

Transcendental Telemarketer

by Beth Copeland

Beth Copeland's *Transcendental Telemarketer* lifts language beyond its typical meanings, lets it "whirl like a spinning top set loose on the sidewalk," until language and meaning split - the way the "I" does in the poems -- "I break in two: one girl stays on the bed while the other one floats to the ceiling to watch." With rare prowess, Copeland crafts these poems, delivering "the equator in that Ouija world," "death" as a "potent aphrodisiac."

—Debrah Morkun, author of *The Ida Pingala*

Copeland's *Transcendental Telemarketer* contains beautiful lyrics of emotion and meditation, but it also contains rants against war and violence, and all the while it swings us from the U.S. to Japan to Afghanistan, from Islam to Buddhism to Christianity. It's compelling, playful, and well-crafted.

—William Allegrezza, author of *Fragile Replacements*

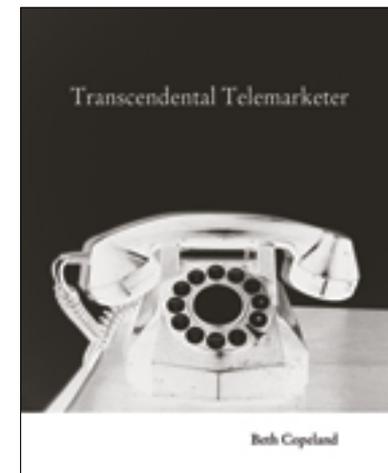
Beth Copeland lived in Japan, India, and North Carolina as a child. Her book *Traveling Through Glass* received the 1999 Bright Hill Press Poetry Book Award. Her poems have been widely published in literary journals and have received awards from Atlanta Review, North American Review, The North Carolina Poetry Society, and Peregrine. Two of her poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is an English instructor at Methodist University in Fayetteville, North Carolina. She lives in a log cabin in the country with her husband, Phil Rech.

Book Information:

· Paperback: 100 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound
· Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-088-0

\$16

Buy it [here](#) or [Buy it on Amazon here](#)



Still Life With One Apple

From earliest memory: one apple
in a bowl predating speech, spores

of sunlight floating on air like pollen
from the garden of Hesperides.

In childhood I wanted everything in pairs,
animals entering Noah's ark two by two,

the symmetry of hand in hand,
bride and groom.

I thought the apple needed another apple
or at least the company of an orange or pear,

that the apple was lonely, that everything—
even an apple in a bowl—

had a soul. Was it wrong to believe
the apple could suffer and bleed,

to project my own needs
onto that fruit?

To believe only a membrane
of matter and speed

separates blood from stone
and bone from apple seed?

To see the apple as a symbol
of the universal soul,

as in Georgia O'Keeffe's "Green
Apple on Black Plate,"

a study in simplicity?
Still Life With An Empty Bowl—

I ate the apple to make it whole.

Misconception

It was like catching a cold.
If he coughed without covering his mouth,
if he sneezed, you could have his baby,
or so I believed

at the age of nine when I read the chapter
on reproduction in a medical text. I knew the facts
of life had nothing to do with storks and bees,
but I couldn't figure out the mechanics

of sex, that tab A had to be inserted
into slot B like the cardboard figures cut
from the Rice Krispies box that always fell
apart when I tried to put them together.

Conception was a kind of weather
or photosynthesis: as leaves absorb sunlight
and turn green, I thought a man's floating spores
could penetrate a woman's pores,

that they could be on opposite sides of the room
just looking at each other or looking out the window.
One could be reading the newspaper and the other
playing *Heart and Soul* on the piano

when, *WHAM, BAM*, sperm and egg collide
and nine months later she becomes a mother.
I thought the microscopic sperm
could pass like germs from unwashed hands

contaminate a door knob, spoon or drinking glass,
or as Casper
floated through brick walls
on Saturday morning cartoons, believing

a wife could receive her husband's seed
like milkweed sown from the pod,
that every birth was a miracle, a gift from God,
that all you need is love.

Learning to Pray

I was told to close my eyes
and fold my hands like an unopened book.

I was not supposed to look
but sometimes I peeked

through downcast eyes
at steepled fingertips,

the double doors of thumbs
that opened and shut on all the people

in the sanctuary of palms.
After we read the one hundredth Psalm,

the preacher said a prayer.
Amen.

I unfolded my hands,
and the church disappeared.

How many years did it take me to learn
what the restless child knew then?

Prayer isn't reverence in our hearts.
It's in our hands.

Confession

I stole another woman's only scarf—

No, I didn't. I stole the line above to lead to the next line, swiped like the challis scarf

lost in a church parking lot.

It was black with a blue-and-white geometric print like tiny Turkish tiles.

One Sunday I looked up from prayer

and an old woman in the pew in front of me was wearing my scarf!

Because it had been given to me

by someone I loved, I couldn't let it pass, so after church, I said, "You're wearing

my scarf," and she said, "Someone found it

and said it looked like mine," adding insult to injury since I didn't think my beautiful scarf

looked like it would belong to

a woman wearing Hush Puppy shoes and a Brillo-pad hairdo. "But it's not yours," I said.

"It's mine," so she took it off,

handing it over as if she were giving me a gift when the scarf had been mine to begin with.

I still wear it, especially

on cold mornings when I need to wrap something warm and familiar around my neck.

That happened many years ago

when I still went to church and still believed I was lost and needed God to find me.

My Life as a Slut

Age 6: A boy finds a penny on the playground. He says he'll give it to me if I go in a closet, take off all my clothes, and let him look. My sister says, "Don't," but I do it, anyway.

Age 21: My mother calls me a "harlot," "Jezebel," and "strumpet" after I stay out all night with my boyfriend. I roll my eyes and say, "If we're going to have this conversation, at least update your vocabulary. The word is 'slut.'"

Age 16: A teacher tells me to kneel in the girls' bathroom. Am I supposed to pray for forgiveness? I get sent home from school because my skirt doesn't touch the floor.

Age 27: I walk down the aisle in an off-white satin dress. It's snowing, and the next day I lose my voice.

Age 20: I have sex with three different men in one week. I write their names on my calendar in wisteria-blue ink.

Age 10: At recess I tell Tommy Faircloth I'm going to be a stripper when I grow up. Tommy tattles to the teacher, who scolds him and says I'm a good girl. I would never say a terrible thing like that.

Age 32: A man at my college reunion tells me a lot of other girls in our class were sluttier than I was. I feel like a failure.

Age 23: I fall in love with a Vietnam vet who plays guitar and writes bad poetry. I sleep with him on the first date. He dumps me for a frumpy girl who waits until the second date.

Age 9: I'm walking down the sidewalk wearing short-shorts, and a teenage boy leans out a car window and yells, "Call me when you're 16!"

Age 30: I buy a bar of *Saints and Sinners* soap in New Orleans. My husband says it's a rip-off.

Age 18: I get drunk at a party and lose my virginity. The next morning hot water runs down my thighs in a stream of silver and blood.

Age 5: I'm afraid of dogs, strangers, and the dark. Shadows cast by tree branches and leaves on the bedroom wall look like the devil's face. Do I hear footsteps in the stairwell? I'm afraid I'll die in my sleep. I know I'm going to Hell.