

BELLADONNA\* CHAPLET SERIES

The Hand Has Twenty-Seven Bones—:  
These Hands If Not Gods



by  
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\*deadly nightshade, a cardiac and respiratory stimulant, having purplish-red flowers and black berries



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The hand is the only speech that is natural  
to man... It may well be called the Tongue...

~*Chironomia*, John Bulwer

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Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with  
your might; for there is no work, nor device,  
nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave,  
where you go.

~Ecclesiastes 9:10

Zahir, Aleph, Hands-time-seven,  
Sphinx, Leonids, locomotura,  
Rubidium, August, and September—  
And when you cried out, O, *Prometheans*,  
didn't they bring fire?

These hands, if not gods, then why  
when you have come to me, and I have returned you  
to that from which you came—bright mud, mineral-salt—  
why then do you whisper O, my *Hecatonchire*. My *Centimani*.  
My *hundred-handed one*?

These Hands, If Not Gods

1.

Haven't they moved like rivers—  
like Glory, like light—  
over the seven days of your body?

And wasn't that good?  
Them at your hips—

isn't this what God felt when he pressed together  
the first Beloved: *Everything*.  
Fever. Vapor. Atman. Pulsus. Finally,  
a sin worth hurting for. Finally, a sweet, a  
*You are mine*.

It is hard not to have faith in this:  
from the blue-brown clay of night  
these two potters crushed and smoothed you  
into being—grind, then curve—built your form up—

atlas of bone, fields of muscle,  
one breast a fig tree, the other a nightingale,  
both Morning and Evening.

O, the beautiful making they do—  
of trigger and carve, suffering and stars—

Aren't they, too, the dark carpenters  
of your small church? Have they not burned  
on the altar of your belly, eaten the bread  
of your thighs, broke you to wine, to ichor,  
to nectareous feast?

Haven't they riveted your wrists, haven't they  
had you at your knees?

And when these hands touched your throat,  
showed you how to take the apple *and* the rib,  
how to slip a thumb into your mouth and taste it all,  
didn't you sing out their ninety-nine names—

The hands—inventors utterers ushers of language—think and speak in  
gesture.

I make my faith in my hands. A writer can declare faith in nothing but  
must bear faith in her hands—: we build words for what they must  
touch and do.

*Fire* was first spoken through the hand's gesture, a gesture which called  
flame from the end of a branch. *Fire*, as sweet a heat a thorn in the  
mouth to speak as it was to touch.

In my language, the word for want and need are the same. Would you  
name a thing you cannot reach for cannot hold?

Would you name her if she were not yours?

The hands say, *Take my body. Take my body*. She does—: with her  
hands.

Our words, our every want and imagining,  
are made of hands.

When we understand a new concept or task, we are said to *grasp* it—:  
the brain, then, is inspired by the hand is mimicker of the hand.

Like any great god, the hand moves the brain in its image.

Who holds the reins of my desires if not my hands?

Or am I the beast of burden, tilling the desires of my hands?

The chariotry of it all: My hands my swift flesh-eating horses—Deinos  
and Lampon. The brain, substantia nigra, dark silvered chariot, driving  
driven by the hands toward all the wars:

the doorknob the greening pear  
the hammer the pin and the primer  
the birds the city walls Her.

I am an artist because of my hands—they are two artists building things  
with me.

Upon her—: we are three.

In Jan Švankmajer's short film *Tma, světlo, tma*, two hands find each other in a room. The eyes roll through the opened door and are absorbed by the hand.

A set of ears beats against the window until the hand unlocks the latch for them—they fly in and circle the lamp like a moth until the hands tear them apart and absorb them as well.

The nose is wrestled, along with the head and mouth. The wild pink tongue and teeth next. The feet. The rest of the body, eventually.

These two hands build the sensual body—: the senses are returned to their masters.

There is no sense but touch—  
no touch but hers.

