

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1974

Blue Woman

Michael McCormick

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

McCormick, Michael, "Blue Woman" (1974). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 1695.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/1695>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

THE BLUE WOMAN

By

Michael McCormick

B.A., MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, 1972

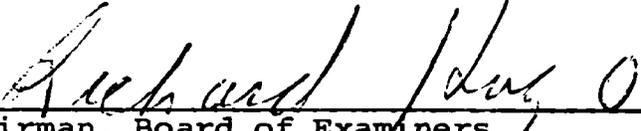
Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

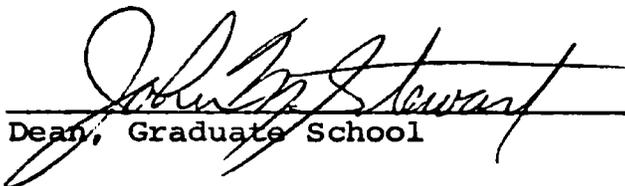
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1974

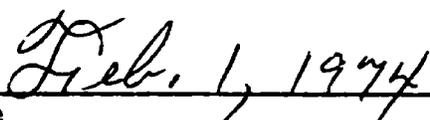
Approved by:



Chairman, Board of Examiners



Dean, Graduate School



Date

UMI Number: EP35232

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35232

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

FOR MY GRANDFATHER

Who started it all by dying

*man is a god when he dreams,
a beggar when he reflects.*

-Hölderlin

Certain of these poems were previously published. Versions of: 'Poem' (for gail); 'Yellow'; 'The Disparaging Fall of the Roman Atomic Theory'; 'The Olive Trees are Burning on Corfu'; 'The Night Before Christmas'; 'Poem' (for dan gerber); 'Anti-Ghazal'; 'Simone'; and 'Ipsos'; in THE ASSASSINATION OF POETRY. 'The Disparaging Fall of the Roman Atomic Theory' and 'Isabel' are forthcoming in *THE RED CEDAR REVIEW*. 'That First Night Home' in *CUTBANK*. 'All I Ask is to be Alive Next Spring' in *CUTBANK*. 'Yellow' and 'Anti-Ghazal' in *PREVIEW*. 'Anti-Ghazal' in *TUESDAY* and *THE MICHIGAN STATE NEWS*. 'Poem' (for dan gerber) in *HAPPINESS HOLDING TANK*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Page
I. THE BLUE WOMAN	
THE BLUE WOMAN	1
LETTER FOR CORNELIA	2
BREAK	3
THE GIRL WHO SINGS TO ME	4
POEM	5
POEM	6
POEM	7
THE BOOK OF ODALISQUE	8
ODALISQUE	9
LETTER TO ODALISQUE	10
VIRGINIA	11
YELLOW	12
HERSELF NESTLED IN HER CROTCH	13
FROM A DESCANT ON RAWTHEY'S MADRIGAL	14
II. LEGENDS	
ALBANIA	15
THE OLIVE TREES ARE BURNING ON CORFU!	16
LEGEND	18
THE DISPARAGING FALL OF THE ROMAN ATOMIC THEORY	19
THE DAY CARL THAYLER LEARNED TO PITCH HORSESHOES	20
A COLD HOME	21
THE YELLOW BOAT	22
COMFORT IN A WELL LIT ROOM	23
THAT FIRST NIGHT HOME	24
ANODYNE	25
WHEN THEY TOOK ME TO PINE REST	26
DETROIT TO CLEVELAND	27
THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS	28
A POUND'S THEORY	29
THE GOOD MAN	30
WHAT IT'S LIKE	31
POEM	32

Section	Page
ANTI-GHAZAL	33
THE W.K. MEMORIAL ACCEPTANCE SPEECH FOR INVENTING THE FIRST AMERICAN BEER TREE	35

III. THE WHITE GODDESS

SIMONE	38
ISABEL	39
LESSON IN LOGOMACHY	40
FIVE LIVES FOR ASHLEY	41
ALL I ASK IS TO BE ALIVE NEXT SPRING	43
POEM	44
IN THE FALL OF THAT YEAR	45
WAITING FOR THE STORM	46

I. THE BLUE WOMAN

THE BLUE WOMAN

Death comes with her earring in water
scarf of mist around her neck
Near Whiskey Ridge the lake pulls
woods and house into its cave

