1999

Nightshade

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NIGHTSHADE

A Project Report

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Kirsty Miriam MacKay

December 1999

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ABSTRACT

NIGHTSHADE

By Kirsty Miriam MacKay

Nightshade's themes are unified by women's search for voice, place, and self in a world in which they experience their lives and perspectives as marginalized and virtually bereft of sustaining models. Under such social and spiritual conditions, some women turn to nature for renewal and reconstruct "primordial images" of the Female (Jung, Man and His Symbols 57). The poems are sequenced along a psychic trajectory--harmony, collapse, and emergence.

Poetic images involve Egyptian and Greek mythological symbols in terms of female archetypes as recurrences of more ancient goddesses, such as the Minoan Snake-goddess. Milton's interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3--particularly in terms of Eve's nature and her place--is implicit in the spiritual conflicts of Nightshade. The poems challenge Milton's interpretation of Woman's relation to God and Man, "He for God only, she for God in him" (PL IV: 299). Nightshade's personae seek divinity and identity in a manner independent of Milton's construct.

Dedications

To my family for their faith in me and for giving me blank journals to fill each year.

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Table of Contents

Critical Introduction	viii
Sekhmet	1
Lady at her Bath	2
Figs	3
Narcissus	4
troutmarks	5
A Gardener	6
Gray-Eyed Boy	7
House-Cats	8
objet d'art	9
Half Moon Bay	10
Plot Dogs	11
untitled	12
Versions of You	13
Rattler	14
Chimaera	16
Poem of the Eighth Life	18
Archaisms	19
Half Moon Bay 11	20
One Car (No Dog No Man)	22
Sense of Fire	23
Restorative Waters	24
Maenad	26

Table of Contents

<u>Skies that Change Color to Match Your Clothes and ...</u>	27
A Place in Mind	28
Silhouette	29

Introduction to Nightshade

Then try, like some first human being, to say what you see and experience and love and lose. —Rainer Maria Rilke

Nightshade comprises an arrangement of non-metrical poems whose focus is the dynamic between and among female self-definition, nature, and a fractured sense of the feminine divine. The plant family, nightshade, evokes danger because it includes black nightshade, which has edible berries but poisonous leaves, and deadly nightshade (belladonna), which is used in medicine to assuage pain but is, as the name reveals, fatal in high dosages. However, the name also connotes sustenance, as the potato and eggplant are members of the nightshade family, or *Solanaceae*. Some of the nightshade genera are narcotic. "Nightshade" suggests the presence of the natural world in these poems, and the psychic perils and pleasures of the writing life. Moreover, the title represents tensions within and between creative pieces such as the functions of art in upholding and disrupting the artist's psyche; the goddesses' dual roles as creators and destroyers; the alienating as well as orienting effects of nature on the individual; and the destructive versus restorative types of human love.

Read in sequence, the poems present underlying conflicts between masculine and feminine modes of perception. I do not advance conclusions for the minor crises and sometime tragedies of male and female universes in collision. As is true for any writer, my work is the dramatization of questions. "[B]e patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue" (Rilke 35). The questions themselves and the "locked rooms" that they open for us are the writer's domain. Sometimes the questions lead along rows of edible plants: other times a writer eats of a plant that induces strange

visions and near-death experiences. That is the nature of nightshade; it may nourish or intoxicate. As a result, the central spiritual necessity for any writer is the presence and development of courage. A crucial juncture of this work is what I call *the nightmare*, which I have had to travel with my eyes open in order to realize the poems that are its fruits. I include in my portrayal of *the nightmare* waking states of mental dissonance. The tools and concepts of dream psychology which Carl G. Jung refined from his work with and in opposition to Sigmund Freud have proven indispensable to me as a writer who concerns herself with dream symbols and the unconscious.

One question I entertain in this work arises from an experience I had at the Portland Art Museum during an exhibit of Egyptian art and artifacts. I stood before a black granite sculpture of the goddess Sekhmet. She is the image presiding over the first poem. Sekhmet has the head of a lion and a woman's body, and she holds in her left hand the ancient Egyptian symbol of life, the *ankh*. She was at once a goddess of warfare, armed with arrows for "piercing hearts," and a healer "great of magic" (Lurker 106). She was known for her ferocity. The way in which her visage is a blend of animal, female, and divine has facilitated my capacity to imagine more fully the images for which I strive in the poems.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a man's hand reach out and touch Sekhmet's knee in passing. In our times, female divinities are reduced to petting status in the rare case that they are not invisible. The incident encapsulates for me relations between the sexes in general. The man's gesture spoke volumes, and I have been fascinated and perturbed by the experience ever since the day I stood before Sekhmet. A corollary is drawn herein between man's domination of nature and of women. In my poems, women and nature are closely related. In joining feminine imagery with images of nature, I mean to elevate nature's creatures while avoiding any depreciation of women's status.

Carl Jung's work is an inspiration for my artistic attempts. He enlightens me as to the wisdom of confronting and consulting the shadow self and dreams. Writers must courageously travel no man's lands of the psyche and bring forth findings for general exhibition. Some of these poems are about the proximity of the shadow self and the way s/he takes us in hand when our conscious defenses lapse. Dimensions of the mind that most frighten us often constitute a mode of release:

One cannot afford to be naive in dealing with dreams. They originate in a spirit that is not quite human, but is rather a breath of nature--a spirit of the beautiful and generous as well as of the cruel goddess. If we want to characterize this spirit, we shall certainly get closer to it in the sphere of ancient mythologies, or the fables of the primeval forest, than in the consciousness of modern man. (Man and His Symbols 36)

Nightshade combines vestiges of ancient mythology with the "consciousness of modern man," or woman. Duality is an important property of nightshade, its harmful as well as healing effects. Further, Sekhmet, whose legendary drunken wrath nearly destroyed mankind, represents the duality of destruction and rebirth, of medicine and regeneration. Moreover, duality figures significantly in Jung's characterization of "the cruel goddess," weaver of dreams. These poems investigate how the cruel and generous dream world affects waking consciousness, which both seeks and repels its encoded messages. The artist seeks unconscious truths even against the objections of his or her conscious mind. The poems communicate the heightened struggle between different realms of the psyche that typifies an artist's life because s/he lives at the cliff edge between the unconscious and conscious mind. Moments and material that individuals generally wish to repress are natural foci for artists. In "Psychology and Literature," Jung discusses the psychic role of the poet; s/he "assimilates" and brings into consciousness that which the reader

"ordinarily evades or overlooks or senses only with a feeling of dull discomfort" (211).

