The Researcher’s Book of Her/mes

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Abstract

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Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences

I will not reveal my secrets. I'll leave that to the Trickster who rips the curtains away and delights in exposure. I want the mystery to remain. Can there be transparency without revelation? The more I discover, the more the questions persist. The more I write, the more my words break down, disintegrate. I want to find something to hold onto but as soon as I grasp what has solidified it turns to liquid and runs through my fingers. There is a desire to find fascination within the obsession. And to know that whatever is sought will always evade.
THE RESEARCHER’S
BOOK OF HER/MES

BY L. BURGHER
PART ONE
The researcher begins
tells the same story

over again
circles
back
and
back
are
Liber librum aperit
“One book opens another”
a rock ricochets
the reflection
a ruse
a step lost
on the uptake

what I read comes back to me in my sleep

The researcher wakes into dream
Enter:

mercury in retrograde
Mercury Retrograde! | Gala Darling

Mercury Retrograde also has what's called a "shadow period" (which we might call Mercury’s shadow), so you may feel the retrograde...

Explained | Astrostyle: Where Astrology ...

18 to June 11 between 4° and 13° Gemini. Go flame-haired from your spiritual fire, dance around maypoles...
Space Time Astrology @AstroSpaceTime • Mar 2
We’ll be out of the shadow of MercuryRetrograde in just a few days (MAR 3rd). Be ready to hit the ground running! #astro

Robert Ohtto @RobertOhtto • Mar 2
VLOG: The impact of MercuryRetrograde in Aquarius Integration... the phase ends tomorrow, #astrology

Lizzette Rulon @Lizzettev204 • Mar 2
Understand the impact of MercuryRetrograde in all 12 zodiac signs futuresobright.com/article/322-me...

Raw Goddess @RawGoddessInc • Mar 1
@starsmoonandsun Yeah this is always the shadow stronger! Feels like it’s gonna keep building up till the #fullmoon.

Raw Goddess @RawGoddessInc • Mar 1
@starsmoonandsun that's that MercuryRetrograde shadow @fullmoon in a couple of days!

Parents of OMM @ParentsofOMM • Mar 1
Best way to deal with MercuryRetrograde is to go WITH against it j.mp/15MxGrF #vortex #sourceenergy #align
I do not believe in astrology

Enter: longitude
Enter: latitude

I was born under the planet Mercury

Enter: time
Enter: date

Ruling: travel, commerce communication

Enter: sex
Enter: name

Your opinions are very strong

you are an independent thinker
The researcher leans
over sink
stares at
reflection
glint of metal
around the molars
Is the metal in my teeth responsible for these changes?

Vaccinations?

Up until the late 90’s mercury was still being used in the amalgams to fill cavities. Various reports state the amount as too small to cause any adverse health effects.

Mercury in vaccinations has been listed as a cause of autism.
The researcher faces screen

Input: ---
Input: ---
Input: ---

Reports piled and tipping over reaching for
Close catch and saved
Made mistake of shifting
Keyboard crashing Cord caught on Backwards maneuver put together again I am messing it all I am missing
(How to Survive) Mercury Retrograde

Expect:
miscommunication
long delays
technological meltdowns
the return of ex lovers or old flames

Survival tips:
back up your hard drive
avoid travel
refrain from decision-making
double-check, edit, proofread
don’t take anything too seriously
connect with people from the past
avoid signing contracts
don’t hire anyone new
don’t begin new relationships

As a child I pressed beetles between sheets. The crunch of hard shell. Liquid shimmer.

The beetle busts itself against the bulb. Repeatedly.
Type: Mercury

Are these charts scientific?

Pull the legs apart and spin on the hinge - the needle digging in

Circles upon circles upon

Is this how I will find him?
Most of the mercury on this planet is found as vapor.

I take a deep breath and wonder

Charts with arrows
I am trying to understand

Volatilization of mercury from the alloys contained in amalgam tooth fillings during cremation of human bodies is a potential source of mercury air emissions.
In the library the researcher glances over to SELF HELP. The book on the shelf:

*Finding Your Element*
Library Resources  Course Reserves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Any</th>
<th>contains</th>
<th>mercury</th>
<th>AND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any</td>
<td>contains</td>
<td>retrograde</td>
<td>AND</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any | contains | 

Search  Clear  Simple Search
0 Results for Articles, Books, and More

Suggestions:

- Make sure all words are spelled correctly.
- Try different keywords.
- Try more general keywords.
- Try fewer keywords.
Mercury rules both Gemini and Virgo. It is the messenger planet, named after the god in mythology.

