I was several years into a PhD in literature before I realized that I had mistaken the term afterword for its homophone, afterward. This slip is understandable, not only through the logics of sound but also through the conceptual registers that each term evokes. One signals the words that come after other words, written by another writer as a response to a primary text. And the other, my mistake, summons an orientation that comes after those words – one that seems both discrete from and adjacent to the primary text. Both afterword and afterward signal a movement from something before into something after, and from one body into another. But these seemingly discrete bodies – the words and the words that come after – are bodies that touch, bodies that make and unmake each other.

I first read *The Perfect Mango* shortly after having spent three unexpectedly intense and enchanted days with Erin Manning. My friend and collaborator, Nathan Snaza, had invited Erin to give a workshop at the University of Richmond. We knew Erin’s work as a philosopher and artist, had studied her writing, but neither of us were prepared for the feeling that Erin’s presence would produce. At once ethereal and profoundly substantive, Erin’s spirit was captivating. An instantaneous mix of intimacy, energy, and hope flooded through us, unequivocally binding...
us together. It is a feeling that is still and will always be in circulation; when I feel lost, I open myself and let it in.

It was during that visit that Erin first mentioned *The Perfect Mango*, a text she had written nearly a quarter of a century ago that had gone out of print and been quite forgotten in the trajectory of her prolific career. A text she had composed in a concentrated time, over nineteen days, in a state of absolute desperation. A text she wrote because she had to, because her survival depended on it. Through the long breathless sentences, the recurring expressions of desire to write herself into being – not to be read but *to be learned by heart* – I came to understand Erin as a being that lives in a different time. That young woman who narrates herself into life, who is twenty-five or a thousand, is scrambling to situate herself in and against time, to make sense of a chrono-logic that cannot account for her.

*The Perfect Mango* is a book about the body, about learning to see it as an entity that has no end, something that is never permanently marked by the violence of history, that can *swim into a new skin*. The sexual trauma that haunts this book is being painted and purged across its pages, and the young woman who refuses to remain caught in the capture of trauma is also learning to feed herself, to become a body-being that will endure in new forms and through new forms of mutual making. I know this girl, for she is many. I love this girl, as I love us all – we misfits whose hurt provokes us to live through other styles and modes of becoming-together.

Afterward, after wading through *the maze of paint and vomit* that constitutes this beautiful book, we surface broken and in love. Broken and in love, no longer having to hold ourselves up to a narrative of completion, but letting ourselves suspend together, in various forms of contact, in life. And there is no mistake in this, in the afterward that *The Perfect Mango* summons and lives out.
Manning, Erin

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