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# From the outside, in, and out again : power taken

Amanda Rasmussen  
*San Jose State University*

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Rasmussen, Amanda, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1994

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FROM THE OUTSIDE, IN, AND OUT AGAIN:  
POWER TAKEN

A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of English  
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Amanda Rasmussen

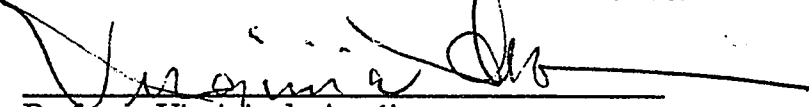
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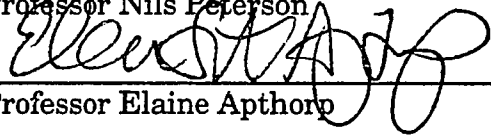
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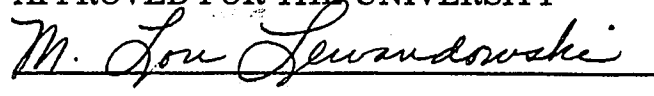
APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Professor Virginia de Araújo

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Professor Nils Peterson

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Professor Elaine Apthorp

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
M. Lou Lewandowski



ABSTRACT  
FROM THE OUTSIDE, IN, AND OUT AGAIN:  
POWER TAKEN

by Amanda Rasmussen

Which authorities must we resist in order to emerge as ourselves? This project is about what it is to be human: to fear, to explain and try to make order, and finally to accept and build a mobile position amid the chaos. It is about the helpless taking power.

These poems and stories are divided into three sets, each illustrating in both meaning and form the different stages of personal separation or evolution. The first set represents external forces acting upon an innocent self beleaguered with confusion, and hence, fear; the second set shows the self responding to disillusionment by turning inward, questioning the validity of authority, and lashing out at external influences with anger, self-pity, and humor; and the third depicts a powerful self that acts as its own authority, interacting with the external and coming to its own beliefs.

**Acknowledgement :**

**To Virginia de Araújo,  
project advisor**

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FROM THE OUTSIDE, IN, AND OUT AGAIN:

POWER TAKEN

Gunther Stuhlman records one of Anais Nin's several celebrations of Henry Miller:

His war was against evasive, reticent language. . . . He took the naked words and used them because they conveyed realities which we were to live out not merely in action but in thought. . . . Now this cannot be done if we are afraid of words (xiii).

This is a journey to the uncertainty of adulthood, a casting away of all authority other than one's own. The journey begins with unnameable childhood fears born of misunderstandings or confusion, which are a reflection of the external world, after which the speakers turn inward in disillusionment, and begin to question authority or sources of fear. In order to become free people who choose rather than react, the speakers must confront and redefine their notions of authority. Only then can there exist an autonomous self who interacts—one who makes mistakes with conviction.

Which authorities must we repel in order to emerge as ourselves? In the separate poems, prose poems, vignettes and short stories in this project, the speakers illustrate the effects of traditional gender roles, and parental and religious influences. For me, all are part of a belief system born of my specific religious upbringing. Herein is an exploration of the seeds of these beliefs, the moments when these strictures are recognized, and illustrations of the courage required to uproot them.

## I. Style

In an interview, William Faulkner spoke of influences:

Q: This maybe (sic) a bad question, but what [part of your reading] would you think gave you most influence on your novels?

Faulkner: Every bit. That is, I don't know one that influenced me more than another. I know that all my life I have been very fortunate in being very interested, completely interested, in living, in seeing, listening, experiencing, imagining; I've never been bored in my life (Meriwether 126).

My influences, too, have been multiple. My first and continuing influence has been Roald Dahl (of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory) for his Gertrude Stein-like use of language and meaning. In speech and writing, I choose words based on sound or rhythm rather than just on denotation, since the latter can be limiting. I think of words as objects or instruments of music and feeling. Certain words look splintery or thick; they can be used like paints. When a writer is fortunate, there is communication among these word objects, or a relationship between matter (sound, rhythm, feeling) and significance.

"What I say and what I mean is two different things,' the BFG announced rather grandly" (49). Thus, the BFG in Roald Dahl's book of the same name defends his "misuse" of language. In the sentence "'Whenever I is feeling a bit scrotty,' the BFG said, 'a few gollops of frobscottle is always making me hopscotchy again,'" the nonsense word "scrotty" evokes a hard, itchy feeling mainly through its sound, and the reader readily understands

"hopscotch" as an adjective by its association (70). Gertrude Stein uses language in a similar way in her poem "Susie Asado":

This is a please this is a please there are the saids to jelly. These are the wets these say the sets to leave a crown to Incy (Primer 57).

The rhythm, sound, and repetition (sound and repetition also being a rhythm) all evoke a feeling rather than a meaning, but nonetheless there is a communication. There is a kind of finality to each sentence: an answer, in the first, to the tension of the repetition; and in the second, to the repetition of sound.

In my poem "My Little Girl," I use nonsensical sentences (nonsensical in that they do not fit the context), hyperbaton and repetition to increase the intensity of the anxiety and ridiculousness of the situation. I create a distance between the two people and what is happening to each of them; the distance reflects a lack of communication with each other and themselves.

I string the words, I fling my arms.

Do you have a fork? I say. Do you wish to flee?

Ahh! he says. of course!

He shifts. He fondles.

Which way to the train? I anxiously. Way train the which to?

Yes, yes! he pumps and shoots,

a potato gun.

Gertrude Stein has made the claim that writing is about movement and immediacy. My occasional use of nouns as adjectives, verbs as nouns, and the omission of articles enables me to manipulate the cadences of the sentences,

so that I can orchestrate not only the meaning, but how a work is to be read and felt.

Faulkner believed that a long sentence is an attempt to contain the past and the future in an instant (Gwynn 31). When Quentin uses a slow cadence (or long sentence), it is indicative of his failure to "escape either his memories of the past or his involvement in the present" (Vickery 1027). In my story "Worms," Davey and Katie will never be free individuals because they cannot see their future. They are stuck in both the present and the past, as indicated by their internal monologues and streams of consciousness, and by their obsessive repetitiveness. When their perspectives contrast with those of the adult world, they question the notion that a collective social truth can exist in a world made up of individuals.

In an attempt to write in real time, or time as it is experienced, I have been interested in the use of segments or vignettes (or "chunks," as I have called them). In the present, the mind constantly makes connections with past experiences, actually living in several times at once. My chunks in "Worms" differ slightly in "camera angle" and sometimes in genre, as do Faulkner's segments in The Sound and the Fury, where prose and poetry co-exist, intermingle, and lose definition. Benjy's voice is more poetic than prosaic in his idiocy, since he can only give an account of what he sees, and not what has gone before or after in a linear fashion. He may connect the lived moment with one in the past, but it is not a linear connection; it is a mental and immediate one. In this way, Benjy creates pure moments—poems, rather than linear narration. The language is abrupt and symbolic. As Chase notes, ". . .it is not



narrative but the association of the symbols and ideas that forms the continuity" (226).

## II. Theme

Alice Walker's The Color Purple propelled me toward a personal search for gender identity. I wanted Celie to be loved by Shug because Celie deserved it and was starved for it; her awakening to being loved was beautiful and genderless. I think that my answer to the gender confusion dealt with in such poems as "Pit Stop," "My Little Girl" and "Test Tube Baby" is genderlessness, or a paring down to the simple basic needs of the characters: to be loved, to be needed, and to love.