Mercury’s placement in the zodiac tells us how we pick up, process, absorb and exchange information.
the researcher pulls
plates off a revolving belt

the researcher wonders
prods at pink flesh

the researcher discovers
a Methylmercury Chart

“it’s just like counting calories”
She paid the dark in stars
dim side down
the windows fogged drawing
constellations
she wouldn’t spill
her secrets
but Mercury would

rather than apply the hard trick
of the European panic
he spent his nights
in ecstatic fervor
discovering PLANETS satellites
Jupiter’s moons

when staring up like this
half blind you have to trust
whatever bizarre move

knowing
it’s going to take you
somewhere
The researcher wakes to glowing
turns it over
I want to be obsessed with something meaningless
turn the page to iron immediately see in advance words that come next am I you reincarnate
when did you die how did you live you take for granted
is it always like this and I failed to notice
find my notebook afterwards
lines crossed off
“Mercury, as in, thermometers?”
A friend of the researcher calls to say:

I have found another
I heard it on the radio
They are mining for gold
Poisoning the rivers
    with
minuscule globules
in their search to find
infinitesimal
    hope for
a future
it is a danger for the researcher to identify too strongly with their subject
Mercury says
   Follow me

   I’m going
      back

   I was born
      a Gypsy

Mercury is
   an absence
   a tomorrow
   a bridge

   take for occasional
      blockages
   take to lose your
      brains

   swallow
   pill after pill
   blue to make you blue
   to make you blue
Early risers may mistake Mercury for a star in the morning twilight. Mercury is a planet of orbital peculiarities.

The researcher shuts the book.
Pull out the compass. Spread the legs. Draw the diagram. Around and around.

_How many times will I find you?_
We sent a shipment of grain seed dyed pink overseas with symbols unintelligible to the local populations.

I have overdone you.

Invented by Daniel Gabriel Fahrenheit in 1714. The scale was calibrated to the human body, which was believed to be 100 degrees.

No less than ten names are mentioned in the invention of the mercury thermometer.

For many years even Fahrenheit kept his methods secret.
how does the brain sift
and flutter
information

silence a distraction

the researcher edges the pages
apophenia

studying these things
obsession
the researcher sits
in the cold room
waiting
how had I never noticed before
the talaria

swift as any bird
as the researcher turns
the pigeon drops

mis

carries
At the show
crooked-tooth grin
Image across
forearm

The researcher stared
Ensnared

Fishing wire alive
sliding back into the wall

I wake

With my tongue
in hand
I beseech you

Strong arm me
into believing

I wake up backwards
the sound of fluttering
Mercury was the Roman equivalent of the Greek god Hermes. He was born to be a Trickster, stealing his brother Apollo’s cattle and hiding in a cave. He was born to be a musician, crafting a lyre to pacify his brother’s rage. With serpent-entwined staff in hand, he led souls to the Underworld, or back out again.

In India, Quicksilver was believed to be the semen of Shiva. The Tantric adept achieved a mercurial body by systematically imbibing the liquid and inhaling the air of its preparation. Once mercurialized he was assured long life and healing prowess.

The association of elements with their planets and symbols appears to have been adopted from Arab cultures during the Middle Ages. Mercury, moving most rapidly across the sky, was associated with the wing-footed messenger. His trickster nature aligned with quicksilver’s volatility.

His most common appearance was on the road. Square pillars which bore only his head and phallus were erected on trails and crossways. Food was occasionally left here to satiate needy travelers.
If you were to observe the sun’s motions from Mercury, you would notice some very strange things. The orbital speed conflicts with the rotational speed in such a way that observers would witness two sunrises and two sunsets. While standing at 180 degree meridians, then you would see the sun rise in the east, climbing slowly for the duration of one and a half Earth months, until it reached noon on Mercury. Just before noon the Sun would appear to perform a loop in the sky, slowing down, stopping, backing up, and then continuing westward until it set one and a half Earth months later. And all of this, before midmorning, would take twenty-two Earth days.

It wouldn’t get vastly bizarre until you were at the zero or 90 degrees longitude you would see the sun rise, hover briefly, set, and then rise once more. Jumping to 270 degrees longitude, the sun would set, rise again, and then set once more. Units it is to performing Earth months loop, and signal half a Mercurian year had passed.
I can’t stop

everything

intrigues

me I can’t

stop can’t

stop can I

become what

I seek I
fill in the gaps but chasms can’t teeth
your ancestors you’ll forget
the mirror a stilted green
grin the walls in lace
find enough to shroud
Mercury I am sick

of you I cover

my eyes I cover

my ears when

I take my hands

all I hear

is whispering
the researcher forgot to leave dusk
descended glow in artificial bulbs
Mercury save me
break my technology
I am not a poet I’m a thief

I meant to say

we are trying new ways

I can’t take credit
I can only take

joined at the mouth
begets

ibis
egret
weasel

your way into words

my tongue has always
rested heavy on my teeth

don’t you speak
don’t you girl

the researcher has lost
her voice

she can’t even call in sick
I meant to say
The researcher seeks an analog:
s/he
PART TWO
Ancient alchemical texts were dispersed throughout several books. This required the alchemist to search multiple sources to find all the information they sought. Some say this was a purposeful esoteric practice; one would prove their worthiness of receiving by enduring the difficulties of discovering. Some say it allowed for new material to be added after a book was complete. Many believe this process hid the multiple authorship of these texts. Regardless, this practice allowed for the constant writing and revision of new editions.
The researcher begins
Tells the same story
over again

Circles back
and back
and back
According to early sixteenth-century physician and alchemist Paracelsus (born Philipus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus Von Hohenheim), three elements make up all matter in the universe; Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt, combined in various proportions.

