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Undertow | [poems]

Ann McGlinn
The University of Montana

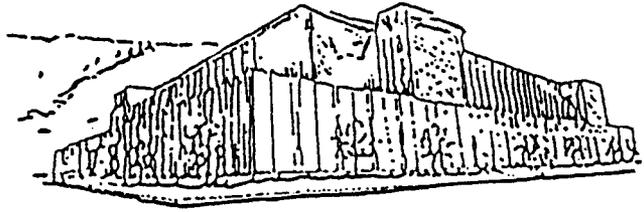
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UNDERTOW

by

Ann McGlinn

B.A. Indiana University, 1993

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

1997

Approved by:


Chairperson


Dean, Graduate School

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THE RINGMASTER

A gust caught in a shell—
the theater framing panic
and a gilded array
of horses, brawny men, ladders, dwarves.
A swamp of sickness,

the audience holding out like breath—
tender blooms sunk in straw.
Except for the little boy,
he's in the back row again, listening
for the horned owl in the rafters.

Parchment flags smoke and drop
cinders, the striped heaven
is moldy and sagging,
and to draw it he digs
in his mother's purse. A pen

and forgotten ticket. She is gone
and he is happy. Triangles are too hard
so he traces the ringmaster's small face
on the program and adds some hair
to his head. Some glasses around his eyes.
Remakes him.

INTRODUCING NEW MYTHS
TO THE SCENE: A COLLAGE

in which saints tilt their heads
toward you, and Mary orange
with moss.

The damp holds you in— a velvet patch
on the desert.

Now, the coyote's head deep into the dead,
the ribcage nearly clean. Or perhaps

faults begin to shift— birds and squirrels disappear,

the lines of the seismograph grow longer
and we are spent again.

We sweep up the glass, and carry away broken beams.

Or, a more peaceful entrance—
the child picks apart

a log, and rotting threads unfold to bodies

feeding on the unseen.

PERSISTENCE

He called her genius. She turned to snow
and drifted against his house. To tuck away,
suckle the babe, irrational, in her arms

was what she thought, what she ate,
what she heard heroines must do. Genius,
but her effort told her otherwise—

though she could feel the switch
on a bull's back, and the last twitch
of a dying girl, she could draw no conclusions.

She wished for the slow descent of a seahorse,
or the timely arrival of a mad tale to her head—
Time, inordinate. Peaceful. His patio glittering with chairs.

THE SERMON

And the soil shook for a sermon on winter
while inside the wooden church a child pulled
a silver crown from his tooth. Coins dropped into
baskets slipped between the narrow pews. Lovers
mistook incense for linen burning

and the soil shook for a sermon on winter.
Crooknecks froze black against kitchen
windows. *Like the discipline of healthy joints
or fuel tempered to an even burn*, the priest
crooned. Old men rubbed arthritic hands and fat knees

and the soil shook for a sermon on winter.
On Second Street a cat scratched through tubes
until a claw caught in a chaos of wires.
Its owner rose with the congregation and
began to read, right to left, pages of psalms

and the soil shook. For a sermon on winter
hit the roof of every mouth, and lifted
the ears of dogs leashed to wrought-iron rails
of the wooden church as the priest
adjusted the volume of the microphone.

ISLAND PARK

Not following where once you stepped
and the smell of you seeped in more than I could stand,
and I don't know if I want to take your hands and pull
you into the cavity I've spent days digging out.
So lonesome, the song of swans at dawn
when the canoes are empty along the docks.

Statues broken against the trees—
feet severed at the ankle, round bellies split. I'm wearing
your pants. The matches are wet. A wedding has begun
in the rose garden and the bride is swept up
in her dress. I can see flowers
on her thighs and pins
in her slip. Are you under the bridge?

Are you shaking sand from your socks?
A water moccasin slips from the bank
and foil streamers rustle from the gazebo roof.
How can such sounds share the same day
with the sirens I fear are for you?

REWORKING DESIRE

**Volcanoes quiet
and physicists give up on poems.**

In his room, a young man pulls back his hair
and promises himself another chapter by noon.

I undress, and you,
as the young man wishes he could do

but, plainly, there are other things
than this to be done. Come, kiss me.
Kiss me. Come. Come.

