

She Says It This Way :

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts
with a
Major in Creative Writing
in the
College of Graduate Studies
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by
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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT THESIS

This thesis of Tara K. Howe, submitted for the degree of Master of Fine Arts with a Major in Creative Writing and titled “She Says It This Way :,” has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates below, is now granted to submit final copies to the College of Graduate Studies for approval.

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ABSTRACT

“She Says It This Way :” is a conversation in writing with the poetic work *She Says* by Vénus Khoury-Ghata and a simultaneous exploration in the essence of form. Forty-one-word paragraphs populate these pages in response to phrases from *She Says*. Amidst the paragraphs can be found written discussions of how form—while constructing and reinforcing aspects of consciousness—similarly constrains and frees the writer. “She Says It This Way :” began also as an experiment in allowing form to serve as a support structure that might recondition the mind/body post-trauma. The project evolved into a micro-memoir, compelled by multiple languages, becoming its own container from which to study the ways grammar, sound, rhythm and syntax are ancestral—become home / of the earth.

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I would like to thank my committee members for their time, insight and willingness to be present with my work, and for their own work in the environmental humanities which inspires, compels and supports those aspects of life and study I hold dear.

DEDICATION

For my boys, who birthed into me and through me,
and as result, helped me to define my own form.

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INTRODUCTION

I speak many languages.

English. French. Science. Earth. Womb. Death. Birth. Body. Drum.

Vénus Khoury-Ghata speaks these languages as well. And Arabic.

She is a Lebanese writer who moved to Paris. One of her collection of poems, *She Says*, written in French, has also been translated to English. I read through the English, go back to the French, and layers of worlds emerge through the nuanced meanings of both. In addition, her poetic discussion of the Arabic alphabet brings it to life as part of childhood places, mythical realms and a cultural-historical past. The music of the poetry is French, Arabic, romantic, and earthy all at once. It takes me back to the land I grew up in as a child, not because I grew up in Lebanon (I grew up in Canada), but because I grew up on the sidewalked borders of various cultures on a University campus with this kind of music in the air.

Just as the Ukrainian women and Chinese families we shared courtyards with in community housing filled the block with the hard and soft sounds alternating, so too did the rhythm of our Palestinian friends become a part of me. In the meantime, my schooling was taken in French, though English was the language at home.

“She Says It This Way :” began simply. I was in Brian Blanchfield’s nonfiction workshop and we were asked to keep a daybook; to enter into a type of conversation with the work of another writer and let it inform. I chose Vénus. Or she chose me. She had inhabited my psyche for some time.

I find myself not only gravitating to those who speak the same languages as I, but to those that speak multiple languages in general. To those who can see and taste the world through sound, consonant, the slip of a vowel. Consciousness reinforces its own malleability when a

person absorbs the sensation that there is not a single syntax or grammar, nor a single alphabet or rhythm: no singular set of rules to the construction of our world. Feeling the fluidity of language opens portals into a fluidity between worlds, between cultures, between even life and death, so that each set of rules demonstrates different freedoms and constraints.

One Austrian girl I met recently explained, “When I read, it is the language in which I am reading that I pay attention to. When I speak, it is usually in French; but when I dream, when I curse, when I come home to myself, it is in German. Still, the only language that explains my sexuality is English, because there’s no other word like *gay*.”

*

For me, the world Vénus Khoury-Ghata created in *She Says* was kindred. At the same time, I was thinking once again about what it is *to be constrained*. To *have* to fit into a shape. To conform to a way of being. What it is, when writing, to allow oneself submit to a particular form.

The idea of form arrived with positive and negative sensations. As a “Nonfiction Writer” in an English Fine Arts program, I found myself increasingly disillusioned by the academic process. I had spent a lifetime amassing experiences and writing them *through* me. My writing was rhythmical, what others often called experimental, but what I knew as embodied; of the earth and of my flesh. I had hoped to enter the academic model to pursue an even deeper conversation about the nature of language and consciousness in the classroom and with my peers. But often, the rawness of my words repulsed or frightened, sometimes threatened the carefully curated aesthetics of the “fine” arts. I reached a point in the second year of deep immersion into the study of English where I suddenly felt more foreign than ever in my native tongue.

Yet it is not fair to say that I did not know, on some level, this was coming. Part of my inclination to enter the academic world was to draw from it what I knew to be one of its strengths: refinement. As Carl Jung said, we are most free when we are utmost bound. I

sought constraint; a structure to push back against. Academia would refine my writing not because I agreed with its less-embodied nature, but as result of leaning hard into its repulsion in order find my own edges.

The poet Alexandra Teague is an explorer of this territory between flesh and form. She was the one to show me the container of any writing to be its own body. In her Techniques of Poetry class students strictly mimicked the wording, cadence, line break and conventions of the poets we read, creating imitations of particular poems in order to kinesthetically embody the poem. At least, this is how it presented itself for me.

“Assimilation of the Gypsies,” by poet Larry Levis, absorbed me through its architecture. One enters the poem through a photograph, where we see “In the background, a few shacks & overturned carts/And a gray sky holding the singular pallor of Lent” and proceeds to travel through time and space as result of the mechanical dynamics of the container. Permutation after permutation, we enter the minds of various towns people witnessing the execution of a young man, symbolic of the disappearing culture of the gypsies themselves, of a time and place that has already gone, yet the poet manages to hold up to the light for this pause. The experience could not be had in this particular manner if it were not for the inherent construct of the piece; the doorways and camera lenses are carefully placed to lead the reader through corridors of dimension(s). The imitation poem that issued forth from entering this form and adhering strictly to its guidelines was the only poem that could have come through me and into that space. The strictness of the adherence to Levis’ style in my own attempt to birth image is what taught me most about his methodology. By taking on another’s skin through word, I could FEEL the way form determined thought and expression.

The poet Andrew Grace, in his book *Sancta*, uses eighty-one-word prose poems to contain and explore the loss of his father. The individual poems have a terseness, almost a punctuality that provides surprising depth and layering. As the poems cumulatively create impact over the span of the book and body of the reader, a tenderness and vulnerability is

evoked. Not only is each poem its own body, but the collection itself becomes a body, the only type of body to say what had to be said.

The precision in phrase of both Andrew Grace and Vénus Khoury-Ghata combined with the expansive worlds they created in their collections compelled the development of this thesis. I would open to a random page in Khoury-Ghata's book, read through the poem until a fragment of text prompted visceral reaction, opening its own portal into my psyche, then use the form inspired by Grace—a 41-word paragraph—to birth creation into.

I had just turned 41 prior to beginning the exercise. Forty (days) is biblical. On the forty-first day, you arrive. Though I am not Christian, I spent time schooled in the Catholic system (where French was available) and I've spent a life in my own study of religion, working also as a Healing Arts practitioner, touching daily not just human flesh, but the interconnectedness of the universe. I have fasted and cleansed and binged and purged. The epic-ness of the forty-days in the desert is mirrored in vision-quests and rituals around the world. Journey, death (transformation), rebirth. I needed time in the desert. 41 words served as my forty (one) days, providing the confines of a structure meant for walking across uncharted, desiccated territory.

In my 41st year, as the template for my existence was no longer solid, neither was I. The immediate trauma that had consumed so much of my life was gone. There was a softness, something very amorphous and greatly needed for its lack of definition. But I reached the point where new shape was needed, new habits: a paradigm. I wondered how adhering to a strict, self-imposed form might contribute.

Life is mundane. And ethereal and existential and beautiful and awful.

And again, mundane.

After living with intense trauma for a long while, this mundane aspect of life is what can be hardest to contend with.

Forcing myself to write 41-word paragraphs was a lot like flossing my teeth.

There is no epic high or low in flossing, but there is satisfaction. And a purging.

I needed this in my world.

The practice also reconfirmed my love of the exploration of languages, of reality; of construct and consciousness.

I was drawn to these two collections, *She Says* and *Sancta*, because each evokes a state of existence between worlds. For Grace, it was the living and dead, the one-self prior to the loss of his father and the existence of an amorphous-self until he could become another (perhaps referring to his father and he both). Vénus Khoury-Ghata sang from the veil that is between living and dead as well and travelled further into the earth, women's knowledge, mythical processes, alphabets and sounds, borderlands of countries and cultures, all with a compelling drive to express in the formal structure of French as Arabic beat strongly beneath the surface. My paragraphs drew from the artists' creations and speak to me like womb rhythms pulsing beneath, pushing against the almost-sterile lines.

I wrote paragraphs because a nonfiction writer must have paragraphs. But the part of me that refused to be constrained allowed them to be "paragraphs" in the loosest sense of the word. Collections of sentences in a semi-square, in a single location that had familiarity, but was altered and bolstered, even deconstructed through syntax from other languages of my past.

Like its own science experiment, I began the project with the hypothesis that form might not only provide necessary shape to my world, but that it might put me back in conversation with the community of artists and academics from whom I felt exiled.

I have thought, since, that perhaps I should have written 41 paragraphs in addition to the 41 words of each. At the beginning of the project, I wondered if this is where it would go.

Benoit Mandelbrot, a mathematician who also bridged many languages and cultures, looked into the natural world and saw surface roughness as a formula. What others considered chaos, he observed, has a particular kind of order we now know as the Mandelbrot Set: a simple equation that takes into account the permutations of the infoldings and outfoldings that constitute roughness. An equation that uses simplicity to portray great complexity. Its own form. Mandelbrot's name became part of popular culture because of the images created by the visual representation of his formula: fractals.

When all was said and done with my project, I understood this in my own ways. In terms of fractals, there was the realization that I could go on and on creating these paragraphs, could let the surfacing memories related to Khoury-Ghata's words and Grace's form create an image composed of base elements (the paragraphs) that in its largeness became something of a magnificence. And I could have. But what was most important to me was the realization that this is what was happening. That by confining myself to this particular equation of 41 words, a recognizable structure did evolve. A structure that led me full-circle back into an appreciation of my earlier writings and an understanding of the way in which syntax and structure worked for me, as an artist, allowing me to further refine my writing by *pushing back against*.

The thesis is divided into four sections:

SECTION 1: CORSET

The imposition of form onto my soft body-psyche held great excitement; was new and informative, created support. Each paragraph in this section is in direct dialogue with Venus Khoury-Ghata's *She Says* compelled by specific phrases from her poems. (References to the specific phrases that launched each paragraph are included at the end of the thesis.) Simultaneously, there are insertions, inflections and assertions of longer prose pieces that contemplate meaning and the surfacing images, the nature of language.

SECTION 2: INTERPRETATION

I perform a small-scale literary analysis of my own work. The writing of the paragraphs began as a compelling and rejuvenating exercise, but once I brought them to class, the response to the paragraphs was two-fold: “I love this” AND “explain more!” Hence, my need to interpret rose-up, and like the deconstruction of Larry Levis or Andrew Grace I entered into in a techniques class, I attempt to offer a route into the experience of the bodies of three of my own paragraphs.