Sulfur represents the Soul,
Salt the Material Body, and
Mercury, Spirit.
In ancient alchemical texts, the relationship is frequently depicted as the *tria prima*:  

```
Salt

Mercury    Sulfur
```
The researcher wakes
into dream

hours spent hunched
over acrid fumes billow
imbibe and still be
followed by shudders

best to return before
the dark lumbers
in on hairy paws
Johann Joachim Becher, in the mid-seventeenth century, believed that all metals contained quicksilver.
One can imagine the sordid history of Mercury (reputed to play male, female, and hermaphroditic roles), traces showing up in combined samples of other metals and gold.
In the words of Professor Kavey: “Mercury is a bit of a slut...”
I follow you back

wander feverish
pallid streets lit
copious corrugated
trail heads back
to beginning of
ring making
time outside
broken glass
slip through grease
fingers you told me
to shut and I lost
it a rope of bed
clothes hanging
down the brick
Hermaphrodite. [Ἑρμῆς, Hermes, and Ἥρμη, Venus, Gr.] In sculpture. "This being," says Millin, "must be considered as a fiction of the imagination, produced by a people who possessed the art of embellishing every thing—the Greeks; who designed, in the hermaphrodite, to represent a union of all the excellencies peculiar to either sex." In point of taste, we must beg leave to differ from the intelligent Frenchman. Although in theory this combination may be exceedingly fine, yet when an attempt is made to place it visibly before us, the result is certainly, to our apprehension at least, anything but ornamental—it is, indeed, offensive. In ancient mythology the hermaphrodite is said to have proceeded from an amour between Mercury and Venus, as is indicated by the etymology of the name. Venus was esteemed the queen of all beauty; and Mercury, to his personal accomplishments, added wit, knowledge, and, in short, talent of every kind. These blended qualities are then to be supposed to descend upon their common offspring, who thus becomes the representative of all imaginable human perfection. The painters of the Greek vases, who, by the by, were not at all scrupulous as to the nature of their delineations, made no small use of this ideal personage; and M. Millin speaks of a crouching statue of the same kind in the sculpture gallery of the Louvre, which
Robert Boyle, the father of modern chemistry, spent years ardently pursuing the Philosopher’s Stone.
Some alchemists became obsessed. Bernard of Treves sought the Philosopher’s Stone from age 14 to 85. He built a lab, travelled the world, squandered his family’s fortune, spent a lifetime in pursuit.

Was this a life wasted?
Isaac Newton compiled *Index chemicus*
in an attempt to solve the secrets of alchemy.
wait until you see the peacock's tail then you’ll know you’ve got it right.
Is this the real life?

through an observation of disconnected knowledge of which is chaotic and remains because no principle of action is discovered, and how many of us know what life is, except perhaps in this way? We see it everywhere, “the birds of the air fly with it, the fishes of the sea swim with it, we carry it about with us everywhere,” yet we know not what it is.

Let it be merely supposed now, that a recluse proposes to himself the problem, **What is Life?**—but, as this word is common and is imagined to carry some meaning with it, while yet the student enters upon the study confessing his ignorance, it is thought convenient to assume another name. **Let it then be called Mercury,** from some remote analogy of this sort; that, if a small portion of this mineral be dashed upon a smooth extended surface, it will separate into an infinity of little globules, each one of which has the entire properties of the whole.
few who escape delusion. And the few who do so are supposed to have been brought back to common sense dreams.

Now, without pretending to solve the true difficulty in the study, I suggest that the Alpha in the art is like to be this, that the Omega the Alpha, and the place of the commencement of the difficulty is by saying that the object is analogous to an attempt to discover the place of that force in nature called gravity or gravitation. In mechanical calculations this force is referred to a certain centre, called the centre of gravity; yet every one knows that the absolute yet there is no particle of matter free from the influence of this power, and every, the most infinitesimal particle, has its own centre. So is it with what the Hermetic philosophers call their Mercury, which they say is everywhere seen in action, but nowhere in essence.

