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Dreaming Our Mothers

Jennifer Boire

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

October 1994

C Jennifer Boire 1994



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## ABSTRACT

### DREAMING OUR MOTHERS

Jennifer Boire

One of the motivating forces for this thesis was a project completed in my first Creative Writing class with Richard Sommer, a Taboo Journal. I became interested in exploring what was for me the most taboo area, memories of my mother's alcoholic years, and the second most taboo area, my own body. Writing these poems, it became obvious that mother and body are intricately connected. There are so many silences surrounding the female body, so much shame attached to "normal" aspects of feminine sexuality, i.e. menstruation, masturbation, giving birth, breastfeeding.

There are three sections: the Mother Poems section looks at the unwinding of memory as film or home movies. An image provokes the memory of the child/body, where it was, what it was taught, what 'mother' means to the child, how she struggles to put the "negatives" of photo/memories together. The second section, "Speaking Flesh", is a journal of my first pregnancy, an attempt to give a language to the silent body in its transformation, written over the nine-month period and the first few months after birth. The third section, "Female Parts", looks at aspects of female sexuality, and at the emotional gamut of motherhood, from anger to erotic pleasure.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

dreaming our mothers.....	1
night-mares.....	2
memory.....	3
MOTHER POEMS	
mother poems.....	5
I am so little.....	6
tongue in tulips.....	7
skinny old apple tree.....	8
photo album memories.....	10
Arpège.....	11
wish mommy & daddy.....	13
swinging.....	14
home movies.....	16
our lady of perpetual help.....	18
Old Mother Holle.....	20
ukulele.....	22
coward.....	24
hag.....	25
return.....	27
spending thanksgiving.....	28
the secret life of seniors.....	29
dream.....	31
taking stock.....	32
Spanish.....	34

SPEAKING FLESH, Birth Journal.....	36
FEMALE PARTS.....	54
descent.....	55
feeling good.....	57
after the dance, 1968.....	58
taboo.....	59
suede jacket.....	60
for Janet.....	62
brainless.....	63
cosmos.....	64
my arms.....	68
bathtime.....	69
crayons.....	70
eden.....	71
waiting.....	72
lightning.....	73
seabass.....	75
after naptime.....	76
mothering the milk.....	78
cycles.....	79
for any life.....	80
lilies.....	81
prayer to kali.....	82
after the sidewalk sale.....	84
august.....	85
listening.....	87

purdah.....	88
penetration of the wind.....	91
dimensions of skin.....	92
cherry blossoms.....	93
cunning.....	94
women's stories.....	96
goodnight sand.....	100
turning forty.....	103
female parts.....	104

Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent.

Monique Wittig, Les Guerilleres



dreaming our mothers

I am in the ocean with my mother  
and one of my sisters.  
the waves are huge - one  
splashes over us, lifts  
us, bobbing up and down.  
the water is salty and cold.  
only I have a wetsuit.

ocean floor swirls  
dark/pale, shadow patterns  
on the bottom, seen  
from far above, as if  
from an airplane.

I ask my mother, where are we  
swimming to? there is no map,  
it seems. we are going back  
across the ocean to Europe  
or somewhere. I think, how  
will we ever make it that far?  
but that doesn't stop us.  
we start swimming

memory

is a kind of labour

a birth of sorts

my struggle to tell her story

pull her through my skin

see her as separate

from myself

cut the umbilical string

that's wrapped around my neck

our common bond

our mother-hood

it smothers us

we need to throw it off,

awaken, be aware

but finally, memory

is a kind of old skin,

to be sloughed off, too,

along with the saviour role

if I awake, will she?

the work I do

I do for myself.

night-mares

i.

mom in her slip head hanging  
over the porcelain  
toilet bowl,  
i'm on the phone  
trying to reach dad at work,  
he's not there.  
i need help with the kids

ii.

i find a bag with 2 bottles  
of gin, take them & break  
them, yell at her,  
mad as hell:  
you started drinking again!

iii.

or else i dream she is  
in my arms, i the mother  
nursing her

iv.

she dips her fingers  
into the inkpot of night  
fingerpaints all over  
the walls of my dream

v.

night-mère, hooves

split air

while she

rides

galloping

while i carry

her weight

on my back

MOTHER POEMS

"Our mother is memory."

Caitlin Matthews,  
The Celtic Tradition

looking at old photographs  
every time I go home  
to my mother's house (why  
don't I say "my father's  
house"?) I pull out the old  
cardboard box, warped and bent  
black and white photos of us  
as small children, eight  
in ten years.

now, moving house, I go  
through my albums, searching  
for meanings, beginnings.  
these pictures always kept  
by the mothers, as if they hold  
the key to the past.  
I'm excavating memories,  
putting together broken pieces,  
sometimes they're too rosy,  
who keeps the negatives?  
the dark copies  
seen in dreams

I am so little, I may be in her  
arms, as she points to a red-wing  
blackbird, a yellow gros-beak  
a red-tufted woodpecker  
cheek to cheek, we sing their  
songs, so I'll recognize the  
chick-a-dee-dee-dee  
the whip-poor-will, whip-poor-will  
at dusk

in winter, she hangs suet  
on a branch of pine, scatters  
crumbs on snow, sunflower  
seeds on a tin pie plate,  
she points at the sudden swoop  
of blue jays  
from the big pine tree in front.  
safe behind the window, I watch  
and listen to squirrels quarrel  
high in the branches.  
she imitates them  
with rolled tongue

tongue in tulip shape  
a trick she taught me

how to roll it up  
twist the mouth

show off tongue's pink saliva  
shine, bumpy mauve underside

bulging slick, forked tongue.  
you can't talk when it's tied up

in tulips.



skinny old apple tree  
in the centre of the wild  
garden, asparagus growing near  
the septic tank, tulips poppies  
bluebells, the rock garden, perfect  
dream haunted by my child ghost  
swinging on the tree-swing

we climb the prickly pear tree  
grass below full of rotting  
fruit, wasps. we are thorny-stemmed,  
wild roses, not ripe round fruit  
or sulky flowers, all pods stems  
limbs and shaky hair, we climb  
way up that narrow tree, knees barked  
and scraped, palms scratched.  
wind in our eyes, we can see  
the whole silver river below  
the highway, and way beyond  
the islands, the other shore's  
slag heap, smoke stack eternally  
present, and then look back up  
towards the narrow brick house

to the wide screened verandah,  
limestone steps up to the front door,  
and inside, a threadbare green sofa,  
the bare wood floor.

my mother  
either knee-deep in diapers, or  
peeling potatoes for supper, or  
slapping someone's hands away;

my mother  
omnipresent in the dark  
house, yet i don't see her  
anywhere else but making dinner,  
doing laundry,  
or lying down for her afternoon nap,  
small children leashed  
to their cots.

## photo album memories

wedding picture (post WW II): official shot taken in the back seat of the newlywed's car, facing out the rear window, Snow White with unblemished skin, ruby lips, smiles on the arm of her dark prince, his eyes follow hers like a puppy's. once upon a time she was the belle of the Officers' Mess, and he fell in love because she knew all the words to the old campfire songs.

what I want to remember is the way she told stories: every night she played it out on our knees, the squirrel running up the tree as her fingers scampered over our legs, tickled our tummies, turned out the lights, then we knelt by the bunk bed and said our prayers now i lay me down to sleep i pray the lord my soul to keep...god bless grandma and grandpa, etc. one last drink of water, all tucked in, turn on the hall light, the door open slightly so i won't be afraid of shadows on the wall (carlights going by on the highway), knowing she will come if i call out, i try not to die before i wake.

Arpège by Langevin

i)

every Christmas, daddy has to buy the same perfume, until they stop making it. when she gets dressed up for a party my sister & i watch her dab perfume behind her ears, between her breasts, we inhale the sweet air surrounding her like a narcotic, as she smears red lipstick on her lips, blotting them with a kleenex (we keep these red odorous kisses).

i think she's the prettiest lady in the world, her hair newly permed, curls brushed up high on her forehead. we make her keep the pointy red high heels even after they're too tight for her to wear, so we can play dress up. when she's out i dig in her closet, snuggle up to the perfume scent on her clothes, try on things i know i shouldn't touch, her honeymoon lingerie, thin rose straps, robe sheer as onion paper flowing way past my ankles, or her gold satin pyjama with matching brown silk pants, braided frogs, her perfume Tigress or Arpège haunting my skin, her transparent aura.

ii)

hiding in the vestibule her soft scent envelopes my fears, my sister has been fighting me, scratched my cheek, pulled my hair, i'm running away from home with a paper bag full of three slices of bread, some cookies, slip out the front door (leaving a note in mom's purse). i crouch up on the hill behind the house near the woods, decide to come back when it

gets dark, and sheepishly hide in the front closet between her coats, too shy to admit defeat and face my sister again; that same sheared lambswool coat mom threw over her shoulders later, when she lay down on the living room couch for a nap. the room heavy with the smell of vanilla. i don't want to remember this about her.

wish mommy and daddy would come home.  
sleepy. dream. hanging upside down  
from a swing set. he is inside the garage,  
looking at me, my dress up over my ears.  
he's unzipping his pants, i think he's  
peeing on the floor. i'm at Mrs. Desjardins,  
her son sings me songs at night on the guitar,  
sometimes he comes back when i'm asleep and he  
doesn't turn the light on, he puts something there  
where it hurts, i can't see what, but he says shhh,  
i think he's mean cause he won't give the kitten  
to play with unless i let him show me what mommies  
and daddies do when they get married. i think, they couldn't  
do that in the church, could they? i tell  
his mother, but i leave out the part about him pulling  
his pants down; the house is dark, full of diaper smell,  
i like Mrs. Desjardins cause she made me my very own  
pillow, blue and pink with flowers a little baby pillow  
just for me, i hug it close when i go to bed it has my  
smell on it i can rub and rub till i have to stop my  
breath comes faster and faster i need this pillow when  
i lose it she makes another, every time mommy has a new  
baby i come here.

