

Melinda Smith

habitus

a hand spread on a hand -
starfish meat on starfish meat
in the old wide belly of the sea.

breathe. *life is very long.*
even with a hand
spread on a hand, ebbing,

cresting. life is. your body
(whose body) this body
is evolving. inhale. you are safe,

face-down in the dark,
face-up in the light,
you are swelling in a warm, salt

womb. life is very.
your body (whose body)
this body is revolving.

exhale. *here we go round.*
it sheds (and gathers
and sheds again) genitalia

as it rolls, bestriding
the darkness. you will turn
many times, ebbing, resting,

unresting, becoming.
as befits a fine, muscled idea,
you will take up brief residence

in a pale lump, flaccid, seamed,
incomplete, a cold cadaver,
neck severed and pinched.

between this body and your body
(whose body) *falls the shadow.*
here we go round. this is quite

unbecoming. wear it. rest. roll left,
as a man. rest. roll right
as a woman. rest. rasp. rinse.

repeat. your body (whose body),
this body, its ribs moving as gills
in the light, its extremities blurring,

doubling. life is very full.
you are always pregnant
with your next self. between

this body and your body
(whose body), between the idea
and the wide belly, falls orlando.

you may feel incomplete,
you may experience some slight
unrest; some warming. salting.

breathe. you are brief. you are always
some body. wear it. work it.
even ebbing, shedding. even in the dark.

Quotes in italics from T S Eliot, 'The Hollow Men', as published in *Poems: 1909–1925* (London, 1925).

This poem is in response to the short film and sculpture, '*Body Double*, 2007'

by Julie Rrap and forms part of the *Shadow Catchers* exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales