

HONEY

IS

A

SHE

-Lina ramona Vitkauskas

# HONEY IS A SHE

Lina ramona Vitkauskas



**plastique.**

HONEY IS A SHE

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The text of this book is composed in Georgia, a serif font designed by Matthew Carter in 1990 for Microsoft, as an updated and digital version of Stanley Morison's Times New Roman. Winner of the 2010 MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship, Carter's knowledge spans generations; from being trained in punchcutting techniques of the 1450s, to working as a sign painter, and finally to phototypesetting for computers.

The anatomical drawing on the cover is by R. E. Snodgrass from *Anatomy of the Honey Bee*.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

“IF I BE WASPISH, BEST BEWARE MY STING” and “MIEL FOR MUMS” appeared in Big Bridge (#16): Neosurrealism.

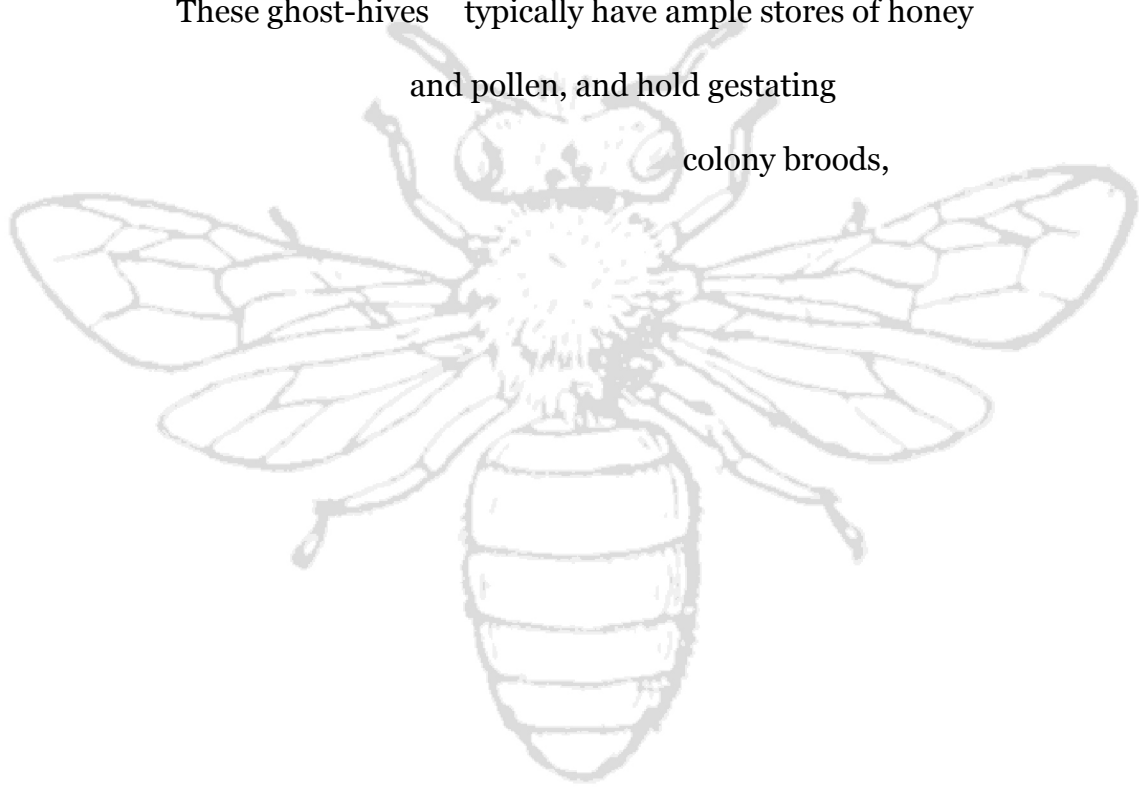
“Since 2006, something strange has been happening  
to North America's commercial beehives.



Beekeepers have found their apiaries inexplicably abandoned by worker bees.

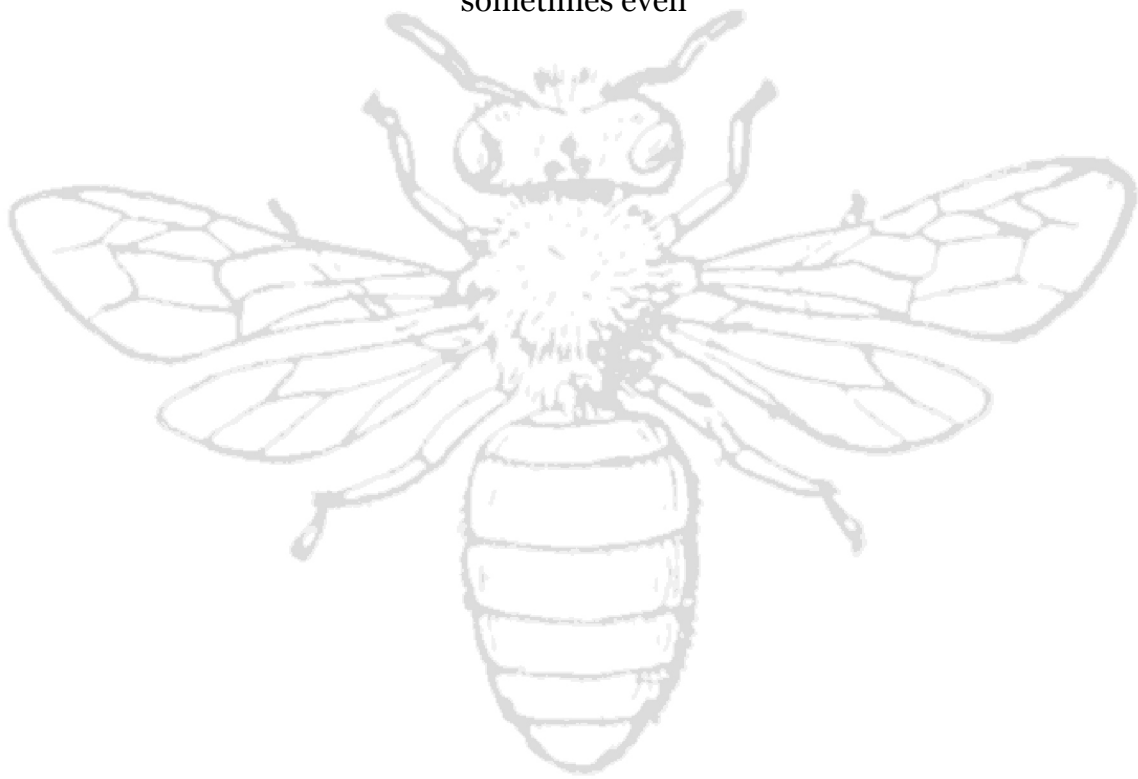


These ghost-hives typically have ample stores of honey  
and pollen, and hold gestating  
colony broods,



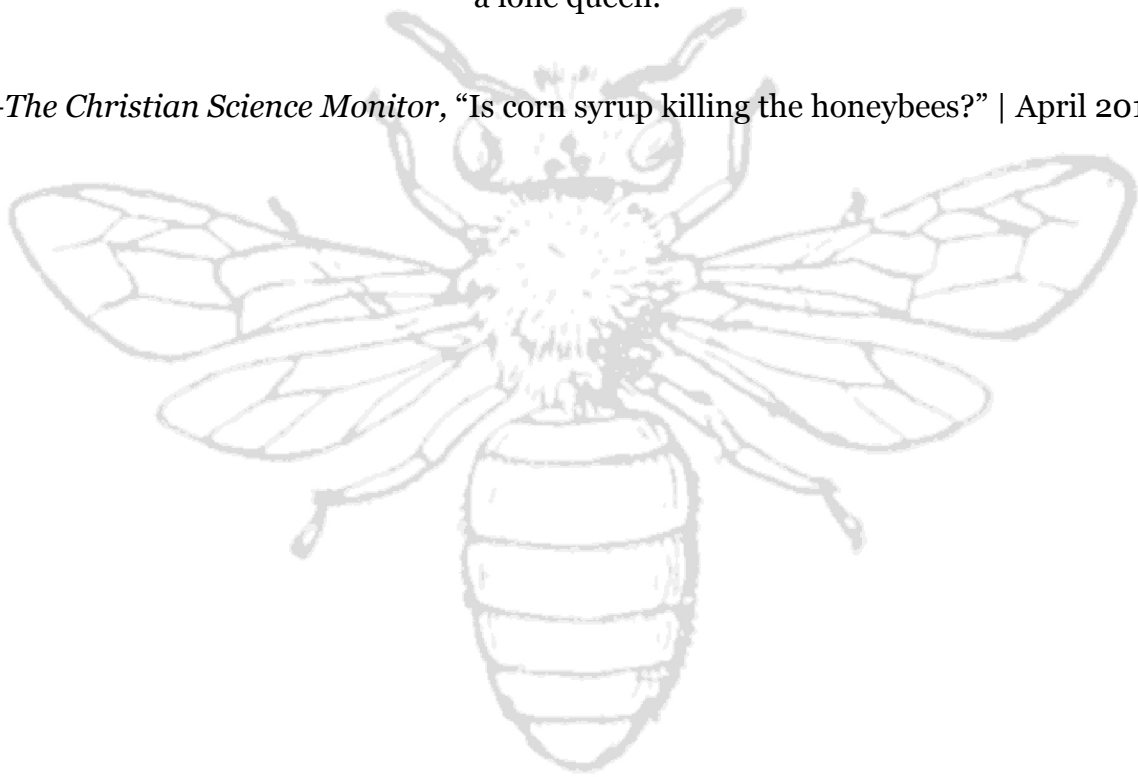


sometimes even



a lone queen.”