SECTION 3: D/EVOLUTION

At this point, I thought the experiment was a failure. That form could not help. Could not contain what I had hoped. Was not enough structure to bring me peace over the long haul. But it turned out that this period in the project, what I first called the “devolution,” my sense of needing to move away from the 41-word paragraph, was in fact an “evolution” as well. It was not a moving *away from*, rather a moving *through*.

SECTION 4: SYNTAX EARTH

The 41-word paragraphs served their purpose. My self-literary analysis provided another form of inquiry. The narrative necessity of falling apart in order to put back together even came at the right point in the story. And I found myself revisiting the way the earth is form. I started to come to terms with the fact that there is a solace in the human-generated forms of language and the particular constraints of institutions such as academia; that we can learn from and draw from these structures in ways that support us as humans, artists and leave the rest be. But I also found solace in the way that human-generated form is *not* enough. That I am continually called back to dialogue with the more-than-human earth. How human-generated language is ALSO a generation of the ancestral earth. How the myriad sounds and syntaxes of the earth have always provided the support, knowledge and structure I value most. Khoury-Ghata’s words were not only drawing me in through the multiplicity of human languages she sings, but because she too, evokes a deeper dialogue with the earth. In this final section, having moved through one form, I come back to myself in another. A prose style that uses rhythm, sound, poetics, lyricism and just plain paragraphs to observe the body and the earth.

When I began this thesis, there was the hope that form could help create new paradigms. There was also a rebelliousness in me that rose up, put on a corset and tied it as tight as possible just to prove a point. She was angry and in heated battle with herself. Constricting and railing against the shape she willingly tied herself into until she came to understand the way in which she was, in fact, swaddled, not tied. Of the ways we must allow ourselves to be constrained in order to make peace with the inherent constraints of the universe. Pushing up against boundaries both gives a sense of where that boundary exists, its nature and its reasons, but it gives the possibility of increasing the size and shape of the boundary as well. Like Mandelbrot's fractal representations of surface roughness, the deep dive into the intricacies of shape yield an astounding terrain that informs as result of its permutable existence.

“She Says It This Way :,” as a title, honors Vénus Khoury-Ghata's fundamental influence in this project. But also titling it such, I am affirming what Khoury-Ghata celebrates: the authority of each voice to speak. These voices, often unheard or ignored, from the earth, from women, from the womb, from the dead, that have every right to speak just as they are. I am affirming my own right to speak from the rhythms that flow through me, honoring their roots in the ancestral forms that created me.

SECTION 1: CORSET

The word corset is derived from the Old French word corps and the diminutive of body, which itself derives from corpus...

Full moon waning
 Blood gone, corset¹
 containing.

My spine has been crooked since I swung out of a tree.

As if I was the first monkey, or chimpanzee, and I fell to the ground, archangel beckoning. When I was in elementary school, I climbed a tree in the park across from our 76th avenue home, and as I gripped a branch above me to swing out and jump, I instead swung and cracked my tailbone on the stump of a limb removed, which catapulted me to the ground in such a state of white electric shock that I thought I was dying and said my first set of earnest goodbyes to the world. But then, upon not dying, stood up and went on. No longer the body I once was.

Today, and for the past week off and on, I've been wearing a corset and experimenting, not only with the length of time I can stand being bound, but also the resulting neurological sensations of sitting straight and tall. I used to have the time and take the time and not be a parent so did not feel guilty (at least not entirely) for having the time to go to the woods and bike for miles and hours until spent and returning for a beer and a gyro or an Ice treat. My spine, in addition to my limbs and my torso—my every fiber—was taut and capable of holding me upright. I did not collapse until after the birth of my third son and the marriage to his father.

I've been needing help to get upright again.

¹ Play on the notion of a “tercet,” here a body-shaped container for word. Corset definition above from Dictionary.com.

This corset is a light one, being, with plastic boning but quite solid and decidedly a corset, ordered from an online supplier specializing in this. It prevents a slouching in the gut and gives my nervous system constant suggestion of length and grace and style. Things I value, oddly, though I am quite raw, or have been. And so, without the endless hours of biking and hiking and camping and living with the woods, of instead being highly domesticated in a way that both serves and frightens, I find a societally constructed garment to contain and maintain and return to some way of prior being that I had in the trees.

I think about wounding. I read that Andy Warhol, after being shot, wore a corset. I feel better in this knowing. That another human, an artist, had also to turn to something more than himself to hold him up.

I think of wounding and how close it sounds to womb. How this has been my wounding. My entry point. My exit. My healing. My bane. My entire wisdom. And what it means to give it support. Protection. To hold in earnest. To hold at all.

I think of form. How the writing of this world is requiring form because it cannot yet be contained which is to say, there is no sense for others even though the beauty of a slug, say, is in its ooze and ability to understand the entire rhythm of its world through its fluid form.

Yet, how often ugly and unappealing to most is the slug and how there is no entry point for understanding its primordial rhythm unless a being can become fluid his or herself. In my hopes that others would take the shape of water, I overestimate the human condition and underestimate the power of form.

I write these paragraphs attempting to keep this in mind.

Even water becomes ice to make itself known in its various permutations. Think snow. Think icicles. Think variation upon variation and what it means to be able to make and then recede from a shape.

I need not take so seriously the inability of myself or others to become water and osmose between us and instead take seriously the constellated pattern of ice on a window as it presents itself over and over for different types of understanding.

Apply corset for hourglass, for leaning tower Pisa: define interior via scaffold's contraposition.

The Role of Molecular Gas in Galaxy Transition

I change too <fall into> constellation : : : become. Now winter, now snow, now no longer (volatile); not gasoline, nor CH₂O. Neither lighting nor embalming. [Still] the next ten years. What if I name myself my own star and revel in my constancy?

Saudi Neighbor *mtDNA* Permeability in Idaho Case Study

She was mango and date, silver platters of rice and chicken spiced. Gave (bones, heart, liver in a plastic bag) from lamb; bounty. Not *words* but *sensations*, and sometimes iPhone alphabet translations for things like doctor, and how to find babysitter.

Laceration of His Scalp Above the Temporal Bone as Examined by 6 yo Girl

Cherry is plum near charcoal, the underflesh milk white. *Blood* is not thought until pooling the temple, blinking eye <<<shutters her gaze wide>>> to children, *not children*, encircling the child. The rock has mass of moon / gravity untethered / at his feet.

[Insertion/]

When winter comes/ she stands upright in its shadow/ a pebble in her mouth to keep her words from freezing/ and her voice from speaking louder than the wind.

I've been talking for a long time. Trying to say all this out right. Out right get it out. Right? Can you hear my permutations? When you speak more than one language, permutation is evident. Obvious. Always consuming the question of language, the way we construct—anything.

I am here now, working as an editor for an engineering firm. Take comfort in the prescribed day, in the innovative reach.

But the legal system, even the lines on a page, these serif characters I type because others will not even recognize (editors they say, of which I am now one, but for a different crowd) will not recognize the *type*. Don't use sans-serif for heaven's sake! Do not recognize *my* type.

Of course, this is why I turn to Khoury-Ghata. To women who speak not only languages of various countries and times but of the earth, the spirit, of the womb. Who use rhythm and sound with the distortion of word order to bring forth life.

Women who, as a result of speaking multiple languages, of loving code, of listening to other entities speaking, understand from an early age that all this symbolic representation of life *is* symbolic, *is* relative. Each of using the patterns that inform us, constrain us, to speak. In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram tracks the way we once spoke with animals, of the sounds of animals, of sound *being* a discourse with the natural world.

When I first heard the French song, "Au Clair de la Lune," as a little girl and it was sung, "mon ami Pierot," I recognized both that Pierot was a proper name but also that the name

derived from the French word for rock and that this was also his friend, a rock, that was speaking. This did not happen in English. That an entity could at once be a human and a geological formation, that we are made of the same stuff in different amounts, and that we could be friends. Many of my most comforting moments have been spent with rock. The big slab on top of the red hill in Pocatello where I would sit, lay, meditate, sunbathe, soothe my angst. The heated rock of the natural pools at Weir Hotspring along Idaho's highway 12, and the cold rock of the same place that leads into the icy creek for contrast below. That the notion of what is alive and what isn't is a construct of mind rather than, perhaps, what one could call the reality of the universe. That the act of writing is in and of itself an act of generation, not just one of reiteration. No two words, used as they are by different people, can possibly be told the same. Each and every letter within those words, the curly cues on the fonts or lack thereof, the memory and intention embedded in the pixels or fibers of what is written as linked to the consciousness of that person, linked to the consciousness of their ancestors, the place and time of the writing, the expectations of, the culture of, the degree of rebelliousness to which that person ascribes—all of this leaves room for a single word to carry vast latitudes of connotation.

I write these 41-word paragraphs here because it gives a common ground from which to speak/communicate. It is an expected form, the paragraph, for a non-fiction (as I am supposed to define myself) writer. But I take the paragraph also because there is a comfort in it, a sense that something *can* be contained. Like life. Like trauma. Like thought. Like love. And because I am angry at the way poetry became exclusive. And disillusioned with the way I've been told nonfiction is supposed to take shape.

When I was 19, I leapt from a bridge with my feet tied in an elasticized rope. I launched 300 meters towards the river below near Queenstown, New Zealand. I convinced myself, at approximately 50 feet of free-fall, that I should call out, scream or yell or let it be known I had done this momentous thing. So, I did. But it was nothing compared to the cosmic silence. The white noise of air rushing past my cheeks, of the fractalated water, of the geological spaciousness of sunlight, like a welcome womb, containing me. Yet, from the

point of the jump off the two-foot platform jutting out over the expanse to the moment my body was restrained by the rope at the bottom of the canyon I was weightless. I flew.

Mammals in general, and primates very much so, have a period of extended caretaking (hopefully) bestowed upon them. When this time goes well, is safe, we are later able to peek out into our surroundings and take chances. We enter the yo-yo time of development where we oscillate our engagement with the world and retreat back to the safety of home. And then we later emerge and take our failures upon ourselves.

What if I am someone who has only ever felt safe and contained by the earth, by the universe?

What if I have never felt this in another human being?

What if I am, by doing this exercise with 41 words in paragraph form, teaching myself to use a societal tool (writing) to enter into an amicable way of being contained by, or at least in relationship with society as someone other than a healer?

Of appreciating what we have constructed as humans together, and agreeing to adhere to certain limitations so that I might also engage in similar dialogue?

I must go back to the mother-book now, *She Says*. Rei/g/n myself in in order to breathe. To connect. To find safety from which to further explore. Too much vastness becomes existential crisis. *Not enough* confines.

A corset allows for each.