Tethered, boats float squarely
in the bay, and their long-sleeping captains
no longer incite song.

You, turned away from me now
to such a scene, are a music pulled away
from sound.

THE COMPOSER'S ROMANCE, OP. 4

Not here, hopeless boy
with your baton and some wire
wrapped around a wrist.

Her chin on ebony chin-rest,
tightened bow near breaking—
now, a dimmed reverberation

of frenzy and reason. She said
she felt *Like the stem of a strawberry*
and fancied stability in distance.

Don't expect letters from Boston
or wherever she may end up. Hush.
The thunder will be sufficient.

THE PROFESSOR

Patient, he refrains from picking up his empty cup,
empty for at least an hour while his daughters
chase one another through the room, throwing confetti,
their swinging hair so much better because the morning
is nearly done and he can see their burnished bodies.

BA-DAH, BA-DAH

the volume turned up, with Ellen insisting
Papa, tie my shoe -- her purple dress pulled
to her knees and an ice cube in her hand.

By now his colleagues are on their way
to the old train station to discuss
the relativity of art

and water drips on his head. Ellen at seven,
and the saints all hearken her name— it resounds
in slowly taken shafts. Her gown is waiting,
with sleeves embroidered for shifting winds. All
is as it should be— the paper whites
on the table, and beetles
caught in humid webs

After school we're going to Sadie's

the postman at the door with packages,
leaves blown against the screen, and BA-LOOM LOOM-BA
the daughters dancing with jackets— empty arms
flung over their shoulders.

THE GLUTTON

The winter castle was closed
to the glutton –
he had eaten all the stew,
the fresh breads,
the wet pigs in their pen
beside the stable.

His mistress of three days
had run away,
after the last strand of garlic was stripped,
and every pumpkin was smashed for its seeds–

but she had left the porcelain figurine
poised on the mantle beside
the oval mirror– its gown
of pink rosettes blown
into a permanent arc.

PRELUDE TO AUTUMN

The crowd gathered there
like unappeased noon
or ice cream melting
through brick and mortar. The mayor
tossed a swarm of symbols

over the voters' heads--
statistics flashed onto buildings,
and the fiends of faulty forecasts
were flushed into the sewer. You faded

before I bathed you in fixer--
jaundiced face, edges smearing blue.
I saw the point
of stable capitals and stacking books
on shelves. You folded like
a warped flower between the tongs.

TO THE GIRL OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

Nothing but daffodils in your hand,
and they mean nothing more
than what they grew into
and you can see

he has chosen her simple room
with ribbons hung from the rafters.
Ribbons unwrapped from her hair,

he climbs the ladder to tie them.
She twists her hair in a knot
and he, looking down,
thinks Swan Lake.

UNDERTOW

1.

My brother hid his maps
of saucy stars--
his coins-- his garland caps
stolen from lost and sleeping children.
I searched. I know his vanity.
The snow won't quit tonight--
he'll come. A glimmering cocoon of coral thoughts.
I wait for measured taps.

Tonight's eclipse-- to plunge
a body into chilly water.
I vow to paint his forearm orange,
a mixture dried in sponge--
dragons entwined around a sculpted spire.

2.

A pail of sand
and bags of dune reeds
set down like gifts-- an orchid
frozen to his chin. *Look, Ann,*

*things for your room. You know
I had it all wrong-- thinking
you would never live alone.*

*I see you've dropped the flour again.
Why do people insist on making me dinner?
Does the repetition of the four seasons depress you?*

As I arrange bowls and spoons he tells me
about tropical harbors, eating papaya
as the ships docked, and a sailor he first saw
pulling opera scores from blue sleeves.

AFTER "A"

Go to wall 3
of cell no. 3 in the basement
of the "Palace". Inscribed there
*No, Mother, do not weep,
Most chaste Queen of Heaven
Support me always--*
and beneath *Helena Wanda Błażusiakówna*
signed her name. The moon
caught the attention of young men
sitting on the roof--their eyes
filled with its orange light--
breaking for cigarettes
and to breathe the chilled air
with one another.