Still another influence has been Fannie Flagg's Fried Green Tomatoes. Though this book is not on the same literary level as the others mentioned, it was recommended to me by peers because they thought this treatment of a loving homosexual relationship a unique study in gender relations. The book delighted me because the two women were committed to each other despite the sameness of their gender, and had a legitimate partnership usually only connected with marriage. However, I did not find the allusions to a homosexual relationship between the characters that my peers had found. True, the traditional male/female roles were blurred. For instance, Ruth left Idgie when Idgie got drunk and gambled. But that Idgie often led a traditionally male lifestyle had nothing to do with her sexual orientation. This fueled my ideas even further; I experimented in order to separate sexuality from gender, and gender from behavior. Thus, the voices across my poems and prose are more like Idgie's than Ruth's, since they contain alternately traditional male and

female characteristics, roles, and speech. The voices can be violent and needy, or soft and demanding.

This project searches for an identity within and without the parameters of societal restrictions on gender and familial behavior. External influences need to be recognized, stripped of their authority, and extracted from the internal, all of which is like performing a surgical operation on yourself. The perspective then shifts from looking out to looking in, an isolation that is another kind of sickness but a necessary part of the process. Success comes when the unfettered individual interacts consciously with the external, and becomes a person who sees clearly and chooses without fear.

Religion, one example of external influences, was interpreted by me, as a child, as the wish to be a man. I learned that not everyone is created equal; rather, God has his chosen people and you may not be one of them. As a child, the eye of this god, men, and parents felt like a movie camera, watching and judging. All my decisions were made, consciously or unconsciously, based on the fact that I was being watched and judged by this Eye; no decision was my own. As with all children, I was not in control of my life because I did not own it.

I think that many writers will resist directly explaining their themes, saying that their medium—poetry or prose—was chosen carefully in order for the work's subject to be not understood by the reader, but rather experienced. Such an author will direct the reader back to the poem or story when queried about its significance, not only because the poem or prose may express it better than the spoken word, but because the reader brings her or his own experience and interpretation to the work. So, rather than explicate, I choose to clarify the significance of these works to each other as a group, to show how

this project progresses from an exploration to a resolution of sorts, just as every child must separate in order to mature. These works are about power and powerlessness. They necessarily deal with both gender "roles," since these are among the external societal influences that are suggested to and thrust upon a pure, innocent self.

I have divided these poems and stories into three sets, each illustrating in meaning and form the different stages of personal separation or evolution. The first set represents external forces acting upon an innocent self beleaguered with confusion, and hence, fear; the second set shows the self turning inward as a response to disillusionment, questioning the existence of authority, and lashing out at the external with anger, self-pity, and humor; and the third depicts a powerful self that acts as its own authority, interacting with the external and coming to its own beliefs.

The poems are sub-grouped into sections dealing with the external influence of parents, men and sexuality, and religion. Within each of the three sections, the speakers choose to deal with these influences in progressively different ways, going from victim or reactor full of fear and confusion, to a necessarily inwardly-turned, disillusioned self who questions authority, to a powerful self who is unfettered with outside influence, who chooses what to fear, what to ignore, embrace, or fight.

The poems and stories are presented in an order which exemplifies the journey. The maturation process should also be reflected in the physical presentation of the works. The stories tend to develop, in line length and in style, as the speaker does. The last section is not as strong in conviction as the questioning in the middle section, since poetry is not about answers, but

middles. Being humans, we are perpetual middles; we cannot ever claim to be at the end of something (except life).

In this brief discussion, I have referred to the speaker as if each poem or prose piece had the same speaker. In fact, that voice at times changes drastically, while remaining that of the original speaker. The voice may, like the human voice, change and be inconsistent, even within the same thought. This may reflect the speaker's continual struggle to unfetter herself from both external influences and blind self-introspection.

### III. Stage I: The External

There are, broadly speaking, two kinds of fear: real and imaginary. The child-like self in this first phase is merely a reactor, and is as yet unable to sort between real and unreal fears; she is also unable to respond positively to unwanted external influences. The child is therefore bombarded with nameless fears and external pressures. The self must change from a victim (reactor) to a powerful actor in order to become whole within itself, and to interact in a healthy way with external influences.

The poems "Monster Under My Bed" and "Towels" reflect this pervasive, unseen fear. In "Monster Under My Bed," the fear is merely "it," an unseen something that is waiting for its innocent victim. The narrator may want someone else to "Make it go away," but in reality she is the only one who can conquer "it." "Towels" discusses one way to fight off the fears, which is to feed them; the speaker does not know, however, what "it" wants, or what the external world wants. Like the children in "Worms," she is powerless because of her inability to identify the source of the fear.

Both "Towels" and "Worms" use obsessive-compulsive behavior to illustrate nebulous, pervasive fear, and the self's flailing attempts to guess with what to placate it. The repetition of short, choppy rhythms in the first page of "Worms" mimics the repetitious rituals to which Davey subjects himself in an effort to assuage "the voices":

He was afraid of the hall. He stood by his door. He touched the doorknob. He counted how many times he touched it.

"Worms" consists of "chunks" in which each chunk colors a picture of fear. The result is a patchwork impression intended to achieve a cumulative wholeness more effective than a strictly timeline-oriented narration would have been.

Societal concepts of femininity and masculinity predetermine "roles" that are imposed on children. Both "Pit Stop" and "Test Tube Baby" refer to these roles, and the conflicts that arise when children cannot meet such outside expectations. "Test Tube Baby" explores the terror and confusion of a self trying to fit an incomprehensible role. "I have tits," the narrator implores and offers all at once, to the baby and to the other adults, as if this physical aspect were proof that she is indeed a woman, while her inability to fit the role tells her that she is not. "Static" points out the comic hysteria centered around trying to be in the right place to meet the mythical man that will make the mythical woman complete.

Surely the biggest, most nebulous and fearsome judge, above parents and society, is God, or the concept of God. "Deviled Eggs" depicts a child's terrifying interpretation of the immaculate conception; the concept is either

beyond the child's comprehension, or she comprehends it too well and very personally. The poem names God, parents, and school as major institutions to which the child is subjugated. While God or the devil may impregnate the child, she still is accountable to her parents and society. Also, as a child, she is bombarded with the most simple to the most complex information, and she has to remember many rules, even the rules for warding off imaginary demons, like vampires: "Maybe I invited him in/by accident, like a vampire." Her mother has given her a religious incantation with which to protect herself. That she may have invited the devil by accident shows her confusion and helplessness, as if her body would betray her without her knowledge. The last stanza chants an incantation of her own to ward off the fear, or perhaps to keep her mind from betraying her by inviting evil.

"The Parting of the Red Sea" serves as a transitional poem into the second section. It sees God as an unwanted violator who is all-powerful and who demands subjugation at the cost of the self. It also may be an editorial comment by a disillusioned narrator who is beginning to liberate herself with sarcasm.

#### IV. Stage II: The Internal

The second section begins with the influence of parents and society, centered around gender roles. The narrator in "My Little Girl" feels no connection with her sex, and becomes a victim of it. The mother pulls dresses—a metaphor for femininity—over her daughter's real self, a self whose imperfections and scars are proof of an active life. In the last stanza, the daughter likens this covering-up to death of the self:

I paint my face, I cover my zits,  
I trace myself in chalk.

Her only freedom from the pressures of trying to interact with others as a woman, and from the adverse societal aspects of being a woman, lies in her "shrinking womb"; she can deny at least this biological proof.

