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# Gypsy Soul, Wolf Spirit

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GYPSY SOUL, WOLF SPIRIT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

By

PAMELA M. DAVIS-ALLEN

B.A., Wright State University, 2002

2009

Wright State University

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

May 21, 2008

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION  
BY Pamela M. Davis-Allen ENTITLED Gypsy Soul, Wolf Spirit BE ACCEPTED IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of  
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## ABSTRACT

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*Gypsy Soul, Wolf Spirit* is a collection of thirty-six poems; the majority of the poems are written in—or evolved from drafts written in—iambic pentameter. Writing formal poetry was a challenge I decided to embrace because I believed that it would allow me to evolve as a poet.

The themes that connect these poems are represented by the collection's title: *Gypsy Soul, Wolf Spirit*. There is the dominant thematic presence of both the natural world and the spiritual realm within the collection. My intention was to lift the reader to a state of mind, through language, where he or she could get lost in the peaceful beauty of nature—even when that beauty is found through powerful images of the bear or wolf—and feel the spontaneous gypsy soul of the divine universe.

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## PREFACE

When I began writing *Gypsy Soul, Wolf Spirit*, my goal was to write a collection of sonnets, allowing the poems to break the form as they evolved when it served the work to do so. In taking on the challenge of writing formal poetry instead of free verse, I intended to strengthen my language skills as a poet and writer and to revisit and practice these forms in my pedagogy as a poetry instructor. The process of writing a free verse poem is creative, but the process of writing a poem within the meter and rhyme scheme of a sonnet combines the creative process with an increased intellectual challenge.

It has been my experience when teaching high school students poetry, as well as when I was a student in college level poetry courses, that amateur poets—when writing free verse—tend to use the page as a place for therapy and cliché. I had an idea that poets, like all writers, have to know the craft, through form, before they can succeed in writing outside of it as free verse allows. It made sense to me that, while not all good free verse poems have to break out of formal poems, a poet who has worked with language, rhythm, and meter enough to succeed at crafting formal poetry will find it easier to weave poetic devices and rhythm into his or her free verse work. This project was, then, a pursuit to bring my poetry to a new level—to heighten my skill as well as my understanding of the craft.

My initial inclination was toward Shakespearian sonnets, which consist of three quatrains and a concluding couplet following the rhyme scheme abab, cdcd, efef, gg. I found the ending couplet was my problem with drafting my first two attempts at rhyming sonnets: “Passion Ink” and “On the Mountaintop.” I wrote many couplets trying to conclude these pieces appropriately, but found that these poems dealt with too large a theme—the speaker in both poems is trying to define what love is and what role it plays in life—to nail down appropriately with a rhyming

couplet of twenty syllables. I chose to break the traditional Shakespearian form and allow the poem “Passion Ink” to be three quatrains of abab cdcd efef without the couplet, and “On the Mountaintop” became six couplets of iambic pentameter in the same rhyme scheme. The following are two couplets taken from the latter:

All life and time will scatter like the seeds  
on winds of children under future moons.

Our spirit knows the path it truly needs,  
the cosmic mother weaves it on her loom.

Breaking the form in this way offered a creative means to confront the difficulty of the ending couplet, and the poem feels complete at line twelve instead of forced, as it did in prior drafts with a thirteenth and fourteenth line.

I moved on from these pieces aware that I needed to find subjects that would allow for a natural sounding two-line conclusion. Ultimately, only two poems in this collection hold the Shakespearian form in its entirety: “35 Henry Street” and “Three Wishes.” Though these pieces are solid poems, it was through the process of fine-tuning other sonnets that stuck to the traditional rhyme scheme that I came to terms with one of the dangers with the project I had taken on: being such a popular form that has been mastered by many fine writers, it was difficult to escape the feeling that my end rhymes seemed simple and forced in comparison to the flowing works of, say, Edna St. Vincent Millay or Shakespeare. I decided to loosen the boundaries of the form and allow myself to experiment with blank verse while still holding the fourteen lines of iambic pentameter for which Shakespearian sonnets are known.

In freeing myself from the rhyme scheme while holding on to the other defining aspects of the form, I created a surmountable challenge that brought about opportunities for linguistic growth. For instance, when writing the first draft of “Gypsy Soul,” because the line length in



iambic pentameter allows for ten syllables, I had to leave the poem for days in order to create the final word in the eighth line, which could only be one syllable. Below is the stanza of lines five through eight (the word is italicized):

I never knew a love like when she tied  
her scarf of coins around my swinging hips,  
the way her hands plucked music from the strings,  
an ancient song rose from me like a *ghost*.

I needed to find a one-syllable word that captured the image of vocals rising out of the narrator unexpectedly. In an earlier draft, the word was *whale*, as I could see the image of a humpback whale bursting out of the ocean water. I realized I could not expect my readers to find this same image without being given visual cues beyond *whale*. Poetic inspiration often creeps up on poets, and I found the word *ghost* bursting out of my subconscious mind (much like the whale); it was the perfect fit.

Writing in iambic pentameter, I was shown that a good poem comes down to splitting hairs. Even a one-syllable word can determine whether a piece rises off the page and into the reader's mind's eye or not. The poems that hold the meter and length of the Shakespearian form but are written in blank verse: "Gypsy Soul," "Gaia," "Lunar Eclipse," and "Chihuahuan Desert," are some of my biggest successes in that the meanings of the poems were served by consisting of three quatrains and ending couplet instead of being hindered by it.

I did try my hand at Petrarchan sonnets, a form that consists of an octave followed by a sestet in iambic pentameter. Though "Crystal Child" does consist of the appropriate meter and structure and follows the turn between stanzas that is inherent to this form, I very quickly decided I would write the sonnet in blank verse in order to create the best poem that I could. "The Wet and Ruby Heart" also began as a blank verse sonnet, but after several revisions, I determined that the octave was the richest piece of the poem and that it could stand alone:

Nothing lies outside of this one beat.  
My breath aligns itself with deeper tones:  
perhaps with songs of whales in ice capped seas,  
the shrinking swelling moon or rising tide.  
There is no chaos greater than the pulse;  
the core of earth is nothing but a drum.  
The hands that keep the beat are also slaves  
to rhythms of the wet and ruby heart.

As I continued to write, the poems began to evolve more and more from this structure on the page. I began to relax and shift my focus from my original goal—to have the majority of my collection be sonnets—and focus on what began to seem more important...my evolving skill.

As discussed earlier, I found that writing in iambic pentameter taught me to simplify my poetry, to sharpen my language in order to paint an image with relatively few words. “Symphony of Sky,” “Grandma Davis,” “The Palace of the Bull,” and “It’s Raining, It’s Pouring,” are all written in this meter, but are not sonnets. The following excerpt from “Symphony of Sky” exemplifies how keeping the rhythm of metered verse allows the poem to seem polished and still full of life and images:

His voice became the zinging dragonflies,  
the red winged black birds singing from their perch,  
coyotes yapping wildly from the woods.

I learned to speak through throats of frogs and geese,  
through cattails stirring in the evening wind,  
to listen to the symphony of sky.

Also shown in these two stanzas is internal rhyme created by *singing* and *zinging* and the use of alliteration with *black birds*, *wildly from the woods*, and *symphony of sky*. The poems written with the iambic syllable pattern, even with varied line lengths, became rich with poetic devices without my intending to write them in. I would hear the rhythm of the iambic beat in my head and found that the act of writing the poem with these devices planted in them became amazingly intuitive.

With “A Rain of Violets,” “Queen of Words,” and “She Wears the Earth,” I took stanzas that had been in iambic pentameter and ventured into varied line lengths, creating three short pieces (all consisting of either eight or twelve inconsistently broken lines). “She Wears the Earth” was originally a sestet of iambic pentameter:

She wears the Earth,  
it dangles from a chain  
of silver serpents  
draped around her neck.

