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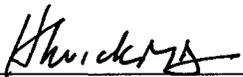
NO MOON

by Annie Mascorro

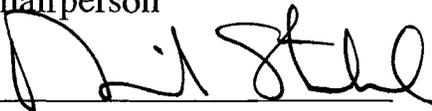
B.A. Latin American Studies, Pomona College, 2000

Presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the degree of
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The University of Montana
May 2006

Approved by:



Chairperson



Dean, Graduate School

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NO MOON

Annie Mascorro

To Matt

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Without evidence of mass lesion,
abnormal enhancement, cortical ischemia,
we sing until it comes, like memory
sprawled then gathered then cut
the pink of a fingertip tourniquet

Apology

A short while after,
we take a walk to make a list of what
matters. We are not sure

about birds- the little ones that sang
throughout the winter. We tell this to the river:
everything we have, we own. We have

bought and sold so hard, no way
to take it back, the unnamed
swallows and flickers, sapsuckers and meadow larks.

Night is falling, we are on a bridge, traffic at our backs,
before us shadows, and if we squint, the outline of
a great blue heron washed in dusk, standing like a blade of grass.

Once

Once, my mother was crying
said to me, let's run away, something
burning in the kitchen. Even then
I knew to be afraid, that house
full of corners, fears that were
or were not, spread, made things
disappear: the baby grand, the yellow
telephone, my father's
clothes. I prepared for us
to run: learned to read a clock
braid my hair, eat spiders
from their webs. Still, I climbed
the black cast iron stairwell just
to look down and feel. Even then
I knew to count the born and the un-
born, brothers and sisters and fathers and cats.

Once, I made carrot cake for a man
who hit me, or wanted to, or couldn't
help but want an American dessert—
something sweet, with frosting for the guests
to see. Underneath the table, he held my hand
tight, laughed *eres mi postre, mi vida, mia
por siempre*. No way for him to know
I called my mother from the thin white kitchen
while he slept, that I cried, a girl who does not know
the metric system, such cold, how
do I make this work? She mentions lemon rinds,
says I will know what to do and when.

Once, a ceremonial robe
hung from the frame of a door.
The color drained into dawn, specks
of cloth catching reflections of glass
from around the room- mirror and
table and vase. I could not see the top,
thought-a body must be inside-
as I stood not wanting to look,
in this house, where terrible
things happened, where the blood
of a goat could not make things right,
where I had decided to leave
for good but could not
move. Not until music
from the neighborhood mosque
cracked the air wide-
a man chanting in another
language, not unlike the song
my mother sang about the cephalopod,
a song I did not understand
but knew all those years.
At first I remembered, then
walked past. A taxi waiting on the other side.

Electrical Injuries #1

Once, he saw a ball of light
the so-called electrician's moons
as he arched, away from the others
who kept at it, away from the cars
below mostly black, heading north
toward the smoke of a factory puffing.

Screens must be erected
to prevent electrocution through the stream of urine of small,
ingenious boys on bridges, or anywhere

aiming at wires connected at the tip
to paths that carry fire to blood
to heart to brain and back
to body where everything begins,

where he walked home
humming the song of a neighbors's
dog, was late for supper,
felt himself grown and round,
for months tasted nothing but moons,
picked up pennies from the school house floor.

Electrical Injuries #2

When more than one object is struck by lightening, they are flung apart:

A man several yards from a tree under which he has been standing,
three glass bottles loosely tied to the inside of his jacket,
a smooth grey rock from the creek's edge

Fragmented, brushburned.

Buckets and iron rods,
any such metal objects in contact with the body
may determine the site and severity of the lesions.
The leather of boots and belts will burst.
If a hat is worn, a hole will be found in it.

The head is invariably struck,
the brain a tangle of rents and fissures
the cerebrospinal spaces distended, perivascular
spaces enlarged, a rupture of muscular coats.