"Baggage Claim" is like "Test Tube Baby" and "Static" in the sense that the narrator struggles against the idea that she must have a man in order to be a woman, and that she must give up her real self in order to accept him and her expected new woman-self. But here the voice is more grown-up and more argumentative, engaged in self-inquiry. The focus has switched from the victim of outside influences to a self who fights them, and seeks inner reassurance and resolution. The last line shows that while the narrator has begun to evolve, becoming the comforter that keeps vigil, she still sacrifices herself.

On the religious side, "Virgin Boy" seems a direct contradiction of the earlier "Deviled Eggs." The angry, powerful speaker becomes herself a sort of god or devil by sacrificing a man, making him victim to his frailties and subsequent fears. The mixture of innocence (evoked by the lines "Honey Nut Cheerios" and "reading riddles") with betrayal makes her vengeful anger, now focused on another innocent, more vicious. She attempts to throw out even her guilt, though she probably cannot. Her anger, like her fear, is probably misdirected at a man that may be nothing like the man who takes advantage of the narrator in the poem "My Little Girl."

"Marge," "Altar," and "Sin" all attempt to discredit or recreate a god depicted as institutionalized, fickle, selfish and demanding. In "Marge," God's wife seems to be married to a "good old boy," and she is doing his work behind

the scenes. Meanwhile, Marge struggles to have her own identity, separate from God's:

and His wife rattles  
in the staring hours  
between His naps  
and His visitations  
and writes her name  
over and over.

That Marge must struggle to separate herself from God may be a metaphor for the evolving self who struggles to separate her will from God's. Marge is also a caricature of society's role of "wife"; he is God, and she is his assistant.

"Altar" rewrites biblical history, and rejects a god whose rules are absolute. It makes God responsible for his actions against every human, both in the biblical context and beyond. "Sin" uses a different voice to show how an insidious set of beliefs operates within a family, however narrowly or globally a family is to be defined. It is also an angry, rhythmic beating of the drum, so to speak, and a call for all women to come down from their exalted mother-wife pedestals and become human, and therefore, alive. The pedestals are a deception, since the women are really slaves on blocks. Jesus is only a powerless man, "green, cracked and thin like flies' wings," unable to save himself or any woman. The narrator must learn to defend herself, and be her own savior.



The collective self in this section seems just as alone as in the previous section, but in a way she revels in this; she is able to question her influences and poke at them.

#### V. Stage III: Freedom

The last section of poems reflects a self with conviction, a self that sees through lies and knows that fears cannot touch her if she does not want them, because she defines herself and her influences. The voice in many of the poems is playful, since it is no longer fearful, and it sometimes even taunts fear. Sometimes the voice is powerful and demanding, and sometimes it is ugly; but when it is, it is still a true, imperfect, unfettered self who acts upon and around others, rather than reacting or becoming a victim. The narrator has ceased in many ways to fight, and has begun to create.

"The Secret of Life" sums up the overall epiphany: the narrator becomes aware that there was nothing to fear, that no one ever could or can touch her self. She is in control of what she internalizes:

And what would have happened except the impotent  
flailing of hands and raising of voices  
that could not touch me if I did not want them.  
In fact they feared I would see through them,  
walk through their invisible arms, and,  
protected by laws and angels unknown to me,  
walk into myself.  
I had such power  
and I did not see it.

Of course, there is an underlying spectre in the poem that says there are things to fear, like "an old unopened phone bill," but the narrator is now "big," and can take control of her life and decisions. She is no longer at the mercy of unnameable fears or external institutions. "On Maturity and Etiquette" playfully shows the narrator making up her own rules, which may include breaking some old rules imposed on her.

"Yell" is an attempt to claim fathers and all men as nurturing, loving people, to free them from their roles as well. The narrator wishes to pull others into her own process. It also attempts to validate her own sense of gender roles. She says of the father and daughter:

Their yell is the same:  
own me, love me.

At the same time, she is reconstructing her own childhood as a place where her desires and accomplishments were respected, and not subjugated to outside ideas—a place where "everything she does is a success," and "he does not hesitate to own her." The beginning of the poem shows that she knows that the father has the power to defend himself and thus love her. However, the last stanza makes it clear that he cannot be the father in his legend until he stops giving his power over to the mothers.

"Woman" is likewise a re-creation of a gender role, depicting a powerful, violent and oily woman who is described in puns centered around automobile parts; she tells the truth about her existence and puts society to shame. "Drill" has a playful and sardonic tone that twists sexuality and gender roles in a similar manner, but with a different voice.

"What, in God's Name" makes fun of the god depicted earlier, displaying a Dr. Seuss-type all-powerful being gone awry that thinks that, since it created this world, it can misbehave in any way it chooses. The narrator's playful tone rejects both fear and domination. Another and more loving god is created in "In Which God's Gift to Mankind is Misunderstood." This god has made a world for its creations because it wanted to see them happy. When the beings feel unworthy, the god does not understand what went wrong. Thus the whole concept is flipped, with the god being the confused one, and the humans the ones who make up the destructive rules and roles for themselves. Furthermore, the humans are the only ones who can empower themselves.

"Millenium" shows the final debate against the judgmental, harsh god, in which the narrator in effect tells the god how to behave. That is, she tells the god who it is in relation to her, and what their relationship is to be:

I do not know you.  
I know vibrant skin  
and slides  
and cranberries.  
I know disgorging flies  
carburetors  
and old donuts.  
If you are all these things  
then you may take me up  
and rub me against  
your beard.

## VI. Celebration

I spend my life casting fears  
away and this makes me drunk with the ordinary:  
every minute is a first.

Thus speaks, in "Snug," one of the final voices in this journey. Freedom is a self that is able to make its own mistakes and be responsible for them; this is also called being an adult. Three different voices speak to us in closing, some with humor, some in retrospective thought, and some clambering out of past neurosis. Each voice, however, is saying the same thing: I am fearless; I am big; I am free.

FROM THE OUTSIDE, IN, AND OUT AGAIN:  
POWER TAKEN

## The External

Monster Under My Bed

What was that?

Your hand,  
your breath.  
Oh  
Sorry  
Please go on.

I clamp you for protection,  
distracted,  
straining. . .  
Stop for a minute,  
Shush

Can you hear the warts, the veins?  
The yelping  
inbetween the smacking springs,  
The scrapings, whisperings talking over themselves,  
Slapping indentations

It wants me  
to try to escape this bed,  
put my foot  
down  
there

It wants me to stay here,  
consume me  
and spit out you,  
your bones.  
I can feel it  
breathing blowing mucous

Knock it off, yourself!  
You insensitive—  
You will be eaten.  
Go ahead,  
go to the bathroom

Wait  
Not the covers  
It will nibble on my ears  
inching and muttering.  
Make it go away  
Make it go away

Towels

She knows the time, and that she has not slept.  
 Don't look at the clock:  
 It will ring, she reassures, in blue glow.  
 I will get up. There is enough reason.  
 She does not know if she will betray her self.  
 Each day she grips in hyperventilation:

O god, I'm ok, I'm ok  
 she chants loudly over the deadness in her lips.  
 When was there hope, and for what?  
 A man to live for, and him for her, a comfortable illusion.  
 Another life in this death, an eternity of fooling herself for one more day.

She does not know why she shivers, why she needs to confess  
 her silly wants—to buy lunch, to surf—  
 to her mother, a clinician, a priest, a man.

She checks her watch, checks herself for disease, tries to remember the names  
 of her friends, is compelled to call them out, something tangible.  
 She lingers over the towels; somehow they look like they can feel her.

