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Silent Stone

Mylène Lise Pepin

A Thesis

In

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

Silent Stone

Mylène Pepin

This thesis consists of two main sections, one comprised of short lyrics and the other of a sequence of poems about the immigrant experiences.

The short lyrics are concerned to render, initially, the physicality of objects, where the emphasis is on texture, colour, and mass. However, the aim does not stop with mere imagism; since it is the evocative power of the literary object--i.e., the poem itself--to evoke feeling, that is the primary aim of the lyrics in this section. Since the poems are preoccupied with love's body, whether that be the body of the beloved or the beloved body of the natural world that sustains us, it is only appropriate to think of the poems, formally, as a means of bodying forth human emotion.

To give the lyric power, I have found it necessary to introduce narrative elements and to explore the longer line, which seems to lend itself more to the development of incident and idea, as well as encouraging greater variety and density of sound. The process of composing these poems has certainly taught me to listen more carefully to words and to build my poetic structures more on the intricate patterning of sounds than on the conventional use of rhyme and metrics.

I. Lyrics

Silent Stone

A transparent pearl, I perform
my dance on pink seabeds,
my spirit knotted in the waves.
Clams and oysters open shyly,
winking velvet lips.
Octopi stretch out scaled tentacles.
I hide in the tangle of seawood,
blueish-grey flesh a stain
in waterstars' orbit.

The man balanced between sky and water
scrapes words into stone,
gathers me into his hands' silent shell.
I sleep in layers of silk poetry;
a white bud pressed between skin and sun.
I dance for him,
the man with the sea in his face.

Tao of Protest

The Buddhist monk meditates amidst the hum
of bullets and shivering skies.
He sits in a puddle of blood and gas,
the bright air mixing rainbows in the pavement.
His shaved head, scratched with tiny
scabbed crosses, is bowed to the ground.
A street urchin offers his soul
in a folded pink rose
the monk clutches.
He grasps a match in brown fingers
and strikes it against his scalp,
his body a bomb rising
in beautiful white flames
as nirvana settles in thick smoke
onto the petals that rain
about his feet.

Daniel Speaks

(based on the Rosenbergs' trial
and execution)

You never cried,
little sister.

You thought the shelter
was a jail, curfew
a death sentence,
and night itself a coffin.
With each visit
I made them frisk us
for the cold sharp metal.
They never found
the blade of hate.

Father went first,
was fitted with an electric
skull cap,
his eyes short-circuited
inside the black
leather blindfold,
inside the ritual slaughterhouse.
His coffin stuck
out at all angles,
would not stay covered.

Marches

slit wrists
and a foundation
in our name.
I am only your brother
with a label.
I am only the red ink
that drips off
his poster.
I am the bruise
pounded
into your flesh
when they dragged
you away.

I am the pain
you could not utter,
the words now shredded
into fragments
inside your head.
White walls
reel into stained skin,

the veins
are iron bars
that cannot
hold you
in.

Silent Sleep
(for Gerry Shikatani)

slender
warm brown
feet
shadowed against
the tiles
in sculptured angles
wanting to turn
yet stilled
against movement.
cedar skin shaped
around ages of stalked
time
lingers, smooth
as patience.
distant feet
etched
into the room's glance,
pulsate,
echoless

6
Seppuku

I taste the red sakura,
lick the last drop of its rays.
The rising sun breaks across my forehead,
thorns inscribe my scalp.
I demand leave of my skin,
a passport into the quick white world.
Earth parts around us,
rivers corrode in my mouth.

My lovers cannot see the gloom,
only the gleam of my sword,
the virgin cotton about my abdomen,
so as not to spill the organs
seeking liberty.
The antique court of Japan
flees my veins,
transports my crimson name.

7
The Martial Art

The folds of your skin shape
around my fist my leg cuts angles
in the air over your head leaves
a wound in the space surrounding
your breath, all movement becomes one
harmony commanding its own form
I am alive at the bone each pore
in my body has eyes blood bursts
through my limbs I am a moon,
pulling without force my energy jabs
darts and is still.

Suicide

The chick lay limp in my hands,
a yellow rag,
his heart a murmur against my palm.
I knew how it was done, tap
the soft part of the skull.
He wouldn't die, became a bloodless blur
against the wood.
I couldn't wipe his silence from my skin.
The final tremor cupped in my hands
was the one that floated from your brain
the night the bullet came to roost.

to be inside

to be inside enamel sky
where gulls collide
letting fall soft eggs
on my empty breasts.
to be inside the pink sea
loving the plush bottom
and the way baby flora
tickle my arm.

