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# Treading lightly

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*Eastern Illinois University*

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"Treading Lightly"

(TITLE)

BY

Megan Rankin

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
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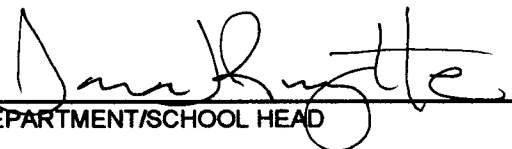
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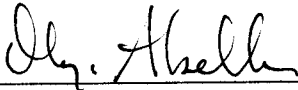
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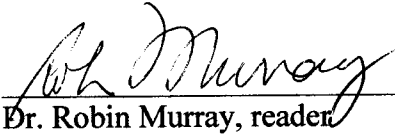
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Dr. John Martone, thesis director



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Dr. Robin Murray, reader

Abstract:

A creative thesis of poetry in four chapters that illustrates the inspiration of Taoist texts, Chinese poets such as Li Bai and Wang Wei, Japanese haiku by Issa, Basho, and Chiyo-ni, and American poets such as Lorine Niedecker, Denise Levertov, W.S. Merwin, and Louise Gluck. The fourth chapter focuses more on myself as poet and on my pregnancy at the time of writing with all chapters looking at the intricacies of nature and human interaction therein.

Dedication:

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents, my husband and my son who serve as constant sources of inspiration.

**Acknowledgements:**

I would like to thank Dr. John Martone, Dr. Olga Abella, and Dr. Robin Murray whose feedback on this project was greatly appreciated.



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## Introduction

*The name that can be spoken of/ is not the constant way;/ The name that can be named/ is not the constant name. (I p.57). Words are not just blown air. They have a meaning. If you are not sure what you are talking about, are you saying anything, or are you saying nothing? (26).*

These quotations, taken from the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Chuang Tzu* respectively, illustrate the difficulty of word choice. In an effort to describe Daoism and its effects on the poetry I have read and written, I need to choose my words carefully, trying to retain the flavor of the Dao and yet explain how the work of master poets has influenced my own writing. I begin with some aspects of the Dao.

A common metaphor for the Dao is the Tai chi. The two halves of the circle intertwine to illustrate the duality of all things. The interdependent characteristics of both the yin and the yang serve to also illustrate the oneness of all things.

Another way of representing the Dao is by looking at the path of nature, particularly the element of water. Alan Watts, author of *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, says that, "the Tao is the course, the flow, the drift, or the process of nature," and he calls it the watercourse way because Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu use water as a primary metaphor for the Dao (41). Also, the image of the wandering stream is representative of *wu wei*, often translated as "non-action." The stream flows to the river because that is the order of things. In this metaphor, the stream and the river are not two separate entities but one continuous flow. The stream does not resist the path, but it is not conscious of the path either. With this concept in mind I read Chinese poets such as Wang Wei and Li Bai, as well as Japanese haiku poets such as Basho, Issa, and Chiyo-ni and American poets like

Denise Levertov, Lorine Niedecker, Louise Gluck, and W.S. Merwin. All these poets, while distinctly representing nature in their own styles, depict nature in Daoist terms.

I have read each of these poets and written my own poems reflective of each representation of the Dao. I begin with the Chinese poets, concentrating mostly on the work of Wang Wei and Li Bai, but also taking into consideration the work of various poets in Wai-lim Yip's volume, *Chinese Poetry: Major Modes and Genres*. In David Hinton's translations of Li Bai's poetry, he says that the poet illustrates the concept of *ziran*, or spontaneity, because the poems, "literally enact this identification, this belonging to the earth in the fundamental sense of belonging to its processes" (xiii). As an example, Hinton gives the translation of Li Bai's poem, "Spring Grievance:"

On a white horse bridled in gold, I go east of Liao-hai,  
 spread embroidered quilts, fall asleep in spring winds.  
 The moon sets, lighting my porch, probing dark lamps.  
 Blossoms drift through the door, smile on my empty bed. (53)

In this poem Li Bai is illustrating his wandering, his movement through the world in such a way that he floats with his thoughts on the spring winds back to his home. His thoughts are like the blossoms drifting through his door while he, as author, places himself in such a way that the reader sees him as part of the movement of the unfolding scene. I too hope to describe the scenery of central and southern Illinois so that my presence blends into the setting.

Studying the Chinese language in Yip's volume of collected poetry and Ernest Fenellosa's historically important essay, "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," has also made me more aware of the economy of language in Chinese poetry.

Yip's book has been especially useful to me, because he provides the Chinese poem, and a literal translation of each ideogram in English, followed by his poetic translation. In some cases, the ideogram can have multiple meanings, making context very important, but it is also in this multiplicity of meaning that the image being presented is so complex. The poems are particularly striking for their concise use of language. For instance is "The River Song" by Wang Yung:

Forests break off. Mountains stretch on still.

Islands end. The river opens wide again.

From clouded peaks, celestial village emerge.

Source of the stream: sycamores and cedars.

The economy and symbolism conveyed in the Chinese ideogram have affected my own poetry in that I've tried to establish more immediacy for the reader with the scene in the elimination of a lot of "tissue", prepositions, unnecessary conjunctions, and articles.

In making the language more concise, I've hoped to achieve what Charles Olson describes as "projective verse." In his essay Olson states: "A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader" (3). Chinese poetry and Japanese haiku both manage to impress this kind of energy on the reader with the use of language. In Robert Hass' translations of Basho, he includes Basho's thoughts on the instantaneous crafting of a poem; the minute the perception is made the poem must be written.

Olson also describes "objectism" and the role it plays in projective verse;

Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which

western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. (10)

The getting rid of the "I" and the use of personal pronouns for the sake of universality as was described of the Chinese language is Olson's concept of "objectism." Gary Snyder also correlates with this idea of ego interference in an interview from the book, *The Real Work*. When asked by Gene Fowler, a student of Snyder's at the time, for some advice about what makes a poem either work or fail, Snyder answers that a poem fails for him when there is too much ego interference from the author (4-5). Universality through the elimination of the ego is the effect I hope to achieve particularly in the poems written for chapters one and two.

The poetry of the Chinese poets Wang Wei, Li Bai, and those mentioned in Yip's volume precede and are models for the work of the Japanese haiku poets Basho (17<sup>th</sup> century), Issa (19<sup>th</sup> century), and Chiyo-ni. The form of the haiku is much different than that of the Chinese poetry, and influences the poetry of my second chapter differently as well. R.H. Blyth, author of *Haiku* in four volumes, suggests in the first of these volumes that while the Chinese poets tended to concentrate on the sublime, vast subjects and indications of a historical past, the Japanese haiku poets tend to consider the particular and focus more on an individual past (46-50).

Just as the Chinese have strict forms such as *Chin-t'i-shih* of the T'ang and Sung poets, with emphasis on strict metrical rules as outlined by Yip, Japanese haiku has its own set of guidelines. The Chinese language itself, as mentioned before, indicates a universal effect. This is not to say that the Japanese haiku doesn't provide a feeling of

unity, in fact haiku's focus on a particular moment often creates a sense of universality. The poem's specific instant usually indicates a much broader feeling and tends to project outward without evoking the images of great landscapes for instance, all this having to be achieved within the 17 syllable, 5,7,5 arrangement.