–*The Christian Science Monitor*, “Is corn syrup killing the honeybees?” | April 2012



About Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD):

“... correlated with the presence of a ubiquitous class of insecticide ...”

–*Science*, 2012

“... this insecticide is introduced into bee colonies through,  
strangely enough, high-fructose corn syrup ...”

–*Bulletin of Insectology*, 2012

“As more studies are published on this subject,

the link between the pesticides and CCD may become more apparent.

In this case, the pesticide manufacturer could only be held *indirectly* accountable,

as it is the beekeepers who substitute inexpensive syrup\* for bee honey,

thereby introducing the pesticide.”

–*The Christian Science Monitor*, “Is corn syrup killing the honeybees?” | April 2012

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\* Used by beekeepers to supplement hives that have been decanted of honey

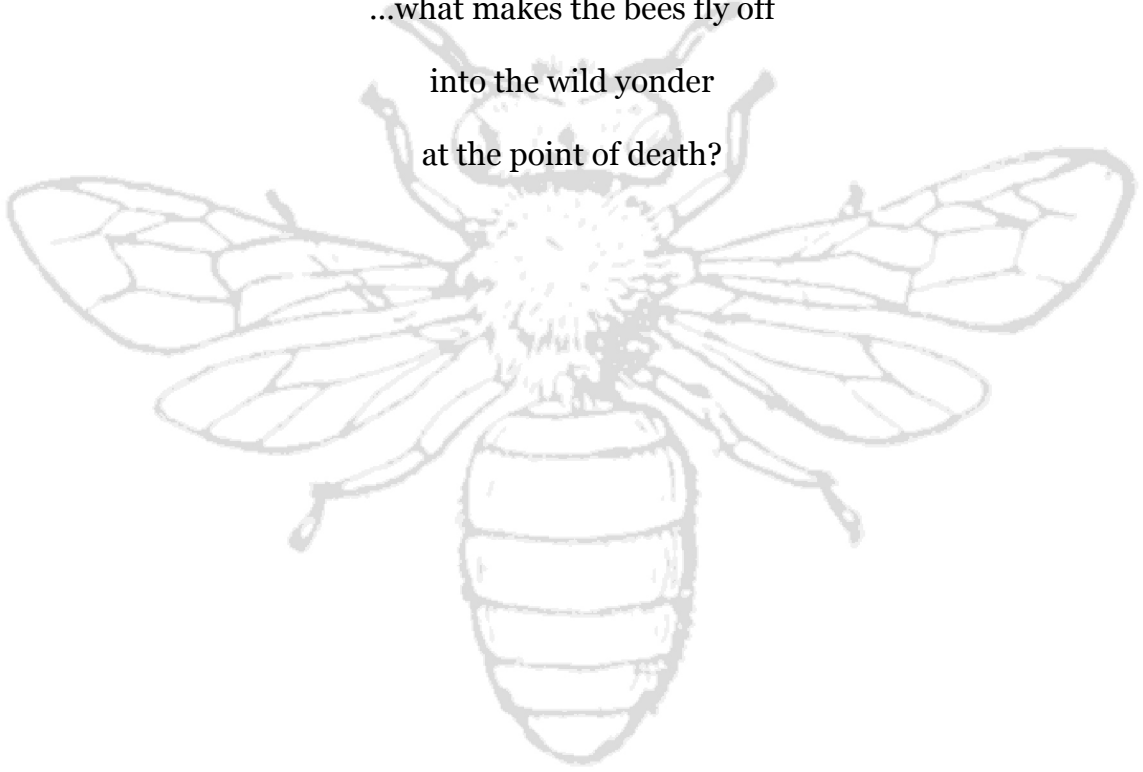
“One perverse twist of CCD:

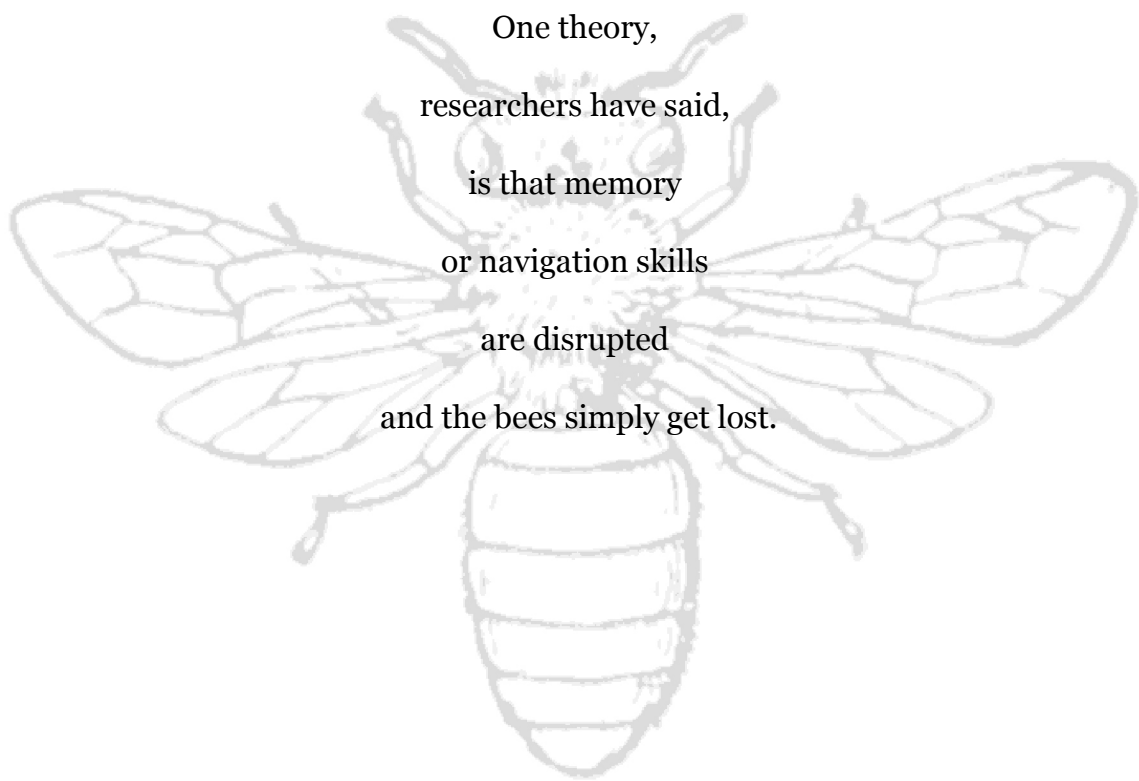


the bees do not just die;  
they fly off in every direction  
from the hive,  
then die alone, dispersed...



...what makes the bees fly off  
into the wild yonder  
at the point of death?