Overnight I am octopus
delighting in orgies of touch.
I am poisonous snake
with colours dancing through trees.
The long orange reed
of my body
lashes out to catch
the slithering moon
that waits

By the Forest of Dreaming Trees

I sit on a rock's cut palm.
by the forest of dreaming trees.
Grass and clouds stumble
against the granite deity.
The woods bathe my eyes
in green light.
I see the sun flush then stretch
its fingers along a tree's brown thigh.
Water is flat; my ear a curved
shell waiting for sounds.
Thunder splits the rock
and you rise from its center,
grey and silver flecks
laced into your skin.
Pine cones hang from your fingers
and the smell of cedar
takes root in your mouth.
I soar into the forest of dreaming trees.

Sun-dog

The stranger is crouched behind the tree
playing low and sweet, the flute
a golden stem growing from his hands.

I thought the tree had opened its magic.
I saw the bark peel off in rhythms
and underneath the dark hard wood
shape itself into a flute.

A white dog guards the pulsing throat,
his silver eye silencing my footfall.
Musical notes drift like leaves through air
and I gather them with branched fingers
while the dog, unblinking, turns to glowing marble.

rue St. Catherine

on rue St.. Catherine
there is a pulse
that runs down
the sidewalk.
and I spend
the whole day
trying to catch it.
there is the man
in red pants
with barbie doll
yellow hair
who kisses
his man friend
with chipmunk cheeks
hello and good-bye.
and the old lady
with torn polyester
green slacks
and three cloth coats
hiding her sex,
grimaces at the
hes of today.
the man she sleeps
beside in the metro
pushes her out of the way
for that dried-up
croissant kicked
over the curb.
the little man
with no legs
sees them all
but doesn't moan
his misfortune.
he sells pencils
all day
and watches the skirts
getting shorter
and the legs longer.
my mother's neighbor
pretends to be a rich
snob
yet her eyes
pickpocket
the mink coats
and gold-flowered
loveseats.

and the Italian kids
on rollerskates and
homemade bikes
never wait
for the green light,
as though they too
were after
that burning pulse.
all day I run down
the sidewalk
trying to catch it
and always return home,
empty-handed.

Blind Boy

The fire dances angles
in front of my face.
I trace the burning lines
against my skin's paleness,
The smoke, thick grey armor,
shields me from their stunted eyes.
I ask them to feel my colours,
the sharp white of pain.
I step into fire's mirror
past the wish of their flesh
past the white of my eyes.
I wish myself fire's colours.
Orange is my brain breaking into dance.
Red is fire kissing my face.
Violet is fire's skin enveloping my limbs,
Black is their silence
I cannot touch, cannot hear.
In each flame I command
the last shatter of their voices,
the cracking of colour around my skin.
I feel their breath turn cool black.
I catch the spill of ashes
from their eyes.

Afterwards

I claw the moon. A bloodline connects
the space around me and splits

heaven from earth.
The moon spills red

its brightness steals into my cells
people turn bodies inwards.

City is starting to close,
tighter in breathing.

Red is wet and quiet
a map that won't forget.

I rub lifelines from my palms
wars settle on my skin.

I burn streetpuddles with my eyes
reflections melt to ashes.

Animals scrape the silence
gentle orphans waiting neutral.

Red is the smell of skin
exploding seeds on other shores.

I. Accusation

Your mechanical eyes and sanguinary skin
cannot penetrate my defenses.

Wars explode on all sides..

My landscape is a molten hell,
white heat dropping from the sky.

Every inch of the city's pavement
has tasted my sweat,
the moving brain cells.

I've planted your limbs across distant fields
like dancing poppies.

The black stems thicken into guns,
tear through the red tissue.

Even the poppies die,

stain the line I drew to keep you out.

II. Reply

The bullets that slowed your brown
and yellow world are not mine.
I've held black pistols to tense flesh
waiting for the red flashes to stop.
You accused me of gathering dark,
could not stand the smell of scorched air.
The cold touch of my bullets
was always a shock.
You never pulled away,
hung on to jagged flesh.
I wait outside your boundaries,
grateful for the shade,
the poppies that bleed my name.

Stray Cat

Gingerbread men.
Eyes are bright red smarties
poked in golden dough;
black licorice for smiles.
She lines them up in sugared molds,
and pops them into the oven
until they blacken and crumble
for her kneading fingers.