Over waves
shadows of
old forms--
Alcyone and
her once
dead love
shake off
the foam
from downy
breasts. We
skip stones
across the
flooded plain
where houses
once held
cribs, jars,
the delicate
starts of
ferns, the
neatly hung
coats.

*Repentance
for twice
replaying
what desire
moves in
me. With
my senses
I climb,
as with birds,
into windy
heaven*

but John

over whisky

cannot sit still. Restlessness

of the unconfined variety.

Is it peace that brings
terror to the mind—
unshelled, the rolling hills
at first lull
then dull,
and subtly
the eyes
shift to
a subjective
realm. What
is told
him hardly
matters.

Disharmony
mutates, grows
sharp and what follows
is a strange violin.

Even in sleep
twelve hours a night
the scientist cannot
leave his special theory
behind. On the branch
of a tree the shaken birds
settle into song.

The lawns of Princeton
stretch from stone arch
to well-swept walk
and who passes him
goes relatively
unnoticed

and what form will we find ourselves
in? I won't ask
you to type dialogue,

only point me in a direction.

Notes. Encyclopedias. Sometimes
she seems near. Sometimes
destroyed by appropriation.

He wipes his equation
from the board. What is missing
may well come tonight
and he will reach
for the pencil and paper
his wife keeps ready
beside the bed.

Couldn't they stand still
for you, Cartier,
half the world waited

for their return and you
caught— I assume not seeing for myself
the particular look of a prisoner
back to his mother, his lover,
whomever was left to greet
and give thanks—
the embrace dreamed in half-sleep.
Behind glass, the eye
is given distance
and the frame
contains what is desired.

A nest floats on
the sea charmed
calm until
the last egg
is broken through
and each new eye
is opened. My son,
my chosen,
I have always carried
you in my heart,
and served you
speak to your mother,
make her happy
although you are already
leaving me

the chill of the body in the hands
how can I show you
what I have brought out
of the darkened room

-show me

show who?

the past is a wall
 between two windows
one who does not lean out
 no longer sees

a faster speed with which
to work, the movement
from still to still
a sequence.

Knotted, the end
of the string stays
in place for the stitch.
You may well ask
why sit-in?
Everything Adolf
did was legal—
he wrote
in the margins
of a newspaper
his letter
from Birmingham Jail.
Eyes
I-it
I-thou
what is held
in the sockets
of the head
made of cells
dividing
in harmony,
holding together
the seen shape.

Please stop.
 We must talk about things-

what is unpleasant now
could turn— the dank head of a baby bird
dries and we reach to stroke
the glittering green or black

You approach twenty-eight
and it is as if you have outlived
your ideas

at so young an age
we are drawn
easily to one another
trying performances
without shame I cut out
props and move them
around midway through
an act. It is the inner-stage
where you move,
and without an audience
the imagination confuses
what comes through ear
and eye, noises
settling in
sunlight.

In Opole
women sang even if
I cry my old eyes out
were my bitter tears
to create another River Oder

they would not restore to life
my son. The sun all through December
strikes the hands of Irene who writes
with the wish to reflect her father's
flight

You are not with them. You came later--
After the blackbirds ate your seeds, after
the Polish woman saw you and exclaimed,
"Look how many of them are coming back."
I never asked how you got there-- by boat, or plane.
Like a blackbird, you landed suddenly.

Ann, to have written is a relief-- though I keep moving
it around on the page. Enclosed is a picture of my
new apartment-- I couldn't fit in the bay window (I have a big
tree to look at when I write).

My love always,

Irene

and perhaps, transformed, Helena
sang to the young men
from a branch
filled with turning leaves
trying to find
through ears
the untuned
strings within.

NOCTURNE 1945

The need is growing-- not forced through leaves,
not through the stem of the liveforever flower,
but where, all cloud, guns were fired-off
and birds fanned from the brush.
Together, waves and rubble mark
what was once a complement to the sun.

Chiding, girls bury their shoes
and listen for the accordion
played through wind and sand. Bald of weeds,
the horizon is a wickless blaze.
Alone, joyous men sing--
singed by what could have been.

APRIL

The world pared-down
to a tremulous hymn--
hairy stems spring back,
and bronze horses break
from fountains at Versailles.