If he had gone instead to church,
taken his wife and children to the clapboard
building off Mainstreet, he would have worn
his brown bowler,
been struck during hymns, taken to bed
to suffer a breakdown
for which there are places to go.

A snapshot of the woods taped
to the inside cover of a King James Bible,
placed on the night stand beside his bed.

After the Seizure

Nothing is one thing today.
As I wake again, time
passes, shallow things surround,
the crunching of cat food is
the tapping of computer
keys, a bird against the window
frame, morning fog.

And when the waking ends:
There is skull, which is
to say, blocks of concrete
bursting, sparks from a welder's
wheel. Pain, too fine to see
sent downward from crown to temple,
past eyelid and pillow case.

Los voladores de Papantla

From the inside she straps
the children in a double stroller, fumbles
with snaps and buckles, a prayer
she used to know, the tips of her
fingers flying to her brow, crossing
the small of her body in one tidy swoop.
She pushes down the sidewalk, a mountain overhead.
She does not know this town, the name
of the mountain, walks straight and counts
the trees. When a shadow overwhelms her path
as if from a large bird, circling its prey,
she closes her eyes, imagines home.

Opening up, the darkness passes.

Los Voladores de Papantla

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as if from a large bird, circling its prey,
she closes her eyes, imagines home.

Opening up, the darkness
passes. Above, a human figure
clutching brightly colored nylon wings, hang-gliding
down the valley. Taking a breath,
she remembers "*los voladores de Papantla...*"
"*Hijos,*" shaking the carriage lightly,
"*¡Los voladores de Papantla!*" The children may
or may not understand. Papantla is far away. Boys
in white pants and red vests, bits of sun and mirror, fall
from the sky into corn, the first day of harvest un-
winding in fat loops, the sound of a flute, people
watching, the wind cupping their cheeks like the hand of a mother.

Walking in circles she arrives
at her door again, not knowing why, from that
falling world, numbness blooms like colors.

A Book on Epilepsy

There is a drawing from Paris,
1838, a man or a woman, impossible
to know which, in bed, eyes
open and unseeing, neck arched
back. But it is the arms
you consider: twisted at the wrist,
one bent backward, the other
lifted. You touch the page, say
this is what your arms do—

You who know, who turn on the lights
at dawn, coax my right half
to one side, you who monitor
the breath, who sit with the body
and wait, find kin in this drawing
and the next. The flipping of the pages
the only sound.

The Center, a light

The fish come
angry come
urgent, fisted
small, streaking,
bodies unbound,
tailing the thing
itself upturned, glass
cut crude, scratching
blackness, a shutter
opening, a depth
unmoored, lit blue,
thickening, turns
time, a surface
floating, streams
into silence, touches
day, touches hour.

The Death Mask of Phineas Gage

*

You who were born,
in that familiar landscape:
neurons, yellowed grasses,
Italian plums, *by god*,
those grape-like clusters, sulci
and gyri, drooping fruit intact,
its own self, its own little brain
untouched for now

You lag and loll, wanting
to be somewhere grand, before
densely packed bodies, apoptosis,
seizures of silence, animal passions of a strong man.

*

If you lie awake touching the exact spot,
with the tips of your fingers, the half drunk
outline of chilled butter, cracked shells,
each lobe processes its own clutch of things:
train cars, skin

we never experience the same thing twice.

*

Ladies, do not trust a man who is touched,
he will clutch your buttocks, no doubt
bend you over like a collapsible chair.

*

If you have touched it, that part on top,
is it rough or has time made it smooth
like rods of light that show one thing
and then the next: your own face
bloated in the dinning room mirror.

*

It is yours no matter what
and there is work, sharp,
entering the cheek
bone, eye socket and beyond, the place

that has made you a child,
rodded in time

*

Touch it if you must, before,
cracking, the rod, the animal, the buttocks,
touch it before it is no longer yours.