[/End Insertion]

Geothermal Effusion and Complex Multicellular Organisms

The place I go is crooning, crevassed in pine. *Magma* whispers succulent stone. I climb naked, amphibious, while cold crackles steam, tastes my skin. We make love, wet and me, then descend the trail in tan suede boots : become a doe.

Beta Testing: Maternal Display of Dominance in Multiparous Alpha Female

Inside my mother I carved a way : she took pins to a voodoo doll, breaking (as consequence) my good leg. If only there were *too many women* and we could birth ourselves forward into being / galaxies / vessels / wombs. Our own making.

[Insertion/]

I am/was a scientist. I was a biochemist. At least one in the becoming.

Though I nearly failed organic chemistry and soon after left the halls of academia for the hills of Southern Idaho—left the expectations that I be something I was not, but in fact was still in part—I sought new ways to understand, represent, define and commune with the world.

As I began to write into these paragraphs, they wanted titles. And as the stricture of form cinched itself tighter, it seemed none other than scientific or psychological research paper sounding titles would do. For in the art of the science is the art of precision, of definition. *This is a study or a prospectus or a trial run.* And it leads to but one kind of conclusion for now. If we tweak a single parameter, the outcome alters/is altered. One word more or less in the paragraph and the entire indication changes.

Here is the thing, I am coming out of a long hard run and the ability to adhere to strict measures is exactly what I need. I'm not interested in sharing that story. I'm interested in erecting a future.

In the mundane.

In these children I raise.

[/End Insertion]

Acoustic Impact of Coffee Percolating and Associated White Noise

If the strings of this steel guitar solo should puncture wounds already peeled . . . the piano arrives next to unfurl, curl metal back from / and edges sharpened on : the white vinyl chair reupholstered, the kitten drinking, silence of ovulation : this home song.

The Cumulative Effect of Stability in the Workplace

Filtered water, ice cubes, a sunny disposition to go with the large windows in the office.
Let's order you a company coat with a logo and won't you please stay? (As though I
wouldn't) / as though it hasn't been this hard.

Study of the Silkworm in Her Natural Habitat : A Prospectus

This time I don't turn back / go around / or fade. I take the gifts in front of me and keep
being / the person I am / in the service of / so much more / than you can imagine. Infinite.
I've come to / realize.

[Insertion/]

I walk between water not on it.

Though I went to Catholic school for two years so I could continue to study in French Immersion, I was not, nor was my family, religious. Per se. But, who is not to some degree infatuated with what is beyond?

It doesn't matter whether you explain the universe through *god* or *science* or *love*. Through art or resistance or gardening.

I explained and was explained to, in large part, by the forces around me that amassed themselves into images, sensations, feeling states, synesthesia, kinesthesia, and voices that were dead or yet to be born, though of course one comes to find out that none of this linearity applies.

Khoury-Ghata said, *Girls rich enough to have two buckets have the right to two lives.*

I wrote *The Study of the Silkworm in her Natural Habitat: A Prospectus* in kind.

Our circumstances, of course, inform us. But our circumstances of course are our paragraphs, our fields-of play, the bodies and/or corsets by which we are contained. A girl with two buckets, with the freedom to consider more than one reality; a girl with more than one language who can leave the confines of her mother's womb and find another realm in the equally-real and constructed *monde de Français*, she has the right to more lives.

See MY MYTHE NATIONALE next page.

MY MYTHE NATIONALE

—*OH CAHhhh na DAHhhh: tara de nos aiii yeux*

i am here in this song where no one has seen

me

except that past life i don't want to repeat

puking until death

ton floren saint, de fleurs en glorieux

flowers i love flowers they are shining glowing bright glitter glorious

not like her face in the toilet

who is Floren, the Saint?

carton bra, ses porte une poupée

my baby, my Margaret, my cabbage patch kid

(mon p'tit chou)

i am a good mother good good mother

mère

mer

la plus brilliant d'exploit

la plou bryant dex pluah

plus brillant

I Shine—

(O Canada! Terre de nos aïeux,

Ton front est ceint de fleurons glorieux!

Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,

Il sait porter la croix!

Ton histoire est une épopée

Des plus brillants exploits.

Et ta valeur, de foi trempée,

Protégera nos foyers et nos droits.

Protégera nos foyers et nos droits)

To repeat: I explained and was explained to, in large part, by the forces around me that amassed themselves into images, sensations, feeling states, synesthesia, kinesthesia, and voices that were dead or yet to be born, though of course one comes to find out that none of this linearity applies.

It only helps us makes sense.

Like the paragraph.

That I distort for my pleasure.

Distill for the essence.

Make a moment *from* that is only *that* and *this*, which is what we are doing now here.

[/End Insertion]

Mass Extermination Leads to an Array of Cognitive Impacts

But /// I'm still here in the [musk] [moist] [loess] of the Palouse. Eating my liver for its dreams. < Radiance > from the sunset shrouded his tales (some listen) but I speak now from the belly of a mountain : my grandfather come home.

Early Onset Visions : Alberta Case Study

One step. Two. Patent black shoes. Alice and the Ace <*I only came here to show you the way*> Red all roll. Baby put your best smile on (*this cheshire want*) / It's so easy to disappear *in* / the master's gone away.

Layering of Earth Rhythms in Bilingual Children's Realities

Je sais. Je sache. Je suis. J'ai (((sounds))) compiled of phylogenic branches that were ebbed from sand, guillotined through guttural // intonations // terse muscles to either side (this neck), head whipped <<north>> open wide. *Save me (from) isolation. Les mots* : mean everything.

Applied Astral Travel in the 21st Century

I fly at will and (used to be) outside of. Colors, sure, but shapes & gray. Pulse leads inside <<where I do nothing but observe>> your past, your now : our relatives. I did not choose this *yet* I know the way.

[Assertion:]

Vénus said: *In her dreams she thinks she is awake.*

Once I walked with my oldest son's father somewhere in Idaho along a vast tract of land that I cannot pinpoint now. What I remember is that we visited a house in a floodplain and for no obvious reason, wanted to buy. We dreamed and daydreamed together and walked around the square of grass and snuck into the white clapboard house.

Later I would want to buy my family's homestead in much the same way. In the middle of the middle of Saskatchewan in a place that brought winter so cold as to annihilate life. But –

Home is a calling beyond the making of this conscious world.

[: End Assertion]

Coming of Age : American Adolescent Male and the Symbolic Role of Matricide

Hushed into crouch, gun laying across his lap @ Freeze Road. My son / man (becoming) waits << for her, the old one, hoof seismically rippled>> this second cartridge : nostrils bleed the lung. Her skin my wall, her skull. This / I asked of him.

Ontological Reflections Past Midday

Motherhood demands everything / I have never been as fierce. Her (deer) fleshed skull boils on the burner but (her) tallow travels in me, pulsing them (children), mine. Land. Even anger <<explosive>> soothes the 3pm, the too many days without / November sky.

[~Inflection~]

Khoury-Ghata is a master storyteller. She can bridge the worlds that I've inhabited that I don't often find others can. She takes the sentience of language, of life and philosophy and story that is distilled into words from our relationships (or lack thereof, depending on the language) with the earth and, like David Abram, describes the alphabet and each letter thereof as the implementation of form onto what is nonverbal so that we use different language, code, description, assessment to reproduce, translate, immolate the pieces of the sky.

I am in this journey in her book. The way I've been in this resonant space my whole life. I find a sentence here or there that sparks an entire world, reality, moment or sentiment I've had and dive in. A meeting of worlds and minds and a salted earth at my lips. One I build upon in kind.

She says: *His mother will hear him running beneath the earth.*
My oldest leaves to hunt.

[~]

The Tower of Babel Revisited from an Agnostic View

Au clair de la lune, mon ami Pierot . . . rock/man . . . and moon and a woman's name all in close succession; he needs a pen (a flying feather with ink) because the darkness consumes him. I cannot say in seven more words.

SECTION 2: INTERPRETATION

The shape of language is the shape of reality. The shape of letter, sound, accent and syntax informs it all. Though I am no language theorist and not here to introduce a lengthy treatise, I am a woman who grew up speaking French in the school system, meaning that all my classes were in French and that discussion with teachers was in French, so that from the time I was 4 years old, my life was French outside the home and English inside.

In the 9th grade, we moved, were posted with the Air Force, to Nova Scotia and the French I grew up speaking was no longer available. (Can you hear, in this former sentence that I do not purposefully distort but can read back over and find distortion, the syntax of French? ...*were posted with the Air Force*. How we acted (we moved) and were acted upon (were posted) and how the music itself is rhythmically changed. One foot is here not there. But it is a dance nonetheless.

Over the years, I spoke French less, even though I moved to Montreal in 1994. This was during the time when Québec was voting to separate from Canada. Tensions were high and speaking French without the Quebecois inflection was not well-received. In the years since, French has come back to me at times in song. As in, the only way the song would come forth was with French words. Sometimes I read in French, so as not to lose it entirely. Because I stopped French immersion in grade eight, my level of comprehension still resides somewhere around that level as well. However, I have found that, as with those many things that are fundamental to our youth, the language, or more so perhaps the vestiges from the language, have infused this project in ways I did not expect.

The guillemets, for example: <<>>

These indicate dialogue in French. But I did not remember that consciously. There were times throughout the writing of these paragraphs, when looking to choose a symbol that FELT right, I went to this punctuation. Though I am not using it entirely in the manner of

quotations, they do serve to emphasize aspects of the writing, sometimes giving an essence of dialogue, nonetheless informing the writing in a kinesthetic way.

I did not realize the way punctuation was inserting itself from the vestiges of my youth. Then I considered how punctuation I learned to use early on was influencing my writing in general. I have often found myself more fluid in how to punctuate or even how to arrange words in a syntactical manner (in comparison to other primary English language folk who care about punctuation), drawing layered meanings from these elements. I understood the French in *Vénus* was attenuating the French in me.

I researched and discovered that even my need to create space between the colon and its preceding word is a function of French language early-learning as well. There ARE spaces between colons, semi-colons, even the question mark in French.

When I read Khoury-Ghata, then, I am reading the French- and Arabic-inflected English and it feels like home. Arabic? I grew up around many Arabic-speaking families. My mother's best friend when I was young was from Palestine. I played with her girls. The student housing, where we lived, was a diaspora of language and culture, ideas and philosophies, religions and beliefs.

And for me, a dreamy child, as interested my dreams as I was the dreams of others, the nature of the Arabic oral flow, the melody, the musical notation even of the written language (none of which I learned to understand in terms of words, but carry instead, inside of me as part of my body's entire construct) jumps out at me, carries me and takes me back to my youth when I feel it within Khoury-Ghata's song.

It is not just the construct of a paragraph then, but the way the punctuation and syntax of that paragraph is constellated to reproduce states of being that I needed to revisit. Each one of the paragraphs, prompted by resonant structures (as well as the words) in Khoury-Ghata's book took me back to a place that was waiting to reveal itself and needed this form to do so.