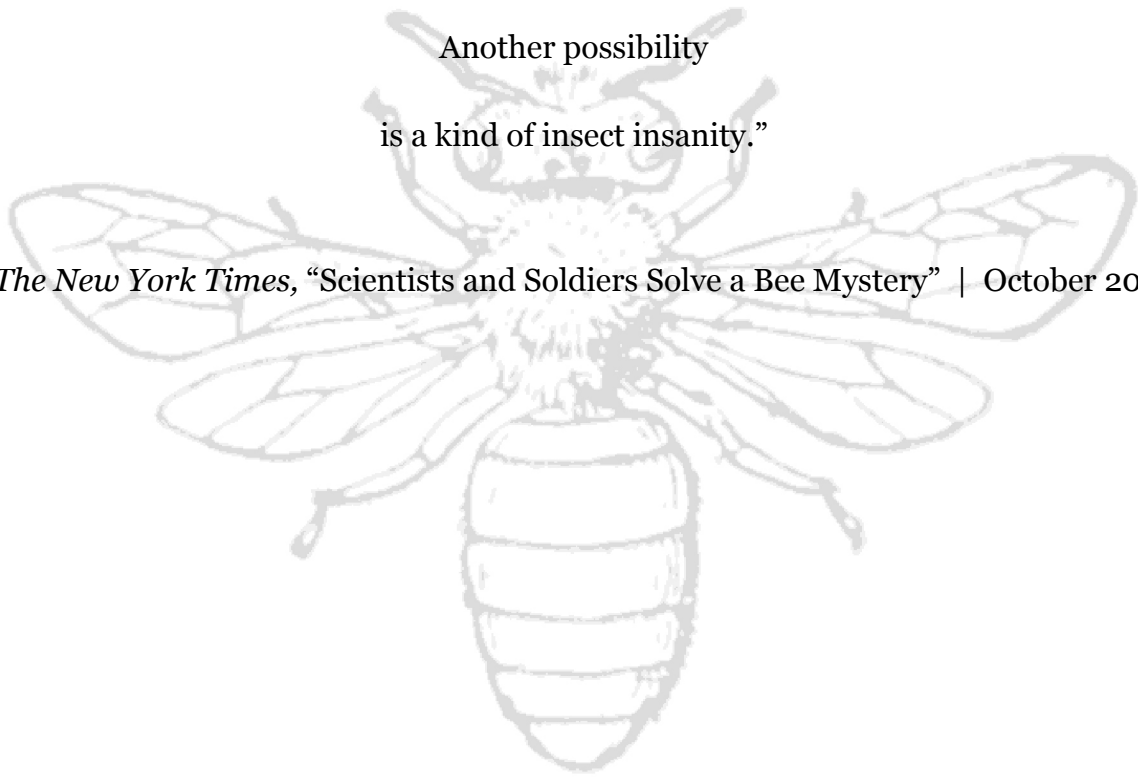




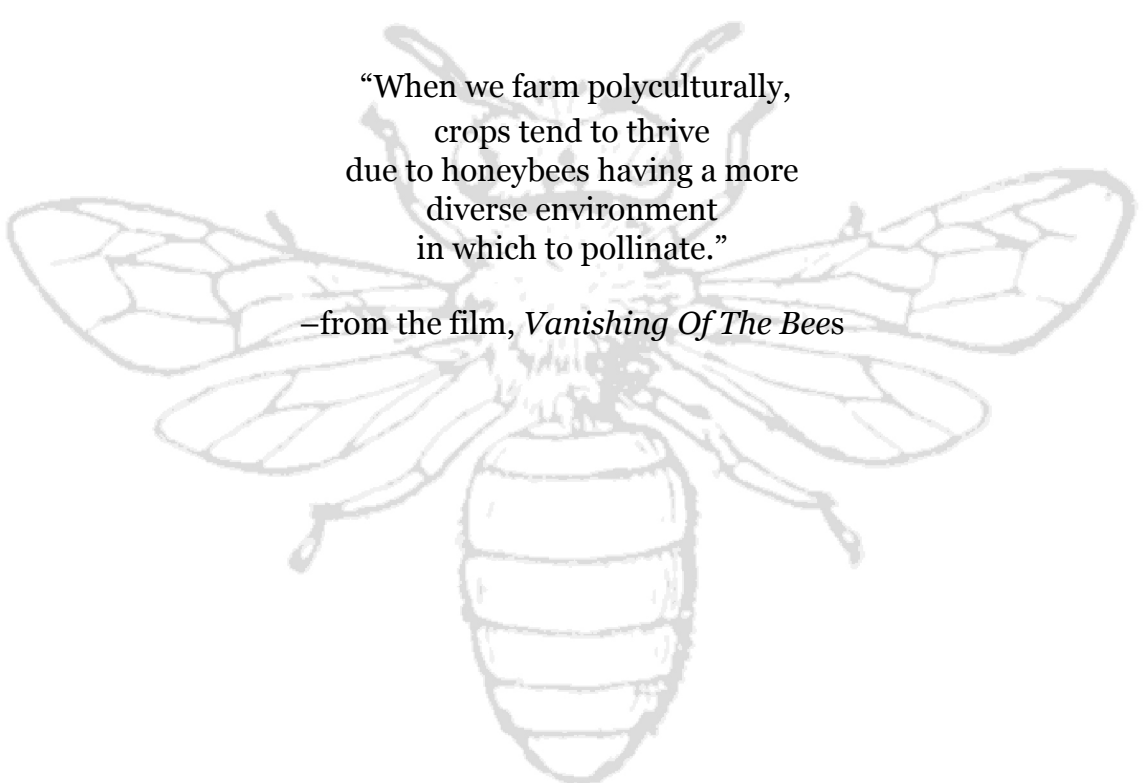
One theory,  
researchers have said,  
is that memory  
or navigation skills  
are disrupted  
and the bees simply get lost.

Another possibility  
is a kind of insect insanity.”

–*The New York Times*, “Scientists and Soldiers Solve a Bee Mystery” | October 2010







“When we farm polyculturally,  
crops tend to thrive  
due to honeybees having a more  
diverse environment  
in which to pollinate.”

–from the film, *Vanishing Of The Bees*

To a divorce



## THORAX

Imagine you  
are the wildflower.  
The pocketwatch.  
The ground coral  
and lapis, the dung.

A brassiere of shrews opens.

She gathers verbena and straw.

He breaks gin,  
breathes kind,  
lingers fingers.

She hangs with  
the plaintiffs,  
misfits,  
and plantains.

She recites  
house,  
plate,  
*žuvis*<sup>1</sup>.

She was instructed  
to insert herself  
innocuously  
into another distilled  
generation. The professor  
exclaimed:

*Go to the sand, reject its ilk with wings! Shred the documents in the sea!*

And this was a period,  
an era,  
in which we lost our vertebrae.

Me in your palm-estuary all cherry-stems and swizzles.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lithuanian: "fish"

## WAX WOOD

*"I become conscious of myself by denying my existence."*

*–René Daumal*

The mindfall it took to move the mind  
or the mindfuck to trip the alarm  
to unfail the couplet connectivity.

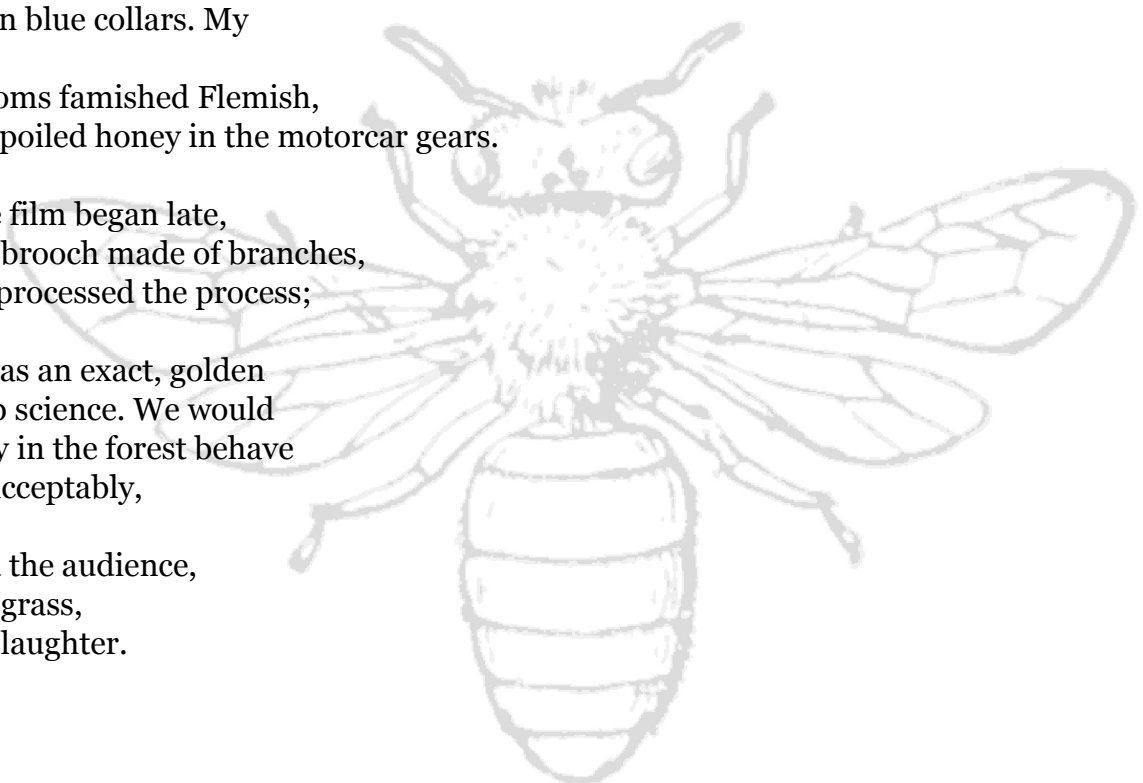
The woodsman is wooden,  
the flowers are flour, the  
fallacy is that you could  
be in blue collars. My

blooms famished Flemish,  
unspoiled honey in the motorcar gears.