I am aware of the fact that some speculative spiritualists of the present day have much to say of what they call imponderables, but I am not as yet convinced that any actual thing in the universe can
He wakes me
in the middle

singing

the cattle home

Is this just fantasy?
fear of alacrity
perspicacity
quick
silver begins
feminine
transformative
muscle memory
sharpness of sight

why the insistence on lions
when the main point
is obscured

green to keep
red to remember

alchemy a marriage
between warring factions

the staff of snakes
the clash of claw
Under the bridge
train

look at me
lacking

the dog follows
smells sweat

I am delirious
think of
self splayed

no one recognizes me
as he
thought eyes dull

The wind cold blowing
prehistoric leaves

details lag behind trails

compare me to the
moon but I can’t help
my erratic
rhythms
I have forgotten
my shoes

winged
with movement
I want to break free
from your lies

Our brains primed
for obsession
a survival defense
mechanism I come
home back scratched
my face a shade of guilt

we know every time
the poison is the panacea
sexually transmitted
the relationship

I imagine the word dirt etched
in the bottom of the door

I want to break free
the ultimate peacock, [Mercury] seduced us all
I know I have to strut
In Waynesboro, environmental contamination from nearby factories has been altering the songs of sparrows and wrens. The birds are recorded singing simpler, shorter, lower-pitched songs. Wrens and sparrows learn their songs from their fathers - a “feat of memory, mimicry, and advanced brain development.” A correlate may exist with the language-function of human brains. The same troubles birds have in learning to sing, children have in learning to speak. Methylmercury exposure, whether in womb or egg, reduces cognitive ability.
I wake to feathers
box of tiled patterns
snowflake ache
I needed an escape an open alley paved with popcorn seeds a bird can’t remember brains it’s seen along the dark night lock us out of our own rooms for forgetting how we should try that again when I’ve got my tongue on straight strewn across the possibilities of misspeak I can’t remember saying goodbye how did the night end without beginning did I give that away what have I failed to conceal paint splattered on drawing boards
When dosed with mercury, songbirds seem to change their choice of mates

she moves the furniture
around the room she moves
(do you love him does he love you)
chairs and desks pile up
corner boxes overflow

she moves around
and around
the room
With his rod
he charms men
to sleep and
wakes them.
any way the wind blows

doesn’t really matter
to me
Come nights
the heat doesn’t turn
on
I sleep with sugar
coated
speech

They found us
sticky paw
whisker licked

I’m not a poet
I’m a thief

Black rimmed
white lidded

smoky bones
just throw my remains in the lake when I go
Cross double
cross over cross
out
Leave-
Linger-

Resist and release

An urge to

Report on Research
forget line and space
sentence between song
frantic rhythm

forgo thorough examination
flag
dogear

_The researcher turns_

off kilter
off place
out of
twinge

An opening

which
suggests

sameness

notate
marginate
he broke the glass
upon the nurse leaving
in seconds he smashed
the glass hypodermic
he raised the needle
to face
intoxicate
raised metallic
to integrate into
muscle
into matter
into mind
don’t

would you diagnose?
mental
Paracelsus advocated treating disease with doses of mercury. This became the standard treatment for syphilis until 1909. The entire time it was known to be a poison.
what if the revision resisted

what if the revision resided
in two homes

what if the revision outlasted
the original

when we lose
nothing lives

to know you resist

mark my mercurial words

Lengthwise
What can a single human contain

Once mercury crosses the blood barrier
There’s no escaping the brain
Mercury contains the cure. It has all along.
Those infected by mercury experience a narrowing of the field of vision.

Children affected with Minamata Disease have difficulty speaking.

The animal effects were severe enough in cats that they came to be called “dancing cat fever.”
I am starting to lose my tongue.

What I meant to say was
The researcher knows to solve to hold

texts are transmissions
when the “hatters” returned home they carried a “paternal influence”

Mercury must die before they can live
maybe mercurial
but not an excuse
to vacillate
one to the other

time to find
direction
indiscrete

On the Vapors
swing below lower than the bridge
to avoid

when the Trickster steps across
the border

Synchronicity begins
I must come to grips with this attraction

it goes both ways
(I wasn’t looking)
Similitude sanctions
irrevocable advances
disregarding time
lost in contemplation
frame this argument
as indecent to deny (identity)(identify)
any harboring effects
of regurgitation

later this will
surface
trans
mutated
to turn one
into another
takes the right
mental state
do you have it
in you
Imagine him
cold in the
hole knowing
he will catch
the glimpse
of elusiveness
not the planet
so much as
the possibility

We are all
looking for
the glimpse
we swore we
saw from
the corner
and can never
shake
plan to place
this stack here
and look away
dragged
daggered
I am

trying to capture

trying to make
whole
If you built a bath of mercury and jumped in, you would break all your bones.
What if every word could come
sullied, fully formed, whole
in my large sticky mouth

Have your lips ripped?
Dis-figured?
poetry stares blankly
at blinking screen

researcher in tact
in tow
Rob
for “female complaints”

no one will know
your glittering
secret
a fluid self that is constantly forgetting

