

# Woman

*A Cycle of 24 Poems on the Anima*

# I

the three stars of Orion's Belt  
and a crescent moon in a blueblack sky –  
why do i think of you?

# II

where you walk, struck through  
with stars  
far above my bed –  
a wheeling constellation marked out  
in mythic joints –

sister, mother  
lover  
friend

there  
the seasons turn, night tilts.

# III

strewn points sewn on a white quilt –

your slip slides over your hips  
your heel the North Star  
morning star at your throat –

i have known you since i began naming  
the night sky.

# IV

long-legged night flies in the window  
folding its lanky wings with  
awkward grace. it clings to a thin  
sill above a whimling water  
that slides under the bed.

dropping into your wake,  
a planet or a bird that swims,  
i feel your slow-motion  
whirl in my bone marrow,  
uncurl and crane my neck  
waking in the odd hours.

## V

diving, cormorant  
that seeks the fish that seeks the depths,  
plunging into you  
watery ledges waver and descend.

what moves? immensity –  
the pool  
ink-black on the sea floor  
blackness from black detaches.

## VI

the black-and-blue night shudders.  
you come rising like a whale  
    night wallows, sky full  
of your movement, mouth  
swallowing all words away.

leviathan, sea-murmuring mammal,  
unfathomable beauteous beast  
lifting your purple back  
and the sea's in turmoil;  
you come whistling to the surface  
trailing echoes into ocean  
chambers 10,000 miles  
traces honking into polar seas;  
mysterious wideness, your emergence  
thunderous in its grace.

## VII

i see you step  
on white feet  
a star pins your heel  
to the sky

your gestures  
breathe  
from arms and fingers.

## VIII

every man has a sister he must approach  
during the time  
he is given to walk a night-bound shore  
before the sea leaps up and engulfs him.

on a shadowy, seductive beach  
lovers seeking shapes  
stretch out their arms to him,  
beguiling reincarnations  
of shadows shifting when pursued; through  
this webby silence  
he must not strut or stagger  
but walk on at a steady pace  
full of light  
and avoid chasing them into the shallows.

no man can do this, yet none  
can refuse the call.  
it infiltrates his daily hours  
until they become thick, grainy  
as old photos,  
until he wakes, hears the ocean thrash  
like a whale that may at any moment  
plunge again  
swallowing into his breast  
the whole sea –  
a fatal stroke.

then he looks for his light and answers  
and sets out,  
or else turns on himself,  
brutally amputating his own limbs.

## IX

California nights, warm and distanceless  
echo like a hand waving down a dusky beach,  
waving good-bye down years  
from a night of love bitten like a warm peach  
in half-lit sand lapped by the sea.

what slips, leaving, down that uncertain shore?  
beach visited once, no more  
(empty now save for that whispering  
meant for closer ears  
tangling mute sounds in the mouth of night  
and lost to hearing).

who turns, entwined,  
and sinks again in the breathing sigh,  
too dim to make out?  
there, in the night-wrung hollow where  
I thought was only one –  
there are two.

## X: Betrayal

the bed spread like a sea  
below a white window,  
turn and sail toward me  
opening your eyes  
cutting the billowed sheets.

blackberry eyes in the ripening dusk  
amber eyes that gather dawn –  
grey-eyed,  
her pearl dress  
gathered in pink nipples  
swimming out of a soft sleep.

blue your eyes, betraying  
when, clothed in his ghost  
of letters  
you galloped down his other side,  
indistinct when, a shadow by his bed,  
you paused in the naked dark  
before plunging into the waiting,  
many-eyed  
sea.

## XI: Half Smile

there, in the bending of eternity's disced hand

a monkey's-paw moon  
touches a curious sky. . .

go and do it

there, in the bending.

trees with no waists bend to their knees –

where in the folds  
are we to be found?

would you forget

the most important question of all?

## XII: Where She Is

there, in the bending  
of her waist –  
there again  
is the movement of her hand –

she sways her hair in the long pine tops,  
a thousand of her  
on the hills surround this little lake of mine.  
in the dark she merges in and out of trees.

i fell over the edge of the boat where  
gently rocking, i paddled  
alone on a dusk-ridden lake.  
i laughed  
and she swayed-smiled down through me.