The moon is but a  
marble in her palm;  
her black skin shines—  
an endless map of stars.

And Shiva bows her  
head when Maya nears;  
she swings her hips  
and galaxies are born.

By making it into three quatrains and opening up white space between the sentences, I was able to make what sounded like a complete piece *look* more complete on the page. The entire writing process of this collection, it seems, was a gradual letting go of the form. This was not done, however, because I wasn’t able to write formal poems, it was done because the poems, themselves, began to break out of the form in order to be heard.

There are sixteen poems in *Gypsy Soul, Wolf Spirit* that are written in free verse. Though I was not expecting this form of poetry to dominate my collection, I can say, absolutely, that these poems are significantly stronger than the free verse work I created prior to putting such time and emphasis into crafting formal poetry. The poem “Pushpins,” for example, still used ten syllable lines, though I did not hold the writing to any meter. Having spent so much time writing in iambic pentameter, I appreciated the way ten syllable lines encouraged better organization and

demanded strong images through fairly simple words. This stanza is taken from this poem and shows the organizational benefit of writing syllabically identical lines:

In Utah, rock was red until dusk crept  
and purples, blues and grays streaked canyon walls—  
a tree of apricots gave shade and sweet  
sap juices on dusty cobblestone streets.

There are five other stanzas that make up this poem, and I feel that all of them swim with vibrant imagery. In the end, writing and revising these free verse poems was like stretching after completing some rewarding but vigorous exercise. I was able to tell stories from my life in a way that I had not been able to do so openly in my formal poetry, but this time with a voice that seemed far more distinct and polished than I have known before.

What is perhaps the greatest gift I take from spending seven months crafting this collection is the lesson that in order to succeed at writing poetry, I must be engaged in the mindset of a poet from the first waking moment to the last of each and every day. I have four children who all have needs and schedules, and it was very easy to step out of a poetic mindset and internalize the frenzy around me. On these days, I would stare at the blank page and blinking cursor feeling overwhelmed and empty.

In contrast, on the days I took the time to smell the roses (pardon the cliché), I found that instead of sitting at my computer waiting, I would rush to it in order to get down the images I had seen and the metaphors my subconscious and conscious mind connected to them. Probably the best example of this is “October Morning:”

Lips warm and wet from our good-bye—  
I watched the car part the morning darkness.

Two pumpkins on the porch, soft with rain  
watched too—one smiling, one screaming.

A petunia listened from a crack in the sidewalk,  
a dew drenched pink Victrola.

Concrete steps cold under bed-warm feet—  
quiet house and coffee steam swallow me.

I wrote it after I walked my husband out to his car in the pre-dawn darkness. I had passed those pumpkins and that petunia countless times. But that morning, I *saw* them because I consciously looked at my environment *as a poet*.

Whether I write formal poems or free verse in my future work, I take with me the knowing that a heightened awareness evokes the muse. Beyond that, creating *Gypsy Soul, Wolf Spirit* taught me that the practice of writing formal poetry, even when done intermittently or when allowing the poem to break the form, can lead to stronger writing overall.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you to my children: Violet, Indigo, Elijah, and Skye. Each of you reminds me daily that poetry is a natural part of life. And thanks, also, to my parents, Dr. Dan and Peggy Davis for taking this thirty-year ride with me and for believing in the importance of education.

I would also like to thank Dr. Gary Pacernick, my thesis director, and Jim Brooks, my creative writing teacher from Chaminade Julienne High School, for their willingness to share their gifts and time with me. I feel very blessed to have crossed your paths.

This collection is dedicated with love and gratitude  
to my grandma, Marjorie Ellen Davis.

## Gypsy Soul

They said I held a fire within my eyes;  
a fire too red for walls and worlds of white.  
Her soul was wild, as red as life itself,  
I found a home within the skirts she sewed.

I never knew a love like when she tied  
her scarf of coins around my swinging hips,  
the way her hands plucked music from the strings,  
an ancient song rose from me like a ghost.

