



*a Stone Worn to
Sand*

Jeff Brooks

A Stone Worn to Sand

by
Jeff Brooks

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Dedication

For Joy Harjo who got me started on the pursuit of the craft of writing after reading one of my early clumsy manuscripts by saying, "You need to take some creative writing classes."

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Introduction

What has always fascinated me is the idea that, through the ceaseless action of something so insubstantial as water and wind, mountains are worn to sand and carried out to sea. My life seems like that, a constant abrasion of little things wearing me into nothing, but then I come from a place that is not known for its water or its wind. A place where water, due to its scarcity, is the most sacred of things.

My home which is in the Sanora desert is a dry place, and often still, so still that sound can carry for many miles. The night sky can be so black and the starlight so brilliant that a path can be illuminated on a moonless night.

The Sanora desert is known for its sun and its heat that can feel like a mallet against one's skin. Summer can be a seasonal flailing that few people would know if they have not felt the July sun bake through one's skin to one's bones.

One can emerge from a quiet canyon, after spending the day in refuge from the desert heat by laying near a pool of tea colored water fed by a trickle against rock, to the low growl of a 10 mile long freight train at the base of an alluvial fan 25 miles away. This life has been a long journey from the refuge of canyons to tentative explorations of our culture that quickly turned into a turbid flow of responsibilities then a long untangling of the webs of commitment before returning again to refuge in simple riparian canyons.

I was born here between four mountains, between the union of two rivers. I rose up out of this earth. The Sanora desert is the center of my world, it is my holy land. I have traveled around the world and I have lived in many places, but I keep coming back to these mountains and ragged canyons, these prickly plants and creatures for sustenance. They fill my internal landscape. I have often observed that sacred moment of the sun rising like an amber disk before peach breakers on a turquoise Caribbean sea over the nearby Rincon mountains that the Tohono O'odham (our local indigenous people) call Pregnant Woman, Sleeping, and I have seen the sunset turn the jagged Tucson Mountain's red like a gila monster's mouth.

My life has been a blending of contradictions where I studied ancient cultures and primitive healing practices, and learned to live in the wilderness off wild foods, then I worked in research labs where I searched for dark matter, measured the temporal stability of materials, and made measurements in environments that approached absolute zero and perfect vacuums.

This book, "A Stone Warn to Sand," explores, in a Vedic or Buddhistic sense, how the sufferings and enjoyments of life ware away our egos to nothingness. The story I weave here is like a watertight basket woven from the disparate threads of social commentary on the drug war, violence, child abuse, environmental atrocities to alchemy, physics and astronomy. I use cross cultural metaphors from various Native American tribes, the pre-Christian Celtic tribes of northern Europe, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern metaphors and various Asian mythologies. I believe, what we do to each other in our interpersonal relationships reverberates throughout the culture, even to the extent that disconnected events seem to serve to inform our daily lives.

The chapters of this collection are arranged in a sequence beginning with observations of the culture at large through my own personal life experience. I punctuate our life struggles with an awareness of the bigger picture. That is, that planetary scientists tell us, all of the major geological features on the surface of the

Earth, like continents, ocean basins and mountain ranges, were created directly or indirectly by impacts of asteroids and comets not just once, but many times over billions of years. The oceans and our atmosphere came here as cometary impacts. The petroleum resources of this planet that fuel our industrial revolution are the remnants of entire ecosystems buried by the debris kicked up by asteroid and comet impacts and our mineral resources are the remnants of those asteroids.

Many of the chapter headings originate with Native American symbolism. I blend these Native American ideas with Christian and British mythologies and Asian ideas. For example, Chapter Two is titled Red Woman, it was inspired by Leslie Marmon Silko's "Yellow Woman," which is a Puebloan tale of a woman who wanders off from her tribe for a love affair with a man not of her culture and returns with twins. To this story I blended a related Puebloan icon, the Spider Woman who raised her twins on the precipice of a high rock and who wove a web of illusion. To this story I blended a little regional mythology of La Llorona, a demoness who wanders the dry washes of Southern Arizona snatching unwary children, and I added a touch of Keats' Le Madame Sans Mercy who exerts a black widow like power over men, and then I further shaped the work with Hinduism's Mother Maya who is the female deity who constructs this entire physical reality as a web of illusion to keep us from understanding the underlying nature of the universe and ourselves.

**Caught in the
Hydrocarbon-Age
Driving Meteor-Metal
on Dinosaur Blood**

Human Intervention

Forests turned to paper
Tar oozes across the land
Ink spills down the page.

**The Kingdom of God is at Hand,
The Apocalypse is Now.**
for my landlord

My rent is due,
and I still have six
hundred dollars to go.

I'm a local boy,
and I've never owned
a house in this town.

I rent from Californians
who buy up our land
because it's cheap.
They expect the rent
to be paid on time.

They've come here to retire
when the property values
reach California standards.

We are clinging to a rock
protected by a tiny envelope
of air, and a thin film of water.

I tell myself, its OK
if we blow ourselves to hell,
or annihilate each other
in the slower death
of environmental suicide,

because we are billions
of years old, and when the pearls
of this planet are exhausted
we'll just incarnate on another
to continue our journey
to one simple love.

It seems so silly
to claw our way
onto a heap
trying to see over
a few more ripples
on an otherwise
uniform plane.

I dream I'm a dark horse
leaping over new-wire fences
that waffle the wilderness
into an exclusionary prison.

Anger burns in my joints.
I want to cut myself free.
I feel fences falling
like flesh parting
before a sharp knife.

While I pumped my last buck
into my tank, the Universe
sent me a message.

I watched a prairie dog
sit on the curb
at a mid-town light,
waiting.

When the light changed,
it ran across, and disappeared
into the bushes at the car wash
where Lance-A-Lot limos rest

on tar covering
what used to be
creosote covered talus
on the bank of a wash
eroded into caliche.

It's now a main street
that floods every monsoon,
and leaves new arrivals
stranded and frustrated
with Tucson's idea
of flood control.

The rent is still due.
I do what I can,
and think of what I can sell.

**Escaping Oblivion
in Waves of Galactic Dust**

After a mushroom trip
On Mount Lemon
Where I lay in the fiddle
Fern seeing the patterns
Of the universe move
Through my body
As feeling waves,

I watched a gecko.
Her five toes held wide,
Gluing her to my window.
Her fat belly pressed flat,
And her tiny lungs panting,
Waiting in the shadows
For bugs to eat.

With a lunge and a jerk
A moth half her size
Disappeared down her throat,
And I thought
Of the many silly
mistakes we humans make
with our childish pranks.

Playing with nuclear weapons
And biological war.
About mosquitoes
Escaping from a research lab
Studying deadly African diseases.

I saw how mother nature cleans
Up after each of our blunders,
And I wondered how long
We can escape
From the consequences
Of our actions.

A boy plays a video game
Unaware that the metals
That make the synapses
Of the computer in that plastic
Case come from a mountain
Of iron and nickel that fell
To earth with a continent
Shattering hammer-
Blow on one day
That was split
Into searing rock
Flashing back
Into the sky
Turned black
For a year.

The plastic comes from a black goo
That was an entire ecosystem
Buried under a mile of pulverized
Mountain, and left to cook
for 65 million years.

We rush about our lives
From time-clock stamp,
To meeting, to appointment forgetting
That we drive meteor-metal
On dinosaur blood.
Unaware that extinction
Is our species'
Most significant experience
In a ripple of time.

The Valley of the Shadow of Death
for my ex-wives

Smoke whirls between the teeth
of a man with a grin looking
at a woman he wants to own
for a moment.

A bus roars by breathing black,
and humans in iron pass
in packs barking and coughing.
A police car whines
in the distance.

I dream of a river that cuts
through a million years of rock.
Where warm water oozes
from a seam
leaving white scale
on the bank.

A wild turkey giggles from a thicket.

I lived in a mud
hut, and dug
in the brown, brown
earth with my fingers.
Her must accompanies
the smell of willow
blossoms and greasewood.

But, I'm caught
in the hydrocarbon-age
where humans possess
everything, even the earth,
fire, water and air.

I hug my thin
nylon jacket at a light
where I gain
a moment of permission
to pass by a line of greedy
head lights that glare
at me impatiently.

I meet a friend at a cafe
next to a Circle K
where an angry man
points a gun at the clerk
who is one paycheck
from oblivion.

She asks me if I want to
“bump pelvises.”
I look at the eczema
that has been growing
down her arm all semester,
and see that anxiety
is about to consume her.

I think of a violet
willow flower nodding
in the breeze
over a tea
colored creek.
The cappuccino
machine offers up
a familiar scream.