*

We are fragile but we are not that fragile

Voting Day

She waited home
with the baby,
sick with whooping
cough or croup. Some-
thing about to
happen though
breakfast was still
necessary, and
medicine. There
is time she thought,
after the dishes,
maybe, later. But
the baby, stretched
out on shag
carpet, con-
tinued to bark
toothless, coiling
into a beam
of dusty light,
and in the kitchen
egg film stayed stuck
to a metal
pan left soaking
in the sink

The Gulf of Mexico

1.

He did not join the family
mariachi band, the one his
cousin sang for, instead
spent the summer riding his
bike down hills, fishing with
a stick, watching water foam
and lap, *cielito lindo, los
corazones*- in him, tumbling out,
toward the bay like pebbles
kicked off the edge of cliffs above
the gulf. He didn't know he
wouldn't always know
the words, the fat way they hung
in the air before falling.

2.

Whizzing down hill on bikes
he and his cousin were not
scared, not even of The Gulf of
Mexico dropping off sharply to one
side. They did not notice brown sea gulls wet
with garbage, animal carcasses thrashed
against the rocks, the rough salt
of mariachi music, always there, sticking
to their skins: trumpet, guitarón, violin,
bells on black vests, the flap of gathering
skirts, her voice like wet sand, drowning
for a moment in the sound of speed, their
arms stretching across the distance
between them, grabbing, as if in the
dark, for each other, tiny fingers
catching tiny fingers against the wind.

To the Women Who Dance with Death
After *The Danse Macabre des Femmes* (1482)

Your ruddiness is aflame dear
ladies, as you sweep across the floor
pointing your toes, arms poised upward,
or outward, moving: perfection of silk and veils,
large cuffs and crowns. All of you: Duchess,
Wetnurse, Pregnant Woman, and others

are still what you ought to be— though
only one role will do, and not for long.
For underneath, red circles rise,
skin swells, and buboes burst.
This thing, unnamed for now, has taken
all of you by the waist, has entered streams

of blood and mind. That flush upon your faces
now burns. Maidens and matrons,
today you are beautiful and death has come
to pasture, or parlor, or fireplace
depending. Village Woman with your chicks
and eggs, you have let him take your wrist,

and you, Darling Wife, the ends of a braided
belt. With a pat and a nod, Bailiff's Lady
outside the castle and Night's Prostitute
deep within the brothel, you have, in your own
styles, curtsied. This dance a knowing,
a coming back at last to body—

skull and borrowed rib. Over your shoulders,
plump Chambermaid, Old Woman, Satan's
Witch, fabric falls in layers and a question— *What
was this world?* A chorus of porcelain answers
breaking— a market scale, God.
Hot wine, full womb, far fields.

To Death Who Dances with Women
After *The Danse Macabre des Femmes* (1482)

On their way to market, baskets of chicks
atop their heads, or else in the parlor
suckling the master's babe, or even under
the canopy of nuptial beds, on honeymoon
or years later, these women, dressed,
and in the midst, do not feel you

until you are there, brown-boned
skeleton rattling into step, here: the jaw
struck open, teeth nobs still attached,
there: strands of greasy hair upon the skull.
Your joints are in constant movement,
as you lunge for hand or wrist

or sleeve. Whatever can be taken, will be.
You are the opposite of beauty, what beauty
will become— riddle of plague, body of no
robes, or else one white sheet draped
across the shoulders, covering only
bones and gaping holes. And words,

the dead have words and you have come
to use them, to teach these women,
and anyone listening from across the way,
“*Ladies*” you cough between the dip and bow,
“*your beautiful starched blouse and friendly
banter make no difference.*” But they are dancing,

robes and skin falling, too late for them
to learn anything from you— you, who know
suffering and its order, the saved and the damned,
who know God and what he loves—
virginity, simple dress, moderation,
the sparsity of men's chatter.