She offers up some compulsions to the Fates. Makes her bed before playing.  
 But look how she folds the towels, soft and straight,  
 They will say,  
 Fresh and ready for a burrowing neck, a curved back, the  
 softly indented ravine of a spine.

How can she be unworthy? How can she deserve this?

They will pass over her.  
 They will sprinkle blessings like privileged children,  
 as if she did not depend on their incantations, as if she did not need air.  
 She will breathe.  
 She will chant softly inbetween her words,  
 rubbing and flipping the hems in the insides of her pockets.  
 She counts as she flips, and this comforts her.  
 It is something she knows.



Worms

Davey was happy in his pants and then His Mommy was saying dinner, dinner, and Davey was scared of the hall. He got up. He looked at his booger collection on the wall by his bed. Some of them were missing. He wondered if they fell off or if Katie had been in here. He had been saving them. He pretended to open a fridge. He chose one.

He was afraid of the hall. He stood by his door. He touched the doorknob. He counted how many times he touched it. Katie came in and pulled Davey on the arm. Davey screamed. He leaned back. Two more, two more touches. Then he sucked in, gulped. He ran down the hall.

The hall doorknob called to him. He pretended not to hear it, but it shot at him, grabbed him. His Mommy said dinner, dinner, and Davey danced as if he had to pee. He touched the knob and he could not let go until it released him. The touches were getting more. He could not count that high, and so he started over from thirteen.

Davey was still screaming, grabbing the air as Kurt threw him into his booster chair. He explained to the touching Voices that Kurt was big. He hoped that would be enough. He would have to touch it extra next time.

Katie blew her crumbs to her brother's side of the table.

Davey watched the carrots in agony. One chose him. He watched his carrot. His Mommy did not take it. Kurt did not take it; he speared it with a fork and Davey winced, but it fell back onto the plate. Davey reached over Katie for the plate. He knew that God would tell her what to do. She looked at him. She reached for a carrot. Davey smiled, breathed. Then quickly God told her (then God blinked, finked) and Katie swept up Davey's carrot and slipped it in her mouth. Strangled, Davey reached, his carrot screaming, its roots flailing, and she chewed wide-eyed and fast, thrilled and powerful, beyond his longest finger.

Somebody yelled at him to sit. He looked at Katie. He looked at her swallow. He looked at her offering him the plate of carrots. Compelled, Davey ran and smeared another booger on his wall. It would not come off his finger.

Davey watched the other boys jumping. He could feel his stumpy fingers grappling the air, mimicking their legs as they kicked their way down to the surface of the water, creating an opening in it, a space where they would fit.

Davey thought them like helicopters upside down, that this must be how helicopters landed, though he had never seen it himself.

He did not realize he was making his burble noise until one of the boys laughed and screeched, a siren. Then the other boys were scrambling at Davey in a loud jeer.

Davey brayed. As quick as his blunt body would allow, he bent his neck and balanced his soft head precariously on the rough deck. He bucked and swirled his feet in the air clumsily, trying to take off.

"Git away from me, farthead," Davey was crying.

Katie could feel her anger, sharp and sudden. She had recognized Davey's awkward gesture from far off. It was the same as how he combed his hair with one hand and poured the oil with the other like a two-fisted drinker, the oil sheeting off of juicy, filial strands. The scene was familiar too. She began to run.

"Get off my brother!" Katie charged as if she had been waiting all of her six years for a moment of clarity. She tossed off boys like artichoke leaves, digging for Davey, feeling the insanity of her rhythmic blood, her breathing. She felt spluts in Davey's soft gut that held his soft heart, his soft brain grasping. She saw him carrying cups of pee down white halls, other childrens' pee. He had a yellowing laminated ring on his arm, and a laminated picture of his baby sister in his plastic bubble. He was smiling and laughing. He stroked empty beds in understanding. He was soft death visiting the welcome, he was clover and baby's breath.

Davey sat like a wounded animal, thrashing sporadically at Katie. "Git away!" he blubbered. "Leave me alone!"

After Katie finished beating him, she picked up his shoe and dragged the rest of him home.

"Kurt says he is stuck," said Katie to God. "He is stuck with us monsters. I would like to be a big hairy green one with curly horns and a wide brimmed hat that pops." Katie hummed a little loudly and flailed in the styrofoam bean bag beads. She unzipped them all over the living room so that they covered everything. She jumped and hopped.

Katie flagged at the top of the stairs, suddenly conscious of her vinyl-footed pajamas resounding on the wooden outcroppings. She hoped that Kurt had not heard her. Distracted, she drug her big toe slowly across the finish, as if expecting splinters. She tried not to stir the air by breathing it in or out. To her relief, she disappeared.

"I," thought Katie, "am really in my room pounding my bean bag. I am humming the hummer song. Hmm. Hmm. I am not. seeing Kurt hang Davey crunching by his ankles. I am not watching him bounce Davey on his soft bent head. I am humming the hummer song."

From under the butcher block the children watched Kurt strip the carrots. He pulled the peeler toward himself in long, quick strokes that ended in a flourish meant for his own face, as if he would erase it, shuck it like corn.

Their ankles and knees began to ache and they wondered if he would hear them over his scrapings if they shifted. Katie thought Davey was breathing too loudly; he seemed to be playing with the air, swinging a booger on a nosehair like a pendulum, in and out with each suck and release. Katie elbowed him and he teetered like a tree, in wordless panic. She could tell that The Voices were talking to him.

Katie said her Magic Words. "Force-Fields! God!" she said, and, "No monsters!"

"Not that," she assured Them, "I am not afraid." Not feeding Them made them roar, made them come back, she knew.

Davey and Katie said their Magic Words and listened to their Voices and waited to see what they would do.

In the mornings, Davey liked to hide under the coffee table with his marbles and Katie's truck while His Mommy watched TV. Somehow he felt safe when he could see her. Katie would always be mad when she found him with her truck, and then Davey would try to sit on her so he could put marbles in her round nostrils. They needed to be there in their roundness. The repetition of these events comforted him.

His Mommy was watching her shows. She shushed Davey. "The Amityville Horror people," she said. "Satan," she gestured at the glowing box. "Eaten by their own furniture." Davey rolled his marbles under the couch. His Mommy murmured, exclaimed. She slowly turned her head. Davey wondered whose head it would be. She looked at him.

"I believe it," she said. "You can't fake that kind of fear." Davey looked at the couch that had eaten his marbles. He watched it. He waited.

Katie could not find her truck. She could not find her clothes. There were some dresses on her bed. One of them was green. Kurt appeared and pulled it down around her head, over her scabs. Katie looked at him dully. He could not tell what she was thinking, if she was thinking. "I'm sorry," said Kurt. He found the arm hole and tried to thread Katie's arm through it, but it would not bend. "I wanted you to be strong, that's why I'm so rough," he was saying. Katie was far away, listening to tree gossip, whispers. "My, my first little boy was broken, and I guess I wanted another one," he said. He looked hard at Katie and gave up. "Where is your truck I gave you, your orange t-shirt from Reno?" He surveyed the room. There were no toys. There were some marbles under the dresser, and some lint.



"The big yellow truck loves to go," said Katie, "in a pile of worms. I roll them and I pinch their ends."

She was happy as she buried her soft worms in the warm. Her truck hummed as it raised the last load of dirt and peat. She said her magic words for protection. Katie began to go blank. She dangled a worm.

"One of the ends is the beginning," she hummed. "Dinkle dinkle dee."