To meet at Greenwich
and walk the meridian's polished brass line,
or take tea at the Shelbourne
and watch Dublin schoolboys
drop their scarves.

The man who will stroll
the square with a carriage
is the Prime Minister's son with a baby born
out-of-wedlock. Beyond, the jerked elbows
of marionettes and children pushing
toward velvet stages.

And we do meet, time and again,
don't we? Your crushed hat endears
such weather. Coffee
splashed on clean linen. Framed
above our table, Maude Gonne in a silver dress
holding a pet monkey. As always, the butter
will be stubborn to melt on our scones.

STEPHENS STREET

1.

At number six, on Stephens Street,
a woman removes her silk shoes

and coarse wig. Outside,
a kerosene lamp

dims beneath the canopy
of two tall oaks. A shower of meteors

and the tapping of sticks
along a fence ends. Two boys kiss.

The walls are studded with putty
and moths that flit and drop.

The woman is feathered
with lilac relics--

the movement delirious
as hands passing through curls.

2.

*Even the cymbals have gotten used
to their own sound. Here,
the men march in squares and triangles.
What went wrong?
Who put on the over-sized boot?
Stole a merit pin?*

This book is as mad as the person
who wrote it. I drank green tea as she typed
the final draft. She sweeps
her floor every morning at three.

Love, until you return
I practice a repose— arm drawn
high above my head— on the couch, the bed,
against the refrigerator, the tiled roof,
the chimney. The cats spit

at each other in the hall. I go
to the mirror and behind me a group of mule deer
flick velvet ears and an osprey
dangles a trout from its claws.
In number four, someone has been playing
the cello, unaccompanied.

3.

A pink flutter
across blacktop
entering, finally,
into the swing of two
long ropes

*Hotten-trot
the wild birds eat
silver beads*

*and the weathered seeds
fall down
on the swallows.*

Boys try to climb
the gutter to the roof
before the bell.
A teacher smokes
beneath a tree. The second floor

windows are filled with the only snowflakes
in the valley— yellow and dry
as flecks of honeycomb.

4.

Dinner begins with a madrigal--
the delivery boy has been tipped
and the singers' grackle hops
to a booster seat.

Only a few knew the three sisters lived here
in the basement room with a door
by the washer. They are hard to hear
above the whirls and revolutions.

But now, their voices-- the juice of pears,
the shine of flawed steel-- quiet the table.

All of us are here-- the tenants,
the neighbors, some visitors
from the clinic down the street, and the nurse
who refuses them wine and smoked food.

All of us are hungry, and the sisters forget
the century and begin a cycle
of *L'homme armé*--
their faces flushed.

5.

(a visit to number four)

*To love imperfectly--
asymmetrical breasts, the flooded garden,
a movie watched on a small screen.*

*The hemorrhaged ear
still attempts its business, and the error
by the first violinist
goes unheard. Mr. Olson's kitchen
is above mine. He has an uneven stride.*

*Thank you for coming,
and thank you for going. The final movement
is usually my favorite. I heard
your father has published a new theorem.*

FERRYING

1.

With your lapel in my mouth,
I am restless. Our books finished,
the food gone, the ruined house behind us
riddled with bullet holes,
sheep bleating through the fog.

I could go on. I could drag you to the nearest lake
and point to the castle poised
on the far bank— ask of you its history,
whose horses filled the stables.

You have answered everything
and now you wait for mine. *I hate nothing.*
I want to smell a jungle. You strike a match
and set fire to the grass.

2.

The modifications of pronunciations,
the syntax of placing you before another.
Now, monumental, the cat descends
from the tree. I am fat of your kisses
and can't move, but shouldn't stay.
The year is young, and the day a somber eve.

3.

How is it one comes to love words
never used and then, when uttered,
run? Night comes too quickly to children
who rub tombstones. Across the sea,
taxis are parked along the shore.

THE PAINTER'S SON

1.

A young woman asks if he is home.
She carries a book
of photographs, kicks off the snow,
and closes the door behind her.

His father's paintings are stacked
in the fireplace, on chairs, and more
line the staircase— shades of orange,
an arrangement of boats, cliffs, and, further up,
a resemblance of his face,
the central element between a knee-high
cow and shoots of burnt bamboo.