Blue Mountain, 2005

You are sleeping in the middle of this
hill of grasses, balsam root, silvery
lupine, overlooking a ponderosa
pine forest, a river moving
in our direction. But mostly
wind. The inner ear of a seashell's
deep flutter. Things
take time. Last year I was sick,
kept a log of the body's day. Ink
creeping outward, spider veins the color
of skim milk: *dizzy spell, the dream again.*

I couldn't have known then that a river
ran through this valley. That I would
come upon it from above, you at my side
sleeping, the shadow of a tall blade of grass
flickering from the crease of your
brow to the shallow print
of your temple, reaching down
past eyelid and socket, on long gusts resting
upon your cheek.

November

Small birds fly in and out
of thinned and frozen branches:
the Italian Plum tree twisted,
twig-like, now held up
by frost or yellowing
grass the color of light,
that light over there, patched
on hills before the mountains
and moving slowly west.
It is soft like hair
wrapping itself around
the blackening cold.
Come closer, it dares,
but blows away.

Elegy
for Greta

Snow has come again,
the silence of cold wrapping
itself around another year.
The seasons my only proof
you were here,
that we went skiing
through the countryside,
that you showed me how to listen
for the snap of boots, the edges of ice.

Leaving was easy.
When we were tired
we turned around, slid
home, and on the way,
you stopped, cupped bare
hands to your face to keep
the blood of your nose
from dripping onto snow.

I see you there now, head
slightly bowed, eyes lifted
toward trees in the distance.
This, an offering not yet ready.

Domanine Kaba

I would like to have been there that morning, with my body wrapped in blankets and in skin, untouched like the day sliding toward me on the floor, the only darkness circling deep and steady in the brain, waiting to flash a fist of moon, the crossing of my roads lit up all at once, the body falling strangely loose, an animal in shape and size moving where it must, not letting go of nights and dogs and hands, tiny cups of bone outstretched, arching into darkness, into nothing. There are pits this deep. Pocked landscape between K rouan  and Banankoro, where men, lowered into the earth, too tired to dig, sleep against shovel heads, and up above, women with large pots of steaming rice, peanut sauce stewing for hours. The children are curled up to the lip of the hole, waiting, fire settling, the moon moving without motion. This is what Domanine Kaba told me: there are gems inside, and the names of things too sharp to touch.

Waking in a hospital, I do not know my name, how I got here, things rolling past. I think, not everyone has a name: Domanine Kaba knows how to get to the hospital and back. Long ago we walked there, past sweet potato fields, red dust clouds sticking to our skin, brightly waxed wraparounds. One of us sick, we sang: *Allah kende dima- Amina, Allah a noya ke- Amina, Allah an be noya- Amina* all the way down the hill leaning against each other, gravel slipping beneath us, our sandals filling with pebbles and earth. At the hospital we sat on a bench in the shade of a thin mango tree, watched chickens fighting in the courtyard, women arriving with babies. The doctor called, had a look, handed us a plastic baggy with little suns and moons printed on the back. Inside, pink pills pressing up against each other, like benedictions all the way home.

Here, smoke is curling cold against the mountains and the houses. All moving in slow circles, cars and people, doors and cats, breathing out heavy, flecks of ash, after-fire grey waxing all the windows, night and soot whirling up, outside, the grass frosting quiet, each blade sharp like a tiny fish bone, the kind Domanine Kaba sells back in Kérouané, Haute Guinée, La Guinée. She is there now, perhaps at her wooden market table filling small plastic sacks with handfuls of ground peanuts, tying the sacks with her teeth, shifting the child on her back to her breast, smoothing piles of peanuts on a clean blue tarp to dry in the sun. There is noise: the baby cries, the women laugh. Domanine Kaba sings out, "salt, fish bones, peanut butter, palm oil." She is there now and would know what to do with all this smoke. She might just shoo it away, with her hands. Tell us all to come back down.

