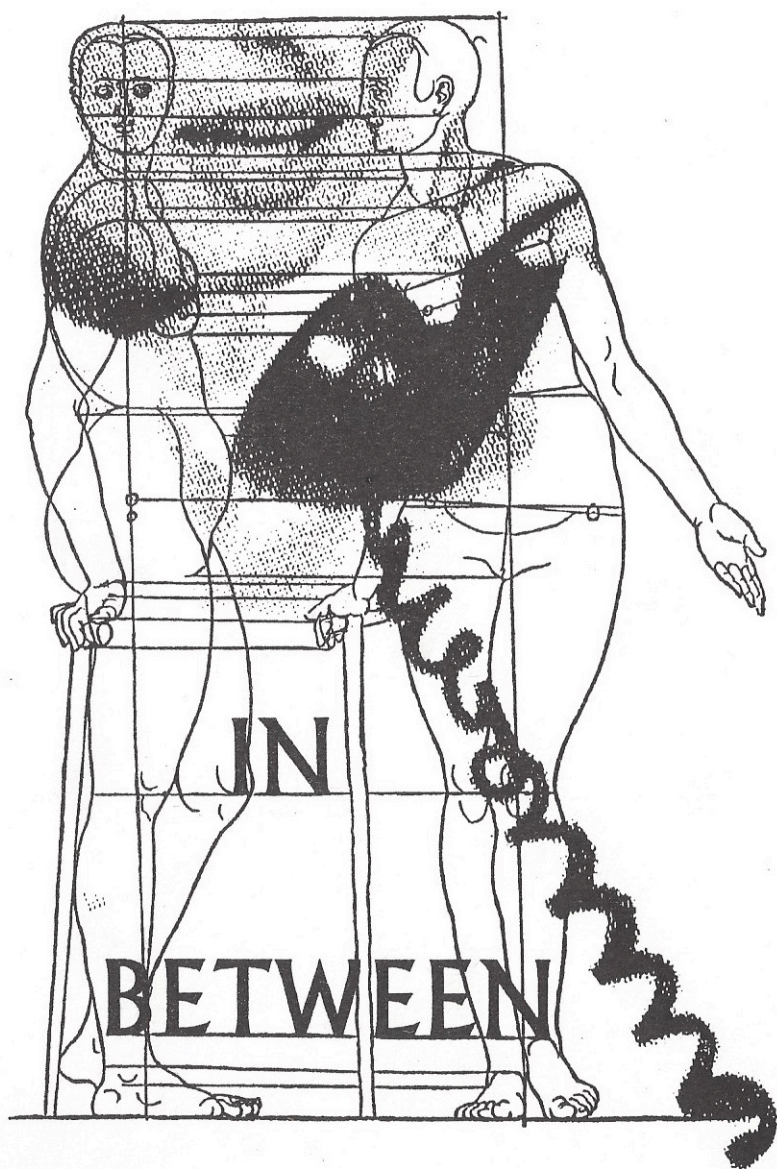


BARBARA HENNING





## In Between

# **In Between**

**by**

**Barbara Henning**

## **Other publications by Barbara Henning**

Smoking in the Twilight Bar  
Love Makes Thinking Dark  
Me and My Dog

*with Sally Young:* Words and Pictures

*with Georgia Marsh:* The Passion of Signs

*with Miranda Maher:* How to Read and Write in the Dark

The final three titles are all artist-poet book collaborations.

***Spectacular Diseases, 2000***  
***Peterborough, UK.***

*warped timber*

*&*

*the shadow of desire*



My body is the only home I can count on & it  
is enough.

Your eye is the empty spot I'm lost in & this  
is insufficient.

The act of turning exists & we wonder if this  
is necessarily adequate.

\*

Perhaps captured by your own willingness to sit in place.  
Reluctantly, suspended by a perpetual plan for future  
mobility. Yes, freed by my negative reactions.

\*

After the pharmacist sends the boy to the doctor, he  
agrees to remove his eyebrow ring. Prior to the witch's  
refusal to offer a remedy, his mother puts a stake in her  
womb. In the interim, tangled and indecipherable designs  
are tattooed on our breasts by big Teddy in Brooklyn.

\*

The wicked rumor at the university might have  
started from a kernel of truth.