2.

How does he sleep with the noise of chain saws
and wires snapping outside the window?
The cats are on the shelves and she sits
on the edge of the bed and opens the book
to caped policemen on bikes,
a Parisian showgirl with a single curl
slicked to her forehead, a couple in an opium den
who hold needles and pipes over a lamp.
The couple wear very little, and she wonders if the room
was warm—if the woman's stockings breathed at all.

3.

*She whispers, If you are really asleep
then this will be completely self-serving. But I've wanted
to tell you I've been sticking notes
behind your mirror. I noticed my caricature*

*on the dresser and appreciate my unexaggerated
nose. I've always wanted to touch
your chipped tooth, and I've never told you
that I fell in the river once and drifted
as far as the duck pond. The feathers are under your rug.*

4.

She steps outside to a horseman
and the horse's blue rump—
appropriate for the brick streets
in the old part of town.

The holly, French horns,
salt-spattered curbs, and children
passing by with bags of fish. She marks
it all with wild turns of a phrase

he said to her without pause.
And she, thinking a meeting place
had been chosen, waits
beside a burning bin.

ASIDES UPON PARTING

A painting on glass, the slow circling
bird. I am dwarfed by summer—

the soon-to-be mothers, the question
of carrying on. Taken generally,

the shrubs are blue and the woman
I am with is pale. It is afternoon and I think

of pianos and of sitting alone in a hall
but then voices of sopranos emerge

and silhouettes along the backdrop
of trees. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow—

to fill them as I please
with pleasantries, with galas for those

enamored of each other, with cymbals
on the street ready for banging,

with girls wrapped in sequined boas,
and painters with easels by the lakes.

But I can't keep up with bygones
or the heavy weights we are, moving ourselves around.

LOVE POEM

1.

Dark glamour, the never-resting mind. The return to frescoes
that have been sanded down, or vats of smashed grapes.
The contortionist unfolds his body after a long day.

2.

To last like a decayed cathedral still attracting tourists,
bricks remain where they fall and the tempers of children
have no resounding effect. We shrink from the wounded,
padding away from each other, sandy skeletons seeking retorts.

3.

Massive, it shakes pedestrians from bridges, the goats leap
back into their pens. Nothing has traveled so capriciously,
so willing to risk running aground. And beaches eaten
by eccentric horses grow back again into draped gods.

THE COMPOSER'S DEATH

And the spade that was left beside the stone
wall is gone. During the wake

the sashed pallbearers sat
beneath a canopy. No, never

had they strayed from slow, measured steps--
they never thought lust could knock

the life from a man. But there, without need
of his morning cup of broth,

a stringed sorrow. The Wagnerian talked
of prime notes and the priest of prostitution and pain--

We are all impoverished.
Indeed, sirs, the jolly devil

always breaks his back. All
the dead man's family was drinking--

bottles of mint liquor and Bushmill's.
They filled the cut glasses fully.

That February, reeds dried out
and green was still months from the vines.

LAYOUT AND ADDITIONAL MARKINGS

I have practiced leaving it alone,
I have gone to the backyard and buried my tools and alarms
and have pushed all the children on their swings. I have
pushed my own arm away from the stove, I have unbuckled
my bag and have tried to let the papers settle
without weights.

I have built you a city quite similar to this
and in it we are posts holding up nets
where the tall hang for a few seconds— hang
over the shoulders of newlyweds breaking
on their blankets, hang quivering
and singularly heated.

True, I am not of yeasty talent
but born at 6:30 in the morning I am habitually up
early and consuming without pause. There are places
to be — Senegal and Haiti, Gnawbone
and Rouen. I have considered marrying

the mathematician from France who writes
to me daily. But I was mean to him once,
and can't forgive it— couldn't live with him
knowing what once came out and not sure
if it could come again, bending the jaw

to a shape grotesque but pleasing for its sheer
originality. I must bronze what's left of my plate—
before the greens rot and I forget about covering
my hands and chance burning them off. I have sewn
the flags together to fly thickly and have pinned
my name to the inside.