Many of the pieces enact moments of crisis informed by attempts of a central consciousness to suppress as well as plumb messages from dreams and nightmares. Jung describes "The sea [as] the symbol of the collective unconscious, because unfathomed depths lie concealed beneath its reflecting surface" (Dreams 122). Several of the personae of my poems search for their truths by the sea.

Many other writers express a certain affinity between women and nature. May Swenson, a mid-twentieth century poet, affiliates the woman writer with her natural environment. Her poems bring to life the innate wisdom of earth's cycles and are notable for merging consciousness with sensual details of nature. In "A Lake Scene," Swenson elegantly creates a blend of human, mineral, plant and animal life that defies any ranking system. The poet seeks in "an Eden of the mind" (34) a symmetrical relationship and identification with earth and her inhabitants.

My eye goes there, to the source
of a first secret. I would be inheritor
of the lamb's way and the deer's,
my thrust take from the ground
I tread or lie on. In thighs of trees,
in recumbent stones, in the loins
of beasts is found
that line of my own nakedness carried.
Here, in an Eden of the mind,
I would remain among my kind,
to lake and hill, to tree and beast married. (26-36)

The system of equal relations Swenson establishes in "A Lake Scene" opposes the one in Gen. 1: 26 that names man as subduer of earth who has "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (King James Version). "A Lake Scene" does not portray humankind as earth's dominators; instead, the first person is "married" to the planet and all of its life. Likewise, my poems do not duplicate a hierarchy that is so often presumed: man above woman and both above the rest of God's creation. Helene Cixous, a French feminist, warns men and women that the "hierarchizing exchange" is a "struggle for mastery which can end only in at least one death" (1102). Man's dominion is at issue for its consequences on women, nature, and on man.

This work is about the proximity of poetry and dream in ordinary lives. The women of these poems turn to nature for spiritual renewal, and they reinterpret female archetypes such as Eve, the maenads, the moon, and animal/female divinities to orient themselves. Marge Piercy influences my work because of the urgency, naturalness, and humor of her poems and novels. Piercy portrays the ancient primacy of women as interpreters of the divine dimension in "The Moon is Always Female": "For we were priests to the goddesses / to whom were fashioned the first altars / of clumsy stone and leaping animal / in the wombdark caves / long before men / put on skirts and masks to scare babies" (13-17). Thus, in the face of considerable cultural opposition to women's independence and positive self-regard, the voices of these poems tap into ancient roots of feminine spiritual support. They may not always be able to name, define, or adequately envision the forms of this power, but they dream them and intuit them. Franz Kafka wrote, "From outside one will always triumphantly impress theories upon the world and then fall straight into the ditch one has dug, but only from inside will one keep oneself and the world quiet and true" (16). The women of these poems receive powerful signals

from inside that urge them to revise their lives. When they suppress messages from the unconscious, they suffer psychologically; their lives remain static or else incoherent.

"For the sake of mental stability and even physiological health, the unconscious and the conscious must be integrally connected and thus move on parallel lines. If they are split apart or 'dissociated,' psychological disturbance follows" (Jung, Man and His Symbols 37). Of course, the unconscious tends to be distinctly unnerving, so these women, even while their self-awareness increases, are drawn in various postures of running away from themselves.

My poems often include reverential moments set in nature. Gaston Bachelard, an influential French philosopher, believes we each possess a "private herbarium in the depths of our unconscious" (69). Garden imagery links the poems.

A botany of the imagination, stemming from an attraction for branches, wood, leaves, roots, bark, flowers and grass, has furnished us with a stock of images of astonishing regularity. We are controlled by vegetal values. We would all profit by taking a census of this private herbarium in the depths of our unconscious, where the slow, gentle forces of our life find models of continuity and perseverance. The life of root and bud lies at the heart of our being. We are really very ancient plants.
(Bachelard 69)

These women recognize their core selves in the concreteness of familiar cycles of nature, the principles of fire, water, and of the stages of life wherein they find "models of continuity and perseverance." Regardless of the extent of their personal disorientation or distress, they find comfort and order in the natural world. For them, the earth maintains her primitive meaning as the eternal model of the Mother. These women intuit and express religious sensibilities of Paleolithic and Neolithic societies for which "Everything

that existed, including themselves, was an expression of the Goddess" (Baring and Cashford 19). The women go out of doors, to the garden or seaside, to restore themselves and gain perspective. Their instinct for seeking transcendence in the environs of nature reaches backwards to rites that precede Old and New Testaments. Jung draws our attention to the erosion of our concept of Nature's sacredness: "Today we talk of 'matter'. . . . We conduct laboratory experiments to demonstrate some of its aspects. But the word 'matter' remains a dry, inhuman, and purely intellectual concept. . . . How different was the former image of matter--the Great Mother--that could encompass and express the profound emotional meaning of Mother Earth" (Man and His Symbols 85). My guiding premise is that recognition of a sacred feminine principle in nature survives as an active force in many people's lives.

These poems explore the dismissal of goddesses in our times, but they also suggest the ways in which their power perseveres. Jung offers us an inclusive appraisal of our psychological inheritance when he argues, "Nothing to which the psyche belongs or which is part of the psyche is ever lost" (qtd. in Baring and Cashford 45). Therefore, some choose to invite Mother goddesses from ancient agricultural societies (e.g., Minoan Crete) into their cosmologies. "Earth-centered, immanent, and immediate, the Goddess of modern neopaganism serves as a refuge from, and counterbalance to, what many consider the remote and punitive god of Western religions" (Frymer-Kensky 1). Nightshade explores the possibility that though goddess imagery was absorbed or demolished by Judeo-Christian systems of belief and worship, it continues to exert its power in the "collective unconscious." Such power is essential to women's sense of belonging, worth, and meaning. Why is the Goddess, or some version of the female principle in projections of deity, so crucial? A woman remains invisible when there is no part of her in her people's understanding of God.