swinging

behave yourself, she said.  
ladies don't sit with their legs open,  
hold your knees together.

riding high on the swings  
singing a song to frogs trees  
wind house leaves, i sigh  
so high i see the wind curve  
over the sky.

up in the treehouse  
cutting out dresses, tabs fold  
over cardboard girls  
no cunt no tits no brain  
just a cutesy smile and curls  
just like the Bobbsey Twins

either i'm Nancy Drew or Doris  
Day, singing love on a breeze  
que sera sera, what will be...  
in my treehouse of planks  
beside the incinerator  
where P.S., my dog, lies buried  
under the green onions and a few  
rows of corn, across from the newly

dug well, (so we won't have to drink  
the river water pumped up through pipes)

cesspool leaks rich juices  
into the garden, right where the  
asparagus likes to grow long and  
green as tulip stalks, mom sends  
me out with a knife. i count  
the flowers as they open and close,  
tiger lilies, purple iris, lily  
of the valley.

while we play outside, she does  
the laundry in a wringer washer:  
don't put your hands there, they'll  
come out flatter than boards!  
chops fire for the wood stove -  
no, that was gone before i was old  
enough to swing, the kitchen's gone  
electric, turquoise blue, cupboards  
just installed and a bench with space  
for toys underneath.  
the others sit round the table  
on their benches and chairs.  
only i have the toy chest as throne  
and the top bunk in my sister's room.



home movies

first early memories of you, mother  
pig-tailed and slim beside the slender  
brick house, holding a rope to a sled  
pulling me and baby Sue in our red snow-suits.  
in those rubber galoshes you look too young  
to be mother of two, already expecting  
number three, but this is a scene from home  
movies, I can't remember being two or three;

Dad, gaunt face shadowed by weekend beard,  
pushes us down the small slope from woodshed to  
driveway, snow up to his knees, P.S., the dog  
cavorting. No sound.

in the new house, in the suburbs of the capital  
outside the Greenbelt, you lie on the living room  
couch covered by your lambswool coat, lights out,  
or sit by the phone on your stool in the yellow  
kitchen, supper bubbling in the oven (baked beans,  
macaroni and cheese?), your coke and vanilla glass  
on the table beside you, cigarette burning in  
the ashtray, of course.

in that first house, though, a two-storey brick house built in  
the 30's with only three bedrooms, the woods mounting right  
behind us, only four feet or so of space separating us from

the wild; not a 60's suburb, but a small pulp and paper mill village of 500 (although the sign never changed even when the ten of us left). a good place to bring up children. afternoon bridge, little theatre in the bigger town of Arnprior. small talk with the company wives (no close neighbours, or children our age). dad, busy managing an electronics firm. trying to teach us a better English than the lower Ottawa Valley slang (tiger, not taiger; bag not baig, you, not you'se).

your urban New Jersey, American-Irish roots cut out. newly pledged allegiance. on the piano you love to play the stars & stripes but dad says, "don't teach them that yankee song" (you're a Canadian now, erase those feelings of independence, of declarations), you are in the great country of god save the queen, we sing every morning in the brand new two-room school, our lady of perpetual help, built by my father wanting a Catholic education for us, miss pream, grade one teacher, prim as cream.

and soon, that house with three bedrooms was much too narrow, too small for eight kids and the shame couldn't be hid behind four walls, the neighbours let in on the secret: mommy drinks.

our lady of perpetual help

old redwood pews stained curious patterns  
murky like the window's light. smell of  
frankincense makes me dizzy, chanting  
builds around me while i carve my code  
initials over & over push my fingernail  
into varnished wood. i rock back and forth  
to latin intonations, the hard bench cuts  
into my bare knees.

the best part is about a little lamb, the one  
offered as sacrifice, then the sick girl whose  
father sends for the lord to heal her, I am not  
worthy that you should come into my house but  
only say the word and my child shall be healed.

then we all kneel again, the black-robed priest  
swings the smelly incense we bow our heads & pray

mea culpa mea culpa mea maxima culpa

(my mother closes her eyes, whispers out loud -

mea maxima culpa - she looks like she's  
crying, beats her breast three times, head down

(I am most grievous guilty)

underneath my prim white hat

and new patent leather shoes

i know i am not worthy

sometimes i throw the bottles away  
drain them down the sink when she's  
not there, look in the cupboard behind  
the cereal boxes or under the sink.  
when i find them i want to hit  
somebody, break them in pieces  
glass flying - if she finds out she'll  
fly at me - but my father said, don't  
do that, I used to do that too, hide  
the bottles, but she just buys new ones  
and it won't make her stop

a car accident almost stopped her  
it was snowing, the driveway was slippery  
she didn't stop in time  
the insurance man wanted to know  
whose fault? that scared her,  
she was good for a while  
but maybe being in the country, alone  
with eight kids, my dad working all  
the time, maybe she was lonely.  
i was stealing her friends away,  
pouring them down the sink.

lord, i can't let you into my house  
but please say the word and my soul  
will be healed.

## Old Mother Holle

Once there was a beautiful daughter  
sewing by the well one day,  
she pricked her finger, dropped the needle,  
stepmother sent her down the well to get it.

on her way she heard some loaves of bread  
crying out to be turned in the oven  
so she turned them over.

then she picked the apples from the heavy  
boughs which groaned for help.

when she came to Old Mother Holle's house  
she helped her shake out the down pillows  
every morning so it could snow.

when she left to go back home,  
her gift was a mouth filled with gold  
every time she spoke.

then the stepmother told her own ugly  
daughter to jump down the well.

she almost broke her legs!

when the loaves cried out as she passed,  
she laughed and said, I might burn my fingers!

when the apple tree groaned, she cried,  
an apple might fall on my head.

when Old Mother gave her pillows to shake,  
she fell asleep on the bed instead.

when she came back to her mother's house  
she got her reward: black toads leapt  
from her lips with every word

the moral: speech is golden  
even the loaves have a voice here  
but mother's golden rule is:  
if you haven't got something nice to say...  
don't speak

and i am the good daughter,  
la petite fille sage, pleasant  
angel-faced one by day  
little witch in the mirror  
by night; black toads leap  
inside me where i cannot speak.  
they turn and twist my gut.  
a hole burns through the sheets  
where i lie.

ukulele

my father told me once about  
the time my mother went visiting  
the neighbours along the highway  
dressed in her lambswool coat

in summer to play the ukulele.  
what he didn't tell me was  
that she was looking for friends.  
she used to abandon the house

the same way she was abandoned,  
ignore the housework to play  
bridge with the girls.  
one winter the pipes froze.

she had to wash diapers in water fetched  
in milk cans from the town well. had  
to shit in a makeshift pail-toilet,  
pregnant, and chained to that narrow

brick house by seven small children.  
the ukulele still waits on the book  
shelf, three strings missing.  
she can't play that song we liked  
anymore, the one we used to  
laugh at

ha ha ha you and me  
little brown jug  
how I love thee

but that day, the day she played her  
concert for the neighbours, Claus,  
the taxi driver called my dad at work.  
all he could probably think of was the

embarrassment, his reputation, and i  
got a ride home from school that day  
with Claus's wife. it was she who told  
me.



coward

i'll eat anything (mom always  
said i was a good eater)

but even i couldn't stomach  
the bitter taste of that organ

(bargain) meat, mom pinching pennies  
to feed eight children, always asking

him for more at the end of the week.  
that cow gave every part of her self,

from udders' milk to pickled tongue,  
blood made into pudding, even her

stomach lining cooked into tripe  
right down to her skin

covering my feet, back and  
hands. Madam,

i can drink your milk  
but i cannot eat your heart.

hag

after you swallow a bottle of pills  
and come down to the kitchen

dressed in your turquoise terrycloth  
robe, you shake with uncontrollable tremors,

bang your teeth on the counter  
as you fall, breaking the cap off your

front tooth, your head bumps the floor  
as you convulse at my feet,

bleeding from the mouth.

Dad at the kitchen sink, turns  
to pick you up, calls the ambulance,

tells me to take the kids upstairs,  
then everything is in slow motion,

it seems to take forever  
until they come, the long

moments have gone blank  
or else I left the room

I don't remember, but I think  
I shrank away when it came time  
  
to lift your body.

return

it started when the second child was born, I guess, and you left the house, shipping me off to Mrs. Desjardin's damp smelling foster home, full of babies and diapers, or later, to my aunt's in Montreal; repeated at every birth, seven after mine; or even the times you were late to pick me up from Brownies, or sent a cab instead, or left me waiting at the skating rink in the village, long after the lights all went off (calling home, dad said you had left long ago), so I walk the quarter mile along the highway, icy river below. and the times you were late getting home to make supper, across the road having a drink with Dorothy and Al. even later, you didn't have to leave the house to drink, snoring on the living room couch, leaving me to guard my brothers and sisters, to start dinner before dad got home.

after one year away at college, I called home to say I wouldn't be back in the spring. you told me later you felt I had abandoned you. for the next ten years I was running away and now that I've come back, turned around and want it to be the way it was (now that they've all left you), when there was only you and me....but that was too long ago, before they were all born, when I had you to myself, your first born daughter.

spending thanksgiving at my mother's

watering desperately dry plants on the second floor landing, I start reading titles on her book shelf, an odd mix: "Know your body", "The White Witch", "Unholy Orders", "Weeds of Canada", "The Beautiful and the Damned", a white missal from church, a plastic spray bottle of furniture polish (unused), a can of zero-off motor oil, a green watering can empty, two dying plants - an asparagus fern in an upside down bamboo hat and a feeble geranium hanging over the railing.

in the living room is an amazing spider plant whose babies are having babies, stems wound together more intricately than a web, dried earth caking in the pot. I water and trim the dead leaves, dust. when I come back later after flossing my teeth, they look fuller, greener somehow. maybe it's just me that's happier, working to clear away debris and confusion I always feel in this dust-cluttered house. my husband and I are sleeping on the sofa bed in the living room (the one with the cigarette holes in the cushions), amidst the relics of the family museum: the conglomeration of Grandma's antique chairs, my mother's mother's old lamps and ancient t.v., Aunt Irene's knick knacks and handmade ceramics, dad's musty book collection covered with mildew from the basement, family picture albums piled high on the endtable, records, ashtrays, and enough dust to cover everything, until I remove it. now I can sleep.