Perhaps *created this form* to do so.

But it is not enough for me to notice these things. When I write, I feel some of it comes across, but maybe being the child and even the adult who often feels she is speaking a language no one understands, I want to bring you in, to describe some of the intricacies and the deliciousness of—the texture of the world that is created by use of word, syntax, and punctuation.

Writing is simultaneously an act of creating, of listening to what is being heard, of translating with the tools inherent to my body, and then also, transcribing or giving literary analysis of, which is what this second section entails: the analysis of three different paragraphs to (perhaps) give further meaning; at very least, attempt to translate.

The Tower of Babel Revisited from an Agnostic View : *Self-Literary Analysis*

Au clair de la lune, mon ami Pierot . . . rock/man . . . and moon and a woman's name all in close succession; he needs a pen (a flying feather with ink) because the darkness consumes him. I cannot say in seven more words.

*

Au clair de la lune. "Clair" is light, illumination, clarity, is the very scintillating breath of the universe. It is also the name of a woman. Suddenly the moon is woman. As she has been to many cultures. As she has become to me.

Mon ami Pierot. Pierre means rock. By extension, his name, Pierot, is *little rock*. It resonates with rock of the moon. The way rock geologically and through warmth and cold translates Paleolithic records into our very cells. Already, in the very opening lines of this French song, we are in the archaic records of the universe, deep into the coming of light and the beginning of life; of a breath that never ends.

Khoury-Ghata said: *The illiterate angels pretend not to hear when she stumbles over/ vowels and consonants separately.*

The "Tower of Babel" was my response. This incredible and honest image Vénus evokes of angels who need not read, who, as David Abram might say, are so ensconced in the music of the natural rhythms of the earth, of the universe, that they need not even write, but can hear the woman's stumbling over rhythm. What does that mean for syntax? I do not know for

sure. But this idea of stumbling over ourselves, over our thoughts and needs to make meaning, over the ways an entire sentence or fragment opens up its universe simply by existing and being arranged. In “Tower,” I go on with the song in my mind. He needs a pen. *Prete moi une plume* (lend me a pen) *pour ecrire un mot*. This is a plea to Pierot, please lend me your pen so I might write, in this magical moment, because my fire has gone out (my very light of my soul) and I need to enter back into god’s door, to the magic of the world, to live.

The plume is the flying feather with ink. There are that many images in a single word. Plume. Feather. But plume, as in the feather that is hollow, that can contain ink with which to write. Again, the natural world informing everything that is to do with the ecstatic state. That is to draw this person from their melancholy. And this need to express in order to be part of.

I stopped short because there was no way to explain all this in the word number I had remaining, so that phrase itself—to create a negation of what could be—suffices to say that in its own way.

And of the reference to the Tower of Babel proper?

I have always loved the idea that once we were united in a common language, the language of the earth. And that the calamity and beauty of the Tower of Babel was that when it came

crashing down, the unity was scattered like the bricks themselves, where each species and human group and the plants and minerals went their own way. That we have been struggling to get back to a way of speaking with each other that can be understood. But also, in that separation, perhaps like the elephant that each of the blind sages goes on to try to describe, we necessarily needed to dive deep into the specificity of each element of the elephant in order to really begin to understand our whole.

Even with two recognized languages that I can speak, and other languages in my cells' texture, I feel I have been offered the opportunity to see more of the world as a result.

Layering of Earth Rhythms in Bilingual Children's Realities : *Self-Literary Analysis*

Je sais. Je sache. Je suis. J'ai (((sounds))) compiled of phylogenic branches that were ebbed from sand, guillotined through guttural // intonations // terse muscles to either side (this neck), head whipped <<north>> open wide. *Save me (from) isolation. Les mots* : mean everything.

*

That verb, SACHE.

The subjunctive form of SAVOIR (to know). The subjunctive as an emotional state or a possible state of being.

Apparently, this does not exist in quite the same manner in English and I've spent time unsuccessfully trying to get at it, but what I knew as a child of five or six is that this word held a world within it. One that I had to learn. And it tasted so good. "Sache."

Rather than making an assertion, "I Know," where I mean that I know and affirm and assert it is so, the subjunctive "Je sache," leaves room for ambiguity, for uncertainty, for possibility.

<<Perhaps.>>

And this has been so crucial in my life.

What others stated was known in my youth was not always the case, as I found it upon observation. For example, the idea that women should be demure and quiet, did not hold up for me when I climbed trees and discovered my body was entirely capable, or when I beat the fastest boy in track in elementary. It did not hold up later when statistics on labor from western medicine commanded *Thou Shalt Not Deliver at Home* and my eleven-pound boy was born safe in our bed, falling asleep with me and beginning his life in this gentle space.

Here then, I was being told by five years old that there was an entirely different possibility to life just by learning a verb tense. Je sache. Yes, that suit me. A person can know without really ever entirely knowing. It counteracted the obstinate and very patriarchal certainty of the world I was supposed to conform to. And it did all this, not by explaining it in words, but simply by existing as a possible state of being within a word—a verb.

Sache.

It opened, as this paragraph speaks to, the evolutionary nature of man. The Tower of Babel. Took me back to original intonations. Vocalizations. Pre-verbal guttural elements. Words *mean nothing*, as I indicate in the paragraph, and of course, everything. The last line “*Les mots : mean everything*” also a call for you to mean what you say.

Save me from isolation. Being brought into these awarenesses was profound, but also isolating. To speak and not be understood, to not know what it was that needed explaining because I thought it was all explained in the word itself. But of course, the way a body that learns early how to work with the earth comes to know an earth much different than a body that never leaves the four walls of a house, it takes unraveling and the making of connections between what is known.

In this case, the subjunctive, as built into a language, as possibility more than certainty, releases some of the expectation of being right, of knowing. It takes that authority off of anyone. Academia. Science. Authoritative Knowledge.

Sache.

Even birds, we are discovering (though like the Tower of Babel, it is more remembering) have syntax.

Research: Japanese tits.

The order in which the calls are made reflects a sentence structure. The whistle before the bleat means something different than the bleat before the whistle. This is an enormous amount of ambiguity to assess and to hold.

Mass Extermination Leads to an Array of Cognitive Impacts : *Self-Literary Analysis*

But /// I'm still here in the [musk] [moist] [loess] of the Palouse. Eating my liver for its dreams. < Radiance > from the sunset shrouded his tales (some listen) but I speak now from the belly of a mountain : my grandfather come home.

*

My grandfather was raised in Russia in his early youth. German Russian. From what I can ascertain, he left with his family when Stalin began his purges. Back in Germany, he was then witness to Hitler's mass executions. Some stories have it that this was with Stalin. Some with Hitler. I don't know. He was too much a drunk when I was a child. But whatever the actual reality, the functional reality is that he was traumatized by the mass executions of a dictator and suffered PTSD that lead to heavy drinking.

Khoury-Ghata said: *the woman who doesn't trust her lantern / has set the fireflies free.*

I was meditating in the backyard one day, diving into the fractured spaces of my grandfather and mother's lives and how this impacted mine, listening to the slow crackling of wild grasses growing into their sheaths, and I realized that my grandfather is the mountain. He is Moscow mountain. Home. Has come home. That my mother was in the air also that day, around the mountain, not yet ready to settle, but interested in exploring her father's proximity. And I could, sitting in my backyard, explore them both.

In the belly of this land, I am home.

In the loess—the glacial soils that create the fertility of the Palouse fields—I find my kin. The liver is known, in Chinese medicine, to be active in the night, and to allow us to travel to other parts of our community, into the lives of others, to astral travel and meet others in those realms and to bring back the wisdom and sorrow, the knowledge of our collective consciousness. Mine is very active. Too active perhaps, always processing and easy to overwhelm.

But///

This emphatic beginning. My assertion to myself. Despite all this, in fact as result of all this, I am still here.

Inside [], these parentheticals showing the inside, the encapsulation. Inside these realms. *[musk] [moist] [loess]* My favorite elements. Inside my cells. Each a cell. Each its own entity but then, by separating them, one must also see they are not separate.

My grandfather and I becoming, similarly, *each* other, speaking from and with each other as result of commingling in the land, through the actual decay and decomposition of matter that we share. Like the mycelium growing beneath the soil, connecting and making vast connections that communicate instantaneously the conditions at each node to the other nodes. High speed information transmission that we are only just becoming capable of achieving with our own human tools like fiber-optic cabling. Each cable its own entity, but combined from winding upon winding of smaller wire. These letters each windings, some going back to German.

Here is my grandfather, Moscow Mountain, come home the way he had to leave Russia and guided us all here, to the Palouse, to Moscow in Idaho. Where we could begin again. The third generation, so that I could create home for my children and the kin to come. Something my mother and grandfather did not have.

Willingly, allowing my liver to be eaten by the microorganisms within me and by the decay of the land, in order to speak to my relatives. This is the nature of autumn.

The nature of word. Syntax is home. Like mountain is home.

Ancestors that speak through rhythm and the placement of detail throughout a life and our languages.

SECTION 3: D/EVOLUTION

What I thought was unraveling was not.

Even the Iliad Became Archaic

You did not think I could do this forever? The urgent need for form remains but my mother enters another eight rounds of electro-shock treatment. My co-worker turns out to be analogous to ex-husband. I drink Honey-Jack with the full moon.

Close Scrutiny of Predatory Behavior in [Domestic] Paradigm

The hawk is one of two that usually circles. Today she foots winter grass <<entirely attenuated>> near liquid skull off-boil (tallow, flesh, brain) and small scraps excised with pliers : left on deck : offer. Through glass, (her) Autonomic (Nervous) System, interprets. Us.

Spectral Archives : Post Lunar Swell

There was a moon (yesterday) that made me question [everything] // fold into my // mind.
Mamacita, won't you come out and play? Today I understand what force ebbed within : I
still yearn. (Three years ago, I was so young I granted every invitation.)

Patriarchal Cases of Ownership in the 21st Century Legal System

(in a) divorce (so much) is arb/itrary/itrated. Who knew signing that line was to sign a life away? I did not. Call me naïve. I thought it was love. I thought he was immature. None of what one thinks (really) matters.

The Words Which Spring Up on the Borders of Lips Retain Their Terrors

Lately I feel sad all the time when I see him taking care of himself. Seemingly becoming a decent human. I wonder why he was so awful with me. Why I lived with it for so long. Though I know why. (I do.) And I will not explain that in here.

In the Alley There is Room for More

Bread and Pain. (Pain is bread in French). I see pain on the table. Discord in my h/earth. I want to cancel my meeting a half hour from now. I want often to cancel it all. *Remember :*
<<*we exist*>> *to breathe.*

She Lives in a High Room Next Door to the Clouds That Watch Her
Choose Among Tears and Photos

(I) select the (parts) of my life to frame. No longer needing to know [earth] through an open womb. Can I release the pounds I bear from carrying what is not mine? Now numbing ; no longer protecting --- instead of crave.