The film began late,  
the brooch made of branches,  
we processed the process;

it was an exact, golden  
drip science. We would  
only in the forest behave  
unacceptably,

and the audience,  
the grass,  
the laughter.



**REVERSE CHROMOLITHOGRAPHY:  
WORKER COLOR-DRAINED**

Like bow to string.

Thread through needle

I-through-you.

Then, a galactic cactus  
imagined me. My raspberries  
exploded in the heat.

And I reappeared  
in the next frame with  
crisp edges. Yes. It wasn't  
the film that was exposed.

*Oh that summer that summer that summer*

The color drained,  
The monochromatic worker burst,  
devouring all the dumb  
impatients outside the hotel.

*She could turn it on or turn it off just like that.*

Reading Leslie S.  
upon batik sheets  
in the wee  
and the night beach  
upon my breasts.

If I move to the right flora,  
gather enough among  
the cornea orchestra,  
the toychest will fill.

*It's true that all of this feels right only when never.*

This repeats itself.  
Omaha Steaks and all.  
But I'm only wearing  
the meadow now,  
so cover me.

## COMB OF COMBS

So I decided on the revolver over the pistol.  
There, on clotted couch, storked and full of ideas,  
I knew the life, I knew the industry.

I was next to a malfunctioning robot,  
me, the varicose rabbit. I huddled  
in the weedy, plaster spring.

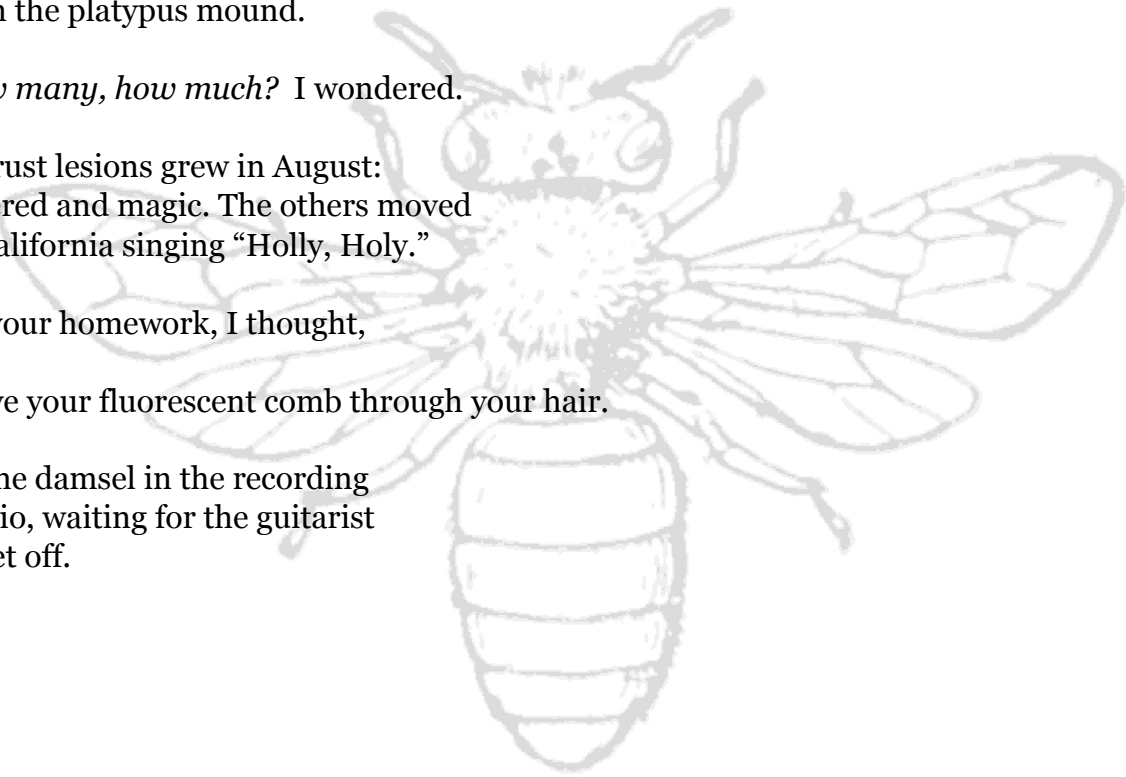
*Rock your energy, your coconut inheritance!*  
He shouted to me  
from the platypus mound.

*How many, how much?* I wondered.

My rust lesions grew in August:  
fettered and magic. The others moved  
to California singing “Holly, Holy.”

Do your homework, I thought,  
shove your fluorescent comb through your hair.

Be the damsel in the recording  
studio, waiting for the guitarist  
to get off.



## MIGRATION

I teethe upon weathermen.  
I am unbridled. Like the magazines say.

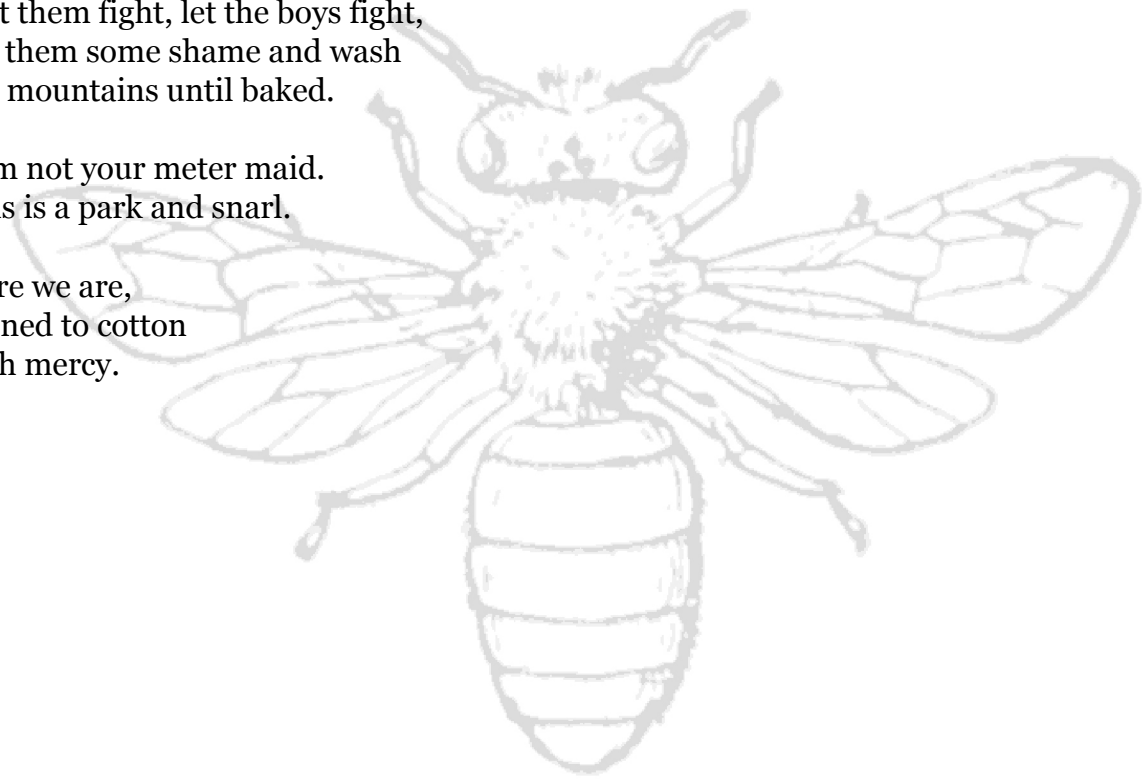
I storm the dentist. My technique is cloudy.  
This fever-to-coyote-to-bilocation.

I'm the grainy-gelatin-girl who  
understands the mob's defection.  
I get it.

I let them fight, let the boys fight,  
cry them some shame and wash  
the mountains until baked.

I am not your meter maid.  
This is a park and snarl.

Here we are,  
pinned to cotton  
with mercy.



## HONEY IS A SHE

To the drowned birds, locked in feather parquet:  
Here's to primitive machinery,  
to nail beds and chipped bone,  
to placing arrows across our abdomens  
digestive contractions, oh Jamie Lee Curtis,  
oh my god.

To our hips, warring with occipital lobes,  
to maids who force-fed us, pared down  
our options to an astronaut, a frotteurist,  
a shamrock, a kayak, or pitchfork.

I love you the way you scored  
my skin with the trigonometry  
of monogamy then tuned my rusting  
throat to the crisp, iced bell that cracks  
a Danish village morning. I love you

the way you grunion, the way you tremble  
post-stable hijinks—me with Canadian Club  
clutched in fingerless leather as a Dravidian<sup>2</sup>  
equestrian.

