eavesdropping on ultramarine. (ex. "listen, hear that? blue is the rawest color.")
- 8. but is it gone if it's not what it used to be? is there still any blue left? (what i mean is that some crabs are blue before they're boiled to reveal their red.)
- 9. this is how we become fools of our own eyes and names.
- 10. if color is an act of bending light, then an object is never truly the color we perceive upon it. suppose that an object is

- yellow, then it is absorbing all light except yellow is it the yellow we believe if it bounces off the physical body of the object?
- 11. i say this to assert that the yellow was purer than the object it had been upon. (ex. "what is the color of the sun?")
- 12. (you picked yellow as if you could look at the sun long enough)
- 13. and yet, we still tell the names of colors as if they are beyond the truth of the object. describing a color is simultaneously the act of calling upon its name, thus making them homes to anything—as things can be colors, the same way that colors can be things. ("does this mean that is a shade of yellow?") ("look at the sun for long enough and your eyes will burn a richer kind of shade.") (ex. "red is blood is red.")
- 14. but i swear, of all the colors, i'm sure i've seen red before, the wettest kind, and i saw it in the night instead—draped across the belly of the moon.
- 15. ("then i want to bash my fingers into my eyes and see red all the time. i'll make a beating heart out of it.")
- 16. if light is playing tricks on me then i want to exhaust all the red within me until i'm all colors—flip my skin inside out and become all of them except the truest one
- 17. here, i'll beat it out of me, all of the red i believed in:
- 18. mosquito bites, the sap out of small flowers, patches of skin after i've scratched the itch, arthur rimbaud's seasons in hell,

forcing the earring back into my earlobe, ripping off my nails, dusk, and lights at night, slamming my head against the wall, cracking my skull, pressing at bare skin when i'm too afraid to pull it apart, crabs and burning eyes—i want to drown in it all—red fingers, red mouths, red skies, red seas, red there, red here, red where red is mine, red where red

- 19. is the deep love of a shadow or rather,
- 20. the illusion of the thing itself.

touching is not needed for the baby turtle to return to the ocean it has only pictured in its first memory.

touching is not needed, for the moon to pull the tide, extending it into the emptiness of the world.

touching is not needed for time to ebb and stretch from month to month, folding our skin into our age.

touching is not needed for me to depart from myself; desolation that should be its own undoing—

for me to be encompassed by all your silence coursing from the shore.

/ /

noun

- 1. the and of the
- 2. and source of all
- 3. the being.
- 4. ex. "a moon "
- 5. it bears what we hold secret—that is, what we hide from ourselves. the depiction of a dog and a wolf, a crayfish emerging from the water, and a moon with a face. in this image, the face shuts its eyes closed.

exclamation

- 1. used for emphasis or to express emotions such as surprise, anger, or distress.
- 2. what did I do to deserve this?
- 3. "will only show you where it hurts."
- 4. something—
- 5. it is quiet—
- 6. it is arriving—

reasons why some ghosts must wear blankets

Type of Ghost	Reason why it must wear a blanket		
the truth	to silence the mouths writhing against cotton, bags over their heads, knotted at the neck, ears plugged with foam, while they talk as one ghost to another; knocking at walls as if they could pass through.	to lie that they have no faces, none at all, not when hiding them must be a matter of proving who exists.	
something we hold near	to demand we have no faces, none at all, not when there are apparitions you have no right to be afraid of.	to veil what is left so that someday, we may stretch our palms across the cloth, press into the fiber, look toward the sky and prism the light through the threads.	

Table 1. Reasons Why Some Ghosts Must Wear Blankets

reasons why mary is bleeding

In this room	Look	Don't Look
Is this how you like it?	Let me handle it. I can make it feel better. You know nothing hurts more than patience. Say my innocent name. Comb my hair back.	Something is beating at the center. See the deep eyes reflect off the window? Behind you so girlish biting your ear spilling secret after secret? After this kiss you press into my skin to kill me.
Do you feel it?	I told you when it is so dark you will not be able to tell if it is bone or flesh. But you keep touching it. Stop Look at me. Not here. Behind you.	My long dark hair, my long dark eyes capturing you at the hip after we undress we keep undressing. So you can show me how I struggle against the corners.

Table 2. Reasons why Mary is bleeding.

light as wound

the great nothingness is the light. the wound is not nothing, though it feels like nothing ever before it arrived. the great wound, skin detached from skin, where maybe this is or the self sloughed away from all the meaning. of peeling off the white, slowly forgetting what it all meant.

self / infliction

Don't you like it?

