

Snow Angel: Text

All poems by Wyatt Townley from her book
*Rewriting the Body.*¹
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I. BLACK WEDDING TRAIN

behind my back the back-
yard a black wedding train
made of catshit weeds and mud

in its folds boys
circle a girl
facedown in the dandelions

the ants bear witness
to her fistened silence
and the zipper's long scream

birds fall out of the sky
night falls rain then years
behind the bride

black wedding train so heavy
shushing and clanking
tin cans and trash bags

get off get out disband the choir
this wedding train
is trimmed with razor wire

II. SHELTER

the smallest room
in the house
is mine
its lock shines

from where I sit
everything is shining

the tiny hexagons
that march with linked elbows
at my feet
will carry me away

from my small days
and big secrets big
as the backyard

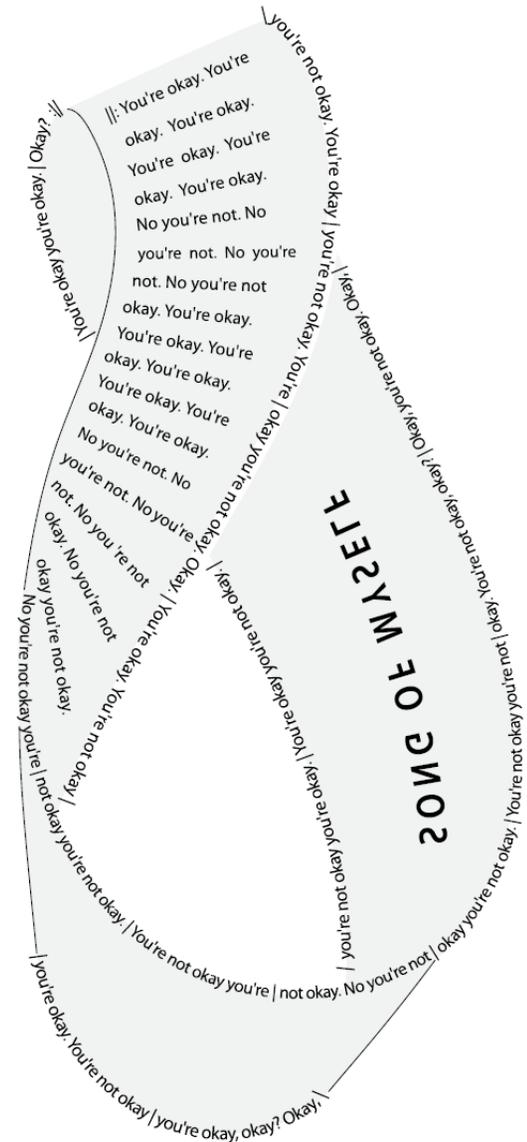
a gang of boys
in a ring bigger
than this room bigger
than a mother and a father
whose ears were four helmets

four being the end boom
of childhood over and out
and I have found myself

at home at any age
in the world's smallest rooms
where I can turn

a lock like a corner
of this page

III. SONG OF MYSELF



IV.
MAL DE DÉBARQUEMENT

It's not as if the world
swirled, dizzy
from the spin, like a girl

in the grass who'd been twirling
too long. It's an inside job.
Not visual: *visceral*.

The day unrolls. Underfoot
it's a tilting Titanic
while the sky stays put.

The room sways. Rugs
rise and subside
under our chairs. The waltz

we've fallen into
climbs the ocean's
churning stairs. Just talking

while rocking is more
than I can manage
long since the ship's

ashore. What did you say?
You're waving. You're
moving your lips.

V.
BEHIND THE SHIRT

My nipples have eyes.
They are watching out

for my heart, bouncers
at the door. They're not

picky. They don't see
shit, can't count fingers

in front of them. They
strain against the shirt

for a view, noses
through a chain-link fence.

They've had enough
of the backs of things—

bras, the insides
of hands and mouths.

They need space, they
need air. Chuck the blouse

and underwear. Their
tiny faces wrinkle, ages

younger than the stars
they wait for. Till then,

they toughen up, pretend
to guard the door.

VI.
LEAVING HOME

Like a girl slipping out of her clothes,
I'm leaving home, this mobile home:
head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes...

and eyes and ears and mouth and nose.
I combed my hair; I leave my comb
behind, a girl slipping out of her clothes.

Wherever I have gone, the body goes.
Breath by breath, it writes its poem—
head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes.

Two breasts, new hips, an old story. I suppose
all books must end—but what a tome,
this girl slipping out of her clothes.

It's poetry in motion—or is it prose?
What finally held it up was chrome
and head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes.

As yoga always finishes with corpse pose,
we drop the body, a drape of bones
like a girl slipping out of her clothes—
head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes.

VII.
SNOW ANGEL

She's nowhere everywhere.
Your mother's hems
catch in the branches, beaks

of birds, peaks of houses.
Now the sky lets out
the weather she held back—

an avalanche of blizzards,
thunder and snow, thunder
and snow. She's mid-air all over

town, underfoot in every yard.
She's in your hands. Make a snowball,
throw as hard and far as death. Lie

down, make an angel. She's behind
your back as you open and close
your arms, your legs...your throat.

Fold her in, let her out mid-breath
in a cloud. Forgive the ghost
that lives inside your coat.

VIII.
AFTER YOU DIED

I breathed

the long black sleeve of night
down my throat and pulled it
down my spine down my legs

closed my eyes and went under
the covers breathed it down
again and again as if its starry buttons

could stub a path to you

I kept breathing down the dark
silence you left
in which I am trailing

the hems of your last breath

IX.
IN EXTREMIS
after Mary Oliver

You do not have to be
good. You do not have to

eat what is given. You do
not have to get up.

You do not have
to quiet down or change

your gown. You have
only to breathe—take

the whole room
into the hallways

of your lungs and let
it out—the house

rearranged one breath
at a time. Just breathe.

Then do it again.

X.
THE BACK OF BEYOND

THE BACK

moving still moving still moving still moving still still
still moving moving still still being
still being and being still
still being and being still moving
and being moved being still
being moved and being still
and being moved and still being moved
beyond being and moving beyond
moved beyond being and moving beyond

OF BEYOND

moving beyond
beyond being
being beyond
beyond being
being beyond
being being
beyond beyond
being beyond and
being back
being beyond
and being back
back beyond
being still
moving

¹ Townley, Wyatt. *Rewriting the Body*. Nacogdoches, TX: Stephen F. Austin State University Press, 2018. Copyright © 2018 by Wyatt Townley. Graphic design for “Song of Myself” and “The Back of Beyond” by j.m.rees.

*The poems have been numbered to indicate their placement in the song cycle, not their order in Townley’s book.