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The madwoman and the muse: poetry and prose

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SECTION I: POETRY

The Muse
Even though summer is over, 
blow-up, multicolored 
beachballs are sold 
year round in K-Mart. 
Even though the Register 
leaves ink on my fingers, 
it tells me how the stars 
are properly aligned 
to bring love into my life. 
Even though my mother 
says Quaker Oatmeal must 
start a day, I can still have 
chocolate fudge Pop-Tarts and 
Diet Pepsi for breakfast. 
Even though the moon 
makes me bleed, I know 
its light will give field mice 
pleasant dreams of cheese 
and give the night's hand 
something to grasp. 
Even though in autumn, 
the Iowa trees are given 
nothing to put on, they do 
the fox trot with the wind 
without ever stopping to shiver. 
Even though my asparagus 
is painted with pesticides, 
I can get rid of them-- 
sort of--by scrubbing with 
lemon-fresh Joy and water. 
Even though a man isn't 
holding my hand, I can have 
babies whenever I choose 
just because I am a woman. 
Even though the Catholic 
church and I are fighting, 
baptizing myself in the rain 
will make me go to heaven.
And even though a hole has been eaten in the sky by hungry technology, the earth still breathes with me.
Just Visiting this Planet or Wearing Buttons is Not Enough

Think Globally Act Locally

Save the Coast! Support Ocean Sanctuary
Keep Your Laws Off My Body
Women Against Nukes
Choice
Free South Africa End Apartheid!

MEN CAN STOP RAPE
"Whatever you do may seem insignificant, but it is most important that you do it"--Gandhi

World Peace

Women Unite Take Back The Night
Boycott Coke!

I Helped Save the Whales
Peace is back by popular demand

Solar Energy is Harmful to Oil Companies and other living conglomerates
Greenpeace

HOMOPHOBIA IS A SOCIAL DISEASE

"You have touched a woman, you have struck a rock"
Peace and Justice

Child Care Not Warfare
Nuclear Free Seas
Silence is Complicity
Arms are for hugging
Give Back The Earth

"...as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world."--Virginia Woolf

Peace is disarming
Never another Hanger

Self Determination For All People
Lets give our children a world without war
Racism is a social disease

Rainbow Warrior
Anonymous was a woman
Better ACTIVE today than RADIOACTIVE tomorrow
Boycott Tuna!
WOMEN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY
ABOLISH APARTHEID SANCTIONS NOW
Housing is a right--not a privilege
69 cents
TEACH PEACE
Clean Water Now!
Save the People
Sometimes the Earth Gets Heavy Holding It Up Like That

Today I took back $5.55 cents
worth of cans back to the redemption
center took my separated garbage
--plastic, batteries, metal, glass, paper--
back to the recycling center
went to the supermarket
and didn't buy things with
excess packaging, didn't use
plastic bags for my fruits
and vegetables, just threw
them all in the cart together,
didn't buy any products
from Ralston Purina,
Coca-Cola, Nestle, or any
other non-politically correct item,
had them bag my groceries in the
cloth bags I brought and of course,
walked to all these places.
Then on the way home some guy
drove by me going about 75 and threw
a pop can and candy bar wrapper
(Coke and Nestle's Crunch)
out the window and all I saw
was his bumper sticker that said
"Greenpeace" and I just stood
there shaking my head and
staring at the wrapper blowing
down the road and the can rolling
to the side of the street
I needed to yell, or point it out to him
but by then he was long gone
spewing CO₂ into the sky
completely unaware of what he
had done, totally oblivious
to the fact that I picked up his garbage,
took it home like some great prize,
and sorted it into cans and paper.
Fine. I said it's fine. Everything here is fine.
We don't mind--it's so fine.

We can ALL choose
and we refuse
to eat tuna
use styrofoam
drink Coke
do crack
hate and
discriminate
to beat up others
for their mate
date rape
to buy Guess
grapes
Exxon
Dominoes
and Scrimshaw.
We all use paper
no plastic please
I get as much money
as a man
69 cents was never grand.
The night is safe
and women can walk alone
self-determination
we all condone.
Toxic waste
is not dumped
with haste
our waters are clean
and I mean,
nuclear free
those ships of the sea.
Peace in the Middle East
we helped out at least.
We all know
that power over
is different when you're under.
Mandela is out
people all doubt
that Quayle is capable
there is a staple
of food for the Third World
Donald Trump builds
public housing
and Bush doesn't lie.
Our lungs
are not a landfill anymore
all along the shore
there are no oil spills.
Dioxon poisoning
and ocean strip mining
are prevented.
Eating disorders
do not exist
we insist
there be no
agism
classism
sexism
racism.
We banned
photoplankton blooms
chlorofluorocarbons
petachlorophenol
racial slurs
and buying furs.
The ozone hole is gone
and acid rain
doesn't water the lawn.
We saved the dolphins
the Beluga whales
the roos
the sea turtles
the seals
the polar bear
the panda bear
the wolf
the crocodile
the spotted owl
the rainforest
the planet.
We saved the people.
And we ALL
are fine.
F - I - N - E.
Fine.
My Life in a Nut Shell

Crazy.
I think I am going
Crazy.
Too many people
telling me
I'm Crazy.
Make me believe
I'm Crazy.
People talking
about those
Crazy
poets.
Adrienne Rich
says
poems are like
dreams,
in them
you put
what you
don't know
you know.
So,
by writing
this poem,
I must not be
Crazy.
I mean,
if I say I'm
not
Crazy.
Unless,
of course,
she too,
is
Crazy
Amy Clampitt said she never wrote any poems until late in her life because she was never sure if what she had to say was right and I wondered when she knew it was finally right and how much she could have told us if someone had just told her she was right all along or if she knew she WAS right but no one would let her say it.