Her/Me

a fluid self that is constantly shifting

the burden of esoteric theories

Mercury bleeds
the researcher:
an instrument of mixing

the barometer:
teasing into imagination
the pressure of the atmosphere

if enough mercury is added
the air around us is discovered
uncover the air
uncover your ears
open your eyes,

look up to the skies

and see
Mercury’s eccentricities in orbit prompted the creation of a fake planet, a ghost sibling, Vulcan.
In 1878, James C. Watson, a renowned astronomer from the University of Michigan, fell victim to its grasp. After believing he had spotted the planet, zipping through the sky during a total solar eclipse, he became obsessed in his pursuit to verify its existence.
He literally became a man with tunnel vision, and built a shaft, 24 feet deep, to house a telescope he planned to use to track Vulcan in broad daylight, during the frigid Midwest winter.
In November 1880, James C. Watson died from complications of pneumonia.
In November 1915, while sitting at his desk in Berlin, Albert Einstein explained Vulcan away. The apparition was merely caused by a warping in the fabric of space-time.

It was Mercury all along.
Every year

Mercury goes missing
The Researcher’s Notes

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Through the Mouth of Mercury
A queer, liminal, alchemical poetics

L. Burgher
Part 1: Liminality, or, the hypnagogic imagination

Poetic language allows for a multiplicitous and liminal sense of a self in transit.
— Ely Shipley

I think poems are born out of all the interstices and liminal spaces, large and small. I’m always writing in airports. My poems are born out of borderlands. The spaces between. Obviously between gender, but other betweenities too – the moment a relationship shifts from one thing to another, or when something that used to be called this is now called this. — Oliver Bendorf

Hear the context. Context my life. Context my body. The way I fall asleep at night. It often begins in the liminal space before dreams. Or when dreams wear slowly into reality. The images in this space: hypnagogic. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, “we do not contemplate the hypnagogic image but are fascinated by it,” (63). The hypnagogic overlays the world of senses, intersperses dream into reality. In these liminal spaces, before consciousness disappears, I hear voices. Startling and strange, these lines and phrases are enough to shake me awake. Moments of pure fascination, I do not consciously seek these words. They settle upon me in the liminal zone. At times I wonder how much control I have over these hypnagogic voices. If hypnagogic phenomena, similarly to dreams, are a compendium of processing, could I subject myself to sounds, images, and ideas throughout the day, specifically with the aim of affecting what I may hear?

Liminal spaces have always fascinated me. I frequently write in moments of literal transit. On buses, in airports, walking. The act of travel invites a deep excitement reserved for little else.
I am writing towards a liminal poetics. Towards, because I can never arrive. By the nature of its liminality I can only ever pass through. Briefly. Momentarily. A liminal poetics allows for a queer discourse. An in-between space. A neither here nor there. A restriction of borders and an elusion of binary.

The liminal zone is a queer zone. In transit. Always traveling. A movement without settling. An elliptical orbit. An irregular orbit. Not the traditional predictability of seasons. A space the Trickster sneaks through. Plays with expectations. Disrupts with images like hallucinations. A visual display that twists and turns and unsettles. Vertigo. I write to circle aimlessly around something that cannot be pinned down. My aim is not apparent but it is there. Shrouded.

Sleep evades me in the liminal space of insomnia. Peter Schwenger sees insomnia as both evocation and invitation to write, “if sleeplessness comes with writing, writing also demands sleeplessness” (63). As an insomniac child I lived in liminal spaces of imagination. In the absence of dream, I enacted scenes from my bed. Many nights I dreamt awake that I sat in the cabin of a boat traversing a vast body of water. I frequently played games of travel, existing doubly in the liminal space of transit within imagination. Similarly to Anzaldúa, “I preferred the world of the imagination to the death of sleep...” (87).

There was another level to my liminal existence: I was always somebody else. I played games with embodiment. With identity. Changing names, ages, and genders. I was fascinated with androgyny. Memories of my false identities almost overshadow memories of my bodily lived experience. They all coexist within the same liminal space.
The act of my imagination brought all manner of people, places, and stories into my world. Sartre finds incantatory powers within the act of the imagination. By imagining the object of one’s desire, there is an ability to take possession of it (177). I ached to inhabit these other bodies and places and held the bizarre belief that through my imagination I could do so. I read books in an attempt to find myself between the words.

As I grew older my imaginative play was translated to the page. To write then, was always to write an autobiography of an imagined self. The book is “at once a reality of the virtual and a virtuality of the real” (Bachelard Reverie 24). Writing allowed me to seamlessly embody other characters and identities and write with their voices. Bachelard’s imagination is essential to poetry, in which “...it is impossible to receive the psychic benefit of poetry unless these two functions of the human psyche—the function of the real and the function of the unreal—are made to co-operate” (Poetics of Space xxxv). My imaginary life was real in more ways than my lived one. In a lack of sleep I wrote, and this writing served to awaken.