Watching me watch myself in the shower.

I curl my body on command, folding my legs,

incising across my breast.

Here: suckle from my raw flesh

call me beautiful, my swelling

bruise pretty, press deep

into my skin, deeper

until it splits.

Don't you like it?

A body convinced to pliancy—does not know anymore—who is watching it —touching it—sway and strip and shiver—like meat—call it raw—so it feels real—feel it—until it is no longer mine— as I—only own in a way that owns—guilt—everything is my fault—

Don't you like it?

I	do not like it	
but	not as much	as I am
addicted	to repentance	one day
will have	enough of the	clotting
"Let it be"	rashes	scratching
under my	knees	until I

weep though I am afraid

they cannot consecrate my peeling skin

when there is no more

room for the non-martyred

I do not like it the same way I like taking showers in the morning just a little bit after I get up from bed when the water falls upon the apples of my cheeks where the tips of my lashes end because here I am fresh and daily as I am sanctified before the drizzle because maybe I would like it the same way I would like someone to share this holiness with but only because I like it as much as I do not want anyone to see me as if I would like another baptism but most of all I want to shove my head under the depths of any river to gargle on the bubbles as I want to swallow the sky when any sun is visible through the drowning then you will see the blood I've bled is limpid in the rivers but no one would believe a girl who depends on forgiveness so you ask for a picture

As long as you like it.
As long as
I like it.

/woond/

noun

- 1. the source of all my being.
- 2. it was not an ordinary source, nor an ordinary dream. my body was burning and in my palm was a small blue frog. it was the most precious thing to me in that dream.
- 3. precious to me because it could fit in my palm, and its weight was all i had to carry. imagine it, something small and blue, sitting in your palm. you were the one who found it breathing gently.
- 4. this was not the first time i dreamt of an animal i never knew the name of.
- 5. i have also dreamt of a great blue heron, sweeping its wings down into a green river.
- 6. i dreamt this like it was a memory. as if i always see great blue herons in my daily life, as if i lived right next to a river. i didn't take this as a sign of anything but i always wondered why it felt like something i had seen before. imagine it, you are on a boat on the river, and the bird sweeps its wings into the water. imagine it being a sign of all the love that was left. imagine you are in the boat with a man who you knew, touching your thigh, before cutting you from the inside. imagine it, all of that love left hurt and confused.
- 7. this made me consider a few things, it made me consider waking up in the middle of the night to ache so deeply it would hurt my sleep too. an aching where i feel like i exist far too much.
- 8. but dreams are only reflections of the inner subconscious, of what you think secretly, of what you are afraid of secretly—ex. the stranger
- 9. "it is safe here. you can tell me that."
- 10. that i am afraid of the strangers i know.

kissing in the body of [...]

die slowly my lip is bleeding where you bit it here nothing is more honest than the pain of it that is this bright belly is the most itself of a thing there is yes this is what i want at the beating flesh of this we don't know how afraid we are yet our bodies & our messages sent to the void are startling in your eyes in the highest order such body of death represents the desire between us blessed are the naive ones poised at the edges of the silence

Strawberry Jam

In a place where strawberries grow, A cold swing sways empty in the middle Of a garden and a little girl falls Asleep in the car ride dreaming about The strawberries, such odd-looking pretty Things she could bring home to show to all Her friends over recess, that they could eat, and then They could play all day, until the dream ends, when her Eyelids peel open to the clouds, she wonders, is it The light or the building? Blinking, she finds Herself looking at a cabin that resembles a house drawn By a good child who knew the triangle was for the roof, The square for the body, the rectangle for the door, the bodies for Mama, papa, ate, kuya, and the sun bigger than the world, it was The depiction of a home where the wood was not real wood And the more she looked at everything the more They did not belong there, such christmas decorations In the middle of the summer, the porcelain baby angels And the dust on their noses, Santa Claus too stiff and too Red lipped because he wanted to scream, so she kept Looking because mama was taking too long talking To the lady at the desk, so the little girl follows the Christmas Lights into that garden of grass crinkling at her every step, And a swingset of bright baby-blue and sun-yellow where she sits, Swings, and dreams about all the strawberry jam she could Eat on a spoon, dreams about all the merry lights in the heat Of June, and about all the children who never knew their way back Home, as the fluorescence swells into the sore redness Unrecognizable from the sun.

gut feeling

As the water in the tummy of the world already knows, you are the kind of daughter that insists on creating a life of her own. So tell me the truth, "you do not understand." So really, it is only the water in the tummy of the world that knows, you are the kind of daughter that is worn-out. "Five more minutes," tell me please, before you wake. However still, the water in the tummy of the world already knows, you are also the kind of daughter that exits as she wishes. Surely I know. I too have negotiated this womb is mine, and I choose how I keep it. So if anyone would ever dare to fuck me without warning I would just shatter it all into pieces. And that is all I know, that at some point you will learn how to drive, and at a further point you hate this world as much as you love your child. That someday, you wake up after those five minutes, and have faith in yourself that you may leave me quite safely. Even then, even after you have left, even after you can no longer hear, or see, or taste, or touch, or smell, or feel, or remember. Even after you already know, I will still tell you.

