

## **was**

Misused, abused and made to look foolish,  
“was”, as indicative past, first and third singular,  
has never relished its irregular role  
as a verb describing existence:  
if “is” was to be, “was” had to have been,  
and so it was, excepting subjunctive.  
It’s: “if she were in love,  
her eyes would shine love-light on all.”  
Not “was”,  
since she is, and will still be.  
It’s: “If I weren’t in love,  
I wouldn’t be writing this.”  
Not “wasn’t”,  
since I am, and can’t help it.

## were

More past existence,  
and subjunctive singular and plural:  
our verb to “be” maintains linguistic life,  
holds friends and families in fruitfulness  
and, when time and interest differentiate,  
discretely divorces incompatibles.  
“Her second husband and she were never friends,  
so she moved to Melbourne with her only son.”  
Our most urbane and love-smart city,  
you move there if lorn-born elsewhere.  
I have to add “were”  
to things I remember of her;  
but I use the present tense  
for everything I feel.

## **what**

Whatever I love, I am.  
So, because I am she and she lives interstate,  
I suffer.  
And because she is I, the same.  
It's like an exotic tree from Europe,  
planted, against its will, in Canberra.  
It looks like a tree,  
but beneath its youthful bark,  
there is aging arboreal ache  
and horticultural pain:  
a longing, as with me,  
for far away, yet not long ago.  
A holding on to dying life  
by tendrils of transplanted affection.

## when

“When are you coming?” I asked as an adverb,  
expecting to find, or add to, her meaning.

“You know when to expect me,” she replied,  
enjoying her ambiguity as a common conjunction.

“Since when have you assumed this?” I replied,  
exasperated as a pronoun.

Then there’s the “when” of the noun as used by lovers,  
for whom relativity predates the theory:

“when”, in waiting, time seems to delay itself,

like a clock tired of time’s interminable measure;

“when”, as duration, time acts the voyeur to love

in delicious delays and oft-repeated postponements;

and “when”, in parting, time regrets its sloth,

and bells the beginning, or end, of relationships.

## **which**

Size matters.

“Which” is longer than “that”

and, by nature, more conspicuous.

So, to draw attention to a relative clause

intended to intrigue or entertain,

“which” is your relative pronoun; “that” won’t do.

They say you can’t control

whom you’ll fall in love with,

but that you can control

which women you choose to meet.

Perhaps. Although our meeting was fortuitous,

and I could have chosen not to talk to her,

she was the neglected relative clause

which welcomed this importunate relative pronoun.

## who

“Who’s up whom and who’s paying the rent?”  
There, contained, are an interrogative pronoun  
and a relative pronoun,  
both vying for attention,  
and yet a third, chancing claimed attachment,  
thinks feelings have a life to be commanded.  
But she, like me Australian,  
knows that this question,  
posed or poised,  
is a social and commercial proposal  
meaning, either,  
“What’s happening and can anyone take part?”  
Or “Who has the lien on the sex on offer,  
and how does this relate to business commitment?”

## **will**

The tide's come in,  
apparently looking for itself  
as it swirls around the rock  
on which I stand at the beach,  
this sandy divide between sea and land,  
imagined future, and acquired present.  
I will be remembered, not for what I think,  
but for what I feel, and how those feelings  
were given a form both more appealing,  
and more enduring, than these stones.  
Find your own rocks;  
make them dry and flinty.  
Strike sparks, ignite passion: become an idea  
which is a tide in itself. She will help you ...

## with

Inclusive of time, occasion, manner, intent  
and the measures of personal and business life,  
this preposition of possibility  
unites with delight anyone culpable or blameless,  
original or copied and liable or entitled  
to associate satisfaction with achieved objectives.  
“I was with her whenever  
she was with me wherever  
time and place conspired in song  
to suggest we were an ablative absolute.”  
Now, I make do with the accusative,  
the case most likely to contain a husband  
trying to conjugate himself when he should decline,  
or find himself another grammar.

## would

Would that I could have heard her sing,  
Mellifluous melisma from the Middle Ages  
or, monophonic and manic,  
anonymous folk songs in lyric desperation:  
anything that voiced her angelic soprano,  
and filled my heart as it emptied her soul.  
I hear the world as it is each morning,  
and her resonance throughout the day:  
birds defy cliché and sing-in the sunrise,  
wind disentangles leaves confused with phyllodes,  
and a thunderstorm rinses the afternoon.  
Such sounds are the lyrics,  
the rhythm, harmony and modulation  
on the ground-bass that repeats as my life.

## yes

Yes; I love you.

You know because I told you, carefully,  
in soup and with duration.

Yes; everyone knows I love you,  
but not because I told them.

Rather, because they knew what I could see.

Regardless of forecast, each morning was a promise,  
and never a threat; each becoming day  
was a house, with all its rooms on exhibition.

You were my guide book, and I turned all your pages.

Nights are concertos, and I like to be soloist,  
for you are my grand piano,  
and the cosmos conducts, as always.

Yes; I love you: noun, interjection, woman.

## yet

Yes; grammar legislates in language:  
by service in one sentence  
this part of speech, a selfless conjunct,  
has authority in two.  
“They moved overseas.  
Yet she always thought of me.”  
Notice that neither “however” nor “but” replaces “yet”.  
Only “yet” reveals the emotional yearning,  
fingers the geographical dislocation,  
and points up the temporal, disjunctive distress.  
Only “yet” hints at the wistfulness  
of deep and melancholic silence  
which, wherever dredged, still brings up loss.  
She knows I’ll always love her. And yet ... And yet ...

## **you**

You are reading in my singular,  
but buying in your plural: thank you.  
This personal pronoun needs either situation  
or relationship for the specifics  
of compassion and understanding  
that illuminate condition.  
“You’d think she’d know her own heart,” you said,  
exasperated with her reticence.  
I tell you, she does: her heart’s a caged lion  
that, released, will hunt down those who confined it.  
And now, in joy and hopefulness, in thought  
and thinking feeling, I bid you farewell.  
I’ll farewell her when I farewell myself  
to fertilise generations of transitive verbs.