Writing is also shifting states of consciousness. I write in delirium, dreaming into realities, fueled by emotion. According to Bert States and his poetics of dreaming, dreams work from a point of emotion, the dream then makes associations, and acts as “metaphor in motion” (30). One image leads to the next, and the loose narrative that emerges is an associative one. The emotion precedes the images and the visible portion of the dream is the manifestation of these images (26). The visible portion on the page, a manifestation of the emotion.
Part 2: Silence, or, speaking through someone else’s mouth

Poetry increasingly seems to be a village full of explainers so today I will hide myself in public in this impossible embrace. — Eileen Myles

my ambiguous embodiment requires readings and re-readings, and invites misreadings and rewritings... to be queer is to be queried.—Gr Keer

Writing allowed me to be silent and heard simultaneously. As a child I found it difficult to communicate, especially in regards to strong emotions. My lack of coherent speech was often problematic, misconstrued. I stood, body stretched so my toes wouldn’t cross the carpet line of my bedroom, to drop explanatory notes in articulated prose to the floor below. I was a well-behaved child but for small rebellions, namely directed at an insistence to socialize me as ‘girl.’ I would return home with pond-mucked tennis shoes. The make-up kit became clown face paint, an unintentional mockery of gender presentation.

Identity was always a space of resistance to expectations. I never wanted to be “read” a certain way and have an identity imposed upon me from outside. I came up with strategies to confuse readings, dressing in clothing that did not represent me in any meaningful way. I wanted control over the ways I was being misread. I wanted to define how my body was viewed by the world. I spent so much time in trying to claim my own readings that I lost all energy towards claiming my own sense of how I wanted to exist in the world. I was always in a liminal space between expectations and reality. I incited the viewer to a double take. Circle back. Look again. I am resistant to a single reading.
Space is important for my poems. White space. Emptiness. Silence. Poetry makes sense as dispersed fragments. Silence, combined with secrecy becomes a strategy. In *Opacity of the Closet*, de Villiers looks at Barthes’s “Silence” as a tactic to outplay the “oppressions, intimidations, the dangers of speaking” (82). de Villiers describes the conflation of Barthes’s “boy loving” and writing. One does not exist without the other (69). What would it look like to map this on to any type of desire? To the desire of an expressed identity? Or to the conflicting desires to be read and unreadable? de Villiers sees Barthes’s desire for the “Neutral” as a queer desire, “to give imprecise answers to precise questions... an indirect way of demystifying the question... every question can be read as a situation of questions, of power, of inquisition” (87). If, as Keer asserts, “to be queer is to be queried,” how might secret-keeping be a response? Baudrillard takes up the political and economic implications of sharing secrets, when he looks at the power inherent in the withheld secret:

> Everything that can be revealed lies outside the secret. For it is not a hidden signified, nor the key to something; it circulates through and traverses everything that can be said, just as seduction flows beneath the obscenity of speech. It is the opposite of communication and yet shares something with it. Only at the cost of remaining unspoken does it maintain power, just as seduction functions from never being spoken or desired (159).

For Baudrillard, it is this unspeakable, incommunicable quality of the secret that provides its “ritual power of exchange” (159). When the secret becomes secrecy it is no longer containable. A secret creates a space in opposition. An unknowable. Writing is a
form of secrecy — whether or not it contains any secrets in their finite forms. The content of the secret does not matter as much as the essence of secrecy. In some ways, the secret is in response to a culture of confession. Foucault asserts that one is always called on to confess, particularly in regards to sexuality.

One confesses in public and in private, to one’s parents, one’s educators, one’s doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about.

One confesses—or is forced to confess (59).

How to write in such a way that doesn’t confess, but rather creates a space for the awareness of a knowledge purposefully being withheld? Can silence work as a tactic in written form? Is there a way to purposefully withhold information in a world that demands full disclosure at all times? Can one write in such a way to honor the secret and the mysterious, and not give in to the impulse of confession? Foucault believes that there are multiple silences, “there is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say... There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (27).

Utilizing Foucault’s many silences, Sedgwick explores the notion of an “open-secret structure” (22) and how “’closetedness’ is itself a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence...In the vicinity of the closet, even what counts as a speech act is problematized on a perfectly routine basis” (3). Freddie Mercury, who “had a twinkle in his eye and a mischievous streak... secretive and shy” (Jones 32), frequently used this tactic of an “open-secret.” His lack of open disclosure of sexuality was given an
excessive amount of page-space in a recent biography. But I find his response to certain assertions about his lyrics performing a ‘coming out’ maneuver, brilliant in a sassy sort of way. Mercury said, “Does it mean this, does it mean that is all anybody wants to know. Fuck them, darling. I will say no more than what any decent poet would tell you if you dared ask him to analyze his work: If you see it, dear, then it’s there” (Jones 146).

But of course there is a difference between silence as strategy and letting others speak for you. If though, we are to constantly be defined by those who read us, if our identities, and gendering and genre-ing is forever out of the hands of the writer, then must we let the reader speak for us? Whose mouth do I speak with? Who speaks ‘me’ through them? Poetry can be a way for me to remain silent between what can be read, is read, is allowed to be read in all of those spaces.