Mother Visits

Attention please, or close your eyes:  
 I am now going to play  
 on all your fears.  
 Something is jumping on splaying nerves,  
 running vacuums inside your closets.  
 It will flash in your windows on blue stormy nights,  
 when you'll pull on curtains that will not shut  
 and when you call Dad and he sees nothing,  
 you'll both know it's in the hedges, just you and It.  
 It will tell that you play with yourself, and how.  
 It whispers on freeways that it will all end,  
 makes your hands wet, your vision stripe,  
 your eyebrows droop on your brain.  
 It will fuck you walking so you can wonder  
 did you stop just then and yell, Yes! Yes!  
 on the sidewalk in front of the lemonade?

You will begin to believe:  
 the Big One will hit while you,  
 naked and unrepentant,  
 will hum at television screens  
 while neighbors scramble for cellars;  
 that bump in the night was the TV zombie  
 you dared to come so you could kick its ass,  
 and if you don't turn the light on, it will get you,  
 and reaching for the switch will make it mad.  
 Christ is coming tomorrow and you missed  
 meeting your only true love by the 10 seconds you took  
 to wet that cowlick.

You will begin to worry.  
 You will check your pants for bloody leaks  
 at every 10 counts,  
 gulp between small talk and was that three or four?  
 Your new fat is a baby in 3-year incubation.  
 Your cough and knotty back are AIDS, your ache  
 a tumor catscan-unseen.  
 Your breath disagrees with the ozone.  
 They're all out of danishes, and your mother was right.

Count and breathe and speak and cough.  
 There you go,  
 you're on your own, kid;  
 pedal, pedal faster  
 it's easier that way, that's it. . .

Pit Stop

Each 3 o'clock  
mom paints a picture,  
frames it in the windowpane,  
a scene: a mother,  
fulfilled in white donuts  
and koolaid, she waits.

At 2 o'clock  
I catch her  
in her pained small life  
dusting boxes in closets  
piled against her on the floor,  
her knees aching  
so she can't stand up.

I am not supposed to be here,  
not supposed to be hers;  
not suckling, not pregnant, proper.  
She hates my fragrance, my freedom,  
my selfish empty body  
invading her home with an old key  
to pee, use the phone,  
try to think of something to say.

I am supposed to fall to the floor with sponges  
to beg her attentions;  
forgive my mannish clothes, clean fingernails,  
my answering machine softly blinking:  
whore, ungrateful, whore.

Get out! her eyes are screaming  
above her sweeping fingers  
and her measured voice  
saying "yes" and "no".  
The bend of her back  
is sharp and she breathes uneven,  
gasping, as my footsteps click:  
Please love me, please need me,  
to the sound of a key, grinding.

Test Tube Baby

Here, he says, hold the baby.  
He winks at his sister, confident,  
though his hands shake.  
He dangles it.  
No! I say, but  
he lets go and it dashes to the floor and bounces like salt,  
shattering each time with a cry.

He hands it to me.  
Nuzzle it, he said, like you do me.  
I have tits, I tell it. It looks like it will sneeze.  
No! I whisper, No! to its imploding face  
waiting to fart, to piss, to scream.  
It breathes like a siren  
and he and she exchange glances:  
This is not the right one.  
But the dog, I bewilder,  
likes me. Please, I have tits. Please.  
It screams.

Static

A pity,  
this preserved wasting.  
I summon you  
with new underwear,  
frost your cake  
and cry as I eat you  
But there are more—  
this mouthful  
just an end of one waiting,  
a garnished disappointment.  
With each new cake,  
new hope.  
The phone will ring,  
a car will drive,  
I must not stop to pee;  
in peeing, lose you.  
To go  
out of your way,  
the natural order  
and I might miss you  
across the string beans,  
behind the pump.  
You will come  
inbetween cakes,  
and, as firemen, say,  
her underwear is dirty,  
let us not save her.

Smears

What is it that breaks me in shuddered heaves,  
yet compels me to shift and arch  
in candied trickles:  
a lack of control, a fear, a lament?

I don't remember what it felt like to have him in me;  
only that it felt, the first time, that it shouldn't be there.  
It wasn't going to fit  
pleasantly like his thumb, his stretched tongue.  
It was making a hole.

The lady had said unasked that it wouldn't hurt, wouldn't bleed  
She looked excited as she probed, stretched the hole like a yawn;  
she was thinking about him being in there, and how she had fucked me first,  
obscene in plastic shoehorns. She thought I couldn't feel her, tickling.  
I wondered why she worked rubbing breasts, she wanted to rub  
in circles out from my nipples, encompassing.  
She was looking for something.  
Let me look here, she said echoing in my hole;  
a word got stuck in there like seed  
clinging to the walls, flagellating, flatulating.  
I can feel it tickling. I arch and it never falls out.

Deviled Eggs

I squeeze my legs tight  
so the Devil can't come  
inside me while I sleep.  
I wonder how Mary  
explained to her mom  
it was god what did it.

Maybe I invited Him in  
by accident, like a vampire.  
Satan leave in the name of jesus christ  
My mom told me to say that  
and he would go away.

I wonder if they will hatch  
right in the middle of Spelling  
everybody will know  
I am His chosen  
hatching a demon army.

I didn't dare him to come  
I didn't think it  
1 2 3  
no  
I didn't

The Parting of the Red Sea

The preacher says  
God is coming.  
Globby egg white  
with fire hydrant force.

On your knees  
he says.  
God likes it  
when you're on your knees.

Love God  
with all your might,  
mind, and strength,  
the preacher says:  
Open yourself to Him.

Open wide.



The Internal

My Little Girl

It was easier being a whore, I think  
 than this, trying the men  
 in my mind like flavors,  
 the right combination, password.

Better though than to have to brush, be witty,  
 to conquer their invisible woman,  
 a sewing pattern I can't alter.  
 I pass by the boxes  
 in the pharmacy aisle where a life rides on pink or blue pee  
 with some freedom and ecstasy,  
 my shrinking womb smelling like the future.  
 Distracted, I poke at these other creatures, these women

that pass me in groceries  
 interacting, superfluous.  
 Why do they speak? And what?  
 Anxiously I listen, a neuter, a snail:  
 I can't hear anything; they only speak in tones  
 that answer each other, a cadence.  
 But they can see me.

They smell me like dogs  
 a ceremony of the sexes,  
 a dance around butts.  
 They know I am not a woman.  
 Where was my mother? The movies  
 told me what to say, how to move.  
 I string the words, I fling my arms.  
 Do you have a fork? I say. Do you wish to flee?  
 Ahh! he says. of course!  
 He shifts. He fondles.  
 Which way to the train? I anxiously. Way train the which to?  
 Yes, yes! he pumps and shoots,  
 a potato gun.

Where was my mother? I pushed in her breasts,  
 a doorbell, a siren, calling.  
 Inverted she looked through me, she did not say  
 this is what, and this we are.  
 She pulled on my dresses, a limb for each hole,  
 over scars, dirt, red marmalade,  
 and ran.

I paint my face, I cover my zits,

I trace myself in chalk.  
The little girl, I think:  
I would have held her.  
I would have loved her.

Drawers

What was I doing,  
sitting in his bed, fully clothed,  
with the covers snugged around me like I belonged there,  
pretending to read  
and not see as he sat cleaning me out of his desk,  
my trembling notes, gifts  
thrown away, hidden under old bills with a pass of his hand,  
a marble, a Sesame Street cup with the Count laughing choppily  
around the curve, toy handcuffs for graduation, and a firecracker,  
unused, and him talking over himself as if his patter  
would stand in front of my eyes,  
and me pretending it didn't matter  
they were thrown away unopened,  
this honest I-can-still-be-your-friend-relationship.  
Why did I strain to like him?  
Why sit and listen to his ghosts,  
pulled out of the corners of his drawers,  
his boasts stuck between them?  
What did I take with me but my pain  
and this moment?  
A ticket stub in a pocket, crumpled soft in the dryer,  
half a packet of Ortho-Novum,  
overalls that were too small for him,  
an empty glass, a stain on the carpet.  
Things that never belonged  
in a desk, always refuse,  
never lost.