Anxiety wont have its day.

I thank her for the offer,
and graciously decline
saying I'd taken a vow
of celibacy.

The shadow of man
falls away from me.

A Beautiful Life
for Czeslaw Milosz

I meditate morning and evening.
Morning and evening I meditate.
I meditate morning and evening.

I don't work a lot.
Contemplate, write poetry,
honor life.
I don't make a lot.

What a blessing it is
to live a beautiful life.

I had little.
Slept every night
under the stars,
bathed in canyon pools.

Witnessed uninterrupted
sun rises and sets over ragged
mountains behind
pointillist desert hillsides
covered with volcanic
rock and pin-cushion cactus.

Took vows of poverty,
chastity and sobriety.
It's a lonely life.

Now I have children.
They need a home.

Every channel has police shows.
The news is filled with violence.
The 80-year war on drugs drags on.
The Border patrol rapes brown
women on dark desert roads.

The DEA brakes down doors
and plants evidence.
A state trouper shoots
a man in the back
with a bale of pot.

We vote in popular
politicians who get
campaign contributions
from organized crime.

The CIA sells drugs
to buy weapons
to sell to dictators
who defend fields of drugs
used to sedate
whole populations
into complacency.

My children said they wanted
to live with me. They wanted
their own bedrooms, and a TV.

It meant child support,
their mothers depended on,
had to go to a bigger house.

I spent a year negotiating
with them while my daughter's
grades went down,
then she started taking acid
at school.

Everyday my son conquers
an electronic empire.
He hit a girl at school.

In Littletown
25 children lie dead,
because adults didn't listen.

I stopped paying child support,
and spent it on a house
with three bedrooms.
Bought a TV.

A war broke out.
My ex-wives had me sent to jail
with drunkards, addicts and robbers.

The sun rose in golden diamonds
through bullet-proof glass.

I sold my car to get out.
Now I'm a middle-aged
dead-beat-dad on a bike,
still working on a BFA.

A field of dogs sprouted
in the Spring. Greyhounds planted
in fallow cotton fields,
because they were too slow,
rose like white bulbs
under the moon.

One mother inherited \$80,000,
and got her first full-time
job in twenty years;
the other got an apartment

complex from mommy and daddy.
She gets falling down drunk, and
brings home strange men from bars.
She has a short temper.

My daughter is now over 18,
graduated cum laud, and
got a scholarship.

I ride my son to the bus
stop on the back of my bike.
He came home from his mother's
with a black eye.

The judge says
I have to get
a \$10,000 lawyer
to prove she's unfit.

The tax collector
emptied my meager
bank account.

The land lord
wanted to know
where the rent was.

I thanked God
I still had beans
and rice in the cupboard.

The news says
One Million people
are in our prisons.
A third of them
are there for drugs.
I think it's time
for Bastille day.

I watch the sun rise
and set over mountains
behind a valley
filled with houses.

Morning and evening I meditate.

What a blessing it is
to live a beautiful life.

Monsoon Madness

The summer sun strikes
against the anvil
of Tucson, and melts
it into a delta of hot tar.

Cicada's frenzied chatter
meets the afternoon heat
as it builds to a delayed
climax.

Heat-tension produces
a black goo that becomes
justifiable homicide.

A man swerves madly
to avoid slow traffic.

Space and Earth meet
at a rising black wall.

A girl bounces her
truck over the curb
to eject her boy-
friend.

He throws a rock
that bounces off her hub-
cap with a ting.

She squeals her tires
leaving a black snake
writhing on soft tar.

Distant thunder rumbles.
Sirens wail.
Wind blows garbage
cans and picnic tables
across the road.

A yellow dust cloud
forms in front of blackness.
The smell of grease-
wood is the only thing
maintaining sanity.

Then a flash of light
cracks open the universe,
and blessed rain beats
against the pavement
producing a blinding
flood that turns to golf ball-
hail pounding
against the windshield.

The street fills curb
to curb and dumpsters
sail majestically by.

We breath a sigh,
and take off our shoes
to wade in brown water.

Such is life where rain
is an anticipated
annual event.

A river sucked dry for a penny

The Cottonwoods are dying
along the San Pedro.
Gray-white bones and black bark
stand brittle along the banks.

Green are ASARCO's tailing ponds
full with copper, water and acid
up-river.

Black leafless mesquite basques
shadow dead cottonwoods and
the skeletons of sycamores.

Slim, yellow saguaros
reach into plundered aquifers.

With distended bellies,
after power-lunches
agreeing to divide up
the desert, developers
and legislators proudly
strut with the staff
of their conquest
held firmly between their teeth.

The bones of the Rio Grande
and the Colorado,
where conquistadors sailed,
now only glisten
through thin skins.

Lush mesquite basques
used to flank a river
of green cottonwoods
along the Santa Cruz.

With stone dams,
metal pipes and
cement aqueducts,
they hold back
the living water
from its journey home.

The longer they hold back
the water, the more poisoned
it becomes. Until even green
golf courses gouged
into desert pan
can't drink
it, so they give it
to our children.

Spawning

When men stepped on the moon
I spent the Summer of Love
in a military school
with the children of
Central American dictators.

They said, "Su mama es puta."
I found no reason to argue.

One full moon August night,
when a man left a foot print,
we were bused to the base
for a dance with the dames.

The boys in their crew cuts
and uniforms sat sullen
along the south wall.
The girls in their braces and
Barbie hair waited expectantly
along the west.

I scanned the line
for the cutest to conquer,
and found none worthy of war.
Having no sense of battle,
I took an eastern escape.

I was drawn to the beat
of the ocean to dance
along shining sand.

Waves of sea turtles
hatched and waddle
urgently to pulsing
foam leaving tiny
pleats in the sand.

One full moon August night
when tracks creased the moon.

Trees A-go-go
for my daughter

As soon as I entered Oregon
I was past by a tree doing 60.
Then I saw a grove laying
down in an iron crib.
Rolling.

It goes on all day long
trees on 16 wheels.
Don't these forests
stay put?

The hillsides of Oregon
and Washington look like
what happens when a rat
gets into the cupboard.
Ragged.

Don't these people care?

When it comes to the man
driving the truck,
he's got child support to make.
The man with the ax
has life insurance to pay.

Everywhere I saw ravens
and dead trees.
I thought it was a message
from spirit, maybe
I'll die soon.
But, it's not me.
Oregon is dying, now.

Washington is being cut
down and sent to the mill,
so some fat cat
can go to Vegas
and sleep with a tree.

The trees in Nevada
will do anything
you ask for \$50.

It's the same in Arizona.

Weevils have gotten
into our mountains,
and dug big holes
where mountains
used to be, looking
for flecks of metal
in a mountain of rock.

Miners have kids to feed,
wooden houses to build,
metal trucks to drive,
and vacations in Vegas
to buy.

Violence
for the children

I have seen violence.
I've seen New York cab drivers
Beating each other for a fare,
And puddles of blood on the subway.
I've seen fathers chafe their children,
And men whip each other for a woman.
I've seen babies bleed to death on my bed,
After bouncing their soft heads
Off unpadded dashboards.
I've seen head masters cane lines of boys,
And boys beating each other
In the school yard.

I've seen violence.
I've seen screaming, drunken
Lovers beating each other, and
Drug dealers toss a stabbed body
From a moving car.
I've seen spoiled white boys on Reds
Bloodied by the police in the Tank,
And armies massing along the Nile
For a six day romp.
I've seen the starved dead on the sidewalks,
And naked swollen bellied children
Living in dumps, barefoot.

I've seen violence.
I've seen my sister shrieking wild
Eyed raped by my stepfather,
And tracks in silent rage wind
Up my other sister's arms.
I saw my sisters hold me down
While my mother sodomized me
With bathroom utensils.

I have seen violence.
I saw myself drink
Until I shit my pants,
Smoke opium until I vomited
And take acid until I died.

I've seen Paradise
turned into a strip mall.

Yes, I have seen violence.

A Sense of Justice

Fly finds plenty to eat
day after a battle

Red Woman,

La Llarona

I am the son of a cloven
footed woman.

She stole our smiles
and baked them, ginger
bread, in her oven.

I was born to Spider Woman.
The Black Widow took her meat
fresh.

We played on a pinnacle
of rock teetering on the edge
of glass.

Her home was a web
of desperately rigid lines where
she mastered her servants.

She glued us to her web
so she could feel
our every quiver.

Silence, like after a midnight
storm, hovered
around us while bruises
bloomed like violets
against a crisp dawn.

We learned to seek the safety
of strangers, and I found
refuge with snakes.