## the secret life of seniors

my parent's huge front window (3 wide panels, a full storey high) is painted like stained glass, outlined in black tape, water colours fading with time (a project my father started when mom was in the hospital); on the back window in the family room, dad taped an outline of a Christmas card scene: Madonna, Joseph and child, abstract window art, churchy reminders that God is Love and Christian people live here. last year's palm leaves droop over the brick fireplace, announcing "behold He has risen", photos of weddings and grandchildren cover every dusty bookshelf and cranny. on Sundays, it's praise the Lord and pass the peas. only now, it's give us this day our daily tai chi and tofu. used to be I was the vegetarian, now I'm the carnivore and their heart & blood pressure diet is lean and green, raw veggies and hold the salt.

staying with them for a few days, I discover the secret life of seniors: Italian lessons, creative writing class, choir practice, music appreciation, bible study, gardening. I watch the tomatoes sprout indoors, the kitchen smelling up with dried chive flowers and wild garlic plants from last season. grandmère in her red shorts, freshly shaved legs and bright red toenails, sips caffè latte while taking some sun in the garden; grandpère snoozes while listening to Puccini in the armchair, licorice twizzlers in a box by his side, the Financial Post on the floor open at the stock quotes; bird

feeders with signposts on them in Italian, Dutch, German and French divide the back yard into Trattoria degli uccelli, De berken tuin Café, Parterre unter der apfulbaum, and Café l'hibou.

but that big front window with all its stained glory is covered by two overgrown cedars rising higher than the house, as solid as a huge pair of shutters, shutting the house up. makes me feel like getting out the clippers...

dream

the queen is in my living room  
on a ship sailing to the north pole,  
islands of seaweed where people swim  
and look for snail shells, clam shells  
in the water, poisoned some say, red  
gold colours, green seaweed, they are  
scuba divers or snorkelers, I hesitate  
to get out, circle the island in my boat.

the queen is on my couch, smiling,  
my baby son learning to talk, says,  
papa is at work, we all strain to listen.  
a whole sentence! the queen laughs.  
she looks relaxed, she is off duty  
here (she looks like my mother).  
I watch her playing bridge with my in-laws.  
I serve coffee and dessert.



taking stock

i

café au lait, caffè latte, caffè con leche:  
this much we have in common,  
my mom & I, our love  
of coffee. (Turkish, my sister calls it,  
Italian or French, really). every  
morning begins with milky coffee  
& now with the new espresso machine  
I drink it at home.

for Christmas two years ago, I gave her  
a Braun moulin à café, the next year  
a Royal Doulton cup & saucer,  
this year a frothing mug to whip up  
her desire for hot liquid, ease the cramp  
of hunger first thing before breakfast,  
a pot always ready when we visit, brewed  
fresh or reheated in the microwave,  
the requisite cigarette to go with it.

she taught me how to brew tea, too, with  
lemon & honey, when colds make my throat  
dry & stiff; holding the porcelain cup now,  
burning my thumb on its thin handle, I drink  
deep and think about her: mother, healer,  
woman, child.

ii

last time home, I stole a picture  
from the album, mom in stocks in Old  
Quebec. no, there are boats docked  
in the background, it might be Halifax  
or Louisbourg, where dad's ancestors  
arrived with a regiment. she's flanked by  
C. my younger sister, dark glasses,  
smocked dress loose over adolescent  
breasts, & younger B., looking skyward,  
avoiding the camera; just a tourist  
picture, shot by dad's roving eye, or

perhaps a true picture of the women  
he has loved: wife (arms & face caught  
in wood's headlock), pilloried in the  
village square; one daughter on each  
end, leaning on the woman imprisoned.  
mother's hands are tied, silenced,  
not able to protect, yet guilty  
by complicity.

I can never speak  
about this picture,  
but it speaks for me.

## Spanish

the beat of latin music draws us down  
into the lobby of the Museum of Civilization.  
mom & I stay to watch, while dad wanders  
off. mom is instantly enlivened, wants to stay  
& rhumba, samba, cha cha cha. perhaps  
it's the memory of her summer in Cuba, after  
a secretarial course & a few years of working  
freedom between adolescence & marriage.

I watch her lined face lift, eyes lit  
with young fire, even her shoulders  
ease up, the burden of 60 years forgotten  
momentarily: eight children, their spouses,  
nine grandchildren, shed as quickly  
as a snake slithers out of an old skin.  
don't talk to me now, her face says,  
I'm dancing.

dad comes back, Come on, Peg, time to go.  
Shhh, I want to see this.  
Come on Peg, let's get back!  
No, I want to hear this.

he moseys off to look at the totem poles,  
stiff wooden faces carved in frowns & scowls.  
then I remember the Spanish she trotted out

for us at the dinner table or if she was  
busy in the kitchen...Silencia por favor!  
or mom showing me how to play La Cucaracha  
on the piano: la cucaracha, la cucaracha,  
he was chasing Minnie Mouse...

even conversation class couldn't help  
her American tongue get around French  
(what dad wanted her to learn), but  
she could speak Spanish. and what about that  
vacation in Cuba? were there Spanish lovers?  
torrid romances, hot blooded boys she threw  
over so she could come north to Braeside, Ontario  
to live in a house with frozen pipes...  
Silencia por favor!  
I'm dancing!

**SPEAKING FLESH**

**BIRTH JOURNAL**

"Speaking flesh.... What words are there? If it  
could speak! As indeed it did: it spoke the babe,  
and then the afterbirth..."

Daphne Marlatt, Anahistoric

## **PART I: The Fire**

March 8, 1990: I call it Poetry, but it's really just me talking to myself, while the radio plays easy listening in the living room; the cat has fallen asleep, left me alone with my belly, barefoot and pregnant (but not in the kitchen).

the snow finally looks like it's melting, frozen dog shit and bare dirt appear under ice; it's been the longest winter I remember living through. but finally it's beginning to show, the belly: it's going to get in the way, already it's pushing up and out, tipping me forward. the muscles seem to have a separate life down there, the belly button pushing inside out (I complain, but somewhere inside I'm dancing, even if nauseous).

this is the body landscape...the miracle drumlin folds over tearshaped hairdowned roundness; scar at the bottom runs transversal above that smaller mount, virginal once more, closed in on itself. the map of the body is changing, becoming alien; once you get to know your way around it, it upheaves again, an earthquake. right now it's just a belly with a thing inside it I can't see.

March 16 (3rd month): placenta forming now, attaching foetus strongly to my uterus. my abdomen carries this alien fluttering thing, only a 3-inch creature we call "Eustache", can't wait to feel him/her kick through the stomach wall. sun and warm today, even this headache can't drag me down. I want

to be here at this moment, conscious, alive, grasp the joy of  
it, understand what it is I am attached to, this breath, this  
involuntary life flooding me, moving in and out of my lungs.

the woman who is not born yet:

my giving birth becomes the birth

of the woman-from-child

I am somebody's child

and soon will be somebody's mother

April 6: it happens to probably 3 million women a day, this  
swelling and increase of cells, but I look at it in amazement,  
the belly beautiful, round as if I had swallowed the moon (it  
is in there, I saw liquid fire at the edges, warmed my hands  
when I held them close to it). I am becoming a believer in  
miracles: the flesh divides and re-divides, forming flesh that  
is separate yet in me; when I see it shining there I shake my  
head in disbelief at its relentless growing, like some  
overgrown melon plant, wildly out of control, it doesn't stop  
but swells and swells. right now it's still mine, but in a  
few weeks, tiny butterfly fingers and toes will dance a  
drumbeat on my insides, fists and knees will wake me to its  
new presence.

April 20 (after amniocentesis): dreamt I was bleeding, bright  
deep red, knew I had to go for ultrasound but not in Montreal,  
in Ottawa where my mom is; strange hospital, but determined to  
go anyway, fearful of losing baby (having already lost two).

May 5 (we still make love):

you suck at my nipple, engorged  
with milk, seek with tongue  
its leaking spout, pull on breast  
with mouth enflamed, hardened  
nipple tingles and burns, wetness  
fills the lips below and your hands  
knead and push, squeeze everything  
in and out, bring my lips to your face  
your lips suck again, everything bursts  
at once out of that nipple and cock  
dances in joy, revived by juice of life  
we embrace sky and earth at once  
rooted in ground but head blown skyward  
spine the lightning rod spirals into space  
atoms dance under skin, en-light-ened  
becoming light

May 8 (Women's work - dance class): we are to visualize women  
in other cultures and dance what we feel: I thought of the  
black women I saw on T.V. last night, dancing in sun, free as  
an island, or the pygmy in the rainforest, squatting to  
breastfeed her baby, or the woman fishing in a stream, machete  
in hand, waist wrapped in cotton sarong, bare breasts; then  
start humming to myself Brahms' lullaby: see me as a baby  
rocking in mother's arms, tears start, someone hugs me, offers  
kleenex, rocks me in the warmth of her easychair body. I let



go to feeling needy, hungry, just a babe myself with a baby on the way.

later, we stand looking out the window, at the nearly full moon: make a wish for completion of a cycle, for fullness: the hills and valleys of the bare moon make a smile of shadows, a kind of mercy shining down, makes me feel grateful, quiet inside, able to release the darkness, old fears, accept her light.