In great part, these poems are defined by a tension between experience and personal vision. The female consciousness has inklings about feminine wisdom and divinity but has not yet developed a personal frame of reference for them. That is why the painter of Skies that Change Color to Match Your Clothes and ... develops a "glowing script of personal hieroglyphs" and paints them in vibrant colors all over her kitchen furniture (6). She must imaginatively conjure a forgotten symbology. Moreover, the new language has to be an element of her basic environment as well as of her artistry. Their awareness of the processes of art and nature helps integrate these women psychologically. Emergences of ancient female sacred emblems within these women's awareness help them survive, but there exists a strong tension between their personal contexts and moments where the goddess articulates herself. The access these women have to feminine deities is obscured by eons of cultural absorption and diminution of goddesses in daily ritual and imagery. In effect, their access to inner reservoirs of strength is obstructed. As a result, many of the voices cry out in pain or bewilderment.

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, an Assyriologist/Sumerologist, describes difficulties which she encounters in her research on goddesses. She deciphers ancient literatures of Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria. Attempts on the part of Nightshade's personae to contact goddess power may be compared to the archeological decipherer's work: "[D]eciphering the message can be difficult. [Clay] tablets are frequently incomplete and hard to read. They are often broken, sometimes so badly that we cannot follow the exact sequence of events. They are almost always chipped, particularly at the edges, which, for Sumerian, means at the subject or verb of a sentence" (In the Wake of the Goddesses 4). The women of Nightshade are, at times, also cut off from the subject or verb of their lives. Their lives are blurred in key places, or they are broken off where there should be a face. Upon awaking to the first day of a new year, the voice in "Versions of You" determines she

"*can't do it anymore*" (2). In a certain sense, there is no verb in the sentence of her life, and further, there is little self-possession.

Consequently, the poems explore female consciousness cultivating and, in turn, suppressing the knowledge and guidance that derive from feminine sources: latent dream pieces, the mother, the moon, the witch, and the earth. The poems in Nightshade suggest that the feminine aspects of divinity have not all been incorporated into the Judeo-Christian deity.

Students of mythology find that when the feminine principle is subjected to sustained attack, as it was from the medieval Christian authorities, it often quietly submerges under the water (where organic life began). It swims through the subconscious of the dominant male society, occasionally bobbing to the surface to offer a glimpse of the rejected harmony. (Dames 152-53)

It is as though evidence and shapes of goddesses are buried in the sands of our minds, not wholly obliterated. Voices of Nightshade participate in their own self-excavation by means of modern transformations of ancient sacred rituals. Occasionally, the transformation is as simple as a gaze into a doe's "large eyes" ("Lady at Her Bath" 10). At other times, the transformation comes about through more intricate expressions such as the moonlit dancing in "Maenad." Dance links the worship of pre-biblical agricultural societies, the cults of Dionysus, and, in "Maenad," the practice of an individual woman of our times who strives to reach something sacred in herself and her landscape. E.O. James describes a sacred dance as depicted on a Minoan ring:

An orgiastic dance is portrayed in a field of lilies conducted by four female votaries in Minoan garments. In the centre above the chief worshipper is a small female figure apparently rapidly descending, and to

the left a human eye, which may symbolize the Goddess regarding the ecstatic dance being performed in her honour at the renewal of life in the spring, of which the snake by the side of the central figure below the eye is an emblem. (103)

The above archeological find typifies what I attempt to portray in the snakes of Nightshade. In addition, in a poem such as "Maenad," I suggest that ceremonial dancing is not dead in women's private sense of god. Something remains in their sense of the female body as an expression of divinity. Of course, expression of such divinity is distorted in the context of patriarchal settings, such as topless bars. The watcher on the Minoan ring is the Goddess herself. Jung says "We have stripped all things of their mystery and numinosity; nothing is holy any longer" (Man and His Symbols 84). The poet must seek this mystery, this numinosity.

Something must be at stake in the poem. I learned to ask myself "What is at stake in this poem?" in Dr. Virginia de Araújo's poetry workshops. It took me some time to understand the implications of this question. Muriel Rukeyser wrote about poetry, "It would be better to say that the truth of the poem is the truth both of the poet and the reader. It has to be given and taken" (32). I also became more aware in Dr. de Araújo's workshops of the spoken word element of poetry during our rituals of reading our work aloud: the poems become new when they are spoken, and they become a part of the listener as well as the speaker. Eventually, I learned about finish as well as urgency in creating poetry--in part, from Dr. de Araújo's instructions, "read it again." In reciting our poems, we become socially responsible for them. There is nothing quite like the silence between the delivery of a poem and response from a circle of writers. We at once own our words and release them into a community of readers and writers. It is largely through Dr. de Araújo's guidance that I have learned how to be self-respecting as a poet.

Consequently, several of the poems of this project are spoken from women who are conscious of themselves as artists.

In "Archaisms," the voice struggles with her conscience because of her troubled intimate relationship. She talks over the matter with YHWH, and, together, they decide that she must perceive her existence in terms of the sacredness of the word. Somehow, the poet is not just a poet while writing: She is also a poet while living other aspects of her life. Rilke advised writers to do some self-searching in order to determine whether they "must" write. If the answer should be "yes," then Rilke instructed a writer to "build [her] life according to this necessity; [her] life, even into its most indifferent and slightest hour must be a sign of this urge and a testimony to it" (18-19). There is so much involved in keeping the imagination active and the soul of the poet at liberty to do her work. Dr. de Araújo continues to be an essential model for me of a woman who lives the writing life.

The central figures of the poems travel along a perilous trajectory of psychic growth. They at once seek and flee archetypes that speak to them in dreams, and they fit them together of splinters left behind from the misogynistic trampling of the ages. The biblical Eve represents one such challenge for the woman in search of models. The myth of creation is foundational literature for our self-concept. The "myth has entered the Western imagination as having something timeless to say about the nature of creation and the nature of the human being, particularly the woman" (Baring and Cashford 487). Adam gives his companion her name in Gen 2: 23, "she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." In the New Testament, St. Paul takes the seminal myth of Eden to signify that the man needs to control and define his wife: "And if they [women] will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home" (I. Cor. 14: 35). Does the husband at home have all the answers? Is he all-knowing? And, further, what if there

should be no husband at home? The voices in the present work do not learn in the Pauline style. Male interpretations of experience and male control, in fact, obstruct women's self-definition and participation in divinity.