I think there is no woman writer who can say that she knew she was right all along because even if we started out thinking we were they tell us we're not and now we can learn a bit earlier than Amy but only if we are lucky enough to have someone tell us we really are right and I am telling you now WE ARE RIGHT.
The Original Sin

EVE WAS FRAMED
This Poem Is For The Heads Of Women
Who Have Lost Their Bodies.

Cut off her head,
paste her up
and sell it...
cologne, athletic wear, ice cream, jeans, and cars.
Forbid her to think--
no head,
no thought.
Enclose her
in a magazine ad.
Even though blood should be spurring
from her neck
and from the staples in her navel,
she feels no pain--
or thinks
she has no pain.
Without a head, how does she know
If this is
pain?
Decapitated women,
with bodies
a goddess never had,
selling--
out.
The mind,
of mind and body
is only body.
Is this really
what Darwin meant by
survival of the fittest?
Everyday I Walk by It* and Think of Her and the Misguided Angel

*The Left-Sided Angel statue
In front of the Iowa State University Library

She comes to me
with one eye
a purple fruit
of anger and
the other eye red
with blood veins
of pain and
tears of coping
rolling down her
swollen cheeks.
She pushes up
her sleeves
revealing the
former resting
places of
hot grease and
cigarette butts.
She says
her belly isn't blue
anymore but
when she sits
she winces.
Her legs show
the map of
her life lately
rivers of scars
connecting
continents
of scabs.
She says she
knows she has
a guardian angel
out there or
else she would
be dead now.
Wishing You Were in the Other Half
*Over 1/2 of the women on college campuses have eating disorders*

I. Driving by I see you,
as I wish you could see yourself.
Running on the side of the world,
the wind carrying you from behind.
You are emaciated, fragile.
Bones piercing through your black tights,
a Halloween skeleton with shoes--
New Balance 690's with reflector tape.
I wonder why your bones don't crack
each time your feet push the pavement.
You don't look up
or out
only down
at your own anorectic legs.

II. Pulling on her black
spandex tights over
fat thighs, gut hanging out
from over two hundred
calories in one day.
"Get it off me...
Get it off me".
Grabs her New Balance
690's, paid $72.92 so she
wouldn't hurt herself,
ties them tight,
packaging her feet.
Pounds her fist
into her stomach,
her life,
and GOES.
Feeling her muscles
scrape over bones,
"Get it off me...
Get it off me,"
she sings to the
rhythm of her pace.
If This Doesn't Make You Feel Uncomfortable, It Should.

I. Woman and self confidence; This is Not a Seminar

It is clear to me
that self confidence
sleeps in the minds
of white men.
I throw up my food
because it makes
me feel whole.
I do it
because
I
can.

II. One of Half Who Cannot Speak

I swallow
my thoughts
until my stomach
pulsates.
Voices inside,
call out.
I purge
the eaten words
drinking lots of liquids
to make them
come up and out
easily.
Ill. Yelling Into the Grand Canyon When I Am Still in Iowa

I did not
cup my hands
around my
mouth
and yell
my own name,
but
the echo
in the toilet
keeps calling
it out.
Lunch

"That imbruted soul and bloated body, with hardly any features left, a mass of horrible corruption now. That lump of living flesh was once a woman"
--Fraser Harrison

I fear
this is what they will write about me
years from now
or tomorrow.
I fear
they will write it
about my daughter.
For a woman, the soul IS the body,
and mine is mutilated--
blown up from the
inside out and the outside in.
Is it what I'm not telling you
or what you are telling me
that leaves me here
with my guts, visions, and creativity
held on a spoon
by someone or something
I cannot see.
I do not understand how
to make this hunger
which is against me,
turn into something
I will fight to have.
The Problem that Has No Name, Now Has a Name, But the Name Is Not Really the Name, Because It Still Really Has No Name
(Betty Friedan Will Understand.)