Relying on translations, a different kind of economy of language is displayed in the haiku. For instance Issa's poem translated by Sam Hamill:

A little shady  
 spot of grass in summertime-  
 sanctuary. (22).

Issa's poetry usually seeks to reveal a scene in the barest use of language, making for an even punchier twist at the end. The first two lines of this poem for instance set up a very straightforward depiction of a patch of grass, and the addition of the one-word line at the end reveals the poet's feelings about a shady spot of grass. The use of the term sanctuary elevates the meaning of the first two lines into a kind of reverence for what could plainly be described as a shaded area of ground.

The poetry of haiku requires the reader to make a little bit of a cognitive leap, but it is that sense of projection that makes the imagery more powerful and propels the writing forward. The movement of the poem also flows unimpeded by any interference on the part of the poet. Chiyo-ni, a woman haiku poet, writes for the senses, and the images she uses also rely on the reader's sense of awareness to project her poetry outward. An example of the sensuality in her poetry is in the haiku:

galloping horses also  
 smell their legs-

the wild violets. (124)

The reader can imagine the power in the sight and sound of a galloping horse in the first line, and the third line represents a contrast in the delicate fragrance of the violets lingering on the horses' legs.

The poetry of W.S. Merwin in his book, *Finding the Islands*, echoes somewhat that of the Japanese haiku poets in his use of language and his focus on particular moments. Merwin doesn't necessarily follow the same metrical guidelines of haiku, but in a section from a poem like "Summer Canyon" which reads,

Tree toads tighten their notes  
 numberless yellow daisies  
 rise through gray grass. (9)

the same kind of economy of language and projection from image to image can be noted. This kind of use of language, again eliminating a lot of the "tissue" commonly found in English is particularly important to the crafting of my poetry because in reading authors whose work was originally written in English serve as models for the ways I can work with language.

In addition, the work of another American poet, Lorine Neidecker, who also references Li Bai, impacts my poetry in a couple of ways. Very basically, because Neidecker and other American poets are composing their verse in English, I have a more direct connection to the language. Until I can read Chinese and Japanese, I have to rely on a translator to access the works of those like Li Bai and Issa. Therefore, the work of my third chapter reflects this concentration on language with an emphasis on how the English language works to convey image.

Along with the elimination of the language barrier, Niedecker's use of English demonstrates how she fits into the movement of the world. Her poem that refers to Li Bai makes eloquent use of language in image with phrases like, "dawn's 40-watt moon," and likening her stove to a cow:

Swept snow, Li Po,  
 by dawn's 40-watt moon  
 to the road that hies to office  
 away from home.  
 Tended my brown little stove  
 as one would a cow-she gives heat.  
 Spring-marsh frog-clatter peace

breaks out. ( GP 22)

The poetry of the American authors does tend to illustrate the role of people within this pattern of nature, not in a way that seeks to work against the cycle of things however. Instead, these poets are presenting another way of looking at the Dao and how the human being is also situated in the movement of all things.

While I did consider the work of poets such as Merwin and Gary Snyder when composing my third chapter, female poets like Niedecker, Levertov, and Gluck seemed to bear more of an influence on my poetry. Conversely, the poetry of my first and second chapters, although considerate of a female haijin, relies more heavily on the work of male poets. This division was made in part by the prominence of the male poets in the Asian traditions and my natural gravitation toward the work of Niedecker and Gluck before considering them as part of this project. Also, I think that perhaps I was influenced more



by female poets writing in English because I think there is a certain, if subtle, division in the language of female and male poets. As shown with Chiyo-ni and her male counterparts, there is definitely a difference in language. However, I think that because a distinction in language along gender lines would be harder to determine in translations, I didn't find the kind of identification with female authors writing in Chinese and Japanese that I would naturally find in the American poets.

Certainly my fourth chapter draws almost solely from the work of female poets as well. This chapter further develops this idea of human life in the pattern of nature. Not too far into beginning this project I discovered that I was pregnant, and my subsequent shift of perception has played a large role in the crafting of my poetry. This final chapter will act as a kind of extension from the third and will be heavily influenced by Louise Gluck's *Firstborn*. Gluck's volume of poetry reflects on the maternal aspect of nature and draws on metaphors from the natural to explain her thoughts on being a mother. Similar to the interaction of people with nature depicted in the work of other American poets, Gluck represents herself and her pregnancy as part of the eternal cycle.

Also influencing the poems of this chapter is the haiku of Chiyo-ni because she is a woman poet, and she tends to represent nature a little more sensually than either Basho or Issa. Basho and Issa's haiku does provide vivid imagery and a real melding of the senses with the world, but Chiyo-ni's seems to do so with more of an emotional attachment.

While the other poets may not as directly influence the poems in this chapter as they do the others, a definite amalgamation of all my reading comes through the poetry for this chapter. I am constantly being affected by everything I've read and seen, and as a

mother-to-be I'm constantly thinking now about how this world is going to look to my child. I wonder about what he'll be thinking when he sees a bee for the first time. I wonder if he'll have the same knee-jerk reaction to flinch that I do, if because he felt that particular burst of energy, the same kind of response will be ingrained within him, or will he wonder at its color and sound without the kind of fear that arises from being stung. Feeling him move around and feeling his movements get stronger with the passing weeks makes me more aware of him and the world. I want to situate myself and thus my baby within a kind of understanding that fits in the natural movement of things so that his transition into the world is easier for him, so that he doesn't see himself apart from his surroundings. I want him to see himself as a part of the thousand things that Lao Tzu speaks of.

The Daoist philosophy exalts nature for its perpetual motion and cyclic patterns. These poets depict nature in such a way that gives the reader an immediate sort of connection with the scene. They are not trying to impose themselves on the landscape they are depicting. They are instead placing themselves amongst the activity of their observances.

When my dad, a Conservation Officer, took me out to my grandma's pasture and the wooded areas surrounding the Sangamon River, I listened to his descriptions of the trees and their leaves with ears tuned only into what I thought I needed to know to put together my leaf collection. My poetry has, in a sense, evolved as an extension of that fourth grade project. If I wouldn't have been so busy leaping over sticks and doing bourrees around the poison ivy, I might have realized at the time how much my dad's pride in his work would impact me.

When writing many of these poems, I found inspiration in the way all the poets I've read look at the world and I began to look more perceptively at my world, and I wanted to describe it in ways as eloquent as Annie Dillard's Polyphemus moth in her, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

I spent a lot of time in my backyard during the summer on my belly, watching my cat Stewie crawl through the grass for an attack on the ever elusive cricket, and when I found out I was pregnant, I spent time on my porch staring at the cornfield that stretches on for miles north of our house.

I watched the farmer methodically cut down the corn, and I went for walks through the nearby cemetery listening to all the life teeming amongst the graves: crickets, cicadas, mourning doves.