While there is much that is problematic for feminists about the Eve of Gen. 2 and Milton's Eve, there are also many women writers who celebrate these Eves' sense of curiosity, daring, and individuality. They identify with her as an archetype relevant to the female poet who is treated as a transgressor in literature, where men are presumed as ordained to rule. Her presence and her speech are rebellious in and of themselves. Diane Wakoski dedicates Virtuoso Literature for Two and Four Hands "to the snake in the garden, for he offered the taste of knowledge, without which I would rather not live" (Dedication). By implication, the female poet is a face of Eve and one of her sources is the snake. In a similar vein, Jane McVeigh's poem, "Eve Falling," is a re-examination of Paradise and the Fall wherein Eve appears as an Icarus-figure. McVeigh likens the "Fall of man" to the role of the woman writer. "I love the Fall of man, / the way it begins with a woman's mouth. / I love my own mouth beginning to say / the truth and then the silence, the aftershock" (15-18).

In Minoan snake-goddess figurines, the serpents, often several entwined about a single goddess, were inseparable from the entire sense of her power and divinity. The manner in which women writers return to Genesis to ask questions about wisdom, voice, and sensuality suggests that the snake has never really accomplished a full theological transformation from part of the body of the goddess to low vermin. McVeigh's poem seems to draw upon the Cretan sense of the priestess or goddess and her snakes. "The snake has thickened within her brain, / wrapped itself so carefully it seems / a strand of her own thought" (43-45). Eve, as well, sometimes appears as a heroine as opposed to a guilt-ridden villainess.

In Milton's portrayal of Eve, there is a confluence of femininity, mystery, intuition, and nature. There is a wholeheartedness about this Eve and her unreserved joy, but she is also poetically undermined. Adam concludes that Eve's creation is faulty, which would seem to be a critique of God's methods: "Too much of ornament, in outward show / Elaborate, of inward / less exact" (VIII: 538-39). Milton portrays Eve as closer to earth than to her God. While Adam enjoys the privilege of more direct dialogue with God and his angels, Eve communes with the natural world and consults her dreams for her assessment of her place in the cosmos.

Eve in Paradise Lost comes to an independent assessment of her place and Adam's in God's creation. She mourns their shared loss of Paradise in her premonition. Her intuitions are authoritative, and she moves independently of Adam. Adam's hierarchy of human faculties with reason as their crown proves to be mistaken. Eve foresees the serpent in her dream, and she believes in her vision despite Adam's dismissal of it. He attributes her dream to the effect of "mimic Fancy" (V: 110). Milton assigns Eve a special place in Paradise, one that is somehow sympathetic to our knowledge of ourselves as yearning and curious. Adam, being the first and favored of the pair, has less provocation to rebel. After all, Adam is "for God only, she for God in him" (IV: 299). Eve accepts the temptation of placing herself closer to God. Perhaps this is why she is still celebrated as a heroine in women's literature. These poems celebrate the nature of Eve and her relation to every living thing in Paradise, and they dispute traditional interpretations of a woman's place in relation to men and God. Implicit in the poems is women's resistance to their presumed divinely-ordained inferiority, masculine rule, the notion of the body and passion as corrupt, and an assumption that women are not fit to name their own experience.

The serpent is key to the constellation of symbols that figure in Nightshade. Its connotations are seemingly all-encompassing. It may be perceived of as evil or regenerative, as inimical or benevolent. "[A]s the serpent represents any primeval, cosmic force, it shares the ambiguity of all ancient, elementary symbols" (de Vries 410). It is associated with the *Mother Goddess*, fertility and healing, but also with "deceit, craftiness, the Devil" (de Vries 412). At one time, Woman and her snakes signified all creation.

In the central shrine at Knossos she was clad in a richly embroidered bodice with a laced corsage and a skirt with a short double apron, made in faience. Her hair fell behind her neck and onto her shoulders and was adorned with a high tiara. Her eyes were black, her breasts bare, and coiled round her were three snakes with a fourth held in her right hand and curling round her arm behind her shoulder, with a tail ascending to her left arm and head. Round her waist and hips were two more snakes with another extending across her bodice to her ear and tiara. (James 100)

The serpent has long held its place as a core symbol in dreams and art. Significantly, it is the graceful, articulate, and charmed snake, a member of the natural world of which she too is so much a part, that seduces Eve. Milton envisioned one of the most animated and hypnotic creatures in literature:

Fold above fold, a surging maze; his head
Crested aloft, and carbuncle his eyes;
With burnished neck of verdant gold, erect
Amidst his circling spires, that on the grass
Floated redundant. Pleasing was his shape
And lovely; never since of serpent kind

Lovelier" (IX: 499-555).

The snakes which animate Nightshade are also charmed. Their allure is sustained in representations herein, along with their regenerative activity in female consciousness. Goddess figures held snakes in their hands, and some even had serpentine heads. My poem "Rattler" indicates what is lost when actual and symbolic snakes are trampled and punished without any regard to their divinity. This poem depicts what happens when the snake is silenced: deicide. Men become unthinking, unfeeling destroyers. The woman ceases to dream and cannot find her voice. The snake slaying also represents silencing of the community, in this case, the woman's family, because when our symbols are stripped of their resonance, there is nothing substantial left to say. But the snake renews itself in the woman; it sheds its life in the road and takes on a new life in the shape of and in the subconscious of the woman/witness. The serpent embodies the potent subterranean rage of disregarded and trampled women.

The serpent's seduction speaks to humankind's unconscious, and some of Eve's culpability is softened when we witness her vulnerability and the undeniable persuasiveness of the voice in her dream:

'Why sleep'st thou, Eve? now is the pleasant time,
The cool, the silent, save where silence yields
To the night-warbling bird, that now awake
Tunes sweetest his love-laboured song; now reigns
Full-orbed the moon, and, with more pleasing light,
Shadowy sets off the face of things-- in vain,
If none regard' (V: 36- 44).

While Adam converses with angels, Eve is left in the companionable solitude of nature and shadows to make sense of her world as she may. Eve's restlessness, her awe at the

beauty of the created world, and her curiosity are sympathetic traits. Women find we must salvage redemptive qualities from patriarchal images of womankind. Likewise, the voices of Nightshade engage in such a revival as they confront the undermining forces in their lives.

Much akin to the snake, the moon figures prominently in Goddess mythologies. Baring and Cashford discuss the primal place of the moon for such cultures-- "As the great light shining in the darkness of the night, the moon, in all mythologies up to the Iron Age (c.1250 BC), was regarded as one of the supreme images of the Goddess, the unifying power of the Mother of All" (21). In addition, E.O. James places the significance of the moon in Near Eastern Goddess cults in their supposition that "the moon stimulates the dew and so promotes the growth of vegetation" (295). Nightshade works with Milton's idea of woman perceiving by the moon's "more pleasing light" and by its shadows. Perhaps Eve is an aspect of the archetypal poet, the soul that "regards" the "face of things." The poems herein feature instances of woman's communion with nature as well as her modern sense of exile from garden and self. I do not mean to suggest that the woman writer is incognizant or that she works exclusively by processes of intuition. Nonetheless, intuition in the form of dreams, sudden moments of insight, and attention to what nature tells us about our spiritual existence, are herein advanced to the rank of intellect and analysis.