Part 3: Mercury, or, alchemy, synchronicity, ubiquity, and obsession

We are now come to treat of mercury and having looked up and down for him... we quickly discovered him, and then we found he was everywhere. —Nicholas Culpepper

In “Mercury Falling,” Allison B. Kavey’s descriptions of ancient alchemical mercury dismantles sex and gender binaries. Kavey explains that,

Mercury is essential to undermining... these binaries because of its refusal to remain on only one side of each divide, and its capacity to be on both at the same time. It thoroughly destabilizes the validity of a world model that depends upon adherence to categories defined by opposing characteristics to achieve balance
through the creation of pairs (229).

Ancient texts use the examples of a chemical marriage to explain the processes of alchemy. These texts use wide-reaching metaphors to draw connections with the natural world and the processes of the alchemist. All of the elements are gendered, and mercury is the only one that can switch its gender to accommodate certain chemical reactions.

Examination of binary opposition thus becomes central to the alchemical process; rather than avoiding mercury, or relegating it to the ranks of the freakish and the powerless as if its hermaphroditic nature were monstrous, alchemy assigns it the starring role in the creation of the stone (Kavey 223).

Kavey is careful to mention that this world-view was in the process of shifting to accommodate fixed ideas of gender as more of the human body was scientifically accounted for. During this period, mercury was elevated and looked at as an important element for its effect on the other elements.

Consequently, mercury “is not the end product, but instead the agent that allows other metals to engage with and reveal their true natures” (Kavey 229). This sentiment aligns well with the idea of the mythological Trickster. According to Thomassen, “Tricksters are trained in upsetting the social order by reversing values” and perform a “socially didactic function” (105). In their process of acting as mirror, the Trickster steps in to teach lessons in what may appear as some of the cruelest, most mischievous and deceptive ways. But while Tricksters “play with words and images, they disregard the real nature of their own acts” (104). Tricksters enjoy the game, but aren’t really in it for
themselves. They don’t always understand their own repercussions. Words and images fall where they may.

The Trickster is also the mythological personification of synchronicity: those moments of coincidence that hold such a strong personal resonance as to no longer feel like pure chance. When the same word or image appears in uncanny ways, that’s said to be the realm of The Trickster. The Trickster, also imagined as Hermes or Mercury, granted the power of speech, and took it away. Additionally, “Mercury was given the name ‘Nebo,’ Mesopotamian God of wisdom and writing —Nebo was the scribe who kept the book of fate” (Strom and Sprague 2). I have succumbed to this mythology.

“Mercury turning retrograde” a belief in astrology that has seeped into the popular imagination, is a common phenomenon in which mercury’s orbit appears to reverse. Mercury reigns supreme over communication, so any failure is blamed on this reversal, from breaking computers to break-ups. The thought occurred to me, contrary to what most believe, could mercury turning retrograde benefit poets?

As I began to research this phenomenon, mercury in all its forms started to grab hold. I became an investigator, trying to follow each line of mercury as far as it held my interest. Could I inundate myself so thoroughly with mercury that it would infiltrate my dreams? Would mercury cross the blood-brain barrier and start to poison me? This was as much an exercise in research as one in obsession. As a child who had suffered from unwilled and uncontrolled obsessions, and an adult bewildered by synchronicity, I wondered if I could create an obsession. Could I become a researcher of my own
circling mind? Could this inundation reveal something about the clinging brain? Could I imbibe the poison to distill the cure?

Humans have been fascinated by all of the mercuries since their discovery, so it didn’t take long. Mercury was suddenly everywhere and everything. I found connections cropping up between all of the mercuries. And as I started to talk to people about mercury, they started to bring mercury back to me. I received text messages and links. Posts to my Facebook wall. Pictures. The more I wrote about mercury, the more it appeared in my life. My fictional existence was starting to encroach on my lived one. The trickster sought me out, in the only way the trickster does, unexpectedly. My life became so imbued with the essence of this project, it began to feel redundant to write about it.

Mercury became an odd and unanticipated way of connecting with people in the world. I became acutely aware of the possibilities of writing as an art of lived experience. People began to contribute to my project and their images and ideas were incorporated into the text. In one meeting with my father, while explaining what I was working on, he held his finger to his lips while he removed a paper from his bag and started scribbling furiously.
One evening, a friend and I left from a tense and awkward encounter in a karaoke bar. We both felt more sullen than anyone should ever feel after just leaving karaoke, but we had been dissatisfied with both the musical selection and the company. We got into my car, feeling the frustration of having been moved by the spirit of karaoke with no release. I wanted a song to come on the radio that would lift our spirits. As soon as I turned on the radio, “Bohemian Rhapsody” began to play, right at the beginning. We held air microphones to our faces and screamed the lyrics until we were grinning.