I was the son of Kali.
She was the lord
of the under world.
who wore a skirt of skulls.

Our home was full of demons.

I thought goose eggs
were budding horns.

Lions walked our nest
licking our chops.

Her victims were men
who had no power
of their own
because she turned
them to stone.

She had no mercy.
She plotted our death,
daily, but we would not die.

Pets became our surrogates
on her sacrificial alter.

We did not expect to survive.

Love Thy Mother

I pass through life
unobserved.
If I walk quietly
mother wont be
disturbed.

I return
to the scene
of the crime.

We were born to be
hostages
threatened daily
with death
and dismemberment.

I remember we had
mysterious
intestinal ailments.

Maybe it was just
a flu
passed quickly
between us.

We joke it was
mother
trying to poison us.

When I played and giggled too loudly
 mother threatened
to cut off my balls,
and hang them
 in the garage.

It was a dark place
with many boxes and old tools,
 cluttered and musty.
It was the place I kept my new pigeon.
I found it the next morning,
lying on its back,
 heart cut out.
I kept my next pigeon safe
 in my room.

When I went to Europe
I visited lots of castles.
We were always shown
 the dungeons,
with many clever instruments
 of torture.

They reminded me
 of mother's garage.

I leaened if I was quiet
I'd live
 one more day.

Crying out

Poetry of homage to Mary Oliver for "Rage"

I feel life suck
right out of me.

I want to cry out
In rage and terror
For help
Like when you raped me,
But there was no one.

Then as now
I can't cry out.
Then as now
It did no good.
It does no good.

I take a hot bath
On a warm night,
But I can't tell if it's hot,
What time it is,
Or what day.

When did I last eat?

I just want to sleep
Away this pain,
But my dreams
Are of blood
Dripping down
Long sharp knives.

The Whipping Boy

I was kept in rags,
And left to lie
In my own shit.
I learned to walk
Early, and deal with it
In my own way.

My one goal
In crawling was to reach
The gleaming freedom
Of the back door.

Often returned
From the corner
Market two blocks away
With dirty diapers
By flirting firemen.

I found company
With dogs in the desert
So, Mother tagged
Me, "My name is JEFF
My master's name is RUTH
I live at 4268 E. PASEO GRANDE."

Like Pooch,
She called me 'Butch.'

I learned to run
When a back-hand,
Or hair brush
Across my once round
Head, on days when beating
The bottle wasn't enough,
Turned into pinning
Me to the floor, tearing
My cloths off, and sodomizing
Me with a thin glass tube.

Leashes

dedicated to Nancy Reid

A leash wrapped tightly around my neck.
Breaking free from the tormentor
has been my great life's work to speak.

Mother intended to stack the deck.
You must know if you are a suitor.
A leash wrapped tightly around my neck.

My stiff back felt the switches mean fleck,
when I stubbornly pulled, jerked and tore.
They only found struggle at the peck.

Step mother thought I lived at her beck
and call so proud was she that meant her
leash was wrapped tightly around my neck.

In my weakness, feeling like a speck.
I only lacked a good mentor
instead of wasting this life a wreck.

There have been some attempts to inspect
to the great dismay of many a tutor.
A leash wrapped tightly around my neck
has been my great life's work to speak.

**When the Moon Thinks
She is the Sun**

the Family of Sun, Earth, Water and Air

The rippling skirts
of the mother ocean
lie just beyond
the horizon where her hem
blossoms and curls
against the sand.

Her husband's heat
lifts her hem
onto the shoulders
of her son

who stretches her skirts
out across the land,
where she rains
down her love for all beings.

A Calcutta Street Dancer

She dances for her Shiva
at night, sleeping with him late,
and making love
on the streets of Calcutta.

At dawn he slips away
to his wife, and she awakens
to find her Shambu gone
once again.

In her own private world
she bathes on the street
before a brass faucet
burnished gold from use.

She opens her vermilion pot,
to renew her marriage vow
of the red moon on her forehead,
and finds it empty.

She seeks her husband,
the merchant, who would
not make his Shakti pay
to keep the wave of her full lips
red below a cinnabar moon.

With bright red lips and talik
she accepts golden saffron
and dall crested with a white dollop
of raita from her Shiva who's wife
strikes the pot with a wooden spoon,
and glares him into submission.

At carnelian dusk she finds a street-band,
and dances for her Shiva.
Her ankletted bare feet pat the
cement imploring his embrace.

A stranger passes and she's drawn
by the graceful roll of his broad shoulders.

She cries out "Shambu," with such longing
that he turns. Instantly he is
intoxicated by her sweet smile and
the crescent moons in her eyes.

She Draws him to her with
graceful gestures of long
delicate fingers, shoulders
swaying, hips and head
jutting, and the innocence
of a winning smile.

Passage Home

On a moonless night
my husband and brother bound me,
tied rocks to my ankles and
dumped me into our reed boat.

They paddled out in the
deep lake near our village.

I was called Star-Woman
because I dreamt I came from
an ocean of stars. A place where
every bright point pierced me with love.

My star-friends told me to give the love
I felt from them to my people,
so that they would be healed.

Those I healed, later talked
about me, and said I was a witch,
because they feared my power.

I could only see that they
feared my love.

My brother accepted my punishment
because he was afraid they wouldn't
let him lead the fishing in the spring.
My husband wanted a younger woman.

They lifted me like a wagging fish
to through me over the edge
when I saw resting on the seamless
surface of those cold black waters

the radiant night sky with
her dress of many shining stars
embraced in the powerful cream covered
breasts of our sacred mountains.

As they let me go
I laughed because I saw,
it was a doorway home,
back to my beloved ocean
of glittering star-friends.

Stubby Wings

Lilith Fair, Portland
for Sara

On their stubby wings
swallows soared
in tight swooping turns
from the high rafters
of the Civic Auditorium.

Women of all ages,
but mostly in their late 20's
in jogging bras and shorts,
held hands, and bought
books like, "Lesbian Erotica."

Women in short sun-
dresses, like Grecian togas,
said to Socrates,
"We are to beautiful."

I thought they'd be disturbed
by the loud music, but
the birds looped
and barrel rolled,
in a winged dance.

I wondered how it is
for Sara to be just 30,
and mentoring a nation
of women emerging
from a 2,000 year
Patriarchy?

One swallow let slip,
from its beak, a large
moth as it climbed high
over the crowd.

An osprey glided slowly
over the swallows.
The late afternoon sun
shown through its large wings
as it circled, shark-like,
away to less joyful prey.

A placard wielding Christian
tried to bar the gate.
He preached, "Lesbianism is a sin."
One red light in a bank
of white glared askance.

There will be no aggression today.

The scoreboard
said, "Pepsi! Pepsi!"
but this generation
said, "Woman! Woman!"

Things Aren't Always What They Seem

When the Sun eclipses the Moon
The Moon thinks She is the Sun.
She teaches her daughters
The ways of War.
They become Red Venus,
And will admit no Man.

At first, Mars seems angry red,
But on closer inspection,
The God of War
Is only a frozen world
Where a web of canals turns
Into impact craters, and
Faces turn into mountains.

Venus is an angry furnace
Melting lead on her skin,
And Mars must dowse his flame
In her pools to win her love again.

Graceful Power
from a dream

They came out of the darkness.

Gracefully, She sat naked
on the back
of that great dark horse.

Her long black hair hung
wave upon wave
down to her thighs.

Dancing, his powerful legs
reached out
to the night sky.

I stood behind chain-
link afraid that black
horse would trample me.

She danced and cartwheeled
upon my barbwire fence
before she passed

indifferent.

Loving Spider Woman

Like desert rain
she comes rarely,
and most often
to another mountain
where I see her draw
her curtains, and dance
on his hill.

I catch her scent
drifting down an arroyo,
a desert rain musk
of creosote, dust and mud.

I hiked a narrow
trail up a steep
canyon wall,
switchbacking
endlessly, to dance
with her.

But, her lightning
pranced along the other
ridge as her thunder
beat against my chest.

I wanted her fat
drops to pound
on my mountain
eroding me into thick
mud like chocolate
churning down washes.

I wanted her to leave
me buried in an alluvial fan
beneath saguaro and agave,
but she only smiled at me
as she danced with another.

Loving Spider Woman

Wild Horses Still Run

The courageous independence
of your upraised head
surprises and frightens.

For in your fierce eyes
can be heard the crash
of your thundering hooves
as they tear at hard soils.

I know, it is only a brief
moment of playful
curiosity that you let me
run beside you.

