

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.