We danced the planet's pulse through naked feet;  
her harp sent shadows, spilled across the flames.  
The caravan would roll in early morn,  
The wooden wheels cut lines into the earth.

My fingers black with ash she left behind,  
my gypsy soul left calling for her kiss.



## Gaia

I was a young girl when I met the Earth;  
but was she found in forest or in dream?  
The goddess Gaia spoke through river's throat;  
her ancient voice was like a mother's song.

Her dress hung from her arms like moss from rocks,  
her hair was strewn with leaves and roots and vines,  
her skin was rich and dark like fertile soil;  
she watched me with her eyes that glowed like moons.

I cannot forget her scent;  
It was like cool mud-clay in summer's heat—  
the secret part of forest deep within—  
where sunlight never casts her golden spell.

I've never seen her in that form again,  
but feel her pulse beneath my callused feet.

## Lunar Eclipse

A February spent too much indoors  
beneath the yellow glow of man made light,  
breathing the stale steam of furnace breath.  
My husband called us all out to the porch.

A dark fog crawled across the pale moon,  
its edges red and curled like tongues of fire.  
The air crept from our mouths in crystal clouds  
and rose like incense smoke to frozen sky.

And in a flash the suburbs fell away:  
the porch beneath our feet, turning to stone,  
the neighbors' lights changed to a string of stars,  
And distant sirens became wailing wolves.

So silently Earth's shadow slipped away  
and television light bled through the glass.

## Chihuahuan Desert

My sleeping bag floated in onyx night;  
Orion's belt shone down like angel's eyes.  
My skin and bones were ash of marble white;  
my pillow was a rock of ancient stone.

I traced the river's current with an oar  
and found that time is not just bound to clocks.  
I stared at canyon walls that stretched for miles  
and wrote my name in sand to watch it sink.

The cat claws and the Spanish daggers tore  
into my flesh like demons on the hunt  
to chase me from their pastel paradise  
where raven's wings beat silence like a drum.

At night, coyotes circled 'round my dreams  
and freed my mind of all its encased light.

Annabelle

The rabbit hops from sweet potato vines  
and nibbles dew-drenched purple cabbage heads.  
New flowers sit atop the onion greens;  
they wave like Mama's sheets on breezy days.

I like it here, beneath sunflower shade;  
the berry bush is just within my reach.  
The bluebirds watch me watch and aren't afraid.  
A black ant scurries 'cross my dirty toes.

The screen door on the porch just smacked the frame  
and Mama's got a basket on each hip.  
She likes to gather peppers in her skirt  
and roll them in a pile of wagon-red.

I'll get to take a break when mine is full  
and climb the sugar maple to the sky.

## Passion Ink

This thing we share is so much more than love,  
for love was bought and sold before our time.  
Don't give me diamonds, roses, morning doves—  
but give me passion-ink for wild rhymes.

Let's run as windswept horses on the beach,  
a legend left among the sea and sand.  
Your salty arms and tongue answer my reach,  
our hoof prints writing poems in the land.

A pair of wolves, let's slink through snowy peaks  
and hunt beneath the diamonds of the night;  
we'll listen to the mantra the moon speaks  
and to the echoes of the ravens' flight.

## On the Mountaintop

When I thought I'd heard love's dying breath,  
there would not be a soldier strong enough;

the rhythm rose like Lazarus from death,  
his voice was mountain rivers, wild and rough.

On the mountaintop we shared our love.  
The rain, singing of union and of bliss.

When the prism streaked the sky above  
the answer had been found; it came to this:

All life and time will scatter like the seeds  
on winds of children under future moons.

Our spirit knows the path it truly needs,  
the cosmic mother weaves it on her loom.

35 Henry Street

The house was built one hundred years before  
we rented it and tried to make it home.

I had no shame in knowing we were poor,  
for roses grow on shacks as well as thrones.

In memories, those roses climbed  
around my swelling belly and the moon.  
So young, I let their beauty hold me blind  
to knowing he could never see those blooms.

