

PHANTOMS

Holly Karapetkova

After Lord Nelson lost his right arm during an unsuccessful attack on Santa Cruz de Tenerife, he experienced compelling phantom limb pains [... which] led the sea lord to proclaim that his phantom was “direct proof of the existence of the soul.” If an arm can survive physical annihilation, why not the entire person? --V. S. Ramachandran

If an arm why not a person
 if a person why not a soul
if a soul why not god
 if god why not my children

the ones with their heads
 curled against their chests
 furled fronds of a fern
 heads a bulge a node
never opening

why not let them grow
 on their own now
 that they have left me
 the entire person
 why not a limb a lobe

why not let them kick
 their stub toes almost elbows
let them grow stronger
 while my breasts sag
 back against my chest

let them spin and spin
 themselves into being
their stories those small engines
 tight threads curled
 around my finger
waiting for a name.