So much was left undone: blankets, a letter to Domanine Kaba, breakfast, the hanging of maps. This was before the waking. To think, mountain flowers were blooming: sagebrush buttercups, prairie crocus, shooting stars. Even babies being born. In the building where doctors sent me sliding down a tunnel, the brain unsheathed at last, babies traveled too, pressing against bone in the dark, moving forward an inch and then back, eyes opening to a strange light, to the beating of non-hearts. I heard machines too, the high pitched siren of time passing as I entered again, as I did not write what I might have: Dear *Na*, there is a river here and many bridges. Concrete held up by beams, supports strong enough for cars to cross, many at a time, and people walk along the side, sometimes forgetting there is water because it is so far down. Once, I looked thought I saw a large bird standing on one leg in shallow water, a rope around its neck.

That morning: a book of poems on the pillow, a map of Africa, two unpacked boxes of waxed indigo cloth, worn cotton sheets. A magazine full of beautiful women falling open. The song birds spinning a film of light and dust until it is falling through us, all the colors of the brain catching fire, clearing the brush of snakes. I ask because I want to know the places my body has been without me. There is no one else to ask. This is what Domanine Kaba left behind: two calabashes of uncooked rice, a pestle leaning against the Mango tree, six children: two hanging from each other, one playing with tin cans in the dirt, two filling a metal pail with water from the well. Nobody notices the ghost who has no name. When Domanine Kaba returned with a crooked pink scar and a baby, she was breathing through her teeth, pointing to the scorched fields. She said to me, blades of grass will thicken there and the snakes will come.

I have waited too long to tell you this again. The words I remember caught in my throat, no place to go. I will write them on a postcard, send them to Conakry, pray a taxi man will drive them through the pineapple market in Kindia, the Fouta Djallon, to Kankan, past the village with steaming pots of bush meat. It will take two days: *I mackino huh! N di na.. San Geli? San kelin, san fila, san...n malon, N bara tunu*-I have been lost to you. Understand: time and duty are as heavy as jugs of water crushing neck and spine. There are wells here too and they must be tended. Or else. Water spills onto concrete, freezes into ice too slippery for even the cats. And I have fallen, no faded cloth upon my head to soften this load. I have a choice to make. There is no way to send this across the ocean without carrying it myself. And distance is familiar: After ocean comes port, comes city, comes dust: miles of red fixing our skins to match the land.

Bacon

I am nobody's stooge, will eat for lunch a tortilla with bacon,
will eat in the backroom so the boss will not think I am the type

who eats on the job. At home I will eat another tortilla with bacon,
will check the faucets for signs of frozen pipes, will pour dry cat food into the cats'

green plastic bowl. Later I will wipe congealed bacon fat from the glass dish.
I will do this with nothing in mind, or else, thoughts of the day: the cold, the boss's

fur lined gloves, my bicycle's loosening brakes. Let it be known that I am nobody's
poet that I will not recite famous lines or write a poem in my head

when asked. I will mop up the fat with a brown paper towel. When it is time,
I will switch off the lights. Call it a day.

Ghazal

Listen: I will no longer be your guinea pig
your “how to live here and there” kid, stretched like a guinea worm.

Between basins of bath waters and iced oceans
I dream their depressions: Canary and Cape, and Guinea.

When I wake, I wake twice, ask for air, think, what if
A monarch stopped mid-air, over a child in New Guinea.

If I drank, it would be the clear wine of palm leaves
the stuff Christians drink, in the forests of southern Guinea.

Once drunk, maybe I'd arrive for good, in my mind
or out, a dry land, unchanged, a desert in Haute Guinée.

If you were drunk too, and said, Annie you *are* here,
I would say, listen up: they call me Aïcha in Guinea.

After Lennart Nilsson's endoscopic human
fetus photographs currently aboard Voyager I and II

Ladies, open up
there is yolk and sac
inside you water we must hold,
must sail, must
keep in glass vials,
science you may not understand
rounding you in space, in
whole continents of truth:
the wings of snakeflies,
mountain ash, trillium, those
elephants you watch at the zoo,
where you imagine you will come back
with baby carriage, gold pleated
skirt, and man and child.