You are the most important thing in my life

embrace

like the letter within the envelope, there is the skin beneath the skin

where all the original words nuzzle at the neck. they are of the body asking itself to forget it is still sore around the wound that only hurts when remembered. i told you these,

that they would only hold each other again, folding forever, knowing there is that wound, but never aching.

1000 Cranes

For Marcelino

My dearest companion, I am sorry that you have to wait for me to answer. I am so sorry that in such moments, you Press the paper corners into paper edges, and your kind messages begin to crease into fourths. There is no seeing where our prayers go when they are only Small words. But that is faith, and ours Is so timid, so then also precious, because We would not even hold it if we could. Because so deeply I must believe you are Somewhere near me; neither here, nor There. But somewhere where the Helplessness does not overcome, But folds into itself and creates A paper bird. And so we have made Plenty, where each of them is a pocket Of light that reminds the world We are somewhere. Somewhere, where It is safe enough to make a wish.

mongkok

red lights, eternal neon and pulsing where
the night is far, far too blue. eternal blue,
blurring of the night skimming past
my own vision looping
down
down
down
until i can almost hear how stranger eyes follow me, how they stripped the world
down
down

down
into flesh
a buzzing steps closer into my hair, breathing into my neck, to rip the world
down
down
down

into muscle	
until the buzzing cuts itself open, bleeding thoroughly	
down	
down	
	down
into bone	
snapped at the midpoints,	
down	

d	O	W	'n
u			

down

into nothing.

but most of all: stranger's eyes feel like a disgusting emptiness until it emerges as the naked fear in front of all of us collapsing

down

down

down

into its final place—			
everything	where	stops,	
, 0	and	1 /	
			every set
of eyes			
are			
neon red, electric blue,			

green and white.

some of them are pulsating,

breathing.

and yet, i dare to look up:

the world is

mongkok

how to meet [...]

kneels to Heaven at the Earth shadows: Pavement hits brick: they do not tell us where is: in never a kingdom: Relating like a perimeter: buried in the corners: The of rest us: Bend toward faith in a prayer to keep safe the ghosts: Glory will architect architect ourselves when we refuge from tragedy: this Upon construction we have fallen: Forward grace of the to dead: the

[...] as poetry

This is a parable about a weak-bodied little Boy who was dying. spoke to him then gifted him the power of a [star]. With that power, the Boy, with much strain, ceased the Earth from ending. So when he became a Man, he was hired for a job at the weather station. Here, he reported when it would rain, when the clouds would arrive, and when the sun would rise. He would marry the Woman he loved. Though she knew his strength would not last, and that neither would he on this Earth, she still loved him. So when he grew old, old enough to begin to die again, she wept by his side. He still loved her as well. So, to him, "From [this] you came, to [this] you return." In the End, the Boy thought, [Man] that if was , then the stars resemble must be made of such frail flesh, and blood, also

Sarah and Pixie

Sarah the pitbull, and Pixie the beagle-askal-mix, were lesbian dogs that loved so carefully when they curled against the other into the shape of a beating heart like so: as if tumor to tumor they devoted so much it was deft to the touch when I came to them, they would push their snouts into my palm tender ears against solid skull and eyes wary, as if to love was to sprain your ankle on the way home, as if to hurt was to show which way it bent.

orpheus lament

I cannot say what cannot be said is what is almost spoken; it does not hide that I cannot saylove is this loss the turning to face you slipping from now to memory to forget, remember, I cannot say love is this vacancy that if there was a world having it any other way, it would still be my perfect failure; it would still be your face to blink after the look, I cannot saylove is this, the complete desolation of you selfishly towards—

desolation of

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About the Poet

Mikaela Rallonza is finishing up her degree in Creative Writing, and her minor degree in Japanese Studies. With a genre specialization in poetry, she is currently invested in the themes around wounds, faith, and one's own relationship with reality.