His ghosts were quick to make the house their own;  
all money that we had went to his drink.  
Our yard out back became my place, alone;  
roses didn't care to watch him sink.

It was the house where my first child was born;  
his father's shadows lurk beneath the thorns.

### Three Wishes

Each night we lie in darkness—spare the beam;  
she sweeps the black with shining handheld light.  
Before we ascend to the land of dreams  
we whisper from our conscious realm of sight.

I watch her silhouette when sleep draws close;  
her voice that comes and goes as ocean chants.  
I ask, “If from a lamp a genie rose  
what wishes would be those you’d have him grant?”

She’s young enough at four to answer fast,  
her wishes, youthful flags of being free—  
There is no need for gold or moments passed;  
her wants are milk, and grapes, and strawberries.

What more is there to want when old or young  
than sweet fruit juices splashing on the tongue?



## Symphony of Sky

My dad would take me out in the canoe,  
he'd thread our lines and slice the silver mirror;  
the splash sent ripples to the lake's far edge.

He shared few words but drew his breaths in deep,  
his eyes were sometimes blue but often gray—  
at times they showed the spirit of the owl.

His voice became the zinging dragonflies,  
the red winged black birds singing from their perch,  
coyotes yapping wildly from the woods.

I learned to speak through throats of frogs and geese,  
through cattails stirring in the evening wind,  
to listen to the symphony of sky.

Grandma Davis

My sneakered feet had slipped on peeling bark  
of birch, and branches snapped like bird-wing bones.  
My hands were talons dug into the trunk;  
I screamed for her: an awful squeaky sound.

Her white curls bobbed against the morning light—  
she looked up from the drying autumn grass,  
and shook her head without a word or smile.  
She turned and climbed the crumbling concrete stairs.

I watched her slip into her darkened house  
and looked down on the yard she worked alone.  
In quiet, violets grew from sidewalk cracks  
and orphaned plants spread sprouts in yogurt cups.

I know the tree could never really be  
as tall as memory has let it grow.  
I think she held the Buddha in her palm—  
she let the silence offer feathered hands.

## The Palace of the Bull

### I. Taurus Sun

Awaken in the palace of the bull:  
the earth, a library for seeking souls.  
A marble spinning through the darkest space  
and gravity—the truest love—holds on.

A nucleus that holds revolving suns—  
the center of my hundred zillion cells;  
each holds the scroll, the grail, the ancient key—  
I hunt the outside world with blurry eyes.

### II. Sagittarius Rising

The gypsy claws my peaceful earthy side,  
she wakes me from a deep Venusian sleep.  
I crawl from cooling clay into her fire  
and dance there on its tongues, wrapped in her red.

The universe will wait outside her flames—  
there are no questions, spare the body's needs.  
My thoughts are children born into the night,  
I wrap them in her scarves of wilted time.

### III. Scorpio Moon

My voice cracks cosmic codes in silent waves,  
the ocean washes ashes from my feet.  
I don't know if the water swallowed me,  
or if I swallowed it and slipped away.

Her warmth of womb encloses earthly lungs,  
and Goddess whispers salve onto my wounds.  
The end is not the end; I slip back through—  
the house of Taurus mothers me again.

## It's Raining, it's Pouring

Acid rain runs off of pale-pink ears,  
sprays fungus as it creeps from stagnant mud;  
it drips from clover blossoms as they stretch  
and flows in water veins toward man made lakes.

Children stand in line in rubber boots  
to drink the water drops from tailpipes.  
Blackened liquid stains their round wet chins;  
they sing of old men snoring in their beds.

Crystal Child  
*for Indigo Ocean*

A rush of warmth and blood and destiny,  
an aural light spread from you like a sun.  
Your healing opal field was edged with blue,  
a crystal child sent here to sew the rift.  
A goddess in my arms, I knew your name;  
you'd whispered it to me for many years.  
I wrapped you in my own indigo light;  
you drank from me, the milk I had to give.