Tertullian had this to say about women: You are the devil's gateway...you are she who persuaded him whom the devil did not dare attack....Do you not know that every one of you is an Eve? The sentence of God on your sex lives on in this age; the guilt, of necessity, lives on too. (Adam, Eve and the Serpent)

yet the Gnostic Gospel says Adam said to Eve: You shall be called Mother of the Living, for it is you who is my Mother. It is you who are the Physician, and the Woman and she who has given birth.

May 21 (last dance class): Taking Space. claim space for all your organs and parts, expand into the larger universe. We eat our potluck by candlelight with songs, poems and prayers, offer sweetgrass to the four directions, an abundance of bread, fruit and nuts, salads and sweets. I pick an Indian medicine card: wolf, or the spirit of teacher who is in all things, compassion for others.

June 28: My days are measured by little accomplishments, counting how many things get done from my list: wash bedspread, get carpet cleaned, call movers for quotes, prenatal class tonight. grocery lists, people-to-call lists, baby cribs & strollers lists, research on diapers, the paranoia of not having done anything today because I'm not "working", coffeetable littered with notes to myself, to not forget - this way most of the moments are accounted for: add them up, they amount to something (all these financial metaphors?)

yet sitting at the bus stop today, five minutes with nothing to do, I feel how full each breath is: scent of green grass and leaves to breathe in, sunshine on sidewalk to see, people in cars driving by to look at. a young boy throws crumbs from a balcony twenty stories high. seagulls circle and grab the tidbits, hover and circle back. four stories higher, an old man watches the birds suddenly surround his building, arcing the air. I cannot count the birds, nor the breadcrumbs, nor the moments waiting to be added to my list.

July 13:           the pleasure taken in small things:  
                  this jerking and kicking in my abdomen  
                  listening to birds, trees in wind  
                  catching early morning sunlight  
                  folding towels (practicing domestic skills)  
                  eating watermelon and letting the pink  
                  juice dribble down my chin (before the

nurse tells me I can't eat sweet fruit)  
the pussycat curled up beside me in bed  
stretching her chin to be rubbed,  
C. hugging my tummy, resting his hands  
there; catching sight of my water-melon  
belly in the mirror.

Watermelon belly Blues

I've got the watermelon belly blues  
can't bend over to tie my shoes  
can't reach down to scratch my toes  
don't fit into any of my clothes

pain in the ribs  
pain in the side  
cramps in my legs  
too big to hide

people stop and stare  
or offer me a seat  
can't be inconspicuous  
walking down the street

heartburn when I eat  
or even when I fast  
can't eat no more ice cream  
how long's this gonna last?

blood tests, needles  
doctors, nurses, friends  
O watermelon belly  
I've almost reached the end.

July 24, 1:00 a.m.: dream of running through a field of daisies, buttercups, bluebells, like some wild butterfly, pollenizing them by brushing velvet lips over their petals, rubbing musty vulva on their upturned faces. touching myself, a new recognition: this is the doorway to my unborn son, kicking inside, and also a place of my own to enjoy, this swollen mouth-cavern, smooth foaming doorway to the burst seed pod at the center of roundness, a channel sucking open/closed, the same rhythm as a baby suckling, coming naturally, body works as one wave tingling. imagine uterus emptying out child, his suckling bringing on contractions; hand pulls on left nipple, fingers explore wetness of the cunt-flower.

Aug. 9. The Raspberry Patch: Hot muggy days, sweaty nights, we move house in the worst of it, then escape for brief vacation in Stowe. These last few days the belly is a beach ball, pushed up on one side where a heel or knee presses against the wall, the movement visible in waves, volcanic bursts of activity when I sit after eating, usually at night. It always surprises and shocks, when hard little knobs stick out, making stomach lopsided. Our hosts at the B & B are worried I am too far away from my hospital. I look ready to pop, start to feel huge, uncomfortable lying down, or bending

forward, breath uneven, laboured: huff, puff. Doctor warns against sugar, salt. Watching me like a hawk, she says.

Aug. 21. Braxton Hicks contractions....stop my breath...wonder if it was real...this evening in prenatal class, discuss the difference between real and false labour. how to know. we cry when we see movie on childbirth...the couple's effort and emotion...a real baby coming out, blue & red....it's too close to reality....four more weeks.

Sept. 10. moody, cranky, restless. tired of carrying the awkward ball. husband massages my back - sensual warmings, neurons dance on the edge of hairshafts. touch breaks the solitude of skin.

Sept. 13. I never knew there were thirteen months before, thirteen moons in one year: the real calendar reckoned by female blood.

Sept. 19 (due date). false alarm. failed induction (into hospital at 6:30 am, out at 7:00 pm.) remarks from staff:

you have a stubborn uterus (female obstetrician)

it's like trying to stick your finger through

the hole in a lifesaver (second doctor)

lousy cervix - tight and high as a kite (my doctor)

Science, however, did not succeed.

Sept. 21. when God cursed Eve for eating the apple, he decreed: "in pain you shall bring forth your children". our heritage. I want to look at my fear of pain, possible reasons for tightness:

teenager's fingers (4 yrs old)  
doctors' hurtful examinations: forcing  
cold metal speculum when internally  
bleeding (ectopic pregnancy, 22 yrs)  
trauma of first blood (15 yrs)  
blood, sign of miscarriage (twice)

Ne touchez pas à ma douleur! "les femmes qui accouchent transpirent, gémissent, vomissent parfois, émettent des sons bizarres, perdent le contrôle qu'elles ont habituellement sur leurs fonctions corporelles."

"It's the resistance that hurts, not the ten pound baby."

"The best way to get out of pain is to go into it."

Say yes, accept. "Je veux ce travail, je veux que mon corps s'ouvre et laisse passer mon enfant. Je veux faire corps avec la douleur plutôt que contre elle." (above advice from L'une à l'autre, Hiver 1987, a magazine for mid-wives).

My uterus is not stubborn, it just knows it's not time.

Sept. 25 (Birth-day).

I Ching: Reality ultimately never coincides with its ideal.

The present moment is sacred.

fruitless labour throughout the night, contractions not

opening up cervix, pitocin at 6:00 am, doctor breaks my water, intense contractions, back labour, strapped to every measuring device possible, monitoring every move. suck ice-chips, hair all over my face, tough work...breathe! 1-2-breathe! thank god for the nurses...breathe...husband had no energy left, nurses command, go get some coffee. Breathe!

amazingly, he slips out, after 10 minutes of pushing, 17 hours of labour, at 2:50 pm, Julien Francois:

What a cool dude! (C.)

(eyes wide open, alert, Julien stretches his neck to see us from the table where nurse coos at him, washes off birth blood).

Isn't it my turn to hold him? (Jennifer)

I'm so proud of you, I told you you could do it!

(Doctor, like a coach at a football game cheering)

It's like science fiction. (Jennifer)

(then follow four hours of too high energy, nothing to do, no baby to hold, the nurses convince us he needs to be under observation).

## **PART II - Out of the fire, into the frying pan**

Oct. 3. out of the fog of childbirth, exhaustion, happy to go home, but so tired, ready to burst into tears, don't let the phone ring just yet, can't bear to talk to anyone, just want to go to bed.

he was so quiet in the hospital, even had to wake him for feedings. first three days home - no sleep pattern, fussy and crying, we rock and stroke, massage and burp him, bitch at each other, our emotions swell and recede. the cat scratches me and I fall apart, scream at her, then burst into uncontrollable sobs, C. rushes upstairs....Motherhood, first stop towards insanity? call Mother! I need a lot of help. (our first idyllic week a disaster, C. goes back to work).

Oct. 5. pediatrician's advice: he smells your milk, move him away from your bed into his own room. it works. he sleeps four hours. he cries so hungrily, angrily, not anger but tummy trouble, or thirst, need for warmth of my belly & breasts, my body his refuge. he will come to me, arms outspread in fear-of-falling reflex, startled into grabbing on with tiny fingers clenched around my finger; or, legs bunched up, small bum in the air, while C. changes his diaper, little anus jet propulses sweet yellow kaka right onto C's foot. little one, I love your peeling feet, your blood-hound nose; you smell my milk, the food my blood makes for you.

Oct. 17.

I am a reluctant swimmer in the current of this baby's attraction. I keep my walls up, but he blows them down with tiny sighs. like no other lover, he offers me pursed lips, his surprise to be awake in my arms. my time and tide encircle his life, his body, his wee



fingers and toes. where he goes when he sleeps,  
nobody knows. at first he was a perfect  
stranger, but now my heart knows him, my ears  
are sharp for every cry. no mother wolf has  
keener sight nor smell.

I sleep with arms crossed like his, across  
my chest. in the mirror, it's his eyes I see,  
his lips, his nose....this is some deep magic,  
pulling me some place I can't withdraw from,  
pulling love out of me, even when I wake  
unwillingly at 4:00 am, I'm drawn under  
his spell by a smile or rolling eyes, some silly  
expression. sleep disappears from my heavy eyes.  
once fed, he drops off on my breast, full, content.  
moments later, I am dropping too, far away, until  
the bugle call of his hunger drags me back  
to wakefulness.  
we are not one, I feel his separateness,  
but we are of the same blood.