### XIII: Caress

brush, whisper, die away  
return, sound, retreat again.  
like shallow waves that run up to my feet at low tide,  
walking Cannon Beach late at night  
your breath swells and ebbs

somewhere.

listening for it to lengthen  
out of the other side of the bed, my skin poises  
for you to reach an arm over my shoulder  
in the early morning,  
put a hand on my face in the tired night.

if i could sketch but a moment's time  
with my fingers down your back  
i would trace your face again.

if i could feel your fingertips  
that run down the long back of night  
gentle as the strokes of waves on a sand-ribbed shore  
run over me  
i'd laugh in a thousand tongues  
just to see your ribs  
like waves rolling full with their water  
ripple over mine.

### XIV

far back  
in the dark death i occupy inside of you,  
in the warm watery depth i penetrate  
while making love  
i hear – and don't know which of us  
is whispering –  
*i will become closer than your bones*

before i was born  
speaking to each other  
over and over *closer than your bones.*

## XV

Mother and line of mothers  
pushing hard against the human form –  
i heard your sing-song  
in hips, in blood that slides  
in mine; your body singing itself  
around mine; felt it flow,  
its upheavals and the soft thrashing  
when you made love, when you, patiently,  
made the ears that closed like tiny fists  
around the sounds you spoke only to me,  
words of flesh, promising bone.

## XVI

the faint wind of your womb  
breathes down

centuries  
to children  
not yet born,

warm and  
immemorial  
tugging back

on the cord.

you lay in the bed, laboring, and asked  
how am i to open their breaths  
with such bare hands?  
with such bone hands?

Mother upon Mother gasping  
as the question unfolds,  
blossoming in your lap – all your labor  
bursting forth.



## XVII

your son plays on the floor where,  
walking quickly back and forth,  
your skirt brushes his face  
blurring the words you speak –  
it phosphoresces; it seems  
the starred sky;  
it is a darkness aglow  
with luminous flowers –  
red, green, gold, blue –  
that burst, expand, and fade  
on a field of black.

## XVIII

Mother, your love  
is an etched face  
worn  
by the gravels of time and care.

## XIX

curtains of wind  
run through me –

endless mouths  
opening  
over my skin –

your memory  
fades like hands  
over my face.

## XX

you stand in the wind in an old photo  
a young woman,  
hair pulled back by the long comb of the wind.

that image of you  
remains  
as year by year we love you out of your body.

## XXI

Mother weeping Mother to her grave, we all wept;  
we heard you go  
as evening approached the day, face down  
in one of the far fields.

## XXII

from grisette to grimalkin  
she pinned year to year together  
at the hem and through them all  
she went firm-ankled

and then straight on, following  
that same straight seam  
into the pregnant night.

## XXIII

Great-grandmother, Mother of Mothers  
who knows our children before they  
come on to meet us –  
not yet cloaked  
by our faint mortal fire,  
too wise for the disguises  
they will inherit from us  
to wear out their lives in: i know

when a child comes, making his way to us,  
on his way he's met by one unknown to him  
(as if his train paused in an outland station –  
on the platform, an old woman watches.  
from his windowseat he stares at strangers –  
the sole traveler she waits for – and sings himself  
his traveling song, "carry me on  
you train" he sings and then

from the welter of color surging out of the station  
she catches our boy's unborn eye –  
her bright glance like a familiar hand  
clasps him in that old warmth; he sits up straight –  
her face sharpening like an unforgettable  
painting – the great-grandmother  
who welcomes him on.

## XXIV

knower of plants, ancient one,  
story-teller, weaver,  
healer of wounds,  
dancer and singer and sew-er of skins,

your forehead,  
your  
withered breasts

unmistakable  
even in winter morning  
even under snow,  
under age,

even discernable  
by bright  
points  
in the night sky –

the blind cave of night  
eternity  
lit by the scattered drops  
of your pearl-luminous  
blood  
falling through space  
without finite number  
or a finite depth  
to plunge.

vastness, vastness and their light  
come all that way.