The wind streaming through
our manes, tails held high,
hot breath in our faces,
and our hooves beating out
the desperate rhythm
of two fiercely
independent souls.

You will soon throw back
your head and, with barely
a glance, leave me admiring
your grace and beauty
as you disappear down
one of the many
labyrinthine canyons
of Mesa land.

Escaping the Heat

I took her to the top
of my mountains
where the ferns grow thick
under tall pines,
and the grass is bright green and wet.

It was a hot Spring day
in the Sanoran desert, and
I was courting a woman.

I mistook the wisdom of years
in the few strands of gray in that black,
black hair, that boyish cut, that fell
in her face, and I wanted to lift

the hair away from those eyes
that looked at me with a smile
that said they liked what they saw.
I wanted to trace those black brows.

I touched a ragged
old scar on her forearm,
lightly, the way her mother didn't.

I thought we wouldn't just be lovers
when she offered me a drink,
and when she placed
fiddle fern on my bread.
When she said "I'm not
looking for anyone."

I remembered saying the same thing
a few days earlier, and it seemed like
love can come when we least expect it.

It was a hot summer day,
and we lay on green grass
under cool pines
and shimmering aspens.

Contours of My Heart

You are beautiful, beautiful.

My eyes and hands have
caressed the landscape
of your body, and found
the contours of my heart.

Your Irish white, white skin
slipped beneath my peasant's paws
between yellow mustard oil, scented
with juniper berry and ginger.

What part of that great
white rolling landscape
with a sealkie's black, black hair
could I not love?

But, of all that breath
taking scenery, it was
the graceful curving
horizon of your lips,
that my eyes
could not leave.

And, when I dream
we are two rainbows
entwining like snakes,
and springs rise in the desert.

I know that I am much older
than you, and I would have only
appreciated your beauty
if I knew that you were so much younger.

But, mother Maya played
a silly game in her web
of illusion, when she made
me look younger
than I am and you older.

I know that the body
can know things
that the mind cannot accept,

and when the mind resists
the body, it becomes a headache
that will not go away.

Please forgive my touch.
Sometimes my body forgets
that we are not lovers.

It is our Taurus moons
that orbit each other
with the magnetic pull
of the touch
we have been longing for
all our lives.

I'm a Fool for Love

I dream of ants caught
in a mechanical maze,
and she says, "I'm not
interested in you."

The astrologer says
we're made for each other.
She is what I'm looking for, and
I am the same to her,
and it sure seems that way.

We hike to secret
canyons, swim in hidden
pools, and massage
each other under flickering
cottonwoods.

I read into her willing
smile that she enjoys
the same throb
in her heart,

but she says she doesn't.
I think she is fooling
herself, and maybe she needs
convincing, so I write
her seven poems.

I stubbornly plod
down the same path
from my mother's house.

She says, "How sweet.
You should have a girlfriend.
She would love your poetry.
How could a girl not."

In deed, how could a girl not.
It's beginning to sound and feel
familiar, and I dream of ants
plodding through a mechanical maze,
but the name and face is different,
and I'm a fool for love,
so I write her another poem.

Lost in a web on a Full Moon

To erase the memory
of a lost love she buried
the feelings of her body
in a pot fog.

When I came to awaken
her from that bog
the reason for her forgetting
had been forgotten.

Imprisonment in relationship
had worn her ragged.
so, she left men
for the company of women,
and found unchanged the lock.

I found her another sleeping
angel to be awakened,
but she says she doesn't want to.
So, I sat at a cafe
waiting for guidance.

In the company of a lesbian couple
with eyes only for her,
a young woman strutted in,
hips a-sway,
with the kind of body
that silenced conversation.

She teetered heel to toe
on black stilettos
contemplating the menu.

A seam rose behind the curve
of her blackened legs
like columns of the Parthenon
to meet her zipper
which was impeccably
positioned down the cleft
of her ass.

When she ordered,
the boy at the counter stuttered
over her tight, tight blouse
that barely covered her
bras-less perky nipples.

When she leaned on the counter
her short, short skirt
rose high up her perfect thighs,
and an inaudible sigh
rose up in unison
in the back of the throat
of everyone there.

The moon of her belly
waxed and waned
with her breath.
My knees shook,
and I thought of the six
months since my last
love dance.

It was so simple.
We are such suckers
for a pretty face
and a tight body.
Who cares what's inside?

Walking with the Lioness

My loneliness covers me
like a familiar blanket.
There have been times
like this, when I held on
only by a thin gray line
on white, white paper.

It is some comfort to think
life is a river,
and we are rocks
being worn to sand.

I know men are long and sharp,
and women are smooth and round.
When placed together gracefully
there is nothing more beautiful.

She hangs out
catching a rub from guys
pretending to be
massage therapists
to cop a lonely feel.

She thinks she doesn't want
a man that gives a damn.
She just wants them to touch
her, and leave her alone.

My mother never weaned
herself from that lonely
bottle.

I want to love her
like no man has ever,
but she wants a mate
with an image,
and I'm just a man.

She responds to my touch
like a snake to the sun,
but she thinks she's dead wood,
and I'll burn her to ash.

My body surrenders
to her touch,
and it doesn't matter
if I am a man
or a butterfly.

What difference does it make?
When I'm a man,
I want her.

I took her to a secret canyon
where I placed her on a smooth
alter of round rock,
before an amber pool
of desert scented water
seeping from a cleft
of stone.

If you are unlucky in love
as I am, you will have more lovers
than you can speak of
in one telling, and yet,
I think I can still have
true love.

I dreamt I led her family
patriarch down a coal seam,
and filibustered for her
freedom.

She is a sturdy woman who
artfully moves from her wide pelvis,
while her hands and eyes flutter
about the kitchen.
I see my young children
orbiting her hem.

My body wants her
to be the mother of my children,
but I see she is with
a woman warrior
in a battle against men,
and I don't much like just
being the sperm donor,
and paying monthly
for the honor.

I kneel at the alter of woman
to accept her sacrament,
and hope I'm not in for
yet another fantasy fuck.

My heart says, It's OK
to walk with the lioness,
but my mind says
I'll be eaten.

A Circle of Inflicted Wounds

We dropped her dog
at the vet
for a castration
while we lounged
by a pool in a canyon
massaging each other
beneath flickering
cottonwoods sounding
like rain in the dry wind.

A week later I took
her to my secret spot
along the cold Gila
river, camping with the dog.

Still licking his wounds
of betrayal he jumped
on her in the water,
and inflicted a similar injury.

Romantic dreams of lying
together under the bright
solstice full moon sky
were replaced by hours

in a one-doctor reservation
emergency-room, where the nurses
compared tattoos and told jokes
over the curtain, while the doctor
stitched up her pubis.

On the way back
she talked about ex-lovers,
and future possibilities.
I found myself missing
from the list.

I don't need no roller coaster
romance or Mary-go-round
love. I need a steady lady.

I don't need no
"I think I love you,
maybe I don't."

At home her ex-lesbian lover
doted on her while I cut up
a cold, wet watermelon.

I took her to a movie,
and her lover joined us,
and sat on her other side.

My car was on EMPTY,
but I spent my last buck
on her lover's ticket.

I see her seeking love
where it isn't offered,
or where it doesn't come
without hooks and glue.

Finding being with her
a one-way street,
I think of my mother,
and give up on filibustering
for love.

I choose to walk
down yet another avenue.

Bed Buddies

We have slept naked,
exchanged massages, and
talked all the chapters of our lives.
We have shared an honesty
of the body and the mind
that few lovers know,
and yet we have not
even kissed.

I know that your lovers
do not know your heart
or any part of your body
as well as I.

When I see that you don't
want me for your lover, I think
that I am less than
the despondent man you left
for an angry man,
the mechanic for a cowboy,
an engineer for an artist,
a business man for a rasta.

I regret the anger I feel
when I see you look for love
where it will never come,
and where it has always been
you will never receive.

But, I know I'm only angry
with my mother
who never knew how to give
the love she so desperately needed.

I want to thank you for the blessing
of the love you so freely gave,
and I accept now that
we just didn't share
the passion of lovers.
But, we are more than that
we are friends.

Apollo and Daphne

I dreamt I had become the sun,
and you were a wild iris, that
rose out of the soil awakened
by early spring rain and
my warm, bright days.

A tall stalk,
pale and slender
with a gentle nod
and a ripple of silk
the color of dawn.

You waved in the breeze
like smoke.

Holding a single blade
you wilted easily before my heat.
I wanted to pile
moist black earth
against your fleshy bulb.

But, you would have none
of that, as you put out
yet another flourish.