Marge Piercy writes of this enigmatic mode of knowing in the final stanza of "The Moon is Always Female":

. . . Now I will tell you
what I have learned lying under the moon
naked as women do: now I will tell you
the changes of the high and lower moon.

Out of necessity's hard stones we suck
what water we can and so we have survived,
women born of women. There is knowing
with the teeth as well as knowing with
the tongue and knowing with the fingertips
as well as knowing with words and with all
the fine flickering thoughts of the brain.

While the poet respects verbal and conscious knowing, she does not dismiss intuitive knowing which she portrays as lying naked under the moon "as women do," or as "knowing with / the tongue." Eve first joined all of these aspects of knowledge.

Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" exalts impassioned knowing: "I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard of songs" (1091). Body knowledge appears again in Jane McVeigh's poem, "Eve Falling," a celebration of Eve's transgression. McVeigh draws a parallel between female sensuality and the power of naming: "I love the melting of wings/ the apple juice sliding down Eve's chin,/ how it lands on her breast,/ how she sees her breast and names it" (30-33). The act of naming, of course, holds deep resonance in the Old Testament. Naming is inherent in the act of creating a poem. The underlying drama of Nightshade is demonstrated in each poem as a woman in the act of naming her experience.

Although each is quite independent of the others, the poems follow an order that is meaningful according to models of psychological growth. They establish a continuum that makes inherent sense in this way. The movement of the poems can be characterized as beginning with supplication and initiation into the processes of knowledge and self-awareness. The supplicant in "Sekhmet" prays to the leonine goddess--"Send the singing muds upon this songless earth. / Soften the receiving ground" (14-15). At this point the

initiate does not know what she's getting herself into in determining her personal need for expansion. She prays without anticipating the extent to which transformation entails sacrifice. The beginning stage features uninformed boldness, and one of its metaphors is childhood. Consciousness exists in a blessed state due to its inexperience. "Figs," also figuring into this initial group, is an Edenic moment when the two figures, male and female, "walk openhanded through the land" in a state of grace and plenty (10-11). The tone in "Figs" echoes Gen. 1: 25: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." The poem cycle commences harmoniously.

The next stage is discordant. The old ways no longer operate well because of new challenges and information. However, as Jung so adroitly puts it, "Man is constantly inclined to forget that what was once good does not remain good eternally. . . . [O]n the deeper levels the psyche continues to work for a long time in the old attitude, in accordance with the laws of psychic inertia" (qtd. in Baring and Cashford 447). Abstractions such as Love and Equality become insufficient in the face of furthered awareness and experience. The voice in "Narcissus" admits "It's true. I am in love with Love / and haven't the heart to slay her as she swirls my skies..." (9-10). She does not want to "slay" her old notions and roles since that would entail loss and disorientation. The mind is troubled and hesitant at this juncture. The questions that a person has asked during the first stage begin to exact their price. The first person in "Gray-Eyed Boy" dreams a child "running on dream feet / and shooting arrows of questions from his eyes" (12-13). He is the child to whom she never gave birth. There is a tendency for anyone in this phase of the cycle to want to revert to uninformed blessedness, a state of innocence.

The next portion of Nightshade turns upon the idea of the Call. Change is now inevitable. The old feelings and concepts seem foreign, but any alternative is uncertain. "The actual processes of individuation—the conscious coming-to-terms with one's own

inner center (psychic nucleus) or Self--generally begins with a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it. This initial shock amounts to a sort of 'call,' although it is not often recognized as such" (Jung, Man and His Symbols 169). These poems have a bitter tone, and nightmare images prevail. The magic dog in "Plot Dogs" has a "face. . . full of scars and ridges" and a "hell smell" (3 & 12). The bulldog serves as an emblem of change in the poem sequence. The bulldog in "Plot Dogs" is guardian of change much as the Egyptian Anubis (the Jackal-headed god) is guardian of the dead, or the "formidable hound with three heads on three necks," Cerberus, is guardian of the underworld (Grant 361-62). The poems at this level are marked by a feeling of strangeness and nostalgia.

After the Call or the pivot of change, poems that turn upon estrangement follow. There is no external salve for all of the wounds and the questions that have opened up. There is upheaval without much relief because no alternative models have surfaced. The pain of this moment calls forth the need for succor from within--the friend who is a person's own shadow. The shadow image in "Versions of You" is a stranger, "The girl is you who looks nothing like you, / except in the drag of her feet or her averted eyes / as she gets up from the steps and goes inside" (20-22). "Thus it seems as if the initial encounter with the Self casts a dark shadow ahead of time, or as if the 'inner friend' comes at first like a trapper to catch the helplessly struggling ego in its snare" (Jung, Man and His Symbols 170).

The unconscious begins to make suggestions in its mysterious and undeniable way. One has asked for change; change has begun. It is impossible to reverse it or to regress. Nonetheless, there may be an attempt at regression as in "Chimaera" when the voice attempts to deny what she suspects about her inner life: "Lethe ran through my head and I said *i-love-you-babe* / and then said it again 'cause it didn't sound right to me" (12-

13). She represses her fear of the loved one and tells her counselor, "*let's not let this thing get overblown*," (19) even though she feels she treads upon ground that covers a hidden bomb. At issue is the voice's power of naming her own experience and identity.

The assertion of the unconscious and its ability to tell us who we are and where the Self is provides a way to survive the gift we have asked for before knowing the treachery of the journey. In this stage, although questions abound and loss seems to follow upon loss, the Self begins to emerge. "Half Moon Bay" presents the tentative self-identification of the Artist--"At sunrise my eyes are wet with gray and a dream" (13). The dream of the poem concerns the central consciousness' chance meeting with another artist at a campground and the way she identifies with him. The unconscious speaks in a secretive yet obvious way. The poems in this phase are about how consciousness fights directives from the unconscious. Life becomes disordered, and those sacrifices the unconscious typically demands seem to be intolerable. The poetry features women who are almost drowning in the unconscious and who are very disconnected from themselves and others. The first person of "Half Moon Bay 11" identifies herself as "a woman on a deserted beach" who sees "as far as a wall of fog" (20-21). A common theme at this point of the sequence is escapism and dissociation. The voice of "One Car (No Dog No Man)" feels nameless and lost in "coastal brush": "Everything around me already has its name / . . . Nobody calls out my name against the air" (8-10). Acute loneliness may precede the Self's emergence.