Let them laugh at my fat
When my mouth opens
the lizard sleeping in my throat
will spit blue poison

I cry for myself
the twenty-first year alone
I cry for the knife
the color of touch
and steel across my wrists

I trade my life for a dozen eggs
they crack and blue run onto my fingers

She like a cloud I want to think
turned me blue against myself
That blue woman once the color
of everything I ate
It opens like a wound

Dear Michael snow
falls around your bed
what you touch becomes blue
My lips my breasts I cannot stop

When you left
the plane trailed
like a dead bird at night
This part of earth
turned the other way
growing against the mountains
in the bluegreen wall of dawn

I waited while the hostess
checked your ticket
You took a seat near the window
I hoped, to see me
watching like a baby
its first moment on earth

Maybe it was the roar the engine
a spider I felt crawling into me
working toward my heart
toward that bitter heart

I remember too much
the illegal dreams
sleeping with my sister
the echo of a shotgun
colors and music I've never heard

Go blind
Remember the odour?
the poison of mornings
and cold bloody sheets

Cornelia, so often
my hands find pleasure
because they cannot sleep
learning to live that instant before winter
when the farmer lies down to dream
in his field of wheat

BREAK

3

The light burned that summer
the way love
locks you from your house

When the ulcers hemorrhaged
I bled for three weeks
The sun whitened paint chips
at the window's edge

In the middle of night
she came to me
held my hand
washcloth to my mouth
We planned a trip

I cried when it reached my ears
Let me die!
Muted by the liquid belching
the words would not be heard

The city burns the last elm
When she made me pray
all I remembered
was a turtle I once smashed
trying to rip the shell from muscle
which would not let go

THE GIRL WHO SINGS TO ME

4

The girl who sings to me
sings at night
music that echoes from these walls

From our room above the lake
snow falls along the frozen top
there too, the song is heard

In the morning she lets me sleep
as a nun who suffers grace

In dreams I pretend
there is no argument
no place for that pure voice

The girl who sings to me
sings to herself

It's fall in Michigan
A Cooper's hawk
circles above the mill in Dexter .

Martha turns the press
a smell of apple runs where sparrows hide
beneath her skirt

Because she doesn't write
we meet again. Her eyes
have taught me to say nothing
smiling in the socket of her hips

At night a whale cries
searching the mountains for his mate
The gambler lies in Deadwood
strangled in his yellow hair

They say he turned to stone
A trick that seasons play
when salmon run upstream to die

POEM
(for gail)

6

In April I leave Michigan
pass land flat as night
past Pleiades still in command of Spring

Stars above
pull taught their intricate lace
Dark edges roll under my eyelids
steam rises from the road

In Pennsylvania
highways are cut from mountains
rivers of asphalt
twist into deep rock walls

Ceiling of green black blue...blue
marble swirling in the sky
falls to tuck us in

Morning in the garden
where a snail has come to die
From the terrace I see you leave
and for a moment pray
to that first fire where we met
and accidentally warmed ourselves

Of course it was spring
when white sea quartz
was the only gift you offered
And the trees were waxed
in a new and better beginning

There's a book called Odalisque
I open on these nights
when there is no one
to tell me I am happy

A call from Montreal
can make me snap
believe there is something
far away that I should know

In the next room, the next page
she lies with another man
A branch is ticking at the window
All the answers point to me

The seasons never change
You know the cold cold tale
and still it opens
on a winter's night
when the door is locked
you think that you are safe

For nine months hiding in my walls
I've seen you stare at me
the way a woman stares
at four in the morning

There are no kings to love
only nights long and dark
like bare rooms
that run into one another

I talk of you to strangers
some thought fat and beautiful
Even young you had a name
Odalisque
I say and lie
we had many children
some were black
none would let me kill you

Lying on your matted throne
one knee bent
away from your gypsy eye
Waiting behind the wall

A secret to drive me mad
No paint to wash my hands
No moon. No mountain
Not even water
can light this room

Where were you when the builder
nailed the last board around this life?
The old earth cracked
and took me down
to see the mother lion eating stones

Once I took a bus in Greece
learned that crooked streets
were for the poor to ride at night
The rich were eating lamb
and have never been the same

The stories all agree
children cry because they want to
And the lady whose face is in the mirror
is dead because she looked

The night I was born
there were no stars
to help my mother in her Hail Marys

Too early in her dream to know
that love could not be learned
like the names of states and women
who hide behind their beauty

Father nodded his approval
at the burst of kicks beneath the coat
Nothing's changed, I've always longed to travel

She laid her head against the glass
and held to each cold throb
I smiled at the pain and tried to make her cry

Spinning her head in one last effort
she screamed and saw me being born in Russia
Russia...

where the snowgeese froze in midflight
above the tiny bundle on the tundra
Who knew that crystalline night
what plans I had destroyed for you?