So, I became the ocean,
and you were kelp, with
long ribbons streaming
like Pele's golden hair

below churning surf
with buoyant bladders
streaming bubbles that
danced in my amber light.

You let go and washed ashore
to become a cloud,
so I became the wind.

I shaped and molded
you into many faces.
I pulled and remade
you, time and again.

I pushed you against mountains,
and you became black
and fell gorging dry washes.

But, I couldn't let you go,
so I became the dark, dark Earth,
and you a river winding
through my broad valley.

I contained you,
but you eroded my banks,
and churned me into
a thick, brown slurry
that you left in crescents,

where you became a tree
rooted deep into me,
and wild irises bloomed
in my black, black mud.

The Web

Melting Amber at the Tucson Poetry Festival

My first sight of you
in that crowd of people
was the thick rope
of your amber braid,

With streaks of world weary gray,
it was captured under your gold
Ethiopian cap, and hung
down your thick corduroy jacket.
Your army fatigues sagged
over black laced high-top boots.

When you turned to face
me, I stood dumb
by the dark beauty
of your heroically lined face
that told me the years of revolution
had worn smooth
the hard lines of your heart.

Years later, at Allison Deming's
early Sunday morning session
I was just about to introduce
myself to the others when you entered.

The dark wisp of your hair
swayed for that moment
while you pondered
your interruption.

I was stunned
in awkward silence
by the pink mottle
of acne scars that
only made you
more beautiful.

Our eyes met,
and in that moment
we told each other
of our mutual lust.

Later, I saw you with a man,
and by the proud feather
that peacock wore,
I could tell you were lovers.

a Detour on the Road to Troy

Warm tropical winds blew,
in the Spring, when I was young.
I longed for my beloved,
and set out for Little Rock

to find that beauty,
that goat herder
with thick black curls,
a tiny waist and a body
speckled with freckles.

That Alabama accent
that melted my mind
into corn mush.

When the paint brushes
bloomed, my truck broke
down in Dallas, and
I landed in the dark eyes
of a woman who mistook me
for a prophet.

I mistook her for my beloved,
and standing ankle deep
in the mud of confusion
we made love in the rain.

Lightning branched
into tongues of fire while
I held her round ass
in my palms, and her thighs
embraced my waist.

Black snakes writhed
over her young breasts,
and the rain ran into rivers
down her tiny brown body.

We made love
like we were lions
and the other was prey.

At the dusk of sleep
I slipped inside her skin,
and felt the quiver
of young breasts
drunk by a gypsy's lips.

I longed for my beloved,
when warm tropical winds blew,
and the paint brushes bloomed.

The River Styx
in memory of Derrick

The day Derrick died
Monsoons built clouds
that dwarfed our 10 thousand
foot mountains, and my finger
tips touched a woman's in the exchange
of money and a smile.

I saw a ring on her finger,
and tried to make nothing
of it, but wondered
how it is that we bind ourselves
to one person who later will
have us thrown in jail?

White mountains spread out into gray ranges.
The power company turned off my house.
Afternoon turned black,
and rain fell turning streets into rivers.
Trucks plowed and dumpsters floated by.

I opened all my windows and doors
to let the heat spill out, and regretted
that air-conditioning did not run on gas.

Kalika said, Derrick died, morphine murdered.
Rain fell heavy, and thunder snapped
in a burst of bliss that turned
a tree into burnt wood and splinter.

My lover paged me to pleasure her
for two hours after a walk along a dry river
that had turned to moving mud.
A large owl flew up in our faces,
and crossed over the bright moon.

I brought posole and a fat
slice of four grain.
She is a twig I'm afraid I will snap,
but she is hard wood.

Mortar and Pestle

Bisbee

The morning after I ignored
the flame of your body
you asked me if I'd ever
had too much love.

For nine months I studied
the secrets of your body
like an alchemist seeking
the philosopher's stone.
But, no amount of rubbing
would turn your lead into gold.

Two dozen wounded women
flipped through my mind,
and I realized my sad choices
met their hopeless longing.

I've whittled on this stone
for 25 years, but it seems like
rain wearing a mountain
to a sandy plane.

Even though I change myself
the world doesn't seem to.
No amount of rubbing
turns their lead into gold.

Your question left me
feeling like Charon
in a lonely wooden boat
on a dark, dark sea.

Mating Lenses

from Adrienne Rich's "Stepping Backward"

When we met your life
was an old shack
that wreaked of a man
like stale spice cake.

It was the familiarity
you wouldn't let go of.

I was an artesian well
flooding green rice paddies
That laid over lazy
with fat grain.

I heaped wild
rice on the spice
cake, and interpreted your life.

It was the Royal Cambodian
family's rosette stone
set in rainbow type.

We made love
in the thick, black mud
of flooded paddies.

I thought you would bind
the wound of my loneliness
but your need for aloneness
caused an infection.

I brought you to the garden
of Eden, but you could not eat
from all the betrayal,
rape, and violence a drunken
father, a philandering husband
and a stranger could make.

When I think of me in love
I wake against the crescent
of you, and leave and come back,
and leave throughout the day.

And, you go and come,
and go and return
punctuated by a touch,
a smile, then I lay down
against the crescent of you.

With cracked and chipped
mirrors we reflect the
prismatic colors of selves
at odds with what we hoped
would become familiar.

So, when I say good-bye
I part with the pauses
that bracket what has become us.

I say good-bye to that reluctance
that has become your greeting,
and that carefully tended
separateness that has become
your mission statement.

The pot of tea
I thought we'd share
often has become
an offering in a temple
to coffee attended
by strangers.

So, I step back
from the simple temple
I thought would be us.

This morning I saw a middle-aged
couple walking to the Country Fair.
Their gates matched
in the way mating lenses
are ground together
until not even a wave-
length of light can part them.

An optician will match
the glass for a mating-pair
of lenses so that one
will not wear away
the other without
itself being conformed.

I wonder if I'm just
too soft a glass.
Too yielding,
for us to be
a mating pair,

Because you hold
too firmly to the mountains
and valleys of your life to grind
them against mine
into a uniform curve.

Without grinding,
two scratched glasses
are only a foggy aperture
through which to see the world.

With a matched pair
of lenses one can see far,
or the very near.

**The Truth or Consequences
of a Full Moon Christmas**

We left Tucson with it's frantic
mid-afternoon cappuccino jitters
from last minute Christmas shopping
for our last Gemini journey.

A white blanket hung
over the belly of the mountain,
Pregnant Woman Resting.

It followed us to the round
Pinaleños etched gleaming
white against dark shadows
by the late afternoon sun.

A lean silence hung
between us.

Hungry hawks, waiting
for fresh road-kill, sat
on yuccas bowed lazy
from cold winter.

The sun set in lavender veils
over Dos Cabezas nestled
in the jagged teeth
of the Chiricahuas,

Where we met
at a shaman's funeral.

A huge red moon rose full
over the low curve
of silhouetted mountains
that reclined
against the horizon.

It was blood red
like the eclipsed
moon we made love
under in a desert
canyon on the bank
of a monsoon swollen pond.

I had been too busy
to accept the eclipse
that had settled between us,
when she had asked,
“What are we doing?”
and I had said,
“I thought we were doing love.”

Bright stars rose over dark
hills and drifted, then
meteored passed on a black ribbon
that twisted through
full, mesquite lined sienegas
and glistening wet playas
covered with brown tuft-grass.

Water and its words
and states wove
us together and
had eroded us.

In Truth or Consequences
we sat in cement tubs,
overflowing with steaming-hot
spring-water trying to shore
up the erosion on Christmas eve.

The moon glared bone-white
through wisps of ancient hair
and shimmered on the rickets
of the Rio Grande.

Accepting duality, Christmas day,
we soaked in hot bubbles rising
from rock lined pools
on the bank of the little Jemez creek
in Bodhi Mondala's Zen garden.

Boxing day the sun rose
late over vermilion
and ochre cliffs
illuminating brilliant patches
of snow lying against talus slopes.

An offering was made
to the competition.

In his mother's kitchen,
Scott Momaday fed us
the pasole of "the night before
the execution of the mad dog
at Gobernador."

Mid-week, mid-journey, mid-life.
Gila Wilderness hot springs
leaked steam, like a mad dog,
through ice crusted creeks
below the Seven Sacred Caves.

At Faywood,
in private tubs
of steaming sunrise,
lavender brightened into
peach capped breakers
on a Caribbean sea,
while gold blossomed
on the horizon
between dark breasts.

It was New Years eve.
The end of a year together.
The last journey.
The last meshed dreams.

Joan of Arc

We met in the spring,
When warm tropical winds blew,
Bringing out the
Sweet sex of orange blossoms.