Bathroom smells of ammonia,
damp mop,
Chalk-white and wrinkled
in the tub, eyes
washed out.

✓ Daddy shut his face. Nights
he ~~held~~ him, begging
for a boy.
Down the drain.

The cat's in heat again,
claws the air in frenzy.
Roams the apartment
tail high,
primal, unashamed.

An unmolded figure
bloated with warm milk,
nightgown tucked around the ankles,
lies untouched
in the starched sheets,
claws breaking her dreams.

Sonnet on a dead cat

I open the cat.
My breath quickens in her warm entrails.
Her eyes are frozen moons;
the shivering gaze
declares their testimony.
Her blood corrodes the sky
and her heat invades the earth.
I try to turn my back on her,
a stiff root stuck in snow.
But my hands have locked
their grasp, paralyzed
by such violent colour.
The sky's bald scar
shadows me all the way.

The Habit

I smoke a cigarette,
my twentieth at last count,
stamp holes in the air with my breath.
I am caught in your face's fuzziness
every single morning,
before you've had coffee
or started to talk.
Your face is a sick sun,
deadly, yellow.
I could never stand the smell
of bacon fat on your fingers
as you touched my cheek good-bye
or how overnight the lines in your face
grew so tight by morning you couldn't smile.
At night when you've exiled yourself
beneath the covers
I take out my cigarettes,
let the smoke settle like a lover
across the bed sheets and smile,
knowing the ashes on my body
are driving you away.

a trivial pursuit

Your bones take flight
Each night forms
a crooked skeleton

In the fog, red flowers
hide, petals
close into a fist

I walk shadows
in someone else's
dream

Dew turns
to dry ice
a glass sky passes

My eye breaks
nothing is clear
but the space between

My tongue the strongest
muscle in my body
stutters

The nights we occurred
scrape their bitterness
from my skeptic bones

In the Night

The stones I throw
splatter inside your house.
Night comes out of hiding,
skeletons breed beneath your bed,
pursue my passage through broken glass.
You stir, call me a restless sleeper.
I write on the walls with purple crayons,
the reflections bruise your body.
I hide inside ultraviolet walls,
soundproofed against your screams.
Stones sear your back.
Morning brings suns that dance
around the house, heal your scars.
You confess your dreams to my closing shape.
I cleanse this house of its fossil stench,
put away the purple crayons.

The Flaming Center

His mother is on duty at night brushing away his pink sweaty hands and the steamy breath that leaves damp circles of saliva on her skin. She smells of starched cotton and wears layers of the heavy white material so he never guesses her shapes and curves.

Hot with sickness, he begs for glasses of water and her cool milky skin to smother his fever. He claws her arms, fingernails scattering tiny red arcs beneath her sleeves. Her eyes roll in anger, the flaming centers spear his throat where the pulse makes small dents.

She draws the thick scarlet curtains, tucks the coarse woolen blanket around his frame, locking in the skin. His warm odor fills the room causing her nostrils to wrinkle in disgust as her stiff shape falls away from his bed.

Safe in her room she removes the scratchy white cotton, releases the scent of her sex and stretches, rubbing the swollen welts on her arms with gentle fingers, massaging the tight muscles. She unlocks the thinning brown hair from its boney scalp and it falls in straight reeds down her back. She crawls onto her side of the bed, the limp flesh sags from her body like a crumpled uniform.

Wet Moon

She is lover of wet moon,
gathers chunks of rock
by night, erects a planet
in the circle of her arms.
Her center is a white pulse,
rivers float on her skin.
Smell of the milky way
courses her veins.
She is lover of wet moon,
spaceships glide from her tongue,
tides swirl and moan through her limbs.
Her eyes, liquid in the cryptic rain
flood the moon from the sky.

The Fall

I can't budge, my damned
foot lodged in the moon.
My eyes, closed bruises,
don't count steps
nor stars--elements
the blood needs.
I thrash in the black.
My blood outruns Mercury,
my laughter pierces the void.
The weight of the insane universe
falls, a tiny pebble at my feet.

before storm

The moon scratches messages
in the open window.

My hair gathers electricity
with each static word.

The room moans,
tucks blackness in corners,
curses the gentle breath.

You leave red marks on our breasts,
the innocents who nurse you.

You glide, then rip through our nests
spread seeds into hail.

Bodies turn sheet white.

Lightning splits our veins.

We gather the bolts with calm,
store them between our thighs.