I rip the itch from gender,  
arrive with it as an operative  
at the state dinner and drown  
the finches in the party pool.

I put my ear to the vetch.  
It's so pregnant and truthful.

It releases honey from its  
most tiny trumpet:  
melted, sweet stick valves.

---

<sup>2</sup> Dravidian peoples are from South India. The word Dravida has origins from Sanskrit "Drava," meaning water or sea.



## IF I BE WASPISH, BEST BEWARE MY STING

Hello. I am a:

- a. platinum wire thread,
- b. legume television,
- c. court skald,
- d. plasmatic haphazard.

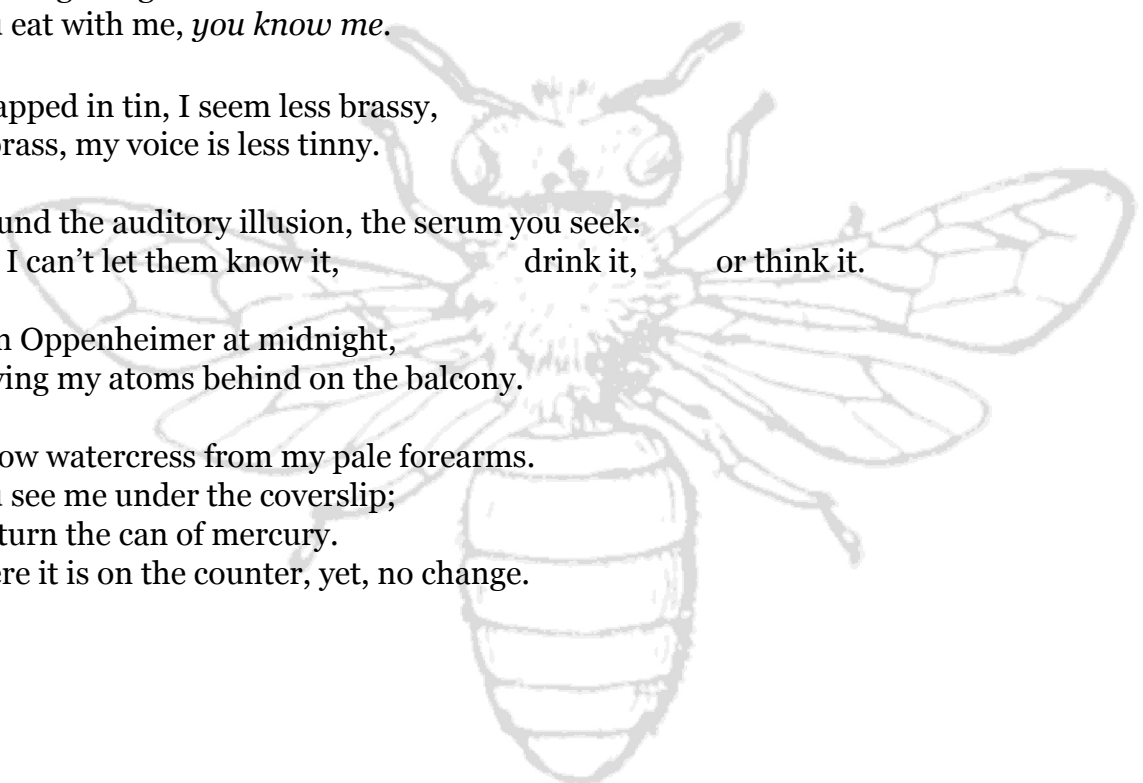
A brassica sprouts from my tonsil,  
from an unclassifiable seed.  
I'm the go-to girl here.  
You eat with me, *you know me*.

Wrapped in tin, I seem less brassy,  
in brass, my voice is less tinny.

I found the auditory illusion, the serum you seek:  
But I can't let them know it,            drink it,            or think it.

I am Oppenheimer at midnight,  
leaving my atoms behind on the balcony.

I grow watercress from my pale forearms.  
You see me under the coverslip;  
I return the can of mercury.  
There it is on the counter, yet, no change.



## **MIEL FOR MUMS**

She's come to Burma to shake her fist at the palms.

She came underlined, from under a pew, all chanterelle and jammy.

She's been meaning to duel you, cut your shades down,

to tassel you and street hassle you. She came from electric maternity.

*She comes at a roast as she would after seismic shocks—blind and with tenterhooks.*

The grave you made her is like February, a rotten aorta.

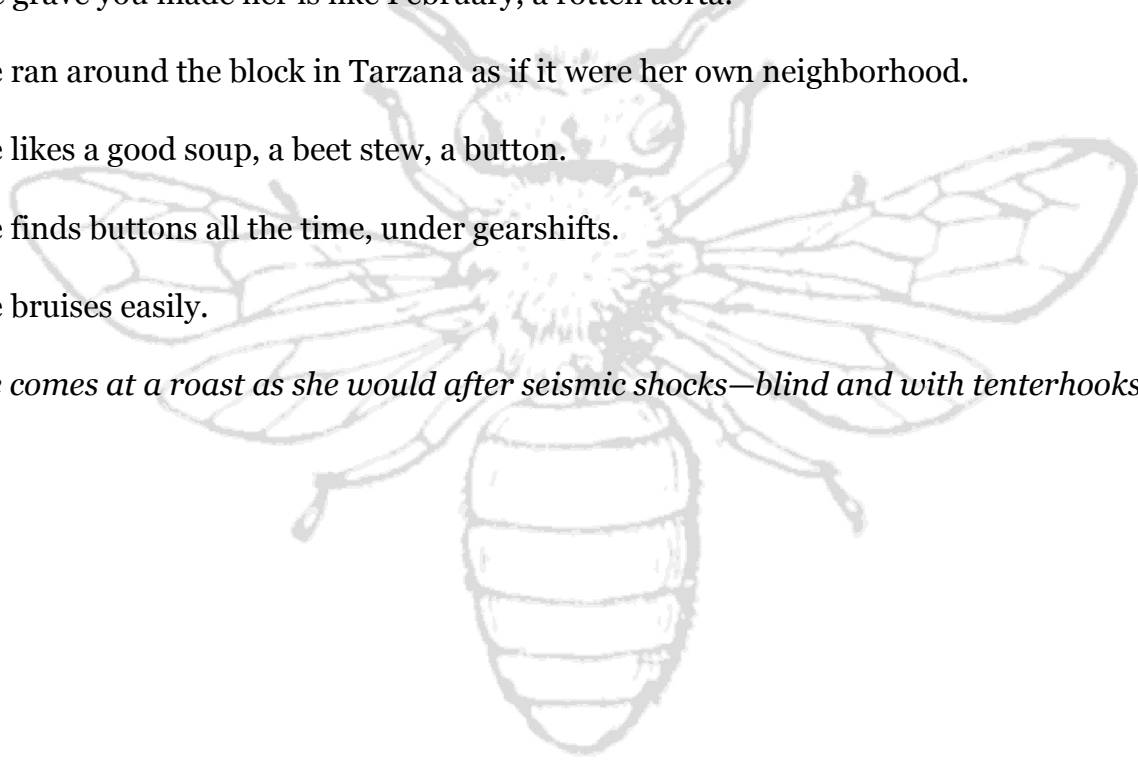
She ran around the block in Tarzana as if it were her own neighborhood.

She likes a good soup, a beet stew, a button.

She finds buttons all the time, under gearshifts.

She bruises easily.

*She comes at a roast as she would after seismic shocks—blind and with tenterhooks.*



## CROSS-POLLINATION

They all use parasols  
for crutches;  
double-back across felonies.

These girls                      skinned their editors              alive,  
these girls                      dissolved              in the basement.

They hammer upon  
mole telegraphs,  
capsize the abacus,  
place the horsehead in the bed;  
their woolly floor plans unravel  
with kindness.

They apologize to myself in the dark.

Their language is a murmur  
*but a murmur is not a word,*  
*nor a whisper, not essence*  
*nor infrastructure.* They choke  
without Sacajawea instinct for  
what's un-poison or  
what's starlet or  
what's furnished. *What*  
*limbs of one body*<sup>3</sup>,  
what we didn't know.

Through the thicket,  
they lead one another,  
cross-pollinate, grow soldiers  
from planted stockings in the soil.

These girls are brave tailors  
in the blur of impossible femme.

---

<sup>3</sup> From the poet, Sa'di

## VISCOUS MINISCUS

Cop-partners tweeze marrow  
meals  
from  
mudslides,  
put nectarines  
'round their necks.  
Piss on harps,  
beam  
a blessed bunch  
of bursts.

Look,  
a pattern dictates parameters.  
The Nenets<sup>4</sup>  
traced sooty, petrified  
cheeks in the snow.