YELLOW
(for nick)

12

I bury my love
near the steps
of an old lighthouse

daffodils growing from her lips
as yellow as she would speak
The salt rises in the back of my mouth

I watch the waves flop like fish
and weave them into a wreath
and place them by her / yellow

Each day there is less to say
The axe is warm
My fur is soft and sharp
She said the welts were German whips

In Okaton, South Dakota they
made a movie called
Prairie Grass. When they come in
I know enough to flush the grain
and when they don't I

sleep in the cross of my arms
in the hot loft, in the way of the
geese pushing a wet skyline

He plummets. He
rides the length of herself
nestled in her crotch
where it reached the seam
and hid the men of dust she rode

Eye fire. She sees Frank
He milked twice a day
until he jumped from the silo

FROM A DESCANT ON RAWTHEY'S MADRIGAL
(for shelley)

14

The man who built this house told lies
His father was a Celtic chief
who sold his wife and sailed to Persia
on a fishing boat

My sister's buried in this field
beneath the nettles and the wheat
The last letter came from Montreal
Steeple everywhere begin to rust

In a later song the tenor bull lies drugged
The mason chips his stone the blood is cold
This is the year of rags poisoned air and a secret
farmers and mad lovers share

II. LEGENDS

It was the man who stripped leather
Olives floating in his skin
They staked their love on hides
between empty casks of wine
while the Patron Saint
smiled from his glass coffin

In the temple
I hold a wick between my teeth
and both ends light

burning in a bar
where an old drunk
has earned his life

They beg for all the mercy burned
candles incense figs
The sailors dance
and push the mayor off the pier

A Greek ship sinks
My empty head rolls down the steps
In a dark room, near the rafters
I think I smell her burning

I look up with a cinder for a tongue
and ask her name
In a dark room, in another town
she pulls the shade and bolts the door
Albania, I think she said

All day the air filled thick with smoke
From Kerkyra we look across the bay
and between layers lifted by the wind
see the ridge of olive trees burning above our camp

Hitching back in the dark
the side of the mountain
streaks in orange and odour
of oily smoke drifting down the village

Continues without control
Sparttylas, Nissaki, Korakiana
razing homes where two days ago
we ate with Greek friends

The children gone
the hens and mules

*

The olive trees are burning on Corfu!
In twenty hours the fire will surround us

Midnight from Pyrgi Village
we watch the bright line
move slowly toward us

Empty tables empty streets empty
the army drives into the hills

*

At one o'clock I try to sleep
and for a while dream

to the west a clear sky
Morpheus draws near for a closer look
The stars a delicate web around him

I see back two thousand years
Hellenes naming constellations
Pleiades, Delphinus, Ophiuchus

I become a star for this night

*

Chimaera sleeps in the infernal orchards

17

Charon waits by the shore

*

I waken at this
and go to the sea once again
the faint ash drifting to the water

Salt and smoke in my mouth
the odour of sweet figs burning in my lungs
waves, brine and soot on coastal scar
the Ionic hot with cinder

*

At five in the morning
there is no one left
The firetrucks returned
the men despondent, pallid

A man with one bar across his heart says
pack your things my friend
There is no celebration for the Patron

I leave, glimpsing over my shoulder
that last, most impeccable light before dawn

You must do this
pick a flower everyday
feed it to a fish

It will make you honest
Anything can happen now

Homer cried
He couldn't see the fish
but knew the sea
takes us like a thief
to different islands
where we are born each time

*The heavens are assuaged and
pour forth torrents of light;
the waves of the sea smile on her.*

--Lucretius

Man has killed mythology
and buried it in the rug of a lamb
I tell you Medea
we are distinct by fear

In bright Venus there is authority
a filial devotion to necromancy
and a raiment of fire we wear through life