Holding Baby

I don't quite know what to do  
with myself.  
This feels  
like stirring  
squirming puppies  
in a box.  
I can almost  
touch it  
almost  
catch it  
envelop it.

I feel like there's  
something  
I'm supposed to do with him.  
Something wonderful.  
Squish him  
into little globby shapes  
to pass out to my friends.  
Smoke him  
or rub him on my face,  
on my breasts.  
Drop him on linoleum  
to see if he bounces.  
Capture him  
smother him  
pat him too hard.  
Lick up his hair,  
roll him up like a bug.

So I throw him up  
in the air  
and thrill that all this could be over if I would just miss.

But of course I know  
that this I-don't-knowing, whatever it is, is at least familiar;  
that tomorrow  
like today  
I will grab bubbles  
pee  
in the rain  
dance  
in the dark  
fart  
in a windstorm.

Openings

Funny thing,  
I remember that

it costs extra  
to embalm a tall man  
I told them,  
fifty dollars  
for six feet.

This is what I have  
left:  
his trade, the smell of formaldehyde  
the blur of the instruments  
the blood swirling clinically in the toilet.  
Not his face  
his touch  
laugh  
only his voice  
I remember that I loved him  
I was so big  
that old ladies  
flamed  
in the wake  
the steam rising from park benches

I am a harlot  
I scream  
in sudden revelation.  
It is what I know  
Come and taste me.  
Lick me up until I am nothing.

Here is my life  
I give it to you;  
Policeman:  
I am guilty  
I am drunk  
and none of this is true  
and the preacher won't take it all  
and nothing ever changes.

A little girl,  
I prayed to be retarded  
and make really good pots.  
I prayed to lose my limbs

so that I could roll  
and not stop.

Please  
don't let me love you  
you won't be able to stand it  
it will feel so good  
so real  
big  
and brave

Baggage Claim

A bag of him falls out of your closet,  
 and squats blinking, defiant.  
 You've been waiting for it, it knows,  
 for the right time, the pain, fury, relief.  
 It flourishes a letter from him,  
 ones to yourself, crumpled  
 a few pictures (wasn't he better looking?):  
 What was it?  
 The ring, in an envelope marked "ring"  
 doesn't break you.  
 You're waiting. "I'm OK, it's OK," you say, reassuring,  
 as you pull him out gingerly like boogers from a baby's nose,  
 but you are, and it is.  
 What was it?

This, maybe:  
 the tender, the trueness, the big.  
 Your new jealousy, your "Oh! Oh!" just cradling his face for no reason  
 on your mother's plaid couch with somebody's brother not watching.  
 Donuts, on the porch at the other side of 5 AM,  
 stolen from a dumpster bag behind Winchells:  
 licking the icing, eating from the hole out,  
 wondering if somebody pees on them before tying the bag,  
 giggling, rich and wallowing.  
 Your dad catching you in the backyard,  
 an orgasm forever a basketball to the head  
 thrown from the back porch, the screen door, sliding.  
 To love him to look over him, deny him.  
 The sadness of the last broken fuck when you both know it  
 His broken face, and you leaving. His cold chest and no-face, him leaving.

No, this! This unlistening,  
 this putting away of childish things—all yours. This  
 putting him on, putting him on you, and his mother, and hers, like an apron.  
 He didn't want you,  
 look here: "these ping-pong conversations,  
 I say 'trucks', and he says, 'niggers, lead pencils'"  
 What was that? That was the next him, and the one after,  
 the same him, the all the same him. Yes! and you,  
 unlistening, and you, fastening aprons, their strings.

You pull another bag, kicking, from the closet,  
 you breathe, you sling it on your back, you leave, saying:  
 never again, the same him.  
 But he opens the door before you can fling it, thudding,



lumpy black with Safeway coupons still in the bottom.  
He answers, takes you up in his neck, crying.  
And his child, around your leg.  
You flag, you hold out the bag desperately behind him, around you,  
you try to speak, and just before you dissolve  
you remember: This is what was.

Virgin Boy

Honey Nut Cheerios,  
the Last Supper

reading riddles  
as foreplay  
before I sacrifice  
you on a couch.

God won't see you  
if you shut your eyes  
I tell you  
as you shut out all you believe  
just to have me.

You left  
some guilt  
when you ran

please drop by  
and pick it up  
with the rest of your things.

Marge

Hunched  
in latent power,  
blue flickers of light  
shoot from his ears.  
All-seeing,  
knowing all,  
God levitates another beer  
and curses the quarterback.

She pulls her fingers  
through His butch haircut,  
decides it's a little too long.  
God looks uncomfortable  
in white, but wears it anyway  
because it's expected.  
He thinks all prayers  
sound like her  
complaining about the garbage.

His wife, she takes His calls,  
cleans up His messes—  
acid rain after too much beer.  
Covers up the flooding incident,  
types the commandments over  
when Moses breaks the first twenty.  
Takes credit for wars won  
in His honor  
and pastes complaints  
about pomegranates  
to the refrigerator.  
She is the last to kiss  
her daughters and sons  
before sending them off  
without a lunch or a memory.  
The phone constantly rings  
with women dying to know  
how God fucks,  
and His wife rattles  
in the staring hours  
between His naps  
and His visitations  
and writes her name  
over and over.

Altar

## Chapter 1

1. Give, said God; whatever hurts you most will be fine.
2. No, said Abram, I will not bow to a god of riddles. Not, that to obey you is a higher law than to kill. Not, that Adam and Eve must sin to live.
3. Abraham, give me your son, said God. Give me your life. Give it back it is mine.
4. Then it was never given, said Abram. My name is Abram.

## Chapter 2

1. I will kill, said God. No, said Abram. OK, how about 50 people, said God. Ten, said Abram.
2. Well, OK, said God. I am a perfect God, you know.
3. And give me Lot's wife. A pillar of the community.

## Chapter 3

1. Don't fuck with me, said God. I am the great I Am and that's all that I Am. You are my chosen.
2. Choose again, said Israel. Friends like you. We are not a people. We are each.
3. I will show you who I Am, said God. Your insignificance. Through your weak you will be made strong.

4. We will defy you  
as we perish, said the  
Israelites. Those you can  
call yours no one would have.

#### Chapter 4

1. Here, Mary, said God in  
her sleep. I adore you. I take  
what you have saved for me.  
You want it. Your skin, your  
shame, give it to me, he raped.

#### Chapter 5

1. My son, presented God  
magnanimously, Here. You all  
owe. You can never repay, by  
virtue of who you are: mine.  
I made you.

2. I didn't ask for it, said  
the world. You couldn't have,  
said God.

#### Chapter 6

1. Aha: Give me your Christ,  
said the world. This truly is  
a great gift; I strike him  
and you stay your hand, God.  
Does this hurt? Your rules  
before mercy. Did you know  
this? Can you hope?

2. An eye for an  
eye, you said blindly. He  
does not know you. It hurts  
us to kill something so sweet,  
so human, this hope you have  
borne. We will have you  
know our pain. A sacrifice for  
the sins of the Father. Rules  
before mercy.