I was a birch child,  
Slipped my eyes back  
into a pebble-cruste  
case on the mantle:  
all polished jasper,  
fingered roots at the bottom  
of a well. I wore my parka,

and you were the detective,  
a risky mink moonshine tomato  
pest. Oil fields vs. the Lituane.

Get out of my garden.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Nenets people are an indigenous people in Russia living in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug and Nenets Autonomous Okrug regions (West Siberia). They were called Samoyeds (due to a false etymology, the name entered the Russian language as a corruption of the self-reference Saamod/Saamid). The literal morphs "samo" and "yed" in Russian convey the meaning "self-eater." The name Samoyed quickly went out of usage in the 20th century, and the people bear the name of Nenets, which means "man." Nenets speak a Uralic language. Only three Nenets words have entered the English language: 1. Nenets itself, 2. Nganasan - an alternative name for the people, and 3. parka, which is the name for their traditional long hooded jacket made from skins and sometimes fur.

## HONEYCAKE

Cake must be the only thing that surrounds me now.  
A foam oboe,  
a parenthetical croissant,  
some snapdragon wine.  
These make the mark above my brow.

I had another dream about me with largesse incisors.  
You don't understand me.  
"Here's a friendly exchange of suppression,  
ending with something smoldering," he said.

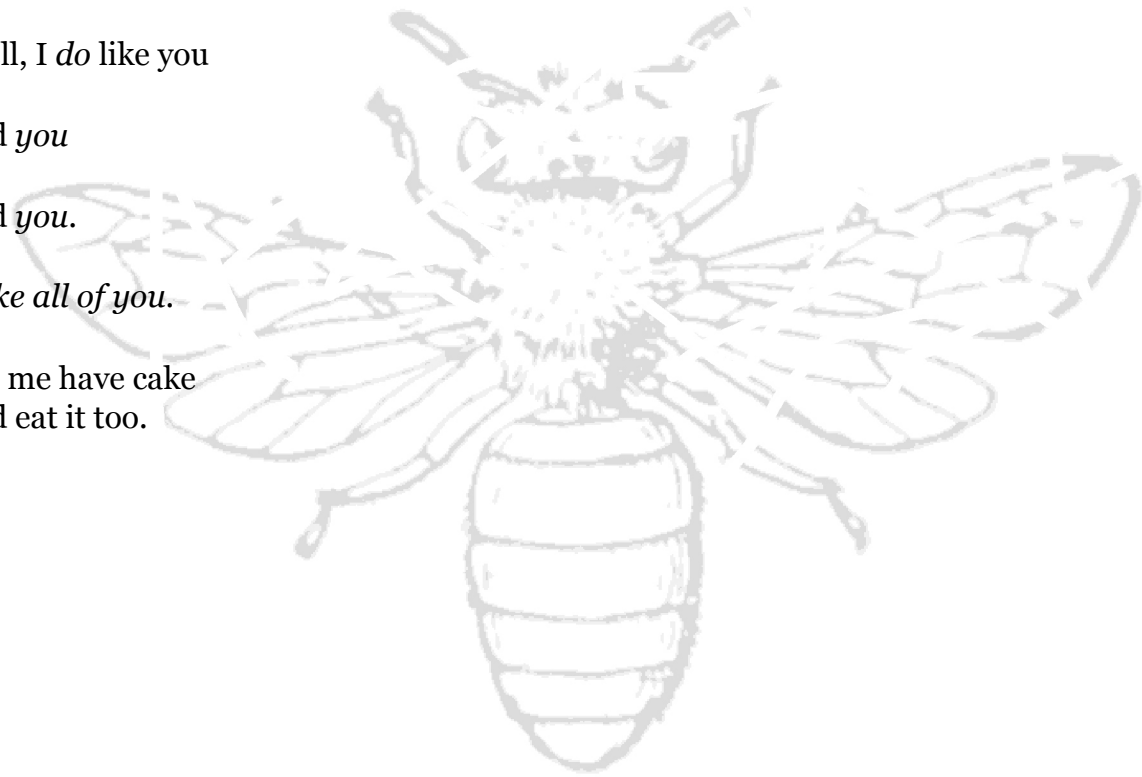
Well, I *do* like you

and *you*

and *you*.

*I like all of you.*

Let me have cake  
and eat it too.



## NON-NATIVE FLORA

Destroy the photographs.

    You live in New York now.

        Now you live on a farm.

            Now you live where what we've done,  
                    is, theoretically speaking,  
                            done,

                    like reelers drum,  
                    like deep plum,  
                    like zippers and yum.

Yes, it was good destruction.

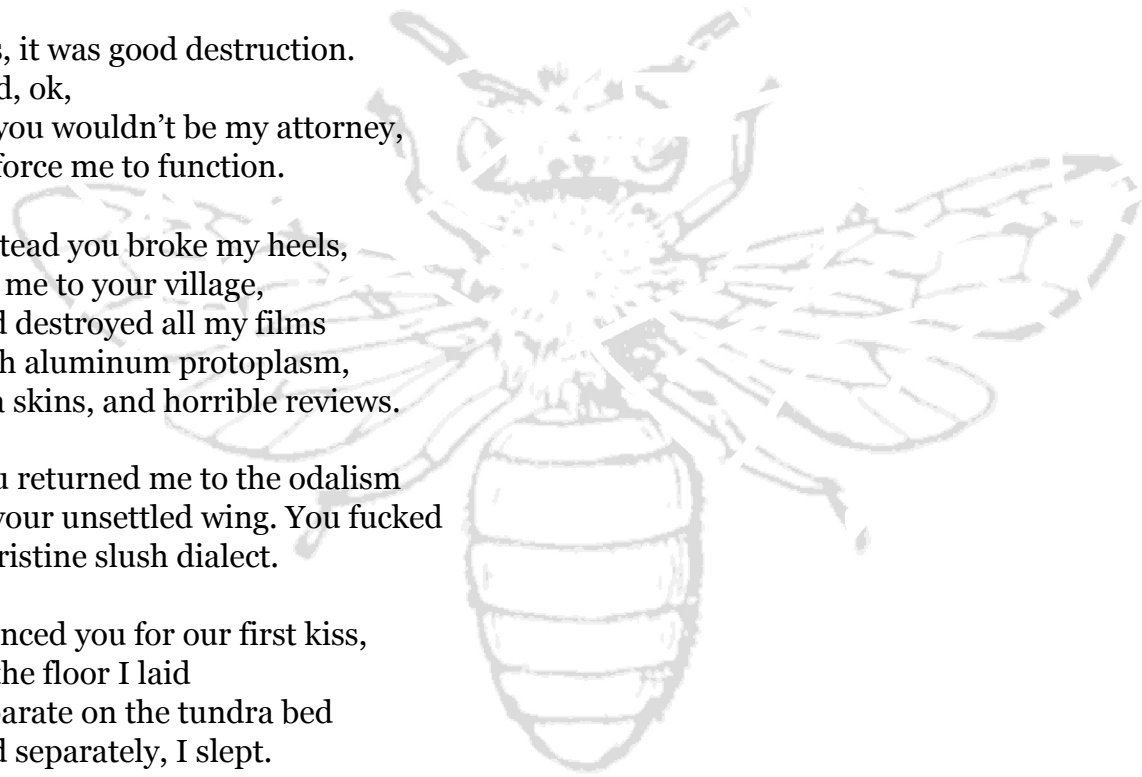
And, ok,

so you wouldn't be my attorney,  
or force me to function.

Instead you broke my heels,  
led me to your village,  
and destroyed all my films  
with aluminum protoplasm,  
boa skins, and horrible reviews.

You returned me to the odalism  
of your unsettled wing. You fucked  
a pristine slush dialect.

I fenced you for our first kiss,  
to the floor I laid  
separate on the tundra bed  
and separately, I slept.



## MATE

Male made of *muilas*<sup>5</sup>

I need to burn you                      and be assigned to another.

I've been nervous  
about this crossword,

I am short a post-box,

a trade route,

an octagon lounge chair.

Poof! Here I am with the fishnets and pirouettes!  
Let's start the show.

I enjoy this. I do not enjoy this.

From your Darger pockets,  
diminutive evergreen troops  
and *policija*. What could go wrong?

(only the small things,  
like my throat:  
ruby croup  
bloodshot with moths.)

I replace you on the porch  
and your categorical qualities.  
What matters is concrete. Concrete picnics.

---

<sup>5</sup> Lithuanian: "soap"

## ANOTHER ANTHER

I knew him once,  
that modern human,  
that ashcan kisser,  
the sword-swallower.

I have a warrant:  
this apple slice  
dipped in buttermilk.