The run of the mill lecture on the street  
corner was finished off with a lie.

It is my opinion that the owner of this cafe  
is making a small fortune on refills.

\*

Men, he says, need to be admired.

Women, she thinks, don't really invite  
humiliation.

We, the middleman disclaims, prefer to be  
left alone.

\*

The dramatic bohemian yells at the noisy family eating at  
the table beside her and they throw food back. An ugly  
academic whispers a compliment to the polite man across  
the room who smiles at someone else. The broker calmly  
discusses daily events with another broker who listens  
intently.

\*

No one flinches. I am an observer. Everyone complains.  
You are not paying attention. A few bear it. They are half  
listeners, half talkers, half asleep.

\*

Emerson & courage.

Edgar Allan Poe & terror.

Hester Prynne & the scar of balance.

\*

this is lewis um if you see michael tonight um maybe you  
can tell him to call me um i left my cap in a taxi cab  
and he knows the name of the taxi driver and i need to  
know the name so if you're connecting i'm at home  
it's about nine something nine thirty tell him to call  
and if i'm not here tell him to tell me the name of the  
driver i know that it sounds insane but it is the hat i  
bought in tibet so I really like it so i want to get it back  
okay kay bye bye

\*

He becomes attentive if I ignore him. And then as soon as I'm aroused, he looks the other way. The cat, however, turns up her nose if he pets her. And now, rather than later if she has sloppy looking eyes, he smacks her with a stick. Undisturbed, the mermaid treads water in the middle of a deep and distant pool.

\*

A virus spread by mice in the East Hampton house. A cure hidden by doctors in the New York Medical Center. Self-diagnosed, she sets out bottles of herbal concoctions to counteract his personality defects: problems with listening, thinking, drinking.

\*

A typical relationship between a man and a woman. I never learned how to play. A rather unusual monologue. I practiced diligently from morning to night. This moribund dialogue. A smattering of haphazard thought in the afternoon.

\*

barbara michael calling i don't know what time you're coming in or what the story is but i would suspect as you know i'll be at school and i'll be back here about five to five thirty i have a car for the day to do some errands and stuff and wanted to pick up food anyway and its a good day to blow off things you know with a car any way i can always run in and pick you up and take you back whatever you know and um later this evening anyhow so let's be in touch i tried to reach you a couple of times yesterday and as you know the answering machine wasn't working and i didn't hear from you on the machine when i went out so i just figured you were busy doing things whatever so i'll talk to you soon

\*

The wind blows the coupons off the kitchen table. Everything stands still, breathless, the bills in their envelopes, unopened. Economically balanced, a pocket of air accumulates.

\*

They want to figure out if I am secretly rich. The man misreads my outward signs of wealth. We recognize the seductive flash of power.

\*



Life goes on one way or another until it stops. Which way usually matters. Death stops speed in its singular way. Of course the manner doesn't matter at all. The years anxiously multiply. Who holds the road holds the law.

\*

hi michah its joseph calling from city as just to let you know that you passed the writing test with an eighty five  
hopefully you're going to do just as well if not better on the reading test tomorrow good luck

\*

He couldn't say he likes her. It would be a wound to his masculinity. The cat admitted her disdain for him. Her femininity was a bandage. The satyr blabbed the secret into the public. Beneath an elaborate head dress, blood coagulated and formed a scab.

\*

Born between a woman's legs. To die wrapped around a man's shoulders. To live unencumbered as a torso without limbs.

\*

barbara michael calling i sure hope you're not out uh at reggios or whatever you know i tried to reach you a couple of times before going and uh you know we got into a little problem coming back and walter and i ended up eating at juniors and i'm just exhausted and didn't feel like you know fighting the cold tonight so i came home so i'm at home it's about eleven o'clock, five minutes after eleven uh okay well give me a call and i guess i'll call reggios if i don't hear from you shortly i don't know what your plans are or whatever but okay talk to you soon good bye

\*

The allusion that he can be husband-like. The startling reality that she cannot be a wife. The poetic addition of an "s" tends toward paralysis.

\*

Should I simply say, there he goes. Could you in all complication announce, here she comes. To imagine the serious exercise as a line in between.