The Married Writer

I bring him
coffee
and fresh banana
bread buttered,
not disturbing him
at his typewriter.
I knit on the couch
and make love
to his back,
silently counting
the tap tap tap
of the keys
with the stitches
that fall.
I am almost jealous
of those to whom
he has given birth
and who have grown
under his strict care.
I've felt myself
come to life
beneath his hands
in multiple exposures,
dancing the many secrets
I'd sworn to keep.
But still,
it is not I
who keeps him awake
at nights.
His heroes are single
and whisky doesn't burn
their stomachs.
His heroines
read cosmopolitan
have waterbeds
don't cook or sew
and never wait
for their lovers.

Ink on Paper

Ink blots on paper,
me twisted into funny shapes.
I strike angry words
feel each jagged syllable
lacerate my skin.
I flatten my hand,
spread words around
like excrement
on the raw wooden floor.
I whirl with the suffocating consonants
that shred my spaces
in a papertale.
I send my tensed fist
through a flexed window,
release the ink
that forms red scars
across my hands.
It drips cold comfort
on the pavement.
I am framed in the window,
see words fall like dry rain
into dust,
hummingbirds drop feathers
like pale tears into my mouth.
I can no longer translate
myself into words.
I have become a museum
of unlettered deaths.
All that is left
are bits of me
scattered over paper,
funny twisted shapes.

First Words

Kindness clung like velvet petals
to the soft folds of his body,
in the wrinkles that cleaved
deeper and deeper as he watched
cancer eat his mother's flesh.
He felt her body's sharp edge
cut into him.

He shuffled through forests
of silence, feeling words pulse,
a wild bird caught in his throat.

He could not forgive the lady
with the white hair and green eyes,
the skeleton house that caged him,
the smell of decaying food
and the father who haunted them
in the last child stillborn.
He went alone to her funeral,
bitter words buried
with the first shovel of dirt,
his tongue consumed to ash.

Then came the green eyes at a campsite
a lady with white hair chopping wood
kids tarzanned through trees
the eldest boy swinging highest
through the air,
the husband busy barbequeing sweet meat.
The bullets that rang out in the clear air
cold and hard,
shattered their charades
with an abrupt applause of words.

Epileptic Escape

I vanish into the silence
of refusing faces;
the brain's marbled cell.
Muscles in the temple knot;
nerves run wild,
scorning the frayed routine.
Wires hooked into my scalp
flash signals into their machine.
They denounce my screams, angry
black words colliding in my brain
betray my escape.
The tongue is clenched,
pushed deep into the cave.
I swim in empty air,
arms pinned down.
Knuckles bruise
in the fury.

Breaking Out

No sound squeezes through the bars
that cage the silence inside my body.
I stamp on hard snow, run out into traffic,
revel in the fast breaking of tires--
trying to break the silence.
I lose myself in the sound of someone walking,
catch the shifts in the bones as he moves,
the way skin rubs skin.
I forget to breathe, straining to hear
the bits of noise shattering
somewhere inside his head.
I scrape myself against noisy surfaces,
feel the thrust of a knife,
hear the sharp edge of metal
so when pain comes I am reassured of life.
When the blood won't stop dripping
I know somewhere deep inside
there are screams that keep moving,
waiting to take on the shapes
of jealous lovers let loose.

scalpel

your movement
in my bones

knowing the
delicate curves,
sculpting the wound

releases into final screams--
lost in the beat
of two hearts.

silent
as your touch

withered and dry

crumbles my bones
and moves away.

An African Victim of Polio

He crawls forward
dragging his death,
legs thin and knotted
are bamboo shoots,
wooden, unbendable.
Sandpaper shoes snug
on the palms of his hands,
he clacks the rough earth
right arm then left,
the sun fire on his back.
Ants and stones dig paths
down the skin's bleeding tracks.
Only his parched soul
refuses to inch towards
the white cure.

Into the Dryness

I hide within a shell,
eyes calmed by the smell of mist,
orange blossoms and balm-scented streams.
Water stirs me into sweet flight,
washes dust from my tongue.
The sky is white patterns,
bathes me in soft layers of alabaster.

They stalk the pumping substance
claws tense and ready,
drawing the sweet liquid from my sight.
They carve the cover from my skeleton,
make empty moons of my eyes.
I enter their dryness
chained to black desires,
heart burnt to grains of sand.

Civilized Cell

When I was locked in my civilized cell,
listening to the radio's static
and peering through a hole in the window
where bits of moon crept in--
I'd guess neighbors, make up lovers
by the gentle arc of their legs.
I was thirteen, unable to talk;
an apple bulged in my throat,
spit out seeds and poison.
I'd dance in the bedroom's white corners,
the static drawing squares across the floor
to restrict the rhythm of my feet.