**Oct. 26. "Birth into the world is the coming into light...The  
beginning of the world." (Erich Neumann)**

I ask you if you know where you came from, one night at 4:30  
am, in the rocking chair after feeding you. sometimes you  
smile "aux anges", look at the light from the window, or right  
above my head. are you seeing someone? your guardian angel?

why do you look over my shoulder and smile to empty air? do  
you see my aura, a halo of light around my head?

"The round is the egg", the circle, my round belly. what does  
a baby think of in his mother's womb? or is he just being, no  
thought, no separation from the One unchanging reality, one  
with the mother of all things. I dream of C., making love we  
form a circle, my legs around him, his around me. yoni and  
lingam face to face, the world parents lying on top of one  
another.

Nov. 6. have to transcribe these moments too, the fussy  
crying draining days, the feeding every hour days, the wearing  
on my nerves days. every pore of my skin feels rubbed raw,  
from carrying him in my arms: from crib to playpen, swinging  
chair to rocking chair, nursing, holding, patting, changing  
diapers. my whole day surrounds him. . 'm so tense and tired  
by 7:00 pm and dinner time, when his daddy comes walking in I  
could just walk out, screaming. instead, I cry myself to  
sleep, baby must be feeling my tension too, and crying.

Nov. 13. my body, his blood  
he sips at my breast, as from  
source of life, his lips  
work up & down, draw liquid  
dew from magic teats, turn  
milk into blood & life: he grows  
fat on my blood

candlelit bath in evening: precious time alone. I hear his cries at a distance (this afternoon I actually blocked my ears as he lay screaming, refusing to nap. I wanted to work on my poems). tonight, I take time for the creature comforts I need: wash my hair, file my nails, talk to C. over dinner. in spite of the seeming isolation, I'm not alone all day. I talk and sing and rock the baby to sleep, talk to him almost constantly, or to the cat - and can never count on two hours of uninterrupted silence. his crying calls me now, he wants to eat; my heart (and body) cannot refuse him.

Nov. 20. my milk needs me to rest.

this morning after nursing, I rocked and held him instead of putting him right back into bed, thought how quickly this would be over, feel the moment, his heavy head nestled on the breast-cushion, warmth of his breathing heavy against my belly; drawing him down to me, small legs curled on my thighs, he sleeps, quick breath in and out, noisy gasps escape his lips, and small sighs of comfort, sucking noises from tiny fist in mouth. motherhood depends on these few moments.

Nov. 23.

catlike his tongue flickers, calling my nipples, his ruby lips glossy with saliva caress the air, ready to suckle, my baby at the breast, happiest when his mouth surrounds me, pulls me in

we're finally settling, dare I say it,  
into a good rhythm, our days follow  
the clock, rock like a cradle  
from morn to noon to night  
with pauses for naps  
and hours of play  
time to snack and suck  
time to bathe and splash  
from sunrise to sunset  
regular rocking days

little clumps of fist enclose my finger,  
chubby thighs, chapped chin, eternally  
raised eyebrows wide-eyed at his success  
in getting me to smile, he surveys my  
hairline, or my hairband, or my green  
and yellow aura, I can't tell which

Dec. 2. cow-eyed

I used to resent the implications  
of a cow goddess - heavy plodding  
creature, but every woman feels Her  
presence, who has once felt her breasts  
harden with milk, ache to be emptied.  
Women: we feed the hunger.

Dec. 12. for a child resisting sleep  
my humming bones soothe you to sleep

sing you to dream,  
while you suck fist and fingers,  
I rub your soft skull. we are  
both so tired, we rock,  
then snuggle into my flannel bed  
with you on my chest,  
ear flat against breastbone  
breathing in tandem,  
bellysoft waves on my shore  
where you broke from amniotic sea.  
now we feel it carry us back  
as we drift, surrender.

Dec. 14. baby's protective hands, possessive of his/my  
breast, pull and push the flesh, rearrange it, kneading with  
one hand, sharp nails leave small red marks on the white. he  
pulls the nipple in and out at his leisure, pleasuring at his  
new control (12 weeks old, already master), but too small for  
control, really, he's just finding his mouth with his fist,  
can barely manage a blanket between fingers, but that breast!  
already home, already his. I don't mind really, I'd just  
rather he gummed a rubber dummy sometimes. his comfort,  
safety, hunger, needs come first, but I'm still anxious for  
his quick breathing to begin, eyelids to fall closed and  
darkness descend, so I can sneak away, put my breasts away in  
their protective wrapper.

Dec. 15. Dream.

in a churchlike building, arc shaped beams, narrow rounded poles stretched across the width like pews, some women standing on them, I stand on one too, white light shines from it. a woman to my right and behind, is telling me to cross it (like burling a log). women to my left hold me up as I inch my way, lose my balance, can't do it. try again, wobbling afraid to fall, fail. somehow I must cross on my feet to the next beam and all the beams to the front of the church. I fall to ground, slither to back or am taken to the woman in charge, am enfolded and embraced. it's o.k., though I feel I have failed, they are taking me back in. this woman is like a priestess or elf queen - her tiny feet have delicate leather sandals with feathers for straps. I feel I belong with these women.

April 16, 1991. Dream.

in my sensuous watery dream, I float with the current, naked in water, baby at my breast, one hand inside my vagina, clitoris washed and rubbed by waves, I lie on my back, legs open, wonderful wet let-go feeling, yet on wakening: feel shame, confusion at sexual content.

my body is alive and dreaming all the time of abandon, surrender to the senses, let go!

**FEMALE PARTS**

Oh, darling, let your body in...

Anne Sexton

descent

perhaps you have no memory  
of how you got here. you arrived  
steaming from this wet place,  
stretched her skin with your head,  
bone & skull screeched through her  
nerve tissue, muscle fibre,  
streaming with water & blood,  
salty & precious, her cord of life  
that fed you nine months long --

there you breathed water  
turned somersaults in brine,  
a tiny seahorse swinging by one leg,  
you forgot whatever came before.  
and now you've been cut away  
from her body. you must re-enter  
through your own. remember  
the earthy smell of this place.

now look, it is you:

touch it, see it, open your legs  
& feel it.

is it some slimy swamp,  
primordial sea? or just a snail  
swimming in the tide, pulled by lunar



cycles stronger than even the lizard  
brain curled up at the base  
of your skull.

now, surface  
into bright sun, parrot's screech.  
water steams off the broad jungle leaves:  
morning in Eden.

feeling good

Sophie, three, wants to rub  
on chairs, on the corners of hard places.  
grandma (visiting) is shocked.  
mommy & daddy are reconciled -  
they talked to the doctor - he said,  
with you in private but not alone  
in the dark. tell her to do it in daylight.  
she asks, is there something wrong  
with me?

grandma had a boy, too.  
she told her daughter, boys do that,  
when he pulled & bounced & fiddled,  
but good girls don't touch themselves,  
so Sophie's mom wants to let her be.  
Sophie's daddy is a doctor, too.  
he thinks weird growths, bacteria,  
some reasonable cause, why  
must she rub and rub?  
she says, it feels good Mommy.  
it's a pain I like.

after the dance, 1968

high up in the bleachers in the school gymnasium,  
where the couples collect to neck, having had a few  
swigs of something in their coke & dizzy, she lets  
him push his fingers down inside her jeans to somewhere  
wet & pulsing, but they are too visible, move down  
in between the bleachers and the wall. in the dark  
space the bass guitar throbs, she doesn't mind if he  
reaches down there but he pulls away after finding her  
warm spot, his tongue withdraws from her mouth. up until  
now it's just been kissing on the ski lifts, snow cold.

another highschool dance, waiting for her dad to pick  
them up, they stand at the edge of the sheltered entrance,  
she, warm inside his winter coat's embrace, his tongue-  
stretching kisses, not knowing exactly how far to go,  
should tongues entwine, penetrate, rub? until the  
muscles ache in the mouth, his hand twisting inside her  
coat, fingers search for under skirt, a fortuitous hole  
in smooth nylon, something moist. her father pulls up in  
the station wagon, she pulls away hoping he saw nothing.

next weekend, his sister relays a message when she calls him:  
fuck off. she's mad, then hurt, then calls him back to say  
fuck off, too (she didn't know boys could be afraid, too).

taboo

there is blood all over my  
night memories - a ski trip  
by bus, trapped in the lodge  
by sudden flood, no kotex  
in the washroom - no one to tell  
this to. underwear cast out  
can't tell my boyfriend,  
men must be protected  
from the curse.  
after a long trip home,  
crying alone in the dark  
highschool washroom.

I needed to feel clean.  
I needed my mother.  
I needed God to be a woman  
who also bleeds.

suede jacket

it was hip to wear 50's clothes then,  
we raided the Sally Ann for plaid skirts,  
cashmere sweaters, embroidered them with hearts,  
flowers, beads, pulled out mom's old trunk  
looking for old sundresses, wore dad's shirts  
long over faded jeans, his soft felt fedora.

but mother's stained hunting jacket, soft as  
chamois (incongruous image that, mother  
with shotgun slung over shoulder), I claimed  
early, as my inheritance, dug it out of her  
cupboard, wore it like a disguise, it's  
magic, feminine power.