\*

They stood absolutely still on the stage. We kept moving from one wobbly rock to another. In an early stage of war, you and I look at each other from our respective seats.

\*

What was of interest was the penetration of another's soul. In itself sex was without interest. Combined with everything else, ecstasy. Freely floating between bodies in a crowd. Here and there and here again, a manic depressive syndrome or the godlike sucking in of the universe.

\*

hi this is harryette calling and um i just wanted to let you know that i'm here in new york i'm staying at the washington square hotel and ah you can leave a message here if you need to do that and a i also wanted to tell you that i put your name down for a complimentary admission to the panel discussion at the new museum on ah whenever that is tomorrow at six thirty um so anyway i'm going to be in and out but if a i'm not here you can always leave a message but i'm assuming that we'll meet at eight i forgot whether we said we were going to meet here or somewhere else but anyway let me know and i hope things are good with you ok bye bye

\*

Treacherous wolves slide away from the road and cross over. I am frightened. We glide by. Nothing but slinky minks crowding into our vehicle. You are ecstatic. They push in. A deep dreamless sleep. Two bodies beside one another, breathing in unison.

\*

My second sex status is very accentuated with him. The first and only one is the only one. A wild sexual encounter in which the multiple unlaces the one.

\*

He has a large need for admiration by other men. She never had a healthy contempt for the other women in her family. Their cumbersome winter clothing sometimes creates an emotional barrier.

\*

He calls me from the cafe across the street where I had wanted to stop, but he was too tired and wanted to go home. He said he could see the apartment from down there. I saw him and waved. He didn't wave back. He was tiny on the corner. I waved three times (my heart not into it — I was *uninvolved* with him last night). Finally he held his hand up and signaled as he climbed into a cab.

The eagle flew off toward the sunset without a word about the future. I refused to accompany him even though he called me with his wing. He was thinking about me and I picked it up, telepathically. He signaled with his wing, a shadow so large I was lost in it. My heart beat loudly as a sign of my love. He turned toward the sunset and left the whole area in shadow.

The reptile, after gorging on a human, grips the shore with his claws and then slides into the swamp. From that point on, they sleep and travel together, forever more.

\*

The refrigerator runs loudly. Everything is packed for a rainy day. The stove is quiet. Nothing remains on the shelf for a low impact evening. The mother in the story hums as she mixes and measures the ingredients for a roast beef dinner.

\*

hi this is joseph calling for michah just wanted to let him know that he passed the math exam as well as the global good work see you at registration

\*

For the roman, the active partner was above reproach. For the christian, the passive one is a perfect compliment. At the border, two patient lines of immigrants and soldiers form in opposite directions.

\*



During the first few days of the century, my dismal punish-ment was confinement to a cell with an impotent young man. The highlight of the last few days was helping the young woman switch her bedrooms. Forty-seven years ago, I was born in a large labor room in a city hospital.

\*

Little quotations from Nietzsche will decorate the pages. Long passages from Kant were recited on tape and then left in the archive. The important texts by Marx lost their resale value in the eighties.

\*

hello, this is walter calling for barbara i didn't get your call until i came back late that night because basically if i'm on the phone and it's busy another message service picks it up and i don't know unless i pick up the phone which i didn't do so i had no idea you called so i didn't get your message and i didn't get to see you and i'll tell you more when i talk to you take care good bye

\*

I have left all my work for some project scattered around on tables in some park or garden with many seats and many old women. Everything is filed away in a drawer inside file folders labeled, park, garden, seats, old women, and other. The young man stands near the fireplace reading the manu-script pages left in his mother's top drawer.

\*

People report back to me about his activity. Should I continue to see him? No never ever ever. No one says a word. He has never been spotted once. I will continue to see him over and over again, no matter what they recommend. One voice speaks from the past, the dead mother prophecizing our inevitable parting.

\*

ah barb, yea barb, linnee called she needs two hundred and fifty dollars for books badly so she can have money for her insurance so she needs that check ok bye

\*

Lately I'm very aware of the here and now. Way back then never ever reread anything. The event that triggered the anxiety attack sometime ago was a promise of perpetual employment.

\*

Be kind. How difficult it must all be with no real position and all that knowledge. Torture him. It's easy as hell to be a dunce even with everything at stake. Deny the problem. With a mundane attention to everyday details, the practical man will succeed.