What is this so deep inside all these women that makes us reach so deep inside our own throats searching to pull out what makes us ache? If we could we'd submerge ourselves in ourselves, down through our esophagus, beyond our hearts into our stomach where we could just pull it out. But instead we gag and can't get beyond the back of our throats, as they keep telling us it's not really there, it's not really there. And we'll keep going on like this trying to get it out --the only way we know how-- until they believe what we keep telling them, It Is There.
You steal
all the stars
while our eyes are
blinded by the tolerance we
grew. We knew the moon
was holding our existence.
Its essence recharges our
hopes of new mornings
and old dreams. The moon
sings to blossoms of wormy
apples, telling us appearance
means nothing to the tastes
of desire. The moon smiles
at magic crystals hidden in
womyn's eyes. The moon shares
its light with the dreams of small
girls sleeping under darkness.
The moon giggles the moment
wet cement sucks an imprint
of a womyn's name, an almost
permanent identity in this world.
The moon's stained glass ideas
are cooked in copper. Creative
energy is frozen in rules made
by the ones with stars in
their pockets. The moon is
ours. You can have the stars
that shoot from the implanted
clouds at dusk. The moon
can never be held in hands
as small and greedy
as yours.
The View From Under The Street or
After a Meeting With the Dean
—for the Women’s Studies Committee

It’s always us,
there,
at the bottom
pushing out
a new blade of grass,
a violet
an earthworm—
providing just enough
growth,
to let them know
it is time to
spread the fertilizer,
again.
We sigh
as we dig our way back
from the China
they promised us.
Covered with the
black earth,
we are more determined
than ever
to prove that
their asphalt
can never be permanent
in this world
because
it is that
which is underneath,
which keeps us all
alive.
What They Know About the Darkness

Everyday miners
left the light of day
to work in unknown darkness
taking with them
a yellow canary
in a simple wire cage.
They mined until
her song was suffocated
by gases of the mine.

Everynight when I
am about to fall
between the moment
of waking and dreaming,
knowing and ignoring,
yellow canaries fly under my eyelids
startling me back,
making me fall ten stories
without leaving my bed.
Are You Really You--I mean REALLY?

She was she
he was he
and now
he and she
can just be.
Cause I am I
me is me
don't you see
where we be?
Deedle dee
doodle da,
what you see
is just me.
Defined
provided
delighted
excited--
all the time
inside
outside
from over there
from under here
always
always
always
me.
My Brother and I Can Spend Forever Doing Nothing

We discovered
the rain is more beautiful
if Father just washed the car.
I laugh as your
homemade dimple
appears and
I promise I won't mess up
your baseball cards.

We agree we must be
the coolest people
alive
then implant ourselves
in the concrete curb as
the wet world goes by on
a merry-go-round.

Rain dots our exclusive vision
as we talk of
chocolate ice cream
Allen Ginsberg and
the Mets
in one breath.

We dance a polka
in the puddles,
sing an Irish drinking song,
and fling mud to the muses,
teleordizing
our white T-shirts.

I tell you the
poem I wrote and
you tell me
the painting you made.
Rain streaks the canvas sky
and in the frame
there is only us.
What I Anticipate With the Moon
Is When Dreams Move to Reality So Smoothly.

The moon in crescent drifts across afternoon
daylight searching for the place in darkness
she knows will welcome her,
where dusk takes its final breath in
and exhales constellations
surrounding her in the familiar of evening,
letting her surface drink whatever
leftover light she may find.

I wander through days gluttonous,
starving to slip out of obligations
and into the resonance of dreams.
Late afternoon naps with him
are what I do best--going in with light,
my head on the slope of his chest,
my hands holding the thick of his shoulder;
it has become as easy as coming out in dark,
when I wake with his lips
on the back of my neck and
his hand in the curve of my hip.
The Repercussions of Crickets and Love

I feel your warm
breath on my neck
chest sticking to
my back one
hand on the
soft of my belly
and the other
lost in my wild
hair. In the
moonlight we
cannot see, there
are no crickets
calling to one
another. I tell
you about my
childhood in Iowa--
pulling on my boots
and screaming,
my mother running
to the back porch
stroking my hair,
wiping the smashed
cricket from my sock
and the tears from
my eyes, warning me
to always shake
my boots before I
put them on--
Laughing, you try
to imagine me
as a child, and tell
me not to worry
because there are
no crickets in Alaska.
You fidget and roll
over on to your back,
laying wide open
waiting for me

to fit my body
to yours. My head
fits on your chest
arms slide around
you knees drawn
up against your legs
toes holding tight
to your ankles.
I lean up and take
your breath into
my mouth and
for a moment
there are no lines
of space or spheres
of flesh and we
cannot tell where
one body ends
and the other begins.
You finally drift off
to sleep and I try
to imagine the sound
of crickets singing
but can’t. Instead,
I think about
how near the
end of summer
is and how I will
have to walk away,
how I will have
to find somewhere
to go back to.
September evening in Iowa &

jazz is making love
to the stars,
each note's tongue
tasting the slope
of the neck, the
slant of the tips, the
slick of the lips, the
shape of the hips, the
fingers of song slide
over a sweet world
of flesh like water,
rolling waves of pleasure
lingering in bellies,
down thighs,
& up spines,
bodies curl
& undulate,
dissolving in dreams
& melting in moonlight.
A saxophone's voice
blows blues to a lover
which is about to cast
itself on me, with its
eyes closed
& mine open wide
the star leaps,
floating on a melody
to the earth,
to the ground,
to the grass,
where I am
waiting,
holding the night,
the moonlight,
the jazz,
& the wish
for you to be
this star.