Your layers unfold before me, shifting skies  
show magic cycling under stoic moons.  
The paradigm is cracked and will recede,  
dimensions blending, opening the way;  
it had to break so that it could be healed,  
a universe born in your every breath.

## The Wet and Ruby Heart

Nothing lies outside of this one beat.  
My breath aligns itself with deeper tones:  
perhaps with songs of whales in ice capped seas,  
the shrinking swelling moon or rising tide.  
There is no chaos greater than the pulse;  
the core of earth is nothing but a drum.  
The hands that keep the beat are also slaves  
to rhythms of the wet and ruby heart.

A Rain of Violets

A rain of violets  
is falling now

like purple feathers  
silent petals spin

to rest on February's  
frozen ground

like tiny sails  
they catch the icy wind

## Queen of Words

a queen of words  
she sliced me with her glove

she robbed me of the beat  
and called it love

the tailor sewed my lips  
and cut my hand

the dancers jazzed my blues  
and crashed my band

my ear cannot forget  
the rhythmic sound

the death of art  
or art of death profound



## She Wears the Earth

She wears the Earth,  
it dangles from a chain  
of silver serpents  
draped around her neck.

The moon is but a  
marble in her palm;  
her black skin shines—  
an endless map of stars.

And Shiva bows her  
head when Maya nears;  
she swings her hips  
and galaxies are born.

Wolf Spirit

calls me to the window  
fingers tapping  
breath steaming frosted glass

pulls me to the moon  
dangling like an ornament  
silver on black backdrop

Wolf Spirit

begs me to slip from this life  
to crunch snow beneath  
warm thickness of my paws  
to hunt to howl to hurl my voice  
let it throb through the currents  
of the night sky ocean

sends me flopping like a fish  
turning round and round  
in my moonlit bed

Wolf Spirit

teaches me to throw open  
closed curtains and ponder  
the night's lone eye

connects me to all women  
made restless by harvest moon  
in the lit windows of the town  
floating like a string of white lights  
silhouettes of women fighting  
a primal need to howl

Sally

The kitten's petal-pink nose  
has a black three-leaved clover  
on its right side.

A white triangle  
rises up from her chest  
and parts her black face.

A broken tail follows her  
like a bent hanger; she  
spins to catch it.

My daughter names her Sally  
after a cartoon racecar;  
she wraps her in doll clothes and sings.

I get to thinking about names,  
what right do we have to call her *cat*,  
to name her Sally?

Her mother had already named her  
with warm licks to clean  
her unopened eyelids.

## Pushpins

I came back to a map in Ohio—  
a pushpin trail of my calls home, scattered  
beads of color—my mother's rosary.  
Eight months of searching to find my questions.

I pulled onto the shoulder of the road  
in Kansas on a July afternoon.  
I watched a quarter roll a cement path—  
the silver wheel caught sun and slipped from sight.

Silent morning, Yellowstone, Wyoming—  
a moose dropped her head to her reflection  
and drank; mama black bear's cubs frolicked and  
burnt skeletons of trees raked Father Sky.

New Mexico where inky black swallowed  
the mountains whole in nightly sweeping gulps—  
red tailed hawks circled over Trail of Tears  
and Natives baked their bread in heated clay.

In Utah, rock was red until dusk crept  
and purples, blues and grays streaked canyon walls—  
a tree of apricots gave shade and sweet  
sap juices on dusty cobblestone streets.

Devil's Canyon, the moon, full at mid-day  
was hung bright white and round. Dunes—smooth sand tide  
rolling across the desert—coyotes  
slipped through searing heat, turning to watch me.

## Yosemite

The toes of my brown boots were red  
where cactus claws had scratched them.  
My steps were no longer in the desert,  
but in mountains where  
pine trees split stone like soft soil.

Halfway to the peak,  
I slept on grass curled and soft like moss.  
My fire was the Seven Sisters,  
my nightlight, Orion's belt;  
stars so bright that they drank all the blackness  
and made the night blue as a sheet of lapis.