The pen isn't separate from the hand, but like all instruments it is an extension of the hand. The tool and the hand—: they are *self*.

*The boundary between the hammer and the hand disappears in the act of hammering*, wrote Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa.

Her pen becomes her hand—:

the way I become beneath her hand.

Written words, or *manuscripts*, are drawn like threads from the manus are connected to the manus.

Manus as puppeteer—: standing the *M* up and then splitting it down the middle to its pelvis before helping it back up, lowering the oxed head of the *A* to kiss the ground with its horns, bending the *N* at its knees in supplication which is another word for begging unless it is another word for thanksgiving—I do both when I am lowered before her in that way—making a cup of the *U* then drinking its hot milk, and the *S*—:

the *S* given to me for to call her name.  
*Saretta*.

Without the hand, the lamp would remain cold.

Without the hands—my unfortunate  
Antigones—the brother would remain  
unburied.

My hands—my body's gates of tenderness, the tools of my wonders, be they violent or gentle, be they both.

The things I reach out with—toward her wrist toward the honey and the stone alike into all the darkneses before me.

Strikers of the flame to the lantern wick and looseners of the laces of my shoes.

In the night and in the light, they take and take, they do and do and do—: my little thieves and beggars.

My makers.

My anaphora—hands again and hands again upon her, striking falling turning like clocks, my hands, my hands, and her my hands my hands and her, her. Her now all the hours.

Again and again they command the copper button of her pants back through the button loop and each time it is no different than leaping a bright tiger through a fiery hoop to the applause and whistles of the crowd of blood dizzying my head—

all this—: the circus of love, the lighting of dark, the Kingdom the Power and the Glory Forever at the tips of my fingers.

When the hand unravels itself from the page, what is left behind of the hand on the page?

The Frankensteins of our wants—chimeras of ink—those *Adams of our labours*—:

dark-legged letters horn-first wandering the white fields

looking for a lover with one violent eye  
and one tender eye.

The dream of the cup began in the hand.

When my hand opens beneath the surface of the river, who can say  
thirst doesn't live in the bowl of my palm,

tell me I haven't quenched every burning in me

by sinking my hands into the dark waters  
of her shoulders and inner thighs  
and letting them drink?

The art of cheiromancy divines the future by studying the lines of the  
hand.

To know my hands is to know me—they are not separate from my  
thoughts but are my thoughts.

Their wishes are often their own and more often become mine.

Read my hand—: can't you tell  
they will soon reach to touch her?

In Florence I saw the hand of David first—the statue the body of David  
I saw second.

Like the way Athena was born from the axed-open head of Zeus, David's  
body must have escaped from this soft marble hand.

Michelangelo's hand again and again upon the hand of David—: the  
bend of his fingers and his own smooth veins.

The hand giving birth to the hand.

We press our hands into the page until the page becomes a body *not*  
other, becomes *this* body.

Page as skin. The body writing the body.

Writing ourselves into ourselves—penhandpage—: we are an ouroboros

devouring ourselves  
with our own hands.

Consider your hand in the moment of its making.

Look at this hand.

Hold your fingers and thumb together so there is no space between them—in this pose it is easy to remember your hand as it was then, in the beginning, before it became itself—

a paddle of tendon and bone,

a fin of desire, a solid whole thing.

This was before we were finished—:

*A hand lying on the shoulder or thigh of another body no longer belongs completely to the one it came from,* wrote Rilke.

I don't know if he wrote this before or after he pushed his wife down the stairs. *Pushed*— implying with his hands. Perhaps there was a moment when they were not his hands fully—: but half hers.

Did he believe she bore the blame too?

Are the acts my hands act on my behalf, the tasks I set them to upon her body, different than what our creators did when they molded our bodies?

Are they less possessed—: am I?

When I am behind her—my hands pressing her hips and shoulders, she pushing back into me—doesn't it seem as if my hands have conjured her? From this position—if you looked upon us—would you believe she is leaping brand-new from my rib?