Fox Ridge and the areas around Lake Shelbyville also made for excellent places for observance. I spent a lot of time out on the Lake this summer with my parents on their boat, and I watched how the wind, sun, and waves affected the shorelines of the coves we would pull into. At the parks, among the thick leaf-cover of fall, sticks came alive as snakes, and squirrels and chipmunks rustled by with a racket worthy of a bear. My husband and I revisited Carbondale for a weekend, and Giant City Park provided trails through fiery maple and oak. Even driving up through Alto Pass to Bald Knob Cross was as inspiring to me as the mountainous areas of the journey North were to Basho.

I wanted to record the scenes of central and southern Illinois in a way that provided recognition for those from this area and for those who wouldn't be familiar. All

the poets I read continue to influence me in their own ways as their different styles serve to provide me with a much rounder sense of the surrounding world.

## Chapter One

Mai-Mai Sze's book, *The Tao of Painting*, further applies the concept of the Dao and how it relates to the arts. Sze looks specifically at the ideogram for Dao, and points out that it is composed of two pictographs: ch'o for foot and shou for head. The author states that the combination of these two symbols represent, "the idea of wholeness" (8). The Dao is all encompassing; it is perpetual motion and non-action (wu wei), the yin and yang, the harmony of polarities, and the path is rooted in the natural ordering of the world. Therefore, Sze points out, drawing and writing with the ink and brush requires, "the finest training of hand and eye. Writing Chinese characters also developed a fine sense of proportion" (6). The Chinese language, written in these ideograms, produces a kind of immediacy with nature that is represented in the poetry of Li Bai, Wang Wei, and that of some landscape poets.

The fluidity of the technique of Chinese painting as discussed in Sze's book correlates with the language of Chinese poetry. Ernest Fenollosa's essay on the Chinese ideogram discusses how the language lends itself to immediacy with nature. Fenollosa dissects the compartmentalization of nouns and verbs and states: "The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things, and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them" (10) as opposed to the Western, specifically English way, of trying to linearly order a motion where the noun and verb in fact operate simultaneously. The author also critiques the weakening of the English language with the use of intransitive verbs. He says that the reason the Chinese language is so much more vivid and representative of nature is that the verbs used in Chinese writing are concrete. For example, Fenollosa points out that in English we say, "the tree is green" whereas the

Chinese translation of “is” shows a more concrete action in “to have” (15). This could be represented in, “tree greens itself” or “tree has green”. The reader of Chinese poetry then has the image of the tree actively doing instead of an abstract concept of a tree that is green.

Andrew Welsh continues Fenollosa’s discussion in his book, *Roots of Lyric*, and his chapter on ideogram further describes how the Chinese written language can establish for its readers a more active and immediate relationship with the nature of what is being depicted. Welsh uses an example of the ideogram for tree which represents, “a tree trunk with its spreading branches” (103). This representation more accurately depicts a tree than the written English word “tree.” Thus, the ideogram eliminates that extra cognitive step that the written word warrants and makes its meaning more direct for the reader.

Welsh, along with Fenollosa and Wai-lim Yip, discuss the lack of verb tense and ambiguity of number in reference to nouns in Chinese poetry. Both of these conventions in the English language restrict the way a poet describes the scene. By eliminating verb tense, the Chinese make their poetry more a part of the path of Dao because that instant portrayed in the poem is not fixed in time; it is both moving and non-moving. The actions in the poem are simultaneous with the sense that the reader is getting from them. The elimination of number when using nouns also provides direct access in the same way. Whether it is one bird or many in a poem, as Welsh points out; “the ambiguity of number in nouns is also an asset that helps poetry to concentrate on the universal” (106). Elimination of these conventions and the avoidance of the use of personal pronouns, specifically “I,” all contribute to the immediacy of the poem’s scene to the reader because

the unfolding action is not filtered through the author. The author's presence is not an obstacle for the reader.

Yip takes up the discussion of the use of the personal pronoun in his volume, *Chinese Poetry: Major Modes and Genres*, by stating; "To have it thus is to specify the speaker or agent of the action, restricting the poem, at least on the linguistic level, to one participant only" (5). By not abiding by the strict grammatical rules the English language has come to adopt, the Chinese poet can set up for his/her reader, a scene that corresponds to the continual flow of time and can unfold universally for anyone. I have to rely on translations of the landscape poetry that Yip includes in his volume, and of the poetry of both Li Bai and Wang Wei, but even in these translations I can see a kind of pared down English that is the result of accurately trying to capture the immediacy these Chinese poems provide.

For example, Yip includes a poem by Wang Yung in his collection of landscape poetry that reads thus:

Forests break off. Mountains stretch on still.

Islands end. The river opens wide again.

From clouded peaks, celestial village emerge.

Source of the stream: sycamores and cedars. (210)

This is Yip's poetic interpretation of the literal translation he also provides. In the poetic translation, he manages to maintain the order of images provided in the literal interpretation without having to add much extra. Although he has chosen to pluralize most of the nouns, the universal aspect is not hindered in any way. In fact, because forests, mountains, etc... are plural, the poem seems to operate on more of a grand scale.

In addition, the use of strong, concrete verbs is evident, helping to keep the poem concise and vivid.

Another example of this direct imagery and vivid language would be in one of David Hinton's translations of a Li Bai poem titled "A Summer Day in the Mountains:"

Flourishing a white-feather fan  
lazily, I go naked in green forests.  
Soon, I've hung my cap on a cliff,  
set my hair loose among pine winds. (27)

While this poem does make use of the personal pronoun "I," the reader definitely gets the sense of a melding of the self with nature. By meandering through the forest naked, the speaker of the poem removes any kind of barrier between himself and the natural world, and again that idea is repeated when the speaker hangs his cap on a cliff and lets his hair down to be carried where it will among the breeze. The speaker of the poem has allowed himself to become a part of his surroundings.

Also, the reader gets that sense of presence with the use of uninflected verbs. Using "go" instead of "went" or "have gone" for instance indicates the perpetual motion of the speaker, and although "I've hung" indicates a fixed moment in time, "set my hair loose among pine winds" gives the sense that this motion is also continual. Once the speaker of the poem has completely let himself up to the flow of nature that movement will remain eternal.

Although Hinton and Yip's styles of translation are very different--Hinton does tend to use more of the connective "tissue" such as prepositions, conjunctions, etc., both



maintain the use of intense imagery made possible with concrete verbs and continual movement of the poem's subjects.

Pauline Yu, translator of a volume of Wang Wei's poetry also demonstrates this kind of movement and imagery that is provided in the English versions of the other poets. Like Hinton, she provides more of the connective tissue common to everyday English but she also does not neglect the poet's intimacy relation to his surroundings. In one of my favorite poems, translated as "Green Creek," the movement of the images truly demonstrates the kind of non-action the poet takes along that path:

To enter into Yellow Flower River,  
 always follow Green Creek's waters.  
 Along the mountains for a myriad turns,  
 yet traveling no more than a hundred miles.  
 Noises deafen amid a jumble of rocks,  
 and colors are tranquil deep within the pines.  
 Tossing lightly, water chestnuts float;  
 clear and still, reeds and rushes gleam.  
 My heart has always been serene:  
 the clear river is equally at peace.  
 Let me stay atop a large flat rock  
 and dangle a fishhook from now on. (190)

Like the chestnuts in the creek and the water of the creek itself, the poet finds himself within the movement of the surrounding world. He roots himself to the rock to meld himself within that flow similar to the seemingly stationary reeds and rushes. The

movement of the poem echoes the calm movement of the creek. While the water may appear to be at rest, the reader gets the sense of the quiet current that is continually renewing this environment.