THE DAY CARL THAYLER
LEARNED TO PITCH HORSESHOES
(for craig, carl, marcia, and emily)

20

From that light
where the sky falls
and brings you into harmony
with the past

it has come to this

control the balance
in your wrist
lean and release gracefully

up into
rowing with itself
accentuate arc
steel over steel

fluttering
for the rain to gather
for the wind to stop
like the wings of a mariposa

Men who drink alone are patriots
dance around their hats
and cry in urinals

They talk about the life that got away
The town where women are too proud
to love their animals enough
The bars too cold to sleep

It's too cold even in a new home
to send letters
The light burns, that lonely glow
the way it did last summer
when the walls were gray
when the hunters killed for pleasure

I can talk to a man
bottle between us
usually a wooden table
hard oak
forgive me if I show no emotion
I'm thinking of someone I don't know
far away

far away
there is someone
I don't know
weeping in a yellow boat

This woman's face has turned
like an old ship to stone
One year the snow froze Perry on the tracks
Eighty winters on the farm

Her soft tongue gave birth to twins
one oak one pine one night
in the stable where the lantern hung
she poured oil on her skin
because she said
there is comfort in a well lit room

That first night Lavern called
Dorothy's chest was filled with # ten
Art's head stays somewhere on the wall

We fished the Betsy
I remember I hooked Black Eyed Susans
and watched a girl

burrow naked in the cold shelves
The runs were filled then
White pine grew instead of Jack

The rollway in Grant is closed
They have picnics now, listen
to the World Series

Back home the wind blows
in a part of this town
where a man still bowls every Thursday

Drawn by the hot dust
two snakes couple in wisdom

The leaves are masks of people
who forget their names
The vines twist into warning knots

I trace the years
like a map that has no roads
Here I clear the bramble
and selfishly dig my garden

I have been here before
and smelled the heat that collects in June
I have been here where a promise burns
at the stairwell of my spine

Here I plant my seeds
Here, where purple is the color of sunset
of insanity, and a tiny vessel bursts
inside my head

It is always one window where I go
one pane to see the fire in the hills
They make me go outside each day
see the masons lay their stone

This the midwest
where they've just now found the moon
I'll stay inside and scream around the fire
While your parents die
you mad go burn and talk
of towns you've never been
say Russia, wind and fires
always know their place

I want you to believe this
if I catch you stealing apples
I'll tie you to the tree
and burn the ones I cannot eat

Deep in the basement a poem is buried
a man who died five years ago
Earrings in the dirt now
voices in the hall

Sorry sir, no mail 'til three
credit cards and bills
I send them down for insomniacs to read
News of Jonci's father exploded over Erie

Strange, the water only drips at night
and poets cry they cry

I drink a cup of night
ash and coffee. Words that
stain these walls
It is Christmas in America
The moon hangs an ornament
on the limb of a spruce

Drawer of ocean in the hall cries
Ishmael, let me out!
A call from the midwatch
Captain, a man is drowning!

I forget the names of my children
this year mailed each week from a different country
Like the butcher who slaughtered his wife
when the cow died

Have we failed
to spend our lives in one place
learning everything we know
the names of flowers
children and our parent's song

I imagine somewhere
there is a beautiful girl
who keeps me in her scrapbook
not last but near the bottom of her chest

Will her husband love
sell insurance and think of me
in terms of charts and decimal points?

Lately Mars has been my sign
conflicts with Nature's order
everything progressive schools have taught

Let the pain be friends
recorded history
not the past, what happened

I tried to learn your language
mine is quite the same
but when we speak
my throne is in the mountains
yours the barren plain

We'll come back again
wondering why we left
our lives a roll of coins
minted out of silver
when iron would have done

He was hit between the crosswalks
his hands deep in his pockets
A man who tried to live this life right
Always paid his traffic fines

Always bought his rounds in order
Stayed home to watch the football games
though something fierce, unyielding
like antelopes jumping in his blood

kept him just this side of respect
always at the edge of fights
A good man who silently cheered
when a friend's jaw was cracked
and loved the pain of fire in his hands

Going back to their mountain
a home in the valley at the end of the road
The breaks and changes took me past Mac Donald
an old fishing lake dried nearly to the center

A disparaged bear retreats
from his warm but high dry rock
the bass and luminous trout beyond his reach
A remnant of hook and line
reminds him he is famous in these parts