I cannot believe that I have not  
just made her.

To be finished, the hand had to be broken.

Lessened before it became more—: split four times, crafting the fingers and thumb.

Our hand-some hydra.

The least important part of the hand might be the hand, since it is only the space around it—the space that makes a finger a thumb a palm—which makes it want—:

the desire to close a distance between the body  
and the knife the hip the orange the jaw.

Georgia O'Keefe called lover Alfred Stiegleitz, *my hand*.

She wrote, *Greetings—my hand—It's Sunday night 9:30—*

I once had a lover I called, *My hand*. I had another lover whom I also called, *My hand*—I snorted coke from a line along the thumb of her left hand. It left a pale shadow of dust that I cleaned with my mouth. When we kissed my lips were already numb.

Those lovers are mostly gone. My hands remain—: like altars.

There are twenty-seven bones in the hand and twenty-seven protons in the nucleus of an atom of cobalt.

Cobalt blue. Our hands are the masters of our blues—: how many times have I given up my head for them to hold?

Cobalt—from the German *kobald* or goblin.

O, mine melancholy goblins.

What darkness of hers wouldn't these hands enter

to catch the thick lux of her in their cups?

Some creator designed the hand like a sunflower a nautilus a Parthenon using the golden ratio.

When I divide my one hand in the sequence of all the hands I have let divide me, the answer is a ratio of memory and touch, a fixed place I return to often—: Her.

When I put my hand between her legs everything is golded. I feel my lunate bone, the small crescent of bone in my wrist, glowing from me, lamed, thin, blurry—like the way the moon was lying on its back the night she called it *Perfect*.

When she traces my throat with her middle finger,

I try to feel the shape of the number 1.618.

My hands are an archive.

What is archived is not the thing, but its existence, so its absence.

Even in absence there are atoms. I name these atoms. My Alexandrias. Mis bibliotecas. My burning downs.

I am archiving the atoms of her cool hands—:  
Hydrogen Carbon Oxygen her palm pressed  
at my chest.

The word *masturbate* is possibly derived from the words *manus* (hand) and *stuprare* (defile).

A year ago my mind and body wrecked—: I had to find a new way.

My doctor prescribed medicine I didn't want to take. I talked about this worry to a friend, who is also a poet and a doctor. He said, *You need to masturbate*. I laughed.

He said, *I'm serious. You need to masturbate a lot.*

In alchemy, the Hand of Mysteries represents the transformation of man into god.

The symbols above each finger signify the formula for *physicorum* described as a red ethereal fluid that can turn any substance into gold.

What are the hands, but gods  
pulsing with red sugar?

Quantum entanglement: My lover's hand has acted upon mine therefore the particles in our hands are entangled.

Our hands are entangled even when we are apart. I touch myself with my hand and imagine the hand of my distant lover.

I act the hand of my entangled lover.

And if her hands are—even a great distance away—at some beautiful work, am I too at that work?

Alone in the dark with only my hands—:  
her hands—: have I come the puppet?

A scientific explanation: orgasm releases oxytocin and lowers cortisol.

Midwives once masturbated women suffering hysteria as a type of treatment.

I took my medicine and my friend's advice—hands as pharmakon.

It is hard not to believe in the hands' refusal to be empty. Or maybe it is easier to believe in the hand's willingness to be full.

Tell me a person who is not full of themselves—:

my hands are full of me.

*My hands wanted to touch your hands / because we had hands*, wrote Frank Bidart.

He wrote about his hand with his own hands—: it's a *mise en abyme*.

To have a lover's hands within our own hands, to become those other hands as those other hands are becoming you, is to be between two mirrors, is to be *placed into the abyss* of touch.

The infinity of her hand.

Physics says we can never truly touch anything—the electrons in our hands repel the electrons in the object we think we are touching.

Touch—: the brain's interpretation of the repulsion taking place between our body's electrons and the object's electromagnetic field.

The feeling of touch is just our luck.