

softbody
Nikki Reimer

MODEL

softmushroom lung

when your mother tells you
they've found a spot low in her lung
that does not look like cancer
you would like to call your brother
(if you still had a brother)
but you do not still have a brother

so you look out the window
at the tree whose name you do not know
with its newly budding leaves
not yet green
 & eat bulk unsalted peanuts
 & try to be present to this moment
the details on the leaves blurred out
because your health plan doesn't cover corrective lenses
& you're wearing old off-focus contacts
to get your money's worth

what kind of poet
doesn't know the name of common trees

it is 2019,
the day after the provincial election
in little Texas

"the first incel premier"
someone said on Twitter

how might you open your softheart to grief
in this moment of rising fascist thought?

this is a bad poem
this is bulk unsalted peanuts
 this is, in fact, doves
 this is the worst dove

pap smears of the gods

how fully can you open yourself up to the universe?
you have to understand the rules before you can join/quit the team

grief cloaca, robust piano
could this be the lanyard of my dreams?

ingrown hairs of the stars get dug out with
diamond-encrusted tweezers

open yourself right up (Alien, 1979)
get ready for the wax of a lifetime (The 40 Year Old Virgin, 2005)
get ready for the pap smear to end all pap smears (Slacker, 1990)
get ready for a skin-melting vasovagal response (the poet, ca. 2011)

ok drop your pelvic floor
ok let go

types of problems:

situations that elicit painful emotions

whose mortality is more painful to confront:

- your child
- your sibling
- your spouse
- your parents
- yourself

seduction makes you vulnerable
choose not to confront your own mortuary
geography will not inherit commentary
madness is not beautiful
nervous tigers do not charm

whose comfort is more painful to confront:

instead of friends you have a series of blinking avatars
you send love letters disguised as memes

in 2020 the cells of your softbody are heavy with the city's cancer
you turn 40, take up weed smoking
no time like the present to make of yourself
holy smoke, relics of past sins

types of problems:

situations that are avoidable, but avoidance can cause other problems in our lives

fight facists vs. sooth ur amygdala? pay off ur debts vs. donate to the soldiers at the front?
whither poetry? whose safety is not political? when is it morally indefensible to purchase that
plane ticket? how will you do penance for your carbon footprint? what burden? reading or
breeding? the supermarket???? what comes first: the painbody or the shamebody? might you
be a nascent Anakin Skywalker?

types of problems:

one-time problem situations

the barista speaks with the voice of your mothertongue
but you're not even the diaspora, tho?

gear down Elbow Drive –
enjoy the trees,
enjoy the silence

hot migraine-sheared the siderunner clean off
(come crashing in,
into my little world)

hey, there it is.

types of problems:

repeated problem situations / similar issues arise over and over and we want to break the cycle

if irritation occurs, key out of reach

having grieved your exclusion, you're already in it
you could never twig *on* or
you could never cotton to

by the time you clued in, the others had moved on
they don't "realize" you're "speaking" in "air-quotes"

so embrittled

moving farther away from poetry,
these lines fail to surprise and delight

there's no crackle, no spackle.
no tricho tricho tricho trichotillomania
you come and go in the March of our despair

types of problems:

repeated failure to stop destructive or ineffective behaviours

confronted with brilliance, you shrank

your entire selfhood a compendium of worst moments:

chronic lateness

lack of verbal filter

envy approaching lust

meeting one new friend for the first time:

wow, you're tall!

another colleague, a much younger woman:

wow, you're stunning!

your garbage squirrelbrain

catches windblown branches

ends up on a fence

chattering madly at a cat

you stupid fuck

you stupid, stupid fuck

types of problems:

chronic problem situation – ongoing issue that creates a state of misery, is continual, and most often in need of solving

the whole body grows in whorls

toenails embed into skin

hair spiralling dermis

pubic mound uterus endometria

deviation from spherical curvature results in distorted images

light rays prevented from meeting at a common focus

a bloated apex deviation

a spiral roughly-shaped like a human

organs fused together by adhesive lesions

how old were you when you realized that painful bowel movements weren't your
"fault line"

there's no poetry in the painbody

there's no poetry in the painbody

where's the dignity in the four times disabled shamebody

diagnosis radiculitis

and I said yes it is ridiculous

rates of failure

the poem itself didn't fail us
our vision failed as to what the poem might achieve