Spring didn't bring the mountain floods
this year the hunters tracked farther
up into the hills searching for the freedom
that drove them to despair

POEM

32

(for dan gerber)

A poet cares you said
there is more than being
the only person you know

Remember Shunner's Fell
and Briggflatts
each day as your last summer

Each moment a photograph
great speeds
travelling through your fingers

I am on an island in Greece
sleeping in the olive trees
The moon has been full three nights
and reminds me of you

You can't help it
It's international
part of the centerline
we're all reeling in

ANTI-GHAZAL
(for jim harrison)

33

No patron of the Hiltons
travelling the glass walls
of your briefcase
reading in bars and universities
ride into town on the back of a girl
spurred in the dust of her flanks
you make a rodeo of love

In some bar
drinking beer like poems
Statton (well into it) smelts Eros
from your sensorium / decants
in a smile, drips sharply

cutting your eye
falling like a match to the well

(auspiciously descriptive)

for a closer look

the thighs fourteen years old
draw cautiously to him in the shoal
then at once close him
in the tightness of water

You reel, grab the waist of a glass
and like the whiskey turning
in your stomach has done you a favor
smash it, on the head of Kate Millet

*

She sat on the stool
a cheerleader graduated
Magna Cum Barely
from the Alibi Nightclub

legs suffocating
her jeans defined
the thin line of
dream and reality

She hung into your eyes
a smile, a wink, and ...

34

AND THEN WHAT?

and then you wished her ass
would drop into your lap

But she married the fullback
and will never read your poems

*

Casting for tarpon
swimming in your drink
At thirty-two if you catch him
what will be left?

Ah! eightball and arm wrestling

Yes, you live well
the lives of your poetry

*

1:05 AM
I leave you with Statton
sinking deeper off Key West

The drive home was long
The headlights pulled me into rain
and through the wet glass
began to shovel that night from my eyes

THE W.K. MEMORIAL ACCEPTANCE SPEECH FOR
INVENTING THE FIRST AMERICAN BEER TREE
(for the missoulian proletariat)

35

In the last winter of that year
the wind blew so cold we were all drunk
Hunting ostrich in the Upper Rattlesnake
draining the river with our boots

When God said *give me your soul*
he meant Bill
So Bill flashed the 16 gauge necker at the clouds
and defied the Promised Tundra

The Good Fairy is my shepherd
The Magic Poker my staff
To his men he said: onward!
The road of excess
leads to the Garden of Wisdom

We followed the snowgeese
passed trains from Siberia
and an occasional Pooka
humping his mate

On the seventh day
living by now on sin alone
we entered the Land of Flame

Once again God said *Bill*
what you've done is not nice
Relinquish your arms, commend
unto me the Fruit of your conquests!

Narrrrgh! I will not be forsaken Lord!
Verily I tell Thee
for the sake of my children
We will take the Eastern Gate
by one this afternoon of Your day!

The Heavens roared, sallied forth
an onslaught of Fags and Eunuchs
He looked at me and said: Son
we must not be discouraged

by the high price of Honor
For five egg-reubens
is all I can possibly eat
And *no* Raven shall pluck the olive

from *my* navel
Nearing the Garden we saw
the Golden bar across the door
What hath God rot? he screamed
onward soldiers to Chucks!

For there the Cornucopia flows aplenty
Maidens drop grapes like rabbit turds
and the Delta is fertile
in the want of Human flesh

By nightfall we questioned
the slack of our pockets
The Sage entertained a parable:
Man who shoots rapids

on iceberg
will surely freeze his ass
Then he ran without regard for personal safety
to the base of the Mountain King

He fell upon his knees
and prayed for coin
of a large denomination

When the massive Earth tumbled
usurped our Hero, he struggled
to hold the bottle high and free
This my last Will and Testament

he mumbled; Son, plant this necker!
Below the snow covered ravine
the wind scurried rose petals from the sky
settling gently around his grave

In the Spring a great tree bloomed
in the pattern of tiny brown Buds
a fragrance of malt and barley
was pleasant in the air

An image in the likeness of Man
appeared in swamp gas
as we wandered over the next ridge
into the Bitterroot

37

Who lured us with his voice of honey
and pointed to the pasture
where the cowboy lies still
a fish hook in his heart
and miles of line being eaten by the Sun