When you were twenty your eyes were slits
of dirt, sunken moons trapped underground.
Miles and miles of chains held them down.
A delicate spider was drawn into your skin
and at night he'd creep outside while you
sat on the edge of the dark wishing for bits of moon.
He'd return and say outside there is the same grey pit
that pounds the walls of your guts.
One night the prison bars came alive
and danced inside your skull.
Your breath was thick spittle that wouldn't form
the long sounds of pain and the spider retreated
with his web of keys,
when I was thirteen and locked in my civilized cell.

Human Rites

White horse
on purple cloud
I was joking.
I never begged
the blood-gallop in my ears
or the dilated pupils
burning holes in my face.

White horse
on purple cloud
my fertile pastures
turn brown and rot
beneath your hooves' urgent beat
where shoddy you could never feed.

White horse
on purple cloud
I will harness you
for the dark jungle,
set loose thick snakes
to scar your sides,
or gather spears.
Call out the hunt!

Withdrawal Pains

(For Lyse)

I

Annie saw her mommy loving another lady.
I was out buying Annie a plastic swimming pool
with purple and green fish painted on the sides.
In the shrivelled-up apartment
she could pretend to be in a mean sea,
not feel the heat and broken air waves.
Her heart scraped the gritty bottom.
She didn't see mommy's whips
rattling inside my brain
or the red smears on my skin's wall.
My face divided into a fish's,
blue and flat.
Mommy's hook gripped the inside of my flesh.
Mommy had needle marks in her eyes
and her body drifted into a cloud.
Annie's long amber hair floated to the top
of the swollen water like silky weeds.
The pool sucked up her fragmented bones,
so she forgot who loved who.

II.

The suitcase is packed with my bruises
neatly folded at the bottom,
hiding beneath my crazy plaid shirt.
While Annie is still sleeping I trace
her face into yours and my fingers
burn for hours.
My movements are slow and awkward,
each bone abandoning your addictions.
I have no room for my oatmeal teddybear
and leave it for Annie's hugs.
This room will always scream inside my nerves
and in my emptiness I will know only its sensuous delights.
I tread softly out the door,
looking back only once
to your heavy flesh pushing against the sheets,
and my skin crawls like an addict's.

Your forever

It is your night I am holding now.
It leaps out of your head,
a hiding place where ghosts
quiver beneath your eyelids
and I collide with your breath.
It is your night I am holding now.
Its pulse pounds through you,
leaves an echo on my skin.
My touch flutters over night's outline,
your whispers cannot draw my body in.
I turn to light for sleep, hold in my bones
your forever bruise.

The Aging

The lake is a scarred mirror of eyes
squinting back my bleached skeleton.

The house looks stripped in the sunlight,
the nerves too raw to walk on.

Now the silence hits,
blocking my escape.

Ribs curved inside out so you look hollow
and our bodies don't fit together anymore.

I roll into your laugh lines
and mold them against my pain.

The lily breaks through,
her pollen a link with baby's breath.

Bermuda Sands

You spent your last summer in Bermuda,
 your long thin body unraveled in the heat,
 wiped away charts of winter cold.
 You ran barefoot in the sand, pink pebbles
 flew into your hair and nestled inside your pores.

I waited for you, stuck where the sun didn't reach
 but curled fingers in and rolled a fist.
 The grass shot its prickly needles into my feet
 and staved the colour of dust.

You roamed the waters in your blue sailboat,
 forgot you were human; grew canvas wings and let them
 lift you over the gentle waters.
 You forgot to breathe, spent hours underwater
 collecting moving-stars, blue-scaled fish
 and precious rocks you would bring back
 so I could hold them in my hands
 and feel the sun and smell the pink sands.

I waited for your brown body, kept places warm,
 chipped off pieces of earth.
 You sent me pressed petals in envelopes,
 the pink scents escaped in puffs
 as I tore open the white sheets.
 You drew little boats with bright blue sails
 and the stickman with the big red heart painted on
 was you. And I waited.

At night you climbed the hill to your grandparents' cabin
 and from the highest point in Bermuda thought you could
 catch the blue reflections of my eyes in the water.
 The earth grew tired of keeping its warmth for you
 and cooled white from waiting.
 I thought the pink sands had stretched into fingers
 that closed over your body in prayer so you would stay.

