



Fall 2015

# Unread Letters to My Mother

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Thompson, Pamela J., "Unread Letters to My Mother" (2015). *Student Publications*. 425.  
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# Unread Letters to My Mother

## **Abstract**

The poem "Unread Letters to My Mother" is a meditation on dream and memory and how PTSD brought on by childhood trauma has effected those things within the speaker's life. Each of the seven sections are addressed to the speaker's mother, but the reader knows these are things which are left unsaid, in the darkness, as the clarity and insight they provide into the speaker's life is perhaps too overwhelming for the figure of the mother to process.

## **Keywords**

Unread, Letters, Mother, Dissociation, Mental Health

## **Disciplines**

Creative Writing | Poetry

## **Comments**

This poem was written for Professor Nadine Meyer's seminar, *ENG 405: Seminar in Writing: The Poet's Voice*, Fall 2015.

## Unread Letters to My Mother

### 1 — The Neighborhood Last August

I had the dream again,  
the one where I call out into the darkness  
as a figure crawls from what becomes an unlatched window  
and I scream and scream until I am awake.

The last lot in the neighborhood is being sold.  
Soon there will be no fields left, I mean the kind dotted  
with clover, daisies, and those moon dusted blue-violet flowers  
whose name I've forgotten.

Once I saw a field stretched  
out over a long hill, speckled in them.  
But that hill homes a house now.

The yards are mostly burnt brown and amber;  
the grass feels like straw underfoot.  
The dog pulls at the leash with her mouth,  
pointing to a robin pecking at the dry earth.

The air is not warm, it hangs heavy  
and damp like wet wool. Steel-blue clouds  
burden the sky with the promise of rain,  
but the rain  
                    never comes.

### 2 — What the Sea Took

We walked the place where the ocean meets the shore,

cold white sand pressed hard between our toes.  
Somewhere along the way I lost the clothespin doll  
we made together. I never told you,  
but I searched for the doll long after you had fallen asleep.  
I could not find her in that moonless night.

### 3 — Dissociation

I am ten, walking out of the movie theater,  
not knowing where I am  
or who I am exactly.  
I wish I could push  
this part of “me” back down onto earth,  
or rip it out completely.  
How can I make my body move  
so it feels real? How can I make  
myself move and speak  
so nobody knows what’s happening?

Sometimes when I’m driving  
I float out of my mind.  
I am hovering just a few inches  
outside myself.  
Soul and body are out of sync,  
out of line.  
It is as if I am connected  
only by a thread.  
Perhaps this body is not mine.  
I know this body is not mine.  
Frantically, I touch that face  
and those arms, pinching the skin as if I am dreaming,  
trying desperately to reenter our dimension.

This is how I caused the accident.

#### 4 — Lost

Two gloves (in the snow),  
a ballet shirt,  
my grandfather's pocket watch (probably stolen),  
the clothespin doll,  
too many socks,  
bobby-pins,  
phone numbers,  
addresses,  
a handmade mitten (I watched it blow away  
down a long road one September),  
permission slips,  
a necklace,  
hair ties,  
several gold earrings,  
graded tests,  
your receipts,  
blank checks,  
eyelashes,  
passwords,  
nail clippers,  
pencils (countless),  
your fine tipped marker,  
memories,  
shopping lists,  
pennies,  
your trust.

#### 5 — Dreams

I had that dream last night,  
the one where I am alone on a road  
where the moon is a pale, dead eye.  
The one where I watch until the moon blinks  
in and out like a star.

From the ages six to ten  
I dreamt again and again that I held  
a field mouse between two  
still hands, only running my thumb  
over and over its quivering head.  
I never age, it never dies.  
Months pass until I rub down its fur,  
years pass until I reach its skull,  
centuries until I touch its brain.  
I am shaking, confused and afraid,  
the dark of the room closes around me  
and the walls of my bedroom become those hands.

I dream, every night,  
that I am pushing a lawnmower  
up a steep hill. The grass  
is tall and yellow, brushing against my knees.  
I see something—a red leaf,  
a bird— pass across  
a too blue sky.  
Somehow I am falling  
                                  down  
  the hill,  
                  and I am pulling the lawnmower over me.

This is how I die, a prophesy etched in my brain.  
I awake in a cold sweat, feverish and screaming.

Do I wake you?

## 6 — Dissociation II

I am four years old  
sitting alone in my room,  
knees pressed to my face.  
From out of nowhere  
the feeling that “I” am a consciousness  
pressed unwillingly onto another  
body, another person, surrounds me.  
It is as if the “I” is not the true owner  
of the body. Perhaps the real “me”  
is trying to get rid of it, trying to be good,  
trying to be normal.

I am twenty and driving down a mountain.  
I can feel it starting to happen.  
It shouldn't, but I can't control it.  
Minutes and miles pass that I cannot see.  
Too soon I am in town,  
cruising up to a stop light.  
I am back, but time moves too slowly  
and I don't see the light change  
or the brake lights in front of me.  
I don't hit the brakes fast enough.  
Three cars dented,  
their ends pushed in like crushed soda cans.  
A thanks is an empty prayer, but no one was hurt.  
You tried to ask me about it,  
my mind blank with anxiety and guilt,

I don't remember,

I don't remember,

I don't know if I'm running.

## 7 — Mother Dearest

In pre-school the teachers told you  
that they thought I had amnesia.  
You know too well that I don't hear  
what you say, I have what you call, "selective hearing".  
You are red-faced,  
screaming, but I cannot hear  
you, I can not remember what you asked of me  
ten minutes ago, how we got here.

I remember only that I am afraid.  
In the dark, I remember the smell  
of your mother-in-law's cottage,  
sticky-thick quilts,  
how that woman pressed herself too close to me  
at night. It does not matter  
what she did or said to me. I was a child. I remember  
how I cried and cried  
and told you to keep her away from me.

It's not your fault,

it's not your fault,

I will never blame you.

I can not even trust what I know  
to be real.