III. THE WHITE GODDESS

Your eyes
the moon stares
the distance light must travel

further than I have ever thought
and your hair twists in the wind

Lying on her bed we talk of ships
The way they come from Amsterdam
up the Tyne into Newcastle

Of the harbor and rows of boats
moored to the wharf
like rows of brick chimneys

The lights go out in Jesmond
but the shadow of Isabel remains
I love this night
the sheets that hold her backbone high

Cold Simone or so I thought
when I found that book
in the shelves so many dusty years
and read that you were never born

Again the stove needs wood
I try to feed it names
because they burn so long
still heat when coals have died

In the empty mission I played Father
Changed your name to Chinaberry
Confessed my sins and learned absolution
could be granted if I caught the snake
around your trunk

But even he was mad and claimed you were a myth
a goat some Greek had tossed
to the darkest corner of the night

I know you lied about the Irish
Those healed lines across your wrists
are rivers waiting to be undammed

1. (the magpie)

Si left his teeth in the beer
and sank the eightball
Everything we love
is taken by the magpie
The fish at Mission Dam
Tammy's blouse
Remember Charley Blood who froze
saving his calf in the back forty?

2. (my father)

It's nine o'clock
not the end of anything I believe
the lies people tell about me

My father isn't dying
It's his way to fool us
believing that we're happy

3. (the good life)

It's a hard life they try to rob
each morning a new fire shapes the limb
We fit we tremble like the side of a hog
flowering, the dream life works

4. (the white goddess)

I come from the sea
Nine waves
Nine branches of fruit
growing from my tongue

5. (the music)

We chewed opium from Nepal
bits of skewered fish
picked carefully from the bone
and left the eyes for children

Winter and no fire
that shaggy goat from the mountain
was a priest who burned his wedding ban

Ashley, I give you the last
of my five lives
Play them, listen
the ivory decrescendo
leading back into that dark room
where we kept the piano

42

Lord all I want
is a free ride through this town
To pass the mountains without fear
the sawmills and the bars

I know she's there
at every corner
waiting for the light to change
handcuffs hidden in her purse

The last time we met
she was a tree I cut
and burned to keep me warm

These street facades
a drunk for every dime
a dime for every door
that opens out

Let me pass
I'd give my friends my guilt
but Lord it costs too much
to pretend next year
we can speak in a different language
a photograph burning at the edges

I've known this place my heritage
birds night an Irish waterwheel
The Mayflower storms across the frozen lake
Redguard Almeah Gypsies tangle
in the secret of their madly stamping dance
The horses scared and neighing
in the shadow of the unsuspecting moon

This is what I hide
rejection wind and poems
aristocracy I carry near my heart

Tell me she is lovely
mast and sails white flowers
rounded near the river

Oh Cassandra Simone and Nicolette
Diotima whose madness turned to hate
Spread out your wings, here
where Mnemosyne left her kiss

so I may clothe myself
wave upon wave of this dark water

Every year the wind
blows the moon through the canyon
dressed in my mother's gown

Child, she says
where is the immortality
your father promised?

Crossing my window
she steals a second
from my shabby life

In the fall of that year
while the children slept
it was so cold many soldiers
jumped into the canyon

Do you remember the music and wild geese
the man who returned the bullet
the silver star that hangs above the mantel?

No, still warm
waiting like a snake
for the poison to root in your brain

I could understand a knife or gun
but why a bridge
when you knew how much it would hurt
Did you expect me to follow?

or was it the wind you wanted
thinking it would carry you
into the moon's canyon
where your father said he'd wait?

In this world I died twice
the second didn't matter
Each began in spring
fired from a pistol
in the hot dry months

we'd built a fence
splitrail
cleared the ground for a barn

The mares were due in Fall
heard the wind
three counties away
blowing from the Great Lake

This was my innocence
that it would bring knowledge
wealth from other countries

All summer I waited
working or learning
I would never be a sailor
rich or educated

that sweat that dirt
stuck to my skin
was enough to force any man's faith
into more than one life

*

In September
a light burned in the stables
my back and shoulders
healed from the sun

I remembered the glass coffin
my grandfather made
when he thought he was dying

Two foals
one born dead
like the young boy

who would not remember
being baptised

only the storm

47

outside the church, dark waves now
approaching like the soft whisper of troops
entering a foreign country