When warm tropical winds blew,
She was everywhere I went,
Sweet sex of orange blossoms,
And we stalked each other.

She was everywhere I went.
We fell in love naked as children,
And we stalked each other
Playing water polo at a potluck.

We fell in love naked as children.
She hid her tall grace in baggy men's clothes,
Playing water polo at a potluck,
Leading the intent against industrial atrocities.

She hid her tall grace in baggy men's clothes,
resisting corporate monoliths,
Leading the intent against industrial atrocities.
Falling in love terrified her.

Resisting corporate monoliths,
She reveled in her power over men.
Falling in love terrified her,
So she had sex with many.

She reveled in her power over men,
A Mata Hari for the Earth,
She had sex with many
Driven stupid by their desire.

A Mata Hari for the Earth.
I found one long, black memory clinging.
Driven stupid by my desire.
We met in the spring.

Mating Lenses

Form and Function

a mud swallow dabs mud
into an upturned pot
where she lays her eggs.

a poet arranges words
on an upturned page
where he fixes his mind.

A Dark Sphere Rests Upon a Crescent Light

Black bronze Kali danced
upon Shiva's chest behind
candles at Elizabeth's party.

The quarter moon made
a juvenile cottonwood shiver
before a sphere of women
supported by a crescent of men.

We honored her with a foot-bath,
and candles lit while poetry was read
for her summer solstice birthday.

I massaged her hand while we were
serenaded by sirens and howling dogs.
Cicadas chirped beneath drug
smuggler hunting helicopters.

Nectar sucking bats swoop
drunkenly into saguaro blossoms.
Flurries of monarch butterflies
bury eucalyptus groves.
Round women and angular men
dance Major Lingo.

Mars in Taurus and Venus in Virgo

Mars lay bruised and beaten
from endless battles with man and nature,
when Venus found him laying
in a field of stubble wheat.

He was Red Sand, grain and grit.
He was man and beast.

She was the moon dancing
on the bank of desert pools.
She was a nun in white,
and he was a red monk.

She walked across his back.
Her toes scribed circles in his flesh.
She pressed her elbows into the hollows
of his buttocks and her knees into his quads.
She traced the ripple of his spine.

He was Red Cliff and ancient alluvium.
His meridians returned to gentle flow.
She pressed her body against the lever of his,
and rocked him on his sacrum.
She turned him like soil in her garden.

She ran her fingers down his ripple and wave.
Traversing contours he had become Red Clay.
She plowed and disked,
rolled and tapped, needed and cupped.
He became Red Mud.

Then she said, "Pleasure me."

He was Mars in Taurus, and
she was Venus in Virgo.
His toe caressed her instep,
and his finger tips
touched her neck.
He held her hips against his
as a wave propagated across
his body and through her.

They were hog backs
of curving sedimentary rock.
They were wave
upon slow moving wave.

Shaman Woman

I first saw her drumming
Around the night fire
At Christmas Star.
An African shaman
Beating out a spell.

Fire glinted off sweat
On her powerful arms,
And glowed in amber eggs
Nestled between her full breasts.
White carry shells embracing
Her round hips kept
A hissing rhythm.

I smiled at her power
Over men, and followed
The call of the desert's
Night silence.

I wrapped myself
In the sky's radiant robe,
While the distant camp throbbed
With the magic she wove.

Her spell was spent
As the morning star jewel rose.
Dawn brought me to my knees,
And her to the Bedouin tent.

She shape shifted as I bowed
To topaz on the horizon.

Later, we past on the path.
The sun exposed
Her blond vulnerability.

I sat before a circle
Of those seeking a healing.
With grace on my fingers
I touched one tired soul,
Found it was her, and knew
Spirit had opened
Another path to the heart.

Retrograde

We met at the Rialto
dancing contact to electric blues
the way I knew we'd make love.
It was the renovated theater
where, as a boy, I bought quarter
movies and dime candy bars.

She's a face painter,
but I have no face.

It was a hot day,
Mercury was retrograde,
and the moon void of course
when we aborted a drive
up the Mountain
because my beater
broke down.

A raven tipped its wing
at my radiator.
At the flash of black
she said, "What's that?"

I was being flogged by my boss
because of a mis-
understanding,
so I said, "Ouch!
Well, I'm not much
for the manicured lawns
of corporate America anyway.

I guess I'll just rattle a few cages
before they send me back to howl
in the bush where I belong.

You can just tell them,
"It's the heat and the natives.
It gets to all of them."

It's not really that I've gone feral,
I'm one of the natives just wearing
pants for the boss-man.

I was born under
a retrograde Mercury,
and a Saturn apposed Mars.

Fire in Wildcat Canyon

It had been a moon
Since we last danced,
So I left my home
On a hot summer morning.

The valley was covered
In the gray haze
From forest fires
In my red streaked mountains.

Along the way
I passed stretches of scorched
Desert With shriveled saguaros.
The entire Southwest was ablaze,
And I courted a shaman
Who lived in Wildcat Canyon.

I arrived at midnight
To find the ridge ablaze
With orange and yellow flames
Leaping from tall pines.

I massaged juniper scented
Oil into her golden body,
And she wiped the road-
Weariness from mine.

Sunrise brought
A yellow fog
Over the canyon.

To tempt the flames,
We ignored the fire
Break to watch a brigade
Of planes bomb the burn
with large buckets.

Three days, adrift
In a sea of dry, brown
Wheat, we watched the fire
draw closer. Finally the brigade
And wind drove it to the other side.

For the fire's wake,
We rode bikes to the break,
And danced naked
On black ash
And charcoal trees.

Rotations of Rosaries

In memory of Arjan

The day Arjan fell from the sky
into Box Canyon, I dreamt
I flew soaring loops
around the Bay Area,
using my will for a rudder.

After his memorial,
in a field of desert poppies,
I fed you soup, and made love
to you like a pilgrim on Shiva
Ratry, then we fell asleep,

I dreamt your thigh
had become a field fallow
with yellow wild
flowers, and five white
rabbits with pointed
ears nibbled.

It was your back
that became a river
with fat trout swimming lazy
under flat rocks.

Your hip was a harrow's
disc turning over black
soil, and I wore your dark
mud, a mantle upon my altar.

Outside rain fell like the flood,
and I found I could regulate
it from my dreams.

I awoke to find your body
wore the gold of dawn-
gracefully as silk.

Reaching for metal
my tongue counted
the rosary of your skin,

and I cleansed myself
in the pool of your belly-
that rose like tide
on ancient worlds.

A Flash Flood Come to Rest

On a moonless night
I took my goddess to a dry
canyon where coatimundi
fractured into a dozen
innocent eyes and danced
like water flowing up hill.

We lay our blanket,
mid-wash, on dry
sand, for love-making
under black cottonwoods,
beneath a dark
sky, glistening
with stars.

Summer monsoons flashed
in the mountains and echoed
rippling over our bodies
and down canyon walls.

In post orgasmic silence
we heard him coming
in the rustling of wind
through unmoving trees,

that turned into stampeding
of invisible deer, and became
brown foam twisting
over dry boulders as
he danced into a blackened
pool wearing stars on her skin.

They surged and swayed
against the sand.

The Bull and The Raven Dancing

She was dry like cracked
wheat and a raven's wing.
She was sinew and sand,
roots and tarot.

He was hot water and bile,
sweat and sweet potatoes.
He was tongue and fingers,
lace and liver.

They were wet clay.

The knotted toll-rope slipped
through his fingers
like wet sinew,
when the bell rang loud.

She was wracked
with resonant spasms
by the touch of Taurus,
and rang like a bell
that had waited decades
for the toll.

Her fingers fluttered like
wing-tip feathers on a black,
black night.

His round back heaved
as he bellowed.

He was mud under her fingernails,
and she was a spider's web.

They danced improvisations
of feathers and hide until 2 AM,
when the bull and the raven
met on a moonless night.

Preface

The morning sun gleamed
through late monsoon clouds
like rippled silk in gold
draped over the Pregnant
Sleeping Woman, Resting.

Mist from soggy desert
drifted into her crevices,
and I thought of water dripping
from a cleft in granite.

I drove glimmering streets
that struck at her heels,
and remembered a pool
and a cottonwood rooted

into sand and rock,
and my lover lying
on curved stone that twisted
like sinew and water.

The Sun made tiny rainbows
in the water beaded
in her vertebral dimples.

We ate ripe mangos
in the sun, and bathed
naked in pools of clear water
splashing over smooth rocks.

Salmon Boy

A Holographic Universe

Drop, window of river
Grain of sand reflects mountain
Leaf, forest hologram.