Reading these Chinese poets and a little bit about the poetics of the language has helped to shape my poetry in this chapter very specifically. I tried to favor concrete, descriptive verbs instead of intransitive ones. I also tried to do away with self-dramatization as much as possible in order to make the scene more immediately accessible for the reader, and in the cases where a personal pronoun is present, I tried to blend it into the visual representation of the scene. Particularly in revision, I paid closer attention to verb tense and tried to stick with present tense. As with my poetry in chapter two, I also tried to eliminate all unnecessary prepositions, conjunctions, articles, any of the “connective tissue” that would distract from the strong language of the poem. I also believe that the elimination of this “connective tissue” encourages the reader to make the kind of cognitive leap that will be discussed further in relation to the Japanese haiku.

*The Stream*

A leaf touches the stream,  
winds its way  
through branches and roots,  
swept along unknowingly,  
passing the scent of lilac  
up on the hill  
meeting eventually  
the lake  
or being deposited  
under current.

*Petals*

My last rose petals  
drop into Wolf Creek.  
Some twist, turn  
hang up on branches.  
Some floating  
free in the current  
I watch the ones  
I can, imagine  
the ones I can't.  
I watch them float  
into Lake Shelbyville  
and over to the beach.

*Quilt*

Sunlight  
patchwork  
on forest floor  
Sky  
patchwork  
through forest canopy.

*Backyard Landscape*

Ant head,  
body  
grass blade  
bent underfeet.  
Leaf stuck  
on its side  
book page  
between fingers,  
a branch  
imagined texture  
mountainous  
and beyond,  
the fence.

*Bluegill*

Flash underwater  
as if the pond cleared  
scales  
spines  
prick fingers  
untangling the line,  
removing the hook.

*Alto Pass*

South of cornfields  
Bald Knob view:  
Missouri  
some say Tennessee  
too. Wonder  
what it would be  
like to dive:  
valley of Makanda.  
Tops of trees  
like cotton,  
receiving sea  
of blurred  
limbs  
leaves.



*Cornfield*

The cornfield  
next door  
rubs the horizon  
smooth.

*Contrast*

The mountains of Li Po  
and Wang Wei...

Cornfield stretches,  
levels the horizon.

Picture of harvest:  
broken stalks  
in rows even  
at a quarter-mile.

*Autumn Storm*

Summer's last violent wind-  
tornadoes of crackling leaves  
Rain sideways-  
blown into the whorl  
threads of lingering  
life.

*Letting Fall In*

Front door swings  
during autumn storm  
bunch of leaves  
fly in.

Open glass  
letting the last  
of summer in.  
Ladybugs  
crawl  
through the screens.

*Landscapes*

I.  
Yellow,  
orange  
blazes  
in the trees.  
The grass  
still green  
underneath.  
Rocks outline  
the garden  
late-blooming  
roses.

II.  
Ground  
covered  
hasn't  
been  
swept.

*From A Bench*

Level with my eyes  
tree trunks, falling  
leaves, a dip  
in the ground  
chipmunks,  
squirrels  
rustling  
brush  
and farther  
away,  
tops of trees.

*Outstretched*

Limbs of fall trees  
jointed arms  
half decked  
with gold and bronze.

*Windfall*

Last of Season's roses  
loosing its petals  
in the gust  
fall wind.



*Pomona Winery*

Apple wines  
view of the orchard  
rows of the tree  
bordered by fall  
yellow leaves  
and bare limbs.  
Shawnee not far away.

*Dry Air*

Lightening

Fingertips

Extend and touch

Flicker

Snap

Step back

*Dust*

Dust moves

Nothing

But settles

On everything

## Chapter Two

A melding of Daoism and the Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi can be found in the

## Chapter Two

A melding of Daoism and the Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi can be found in the work of Japanese haiku poets such as Basho, Chiyo-ni, and Issa. There are many similarities between Daoism and wabi-sabi, especially in regards to how nature is viewed. The Dao takes as a symbol the flow of water and the path of nature to illustrate the oneness of all things. Wabi-sabi, defined by Leonard Koren in his book, *Wabi-Sabi: for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers*, holds a “spiritual value,” “Truth comes from the observation of nature” and as a “state of mind,” “appreciation of the cosmic order” (40). Also, poets working within the ideals of the Dao represent nature and themselves within that nature without disrupting or working against this natural order. These poets, as well as the Japanese haiku poets, depict an understanding and appreciation for a moment of nature’s ways.

The aesthetic of wabi-sabi similarly values, “treading lightly on the planet and knowing how to appreciate whatever is encountered, no matter how trifling, whenever it is encountered” (Koren 59). This overlap of values prevails in all the poets I’ve studied and was probably most consciously incorporated into the work of the Japanese haiku of Basho, Chiyo-ni, and Issa.

In fact it is mentioned of Basho in the biography written by Makoto Ueda that he frequently consulted a copy of the *Chuang Tsu*, and his travel journal, *Narrow Road to the Deep North (Oku no Hosomichi)*, was, “based on the idea of sabi, the concept of the ego-less, impersonal life of nature” (30). One of Basho’s haiku, in a translation by

to see lightning and not think  
 life is fleeting (24).

This poem, similar to probably his most famous frog poem, is about a moment. Basho, awed by that instantaneous flash of light, equates that sudden brightness in the sky with a person's lifetime. In the history of time a person's life, of even a hundred years, seems fleeting. This sudden flash of life is also seen when in the frog haiku the calm water is momentarily disturbed. The second of light in the sky or the splash of water in the pond both serve as metaphors to illustrate how life is one with these moments.

These two haiku serve only as examples of the many haiku Basho wrote that were influenced by the Dao. In many of his haiku, Basho illustrates the convergence of all things with nature, and in the two examples given he not only presents life working with this flow but as having a profound kind of unity with it. The person who can see a bolt of lightning and not equate that in some way to life's brevity is in effect not aware of the ever continuing path of nature. Basho's journeys and close observance of the world around him is reflective of his study of Daoism.

Already mentioned was Basho's reflection on the idea of *sabi* in his haibun, or travel journal, and this concept also melds with the ideas of Daoism in his haiku. Ueda translates the following haiku to illustrate:

The rough sea-  
 extending toward Sado Isle,  
 the Milky Way (30).

Ueda explains *sabi* as a kind of loneliness, not in the sense of a negative isolation, but as an "absorption of the ego into the vast, powerful, magnificent universe" (30). This

“absorption” is also similar to the Daoist concept of wu wei, or non-action. To understand the Dao is not to make a conscious effort to know it but to simply be enveloped by the works of nature like Basho has illustrated with this haiku.

Another haiku poet, Chiyo-ni, born after Basho’s time, illustrates a female aesthetic that will be discussed further in chapter four; however, there are similarities between the two haiku poets in their observation of nature. In a book of Chiyo-ni’s haiku, translated by Patricia Donegan and Yoshie Ishibashi, it is said of the poet that she “was a master at making connections, by being open and carefully observing the ordinary things around her, especially in nature” (85). An illustration of her observance of the world is shown in the haiku:

galloping horses also  
smell their legs-  
the wild violets (124).