That last day you sailed in your blue boat
 with your best friend and tried to hoard the blue
 and sun into your skin and hold them there for me.
 Wind died, currents seized the hull,
 the colours fell from your fingers.

Empty cans of beer gathered at your feet
 as you nursed the cold motor with sweating hands
 until finally you provoked a response.
 The motor rotated shiny blades
 that exploded through the boat, splintering
 wood and cans of beer into the water.

The blades shrieked, lashed your skin
with mechanical wings.
Your best friend turned and saw you
lifted into sunlight,
reflect the blood-red
Bermuda sands.

Finally Free

I paint the sky orange,
my skin absorbs the colours
of earth and sun.

My outstretched bronzed hands
burn with intensity,
mold leaves into breaths of air.

Lungs open, swallow hill and sky.
I guzzle the chlorophyll clouds,
hide the sun in my fingertips:

My eyes breed birds in nests of hair.
Fed with fossils and bits of moon
I grow wings, dip the feathers
in sun's amber lagoon.

Cut Stone and Hourglass

Locate the dagger
in your dowry.

Exorcise your flesh
in the hollow hours.
Execute the rituals

with broken pieces
of cut stone and hourglass.

Frame yourself against steel,
watch shells disintegrate
from sides of crayfish.

Your sungod hands
unpack

the pointed edge.

Cold Canvas

His smile clamps shut quickly,
before her nervous eyes say yes
to the hard pink and red candy.
He leads her to beaches and fluffy water,
says if she is a good girl
she can build sandplanes
and fly home to mommy and daddy.
He boasts he is full of secret places
and she can fingerpaint him into happy colours,
show him the big blue house
where mommy and daddy live.
She grips the bright blue paint
and then orange for the colour of her bedroom
and sticks it all over his cold white skin
until it looks like he is bleeding
all sorts of colours and she starts to cry.
He drags her to snow mountains,
hides her in bricks of cold,
whispers that she is frozen inside,
and only he has the magic to thaw her.
She wraps her tiny blue limbs around herself,
hides her eyes and waits for the sweet warm fire.
A gleaming and sharp ice-pick,
he comes crashing down
on her body's smooth light.

*The Caesarian

She is wrapped in a blue wool blanket
like a second skin. Sleep folds inside.
Her arms and legs are heavy white weights.
The eyes have floated out the body into night-space.
He intrudes, staining the womb with the smell
of greasy fingers and gleaming sweat.
She can hear his straight tight bones
pounding against her eyes' jellied sockets.
His black rubber boots creep over the quiet.
She feels him bald and scarred,
brown eyes stinking of squalid intentions.
He is naming her.
She becomes a blur inside his mouth's thickness.
He rips away the protective skin,
pushing through the wet film to the blue blood.
Crushed in his hands' bitter palms
are the silent globes of her eyes.

Entry

Your tremors are fierce, explode
the carnival you have drawn in the sky.
Tight-rope walkers fall, the ground
opens, sheds yellow dust. Monsoons
rake your eyes.

Stars drop from my fingers as I unleash
your touch. You watch them burn holes
in the sky while dancing horses
mount the moon-beams
on your face.

You hang to the edge of a cloud,
ready to dive off. My chants
trail your departure, call for snow
in mid-July. White waters flow
through the air, filling in the holes.

Your release is final, the throbbing
thick and intense as you crash
through the moist sky, film dropping
from your eyes. My body, covered
with white light, precedes your birth.

small morning

In the small morning
blue wishes
fling shadows
in the bitter air.
Small fist jammed
in the hard edges of my mouth.
Bruises sprout like purple grapes.
Floorboards harbour sharp nails
for perfect feet.
Abortions occur, stream-lined.
Favorite babynames fall uncollected.
Film-makers scour the streets
for three-month flesh,
call it surrealism; film-strip.
An unmarked coffin rides
the salty waters
where lost limbs float.

Death's Snowfall

White walls. Cold room.
My pale wings beat against
his eyelid's glacial rim.
His fingers are icicles,
a frozen moon has closed his mouth.
My body is a fist.
I lay my heat on cold flesh,
an avalanche of silence
passes beneath my bones.
Now she stands there watching us,
adjusts the blanket of snow.
The words she speaks flow into milk and honey,
the tears she sheds have turned to snow.

Snow-Edge

Milk-white circles float in space,
sun-yolk spills down my back.

He moves harsh and brittle. Limbs are branches
coiled in the dark, collecting rain and wind.

The glazed soil lacerates my feet.
I hit iron, thorn, and jagged air.