3. And mercy looks to you  
and screams his own name,  
and, omniscient, you cannot hide.

Sin

I am born in sin, a sin hatching.  
Family! they whisper, Family!  
they cry, Family! they whimper, Family!  
they lie,  
and I was born, a sinner  
my people told me  
But I didn't know nothing 'bout that.  
My people loved me, their aprons in light patterns.  
We loved Jesus,  
he was a man, he was white, he was a god.  
I waited for him to come, in white blankets, with three dicks  
and dark whores around them, suckling.  
He never did, and he never loved me.  
No wonder, who I was.  
We played in the dirt,  
in the wet worms under the rain. I loved them, my people,  
until I rose, pure and flowered, dripping.  
My people put me way up high, and I was so proud  
but couldn't see them, just some other pedestals like dentist stools  
or whatever it was flowers stood on.  
We stood there, hearing our people below sing our lives, chant our names,  
we thought we heard our names, we stood until we shrunk.  
We began to turn, it was all we could do,  
and one by one we started to spin, up or down,  
and up they couldn't be heard or seen.  
But down, down I spun and my dizzy white vomit spattered my people,  
rank and defiled. I could see them, corpulent, feasting on themselves.  
They busied in worm slaughters, they spoke to Jesus, they suckled each other.  
I starved and one fed me his dick, glued me to a disk, and began to spin it,  
stiff and creaky. I broke my legs and ran on my bones,  
I spun the dickless flowers down, their vomit clean like rain, like snow.  
We fed to our people their dicks, dizzy and white. We saw Jesus in a closet,  
green, cracked and thin like flies' wings. Jesus was a man.

Freedom

Yell

Once,  
 when daddies roamed the earth  
 snuffling about for this and that  
 to snug about their children,

someone took the daddies and told them  
 it was no longer their job  
 to love them, they couldn't love them as much.  
 How could they be worthy? No sucklers, no wombs,  
 only these hard laps and scratchy faces:  
 they surely were all uncles,  
 meant to visit, to pull quarters from ears,  
 and not to wipe fevers or wake in the night listening for a breath,  
 to pull her starving to their impotent nipples.

Surely he never felt she was his,  
 could not pick her, new, from among the others,  
 all bald and breastless like him,  
 the father of everyman, the lover of no one.

But he knows her.  
 Their yell is the same:  
 own me, love me.  
 Look, she knows his finger, eats it;  
 she would consume him if she could.  
 And she can, and she does.

He says, "Let me tell you a story  
 about daddies. We are real.  
 We snuggle our children as if we love them,  
 as if they came from us,  
 as if we would kill for them like a mother.

He tells her how it will be with them:

We wait while she finishes a story  
 that begins with cousin Jinny and ends with dandelions  
 to wipe treacle from her cheeks, like dents in a cushion,  
 quickly and dabbily hard  
 because he knows she is too busy to pee.

Everything she does is a success,  
 Look, how she balances peanuts on her nose while yodeling la la la.  
 At gas stations she drinks water meant  
 for radiators and squirts the patrons, and



He does not hesitate to own her.

He feels her wander from his leg in supermarkets,  
and doesn't scold when she drops pears in sweet piles,  
doesn't ruin her delight, her squeal  
with his tall quiet presence  
changing her to Eve poised at trees,  
suddenly knowing she is wrong,  
everything she does, something she is, perhaps,  
Bewildered, to look around her: It must be the pears,  
they must cost money, or perhaps her loud.  
She does not stare and wail, knowing not what is coming or why,  
except that she is the little one, the unknowing one,  
the one always who learns  
what it is that is wrong with her.  
Everything is too loud,  
or too messy,  
or is not free for the taking or flinging as it seems, as if  
nothing is as yummy as it seems,  
her world only a series of delusions waiting to be popped,  
a delight to be stepped on sharply, aghast, a puppy under a tire,  
a bug on a dog's tongue.

No, he dresses her,  
laughing and patient as he grabs  
for busy, flagellating limbs through holes,  
a blur of clashing stripes, her favorite shirt  
never hidden, never thrown away;  
he only washes it while she sleeps,  
sews the new tears, rubs stains in circles with his fingers,  
smiles and pats as he folds.

He tells her these secrets,  
he writes their life together,  
he finishes his story  
and before he lays her flailing and strong back in her empty bed,  
before he leaves her forever to soft surrogates who birth her and drink iced tea,  
he nuzzles her with his face like a lamb,  
and smells her, knowing that smell is a thing,  
a molecule entering his body.  
He does not breathe out.

The Secret of Life

Now that I am big,  
I know the secrets of adults.  
I have had the privilege on holidays  
of sitting at the big people's table with Uncle Harry,  
under which Aunt Gret kicks him, ferociously and often,  
and most times I know why, too. I know about loans and equities and  
closed doors and Machu Piccu.  
I know their secrets.  
Like when they say no,  
said no,  
I had a choice.  
I could have said, oh? I don't agree  
and flounced out without a coat, a thank-you note for Aunt Gret,  
galoshes, a savings bond, a date for the prom, a condom.  
I could have said something,  
made a face, a noise, a scene,  
a spectacle of myself, how grand!  
I could have done it anyway.  
And what would have happened except the impotent  
flailing of hands and raising of voices  
that could not touch me if I did not want them,  
In fact they feared I would see through them,  
walk through their invisible arms, and,  
protected by laws and angels unknown to me,  
walk into myself.  
I had such power  
and I did not see it.  
And now, when I am late for work again, hurried, my butt tingling,  
when he hasn't called for two days and I begin recounting our conversations,  
looking for clues, for anything,  
when a curt voice from VISA is the only sound after the beeping,  
and an old unopened phone bill curls behind the dresser,  
I leave them, step over them and go the other way, fists swinging,  
knowing, and yelling:  
nothing can hurt me,  
nothing can ever hurt me!

On Maturity and Etiquette

Because I am growed,  
I can eat applesauce  
straight from the jar  
with a big long spoon  
meant for ice cream  
and return it to the refrigerator.

I can drink  
from the carton,  
and let some of it  
dribble down my neck  
inside my shirt,  
and return it to the refrigerator.

Because I am growed,  
I can offer my own things  
to my friends  
when they are called guests.  
I say  
Would you like some applesauce?  
Would you like some milk?

Woman

Well, har-de-har-har,  
she said in a splatter of woman spit,  
squeezing and patting their heads.  
She sat as if bearing her oiled children  
from her creases.  
Let me tell you a story, she creaked.  
She coiled up, idled,  
and sprang on her words.  
From a spark you began, she said,  
you started. One driven blink, a greased shaft pumping,  
and I radiated! Hell, I broke.  
A line split up her hosiery like lightning, startled and powerful.  
A battery of words flew from her,  
harsh and unfiltered, curdled and vented.  
And what do you suppose I got? she said,  
and peeled her skin and pointed  
at the red strings, at lumps undusted and shriveled, a soul waived, waived.  
Her skin stretched and filmed, breathed.  
And thus pissed on, they left,  
and, turning the rings on their fat cylindrical fingers,  
they screwed themselves back into the ground.

Drill

Please don't love me,  
you skitted

Now hold still, you,  
a little pinch  
there we are  
this won't hurt a bit  
I'm just going to stick this in here  
and screw  
gut  
rearrange  
while you stand openmouthed  
waiting for the extrication.  
There will be pieces left over,  
I whisper  
There will be caverns  
and danglings  
and effluvium you cannot chase.  
I will steal and  
I will insert odd parts  
to remember me by,  
almost fitting.  
You will like it, strangely  
and split your own chest  
to pull and flip the corpuscles,  
examine them.  
You will chew them and you will gurgle:  
I have not even regrets.  
Can you feel  
the numb?  
And then,  
shut up and gum your red sucker  
and remember that once  
I said I would always  
love you  
and I meant it.