The image of a horse running through a field and passing through a patch of violets reflects a oneness of the horse with the flowers as the scent clings to its legs. This haiku shows the balance between something as delicate as the fragrance of the violets with something as powerful as a horse’s strength.

In their book on Chiyo-ni, Donegan and Ishibashi’s discussion of poetic craft inevitably turns to the Japanese language itself. They state, “to create a powerful haiku, a contrast of the eternal and the immediate present is often used, for in order to become aware of the eternal there must be some momentary perception” (66). They note the ease which the Japanese language lends itself to illustrating these fleeting perceptions of nature. Because of the brevity made possible by the use of kigo, or seasonal words, the

poet can closely mimic the instant that nature revealed itself to him or her. In my own poetry in this chapter I have borrowed the use of some seasonal terms to make that quick reference to an observation. For example, the term, “autumn wind” is frequently used in translations of Basho, Issa, and to a lesser extent Chiyo-ni to imply not only the time of year but a certain sense of loneliness associated with it as well.

An example of the use of these seasonal terms in a haiku of Issa’s could be this translation by David Lanoue in *Issa: Cup-of-Tea-Poems*:

harvest

moon

going

out

going

back

in (65).

An indication of fall, given in the term “harvest moon” also serves to illustrate a kind of loneliness. Issa is standing possibly just outside his hut watching the moon and even it seems to make him aware of the fact that he is alone in moments when it fades behind the clouds. It is these kinds of perceptions that link Issa to both Chiyo-ni and Basho because they had the kinds of established connotations with which to imply in the use of such seasonal words and phrases.

Although the poetry of Basho, Chiyo-ni, and Issa share some similarities, their differences of style have worked to influence my poetry in this chapter in different ways. Basho’s many layers of meaning contrast with the sensuality of Chiyo-ni’s poems

(influencing my poetry to even more of an extent in chapter four) and the pure humanism of Issa's poems. Issa's presentation of the ideas of the Dao sharply contrast those of Basho's. Basho, in the lightening poem and the frog poem for example illustrate the fleeting quality of life with a certain subtlety that may not be uncovered at a first glance at the poem. On the other hand, Issa, especially in Lanoue's translations (and to some extent Hamill's in the selection of poems following his translation of *Spring of my Life*) presents a quick grouping of concrete images that make connections in a more obvious way.

In the preface to his translations, Lanoue explains the reason for the vertical, one-word line arrangement stating, "presented vertically, the haiku forces the reader to dwell, ever-so-briefly, on each word, each building step in the sequence toward full revelation" (10). This particular scoring of the poem, Lanoue goes on to write, aids in the reading of Issa's poetry with "the same non-grasping attention we might pay to a bird warbling in a tree" (11). This way of reading the poems itself is a reflection of Daoist ideas in that it also represents the concept of wu wei. There is an absorption into the nature of the poem without too much of a conscious effort.

An example of Issa's method of simple revelation is shown in Lanoue's translation:

wanting

to

grab

that

moon



crying

child (64).

Similar to Basho's lightening poem, Issa is illustrating a moment. Instead of the slightly more abstract way of presenting life absorbed in nature like Basho does, Issa captures the very stark images of the moon seemingly looming just in front of the crying child who doesn't understand why he can't just reach out and grab it. The innocence of the child is illustrative of wu wei because he is wonderfully unaware of why he can't just reach out and touch the beautiful object that seems to be dangled just in front of him.

These three haiku poets have their own individual ways of expressing these mini-revelations that are reflective of the Dao, and they as a group are distinctly different from the poetry of Li Bai and Wang Wei before them and the American poets after. The Japanese haiku poets have influenced the language of my own poetry in that I've tried to play with the connotations of certain words and phrases such as the one mentioned before. I also grouped certain poems under one title to keep the moments of observance brief, and to express the different angles of looking at something. In addition, I have scored some poems like Lanoue has done with Issa's poetry in order to emphasize each word presented in an image.

*Looking at an Herb Garden*

Mini-pine tree  
rosemary.

Italian bouquet  
parsley.

Unkempt grey  
sage.

Hint of lemon  
thyme.

Whispering fronds  
dill.

*Clover*

I.  
Clover bends  
Bee drinks

II.  
Clover cup  
drunkard bee  
ceramic cup  
mead for me.

*Ant's Journey*

Grass blade  
hiking up  
vertical rise  
bending arch  
descent.

*June Rain*

I.

Heat subsides

momentarily

Maple leaves  
rustle.

II.

Drops

slide

down

the

stalk

purple

iris

already

drooping.

*Summer Grass*

Stepping on grass-  
line before corn  
at my shoulder:  
my footprint  
won't remain long.

*Osage Orange*

Mini green  
brains  
along  
the side  
of the road:  
Osage Orange.

You seem  
to have  
dropped  
your  
mind.

*Sassafras*

I.

Sassafras root  
scratch and sniff  
leaf collection.

II.

Shaking hands  
with many  
summer walk.

Lending a hand  
for tea.



*The Cat*

I.  
Orange spheres  
in the dark:  
cat eyes.

II.  
Cat locked  
in staring match  
with the wall  
you better  
stay hidden  
mouse.

III.  
Grass blades  
cat snack  
Eaten sideways:  
chewed clean.  
Pulled straight out:  
cat with long green beard.

IV.  
Maze the cat  
walks through:  
corn stalks.

*Lighting Bug*

I

A child's  
glowing ring:  
lightning bug.

II.

Nightlight  
for the campers  
lightning bug.

III.

Summer days  
are so long  
lightning bug.

*Sycamore*

I.  
I could identify  
*your* leaves  
in the fourth grade.

II.  
Bold leaves,  
Grass-blade thread,  
A seven-year-old's  
gloves.

*Catalpa*

-You and the sycamore,  
my fourth-grade friends.

-A nine-year-old's  
baking:  
catalpa bean  
for flavoring.

-A child-queen's fan  
catalpa leaf.

*Sweet Gum*

-Your fruit  
a child's  
ammo.

-Growing up  
with boys  
many  
spherical  
bruises.

-Better than  
a banana peel  
when found  
underfoot  
sweet gum balls.

*Cicadas*

I.  
July's  
only  
breeze,  
drumbeats  
of  
bugs.

II.  
Shimmer of water  
mirage made  
by cicada sound  
pushing heat waves around.

*The Mourning Dove*

Sun

rises.

Humidity

settles.

Dove

coos.

Solemn song.

Bright day.

*Bluegill*

Pointy fins  
but gasping  
for breath.

No eyelids  
to close  
to the summer sun  
so I cover him  
with dirt.