I'd wear that suede jacket & felt hat  
to hitchhike downtown with Janet, the two  
of us skipped class, doing little jigs  
for truckers who winked & waved. we felt  
our power then, impervious to mother's  
warnings, harm downtown, the night  
cafés & folk bars filled with smoke  
too small to hold us. hungry for sex  
(& innocent as baby bats) we hung out,  
smoked up, dropped acid, came home again  
(jiggity jog) before our glad rags could  
turn to plainclothes. somehow escaped white

slavers & narcs, underage & drunk in bars  
where draft reeked through the doors.  
then safe in suburban beds, we dreamt  
boozy dreams, hash-highs, escape  
through the bathroom window,  
imagined our mothers  
never blinked an eye.

for Janet

you're right to want  
the company of girls  
who'll look at your body  
without fear, & mirror

slender bones under white flesh  
here, at collarbone & wrist  
there, at shoulder & waist  
who'll say in female tongue

this is my body, my blood.  
who'll know themselves in you  
feel acknowledged (yes!)  
as fruit of no evil

who'll have no fear of entrapment  
nor of being swallowed whole,  
no passage of regret  
in re-entering the womb

no way to forget that entry  
here, at thigh  
there, at pelvic curve  
here,  
& here.

brainless

in the dream I am watching  
the women below me twist on the floor

hair writhing 'round their naked bodies,  
traces of blood or water on their skin

as if they have just been born,  
whole, transparent, oozing

sensuality, their brains not yet  
their own. the men behind me play

cards & drink whisky in the wagon,  
smack their lips.

I'm caught between them &  
the snaky goddesses below.

they're laying bets  
I am one of those women.



cosmos

(i)

I think of the Virgin Mary  
alone in her labour  
crucified with pain  
no midwives or doctors  
just the grunting rhythm  
of cow's breath, sheep snorts,  
manure pungent, steaming  
the stable like incense.

& here I lie, on this sterile  
steel table, heels strapped  
into stirrups, trying to feel  
my legs again after numbing  
epidural, trying to bear down  
eyes shut, intent on squeezing  
you out

the stretch of skin, breath  
held till breaking,  
stinging fire round the lips  
round 'O' of your head  
as you are pulled, limp  
& wrinkled from my womb,  
blood fresh on your fingers.  
an arc of red dots  
splatters the stainless white

cloth where the cord  
is cut from round your neck  
& clamped tight,  
on the table, placenta swims  
in its chalice

& you, my sacrament  
blotched face the colour of grapes  
or wine, no bells ring  
to herald your birth, no angels  
sing but our voices call  
& coo to you

you don't scream or cry,  
eyes wide as they wash  
the old blood from your body  
hand you into my arms  
now we are delivered  
now we begin, you and I.

(ii)

head bowed, as he drinks  
eyes closed, intent as a monk  
inscribing gold letters,  
or a glass blower shielding  
his cheeks with both hands:  
something delicate, fragile  
in the making

milk, like manna from heaven,  
flows into his working lips,  
his fingers knead the breast.  
something pure from me  
goes into him, strange alchemy

he curves into my body  
we breathe lung to lung  
his snug warmth warms me  
all movement & joy  
beside me, alive  
awake, alive.

(iii)

early morning, so still, nothing  
is moving, yet everything moves:  
the cosmos nods off on its long stem,  
even the tiny purple pansy  
is stirred by cool air, not wind  
but exhalation.

the phlox, heavy on their stems, toddle  
like old ladies with walking canes,  
even the elegant roses suavely twitter,  
serrated leaves titillated by breeze. petals  
drop to dark earth, slow decay.  
the brick wall moves also,  
inches a millenium.

my baby squats in the sunlit garden,  
dirt dribbling from his lips.  
he pulls on the cosmos, takes it  
by its thin green stem, & shakes it,  
pulls apart, one by one, the mauve  
& white petals, saves the gold heart  
to crunch last. then crawls over  
to me, odour of black earth in his mouth,  
squats, falls back, leaning on a peony  
bush, like an elf in the forest,  
green parasol over his egg-shaped head,  
his container full, right now.

my arms

my heavy arms clasp empty space, where his  
small body just left mine. his fevered head  
I cradled in my hands, and tried to smooth  
hot temples' pulse, then rocked him to cool sleep,  
his tiny body curled in foetal pose.  
my arms enlace, hug & embrace but can  
never hold him for too long, for he will  
struggle free, eager to climb stairs, chase balls,  
push chairs, his moment never standing still.  
yet always he returns to my warm arms  
on his terms, now, when he is ready to,  
laughing or crying, happy or upset.  
I end the day on empty, drained & yet,  
my heart encircling him is overfull.

bathtime

Julien in the bathwater screams,  
doesn't want his hair washed. I turn him  
over, hold him, handsonskin so soft,  
brush quickly by the petal folded between  
his legs - someday it'll be the hardest part  
of him, yet skin so smooth, the hardness  
hardly matters.

If I love him well enough will the softness  
remain? all the male adjectives await him:  
hard as iron, hard as steel, hard as stone;  
it's not a muscle, not a bone,  
but can be tense or taut, stiff  
as a poker, or a ramrod, yet supple  
& lithe (athletic), elastic  
not spongy or flaccid, downy  
as velvet, malleable as clay  
soft as in not tough, silky smooth,  
soft as butter (though it hardens  
in your hand, not in the fridge),  
yielding, giving way, not forcing its way.  
not a sword used in battle, but more like  
a flower's stamen.

crayons

she said the crayons are alright  
to eat  
being made of beeswax  
& harmless

I was thinking of candles,  
honeycombs  
coloured scented pictures  
drawn by hand

light  
dripping  
from them

eden

under the umbilical tree, a girl  
child asleep, coral fan of placenta.  
the sun not risen yet, a dark watery  
space just big enough to turn in,  
blood warm water, amniotic garden.

in paradise, all is provided for,  
life flows liquid into her open mouth  
as she-horse rocks & plays  
& sucks her thumb.

bathysphere mother, surrounded by  
porcelain walls of my pink bathtub  
relax in the softened candlelight,  
I imagine her enclosed, yet comfortable  
until the tidal wave of birth awakes her.



waiting

all week for signs, omens, portents of imminent birth: a bloody show, a deeper displacement of hip joints, pain in the lower back, belly contracting in regular five minute intervals, sudden loss of weight - whatever the science and magic of pregnancy manuals can use to foretell the "event", a child dropping out of the red sky into 6:00 a.m. on my bed. but no, false labour comes & goes, bones under flesh distort my belly, hiccups of thumb-sucking baby disturb my sleep, I dream of pushing, hands tight on the handles of a hospital bed. nothing but fullness, days sitting in spring sunshine, waiting for hard tulip blossoms to open, their surprise of yellow and red, like Dutch girls' hats, winged open in day, closed tight & vulvular at night.

red lawn chair collapses on top of me, my awkward weight & beachball stomach can't move me out/up quickly enough. my son laughs to see me squeezed between two halves of the folding chair. balls his favourite object, he hugs my tummy, bangs his forehead just there where a small opening, belly button's fragile web of skin, pushes through, a foot or elbow.

windy today, rainy & cold. we are all waiting, phone rings often - friends, mother-in-law, sisters, have you had...? encore de ce monde? my body floats somewhere above planet Earth and my mind has been put on hold, welcoming into the future a child.

lightning

i)

i am small in her hot bath of amniotic fluid, floating, when the smell of smoke wakes her, running she hands buckets to my father, he dashing it down the stove chimney, she rushing up flights of stairs with water breaking, 8 1/2 months ready to break me into, out of her at break-neck speed, waking up again at 4 a.m. with contractions, she prays to the Virgin Mary for a sign, sees a show of blood, he thinks he has time to shave, she grabs a packed suitcase, heaves her bulk into the old Plymouth, he still pacing the halls waiting to hold her hand in labour, while she shoves off the ether mask, wanting to be all there to see me, nurse tries to hold her knees together - wait for the doctor! but I arrive anyway, ripping through her hysterical uterus two weeks early, no time to wait

ii)

now, my baby, two weeks late, induced by castor oil, sex & situps at 8:15 p.m., at 11:30 rumbles through my belly like a fire engine, siren screaming me awake every 3 minutes, still reluctant to leave, soak my fears in a hot bath, soothe cramps, manoeuvre into jeans, down the stairs an hour later. cautiously lie in the back seat of father-in-law's car, pray it won't be long till the hospital - where are your hands, to push on my aching back?....a gush from inside gapes my mouth wide, my lower mouth wider - Eye-yiee! she's coming! panting's not working, her head's already there, my feet against the car door push my head into the upholstery, it's not supposed to

happen like this! but she pushes through my fear, mouth & vagina forced open, as J. rips off my jeans, I'm howling, as her quiet body drops into his arms bent over the front seat - CATCH HER SHE'S COMING - then she's on my tummy, red & wet, one small Wahh - check her mouth & eyes, car still moving, driving through red lights stop signs up a one-way street the wrong way, & oh my God, she's beautiful (she's breathing) - lie back on the dark wet carseat, cover her in dad's red plaid shirt ripped off so fast all the buttons popped. we pull up to the brightly lit Emergency, new, vibrant, half-naked, he, sobbing with joy & relief, me, placenta still inside me, vulva split open like a tree struck by lightning. as they wheel us upstairs on a stretcher, wrapped tight together in hot flannel, we breathe breast to breast, I won't let her go.

seabass

the weight of her head  
bobbing at my apple-nipple,  
mouth gumming my skin,  
thrumming of small fingers  
on breast in ecstasy of milk-joy,  
help me forget the needle-like  
pain, raw blisters from nursing.

her fists clench my shirt collar  
as she kicks her feet, curving  
away, a fish on a line,  
her mouth's attention to detail  
perfect, milk,  
still warm, dribbles  
down her sensuous seeking  
mouth onto my damp skin

O seabass mouth!

she sucks her tongue  
in open bliss (no small  
oral fixation this)  
I am the bait, my flesh  
the hook, to reel her in.

after naptime (for Rhonda)

a baby in blue gingham kicks  
her legs, smiles at me with teal-  
blue eyes, smells of Baby's Own  
spice: zinc ointment & powder  
mixed with summer sweat & damp  
saliva'd sheets.