\*

Where have I gone philosophical? Over there in the apple tree. Here within this mystical and poetical body, my right ovary aches.

\*

hi barb      it's georgia it's ten o'clock on thursday morning and i'm calling because a friend of mine called from paris and he's a very nice guy and i told him to meet us tonight and since i didn't have any idea where the orlin cafe was but i knew i could figure it by sight i told him to meet me at saint marks bookstore at about ten so if you're early meet us at saint marks or if you're not we'll find orlin and meet you there okay

\*

He said he was going home, but as I watched from behind the door, he walked around and about looking to be sure I was gone and then he called a cab and went in the opposite direction. The sound of her voice dropped as she explained she was going home for the evening. In the background, I heard someone coughing. They pushed into the cab on both sides of me, kissed me, fondled me and then at the light, they paid their part of the fare and went home for the evening.

\*

A man with a cane comes one way. A woman with a baby in a stroller comes the other. She pulls to the side (my knees are in the way). Thank you miss, he says. A woman, young and sexy, wearing high heels, cuts across the street. A man with a woman in a wheelchair goes in my direction. He blocks the way (my head is in the path). Fuck you, slut, he shouts, passing by. A middle-aged woman in a leather jacket, levis and baseball cap saunters past. A dog pauses to urinate on a garbage can. Hey, little puppy dog.

\*

The teenage boy is playing cards on the porch in the country. The little girl was daydreaming on the roof of her apartment building. A few years stretch out into a long range bet on the knowledge factory.

\*

hello barb it's ann calling on wednesday evening um the voice sounds very strange in the machine it's barely recognizable, just hard to recognize barbara and michah to assure myself hope you're well hope you're warm etcetera and continuing creatively chow bye

\*

The Nazis stripped away passion from longing and what was left was a large glass of water. The decent mother was relatively indifferent in her response to her child's mental acrobatics and therefore nothing remained challenging beyond the essentials of logic. An army provides a purpose for the striving middle classes, murder as a surplus for the average.

\*

*By pulling away from error, Aristotle instructs, we shall reach the middle.* Perhaps with a shove into the very essence of correctness, the little mouse will be held back from the far ends of her tendency toward psychodrama. A wild dance on the tightrope with the baronness of dada — *we will play again the old WONDERFUL play of TWO TOGETHER.*

\*

Both of them were late tonight because they were absorbed in watching the baseball game. Always on time, especially in the afternoon when I am accompanied by the symphony of my alert parental voices. The crowd in the cafe disguises the spatial median between my anger and his guilt.

\*



uh barbara michael calling my telephone's dead it's been  
dead since two thirty quarter of three this afternoon so i  
can't get either incoming or make out coming they're  
supposed to come out early tomorrow morning to fix  
it i thought i might go back on but no dice so um i've  
been at home just working doing things here and i'll give  
you a call i guess you know um um in the next hour or two  
i'm sure peter you know its about eight o'clock i've  
been trying you at school but no answer there and i  
guess peter has been trying to reach me but he didn't call  
me before two thirty because i was on the phone up until  
then so anyway if you run in to him you know i'm at  
home thank you bye

\*

His hunger for attention and love.

Satiated she pushed him away.

My vampire. My nurturing brother.

The machinations of chewing

become a scientific discipline

with various branches of inquiry.

\*

He loves it here and wants to keep coming.  
The little dog hates this position and needs  
to throw himself onto a different path.  
Along with adequate food, shelter and  
clothing, a leash produces the ordinary.

\*

Begin with the days soon past or today in the  
moment.

We visit the ocean, wild and ominous after  
the hurricane.

In the future, finish off the evenings with a  
solitary, meditative walk in the  
mountains.

\*

I thought I could survive a three and a half hour train trip with only coffee, donuts, pepsi, rice cakes, bland overripe figs and a slice of cantaloupe. Asleep, god exceeded himself by gorging after a twenty minute walk on thick beer, exquisite french pastries, Italian sodas, chocolate cake and a bowl of exotic fruits with whipcream. The administrators and nutritionists are busy balancing cost and health in the menus for the public schools and hospitals.