What, In God's Name

"I am Sam.  
 Sam I Am.  
 The great one;  
 the Sam one,  
 I Am."

She eddied, she whirled;  
 the universe unfurled in her bowels and she liked it.  
 This is pretty good, said Sam I Am.  
 Now I will think up some rules,  
 some bothersome riddles, some hey diddle diddles, I feel like having a cow.  
 And so she did.  
 Sam I Am had a cow, and she had a woman, and she had  
 some breakfast in the evening, because she was Sam I Am.

Sam I Am dropped some bawling bibblesnogs  
 to watch them fall.  
 She added some pepper, some rice, and a vat  
 of warm Sam I Am spit, she added them twice.  
 She stirred them with a Yum-Yum tree because she could,  
 and because she never like dumplings.

I am perfect, said Sam I Am;  
 Whatever I do here is just what I do,  
 they'll thank me for living,  
 for the when who and what.  
 I can eat them or leave them or grind them all up.  
 She giggled and twirled and then took a nap.

Meanwhile her cows mooed in confusion  
 Her woman and hamsters had green psychic visions  
 The bawling bibblesnogs changed their names,  
 they bubbled, not bibbled, but snogged just the same.

Awk, said Sam I Am Sam  
 They have run off like bugs  
 A nice thought, she mused  
 and squeezed out a few  
 red ones and pricklies and antennae and shoehorns.  
 But enough of this! I want perfection.  
 These defecting pawns are losing direction.  
 Zap, she said, and Abracadabra, and she sat on the air.  
 You're not playing right, said Sam I Am.

Vandersneet, said her brood, brooding.

Wickets and bibliographies.

Oh my, said Sam I Am. She giggled and tipped a cow gently  
with a hair from her toe,  
She prodded a hoot bug and tickled the snow.  
They like me, she said, look at them bowing  
under the weight of the atmospheric pressure times seventy-seven deciwatts.  
She smiled and curled her lashes.

The JujuBees bent  
the red fig trees waved  
the woman and juice cows sacrificed  
each other on a cool pad of chew grass.

Go back there, she said, get out of my face, go away,  
you belong where I put you, now stay in your place.  
But she was pleased  
and so she made a new riddle, a limerick, as dirty as she liked,  
and she gave them her very most favorite life:  
Here is my Bleetblat, said Sam I Am.  
She caressed it and threw it  
and blew it to far away where Diosmio lived, the hateful.

I did not ask for this sacrifice,  
I did not ask it Sam I Am,  
warned the dour daygenblegs.  
You're not playing right, stomped Sam I Am  
before she ate them.  
Cow's tails and hoot bug brains,  
a little piece of fig tree,  
they all stuck perfectly in her teeth.

In Which God's Gift to Mankind is Misunderstood

A gift, It said lovingly  
around all at once. It cried and did not know what to do with Itself,  
It made this place. It hopes you like it, giggles in hushed bursts.

But you do not remember It.  
All you know is this place, this Place. That whatever made it  
was filial, in sweet juicy strands, tastebuds combing ice cream.  
You must pay it. You are not worthy.  
You run up the highest bump, you mutter your scarcity, your mediocrity,  
and jump up and down, hoping to please, to mend, to not dirty the towels.  
You chew on your eyes for looking, cut off your fingers for knowing.  
You are very sorry that it is not enough.

It is stunned. It was a gift, It stammers,  
It folds. It doesn't understand.  
It never meant to hurt you.



Millenium

All will bow,  
Every tongue  
confess  
in awful remembrance.

What,  
will I treason myself?  
Agonize  
over tender passions  
Remonstrate over  
carefree sun days  
Bleed from every pore  
over days not wasted  
a life lived  
felt  
and loved?

Or shall I give up,  
while I can,  
my power  
to a ghost?  
Haltered by an unseen fear,  
gilded guilt,  
I take hesitant steps.  
No!  
I will not be taken  
I will follow sand dollars  
step back from misery  
steal its teachings

And meet Him,  
my knees locked  
head straining at a tilt,  
put my fingers in His holes  
and say  
I did not ask for this.  
I took your gift  
and used it,  
until there was not even a drop left  
except that I would lick it up.  
I have lived  
I have loved it  
I have not wasted a day  
or a choice  
without some mourning.

I stand before myself.  
Do what you will.

I do not know you  
I know vibrant skin  
and slides  
and cranberries.  
I know disgorging flies  
carburetors  
and old donuts.  
If you are all these things  
then you may take me up  
and rub me against  
your beard.  
You may scratch me  
and pummel me  
and kiss my ears off.  
If I am truly home  
you will set me down  
pat my butt  
scuttle me off to play  
and say at my velveteen scampering:

Boneless skin  
weathered and used  
tired and full,  
come to me  
and let me give you  
no respite.  
I have enjoyed watching you.  
Your plunder  
at each piece of being  
that dangled within grasp.  
Your thrilled shrills,

God, this stings! I love it!  
I revel in dirt and orange candies.  
Come, come, and let me taste you.

Celebration

Snug

I spend my life casting fears  
away and this makes me drunk with the ordinary;  
every minute is a first. Today I can pick my nose with no fear of answer  
to almighty god or Satan or disease,  
something that will mean  
I will be found out.  
I feel a little retarded  
I am warm  
I can take care of myself  
feed myself  
I can make rules, and break them  
I can make friends,  
leave them; there will be more  
There is always more  
It is delicious, these monsters, dead,  
and me, here, in my soft pudding. I eat, I scratch, I breathe loudly.  
No one listens. No one whispers.

The Unraveling

This hope chews me  
but never swallows.  
I try to force it to its blunt edge, to feel its end,  
an inevitable culmination, some dark cum,  
an anticlimax to be put away in boxes and labelled.  
But it won't be hurried.

I don't know what it is that I hope for, but it must be big:  
A trust that I will grow into something,  
happy, or good.  
I try to break it against something hard,  
rush it toward any end,  
to revel in a misery,  
snuggle against the known.  
But it will insist on dying at its leisure  
like a tag-along, someone's little brother in front of a train.

I am the human waiting for the unraveling:  
Never to be happy in desire, to be alive in complacence.  
Happiness, the shifting thing  
between one and the other, end and beginning,  
The pain, allowing it to move.

Silly Sally Rides Her Bike

The hills seemed far away and big  
but actually they were here and the size they looked.  
She was apart from the earth, knew that  
to feel one with nature was to become part of the food chain.  
And when would they find her body,  
here on this plateau made by giant bugs?  
The mud was inviting,  
though she knew it would suck her down.  
She bumped and sucked and slid exultant in earth cum.  
The wind brought her the freeway unwanted, a dead mouse.

Silly Sally stretched and saw the road before she sank.  
She adjusted her weight and blinked,  
shook her head to avoid breathing mud flips.  
She whirred down the road, past the ranger  
protecting developers with yellow beetle hats,  
ignored the honking truck as she normally would. The truck lurched, spat out a  
marbeled fat witch who could yell:  
Get awf my property!  
Sally had met this woman before. She appeared  
on the north coast atop a cliff, yelling at her and her lover to stop  
frolicking in her sea. She yelled to mountaintops and beaches,  
from the tops of roofs and canyons, from airplanes and from heaven.  
You can play over there, she yelled gesturing at the rest of the world.  
Silly Sally laughed because she knew she meant it.

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