I see myself in her chubby arms  
& thighs, this seal blubber  
baby. mother said she liked girls  
best, but my neighbour cried  
when she knew it was a girl,  
six months pregnant -  
how not to be like her mother?  
whose mother slapped her face  
when she started her period,  
slapped the curse out of her.

& me? part joy, part tears,  
my fears at having a girl  
having to do with a vagina.  
everytime I change her diapers  
I see we are the same:  
same slit between the legs,  
same sweet flesh, same fear

that someone will open this  
pearly oyster before its time,  
as they did, as he did.  
always my fear  
guides my touch,  
so careful.

mothering the milk

napping to let the flow continue, both babies sound asleep, rain outside, could sleep all day myself. want to explore feelings in my body, so open to touch, sensation. babies bring all feeling to the surface, tingling; my breasts from nursing feel almost raw, Caitlin sucks as if I were a rubber dummy, pulls skin up & down; Julien occasionally wants to nurse too, more like a wet kiss on my nipple, shyly placed then removed. he's forgotten how. roughhousing with my little boy, he climbs my back, rides my hip, bounces on my stomach, pushes up my shirt to touch my bare back, makes me laugh all over, butts me with his head, clambers over me. we collapse on the floor, lady lion with cub. my skin is open to sensation, but wary, questions the feeling - is it aroused or just aware?

stumbling over nicknames for penis, we try wee wee, pee pee, kaka and poop he knows, points to his bum, says kaka! laughs heartily when mama farts - Maman big big kaka, his mixed French with English. my mother always said number one and number two, bumpty & bum, never vulva or vagina.

cycles

weaning my baby girl, I wonder  
if the full moon is the right  
time, or maybe at the waning,  
the way you cut hair  
at the new moon, so it'll grow  
faster, or push seeds into raw  
earth, or mourn a loss  
at the dark of the moon,  
which cycle should I follow?

the cycle of wet & dry, heat &  
cold, the signals my body sends  
me now that the monthly blood  
is back. the sharp twinge  
of ovulation - dormant hormones  
wakening, the breasts' loss  
of milk a sign to my cells  
to begin breeding.  
searching the night sky  
I look for the moon, to know  
where on the earth's circular  
trip around the sun  
I am.



for any life

this scrawny baby, claws curled, creamy skin barely covered with grey fluff, tiny yellow beak open, throat stilled. first a blue egg fell, yoke broken on my balcony. I swept it up, washed away the gold stain. now this skeletal bird, brought in by the cat, her small teeth a necklace of pearl round its throat.

they worked so hard to hide the nest, refused to fly into it when I stood watching, yet a second hatchling falls or is pushed. I bury it too, wrapped in white toilet paper in the garbage can, feet curled into its puckered body. sounds pathetic, but I'm sad for those parent-birds, for any loss of life. mother sticks her beak out of the nest under balcony roof, calls to her mate, perhaps a new egg to sit on? time enough in the season to start again.

maybe it reminds me of my lost embryos that never quite hatched, never formed past an egg sac, dissolved into themselves, expelled somewhere before crucial three months; each time I was pregnant, so hard to trust I would make it through the fragile time, foetus & placenta forming time. two eggs pushed out of the nest. no cruel predator, just nature ensuring only the fit survive.

five pregnancies later, I have two beautiful babies. there was time to start over, blend our cells into a whole perfect child. and give thanks, for any life.

lilies

dream zooms me to a stone  
Virgin in a field, a mountain side  
her robe blackened by fire, she walks  
in front of me tall & stern,  
turns to look down at me from inside  
her dark hood, I am knees to the  
ground, trembling & scared,  
ready to kiss her feet, or the tips  
of her fingers.

she tells me the sorrow  
is too heavy, I stutter, why?  
why do they have to die?  
"I throw them back" (like fish  
too small to catch).  
she can't stand to see them  
suffer.

she smiles while I comb & braid  
her long red-gold hair awash  
in sunlight, her dressing room  
scented with flowers. she says,  
they bring me roses because  
I'm tired of lilies.

prayer to Kali

o goddess of black deeds

I have felt the knife's

rage in my wrists, the urge

to throw my baby

down the stairs, the blood

surge making me crazy

or just a lack of sleep

a fever in the chest

never enough rest

stomp yell slap bang

the knife on the counter

instead of hitting him

yet, next moment,

all is calm, I soothe his

head, caress him next to

my heart, tell him I am dead

serious. I will not yell,

if you don't. bargain, deal,

trade, but not beg. only  
request.

o raging goddess, this anger  
is not for him.

help me give tears to my sadness  
voice to my rage

turn this darkness  
into light.

after the sidewalk sale

headed for Kentucky Fried Chicken, three grocery bags in one hand & a jumbo bag of Pampers in the other, we enter ass backwards pushing the door open, baby in the stroller, 19-month-old straddling the edge, holding a basketball twice the size of his head, a helium balloon hooked onto the handle. we outblimp even the life-size pink elephant full of hot air bobbing in the parking lot. then overloaded, we roll home singing This Ole Man with our fragrant chicken dangling from my thumb.

baby wakes just as I'm stuffing my face with greasy fried; Julien gnaws a drumbone & the cat miaows at my feet, begging for meat. stick the baby under my blouse, milk rush tingles as she settles in. Julien debout dans sa chaise demands milk, drops his cup (I can't move in time to reach him), he screams, baby chokes on too much milk as I lean to catch him - Sit! I yell (Fuck you! I'm more tempted to say, but don't). they want my blood, these hungry mouths. my cells are on empty, too. yes baby, I'll feed you, as soon as I get some food in my own belly.

august

here it's a women's world - the park, where mothers, transparent, vulnerable, venture out with their children, in search of fresh air, sun & playtime for the kids, or just company, to find amongst strangers a welcome, however hesitant. we can smile & ask, how old is she? what's her name? without divulging our own names, an anonymous ear to listen, commiserate with over lack of sleep, lunches eaten standing up, potty training trials, sibling rivalry & all the professional problems of working at home; nowhere to punch in, so we wander over to the sandbox, tots in hand, strollers & tricycles lined up at the fence.

some of us are anxious to work again, to be in mixed company & adult conversations, to be busy shuffling paper or doing anything but dealing with recalcitrant egos, ripe kaka, squished bananas at our feet, tomato sauce & popsicle juice on our t-shirts, sand in her hair (again!), three loads of laundry a day, all those little shirts shorts & pyjamas to fold & put away. the endless list of things to do: change the cat litter, remember to feed her, fill up the wading pool, empty the wading pool; while the weeds go unweeded in the garden & toys litter the grass; Daddy comes home late at night & trips on them.

at the end of the day, putting the children to sleep, she looks back, was it a good day? did we hit each other? (too

often) we had fun at the park, on the slide, on the swings, he rode his tricycle, played with a friend, ate nachos & popsicles & watermelon. they don't always agree, his memory of events cancels out fears, pain, anger; then they hug & say, I love you! I love you too, I love you three! I love you mommy. And he gets the last word.



listening

listening to the peculiar hum of machinery,  
the humidifier at night, steady thrum of  
moisture hitting dry air, a persistent high-  
pitched whine that smacks the eardrum,  
wakening she hears a cat crying, maybe trapped  
in the basement two floors below, or locked  
outdoors, a sound not loud enough to make out  
clearly. it's like that every time she vacuums,  
hearing cries of momma, momma, she quickly turns  
off the switch, heart racing, especially if  
she's left them in the other room, even for a  
few minutes.

everytime this happens, they are playing quietly,  
with blocks or balls or making a house with cushions  
& chairs; there is no danger, no accident, no tears,  
but as soon as she turns on the machine again  
& hears that whine, every fibre of her body listening,  
expecting disaster, every resonant chord in the mother-  
apparatus ready to hear someone calling her. even  
in the low pitch of her husband's breath, sleeping  
beside her at night she can hear a cry for help.

purdah

a woman kept in a house  
is like a cuckoo in a clock  
her breasts sing with milk  
in the middle of the night

when she comes out  
into the company of men,  
her breasts fly out of the cage  
her husband catches them  
red-handed, trying to escape

(her wings clipped, a bird  
in the house, two breasts  
behind bars)

all night the house blows  
in the wind, a cradle  
on top of a tall tree  
or a ship lost at sea

a man thinks he owns his wife  
if she stays in the house  
she is his, but once she shuts  
the door behind her, shuts  
the door on her kids behind her,  
if she shuts the door of her mind

behind her, she can fly  
no longer under lock & key.

her two breasts, small partridges  
rustle in their nest, escape  
like two cups overturned,  
two loose dice on the floor,  
two blind mice running to get the knife.

a mother alone in the house  
is like a cat in a cage  
with two birds, alone in  
the house with two children  
in the house without wings

at night the house doesn't rock  
like a boat on the sea  
it is rooted, stands still  
like a woman chained to a rock  
awaiting rescue, like a cage  
rocking on its pole

the dangerous woman in the veil  
sings like the sea  
to the old woman in the moon  
she sings to the old woman  
in the shoe, she sings to a woman  
in anything else besides a house.

at night a woman tosses in her bed  
like a tree in a storm  
like a house in the wind  
like the sea rolling over  
every thought in her body  
alive.

penetration of the wind

(I Ching #57) Open yourself to the quiet  
penetration of friend's character

warm & slow, touching you  
hold me in your arms, drink  
milk from my engorged breast,  
a wet pool of milk between  
our skins, melts my resistance.

who am I to fear your fervent hands,  
persuasive tongue? under your mouth  
my skin shivers, tongue unfolds  
as a petal meets the dew,  
though my thighs are still tight,  
green & untried like the very first time.  
I have to ask you to slow down,  
not ready yet for you to penetrate.

