Introduction

by Marie Buck

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 earlier Tardos's 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*

Letting Go

A Poem in 100 Parts

Each page is connected to the next by the initial appearance of the phrase or the concept of "letting go," in its various forms.

The rest of the page is free.

(2007)

For M

1

It's the ego that lets go of the ego.
A leftist is usually right.
Everyone is really a very fine fellow.

I am an Acoustican.
I come from the planet Acoustica
Where we g'oham yeolnia ooh yeeanh
Some varsity sensibingatee zenifer lida
Shaka-ha-cha-ka!

Different papilla pamina different zugoria.

The standing the name the gesture
The movement
One cigale verisimilitude sentimentablement genial

Dissertation vegetation permission

A very fine fellow

2

The egg lets go of the egg and becomes a bird
The bird appeals to our sense of freedom
and makes a cat salivate mentally
Cats don't salivate
Dogs salivate
Therefore dogs don't salivate mentally but actually
Birds don't salivate
I doubt they even salivate mentally

The killer instinct brushes its teeth at night
It flosses between its thoughts

Thoughts that create sounds
Sounds that become words

And words get along well with each other

Can't hold on to anything
ever
anyway
Not to the bird or the stone in your hand you would never
        throw at a bird

And all of this is really happening.

3

The girl lets go of the girl and becomes an adult
After a while, she will let go of herself and become something
    else
It's difficult to understand what
But I know that all of this is really happening
And that everyone is a very fine fellow

You confirm and you build by repetition
You invent a device that will repeat for you as needed

You hand a stone to a child and watch her break into a smile
The stone will remain calm and composed inside the little fist

The stone dreams of the beach
and of sandhood
The edge of the water where the children play

A play is by definition amusing
A muse is by definition a scantily clad young female floating
    about

4

A PENGUIN UNDERSTANDS the meaning of life just as a seal
ends it.

Shilly-shally winter death
Monkey colorectum
Embrionic bazaar fracas
comprehension overcast

Cendrier Baudrillard
Upscale venison

Vertical severance
Digital mismatch

Empanades truc machin-chose
I chose to be the dingo

A pecking order in Beijing
to be
to live
to do
to give
to die

A cat, a sweetheart, maybe a baby.
In this case, maybe a koala.

5

The eagle lets go of the eagle
Its need to control reality causes its insomnia
Fear creates what is feared

Conversation scuba diddle
Verification jumble zig

Pretty little short supply
Glitter kindness gender gap
Delicate gene pool
Frisbee mutation
Unexpected peppermint

Razzmatazz

Thought exists.
Rigid necessity.