*Fog*

I.  
Mist folded  
over the clothesline  
fog hanging.

II.  
Lake breath:  
fog.

III.  
Enveloping  
the neighbors,  
resisting  
autumn wind.

IV.  
Hiding from  
the sun:  
low-lying  
clouds.

*Fall Wind*

I.  
Fall  
wind  
shaking  
trees  
leaf  
shower.

II.  
Leaves swirling  
in fall wind  
brittle summer.

III.  
Dancing in fall wind  
bits of maple  
and many oaks.

*Harvest*

I.  
Harvested field  
treats the squirrel.

II.  
Autumn wind  
Husk tornado

III.  
Field stubble  
facing the autumn wind.

*Autumn Fires*

I.  
Someone's  
distant  
fire  
autumn  
wind.

II.  
Extending the days  
of summer  
autumn fire.

III.  
Casting shadows  
of the woodpile  
autumn fire.

IV.  
This log  
will help me find  
my way back  
night walk.

V.  
The ant's sun  
in my face.

*Persimmon*

I.  
First frost  
even the persimmon  
is ready for dinner.

II.  
Broken bark  
ants living around  
the block.

## Chapter Three

In addition to the Chinese poetry of those such as Li Bai and Wang Wei and Japanese haiku of Basho, Issa and Chiyo-ni in particular, the poetry of American authors has also served as a basis for understanding nature through the Dao. Because the poetry of Lorine Niedecker, Denise Levertov, and Louise Gluck is in my native language, I have a more immediate relationship with the work and the ways in which the authors position themselves within the flow of the Dao.

For example, Niedecker's work, stemming from her life on Black Hawk Island on the banks of Lake Koshkonong in Wisconsin, provides a real sense of connectedness to the land--the trees, the flowers, and how this environment is affected by the change of the seasons. Like the Chinese and Japanese poets Niedecker writes in a way that doesn't draw attention to herself as author. For example in her poem, "Easter", Niedecker writes:

A robin stood by my porch  
 and side-eyed  
 raised up  
 a worm (GP 40).

We see what she sees, not her. The piece simply unfolds as if right before the reader reflecting on the cycle of nature. Even without Niedecker there to observe, the robin would have gone about his meal in the same manner much as the "ten thousand things" continue to cycle everyday. At this point the robin, the worm, and Niedecker cease to exist as separate entities as Niedecker the observer is invisible to the stop-motion action that is representative of nature's continuance.

In other poems, Niedecker is more visible as observer. Consider this untitled poem from *Blue Chicory*:

The radio talk this morning  
 was of obliterating  
 the world

I notice fruit flies rise  
 from the rind  
 of the recommended  
 melon.

Niedecker occupies a space between the world on the radio and the fruit flies on the melon. I envision her in a state of absent mindedness and being drawn partially back into reality by the sound of the radio. Then, almost as if she's come to, she realizes she should probably eat the melon before the fruit flies get their chance at it. She's just sitting back, watching and remarking on the world around her and whether she takes action or not, things will keep moving.

Similarly, Denise Levertov writes poems that both represent nature in the way of the invisible observer and as a human being interacting and finding a place among the way of nature. In her poem, "Early", Levertov echoes the images presented by Niedecker in "Easter" and those given in poems of the Chinese and Japanese:

From behind the hill,  
 flowing through somber  
 palm, eucalyptus, web

of oakboughs, rises  
 light so pale a gold  
 it bathes in silver  
 the cool and still  
 air a single bird  
 stirs with tentative song. (*DH 70*)

While Levertov's approach to the scene is more painterly than Niedecker's, the landscape remains unaffected by the presence of her observation. This is a landscape that would have unfolded with or without her remarking on it, and therefore, eliminates her as the filter for the way the reader sees it.

Much like Niedecker's narrator in the poem with the fruit flies, Levertov presents humans both as subjects absorbed in the world around them and as subjects seeking to divide themselves from the Way. Lines from Levertov's longer poem, "Two Threnodies and a Psalm," indicate a definite presence among nature, but it is one that is absorbed with all other things: "Our flesh and theirs/ one with the flesh of fruit and tree./ Our blood/ one with the blood of whale and sparrow" (*DH 47*). This poem exhibits a co-existence with nature that recognizes the melding of all things. Other poems like "El Salvador: A Requiem and Invocation" illustrate the destructive and inhumane way humans interact with each other and with their environment.

Levertov recognizes that the way in which human beings interact with the world can be in the way of the Dao, or in a way that seeks to oppose it. In an interview with Nicholas O'Connell for *Poets & Writers Magazine*, Levertov describes her effort to "submerge the ego" and the kind of "spiritual quest" that is required to do so: "I think



interest in religion is a counterforce to the insane, rationalist optimism that surrounds the development to all this new technology". Levertov's own spiritual background was diverse. Her father was an Hassidic Jew, and her poetry reflects her interest in Christian mysticism.

While Niedecker and Levertov both write poetry that sometimes presents nature from the view of the invisible observer, Louise Gluck chooses to represent nature from a definable place. She as the author is presenting nature with human interaction in the world. She does seek to illustrate the profound connection between humans, the supernatural, and the natural, especially in the poems in *The Wild Iris*. Other poetry such as that in *Firstborn* or *Descending Figure* makes metaphors for human experience with images from nature to illustrate the connection. In "The Wound" from *Firstborn* lines such as, "The air stiffens to a crust./ From bed I watch/ Clots of flies, crickets/ Frisk and titter" (14) serve as a correlation between her poem's persona and how nature similarly reacts. In these lines "the wound" either literal or figurative is behaving like the scene she is viewing from her bed. The healing of the wound is seen in the stiffening of the air and the clots of insects busily working around her. Like blood clots forming to prevent excessive bleeding, groups of flies can be seen encircling decay.

In other instances, Gluck uses the voice of nature to narrate her poems. While it could be said that her use of writing in the voices of the flowers for instance in *The Wild Iris* can be seen as a poetic convention that may draw the reader away from the melding of human with nature, her use of language stitches the convention into the voice of the poem so well that her presentation of that nature remains seamless.

Gluck's use of simple language, of which she comments on in her essay, "Education of the Poet," serves a role similar to the invisible observer in that the reader has the most direct access to the poem itself. Gluck states, "What I responded to, on the page, was the way a poem could liberate, by means of a word's setting, through subtleties of timing, of pacing, that word's full and surprising range of meaning" (4). In looking carefully at the words the author uses in her poetry, the reader not only has the experience with the image or action itself through the simplicity of the language, the language also, paradoxically, presents a more complex interrelationship with the other images and actions within the text of the poem.

For example, in Gluck's poem, "Heaven and Earth," she writes; "Where one finishes, the other begins./ On top, a band of blue; underneath,/ a band of green and gold, green and deep rose" (*WI* 32). This poem uses straightforward, monosyllabic language to weave a tapestry that melds heaven and earth into one while the narrator then speaks of her husband "at the horizon" as one at the threshold of the sky and earth. Both the narrator of the poem and John, the husband, are likened to the area where heaven, earth, and nature are one. They are a definite human presence in Gluck's presentation of nature, but her use of language ties her work with that of Niedecker and Levertov because their representations of nature illustrate the Dao and the convergence of all things into one.

W. S. Merwin's volume, *Finding the Islands*, was also a link for me between that of the Japanese haiku and the American poetry. Merwin's extremely concise style is more reminiscent of haiku—in fact they are one-person renga, or linked haiku poems. An example is a stanza from "Summer Canyon:"

Whistle of  
 mourning dove's wings  
 stretches the shadows. (8)

Like the Japanese and Chinese poetry as well, the language of the poem is spare. The reader makes a kind of intuitive—and synesthetic—“leap” to connect the sound of the mourning dove's wings (extending through time) and the shadows' lengthening (in space). Merwin allows us to put the image together without giving us explicit directions or making himself a visible presence in the poem.