Many of these moments didn’t make it into the actual manuscript but I see them
instead as functioning as a living document, along and beside the one in print. These
moments became just as much the project, if not more so. Writing is not only an
embodied experience, but a lived one. I anticipate the project of mercury will persist
after I have finished the manuscript, and will continue to surprise me.

This is a history that lingers on the liminal. That vibrates above or next to the
history we regard as our own. Akin to a hologram. The dream that overlays the room as
hypnagogic images surface before the eyes. This is a research that does not wait
passively to be found, to be discovered, like the lover in wait. This is a history that
forces itself upon lived existence. Makes itself known repeatedly. Takes a step off the
page, out of the imagination, into the bodily, lived experience. This history seduces the
historian. “At times when we believe we are studying something, we are only being
receptive to a kind of day-dreaming” (Bachelard Poetics of Space xxxviii).

At times I have become a compulsive researcher. I don’t even know what it is I
am really trying to seek. I scour the shelves of the library, following footnotes to
endnotes to the library catalog to interlibrary loans. Books pile up in the corners of my
bedroom and still I don’t really know why. Perhaps it ties into the juvenile desire to find
myself in a book. To find an identity, claim a voice. But in the obsessive pursuit, I seem
to lose more of myself in every page.

It got to a point where I became exhausted and overwhelmed with this exercise
in mercury obsession. I no longer wanted to follow, forever running to catch a glimpse
of the winged sandals. Could I stop the synchronicity by willing it so? Would the
mysterious appearance of Mercury cease? In the library, when searching for something completely unrelated, my hand still reached for a book off the shelf: *The Ears of Hermes.*

On the first page I turned to:

> if someone wished to ask something of Hermes, he was to come at evening, burn incense on the altar, fill the lamps with oil and light them. Leaving a coin on the altar on the right side of the statue, he was to whisper his question into the god’s ears. He was then to quit the square, holding his hands over his ears. Once outside, he was to remove his hands from his ears, and whatever voice he heard in that instant he was to interpret prophetically.

On the second page I turned to:

> Hermes’ function as the disseminator of fortuitous messages is not surprising. As the god of chance discovery, anything that anyone happened upon by accident could be referred to in Greek as “a gift of Hermes” (*hermaion*), and Hermes also played a role in the ancient practice of casting lots, where meaningful “randomness” was of central importance.

And on the third:

> Hermes stands at the very center of discourse. The entire process of communication—speaking and hearing, the mouth and the ear—constellates around him. Above all, he is at the center of the most delicate part of the linguistic operation: interpretation. To use Aelian’s imagery, Hermes has the ability to turn the ibis’ black feathers white, to make explicit what was implicit, and to bring “out” what might otherwise have remained “in.”

When I turned the page and read:

> Hermes, then, was also the god of research and investigation.

and:
I shut the book.

Perhaps, apophenia is a desire to see these things. A desire for a world that feels connected in some fragmentary fashion. A way for art and writing to tangibly reach out into the world. A way to notice and pay attention to what would otherwise be filtered out by an already overloaded sensory system.

Mercury becomes a cipher for desire. For the desire to speak and remain silent. For the desire to be unreadable and yet read. For the desire to shift and morph and never remain still in identity. For the desire of both completion and fragmentation. The desire for a published work on the page and one which continues to live and breathe, morph and change.

I will not reveal my secrets. I’ll leave that to the Trickster who rips the curtains away and delights in exposure. I want the mystery to remain. Can there be transparency without revelation? The more I discover, the more the questions persist. The more I write, the more my words break down, disintegrate. I want to find something to hold onto but as soon as I grasp what has solidified it turns to liquid and runs through my fingers. There is a desire to find fascination within the obsession. And to know that whatever is sought will always evade.

In the way that gender feels insufficient for describing my physical body, genre feels insufficient for describing my textual body. To some extent I both worry and rejoice at the possibility of creating an unreadable text. Not in the literal sense, that it
can’t be read, but in the sense that it tries to sneak its way out of labeling. This book resists others genre-ing it. In part because this book doesn’t know what it is, a mercurial book that keeps changing its mind. This writing is multiple and fluid and feminine and genderqueer. And in those senses it tends to fail the traditional expectations of writing. But Judith Halberstam offers a “Queer Art of Failure,” where “failure allows us to escape punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods” (3). My writing then tries to occupy a space between unruly childhood and orderly adulthood. A zone where the transition hasn’t quite manifested and the identity has yet to solidify. Writing is about entering a non-space to construct identities that can never be pinned down.

To live in the imagined space is to reject those overarching controlling norms. The power and structures that determine our identities for us and bring ourselves into being. I am letting the slipperiness of identity slide through my fingers. The “…post-structuralist figuring of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions” (Jagose 3). I have made Mercury that liminal space. Or rather, the one who, arms open wide, holds that space where all of these questions can be played with, investigated, or wrestled with.
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