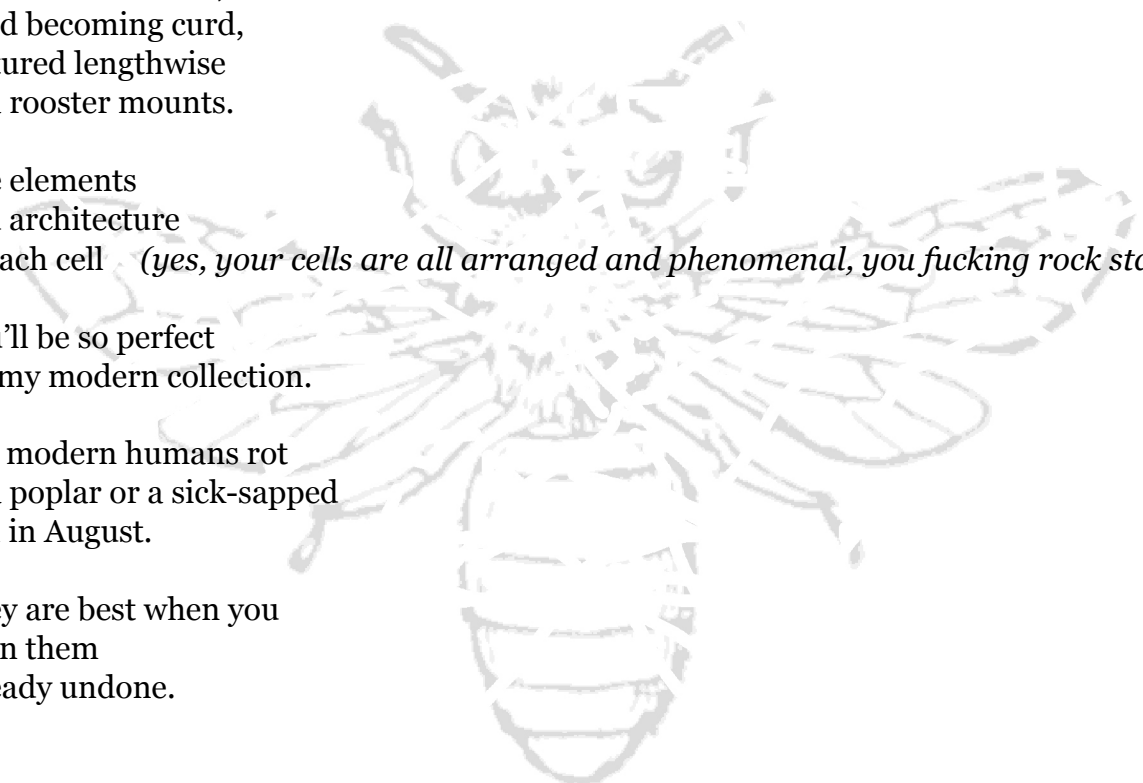
I have an abdomen,  
child becoming curd,  
pictured lengthwise  
as a rooster mounts.

The elements  
and architecture  
of each cell *(yes, your cells are all arranged and phenomenal, you fucking rock star).*

You'll be so perfect  
for my modern collection.

But modern humans rot  
as a poplar or a sick-sapped  
elm in August.

They are best when you  
open them  
already undone.

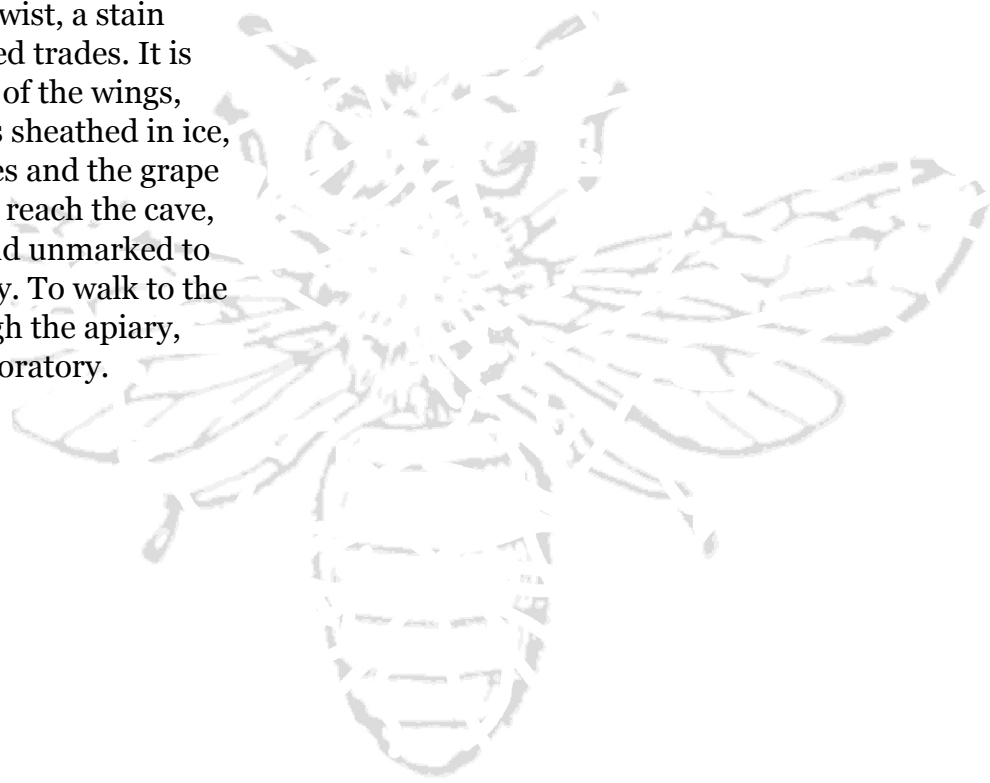




## **APIARY BEFORE US**

*(With excerpts from “Impostor With Housemaid’s Knee,” by Kristy Odelius)*

They will get stung in this field,  
as billy-witch mermaids sans  
sequins, waitresses in a bath, (they  
are sometimes referred to  
as cockchafers) as thawing  
quills, with prehensile ability.  
They will grow swollen  
in this field and carbonize  
each curve. Romance has been  
an ammonia twist, a stain  
of synchronized trades. It is  
the scrubbing of the wings,  
as floorboards sheathed in ice,  
that rubs knees and the grape  
of mouths. To reach the cave,  
to fall crisp and unmarked to  
the reverse sky. To walk to the  
swamp through the apiary,  
each girl a laboratory.



## **STRIP/E**

This girl again,  
a plutot,  
a worker.

Her hair, all these requirements.

Necessities.

All night my thorn cough  
upon the mirror; proving breath.

Each of us only knows the other  
by a foggy touch, through  
neighborhoods of our knots.

And I am knotty this time. Just try me.

This time steel,  
the rough douche of shame.  
*Seriously, Shakespeare mentioned this staleness.*  
Every time we speak,  
the skating rink cracks.

I'm the woman who  
could wear a Rome  
wristlet from age 10.

And you have no idea  
how much I want.

Home much I wane.

How much I am.

## PHYLLOTAXIS<sup>6</sup> (RELATIONS)

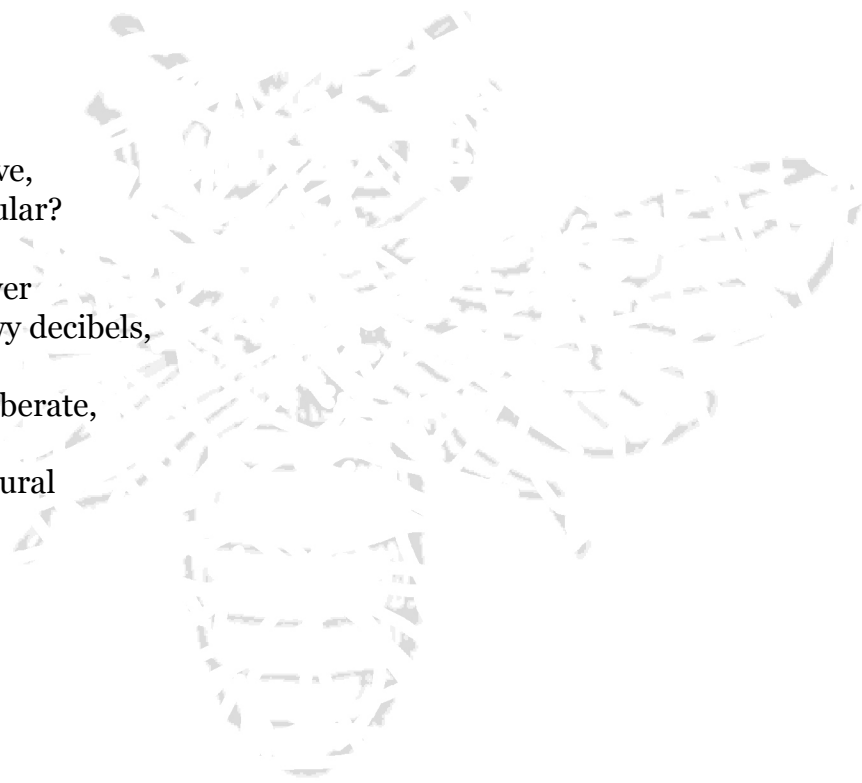
The tactics  
of your love:  
a node away from  
what I would consider  
downright distichous!<sup>7</sup>

I cannot mint you or mend you.  
I reside in this arrangement,  
you a seaside ranger, both of us  
cheating buds  
in the papal garden.