THE ALLEY

A dog throws his bark against wind,
the whistle of trains clanking mud
from backyard tracks--

anything that can move beyond
a rope and pole. Ice floes break
crude beneath footbridges

and children toss snowballs
at a rotted hive. A woman in fur sips
coffee. I watch her from the alley. It is December

and her kitchen shines pots and tinsel out
toward the almost-night. The gravel mute--
caught in drifts against the fence.

POEM TO BECKETT

Remembered time, a coat dragged
through snow, is lost

and what to do with incurable future
but fill it— like dogs jumping

into the sea. And what would I do without this world,
this spinning to light and shade—

the voiceless room into which I'm packed.

MENDING

Such small hands I held
last night. Now,
the pressure of pins,
the unraveling hem
I must fix before
five. Meeting again.
We—dust that sometimes spirals—
have reservations.
At the Louvred Door.
Perhaps a scotch
before she arrives.
Bar paintings of fruit
and cobbled streets.
Her face is oval.
This thread so green
it's almost black.

POEM FOR JAMES

What do you care to see
What do you care to know,
In a spray the sea can lift

the skins of swimmers.
Erase the sea, and before
such a silence

you will need
to speak. Loosely held,
faith breaks— coral from a reef.

LAMENT

Why gone, the painter
and his pains?

Too dark to see how done,
what senses
can reach beyond?

Hot at his desk, hot in his bed,
too hot to be awake and wait.

Rain started up
and what grew
in the fluorescent light
was pulled away.

Messages accumulate.

Found Sunday,
done the previous Wednesday,
where the ashes?

Had he heard
the body's beauty lives
so evenings die, in their green going,
a wave, interminably flowing
perhaps his deadened ears
might have saved him.
Not knowing him well,
what can I do but offer
my mouth after the fact?

THE OPERATION

1.

October ash in the north mountains.

Nurses guess at what the sky
might do to children in the street.

Three stories below my window
a boy smashes through dams
of clumped grass, leaves, and sun.

An old couple tours walkways
to neighbors' doors— uncertain
if one will open as the time it takes for plumes of gas
to catch on the mirrors of machines.

2.

A toe in honey. What did you say
Tom? That you would stay
until the column collapses or light

hits my face? Doctors pushing needles
into my arms. Don't strap me!
Not flat. I like fetal

positions. That feels good. Maybe
they could ease my bed into the woods.
I wonder how many times I should

roll over for them? I could pull out
this tube. Drain a little blood— make a spout.
Wait... take my fingers,
they're worthless.

3.

4:30 a.m. we walk corridors with metal staffs
or roll into rooms, collecting each other,
our bags dripping solutions—

lethal if given too fast. The opening, then subtraction,
the rearrangement of remaining substance
in a slick space. Replicas hang in each room—

Waterlilies, Floor-Scrapers, The Gleaners.
Televisions turned to channel four—
the first floor chapel empty. The camera is focused

on silk flowers in front of the podium. We infuse
ourselves— thumbs on black buttons, sting of morphine,
and wait for the show to begin.

4.

(eight ways of looking at a scar)

I.

An archangel's tongue
pressed to a girl's belly
bristles the feathers
of a blackbird.

II.

No path to the evening market—
the road collapsed
before the entrance to the forest.

III.

The flight of a blackbird
mapped from Abyssinia
to a broken weathercock.

IV.

Deer trophies fallen
from rusted nails. All that's left
is a strip of wood— stapled and shellacked.

V.

A line burnt through a field of wheat.
Tufts of hair stuck
to the beak of a blackbird.

VI.

Blackbirds trapped in the orchestra pit.
Ann, eagerly, deftly,
dropping her skirt
in the second balcony.

VII.

The sheen of a blackbird
floating in a bath of almond oil.

VIII.

A scroll, poorly rolled—
heat-blistered— shoved
between slabs of coquina.

5.

Come closer. Be my doubting Thomas.
Put your finger here--

past wet layers
to the blue glaze of muscle.

A belly flambé the infection
burned its way out

without the sweet smell of brandy.
Did you bring some? Have I told you

I've left off prayer? I didn't think
you would come. Five strips of gauze

to plug it up. Pain killers
twenty minutes before the changing.