i'm not saying it was a straight line
from the ash and sea of papers onscreen on 9/11
to Trump's kids in cages
i'm not saying it wasn't
i'm not saying I can't learn to love heat death

here's a cat with the softest velvet paws
she's not Schrödinger's cat, she's alive
she's purring through the poem as we speak

late capital

I am bedding down for winter in the dawn of the new Detroit. been years since we've had a good hospital fire sale. I yawn ferociously on the plane. are the rents high someone asks. I don't know that man but I called his cat Baby. I drink tea up and down the cafes of Plateau Mont-Royal. where I'm from we'd call that mountain a bluff. don't call me. in Baltimore a man said hey I like your style, I like your hair, baby. In Montreal I became Madame. in-flight wifi an excuse to be my worst self. what year did my anxiety stop being sexy. do you like my style? do you like my hair? bought the IBS probiotics so I could stop shitting every half hour. poop jokes don't even write themselves. that fall my lymph glands swelled and threatened mutiny. no cure for the common cold; no vaccine for the bird flu. I can't keep up. who's dying and/or getting fired. the oil and gas industry needs our pensions and our job funding. it's January, again. we're in mourning, again. just tuck me into this nest of pillows and leave me here; I'll either thaw out in the spring or I won't.

the height of bathos

don't admit to still being affected by minor childhood traumas like bullying
or major adult traumas like ptsd

*In either case, the weakness, the original source of shame, belongs to the
victim. How gauche to admit yourself affected in the present day by
something that is not happening to you in the present moment. How
solipsistic to be embodied, how shameful to have a self.*

I have finally learned how to contort my body when rolling over in bed
so as to prevent the cat from leaving
it's my greatest accomplishment

a malevolent wind blows through Claresholm
a cursed migrainal prairie wind

"Anything properly applied can be a weapon. Kindness can be a weapon."
[*The Expanse* season 4 episode 10]

one day my father will be dead
so today I am eating all of the shortbread cookies he has baked

"Hello, devouring father"

[MC Hyland]

I don't have the spoons to be present for every soulbody that needs me

we're out of vinegar

I want to gather all of my dead into the house with me, but I'll need to bleach the place down first. one hundred more mouldy pants for the archives. we thought you were on death's sour. thank you for your hospitality and hospital slippers. there's no agents available for the first of the month. there's a knife with a trick I'm yearning to do. fuck your loyalty cards. when might I pack up my trauma and make a meaningful philosophical statement?

but the moon

is the moon

but is the moon

what is the moon

what exactly did you think the moon was going to do for you, poet?

why are you writing these words, line by line by line?

towards what widening gyre do we turn, poet?

do we abandon our friends, moving our slow thighs?

letting the soft animal of our body abandon what it loves?

crawling on our knees to the falconer daddy?

letting the body animus of our softening

BUT IS THE MOON

leading the animatronic heart of our body

letting the soft dirty shirt of the distancing

of the moon is the surface of the distance

of the body **POET WHERE HAVE YOU LEFT THE MOON**

in the distance is the surface of the rough beast

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH MY SOFT ANIMAL BODY

NIKKI REIMER works and lives, in that order. Fifth generation chronically ill neurodivergent prairie settler with too many side interests and not enough main narrative. Currently residing in Claresholm, AB in Treaty 7 territory, formerly of Calgary/Mohkínstsis, emotionally always in the unceded lands known as Vancouver. Explores capitalist detritus and its impact on bodies in *[sic]* (Frontenac House 2010) and *DOWNVERSE* (Talon Books 2014). The labour of grieving is worked through *My Heart is a Rose Manhattan* (Talon Books 2019). Poetry, non-fiction writing, collaborative interdisciplinary performance and artworks have appeared in print, digital form and meatspace via stages, billboards, public art exhibits, poem-plays, magazines, journals and anthologies, most recently *Watch Your Head: Writers & Editors Respond to the Climate Crisis* (Coach House 2020) and *Locations of Grief: an emotional geography* (Wolsak and Wynn 2020).

MODEL PRESS 2021
Toronto/Tkaronto, for now
rcfmod@gmail.com