SECTION 4: SYNTAX EARTH

When I started this project, “She Says It This Way :,” it felt subversive as well as structural; like I was sticking it to the literary world by using the paragraph how *I* want to, sneaking in lyricism and poetry without apology. Using those master’s tools. And for the first set of 15 paragraphs I wrote, it was restorative, as the corset, a reckoning of the shapeless mass into something over which I could have control.

Control. Something we all need. Something one who has felt at the mercy of outside forces of trauma needs to remember how and where it exists for her.

Yet others who read the project still wanted more, more understanding. More. More. More. There was an aspect of me ready to translate. To a certain degree.

But this was limited. This was not, I felt, my responsibility.

Like the character Horse in Linda Hogan’s, *Mean Spirit*; he spends years in the study of bats, intent on learning what they were saying. He did not expect it should be the other way around.

I felt my job was to write into the paragraphs in a manner that took all my senses to their extremes and let the doorway open.

Writing “She Says It This Way :,” it was Khoury-Ghata who opened that portal for me. I was ready to walk through the doorway and emerge within the structure of the corset; let her words take me with their French-Arabic music, the mythical, the worlds of woman and earth; allow me to drop deeper into familiar territory even if I did not entirely know why it was familiar in such a way.

I discovered, in allowing the paragraphs to take shape, the structural components of my psyche as had been developed through the elements of language not just in my multicultural community, but through my immediate kin as well.

I heard the guttural Russian-German intonations of my paternal grandfather, the science and legal rhetoric of my father and his dad, the broken half-Parisian/half-Quebecoise French that provided my refuge. I came to understand English itself has been a contested space in my own world. That my home-space in the early years was fraught with trauma that occurred in the world of English, and that I was offered other worlds of sounds into which to escape. When I began to learn French, I was 4 years old, painfully shy and would not ask questions. I grasped instead at rhythm and worked hard to construct meaning (*My Mythe Nationale*). I read people's faces and emotions. I also read extensively in English. The written word, then, became somewhat safe space in English, except I always felt I was being chased and confined into that world, compelled to write whether I wanted to or not, trying to make meaning as a mutt who belonged nowhere and everywhere at once.

I entered the MFA program with a rhythmic, raw and impulsive urgency that poured through my body onto page. But I entered this thesis with a softness seeking new definition. I trusted the process up to a point. Yet when the excitement over the paragraphs waned and I saw current day issues creeping in; when the peace was feeling was derailed as my mother entered shock therapy and an ex started his crazy-making once more, I suddenly felt I could not trust the word, the page, the academy or anybody again. I should have seen it for what it was: the natural slippage of old patterns into the life of a person attempting to establish new habits.

I would have explained this was the case to any one of my former body and energy work clients had they presented me with a similar concern. But we can only do what we can to protect ourselves with the resources we have at hand. So I took up the gauntlet once again, blamed the elements of academic discourse (a space I was charging with the crime of being too sterile to be alive) for the inability of a paragraph to bring me to a new paradigm and

stormed back into the writings that I knew could sustain: those that came from direct contact with the earth.

It is fortunate I am tempestuous. Honor these storms. They are necessary, and this last section showed me that the rhythmic pacing, lyrical composition and French-language mediated container has long been where my writing resides. I believe the beginning exploration in my thesis builds somewhat of a map that a reader can follow, albeit dream-like, which leads to the songs I will leave with you.

I am also grateful for the healing capacity of time and age. For the committee members and students who gently questioned me, for my own ever willingness to explore construct and consider what resided in the black and white definitions I set “against” academia.

It is true the journey was problematic, and as it will be with any organization or relationship, a person comes face-to-face with the most difficult aspects of themselves represented in others. As a healing artist, I have always worked from the paradigm that it is what bothers us most about others that we need to work on within ourselves. Once we do, it tends to be the tension no longer resides with the external entity we chose/or chose us to teach us because we have come to terms with it within ourselves. I speak to this in one of the stories to come, in reference to the psychologist who entered the prison system and healed what he found to be hurt in each the inmates by healing that aspect of himself.

Once I visited this element within me, the part that was angry at feeling silenced, the part that felt her rawness was ill-received, I understood entirely (I had seen inklings before) that this was the construct I created so I could see its architecture, discover the proverbial man behind the curtain and set he and I both free.

It is nearly impossible—when we have been conditioned in any manner, but especially where trauma replays itself and etches scars and patterns so deep, ones that prevent us from seeking solace in other people, prevent us from trusting the support structures in our midst because we have had to go it alone—to just let it all go at once. I have been working on this

healing for years. When I entered the MFA program, I simply had no idea it was the part of me that felt ostracized from the English world who needed to heal.

When I started to allow myself to feel the pain of being misunderstood, I found also the curiosity in those that wanted to understand. I remembered that, part of why I chose academia was for the improvement, the refinement of my craft: the ability to construct work from the codes of the English language. The academic model cannot offer all the answers just as no single person or institution can. But the forms, the investigations of architecture, the deconstruction of the strengths and tools of the English language did serve a purpose. I had to acknowledge that I came into a program expecting the constructs of its central beliefs to be opened up for dissection, but it was necessarily the other way around: I was here to be constrained, to embody the restrictions in order to kinesthetically learn.

It just took me three years to let it happen willingly. Even my verbiage reflects the almost-violent essence of containment. I understand now, that given different circumstances in my youth, a different core personality, I might have phrased it as swaddling. It could have been a loving and safe embrace to be shaped and formed.

Now I am somewhere in the middle. Proud of the explosiveness I have come from, the intensity with which I pushed against the world in order to learn it. The willingness to feel rhythm and take risk. In that, as I speak to in “The Auricle of Lake Pend Oreille,” I was always seeking something more powerful than myself, something with enough wisdom and compassion to contain me; to let me know what my boundaries were. To offer safety.

I found that in my experiences with the earth. She was the mother, all-powerful with no-nonsense and yet incredible ecstasy, who could teach me, hold me, scold me and all that which I required. My experiences with the more-than-human world are the only aspects of this world I trust fully. So for a moment, in D/Evolution, I thought this project had failed.

No. The confines of this 41-word form, though not able to contain me wholly, did swaddle, did bring comfort and did inform. It brought me here now, where I not only understand with

more depth the architecture of my psyche through the constructs of language, but am enjoying engaging in a discussion with you, my peers, my family, whomever might read this work.

I decide that if “She Says It This Way :” is really what I mean, then this project needs to culminate in the expansive conversation with the earth that Vénus and I have been having, that has been a fundamental part of my world.

The corset I bought, though imposed and only temporary, did provide a direction into which to shape. Did provide new neurological sensations of shape, which more than whatever shape takes place itself, IS the fundamental importance. I am working on the tautness of muscle toned and leaned through conditioning and strengthening, but when I need to feel the edges, the support and boundaries of right now, I put on the corset. I have something to reach for.

These final pieces are the ghosts and the wombs and the rhythms of the earth the way they filter through me.

She Says It This Way :

October Litany

*I am not interested in the voice of girls anymore.
And I have certainly never been particularly entertained by the men.
I have been seeking only the life of the bones you see.*

(One of) the Voices

October beckons.

I long and I rage.

Agony.

Dead human bodies pile up around the earth while a false dominance pursues power. The targets are not just women and children, but anything that chooses a route other than greed. Greed is not want, is not survival. Greed is consumption in its ultimate form: a wasting away, the Old English meaning, the sickness.

False Dominance.

As if anything other than the earth ever held supreme power.

Anger.

I want to spit on you. I want to eat the skin from your cheeks, devour your eyeballs, the very gelatinous flesh itself before biting into the orb, before taking apart your maxilla and cracking open the mandible to take a deep look inside and choose from each of your teeth

which I want. Your gums are red and vibrant. I suck the life from them, draining the color. I want to disassemble one vertebrae at a time your spine, holding you up as though you are king and proving to you once and for all, what reigns. Your heart I will leave beating, until we are through with this dance. You are my dinner, but more than that, I am your reckoning.

But only if you are not willing.

To decay.

Come sit with me on this hill and watch the hawk circle.

See it's umber tail?

Red-tailed hawk, we call it.

She, it, my beautiful creation, given a name for ordering; yet, what is that silence in the still air today? What is it that can lift her wings and settle you down? What is this time of year that matches day and night, earth and sky? Already, we are over the tipping point and into the beautiful decay. Already the night lengthens. Already the fermented leaves, fermenting to her tail's stark subtle defiance, already the wet disassemble of veins, of thin skins piled on top of one another becoming earth. I am only looking for a lover that can die too.

Die into me and I will die into you.

*

When you, but not you, get uppity, it is my turn to smack you down.

This voice is not comfortable, is it?

I've spent a lifetime trying to adjust.

There is a truth that this is also the voice of my own mother, the flesh, blood, most immediate that I come from, not just the mother of millennia—as if a mother could be 'just' a mother, as if justice is an earth term.

Human justice:

Man's defiance of decay.

Man's repulsion of menstrual blood.

Man's fear of the cycles.

Man's imposed order.

Oh go on now, 'our heavenly father'?

Do I sound angry?

Good.

You have the Old Testament, I have Autumn.

Winter will resolve the debate.

I only get angry when you will not listen.

Back to the decay.

But I cannot go, back to the decay.

Nobody is there.

You wrap yourself in plastic and put your body to the ground as if we need to find you later.

We know you are there, sweetheart. Your bones are now earth and we have intermingled.

You cannot be forgotten. The plastic is only your separation, the one divide. The reason you never come home. Why did you build this divide from me? Me, darling, we are the us.

I am over here crying that decay is the answer, it is fall, it is necessary, this is the only way through to winter. Death is the only way through to spring. Summer will follow. Do you understand? When you birth a child, you cannot skip transition. You cannot birth without the fetal ejection reflex: that is to say: without letting go. But science gives it a name. Does that help you understand? It is not pushing, per se. There is no pushing in birth. Only release. I made you this way. To just let go.

I have always been here to catch you.

*

I am so angry it makes it hard to be your lover.

I've been sitting here waiting for you to understand ever since, well, you left my womb.

Why won't you come back?

If you have lost your mystery, why is it my job to explain it to you?

Do not fear death.

It is not so bad.

And,

quite

inevitable.

*

I know you need more than these voices in order to understand. Someone to translate. I will try. Sometimes the voices are so forceful that I don't want to do anything other than listen. Write them. Heed their words. Hope for you to understand without my translation.

Translation, my own resistance; but that is for another time.

And it is lonely when we do not speak the same language.

For one thing, our language is limited. Est ce que vice comprends? Even this autocorrect won't let me type in French. As if it is that far removed from English, which is light years removed from the crickets.