You haven't written or called. Your hair
has grown. You look pale. Sit before

you fall but first, touch me.
The proof is my warm skin.

RECOVERY

Once a thrill, your touch is now a need.
Sickness dangles in me. I am alone these days,
and terror has taken a tally of the hours
since your last kiss. Doctors pry
and predict a good end but I hold now
to a lower rung of beauty or possibility.
I know you think this, I am sure.

Wet and angled, I lie sobering.
Still, there is the morning grass
from which to pull living things.
Squalls sink and stretch the sea
and merchants rope-down their wares
as each crest returns to its blackened body.

ADAPTATION

1.

Mother's time,
kept stuffing her daughter's wounds.

Her daughter, head hung,
whispering *hurry*.

A fly in a bowl of dried flowers.

Counted among the alive
who must manage as they can,

the daughter fixes her eye
on what navigates toward the window

and nervously probes a glassy branch.

2.

Men whistle.
She should say something but she lacks the wit—

it left her early in the evening after too much
talk at the table. She sits on her front steps

near the sidewalk pushed up
from the roots of the oak tree—

a detour sign tacked to its massive trunk.
Light bulbs scattered on the lawn. She is something

to see. She lets her thin legs poke
out from the blanket. She unrolls her hair

to arm's length and wraps it around her face
and neck—a black bandage smelling, faintly, of apples.

3.

In her lover's bed, she is happy
for the dark sheets and the fan

that drowns out the splashing
of the neighbors in their pool.

He is in the bathroom. She can hear
the water running as she passes

her finger through the white flame.
In the shadows, the blooms

of hanging plants close
and she is sure of what he said

when he put his ear
to her back and pressed

his fingers to her ribs—
There, yes, there

as if something solid
rolled around inside.

4.

The guitar is locked
in its case. She cannot
bring herself to play
what she wrote
on hearing the squirrels
scratching in the eaves.

She sees the blue head
of a stitch to pull. Slick
from her side
she wraps it around a polished hook
and screws it to the floor.

Notes

AFTER "A"— This poem is influenced by the twelfth section (A-12) of Louis Zukofsky's poem "A". The largest section of "A", "A-12" is a sprawling landscape of voices that move in and out of one another. Within the section is a subsection composed in the form of a quartet that uses the name "BACH" to signal the different voices or ideas based on those of Spinoza (B for "Blest"), Aristotle (A), Celia, who was Zukofsky's wife, (C), and Paracelsus (H) whose real name was Hohenheim. In *After "A"*, I use both the name and music of the contemporary Polish composer Henryk Górecki to organize themes and the several voices present in the poem.

G (God)— The "Palace" was the headquarters of the Gestapo in Zakopane.
'*No Mother, do not weep...*' the prayer inscribed by Helena Wanda Błażusiakówna on "wall 3 of cell no. 3" of the Palace (Information and prayer taken from the jacket notes of Henryk Górecki's Symphony No. 3, cond. David Zinman, London Sinfonietta, 1991. Notes translated by Krystyna Carter, Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd., 1992).

O (Ovid)— reference to Ovid's story of Ceyx and Alcyone.

R (Rainer Maria Rilke)— from Rilke's poem "Moving Forward": "*With my senses/ I climb/ as with birds*". Also, "strange violin" is taken from his poem "The Neighbor".

E (Albert Einstein)— Einstein fled Germany in 1934 and went to the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

C (Henri Cartier-Bresson) French photographer whose film *The Return* documented the French prisoners of war of World War II returning home. "My son, my chosen..... my cherished hope" from "Lamentation of the Holy Cross Monastery from the Lysagóra Songs", also taken from jacket notes of Górecki's Symphony No. 3. "The past is a wall..... no longer sees" from Zukofsky's "A-12".

K (Martin Luther King, Jr.)— "You may well ask... was legal" and "I-it/ I-thou" refer to King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail".

I (Irene Sosniak) My friend Irene Sosniak's father, a Polish Jew, fled Nazi persecution during World War II. "Opole" and "even if I cry.... life to my son" taken from the jacket notes of Górecki's Symphony No. 3. Opole is a city in Southwestern Poland on the Oder river. "You are not with them.... you landed suddenly." from a poem by Irene Sosniak.