I awoke to fallen branches bending,  
breaking beneath the weight of a bear.  
He seemed as big as the moon  
against the stillness  
and held its light in his fur  
as it rippled and rolled over rounded muscles.

The mountain, the stars, fell away  
left me with only the drum of my pulse  
and the sound of the bear's breath coming close.  
I sprang to my feet to face him.  
He turned and ran  
sliding his shadow into the trees where  
he, too, was swallowed by the stars.

He hadn't expected me to leap at him,  
for round dark eyes, like his, to stare from such  
a pale awkward creature.  
I was still awake when the lapis sky became quartz,  
digging my heels into moist earth,  
thinking of his wet black nose.

## 32 Weeks

Your heels and elbows  
slide across my moon-belly,  
you dance beneath a canopy of skin.  
Waves roll through me when you wake  
What do you dream of, little one?

Do you dream of births passed,  
of sliding on molecular threads  
between realms and beyond time;  
of other passages you've made  
into this life?

Were there candles the last time?  
A flurry of women's hands and scented oils?  
Was there silence engulfing the  
echo of your first breath,  
or did harps sing your greeting?

Can you see it from where you are?  
The undulating tunnel,  
the slip from wet darkness into light?  
A dark eyed midwife pulling  
you forward on long blood ribbons?

Do you dream of your father's deep voice  
wrapping you in welcome;  
of his hands sliding beneath you,  
pulling you free,  
placing you on my warm belly?

## Our Parents Dreaded Talks of Birds and Bees

“What are lockdown drills for, Mama?”

He stands with his black backpack slipping  
down his arm, blue lunchbox hanging  
from his hand. His buzz has grown out some;  
it’s soft against my fingers. His new front tooth  
looks big and yellow in his mouth.

Yesterday, his teacher had huddled the class,  
whispering that they should press their small spines  
against the cool concrete and stay away from windows.  
I can’t tell him that he’s safe; that one day  
a sad man won’t walk into that school;  
that he won’t ever feel the fragility of his life  
when bullets split metal lockers and wooden desktops.

This morning, the red bud blossoms are miracles  
splitting the creeping green dawn; but as we walk  
the sidewalk to school, the pink petals drip from  
bleeding limbs. I sling his backpack over my shoulder;  
it seems far too heavy for him to carry.

## Every Other Weekend

Every other weekend  
when my son  
is gone,  
I keep his door shut.

This morning,  
I open it  
and stare  
at his absence.

A red sheet  
lies tangled  
in a wrinkled pile  
with Spider-man pajamas.

A black and white robot  
awaits batteries;  
its right plastic claw  
stuck reaching.

A pair of soccer cleats  
stands above  
fallen clumps  
of dried mud.

The nightlight  
behind the skateboard  
is so much brighter  
when he is home.



## Mother's Flowers

My mother says  
the purple hyacinths are the  
color my lips were  
when I slipped  
from her womb to white sheets.

She says the snapdragons  
are the color  
of Grandma's red  
lipstick stains  
on cheeks and coffee cups.

My mother says the hollyhock stems  
Are blue and bent like Papa's spine  
when the Earth  
took him slowly,  
shoulders first, into her darkness.

She says the coral bells  
stir like my daughter's  
restless slumber,  
and hold pink softness  
like her infant ears.

My mother says  
the flowers grow better  
when she talks to them.  
She drops to her knees  
in her soft soil church.

She whispers to the white phlox,  
combs them with sore swollen knuckles.  
The flowers have become her children—  
her parents—  
filling beds outside of her empty home.

## A Thought Deferred

the poems whisper to me from the dark  
when light spills on syllables they shrink  
back into themselves into silence

can a thought be silenced? does it float  
as a bubble in collective conscience soup  
(a rung in the Jungian helix-ladder-machine)

when someone ponders the patterns on  
the wallpaper too long and has an epiphany  
a lobal itch somewhere deep like paint breathing?

A Winter Meeting  
*for Brady*

The sidewalk was cracked beneath his  
split snakeskin boots.  
His callused hands were pale pink  
against the white icicles  
that hung in front of my apartment door.