Listen, it is easy now
to know the unknowable, to still
constant motion or to make
it last forever somewhere
far away from here,
Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus
any life up there
must know ours,
the animal inside you bearing all-
This is what we are
before we are (if we ever are)

Daylight Savings

And if it is not saved while
we sleep, not stashed away for
later use, like light bulbs in a kitchen
pantry, where would it go? If we
could not hold it, would it
burn away? Grow too bright? Knock
down the frames of buildings?
Call us names?

I say, ask the trees, they
keep one eye open, they
have seen it all, have
held daylight up like a child, have
stroked its long golden back, have
watched it slip away.

From the Porch I Call to Him

From the porch I call to him
and he comes, armfuls of eggplants

and tomatoes visible even in this
clouding twilight, the cats approach

in bounds, hunting sticks and
wings, behind them autumn. Watching

through the fence posts a deer curling her
tongue. Every day is the last harvest

now, in this garden
that we made, where we came

when I was sick. We are all
stronger now, bearing fruit before

the winter comes, the freezing and
the pickling, onions drying overhead

Even the cats keep a pile of dying grasshoppers
in dark spaces on our bathroom floor,

all of us are heading indoors, for now
thick coats of flesh and grime upon us.

A Beginning

That house is, to me,
what is underneath: it is empty
and fills with fog. Its windows

are skinny, and cut more for
unhappiness than horizon or quiet
bedside wonderment.

Where moon is, it is farther
and rests untouched. It was built
by my father in unmindfulness.

But in it I had been, at first,
conceived. If it bears,
I will myself, and carry it.

From Over Here
To Na

Ask me what I have to offer
(in return)
and I will tell you about a woman
who loves her children
through the pounding
of rice and rocks and days
who is giving birth (even now)
without uttering a word (not one).

Ask me her name
and I will tell you about night
about two women waking in the dark
nothing else (at last)
I am writing poems
in a mud-brick hut
and she is standing underneath a moonless sky
all shapes and shadows and shine
tin cup banging against a metal bucket
as she dips
as she pours
well water falling over her head
like words onto paper

Maybe someday she will know
that this is all I have to offer her
(from over here):
a vision of her (a woman I love)
standing in the middle of a poem
a woman who knows her name
a woman who needs no moon

Epilogue

We are still here, above,
counting each other,
the days we have carried,
seizures of all kinds,
slow ones falling leaf-like,
whirlwind of colors and speed
catching. The days are shorter.
The river gathering tines of frost
along the edge. Nights
we stay indoors, bake squash
until the rinds have crisped,
liquify the meat. We remember
our bodies this way,
between, mostly water,
cut and opening.

Notes

Pages 5 and 6- After Donald Hunter's *The Diseases of Occupations*

Pages 8-9- Los voladores de Papantla (The flying men of Papantla) perform a harvest day tradition in many parts of Mexico though they are named for the northern city of Papantla. Men or boys attached to ropes wound around a large pole fall backwards and fly through the air to the sounds of live flute music as the ropes unwind in large circles.

Page 11- After *Brainstorm #9*, 2004, Acrylic by Craig Getzlaff

Page 12- Phineas Gage (1823-1860) was a rail-worker who lost a large chunk of the front part of his brain when a steel rod blew through his skull in a mistimed explosion at work. While he survived the accident, he went from being a responsible and industrious worker to a drunker drifter who could not control his actions, especially with women. Phineas Gage is often used as a case-study in the neurological origins of behavior and personality. (Info taken from *Mapping the Mind* by Rita Carter, p.25).

Page 16 and 17- After *The Danse Macabre des Femmes* (1482)- A 15th-century French poem accompanied by medieval illuminations. In each poem and painting one woman is called in the midst of her daily life by death, depicted as a skeleton, to join the Dance of Death. In each poem death calls and the woman replies.

Page 32- after Robert Creeley

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