I move towards him with skin cream and light
that soothes the torn fringes.

I spread myself in endless sky,
colours flicker rose, azure, and smooth emerald.

The smell of stone pressed against the sun
melts the snow's mocking glitter.

Jewels flow beneath my fingers.
Silver fluid cools his quarry-mouth.

Tangerine

Tangerine light flows down my face.
The peel is thick,
catches in the fingers' creases.
Tangerine sheds light from open scar
to trembling skin.
My palm is stretched flat.
Tangerine is autumn wet.
I curve my fingers around its scent.
Silk pollen lifts off into air.

Frozen Fairytale

He painted the kitchen orange,
stripped the soft eggshell wallpaper
left by previous owners.
The scratching brightness repulsed me
as I watched him drink from a cold clear glass,
swallow one curse after another.
Cubes of ice clicked thoughts
that froze into silent particles.
Too often I watched his face
stumble into the glass,
only his smell escaping in fumes.
He would sink to the bottom,
grasp air bubbles that exploded.
As his breath frosted the glass
I would evaporate into sheets of air,
wish him into a frozen fairytale.
There was always the next morning,
mornings where leftover meals
looked like dead meat
and his cold feet on white tiles
slapped insults into my thoughts
and there were always dishes to do,
so many dishes that I broke them all
once in a fit and all night
his voice crashed around the kitchen.
Now oranges look rotten,
taste drunk,
and make me want
to yell bright colours from my mind.

Red leaves and winter

Autumn flowers fossilized between our bodies
lock out the thick frost.

Fistfuls of snowflakes cover our shadows
with perfect white.

Our smell freezes and hardens;
the smell of musk, a new moon, snow-angels.

The bones of birds shatter in the sky,
their madness sheds diseased clouds.

We mark the air with slow breath
while winter spreads and sky is quiet.

Red leaves fall untouched
in the tangle of weeds and damp muscles.

We sleep, dreaming of snowstorms.

Last. Snowflake

A snowflake settles in the center of a faded flower
that hides in the beige bark's wrinkled skin

frost is slowly licking off the birch tree,
bent at my feet like a body in prayer.

I mold a snowball with the heat of hands
letting the cold diamonds melt down my arms

where the white flesh puckers in shock.

Feast

Morning sun plows
through curtains.

The outstretched shadow
shifts its weight,
nose raised to sniff the wind.

Autumn tablecloth harvests
orange mushrooms, green acorns,
and red petals.

Strawberries planted in white bowl.
Sugar clusters silver
the wet fruit.

Air smells of mist, cedar
and earth-brown coffee.
Moon turns in sleep.

Pale fingers reach out,
reap the room
with hungry hands.

In the garden —

His falsehoods rake deep scars across her breasts.
His nerves and anger shoot in all directions,
weeds she rips from the garden,
feeling them bite into her hands.
She watches robins come to breed,
leave eggs like large blue berries
in nests of cloud and sweet evergreen.
She listens for the cracks in the shells.
His voice pricks their first cry.
Spring arrives so fast and warm
she spends every day planting fragile seeds
from the white envelopes.
Pink and yellow fantasies wink from the ground.
She puts her face close to smell the richness,
to feel earth throb against her skin.
His limbs are vines choking the sky
with bitterness and burning heat.
The flowers blacken, grow no bigger
than her baby finger and he laughs,
holds the fat raindrops away,
lets them fall far away
from the desert she has become.

Walking Away

You catch the fire-fly's green glow
on the knuckle of your hand and watch
it dance delicate patterns on your skin's
brownness and accept your smell
and slow way of walking and you respect
its smallness and need for freedom.
and you disappear through grass and trees
and night, a green glow of silence
separates the wildness in-between.

The Sound of Waiting

There is the sound of the fog
breaking its white across the waters;
the sound of the sun being squeezed
in the crook of your arm;
the sound of mud sucking at your feet
kissing the holes where you walked;
the sound of a soccer ball being compressed;
the sound of your stare like black stones falling
and your breath and the water's cold foam;
the sound of tiny sunballs delicately balanced
on your fingertips;
the sound of you kicking the smooth ball;
the sound of it whirling orange and red
and clearing the sky;
the sound of it never landing.