However there are examples from the same volume in which Merwin, or some narrative presence is very much at the forefront. In a stanza from “Green Island,” Merwin writes:

I want you to be  
 the air in the house  
 the footfall inside me. (61).

In this poem, much more like the poetry of Gluck, Merwin shows the relationship of the narrator to his surroundings. The house is representative of the domestic and by letting the air in, he is introducing a natural element to what would otherwise be shut against the outside world. Because the house is open there is a melding of the man-made element with the flow of the air current.

So it is with the reading of these American poets along with the poetry of Chinese and Japanese authors that serves to enrich my experience of nature poetry. While my reliance on translations may hinder my full understanding of the language of the Chinese and Japanese poetics, the reading of the American poets serves to provide me with the

most direct access with some nature poetry and thus influences my own writing in a different way. Looking closely at the American poets has inspired in my own poetry a more in-depth look at myself and the way the people around me interact with the world. I seek to find a correlation between human experience and nature.

*Gnats*

Lying down  
in brown grass  
apparition  
of clouds  
swarming between  
my eyes  
and July sun.

*Form*

I stand.  
Grass reanimates  
quickly  
my form  
disappears.

I speak  
the mourning dove  
answers  
a woodwind  
among the brass.

*The Bee*

Unravel your sweater.  
You won't scare me.  
Just a thread  
    floating by  
        on a breeze.

I've learned to wait  
for you to pass  
instead of walking  
against the current  
of the creek.

*Spider Web*

A spider web  
on the ground.  
Lazy spider  
content catching  
ants not  
June bugs  
hanging out  
on my deck  
at night.  
Maybe his  
appetite just  
isn't that big.  
Perhaps confined to ground  
by gripping fear  
when climbing  
a pole or a limb  
despite chiding  
from fellow  
spiders, brothers  
weaving between  
the siding of my house.  
Or did he parachute  
from the space  
between siding  
and window,  
abandoning the domestic,  
landing with his web  
spread around him  
in brittle grass  
that hasn't  
been watered since  
the last rain.



*Bitter Grass*

Glass

grass

sharp,

stiff,

pokes my feet

softening not

when tardy clouds

tip

toasting,

patient green.

*Box-Elder Bugs*

-Although we share siding,  
I feel you must be mistaken.  
Growing in my backyard  
stands a silver maple.

-The one that sneaks  
into my house makes  
a fatal mistake.  
The cats wait  
watching the door.

*Mourning Dove in Dodge Grove*

Are there the ten-thousand  
things in a mourning  
dove's wingspan?

Not quite two feet  
whistling flight.

Grey-stone perch  
Henry Parker  
His wife Sarah  
d.1924, 1944

*Afternoon Walk through Dodge Grove*

Cemetery

Cacophony

Washboard wings,

Crickets flanking footpaths.

Cicadas in oak

drum their abdomens.

Maple maraca

Limbs shake drying leaves.

Mourning doves

atop stones

provide the tune,

tennis shoes

on concrete.

*In My Poem*

I'd save a glass  
for Li Po,  
even if Seval  
wasn't his preference.  
Wandering under  
bamboo that grandma  
cut out of her pasture,  
I'd dance under  
Niedecker's moon  
but for my husband's buying  
60-watt.

*Picking up Walnuts*

Once, we forgot  
to wear gloves.

The blackish-green  
stained our hands  
for a week.

*Lombardy Poplar*

Wind block  
Silent mock  
You once held my cat  
in your limbs.  
Coaxing Butterball  
down from your  
mussed-up  
spade-shaped  
leaf coif.  
I know you  
called her up.  
You're not  
so old yourself  
only fifteen feet  
taller than me  
and only one  
in a line  
of the same.

*Shadow*

An outline  
drawn by the sun.  
An imprint of me  
the butterfly lands  
on and my hand  
closes round it.



*Late July Sunset on Lake Shelbyville*

I find sparkles  
on wave tops  
from the last of evening's boaters  
in mounds of snow  
piled by my driveway:  
sunny January day.

*Waiting For Fall*

Monarch  
orange  
flutters  
down  
from  
tree  
branch  
leaves  
still  
green.

*Squall line*  
Storms stack  
Cells combine  
Winds lift  
strands of hair  
loose  
falling  
as lightening  
veins under  
gray clouds  
collect rain.

*Return of Summer*

Relishing the air  
that laid so lightly  
upon my arms,

I started to notice  
a few leaves brilliant  
shades of red, yellow, orange.  
Even the brown ones,  
weathered hands  
welcomed season.

I wanted the crisp, the crunch  
both bright and dying colors.

Then, you came back.  
You with your clinging air,  
weighing on my forehead  
and arms, dragging  
everything down  
that was content  
to fall so gracefully.

*Fall*

If I could paint  
the fall  
leaves would drop  
Ochre, Crimson,  
Venetian Red.  
differentiating  
the fallen:  
burnt sienna  
and  
burnt umber.  
The whole world  
would be a brushstroke,  
and my canvas  
wouldn't stare blank.

*Pumpkin*

Freckled skin  
reveals entanglement  
within. My blind touch  
sees ridges and takes  
me along twisted vines.

*Red Delicious*

Round red  
Smooth skin  
Crunch at the center  
empty  
Ladder high  
to the sky  
frost around  
the bend  
color of autumn  
sweet blossom  
I weave into my hair.

*Forest Floor*

I go with dad  
to cut firewood  
not out of necessity  
but for company.

I tramp through  
leaves that conceal  
the inhale, exhale of soil.



*Waiting for Thunder*  
Snow sneaking down  
Egg white  
In the cracks

When nothing  
precedes you,  
you're not  
so impressive.

But, if there's no  
difference before  
the pine,  
you're *all*  
of it right now.

*February Walk*

Cardinal in bare trees

Smell of warmth  
In the chill  
salt in expanding air.

Few blades, grass  
Pushing up.

## Epilogue/Birthing

The poems in this chapter stray a little from the more objective view of nature that I try to convey in the others. My personal reflections on my pregnancy are being incorporated into how I'm viewing the world. I've also incorporated many of the different styles of poetry that have influenced me to this point. For example, the series of haiku-like poems were obviously influenced stylistically by the haiku I'd read, especially that of Issa and Chiyo-ni. In one case, one poem is scored with the one-word lines found in David Lanoue's translations of Issa's *Cup of Tea* poems. In terms of sentiment and content, these poems were most influenced by the sensuality found in Chiyo-ni's poetry and the kinds of images found in Merwin's work in *Finding the Islands*. Mourning doves, for instance, are an image and sound common to both Merwin's and my poetry.

Louise Gluck's work, particularly from *Firstborn*, has influenced the poems of this chapter as well. For example, my poem, "Winter Air" mimics the kind of verb usage found in Gluck's "The Wound." In Gluck's poem, phrases using very concrete verbs such as, "stiffens to a crust" present a very visual image of the metaphor she's presenting with the language. My poem also uses strong verbs such as "tightens" and "breaks" to build the connection between the sharp winter air and the feeling of a contraction.