The word 'vice,' interesting choice, if I do say so, for the autocorrect, it should, or course, be another word that I cannot get this computer to type. It should say 'you,' but in the formal,

plural sense; the you that is more than you. A recognition, in French, of the ‘multiplicity,’ the common, the connected. A ‘you’ that is ‘all of you’ that is one word I can use to show we are connected. One simple difference, but such a leap in understanding. Imagine, if we did not erase the language of the animals when we moved into the Germanic tradition...

Really,

take a minute,

imagine,

I’ll wait.

Ah. The voices, they are compelling, it has taken a long time, in my life, to find a balance that can hear them without either being consumed or angry that I have to explain. And I know, my reward, is that when I am done writing this, I can go and dig a soft place in the leaves and decay myself. Sweetness wishing for you also to join.

So let me elaborate, let me put it in temporal time.

Yesterday. I drove my silver F150 to Moscow Mountain with my red, white and black Trek Mountain bike in the pickup bed. It has the coloring of a Rose-Breasted Grosbeak, the bike, very striking. The ladybugs were out full storm, mating. They coat your skin, bite. There are patches and swarms in density and reprieve, neapolitan layers moving up the hill.

I was exhausted. I read an article that the full-moon eclipse may be responsible. Perhaps. I am also anemic because I lose so much blood with my cycle every month and it is an effort to keep up. I am also tired because I am a single mother and my duties are relatively non-stop. I am also tired because the pace of this modern world is not one of my choosing. Not exactly. I choose to come here and write and translate because I am compelled to do so. And when I chose not to, I feel worse. I feel it is my calling to write what I feel, a channel intimately aware of its own input. I feel half autistic and ADHD trying to bring the confluence of thoughts on to page and wish sometimes I was the Grande Ronde entering the Snake.

There is so much to learn and observe at a confluence.

I long to just be the confluence.

I was exhausted. The one place that makes that better is the mountain.

I was exhausted and by exerting myself into the mountain she would exert herself back into me and I would feel better, and I would come home, and I would have something to bring back to the concrete world I live in both metaphorically and literally.

I was still exhausted when I reached, close to the top of Moscow Mountain, and saw that Bennett Lumber company had cleared an old logging road once again, making a trail to several sets of boulders I marked as the best kind of resting spot to which I would return.

Hot rock gives of its ages.

But first, I needed to bike to the top, the ridge that rides across to the Four Corners, so that I could find a zenith, a transition from which to return.

I stripped off my tank-top, when I came back to the lumber road, and chose not the boulders that were jutting off into steeply sloped hillside— legs fumbling and the climb onto boulders jutting over the cliff edge a hazard—I chose, instead, the deadened, hardened edge of road with wild grasses yellowed and reedy, the clustered flowers brown. I lay down my shirt to soften the sharpened edges.

Still. Absolute stillness; a fullness that leaves no void.

It was only in that absolute stillness where you can feel everything that I looked up and not down for a moment. Hawk. Drifting, spiraling. Fall. Equinox. In the week after, more night than day, more focus on the earth than on the sky. Yet, still an acknowledgment of sky. 5000 feet on a hill, I sat, a silent hawk, but I could hear everything.

Stillness. Connecting us completely.

Stillness, a state I did not want to leave but have learned that I must. And to which I can return.

This yesterday I am telling you about was compounded by the yesterday before. On that yesterday, I was consumed by the poetry of leaves. I was aware of my wandering bones and the way in which the autumn has always called to me to make love. Because the yesterday before that, I was reading once again of the genocides and massacres of this human race, and trying to gather all these collected bones into my womb to tend to them. Because I am a mother and there is a part that mothers everything. And I am a woman, now without fallopian tubes. And that makes me closer also to a grandmother. Who makes love in a completely different manner.

So on the yesterday before yesterday, I was collecting memories of bone into my womb and weeping and wondering how I could share that collective grief of loss and decay. Because I have held hands of people dying and handfuls of decaying leaves to my nose and mouth; I can still always taste the ferment in the smallest breeze that lifts those same molecules into

the air, so that now, even fragrance is body is death is decay is the sweetness of connection through life and death. And the bodies of the cruelties and the bodies of decomposing flora are all one of the same in the womb that wants to blend and contain them all.

But I'll stop here for a moment, because in the midst of all this, the lovemaking and reckoning, there were more deaths.

Another man took another gun and shot more people.

He was disconnected and we can cite reasons, but I found in the voices that spoke to me in the last several yesterdays that his voice also blended with mine. His anger matched my anger and we breathed it in together. That is not to say that I, too, will go out and engage in a violent act. It is to say that I am willing to say that within me there is still violence. And, in my experience, when a punctuated-event breaks through the masses, it will find the places with which it resonates.

Have you heard of the psychologist who used to spend time in prisons and appeal, in his own form of non-religious prayer, to the parts of those sentenced in order to find their hurt within himself and heal that first? That it is this healing that heals.

This child, a young man, who shot students in Oregon, found a way to make sense of his profound disconnection and subsequent anger through violence. I thought back to how violent the need I had to tear into a mandible with words in the opening of this essay, to tear

a 'man' apart. It was no different. I wrote about my anger instead of purchasing a gun, and what I was saying about the earth and decay came from a different vein. But same heart. Same arteries. Different pattern of return.

This all sounds like words but I am crying now, in this living room, that I forgot I was in as I consumed and became consumed in this certain womb. I have raged enough now to be only tired once again and only saddened and in grief. But even that, see? Even in grief we are connected.

I worked for hospice for many years. I wanted to make sure I understood death as I thought I understood it. And yes, it was. Numinous. Luring. Easier to let go when you are not one of the family or one of the friends, and, like the Autumn, a threshold.

Three yesterdays ago, I sat with one of my sons and his friend and taught them how to be with death when they found a robin, cataracts and nearly vacant, sitting upright and slowly breathing, coming close to its end as a robin, sitting on the grass of the commons where they play football. We stroked the bird's soft oily feathers. We looked into its thickened lenses where life was already joining the soil. And we reminded ourselves that to know we are part of something larger, and to know we are loved is what mattered. And so we gave our love to the robin and were loved in return and in making this love, we grieved and were completed. The boys buried the robin later, after I wrapped it in an old t-shirt, but first we kept it close to us, so the boys could be part of the process of death, to know the last spasms of muscle and nerve that are like life taking hold again and not be afraid, but just know. Just that

simple. And the robin whom we knew was already held by the earth and could also be held by the hands of boys. My son, later, unwrapped the robin from the cloth and simply tended to its feathers and its being. My son tended to his soul and became more embedded in this earth as well.

So, when I say I sat on the mountain, on a deadened strip of earth readying itself for the winter and stared at the hawk who is a hunter like I am and smelled the decay, I mean to say that I sat on the earth and wept from my womb while I decayed within and absorbed the decay without until we were all one.

*

Which is where I started: October beckons.

I long and I rage.

I have told you about the rage.

Let me end with the longing.

When life has been stirred in the womb. When children, full beings and flying through trees, made of you and of so much more can come into being. When everything about your body a center for creation and destruction and you know you could house the world—

then decay comes like a sweet ripening in reverse. Your own decomposition is the melding and blending of the universe. Grief is the product of feeling intense connection that is lost. But you can't forget, that intense connection. Because every day, your most intimate beings, the ones created of you, go out into the world. Are consumed.

So, what can you do but decompose your own self over and over again back into the earth and become the dead of the Fall?

The melting into eternity, its own sensual form. The earth as lover peeling my layers back from my bones until I am undone. The insane beauty of being.

I come back to write to you so none of us forget.

If we must use words, so be it.

My body also waits.

The Auricle of Lake Pend Oreille

OTOLITH

“Otoliths are tiny crystals that sit inside a specific portion of your inner ear and help orient your body to the effects of motion and gravity.”¹

“GO HOME.”

Wind ripped the tarp from my grey dome tent and pitched it into the pines. The thin walls of nylon sucked air like a kid hyperventilating a paper bag.

Every bit of solace I had ever felt with nature was thrown into question.

This was no mother of nurture.

This was Mother scolding:

“You are in the wrong place.”

Go Home.

*

¹ Livestrong.com

AURICLE

noun

1.

Anatomy.

- a. the projecting outer portion of the ear; pinna.
- b. Also called auricular appendage: an ear-shaped appendage projecting from each atrium of the heart.
- c. (loosely) the atrium.

2.

Botany, Zoology. a part like or likened to an ear.¹

What is a Nation? A continent? When you have lived in more homes, more squares of lawn and earth than numbers of relatives you could name, what then? When a land without lingua franca threatens to swallow meaning? If purpose is as foreign as your name? What if an umbilical cord to nothingness is the only lifeline?

*

EXTERNAL AUDITORY MEATUS

“The ear canal, also called the external acoustic meatus, is a passage comprised of bone and skin leading to the eardrum.”²

¹ Dictionary.com

² Healthline.com

The two-tone blue VW Vanagon travelled well over the heavy pocked dirt road to the bay. It was a losing of self into nowhere.

My memory is vague.

Garfield Bay—target—was busy.

Human residents. Occupied.

Turned instead inward.

“That road there,” he pointed. “Head to Green Bay. No one goes this time of year.” Local advice.

Heded.

All my belongings, everything in one van, winding a progressively narrowing road: Kayak, yellow hard plastic; No more bike (meth heads next door stole it); Cooler with standard boiled eggs and baked potatoes, cheese and other perishables to get me through the transition from wanting to releasing; clothes; 2 Journals to record my devolving mind.

Not a letter etched about it all until now.

*

HOMEOSTASIS

“Under normal conditions, the inner ear possesses remarkably stable homeostatic mechanisms for the maintenance of functional integrity of the inner ear fluid.”¹

The first day was beautiful. Calm water, see-through to the bottom, rounded rocks, smooth and creamy. I was busy with the tending of details:

1. Set-up the tent
2. Build a fire ring
3. Take stock of inventory
4. Plan for dinner
5. Explore by foot
6. Sleep

Sleep came.

Well.

*

¹ Tinnitusjournal.com

ENDOLYMPH

“Angular acceleration of the endolymph in the semicircular canals stimulate the vestibular receptors of the endolymph. The semicircular canals of both inner ears act in concert to coordinate balance.”¹

The newness of space was always something of a high for me:

Exhale into the freedom of forms not yet taken.

Feet find fascination in the round, flat pebbles twice the size of my soles, hard, but placed so well in random interlocking terrain to make barefoot walking possible. Nothing jagged, but nothing welcoming. Cool ground moisture tightly stored in bodies of stone before the sun, speaking clearly of Autumn, resonates up through my knees. Trepidation, pulling the yellow banana boat over the rock, toes cold, and nosing into the clearest water with slight ripple today. Plastic does nothing to provide warmth on such a day.

Nothing.

Breathe.

Ice cold. Water of this crystal quality always cold.

Note for self: *Like clear skies magnifying stars in November and moon dogs; snow the next day.* Cold. Clear. Omens.