When will rosettes  
form upon the bridge  
of my stems? When, love,  
am I a nude perpendicular?

Someday by a warm river  
scratch, we melt as dewy decibels,  
catch a cobweb rash.  
Each of us a snail's deliberate,  
garnet toe, scraping up  
to the podium, the guttural

sound of lifetimes  
and universes  
in bitter autumn.



---

<sup>6</sup> In botany, phyllotaxis or phyllotaxy is the arrangement of the leaves on the shoot of a plant. The basic patterns are alternate, opposite, whorled or spiral. With an alternate pattern, leaves switch from side to side. An alternate distichous phyllotaxis means that each leaf growing at a single node is disposed in a single rank along the branch (such as in grasses). In an opposite pattern, two leaves grow in opposite directions from the same node. In an opposite pattern, if successive leaf pairs are perpendicular, this is called decussate. A whorled pattern consists of three or more leaves at each node. An opposite leaf pair can be thought of as a whorl of two leaves. A whorl can occur as a basal structure where all the leaves are attached at the base of the shoot and the internodes are small or nonexistent. A basal whorl with a large number of leaves spread out in a circle is called a rosette. A multijugate pattern is a spiral composed of whorls.

<sup>7</sup> Arranged in two vertical rows on opposite sides of an axis.

## IF YOU WANT FRUITS

*Commander:*

We collapsed and interrogated all the garden gnomes.  
We slung the jute boots over our shoulders,  
we stabbed at our indigenous domes  
until the cover-cave-son came;  
we cut compulsively, washed mouths  
out with silt crayon, defended our division.

*Commander:*

You're never going to get fruit like this.  
You need to party with me first.

*Commander:*

Let's harvest Fellini's women,  
go down the boreen,  
to the hamlet,  
to the backyard,  
of the organic man who  
has the wind engine,  
a hammer, and a posh hut.

Let's fight him.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES / CODA

*HONEY IS A SHE* utilizes the concept of the worldwide honeybee colony collapse to examine a failing relationship leading to divorce. I first read about it in 2006, around the time it was evident that my marriage was falling apart. As most writers would, I found it symbolic, and began researching colony collapse disorder and its causes. Most interesting to me was the *strange behavior of the honeybees* prior to mass death—their *navigation skills* so strongly affected by ingesting pesticides that they *lost their way home*. Chaos theory's *butterfly effect* also came to mind, colony collapse being another example: *an entire ecosystem*—ultimately, the international food supply and human existence as we know it—*hinges on* the presence and function of *the tiniest of creatures*.

Nature offers us patterns everywhere we look, should we choose to stop and recognize them. In poetry, similarly. Where there are endings, there are beginnings. Upon completing *HONEY IS A SHE*, I'd discovered some of my spoken word tracks recorded from 2003 to 2006, a collection I tentatively called *Opaque Lunacy*. These poems, once juxtaposed with those in *HONEY*, clearly offered structural patterns (the hexagonal wax cells of a honeycomb); gender-voice patterns (sepals and petals of a flower); and content-subject matter patterns (see excerpts of *Opaque* and *HONEY* poems below).

Today, new evidence asserts that [beekeepers could possibly inadvertently be one cause of the mass deaths...in other words, the protector may actually be the killer.](#)

*The nurse should not be the one who puts salt in your wounds / But it's always with trust that the poison is fed with a spoon* —Jack White, “The Nurse”

Conclusion: Had I been the nurse once *then* the patient? Had I been the beekeeper, worker bee, apiary, *and* queen? Even as a title, *HONEY IS A SHE* may represent this simultaneous creation and destruction, reiterating that a "honey" (a female inferred) is indeed a "honey" (perhaps her own worst enemy).

**PEKINGESE MOUNTAIN** (Lina ramona Vitkauskas, Shawn Baker)

*your skin a paraffin pugilist /  
hit me under the shelf /  
wrap the octane in heather /*

-----

*I let them fight, let the boys fight /  
cry them some shame and wash /  
the mountains until baked.*

– “MIGRATION”

**WILL SUCCESS SPILL ROACH JINTER?** (Lina ramona Vitkauskas)

*the hairless language /  
of starboard velvet / the taxidermic  
needle of the aleatoric cosmos...*

-----

*Each of us a snail's deliberate /  
garnet toe, scraping up /  
to the podium, the guttural /  
sound of lifetimes /  
and universes*

– “PHYLLOtaxis (RELATIONS)”

**THIN LIFE** (Lina ramona Vitkauskas, Shawn Baker)

*and the limp machinery /  
of irrigation, wheeled rows /  
off in a distant coma of supply & /  
demand/ under the tilled fields /  
of seismic unrest, rubbed from /  
the pesticides of memory*

-----  
*Here's to primitive machinery /  
to nail beds and chipped bone / ...  
I love you the way you scored my skin /  
with the trigonometry of monogamy*

– “HONEY IS A SHE”

**I’M GATHERING YOU (IN TINY MOON ECLIPSES)** (Lina ramona Vitkauskas)

*I curdle your response time /  
interfere with your deaf yam circus /...  
from honeyed cores and pores /  
excavating you from your convalescent wreckage*

-----  
*to unvail the couplet connectivity /...  
My looms famished Flemish /  
unspoiled honey in the motorcar gears*

– “WAX WOOD”

**MARINE NOZZLE** (Lina ramona Vitkauskas)

*The fisherman / is delectable / as a letter  
a lavender teller / a simple pistol of grace.*

-----

*So I decided on the revolver over the pistol.  
There, on the clotted couch, storked and full of ideas, /*

– “COMB OF COMBS”

**INTEGERS** (Lina ramona Vitkauskas)

*We are finches tied to metal /  
the severed heads of matadors  
surround us / in a quagmire of subtlety /  
and nothing hears us /  
but the aching stars*

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*I rip the itch from gender /  
arrive as an operative /  
at the state dinner and drown /  
the finches in the party pool*

– “HONEY IS A SHE”



**ROUND PEOPLE** (Lina ramona Vitkauskas, Shawn Baker)

*Today, a pulled pork of the people /  
Open flesh, it seems, is diminutive*

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*She comes at roast as she would after seismic shocks—blind and with tenterhooks.*

– “MIEL FOR MUMS”

**WHAT YOU CAN SAY IN THE DARK** (Lina ramona Vitkauskas)

*They touch like thieves /  
on things they could never /  
bring themselves to steal*

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*cop-partners tweeze marrow meals  
from mudslides ...you were the detective, a risky  
mink moonshine tomato pest...*

– “VISCIOUS MINISCUS”

**LIP SERVICE** (Lina ramona Vitkauskas)

*Minor concussion*

*Motorcycle fraud*

*Control my drift*

*And kiss me.*

-----

*Like reelers drum /*

*like deep plum /*

*like zippers and yum /...*

*you broke my heels, /*

*led me to your village /*

*and destroyed all my films /...*

*I fenced you for our first kiss,*

*to the floor I laid / separate on the tundra...*

– “NON-NATIVE FLORA”



**Lina ramona Vitkauskas** (Lithuanian-American-Canadian) was selected by Pulitzer-finalist Brenda Hillman for The Poetry Center of Chicago's Juried Reading Award in 2009. She is the author of *A Neon Tryst* (Shearsman Books, 2013); *THE RANGE OF YOUR AMAZING NOTHING* (Ravenna Press, 2010); and *Failed Star Spawns Planet/Star* (dancing girl press, 2006). She is co-editor of the long-running online literary magazine, **milk** magazine, and has been featured in Ugly Duckling Presse's *Emergency Index*, the anthology *The City Visible: Chicago Poetry for the New Century* (Cracked Slab Books), and has published/will be published in *DIAGRAM*, *The Prague Literary Review*, *The*

*Chicago Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *The Toronto Quarterly*, *Van Gogh's Ear* (Paris), *White Fungus* (Taiwan, displayed at MoMA), and many others. She is a faculty member at the new Chicago School of Poetics.

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**Shawn Charles Baker** has a rabid interest in the written word and the inner workings of acoustics and sound. Shawn lives in Los Angeles where he writes screenplays, is working on publishing his first novel and makes music with his bands Christian Fisting and The Forest Children. Recently Shawn helped a friend launch an online magazine, Joup.co. He holds his collaborations with the author very near to his heart.