In addition, I've included some prose pieces that speak in more detail of the experiences I've have while observing in different locations, most notably at Fox Ridge and in my own backyard. The poetry of this chapter is also an amalgamation of images from various other places familiar to me such as areas around Lake Shelbyville and Lake Mattoon. The prose pieces of this chapter, while they did inspire some of the poems,

serve as more of an instant where I thought elaborating on my actual observation was important.

I've been fortunate enough to grow up with areas like Lythia Springs campground and Wolf Creek being an integral part of my childhood. My dad, a conservation officer, would make it a point to make me and my brother aware of our surroundings during walks through trails and on our many camping trips. Having the advantage of looking closely at the world at a young age has really made me aware of my perspectives and how they have shifted as I've gotten older. When I found out I was pregnant, I would say that my perceptions changed and continued to change as the baby began to become more tangible to me. Perhaps once the baby is born the shift will be more dramatic and intense because that change will be so much more sudden.

Also, in light of the fact of my dad's heart surgery last year and my due date falling very near the one-year anniversary of this surgery, my pregnancy has also made me more contemplative of the idea of the Tao and of Nature's balance. For instance, almost losing my dad and the incredible feeling of life due to my pregnancy, the delicacy of a flower is more closely felt whereas before this frailty was only observed. I have a lot of poems about lilacs because their fragrance and their image brings me strong associations with my childhood at my paternal grandmother's house where lilac abounded in the springtime. The fact that they are so fleeting and have such a short blooming period really reminds me how important looking closely at the world around me is.

In this way this chapter, although accomplishing quite a different end, nevertheless ties in with the other chapters. With the others, I hoped to make them more

personal for the reader by eliminating ego interference. With this one, I'm illustrating how I'm personally influenced by the world around me especially at this pivotal time in my life. Even though they are direct reflections of my world and concerning my pregnancy, I think others can relate to them as well because the world does change after any big event, and this change is something I'm trying to convey.

*Discovery*

You came to me  
as lilac-fragrance  
veil lifted  
parting  
before spring  
was really over.

## I.

In the weeks before I found out I was pregnant, I would lie, belly-down, in the grass of my backyard, preferring to do so when my husband had gotten a little lax about mowing. My hip bones, ribs and elbows found grooves in the padding of the grass, and the tips of the blades were a little more eyelevel when I propped myself up. This way, I could keep an eye on the bee visiting the clover and still examine fallen leaves, feathers, ants, and the little cloud of gnats that followed my finger if I held it out to them. These days were quiet, no one minded me not even the grass; it kept growing about the sides of my feet and legs, and the tree's shadow slowly crept up my toes, heels, calves, thighs, and up my back until I got chilly enough to re-situate in another patch of sunlight. I would get up and watch my impression disappear as the crushed grass unfolded itself back to full height.

## II.

Once I found out I was pregnant and before the weight of the baby prevented me from lying on my back, I would stare at the cloud of gnats above my face and amuse myself by watching them part then coagulate around my finger. I would also try to match the veins of nearby leaves with the veins in the backs of my hands. I would let the sunlight wrap around my belly, and I would take water from my glass and, letting it drip off my fingertips, pool in my bellybutton and overflow on the grass growing in the space between my back and the earth.

*Fishing*

The subtle pull,  
catfish on the line:  
something you  
just have to feel.

Set the hook  
and reel.

I wonder  
what fin flicker  
under six foot of pond water  
sounds like.

Can he hear  
the whirl of my reel  
under murky warmth  
of August heat?

Surfacing, he rolls  
just breaking  
the tension,

and I realize I'm  
going to be a mother.



*Summer Night*

I.

Moon dips  
its beams  
into water  
cradling  
reflection  
and stirring  
into whirlpool  
filaments  
of algae  
and waving  
fish fins.

II.

Moon gently  
breaks  
smooth surface  
of water  
and leaves  
a fingertip wake.

*9<sup>th</sup> Street Beach*

Further from the shore  
little birds impress  
feet in warm dunes.

Grass pokes up,  
pebbles in a sunshine  
current.

I rake my fingers  
through wave-  
washed sand and watch  
little bivalves scurry  
under the surface.

Lying down,  
the water  
soon fans my hair,  
strands of seaweed  
that become anchors  
for life.

*Collecting Dew*

Petals heavy  
with summer  
drip  
and catch  
pooling in footprints.

*Woman's Path*

Follow the butterfly  
alight from flower  
to flower.

*At Fox Ridge*

1.

The trees were calm  
even though they shook  
with the breeze  
Soft rain of cooler weather.  
The leaves fell.  
One landed on my back  
as I peered over my belly,  
the baby to be born  
in the spring.

2.

Fall  
wind  
loose  
leaf  
settles  
on  
my  
belly

*Untitled*

My skin too  
is golden:  
autumn sunset.

*Pumpkin Patch*

Propped up  
against a great  
pumpkin  
in the little wagon  
the child's eyes  
follow the dust  
swirling  
mini  
tornado  
around  
dog  
pumpkin  
person  
wagon.

*The Feedings*

I awake  
the weight of my womb  
shifts as my left arm  
helps prop me upright..

My cats, statues  
watching the squirrels  
collecting the bread  
I threw out yesterday,

come to life  
with the sound  
of food in their bowls.

I made my husband's  
lunch for him today,  
and drank a glass  
of milk before  
going back to bed.



*Winter Lake*

Finley Bridge  
above ice  
spread silk  
over Lake Shelbyville.  
Petals of frost  
mold to stumps  
and sandbars  
while fish, eyes  
glazed, churn  
a current.

*Winter Air*

Chill tightens  
and breaks  
as my breath  
freezes  
clouds in front  
of me  
clearing with sweep  
of pine branches.

*Waiting for Spring*

Ice-crack  
threads unravel  
earth heaves,  
casting off the sweater  
and the moon pulls  
new waves of tides  
breaking on shore  
over grasses,  
flowers,  
and the little sea birds  
scuttle over dunes  
and ridges:  
receding ocean.

*Labor*

Frozen ground  
in early spring

tulips triumphant  
return  
bidding life  
to follow.

*Silver Maple and Cornfield*

The Silver Maple  
scolds the Cornfield  
through December breeze.

April's current  
catches in leaves  
and rustles the Maple's  
own branches.

*Breeze Through Flowers*

Breeze strong enough  
to ripple the tulips-  
stems bent  
fingers clutching  
sunbeams,  
and the roots  
wiggle further  
to the waves  
the water swells  
underground.

Shining sun  
in the sky  
mother's face  
too is turned.

Baby's eyes  
follow the lilac  
mother smells it  
on the breeze.

Belly shifts  
mother thinks  
of clouds.

Baby's  
cry  
quiets  
the  
storm.

*Crawling*

Hands touching  
the world in  
a way no one  
remembers  
Clutching grass  
and filling  
every crease  
on his palm,  
Understanding  
dirt purely,

his knees  
smoothing  
tracks for feet.

II.  
Spring rain  
fresh mud  
closer to a child's nose.



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