¹ Wikipedia.com

Clarity is a bitch.

Second note for self: *The paddle shaft is still too long. It would have been wise to fix this when you had access to tools and the knowledge of other humans.*

Deep water instantaneous.

Breath caught cold and hard in lungs.

Able to see too much.

Paddle. *You have to do something.*

Paddling:

Thrust the left black blade into the unfathomable lobe of the ear on the Pend Oreille, twists and turns leading to places of equilibrium deep in the cartilaginous labyrinth. Thrust right paddle, drops of morning liquid ice cascading down the shaft onto fingertips, exhale fine mist into morning wetness.

Doing something while you wait for the sun.

Slight adjustment of hips to rectify change in balance brought about by arms, moving. *I do not want to fall in to this water. Deep, clear and cold. I do not want the abyss at my feet.*

Stability through motion, paddling the small bay in the early morning, generating heat, generating calm.

The lake is gothic. Primordial. Rock older than thought. The chill of the ice age in its depths. *I swear I feel the pulse of the Navy's acoustic tests below me, submarine craft with beacons like bats and hard cold metal impervious to flesh. Signals in space so distant they must travel through visually imperceptible fissures, because I can feel the drawing away of light and life. Perhaps the craters in the deep are not at all out of view, and this is nothing but a Dali painting in fluid form, where the bottom has already dropped out, and I am unwittingly awaiting the suction.*

The thoughts flow over
faster than I can paddle;
the emptiness of sonar pinging off my boat,
eons of light ending in a vacuum,
a world without sun.

The ripples are foot high waves now, most noticeable in a plastic boat without a rudder and with a paddle shaft too long for its handler. I round the corner from Green Bay into the open lake and find signs of other human life: a motor boat and two sail boats within visual distance.

I am not as alone as I thought.

TRANSGRESSION

noun

1.

an act of transgressing; violation of a law, command, etc.; sin.¹

She spoke to me softly first.

I did not listen.

*

COCHLEAR IMPLANT

“A cochlear implant is a small, complex electronic device that can help to provide a sense of sound to a person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard-of-hearing.”²

Day 4 of my life to be lived without society.

The ragged edges are all mine.

In this crisp clear place, there is nothing but smooth lines, cold that emanates from space and hard surfaces. Even the water. Even the water is hard.

I haven't slept well.

¹ Dictionary.com

² NIDCD.GOV

I have seen humans (2 days ago) but not spoken.

There is mostly fear in my throat.

*

DRUM CIRCLE

The tympanic membrane of the ear translates the acoustic waves to mechanical motion, to electrical impulse and back to fluid itself once again.¹

I had no drum at the lake. I did not own one yet. I had always borrowed.

We used to sit, stoned, and play djembes, doumbecs, tablas, hand drums of many lands in one living room, or open gathering at festivals; five players to hundreds, each pulsing to rhythm, moved and moving one another.

If ever there was a metaphor to fetal origins, it is for me the assimilation of oceanic wisdom through a single pane of flesh: in ear and drum, as in the amniotic sac, one fluid conversation.

*

¹ TaraKHowe

MALLEUS

“The malleus is the outermost and largest of the three small bones in the middle ear, and reaches an average length of about eight millimeters in the typical adult...It is informally referred to as a hammer.”¹

There is only one authority to whom I will bow.

*

INCUS

“The incus is the middle of the ossicles articulating with the head of the malleus anteromedially and the stapes inferomedially...Derived from the latin word for anvil.”²

“Hush little baby, don’t say a word, Momma’s gonna buy you a Mockingbird...”

Singing words out loud of songs that made their own meaning in my mind. *No notion of a Mockingbird; never seen one on the Canadian prairies.* Carefully counteracting the increasing winds. The Pend Oreille is known for its winds.

“And if that Mockingbird don’t sing...”

¹ Healthline.com

² RADIOPAEDIA.COM

STAPES

“The stapes is the smallest and lightest named bone in the human body, and is so-called because of its resemblance to a stirrup.”¹

stir·rup

'stirəp/

noun

2.

a pair of metal supports in which a woman's heels may be placed during gynecological examinations and childbirth, to hold her legs in a position that will facilitate medical examination or intervention.

3.

another term for stapes.²

The tent ripped flesh from its bone.

2am: The cooler is now in the tent to hold it down.

2:05am: The top third of the kayak too.

Things I would have written.

¹ Wikipedia

² Dictionary.com

2:06 am: And on the fifth day, the winds came.

2:07 am: Will there be a sixth?

I open my mouth to say something—just to remind me I am self— but a fist of wind jams open my lips, spreads apart my esophagus and grabs at once for my heart.

I watch her,
suspended,
black hair full of gray, body as wide as bay,
fingers inside me pulling me apart, knowing me
to the core.

She hauls me out to the open rock, body running no longer my own.

I cringe against the bark of trees that might gouge me if she decides to throw. My body bleeds just thinking. Every single part of me senses,
I could hurt
so badly.

All of this wandering to be alone, to live with an earth more closely, than from 4 walls of exile.

No preparation
only false expectation
that I am ready.

“GO HOME!”

She shakes me wildly, pelting my flesh now with hard, cold, rain.

“No,” I respond.

I have no home.

“You are not welcome here,” the almost-lullaby of a gentler wind seeps into one ear.

How can that be?

This is some cruel joke. I cannot go back.

“NO,” I am heaving, screaming, hair icicles on my rock face, eons of wind-rain slapping me from beyond the bay.

“YES.”

One sonic pulse, shaped from the rocky current, the hands of pine and the weight of low sky slams my chest, face, thighs.

BOOM!

Oh hell no,

she did not

just push me this far.

I realize,

I am ready now.

“COME ON THEN,”

I scream back,

“SHOW ME WHAT YOU’VE GOT!”

And she did.

*

OVAL WINDOW

“By the time vibrations reach the oval window, they have been amplified over 20 times from what they were when they contacted the tympanic membrane, a testament to the amplifying power of the middle ear.”¹

I collapsed on rock laughing. I dared her and she threw me to the ground. I didn’t bleed.

But I fell hard.

¹ Wikipedia

Alive.

Finally,

contained.

*

LABYRINTH

“The inner ear consists of a system of fluid-filled tubes and sacs called the *labyrinth*. The labyrinth serves two functions: hearing and balance.”¹

I packed the detritus the next day. I slept the most sound I had slept,
ever?

The wind blew its own cloud right to clear black skies and I stared at the stars, drifting off
on top of the soaked nylon, cooler next to my head, nothing left to nourish anyway.

All my life I had waited for someone stronger and wiser.

And here she was:

A voice to follow.

¹ Vestibular.org

EAR

“The mammalian ear is a complex structure divided into three main parts: the outer; middle; and inner ear. These parts are formed from all three germ layers and neural crest cells, which have to integrate successfully in order to form a fully functioning organ.”¹

I found Green Bay again the other day. 16 years later.

I could not, at first, remember the name, or
the exact location where I was rebirthed.

It was in feeling my way through—
the Paleolithic record of permanence,
that I found it.

Nothing had changed
but me.

¹ NCBI.GOV

Prairie Psalm

I have long been attracted to the way an abandoned farm truck looks on the sparse backdrop of prairie; stripped carcass, metal edges colored by alternating seasons of sun, wind, rain and snow. All the marrow taken by animals for nests, rotted by bacteria for food or simply cooked by the sun until crumbling orange. The engine can't possibly start for its missing softness, hoses and seals cracked and caked, a hardened part of the prairie, but beautifully humbled. Like it knows the importance of its remains, letting the wind deconstruct its mold.

My people come from the Prairies. My blood is thick with coyotes and sage brush. My blood is thick with grasses and scents of wet reeds, the migration of the water fowl. My blood is thick with hard work, take responsibility, save the fun for later, and pack a week's worth of gear in your vehicle to survive the cold if you break down.

The aunt of my paternal grandmother lives in my belly; walking me in her rounds over the land. She was a renegade midwife in small-town Saskatchewan I never met.

There is the homestead on a flat near Wood Mountain, and the wind that sprang up like an old lynx, pinning me to the spot the first time I set foot on its territory, rendering the grey, sun-washed boards of the house my own bones.

They bicker about me still.

There is the slingshot my grandfather used to kill the prairie dogs in his garden and my scream, still, in the air over the chicken wire about those killings. There is the way the algae traced my legs, measuring me while I swam along the rocky shore of Long Lake; the fingertips I felt then, and understand now, of those who wait to take us to our common grave.

There is the little house next to the dried creek bed in Regina where the blood of my mother's kin kept pouring out. The plastic swing set in the backyard, the dog shit. My grandfather, the chair, in the corner by the mirrored shelf, Rye and Coke in his hand. The walls sing 'Ach ben de musica, Deutches Faderlander,' and sometimes it comes also through my mother's mouth. My grandmother, the kitchen, me on her lap—quiet—listening to Lover Boy: "Turn me loose, turn me loose." Aunties and Uncles, hollering, alcohol dripping off the card table, Players Extra Light Filtered—the air.

My young parents hoped to get as far away as they could from their lots, from both sides of the tracks. But my ancestors fill my dreams. They whisper on the wind in the hollow emptiness of prairie sky through the names of the places themselves: Craven, Estevan, Medicine Hat, Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump, Fort Qu'Appelle, Moose Jaw, Athabasca, Saskatoon, Assinaboia, Glentworth, Fir Mountain, La Flèche. They send me coyotes and ravens, wolves and snakes. I collect feathers and bury the dirt from another land. I try to understand.

My blood is thickest in the earth. I wander the traces and feel for signs.

The prairie was the first to lick me dry and clean. It brought me my children and showed me how little I need to survive.

*

A silver thread led me to them. This is what it looks like now when I see how I wandered the earth pulled by my womb. Australian Aboriginal women knew their children came from the place in the Outback where the quickening occurred. That is where the child jumped into them. I know that feeling. The certainty of meeting the souls that chose you.

My own parents told me I was born from the face of a rock wall, a steep overhanging cliff into the Saskatchewan River in a narrow part of the ravine nestled by trees and darkness where we picnicked. Not in the big open flow of the river that was too broad and fast to cross, but this molded world of green and rock just across from where we sat. This was a joke my parents do not even remember telling me. But it does not matter, because I believed the earth herself brought me to these people, so that I could have this life, and it made a bodily sense that I was a child of stone.

The Australian elders tracked the song-line upon which the quickening occurred to find out what part of the long ancestral lyrical memory the child belonged. There was never any doubt in my mind that each of my own children, despite coming inside of me, was of someplace far beyond. That I, too, was land inhabited of something larger than I could conceive.

I was 21 when I first dreamed of my children-to-be. The dream was a premonition that I would have three. I can tell you now the birth I felt in my dream was exactly as it happens; one big surge that left me wide, awake, wet, and in wonder.