He peeled flannel and denim layers and  
we sat on my red couch;  
I kept my feet tucked beneath me.  
A plant reached toward the cold glass  
of a north window.

His kiss was warm and wet  
and hung like a shadow  
against the cold brick fireplace.  
The wind was louder than my pulse  
and my wineglass cradled red heat.

## A Lake at the Summit

An ice mirror clung to the lake's surface,  
it held the noon sun and June's blue sky.  
It slid on wind toward one small rock;  
it pierced the surface, giant in its strength.

The sound of a thousand shattering glasses  
splintered the silence miles above the ground  
as the sun was swallowed by murky darkness  
and the frantic mouths of restless fish.

## October Morning

Lips warm and wet from our good-bye—  
I watched the car part the morning darkness.

Two pumpkins on the porch, soft with rain  
watched too—one smiling, one screaming.

A petunia listened from a crack in the sidewalk,  
a dew drenched pink Victrola.

Concrete steps cold under bed-warm feet—  
quiet house and coffee steam swallow me.

What Did I Know Then, of Life?

Frantic fish cupped  
in my child hands, thrashing  
against warm cellophane—  
its orange mirrors  
scattering evening light  
like fireflies.

Its iridescent belly  
bobbing, sliding around the lake  
in my hands—  
its slick white scales  
holding the spinning carnival lights  
and the full moon.

The Summer of Your Second Year  
*for Elijah Angelo*

We stood near the end of your second year,  
sun-warmed earth under our bare feet,  
shadows stretched across the lawn.

The fuzzy bumble of bees,  
distant roar of an airplane,  
white towels on the line waving like flags.

You held a freshly plucked radish,  
red against the pale blue heat,  
dirt clinging to its roots in clumps.

I savored those summer days with you,  
watching the snap peas and your mind grow.  
The sunset's whispering of winter's return.

Your Distant Shore  
*for Violet Annabelle*

You slipped from me like boulders from mountain sides  
tumbling toward warm clay hands that cradled you.  
Your father held your purple slippery body;  
your lips quivered and parted like continents.  
Resting you on the universe of my chest and empty belly  
breath spread through you like pink fire.  
You turned to gaze at the stars—our eyes—  
marveling at the constellations of this strange destination,  
of the green-pink glow of your mother's heart and voice,  
the voice that called you from your distant shore.



Sex at Noon, 1985

She picks up the bottle from the dresser,  
rubbing the dusty silver cap against her palm.

She raises the nearly full cologne bottle to her nose;  
winter sunlight slides through its green patterned glass.

“This smells like sex” she pauses to breathe in the memory,  
“at noon...on lunch hour, 1985.”

She sets down the bottle and comes back to an apartment in  
Manhattan, 2007; her cheeks flushed, her eyes glistening.

Are Gravity and Destiny the Same Thing?

Jellyfish open and close like parachutes, pink skin glistening,  
tentacles trailing, catching the current like tendrils of grass.

Orange and white scales blur in flight like feathered red chests;  
their forests of anemones waving like trees dancing before a storm.

Gray shark fins slice water like black panther spines part night,  
ocean opening and closing in silence like earth meeting padded paws.

## Sleepy Heads

An orange sling cradles a child against her sun-kissed flesh,  
her yellow skirt with red flowers hides her bare toes,  
dark hair hangs in a braid down her back, brushes her elbows.  
She bends to pluck pea pods bathed in morning dewdrops.

On the line, a blue dress and white t-shirts stir while  
wild onion and lush peppermint grab hold of the same breeze.  
There are plants poking sleepy heads through spring soil;  
lavender, sage, and parsley are scattered like maple seeds around her.

A small pink mouth hunts for milk like a fish in the lake's shadows;  
she stretches and listens to her baby's breath against her breast.  
She hears the song of fuzzy robins from a crabapple's tattered nest  
waiting for their mother to return with warmth for bellies and tales of flight.