Following upon the heels of disorder, the poems indicate a tendency toward restoration and eventual emergence from *the nightmare*. Voices are tempered with fatigue and humility; the unconscious provides some gentle and more hopeful messages than in previous stages of the journey. The poems explore the role of solitude in artistic identification. In "Half Moon Bay 11," a woman wrestles with her impressions of

Wyeth's Christina's World. Her initial innocent appraisal of the work is different from her "adult" more factual response to the painting. Her thoughts help her trace her dissociated state of mind. She intuits the wisdom of more intuitive, less distancing attachments to symbols and to life.

In the final stages, each voice reaches out to a community of other women whose lives are familiar in terms of their creativity and their search for accessible female models of power and eternity. The companion voice of "Restorative Waters" notices about her country setting: *"I am here more in tune with the moon"* (8). The poem explores the interaction of two friends who seek healing in a mountain setting. Since many of the goddesses' emblems and rituals have long since been erased or masculinized, the women must connect with earth as part of the body of the goddess. They must also connect with themselves in more profound ways through dreams as well as increased acceptance of their own power as women. This is why in many of the poems, the women are drawn on a vast scale. Angela, ". . . stands under her skies of change / comes in wrapped in a mist of red morning" ("Skies that Change Color to Match your Clothes and . . ." 7-8). At last, the poetic figures signify real women with familiar personal and sociological problems and mythological women who transcend their situations and the limitations of their place.

Poetry's questions are among humankind's deepest ones. There are no certain answers, but there are intimations. "In contemplation of created things, / By steps we may ascend to God" (Milton V: 511-12). Where can God be found? God is in everything. Who and what is God? God is male and female. "So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1: 27). And where, then, is the Goddess? She is in earth and the animals; she stirs in

God and in woman and man. She emerges in dreams and in the body's "unheard of songs" (Cixous 1091). Her faces and forms re-appear in the poems of women.

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Sekhmet
powerful one

Beneath the velvet of your lioness lips,
curved and perfect,
are teeth that men flee when you roar.

At your bare feet lying flat under your long skirt,
I pray in carnelian necklaces, hair weighted in blue.
I kneel to your beauty and ferocity.

Your head is high.
Loose the mountains of Ethiopia
and smooth this valley in black birth mud.

Your eyes are fire.
Swirl with green my parched sight.
Burn from the waters, life.

Your back is straight.
Send the singing muds upon this songless earth.
Soften the receiving ground.

Lady at Her Bath

Henry Coe State Park: April 26, 1998

A breeze slips fingers into wild grass
as cool water strokes her underside
and mud sucks at her slender ankles.

Her eyes are dark pools where fish hover
like inclinations of a mind.

Sunlight arcs along her turning neck
and her lashes drift over her eyes.

Her air is a clutter of butterflies.

Inside her flanks, soft valleys lie,
and in her large eyes there is nothing
but a season of wide open wanting.

Figs

In the midst of this unmolested orchard
a fig tree spreads its wide leaves
for autumnal sun. Shaded in its branches
are imperative fleshgourds of promise.
This place of shamelessness finds us
again incognizant of our nakedness;
our hands are sticky from picking
the small many-seeded fruits:
each bleeds white onto our fingertips
and into our palms. We walk openhanded
through the land, our wrists bent with fruit,
as it was always meant to be.

Narcissus

*They lived there behind closed shutters and doors,
with flowers on the floor, sipping the iced fruit drinks
they began to order as soon as they got up in the morning.*

--Flaubert

It's me,

and I'm running across a path of slick river stones,

a warmed blanket drapes my hips and my stomach.

I am still wet--fresh from a Klimt painting

my hair passion-mussed, my heart pulsing in my neck

and beating beneath that island between my thumb and fingers.

It's me again,

flowing across a man as light that spreads across meadows.

It's true. I am in love with Love

and haven't the heart to slay her as she swirls my skies,

or to scavenge through piles of her white feathers

weighted in shocks of her hot blood.

troutmarks

You stand over the stream casting and reeling
until you feel the fight at the end of your line.
I see glimmers of a black-spotted rainbow;
you let line out and pull it back in,
trying to tire out the fish--
your thigh muscles strain against your jeans
and inside your boots you stand on your toes,
but your jaw is relaxed and your focus intent.
I want you to catch it and I don't.
We are hungry for fresh brook trout with lemon and garlic,
but the bleeding and the whitened bulging eyes
make me sorry. A live fish is better than a dead one
for the fish itsfishself--these are things I think
watching you fish. I like the hint of water rainbows,
the hope of them hovering below underwater rocks,
shimmering in their cold shadows.
Of course you catch it and I watch you work the hook out.
The greens and pinks fade instantaneously.
We are tired and silent on the way home.
I can tell you are pleased by your open hand
lying between us and by your ready grin.
There is silence though when you split her down her center,
and I tell you I don't want to see them,
her small bright orange gobs of eggs.

A Gardener

I bathe, running my hands over my waning belly and hips,
let my hair drift out in tendrils the reach of kelp forest fingers.
I weed, gripping with the fingers of both of my hands,
lean back and pull with everything in me,
listen to the tearing asunder of roots from their earth bed.
I plant perennials. Girls sing *Promise me? Promise me?*
I make love, whirling him round and round my body.
My hands warm the beginning place. I lie here, parting for poems.
In the wind are things I have never heard before.

Gray-Eyed Boy

Our sleep was fitful--we jabbed each other
with elbows, knees, chins, heels;
and this morning again, just before dawn, he came to me.
I say out of hours coiled in hours of silence,
My head is filled with dead thoughts.
I try to quiet the unease--
follow my breath, as they say.
Later, about midday, I see the face again
of the gray-eyed spirit.
I want to tell you he would have been a boy
and that he came to me again
running on dream feet
and shooting arrows of questions from his eyes.

House-Cats

Who painted the leon, tel me who?