Awakening to my Feelings

Falling to my knees
in snow and ice
cracked open
the encrusted shell of my fear.

That emerging embryo
quivered
in the blazing sun
of tears, terror and rage.

I wanted to yell
that jagged pain
out from the deep
black tar of my belly.

But, fear's yellow mustard
lay coiled
at the base of my spine
constricting my viscera.

In my fright
it snaps up my back
and grasps my tongue
in its toothy grin.

Red salt, metal blood
floods my dry white mouth
and leaves me the fool
one more time.

Snake Dreams

Struggling with the demon
I spent a decade in austerities.
I took cold showers,
Ate no meat,
No refined, preserved, colored
Or processed foods.

Fasted for weeks.
Ate raw food.
Lost seventy five pounds.
Meditated at sunrise and sunset
Abstained from sex, speech, sleep
and intoxicants.

Still, the demon
Tracked me down.
She lived in the stone
Of the shame of childhood abuses
That pressed against my heart.

Her domain was my dreams.
She took many forms.
Sometimes as a witch or tiger
She tore at my flesh
With long sharp nails and fangs.
Most often she was a snake.

I suffered many deaths in my dreams.
The first death was by the prick
Of a thousand fangs
Buried into my flesh
From a nest
Of baby water snakes.

In each dream
The snakes became bigger.

The last snake
Was as big as a house
Pink with turquoise eyes.
She slithered faster than I could run.

Cornered on a small tongue of land
Surrounded by water,
Her element,
She came to devour me.

I sat in meditation.
She came down on me,
Her hot breath on my ears.

I remained resigned to my fate,
And one pointed on luminosity.
I flew from her jaws
To the company
Of my teacher, in the desert.

We walked down a dirt road
Through a forest of Cholla.
Pointing at a clump
He said, "You must care
For your snake."

She was a happy little rattle
Snake in a doll house
Watching TV
From a lounge chair.

Ghost Dancing on the Edge of Absolute Zero

They broke the tree in two
and gave it to me to carry,
a gift of peace
to the white conqueror.

Assembled mortise
and tenon, and held
together with a peg.
I slung it over my shoulder
with a silk rainbow.

The burden was light.

My medicine bundle
became the tree of life
polished to amber
by centuries
of reverent touch

by people numerous as stars.

I bowed to Spirit
as a line of the dead,
like children for hard
candy, passed to touch
the tree

one last time.

On my way to therapy,
sanding from splinter
to strata of grain,
I passed the house of the woman
I would have lived with

all these years.

She would have had my children
if I could have overcome
my inherited shame.

Sawdust drifts about my feet
like deep snow.

She remains with the father
of her children

because they are that way.

The chill in my heart
reminded me of a place
where on a winter's night
only liquid helium flows
from contraction cracked
oxygen glaciers.

And, the blackness is split
by starlight powered
helium fountains
erupting from frozen
nitrogen caldera.

It is the Milky Way
that brings a brief
summer to melting
hydrogen icicles.

Mars Dives into Venus Pools

In my tiny, ground floor,
inner-city apartment
that I shared with my wife
and new-born daughter I dreamt

I was a young Azteca sitting vigilant
for many days of fasting,
chanting and wakefulness.
Striving for spiritual illumination,
I conquered my material needs.

One pointed on my destination
my mind was poised, life-times lay
suspended before me.
Gathering power, I inhaled
the worlds through my finger tips.

Reaching out with every fiber
of my destiny, I sprang
off the high cliff. Arching
my young body, I dove
gracefully, determinedly
to Venus crashing below.

I pierced the surf, and
transformed into the liquid
power of salmon, free
to streak through the water.

Many creatures joined me
along the fertile ocean currents
in our mass seasonal migration
to the rich Arctic waters
of the far north.

Everything and Nothing

The Mother's Gift

a long time ago,
on one full moon night,
I had a dream.

Facing south, my footsteps
traced the path of the pilgrim.

We walked a dark path
up a black volcanic cliff
to her cave.

Others brought little gifts
of shining black stones
and small brightly colored boxes.

Standing in her cave,
surrounded by many gifts,
her black eyes touched
me with a smile.

Feeling like a neglectful son
on his mothers forgotten birthday,
I said,

“Forgive me Mother,
the only gift I have to offer
is myself.”

Smiling, she gently held me
in her palm like a small
and precious gift.

She extended her hand
from her heart,
and released me.

I fell from her loving safety
like a bubble drifting
effortlessly
to the sea raging
against the rocks below.

Coming to rest
I became formless
sea foam and limitless ocean.

La Corpa Dia
(My Body)
for Rumi

At my birth, time and space began.
When I choose to cease my existence,
time and space will end.
Space is the extent of my body.
Time is the span of my life.

I am everything,
Space, Time, Light and Gravity.
Nothing has come into existence
except through me.
There is nothing that is not me.
I am all that is,
and all that will ever be.

Beyond the death of this body
I alone will exist.

The cells of my body
are galactic clusters
made up of sub-atomic solar systems.
The expansion of galaxies
is like the blossoming of flowers,
and supernova are like shooting stars.
To me, the Human life span
is as brief as the sub-atomic particle's.

I am consciousness.
There is nothing in my body
I am not conscious of.
My consciousness pervades
even to the smallest particle.

I am the silent ocean.
I am darkness waiting
endlessly to embrace you
wholly.

Bottomless and with no shore.
In me, you will have no foothold,
and no place to grasp.
I will embrace you
totally.

If you struggle against me
you will only become exhausted.
I will hold you up,
and when you reach for
the density of Earth
I will not hold you
back.

I am yielding.
When you come out of me
I will fall away,
brooding your inevitable
return.

I am the pull of emptiness.

Many Windows into a Holographic Universe
for Alice Di Micele

A constellation of mercury
lay beaded on a flagstone floor.

Just as a star is a hologram
of the Universe,
so we are all holographic
projections of the One.

A galaxy of face-painted people,
and women with bare painted
breasts, whirled through the grove
of the Country Fair.

The leaf is a holographic
fragment of the forest.

Each fragment of a shattered
hologram contains
the entire image
from the perspective
of the fragment.

A drop is a window
into the river.

Alice sang of Universal love,
and social and environmental
responsibility as a river of light,
over her shoulder, flickered
through the trees.

A river of humanity flowed
under the tree-covered
Oregon Country Fair.

Men, women and children
showered and saunaed together,
and Alice sang "Naked."

A grain of sand
reflects the mountain.

Beads of liquid silver rejoin,
gradually, unaffected
by the rough stone floor.

Rain.
Man Dreaming Eagle, Dreaming Salmon,
Dreaming Woman
before dams and canneries

Released from the prison of density
I embraced the freedom of wind.
Arching my body in tight turns
Around cumulous mountains,
I flew through streaking cirrus,
And circled crystalline showers
Of water and ice.

Called back to my cell
I drifted down to the rolling ocean,
And dove into a joyful harbor
Where men and women danced and played.

My rainbow came to rest
On shining Salmon Woman
As she was scooped into a hoop net.

She is Sea Buffalo.
Born in the trickle
Of high mountain creeks,
To graze in liquid meadows,
She was carried out to sea.

Along warm ocean currents
She swam for years.

In the rivers
Spirit of Rain roars
Through thundering falls
Calling her back
To the laughing waters
To spawn only once.

And, me called back
from my rainbow body,
swimming in rivers of stars,
by a cry in the wilderness.

a Toad Hunter's Night in the Tortalitas

Cicadas call the rain
with their incessant chatter.
Monsoons build mountains
on the flashing horizon.
Wind tears at trees,
Lightning leaps to Earth,
rain screams, and thick water
foams down empty washes

waking the toads from their dreams.

Jacks race my lights,
leading me to them.

Avoiding amber tarantulas,
transparent scorpions
and night hunting rattlers,
I find them sitting in the bright
moonlight like malachite stones
leaning into the creosote scented wind,
chanting.

I hunt them for their medicine,
which they carry in sacks
like flabby armor.

Bats dart through the cool
night breeze over blackened
ponds with rain driven
concentric waves shattering
lightning reflections.

Coyotes laugh and giggle nearby
while I gently milk the toads.

I was born here,
between these four mountains,
between these two rivers.
I rose up out of this earth.
This is the center of my world,
my holy land.

Mesa Land

Chaco Canyon, Poetry of Homage for Joy Harjo

Mesas like tall ships jut
From this undulating plain
To touch the white feathers
And hishi of the sky's sacred
turquoise robe.