the rain falls outside, fan blows  
cool air through the window.  
2 a.m., wide awake, opening  
into new love. five weeks after  
childbirth, I am still afraid  
it will hurt.

dimensions of skin

when I want to praise your animal body  
sniff its every crease, pull back

the skin and crawl in, my moist pores  
smooth against the pelt of your thighs,

I snuggle into down underarms, stroke  
the mole-soft rounded snout

as it snuffles & shoves its way  
down in. under its muffled voice

we sing, the wonder  
finger tips arouse

touch breaks the solitude  
of skin.

cherry blossoms

I figure you can always learn something from T.V.  
like yesterday, on Oprah, the "Light my fire"  
seminar lady suggests, to renew a dormant love-affair,  
cover the bed with rose petals & make love on top  
of it. but tonight, just before dusk, limp cherry  
blossoms lie on the grass, cover the cement path  
to the backyard. and soon you will walk through  
the open gate, stirring up strewn petals with  
your leather shoes, scuffing their maroon shine  
with damp pink - the way you walk out of my bed  
every morning, leaving the scent of bruised  
petals in your wake.

cunning

and that word, cunt, my knowing cut  
off from verbal roots, unwritten.  
not only the word belittles, it's the body  
maternal, sexual

it's something more than 'contemptuous slang  
for vagina or woman', cunt: from cunabula,  
cradle, protective body, rocking at the breast of,  
cunctipotent, all powerful, cunning, knowing,  
(not able to know her sexually, of the same sex,  
unable to know my own sex), skilled  
at deceiving, crafty

cunicle: passage we all come out of, sacred  
well not a walking smelling box reeking of the sea  
nor a slimy swamp. cunnus diaboli - devilish cunt:  
the church's name for a cave or grove sacred  
to the goddess

when did it become just a slit, snatch, beaver, tail  
vulgar for vulva, even your mother said don't touch  
yourself down there, female genitalia as the mouth of Hel(1),  
fanged castrating womb of death that swallows  
men whole



my baby comes from this mother  
of caves covered in blood  
streaming wet trailing his cord  
& crying as he slips out smooth  
as water my body the ground  
he is leaving for home helpless  
fish in thin air line cut  
& tug at my heart pain now  
eased mouth gasps open

remember the sharpness of the knife  
that cut the slit wide open  
allowed his crowning bone-hard  
head to push through that cunt  
so quickly cut then closed  
with catgut

my cunning cunt gives up  
her magic trick  
her one life-giving stunt

and that word cunt,  
I know you now  
as mine.

women's stories (a letter)

the ones we tell each other, late  
at night or early in the morning  
over coffee & a cigarette,  
more than one if it's a story we've told  
over & over like chain smoking, like  
dirty laundry soaking in the tub, stains  
evoking lost memories of teething, cut  
lips, blood on the sweatshirt where  
you held his head & he bled all over you  
& you want to speak about this love  
you have for other women who listen  
intently, with their own pain showing  
& many cigarettes to carry them  
through the telling

a compassionate voice or ear, a dream  
we both had, a dream of breasts, of loving,  
the closeness we feel yet cannot say  
because we're afraid of a label,  
but what we really want, I want, is  
someone fearless, a weaver of words  
or truth teller, someone who's not afraid  
of hurting while resetting a bone,  
to make it straight this time,  
not covered over with untruths, anger;  
to talk about the helplessness

of being in a house in winter  
with a sick child, the boredom that strikes  
when you're housebound, the complaining  
we do, being called martyr when all  
you really want is to tell someone  
how unfair it is that you're the only one  
they call for in the middle of the night  
& it's your ears hear them coughing  
at 3:30 a.m. & you can't just lie there

bad days, I tell myself I'm lucky  
the money's there, someone helping  
with the kids & cleaning, & yet, & yet...  
how to find out what our needs are & how  
to take care of ourselves, not wait  
for him to come home, take over, pick up  
the toys & the pieces, mop up our spills,  
how to find a quiet time, time alone,  
time to think & write

I send you this in guise of a letter  
because that's the way the words are falling  
out of my fingers, in my mind I hear  
the tapping on keys & it comforts me  
at least I can listen to myself talking  
& not talk out loud (for that's what  
crazy women do)

reading Bronwen Wallace, Mary di Michele,  
& any other poets writing what they think  
is only their lives, only their thoughts,  
only the most important work being done  
right now on the planet, the raising of  
children with love, the control (or lack of)  
over anger, our need to be replenished  
with each other, filling up our bowls with  
sugar & coffee so we can tell our stories,  
not just talking over fences in the backyard  
but actually getting out & seeing women  
doing the same hard work with no pay, no  
thanks, just their little faces when you least  
expect it, smiling & asking you to sing a song  
about I love you or making up a song  
about superman all by himself in the living room.  
he says, go away mom, don't talk (meaning  
I have to do this alone, mom, don't listen  
or I'll be too shy to do it, cause it might  
not be perfect the first time)

so I keep on writing, dreaming, trying  
to live truthfully with my emotions  
in my body, and I hope you  
do the same

Goodnight sand

(camping, Rollins Pond, 1994)

after the rain, torrents of it, after sandy wet feet, soggy sandals, panic buttons & god get me outta here! there is still no shelter from it, tent wet so we sleep in the van.

but how sweet, after all this discomfort to be alone with my little duckies following me to the beach, to the tent, to the toilet, along the asphalt road, now that our fellow campers have left, hallelujah!

it's quiet, says Julien, down at the beach near sundown, and at our picnic table it's quiet too. yeah, I say, smiling. everybody's gone. we're the only brave campers to stick it out, because I want to be outdoors, not stuck in the house. I hate the dirt & mess (the new van looks like a silted up river valley after a flood) but the kids are happy - running in the woods, even laughing when they fall, holding hands like two little cherubs in the bush - the lake & sandy beach all our own. a mother duck swims by with six silent little ones sticking close, they come to nibble our tortilla chips, then leave for better insect treats. a butterfly flies under the tarp - it thinks the sky has turned green! sun appears from behind clouds & now I'm happy I didn't pack the tent.

tonight, by the fire, kids asleep in the tent, fear of the dark forces me to huddle in my lawn chair close to the flames - fear of what? the wild? of noises in the night that might be

raccoons or bears eating my noodle & scallop leftovers. last night I heard pots banging, opened the van window & shone my lantern at it (but blinded by the lamp, I couldn't see anything).

tonight, it's clear, cool & damp. I can't see beyond the circle of my fire or the beam of light on this page, white circle beneath my pen; snapping noises, wood crackling in the fire. I assume our neighbours are not cannibals, but we are still vulnerable, even if protected by park security & locked gates. part of me is reassured, but another part feels the rapist's breath on my neck. shake it off, look at the red coals, think about going to look at the stars (too dark), at least fire keeps wild animals at bay.

and what of the stars? their multitude of flashlights in the sky - leave the green cone of trees to see them against dark sky. my god I'm small. yet I can take my place, here, beside this tall pine tree. look up. neck bent. this is what calls me back to campsite after campsite, every year: this union with sky lake sun & stars - this loon-filled sound, at dawn or just before, this pine needle carpet softening the earth, moss & birch bark & rotten leaves underfoot, dozens of dragonflies at dusk flying kamikaze. Julien has counted them - nine, ten, eleven, fifteen, eighteen.

they're full of kisses & hugs for me, my kids, part of my resistance breaks away like sand between my toes, falling

grain by grain...they like me, surprise, surprise. I can push them away, try to escape, but they welcome me back, they love to touch me, look Mommy I'm a worm stuck on you, says Caitie, as she wraps her legs around mine & roots me to the ground, so I have to carry her with every step. she presses herself to me whenever possible, pick my up, mommy. command disobeyed at my peril.

so I give my kids what they want - a piece of my heart to chew, spit out or digest, & say goodnight stars, goodnight lake, goodnight sand...

turning forty

scraped clean like a cantaloup  
or a hollowed out pumpkin,  
juicy orange seeds scooped out  
& composted, or left to dry  
like a gourd,  
hard-edged spoon for instrument,  
a woman's womb  
& what happens when the dry seeds  
rattle in autumn.

I have a small ripe melon  
under my tummy, yet still  
hold on to my edge,  
the possibilities: to let it swell  
& grow, or cut it back to the bare roots & tubes,  
forty being some kind of watershed  
(my horoscope equates September  
with a ripe sexuality, abundance).

yet cords & muscles are slack, skin  
stretched & tired, no longer taut.  
perhaps it's just as well the seeds  
are laid out to dry, perhaps  
the squirrels are interested.



female parts

over café au lait & chocolate croissant

I name all the parts of my body & write  
a line for each:

from these breasts, milk from blood transformed,  
to my mouth-cunt birthing whole flesh bones in rupture &  
rapture, the body as flower/fruit, sustenance or poison,  
feet, loco-motion in dance & trance, drumming down  
the bones into world through pelvis, hips &  
knees aligned with earth, toes clutch the void  
on my back, monkeys: babies, spouse, mother & father  
(heavy as pianos on both shoulders), fingers arms  
& hands to withhold, shelter, slap, hurt, hug,  
hold the pen as it runs across the page,  
mouth, tongue its otherness, utterance, language rippling  
in the cheeks, bumping into teeth,  
skin maps the depth, dimension of touch & taboo, frisson  
raises goosebumps sitting on the seat of anger  
in the base chakra, grief & joy, churning & turning  
the stomach, sobs, like breathing water, air gulped  
into lungs, breath the connection  
whole  
in all our parts

Women are made taboo to women, not just sexually, but as comrades, cocreators, conspirators. In breaking this taboo, we are reuniting with our mothers; in reuniting with our mothers, we are breaking this taboo.

Adrienne Rich