II. Immigrants

The Immigrant

In my head the cold is running round
and round night is falling in my eyes
the sharpness of stars claim the soft
brown petals of my skin and flowers
are bursting red seeds on the ground
where my breath becomes moon's frosted
shadow and all things are dark and deep
in the stillness I feel the weight
of the moon the thousand slow years
of japan and thorns pushing their way
through outer layers of my skin sharp
against the empty air trying to find
root in the rotation of the night
where snow's whiteness silently
hides night's gaping mouth where
she holds between her teeth the last
fading bloom.

Lament

I fold all time into my body
the swallows and water petals
the mating cries of my dead
I let the sun dance on my wrist
and my blood glows a sunset
over their silence and my skin
smells of burnt cedar
all the trees my blood has made fire
so their smell and the taste of their bark
would not remain behind and my fingertips
touch water's softness and follow the rain
and I am land and I am water
warm with her milk and light
and the blood she pumps
gave life to all my dead
and now to me so clear
I see them in each drop
inside my body there is no other world
my dead have come back to life
and their words fold
an island around my body.

vigil

china
eves
fragile
chipped
cups
or wishing
well letters
floating
at the bottom
breaking circles

watching
dark
an onyx
panther
sleeking behind
rocks
in the garden
claws digging
up dead seeds
digging up
dead
from china
eves

Running Home

He sits on the subway peering out the black glass
to tall spiky ferns. Children sprint naked
through the sun; homesickness rides his eyes like a wave
thrashing air, then pulled back out to sea.
His hand rests on his lover's crinkled dress,
feels the swell of her thighs, and she is still,
claiming his smell of mountains and dry air.
Subway wheels grind to a stop and he guides her out,
his hands pushing the soft folds of her back.
The street is white with snow and his cinnamon skin
is streaked from the wet flakes falling.
A snowman with a rotted banana smile rolls by,
intransient, leaving a cloud of melted snow at his feet.
He climbs onto the roof of his house,
locates the plump shapes of mountains
and runs barefoot through the sky.

Molding Flight

His bedroom smells of imported chocolate
and lush tropical plants that mesh
across the window.
Italian planes are patterned on opaque walls.
He shuts himself behind the thick oak door,
a frightened sculptor with olive complexion washed away--
tearing apart skin, pounding it into someone
who can fly.
Madness flutters inside the mirror:
a bird without wings, dull and earthy.
His Italian planes out the window,
a tiny white air seeking sky.
His planes fall wherever he falls.
They hang limp from his skin.
Half man, half bird, he sits on the cold
white floor, knees curled up beneath his chin,
mouth open.

Estonian testimony

Posed between black rivers and white.
Hand seizes a dark-leaded pencil,

stalks the children born and buried
in the red hot womb,
husbands and wives ripped in two,
digging holes through flesh
to see who is hiding.

Face taped shut.

The charred vision
rises from steel drums;
steers the hand with strokes
crushing every nerve of the skin.
Colours are massacred on paper.

Rivers split wider and wider.
Hand lifts the iron curtain.

The Wine-Maker

Dead petals, stiffly curled,
are heaped in a round blue bowl.
Rough swollen fingers shy away
from thorns, crush roses
for wine clear and delicate.

She reconstructs the barbed-wire
nightmare, with much concentration.
The talking smoke still burns her lungs
and gives each word a ragged edge.

Her life is ordered on the kitchen shelves,
but in sleep she searches for the one dead eye
left behind, bloodless and grey--
a burning stone, a crystal ball.
The face forms in the steam of borsch,
then sizzles in the pan.

Her fingers pluck the fresh buds from their stems.
Blood-stained flowers dance inside her head.

Land of Morning Calm

He traces patience onto a sheet of paper
and presses it into my skin.
The sounds flow from his throat to mine
where they vibrate down my body's tunnel.
I never learned his language.

He remembers Korea, the fishing village
where he was born, the long stalks
of wild plants they raked in for meals.
He loved the white fruit tucked inside
the skin of a red heart, the freshness
exploding inside his mouth.

His master taught him to breathe,
open arms, push air into a circle
until the pulse in his chest expanded
like a fish drawing in water.
He learned to smell oranges with his lips,
run their red lining over the bumps,
letting the acid escape in streams into his mouth.

The rivers he swam in drew their purple
liquid from his veins.
Shipped to the hard streets of Vancouver,
he defends his corner of Korea,
mouth pounding from thirst.
He rolls his tongue around the new name
they gave him, spits the sounds
like a curse onto the pavement.

At night he forgets where he is,
wakes up, long body shaking,
clinging to Land of Morning Calm.
He murmurs words that fall like a sheet
over his body, locking me out.
I am alone in the dark.
A shadow swims in my eyes.