--Geoffrey Chaucer

I stretch across your windowsill
and fit into your bookshelves.
Fine strands of my fur line your pillows.
Incidentally, your hand rests on my head.
Sometimes, your thick fingers make me purr.
I sit on your chest while you read,
and you call me "My Cat,"
but I predate your names for me.

My slit pupils
are portals of night,
and I slink,
moon-ruled,
through your
sleep.

objet d'art

In the miniature garden, the becalmed man sits,
his robes at rest and crinkles of his brow stilled.
Green with life, all around him, the ground cover
sinks under water. Water engulfs his midsection,
and still he sits, his eyes closed like petals.

In a flash, I see us as my mom sees us.
I sit amidst your flood of spit juice and beer
which rises over the years about me--
and still I sit, a portrait, a statue,
a study of calm while the floodline rises.
She wants to throw me a rope to grab
or yank me out of this rank life with a crane.
Her consternation rises with my stillness.

Half Moon Bay

A man in a beret roves the coast with his eyes,
trying to know it by paintbrush.
His art is an experiment in youth's blue.
His walk is side-to-side like a pigeon or pendulum.
At our firepit, he tells us he needs new knees.
What has happened to his?
Life. Now he moves through his eyes.
All night long, I listen to the waves
dragging land back into sea.
I still run up the beach and back down;
I kick and pull myself out to sea--back to shore.
My body carries me to the limit of what I see.
At sunrise my eyes are wet with gray and a dream:
I take my two knees to the artist's mobile home
like two sticks of surplus firewood. I offer them up,
--Let these carry you across your blue dunes--

Plot Dogs

1.

It, or he, I think, came on a windless day as we all were moving into spring. It had been a long time since he had been somebody's pet, a Rex or a Fido or a Killer. His uncollared neck had fattened and his face was full of scars and ridges. He smelled of drool and dust and oil. His breath was incomparable. He chose my stoop and just sat his great rump there. I saw the back of his Titan head from the front window. *Is this good or bad?* I thought.

When I opened the front door, and he turned, his ugliness entranced me. I put down a water dish and told him "Drink!" He nuzzled my ankles and batted his head against my knees. He didn't drink. His lips seemed to be flipped inside out. He lumbered down my street without looking behind him, chased by men with green hoses and women with straw brooms. He left only a mad dog mask for my psyche's closet and his hell smell.

2.

Now it is the same time of year as the arrival of the beast on my block, last spring. Everything is changed: the waterdish, the stoop, the street, my eyes. I think of that nameless daemon's wet and loose bloodshot eyes as he snuffled my ankles and I laughed and leapt. It was a trivial game of death: *Bulldog*. And you have to play when you are picked. The day the Plot Dog came was a still shot in time. And change is not a wildfire as seen from a spaceship. He is a bad unchained dog and nobody can make him budge.

John 4.13

Whosoever drinketh of this water, shall thirst again.

Dampening--

The rose petals beneath your slipping skins

are weighted in tears;

they blacken and curl.

Waning--

Inexplicably, you can no longer feel the body,

your own, his,

without the passion.

Echoing--

You remember...

the way you felt

when...

the way your hair flowed

when...

the way you came together on a riverbed

screened in reeds.

Versions of You

On New Year's Day, death swims in my throat like a spined fish:

I can't do it anymore.

The refrain--what about reading? how about taking a trip?

The stories are about disappointing men:

the motorcycle lover with his black handprints
who leaves loudly and frequently

superman and his perennial potential, stasis
and so much waiting to happen

stanley shouting *S-T-E-L-L-A!*,
this one we know as noise and rumbling,
a muscle-bound inevitability

And then the refrain--take a trip; join a club; get a hobby.

Mom cries in private over years gone by

that lie in wait for me.

And then the dream sequences--taffy-legs running noplac;
driverless cars rolling downhill; soundless screams in the night.

Stone-faced houses hide the people inside
and their feathers of suffering.

Passing them by is too close.

The girl is you who looks nothing like you,
except in the drag of her feet or her averted eyes
as she gets up from the steps and goes inside.

Rattler

Men slay snakes.

Seven men surround the snake on Mt. Hamilton Road.

They stomp the pavement near it and jab it with a stick.

They make sport of it as it strikes

near a black-haired man's heel.

It is a spiraling darkness in the road.

A woman watching from her car knows

if it were not it, it would be me.

The men parade the lifeless snake

who has died of terror

and whose fangs will hang from an *Impala's* mirror.

A woman drives back down into the valley;

her tongue is heavy in her mouth,

without volition, like a pale band of snake.

That evening her family calls goodnight-goodnight

and she stares back at them.

How do we speak? I cannot divine it.

In her bed she feels the slopes of her hips

and sees again the round motions in the road,

bead on bead, and the men closing in.

Rattler (Continued, No Stanza Break)

Her sleep is sightless and soundless,
void of dreams.

Chimaera

We would play where's the bomb??
 And you would say you're my nice little Jewish girl.
 Sometimes we threw things, little things thrown hard;
 those times you would say I'm going to hide the gun
 because you are acting crazy, unstable, female, crazy or
 I should just shoot you now and put you out of your misery.

A person can cry until her head feels like it's made of iron
 and everything shimmers in a haze. You would say
 there's no reason to cry I didn't say that I never said that
 i love you babe/your ears/your face/your frizzy hair
 i love you i love you and
 Lethe ran through my head and I said *i-love-you-babe*
 and then said it again 'cause it didn't sound right, to me.

I tell my counselor, who's a witch, wears black and stones,
well he's made a bomb and I'm not sure exactly where it is
you see it was a game we played only now it's not
in any case, I'm afraid to start my car
but he loved me you know and I, I, loved him too you know
let's not let this thing get overblown
you act like he's a monster

Chimaera (Continued, Stanza Break)

and my counselor, a witch whose face reverts to prior incarnations
when she's really mad, said Shit is Shit!

It didn't fit with her more New Age sayings and
how could I reply? Love is shit? Shit *is* Shit but love is love,
the stuff of school-age valentines and PG-13 movies?

Shit.

Poem of the Eighth Life

The Cure reminds me of you, but I play them anyway;
after all, other people cry to these songs
and let their memories and tears run into the music.
For a moment I am reflected by women in windows.
I'm older now and see I'm cut out of the same cloth
as everybody else. Sometimes I look in the mirror at someone,
not at me. There is a name for everything wrong and right
with me. There was shouting and shuddering in our house;
holes in walls, doors, windows; holes in hearts:
almost drably, I commence my reclamation of these fields.
And, when you come to kill me, I'll not be here.