\*

hi this is joseph calling for michah just let him know that he passed the global rct and I wish him the best of luck tomorrow on the math take care

\*

*Those who restrain desire*, Blake warns, *do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained*. On the other hand, this herd of animals chooses to spurn and they won't act without reason even though they are not strong enough to be released. After being excused from the cigarette factory, the baronness punched a poet in the face.

\*

Stooped over, I walked into a door and gave myself a black eye. The cat walked upright into the room, and before leaving she put black eye makeup around her eyes and shut all the doors and turned off the lights. With his back arched, the angel flew off the window ledge of the ninth floor of Westbeth, a mad man with yellow eyes out of New York.

\*

A den of scandal. A group of ethical academics. A gaggle of exhausted English professors napping on a king size bed.

\*

Does he beat you? Does god soothe the trials and tribulations of the animals in his kingdom? The members of this tribe are characterized by the extreme nature of their masochistic pleasures.

\*

They sit back in the chairs, ready for some kind of accusation. We lie down in the bed, unprepared for the voices in the air shaft. It is debatable whether the knot is relatively simple and loose or whether it has been tied too tightly.

\*

hi barb it's sally and i haven't talked to you in so long but i've been thinking of you and anyway i'm just calling to say hello and also let you know i'm having a little thanksgiving day dinner i'm not so sure of the time yet um debby & dennis are coming into town and i just want to have a little dinner probably you know late afternoon early evening that kind of time and i just wanted to know if you wanted to come i'd love to see you give me a call and let me know if you're in town or i will talk to you later later ok bye

\*

A rain cloud passes over the university. A stable atmosphere is maintained in the coffee shop. We bicycle in high gear non-stop from the cabin in the woods straight into the city to the hall of justice where court is in session.

\*

Now, I'll have to speak to him and ask him to go back to the others and tell them emphatically that they are all wrong. Last night the mouse decided to clam up and let the cats do as they please since they know exactly what they are chatting about. In the morning, the furnace in the old rickety house hums and rattles while we sleep soundly after taking large doses of melatonin, valarium and anti-histamine.

\*

barbara, michael calling, thursday about um eight o'clock your time just wanted to check with you and see how you are and maybe get to you before you went to the island tomorrow so i'm gonna go out and have a meal with costi and probably down to the bookstore and you know maybe a little walk down to the french quarter will do me some good and a then i'll be home and so if i get home reasonably i'll give you a call or you can call here and a (inhaling) and a if we don't speak to each other tonight let's talk tomorrow morning you know you can always call collect here if you want but anyway um hope all is well bye bye

\*



He does not beat me. God does torment his subjects. I rest  
in the bathtub.

\*

um um let's see      could you tell um david alexander or  
richard alexander      i'm so confused      i'm calling and  
i'd like to invite richard      is it richard david i don't  
know what i'm doing now      to a party this Saturday run  
by the german director      if anyone is back in town they  
can call me at two one two five eighty two zero zero      it  
should be a fun gala and give everyone my regards

\*

A cure in the middle ages for passion: stare at soiled  
sheets. A cause in this day and age for depression: the  
absence of any substantial contact with filth, dirt,  
abjection. A relevant fifties project in the suburbs of  
detroit: Build local bomb shelters, store canned goods and  
accumulate appropriate weapons.

\*

I woke up on the narrow bed in the living room of the  
cottage on Floyd Street. The telephone was ringing. It was  
Michael, calling to say he loves me. The mouse fell  
asleep on the floor of the apartment building. There was  
an eerie silence in the room. She was totally alone with  
her life and her death and everything in between. With a  
detailed plan for extermination, we begin by meditating  
on an ornate detail on the ceiling of the cathedral. The  
choir sings Rock of Ages at an extra slow pace. Come to  
me. Come to me.

\*

I am at the oceanside now, writing in this little Japanese  
accordion notebook. On a bench waiting for the D Train  
at Dekalb and Flatbush, she fusses with a hole in her  
stocking. The airplane rolled over on its side and the entire  
chorus seated in the A.B.C. section groaned at varying  
pitches. The aviation technologist played back the tape for  
the television newscaster.

