

Flamingos et al

by [Peter Cooley](#) in the [October 2023](#) issue

When I say "I," it is a supposed person.

—Emily Dickinson

Emily, I am writing this poem to be another—
my aged neighbor, kneeling at her flower bed
her prayer the lantana she's gold-transplanting.
Or the person of the flamingos, New Orleans zoo,
I took in yesterday, the pink sunset
their preening feathers pinked, our pinkness
the whole flock of us, on spindle legs,
our bodies tower rooms, our necks descending,
condescending to drink the black pools at our feet.
Why be who I am when the world
claims me, the willow by the river
taking my name as I pass, the shaking
a willows' kind of fluted benediction—
I suppose at my last breath I'll come back
to stand in my soul, naked, dispossessed—