Archaisms

for J.D.J.

Disgraceful

is such an Old Testament word,
 especially for poems of our times
 which are pieced together with scraps
 of words like new junk.
 The way we spoke to one another
 was disgraceful. My tongue pricks my mouth
 and I bleed down my throat just to remember them,
 our spoken words.

Who was the more cruel? You or I?
 We took great red-ant bites out of one another's hearts
 that lay out in the open, an immovable feast.
 I talk to god now, with the same wounding mouth, but
 different words:

He asks me about the *meditation of my heart*
 and he reminds me that I am a *puff of wind*;
 and then he shows me reels of this movie,
 more violent than anything playing this summer
 at theatres nearby. I am the leading lady
 and you the leading man, and it is disgraceful.
 And then I remind god of all *you've* said and done to *me*,
 and he reminds me that language is a sacrament
 and I call myself a poet.

Half Moon Bay 11

I have indexed [*Christina's World*/ Wyeth]
 into my stretching universe of facts,
 but when I first saw Christina's world
 it was its own being, free of any maker.

The hill of straw was real to me, the dark house,
 the girl in her pink dress. And my child's eyes blotted out
 Christina's arms: I saw only a beautiful and dreamy girl
 whose name and world I now know and have indexed.

Today the ocean reaches for me.
 See (lōn'li) in your dictionary
 and a pencil sketch of my face in the margin.
 But then everybody feels that way.
 There's a crowd of faces illustrating (lōn'li).

I know something. If I were a sanderling, I too would sew
 my beak up and down the vast sea's white skirts,
 run my small heart out,
 never think of you.

Half Moon Bay 11 (Continued, Stanza Break)

Sometimes I laugh out loud,
a slight sound crushed in waves,
because I am a woman on a deserted beach.
I see as far as a wall of fog;
as I walk into it, there is no one there.

One Car (No Dog No Man)

I chest a petrified heart and hide myself
in this coastal brush. Silence burrows in my ears.
I watch birds land on mustard stalks.
I am an incident in the life of birds.
My gear: a small cooler, about the width of a sandwich;
bedding, heavy with incantatory scents.
In the manner of birds, I give my bed a dust bath.
Everything around me already has its name,
and I have nothing in the way of fire.
Nobody calls out my name against the air
as waves smash bottled notes against ocean stones.

Sense of Fire

I put my open palms over each burner for sense of cold.
I pinch the wicks for their brittle blackness.
My mind wanders, chanting *on or off*
at the rate of my heart beat.
Fire is the inmost part of earth--soul of her.
Fire of the body made each one, panted each one unto itself.
Each is smoke of somebody's burning for somebody.
All are brief shapes flung against the dark.
Fear of fire. Fear of fire:
a cyclical disorder of the mind;
some racial memory of ash-darkened suns;
or guilt of Prometheus,
a wish to restore the flames to their heavens
in vast chiseled black bowls.

Restorative Waters

Orr Hot Springs April '99

*Well, then, I have come here to heal myself,
if you like to put it that way... -Lawrence Durrell*

A frantic call to Portland from San Jose:

...What do you do for a breaking heart?

-You sweat.

A trip north to visit a San Francisco escapee,

mother of two toddlers;

sheep graze out her kitchen window

and a bird guide lies open at finches.

She says I am here more in tune with the moon

and Mountain nights are blacker than sleep.

What is your thought at dawn? Be honest.

Is it "What's next?!"? Or is it "Thank God!"?

...And what do you do with the poisons, the madnesses?

-You sweat.

Here in a stained glass scene, we bathe in hot pools.

I look up into the azure, an eye fringed with Giant Redwoods.

There is a calico at my shoulder,

shaking water off her head from many wet fingers.

Restorative Waters (Continued, No Stanza Break)

Somebody said cats don't like the water;
but, then, didn't someone also say that love conquers all?

I am with the maternal body of my friend;
She says *I have pierced my belly rather than deny it.*
I look at light swimming in water across her strong feet.
Our female desire is unremarkable and ferocious.

Maenad

I dance sexily in my room alone don't tell anyone,

Dana blushes and laughs.

And anyway the girls say you can't see them past the bright lights.

She will dance in their dark for hire.

Upon the hill grass slithers up and between old barn planks.

Dana moves through a pagan language of shadows.

Hers is a darkness against the always open moon,
individual and faceless.

In her black net stockings and slick spiked heels,

Dana will dance for eyes which she won't see
past the bright lights of the stage.

She will have many costumes and a long red wig.

After hours showers wash their eyes off your body,

but they do not wash them from your dreams,
say the girls.

Dana swims above this glittering city,

a blonde minnow,

a streak of light through night rivers.

Skies that Change Color to Match your Clothes . . .

Angela, sea-eyed, poppy-haired, smattered with freckles
like ladybugs holding to an iceland poppy leaning windward--
Angela at midnight paints the tables and chairs,
the windowsills in all her houses,
a glowing script of personal hieroglyphs.

Angela at 2 a.m. stands under her skies of change,
comes in wrapped in a mist of red morning.

Like Most Girls I Look Best Under a Peach Sky. . .

Angela at 4 a.m. fills up coffee cups with black holes,
vines reach from them, *My 5th Cup. . .*

The city's eyes simmering, red and purple haze--

A World of Possibilities. . .

Angela at dawn, her ankles feathered softly,
whisks a spiderplant across town to a new Love.
On Market St. cars turn, people cross, Muni squeels;
and Angela recovers her offering from the pavement.
Angela laughs, her whole face tipped skyward,
and I can see her appleseed nostrils.

A Place in Mind
for Angela Marie

I dream our house with breezes swaying curtains,
of basking in moonlight's slanted rays with you.
You summon worlds out of blank skies.
I peer into the black and name the stars.
Chaos is nothing for us but a source.
Parti-coloured bottles fill the bedroom window
casting reds and blues and amber pools
over our palms and across our breasts.
As we look, everything is full of gods.
We live in beauty and our breakfast table
is always graced with open yellow roses.

Silhouette
for my mother and father

Time is a frozen lake that cracks and shifts at dawn
and Love is a plain waterfowl that expertly fishes
and makes its nest of snow.

In the salmon and safflower veils of the sun
are two, small as ants to Gulliver,
who would not notice them,
except for the splash and dance of their wordless rowing.