Salmon dawns and dusks rain
Down on white capped mountains
Sending deer and antelope
To dance over shoals of silver-gray sage.

Great cloud-mountains drift
Like icebergs dragging
Nets of rain
Past island-mesas.

Rose colored stone cut
Like cake, stacked in cords,
And scuttled
On the reefs of time,
Sink into red dust.

A blood-red road snakes
Through the cresting waves
Of a yellow-green sea of grass.
A scar gouged into a soft cheek.

Burying the Shaman

In memory of Roger

A few puffs of down
floated across a lapis sea
sky washed clean by three days
of southern spring rain.

Paradise lay at the feet
of Silver Peak gleaming
with late snow.

A Cathedral of jagged red cliffs
erupt from this fallen valley
of Cave Creek. Where
a river of life flows
through sacred sycamores,

that shin silver in the bright
warm sun, filtered through
a malachite blanket of new
leafed cottonwoods.

The Shaman's twelve apostles
bore his ash through cedar
and juniper medicine-
scented trails to his rocky
pool below jutting alters
where I rang the bell,

and chanted the spell
for a blessing
attended by whirling
starlings, and anointed
by sudden rain.

Dreaming a Dead Friend on a Silent Centipede
In memory of Roger

We were stretched out
like pouncing cats
hunched over the handle bars
of our spindly racing bikes.

Gray-lavender hung over
the crisp wisp of dawn
that clung to our wet faces.

The long segmented body
of our pace-line rippled
down the bent ribbon
of a county road that twisted
through Mesquite basques.

Our derailleurs kept up their
whispering chant to the silent
swirling cadence of our legs
and long even breath.

The glistening hump
of my dead friend
heaved before me.
His breath beat a rhythm
of effort that was his vocation.

I gripped my drops,
and hung onto the tail
of that silent centipede
for a morning jaunt.

Magnetic Pilgrimage
for Alison Hawthorne Deming

On a dark moon,
after Tucson's Magnetic
Poetry Festival, when the pollen
count left my lungs feeling as fragile
as butterfly wings,

I read Deming's "Monarchs."
She said they carry a fleck
of magnetite for a compass
in their heads.

They migrate to a mountain
in Mexico that is a remnant
of a nickel/iron meteor
that is now a magnetic
anomaly that butterflies nibble
at for guidance,

then they fly to the North Pole,
driven by their magnetic appetite,
until it's too cold
for them to fly,
so they turn South
back to their meteor mountain,
the southern pole
of their world
of magnetic migration.

I thought about their journey
taking several lifetimes
like our migration from solid
to spirit, and I remembered leaving
Krishna Murti preaching
in his oak grove in Ojai
Twenty two years ago
on my first pilgrimage
to San Francisco.

I was stopped
by a blizzard in Big Sur
where thick flakes
of monarch snow
fell in a eucalyptus grove.

Black and yellow drifts
obscured the path, and
countless wings beat a wind
that drowned out the sound
of the sea.

Dawn in the Kitchen

Have you ever listened
to the water boil
in a kettle
on the stove?

A coil glowing orange
peeks from underneath
a silver pot, rattling.
Or, maybe its the whisper

from a blue and orange
flame hugging the pot.
Water vapor condenses
from the flame
on the silver sides.

Have you ever listened
to the water boil?

Dawn sets flame
to the golden tips
of pine outside
cartographic windows.

A black wood-stove crouches
against the wall murmuring.

The sound of water approaching
its boil uncoils
from an old porcelain kettle.

It begins with an almost imperceptible
vibration, to an urgent rattle
that suddenly quiets
before a hiss of steam

leaps out of its upturned mouth
forming a cumulous below ancient
kitchen utensils slung
below rough cut rafters.

Have you ever listened
to the water boil?

Returning

Bodhisatva, for Sherman Alexie

When you are billions
of years old
what is that fragment
of a moment we call
a life time?

The dust of my bones
blanket the planet
from tens of thousands
of life times,
and you say I am not
one of your people
because this body
carries the blood
of the conqueror.

How do you know
that on some good day
to die, your cavalry
bullet did not pierce
my war shirt, and
my blood did not soak
into the red, red earth
as I lay on the sweetgrass?

When you are all of space
what is that speck of dust
called a human body?
What is that cluster
of particles we call
clan, race, gender, species?

I have felt the fullness
of man inside of me
and given birth and death.

My skin has blistered
in the fire of the stake,
and I have lain in heaps
of bodies in large pits
under fresh snow.

The greed of humans
knows no end,
but as many times
as you strip my soul
from its temporary home
I shall return.

**the Five Elements of Blossoming
for Kabir**

“Love is the only
thing of value
in this world,” says Kabir.

Dry July winds
blew across
dead cotton fields,

and I slept lonely nights,
frozen in a crystal
matrix of hard lines.

A vast emptiness
echoed inside, where
there was nothing,

not even crisp seeds
to grate against
a brittle skin.

At the end of my road
I slept on a ledge
above high tide,

beneath an ocean
of stars that reached
out and touched me.

They sang all night,
“love is the only
thing of value.”

Monsoon rains fell diluting
the fire left in desert rocks
by the summer sun.

I sought peace and quiet
in the roar and whine
of the late-night city,

and found it, inside,
like melting snow.

A stream of glacial milk
glistened down the center
of the peaceful valley of my mind.

Light shines
from that deep blackness.

Like liquid obsidian
I have grown fluid
and glassy smooth.

I send this wave rippling
across the sea to the hearts
of the few who know,

love is the only
thing of value
in this world.

Glossary

Absolute Zero, the theoretical temperature of -459.67°F at which all molecular movement ceases.

Caliche, a hard rock-like formation of clay and calcium carbonate that makes the soils of the Sanora desert hard as cement when dry, and slimy when wet.

Carry Shells, a shell from Africa commonly used for adornment and associated to the Goddess.

Creosote, Chaparral, or more properly known as Greasewood, is a yellow green bush that grows throughout the Sanora desert and other places in the southwestern United States, and northern Mexico. Creosote has a smell that the bush releases profusely just prior to rain and is the distinct smell of Sanoran rain. It is a common herbal remedy used topically and internally primarily for its detoxification and antibiotic properties.

Dall, a culinary dish of India, made primarily of any one of a variety of split peas.

Five elements, from metaphysics and alchemy, the spiritual forces of nature, Earth, Air, Fire, Water and Ether.

Ghost Dancing, an ecstatic spiritual practice originating with the Paiute in the middle of the 19th century for the purpose of communing with the dead and the spirit world, specifically with one's ancestors.

Hishi, a Native American style of jewelry common to the tribes of the Four Corners of the Southwestern United States. It is made primarily from shell or turquoise that are cut into thin disks then strung and worn, usually as a necklace.

Kabir, a poet/saint of India equally revered by both Hindu and Islamic peoples.

Malla, a Hindu rosary.

Maya, an aspect of the Goddess in Hindu culture that is seen as both the creator of the physical world, and the spinner of illusion, confusion and dreams.

Pele, the Hawaiian Volcano Goddess and female Creator.

Pele's Hair, a formation of volcanic glass that is long hair-like fibers that are amber colored and called 'Pele's hair' because of their likeness to strands of hair.

Raita, a condiment of cucumbers and yogurt used to cool the spices in an Indian dish.

Salmon Woman, a deity of the Native tribes of the Pacific Northwestern United States. She is the spiritual power within salmon. The gift of sustenance.

Shakti, a female deity of Hinduism, specifically Shiva's heavenly consort. The spiritual power of Shiva. The name given to a man's consort in Tantra.

Shaman, an individual who acts as a medium between the physical world and the spirit world for the purposes of healing, divination, spiritual guidance and control over natural events and processes.

Shambu, a term of endearment for Shiva.

Shiva, A male God, one of three in the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Shiva is the God of destruction and the lord of the underworld and demons. Shiva has a female consort named Shakti. Shiva is also the name given to a woman's consort in the practice of Tantra.

Shiva Ratry, the high holy day for the Shiva cults of Hinduism. It is celebrated during the new moon when the sun is in Taurus.

Spider Woman, a spiritual deity of many of the native peoples of the Colorado plateau. She is the creator of this world. Her aspects are quite similar in many respects to Mother Maya in the Hindu culture.

Talik, the red dot on a Hindu woman's forehead indicating her marital status.

Tantra, Tantric, a Hindu cult that personifies the God and Goddess as one's self and one's consort. The metaphysical side of Hinduism and Buddhism, commonly typified by its incorporation of the sexual act into its religious practices. A practitioner of Tantra.

Tortalitas, a small range of dry, rugged mountains in the Sanora desert where toads and wild horses abound.