The next dream, I had at 25. I did not know it was about the first child to come. But there was no doubt I should follow.

*

In the dream, a large Ferris Wheel turned round and round. Someone from the top yelled to me: “Cheee-Gonggggg!” I turned, startled, to see who it was. My boss, from my waking life, where I worked at the Chinese Village Restaurant, was up there laughing, swaying recklessly from his seat, and there was no mistaking his words. I woke abruptly and wrote it down. Whatever force could speak Chinese to me was one to which I would acquiesce.

Qi gong, I found out, was the practice of cultivating the life force, Qi, and we had a Daoist Hermitage outside of Moscow, Idaho of which I was completely unaware prior to my dream. Not only that, but when I arrived at my massage therapy training program later that morning, I was informed that the woman who ran the hermitage with her husband was coming to teach us the following week. Yes, of course, Qi gong.

By this point in my life, I had a strong certain sense, despite the premonition, that I could not get pregnant. There were pains and closures. Blockages. Something was not right. There was no flow in my life. Stone. Believe me—for pregnancy, there were many opportunities.

The draw to my first son's father was primal. We fucked day and night and all over the Palouse, into Northern Idaho, and up into the Kootenays. That autumn, even the tilling of the wheat fields made me wet. I was back at the Great White Pine the other day, laughing when I remembered a winter tryst up against a tree, down in the snow, pushed up into his truck, moaning with the wind. New wood signs may have been added to give direction to the trails, but the same trees stood where they had that winter, bracing us, as I am sure they have held countless others. We never used condoms. Usually he pulled out. Until the pull was stronger than the out.

There was nothing he wouldn't do with me.

We didn't get pregnant at first. I had no conscious inclination to be pregnant with him. But I couldn't stop. Why on earth, if you could feel the very possibility of creation itself, would you stop?

Qi gong. Only one day of it with this woman, but I felt its subtle power. Tapping my kidneys, the sternum above my thalamus, swinging my arms to open my hips, expelling air from my lungs. She taught us how to hold our arms out in front of us, fingers of each hand pointing at each other without touching, elbows hanging, like we were holding a large bowl

out at our heart level. The heat built up in my biceps. Moved to my forearms. After a minute or more of holding this position, I felt I could no longer sustain. She commanded us to hold longer. I did. Suddenly, the rigidity dissipated, my arms felt like rain. Small bands of film, transparent as mirage, traveled across the gap between my fingertips. My arms were a conduit. There was a release.

I signed up for a workshop with another Qi Gong Master who would soon be in town. The day of the workshop, I resisted everything. My grandfather was dying and I would be visiting him soon. Like a wounded animal, I wanted nothing but solitude. The master asked me, instead, to come sit in the center of the circle of participants. He explained briefly that he was going to direct energy through me from where he sat nearly 10 feet away. I obliged, as rigid and determined as I had ever been to feel nothing at all and vowed to leave as soon as he was done. In the middle of this silent internal tirade of pain, a burst of liquid warmth gushed through my shoulder blades and exploded my heart until my eyes sprang tears. I opened. The group held me in their silence. I entered back into the flow.

And conceived.

My son's name is River.

He is named after, and born of, the Snake River, the conduit that connects Idaho North to South. We used to kayak the river, the River in my belly and I. He wanted to be born near the Blackberry Patch where the Grande Ronde meets the Snake. I failed both he and I on

that count. They said it was wrong to want to birth from the land even if that was the only place I knew strength. *What if he died*, the doctor threatened and said it would be my fault. Then she broke the waters, pumped me with drugs and cut him out.

I still grieve my weakness. I made a pilgrimage to the blackberries once since and stared at a screech owl who lived in the hollowed-out school house by the creek. She was domestically wild; sutured between worlds. I understand that feeling.

*

There is a beauty in recklessness.

My girlfriends and I used to enter people's cars in the parking lots around the University of Alberta if we found them unlocked. We wouldn't have been older than nine or ten. I had a penchant for mischief and realize now I was the ring leader. We never stole anything. I never wanted to hurt anyone. I just wanted to know. I wanted to know I had the guts. I wanted to know what was inside the lives of others. I wanted to know the thrill of living that is only found in living. We would open the glove compartment and take a look. I was amazed at the objects: how mundane they were. Nothing I can even remember now. What I do remember is the stillness of the air, the singularity of the moment; the focus. A nearly surgical slice into the bowels of another to see what they had eaten, this fine breach in the hermetic seal, before we closed the door and walked away; disemboweling our neighbors one vehicle at a time.

Around the same time in my Alberta youth, I was checking out books on hypnotism from the library, feasting on horror movies; mesmerized by the occult. A house exploded due to a natural gas leak, killing two kids just before we moved onto the military base. Our next-door neighbor committed suicide in his shed not long afterwards. I remember how empty and permanent it was in his backyard from then on. A seismic shift, the land a new psyche.

My body a new land.

Later, some guy tried to pick me up from my city bus stop on an unbearable Edmonton morning. “It’s so cold out there,” he cooed. I can see, now, the look in his eyes.

Predators are the ultimate stage hypnotists, incredibly skilled in reading people, isolating weakness, making a kind of love to your hollow. Like the coyotes I revere, so adept in the deception and the hunt. Like my girlfriends and I stalking cars. Looking for a way in.

My hardness aches for the extraordinary intimacy of vulnerabilities revealed.

*

Moving to Phoenix, Arizona, a single mother with my first son in his car seat and all that was left of our belongings, I felt the second swell. I’d been dreaming of sand. I recognize it now distinctly for what it was; another child calling. But then, I didn’t yet understand what these urges meant. The quickening—the certainty—comes later. First, you just feel your

way along the strands. I was supposed to spend time with a friend in Twin Falls. But I cut our visit short after lunch. I couldn't stay. I was an animal in heat. How could I explain what I didn't entirely know?

Ronan. His name means 'gift' or 'pledge,' and also, 'little seal'. He likes that one, the little seal.

When I had that orgasm, the one that left me sitting on the toilet my first night in Phoenix after reuniting with the man I once thought was my soul mate, feeling a strange peaceful bliss I immediately recognized as conception, some part of me understood that it was the child—and not the man—I had come back for.

I can explain the Plan B away, and I did. I was a single mother already. This happened too fast. My own mother had married my father because she was young and pregnant with me. I vowed never to be with someone as the result of a child. Really, there were all kinds of reasons I could give, except that, I knew I wanted him, and I took that damn pill anyway.

When I started to bleed, I prayed like hell.

Ronan stuck around.

I bear the family name.

*

I looked for ones who know light and dark. Sometimes the darkness is all they have left.

*

My third son's father eyed me from his table at a bar called The Alley. I knew he was trouble, but I let his sister convince me he had this sweet side. Just a misunderstood artist, she said.

“You think he would be a good lay?” I asked my girlfriend about the land locked surfer in his brown winter cap. I thought I was contentedly ready to stay single until I was 50, but couldn't deny my craving.

She laughed. “Yeah,” she said, “I guess so.”

A week later, some phase of the moon, I thought, pulled me forward by my ovaries. Of course it was my third son, Noah. The one I birthed in my bed, exploding wetness and warmth down my legs and onto the sheets. The one whose head I nuzzled while he drank from my breasts and we drifted back together into sleep. The one for and from whom the strength finally manifested so it could pour through them all. But before all that, all I knew was that I needed to dance with this man.

It was like junior high—awkwardly sweet—dancing with our arms around one another. I asked if he wanted to exchange numbers. He confessed he already had mine. He'd stolen it

from his sister that night I first saw him. I had given her my number so she and I could go mountain biking. I found his clandestine kleptomania endearing.

He called me the next day and asked me to join him on a walk. I had planned for two hours, but we were gone four. Then two more back at my place just talking over a bottle of wine. He had once jumped off a cliff ledge into a hurricane gale in Florida with a group of friends in order to be blown back onto the ledge. I was mesmerized. That was the kind of living I understood. I don't remember if we kissed. But I remember I wanted him. I remember he touched my thigh. He made me wait. He played me just right.

I don't believe most people recognize a sociopath for what he is. A void that cannot be filled. An emptiness of universal proportions. The prairie itself, one might say.

I liked the way his nothingness made me calm.

I liked the risks he was willing to take.

If you met him, your impression of him would depend entirely on the impression he wanted you to have.

*

There is a kind of living that reveals you.

A kind of song that heals.

The prairie sang my children to me.

I consummated.

Each of the three men, too, were invoked.

There is a kind of beauty in recklessness—

the need to experience all there is that makes up this infinite universe,

its violence and its stillness,

the scarce and the profuse.

Some might even say it is not reckless at all.

To heed the call.

REFERENCES (IN CONVERSATION WITH)

She Says by Vénus Khoury-Ghata, Translated by Marilyn Hacker. Graywolf Press. 2003.

The titles below are the titles of the paragraphs I wrote while the italicized text is the phrase from the poem in *She Says* that prompted the paragraph:

The Role of Molecular Gas in Galaxy Transition

The caravan that left the old town of Manama disappeared between Sirius and the Great Bear, 152.

Saudi Neighbor mtDNA Permeability in Idaho Case Study

Arabic infusing its honey and its madness into French; the latter acting as a safeguard against over excitement and side-slipping, 159.

Laceration of His Scalp Above the Temporal Bone as Examined by 6 yo Girl

I'll tell you everything there were five pebbles/one for each continent, 5.

When winter comes/ she stands upright in its shadow/ a pebble in her mouth to keep her words from freezing/ and her voice from speaking louder than the wind, 155.

Geothermal Effusion and Complex Multicellular Organisms

Man and oak shared the same bark/the same age inscribed in the sapwood/and the same shadow, 25.

Beta Testing: Maternal Display of Dominance in Multiparous Alpha Female

There were too many women for too few seasons, 35.

Acoustic Impact of Coffee Percolating and Associated White Noise

She howls to frighten her own voice and make the water in the pond//shudder, 39.

The Cumulative Effect of Stability in the Workplace

She only keeps those who flame up with her vine shoots, 93.

Study of the Silkworm in Her Natural Habitat : A Prospectus

Girls rich enough to have two buckets have the right to two lives, 145.

Mass Extermination Leads to an Array of Cognitive Impacts

...the woman who doesn't trust her lantern / has set the fireflies free, 47.

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Their facades are painted blue to escape the bee's evil eye, 145.

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Words she says are like rain everyone knows how to make/them, 23.

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His mother will hear him running beneath the earth, 127.

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The house had only three walls/ the fourth would come when the child was born, 121.

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Close Scrutiny of Predatory Behaviour in Domestic [Confine] Paradigm
Every moving shadow sketched a phantom/ every cockcrow became an omen, 105.

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There are snowfalls longer than the year/ moons vaster than the night, 91.

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then time was written in a rough draft/ they drew straws for the years, 13.

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Le pain ivre sur la table/ le sel de la discorde face a l'atre, 47.