\*

ah barbara michael i'm in town about five o'clock at my desk going through my mail kind of tired ah cause i worked this morning too uh i'm going to go to bushwick at about six thirty and i'll probably be in the city by at nine so if you'd like to meet over at the no bar i'd like to get a good you know arab meal middle Eastern food tonight kind of calm my stomach down and ah why don't we meet there at nine or i'll call you from there if you don't you know show up okay look forward to meeting bye bye

\*

ah barbara i'm waiting for you at orlin i mean i've been outside for *fifteen* minutes it's eleven o'clock *okay* i hope you're on your way bye

\*

Why is he speaking to me like that? Because the cats have nothing else to hide. It is. This is. I am. *The* is a definite article, often emphasized by certain native speakers.

\*

On the subway on Friday the 15th, a destitute man is asleep between me and a tough looking jock. The sleeping man leans on my shoulder. (Lean on me brother.) He leans the other way. Lean on me one more time and I'll knock your block off. This isn't your home, you faggot. The man starts screaming hysterically about his homeless condition as he backs toward the other side of the train. The onlookers are amused and entertained. I roll up a twenty dollar bill, pass it to him, and apologize. He follows me off the train and all the way to the doctor's office on 9th Street where I go inside.

On a country road in between two small towns, a woman drives her porsche with the top down, hair blowing in the wind. She's speeding. On the side of the road, a man in a tweedy coat, with a worn brief case, attempts to drag a woman with a little child on her arm into the center of the highway. The speeding woman pulls over to the side and offers a ride to the woman and her child. "Not you," she says to the man, and as they prepare to drive off, she throws her car into reverse and smashes into him, breaking both of his legs. The two women and the child drive off, waving.

Half way in between, a suburban man shops at Farmer Jacks for his family. It is 1962. He fills his basket with red meat, canned vegetables and frozen deserts. The man at the cash register gives his baby a lemon colored sucker. Contented the father and child drive home in their station wagon with their groceries packed into the back.

\*



hi barb it's georgia it's thursday about ten of six and i'm glad i picked up my messages cause i didn't have your number i'm in new york downtown hospital and um let me give you my phone number here it's three twelve five thirty nine and i did have surgery on monday night or monday during the day and it did in fact turn out to be cancer and so they took everything out and i'm fine now and i'm recovering so when you get this message give me a call but don't call too late because i go to sleep pretty early so i'm also up pretty much at the crack of dawn so call me anytime in the morning and i'll be up at about eight thirty or so i just want you to know everything is fine so i'll talk to you soon bye

\*

The slightest look, a number on a scrap of paper and I believe she is keeping a secret from me. I begin to weep and she says, "Keep it to yourself." When a major sign appears, like words in the sky, the cat refuses to read, refuses to believe the zebra has left the house. Instead she writes a memorandum to herself. A flash of warning on the computer screen: Insufficient memory. Word not found. Access denied.

\*

Either this half of what you want becomes what you want or leave and look for something else. The whole of what you need undoes what you need or stick around and take a nap. Expect nothing. "That's for *me*!" Barren, with everything everywhere. This is not my separation. Chum or demand. Estrange and disclaim. Undone, undressed, into bed, sleep on it—

\*

Oh pleasure, your body  
Oh pain, my god  
No prosac, no mean, an answering machine

\*

Either z or not z, either blue or not blue. Definitely A is A and a nose is a nose is a nose. If in addition A is B and a nose is a rose. Oh no! Indistinct, loose, and uncertain concepts are necessarily censored.

\*



My mother underlines a passage in the Bible: I have no husband. Her father lost his newspaper. The River Hades waits to be crossed. After passing through the country of man parched in the sun, we wait in line at the check cashing joint on Myrtle Avenue.

\*

I never invent anything new. Everything around me is under continual change. The agitated animal rearranges his bedding. Nothing within its realm ever changes. All things are static forever more. The sun works at transforming the plant and animal kingdoms. A star is not eternal.

\*

Hello i'm calling from hansen place dental associates, this message is for barbara henning you have a dental appointment today at eleven please call to reconfirm the number is six three eight zero seven zero zero thank you

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The illustrations used on the front and back covers were conceived and completed for this edition of *In Between* by Miranda Maher, an artist living in New York. If looked at carefully, they seem to resemble ideas expressed in some of the drawings of Albrecht Dürer — a German who, although still much remembered today, rose to great prominence within Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries.

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