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Eclectica

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Eclectica

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts
Creative Writing

by

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B.A. English, California State University, Chico, 2001
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To my mom,
my muse. I love you.

For Ilene. Love always.

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Vita

Preface

Poets have to dream, and dreaming in America is no cinch.

---Saul Bellow

Dreams. We all have them. Some modest, some grandiose. I dreamed when I was young of making my mark as a renowned dramatic actress, a la Meryl Streep. I wrote poems as a means of self-reflection and catharsis but held them close to me, not wanting to share, not needing to; the act of creation was enough. At this point in my life, I did not seriously consider what it meant to be a poet; I simply read poetry as voraciously as I read every other genre. I could not get enough words and that still remains true.

However, I now see that poems are in some way written dreams expressing a flash or moment of emotion captured by the poet and preserved on the page. We are conveying our dreams, thoughts and desires in a language crafted in a manner which we feel best expresses them. Sometimes the poet is writing about dreams existing in a sleep-state but often we are talking about the kinds of dreams that Bellow is referring to, hopes for future accomplishments or changes that will enhance ours and other's lives. My own verse occasionally exists in a dream-state like you see in "You Walked In" but can also be highly socio-political, as in "Dear Federico" and many others.

Twentieth century poet, Langston Hughes's poem, "A Dream Deferred" (also entitled "Harlem") is an excellent example of a work that blends the dream and the social poem together to issue a strong warning to those who suppress their dreams and ambitions. Here, the writer is definitely not speaking of the sort of dreams one has while sleeping but the kind that shape one's goals and desires. Hughes does not write about the joy of the dream accomplished but instead questions what happens when one is not able to achieve his or her aspirations. He uses strong

words and phrases such as “dry up,” “fester,” “stink,” “crust and sugar over,” “sags,” “heavy” and “explode,” to ask what happens to an unrealized dream and gives the reader the feeling that such dreams end as dangerous or broken things. Employing numerous similes, including “like a raisin in the sun,” “like a sore,” “like rotten meat,” “like a syrupy sweet,” and “like a heavy load,” Hughes delivers a social message by implying that dreams or aspirations placed on hold, for whatever reason, can dry up and harden, fester and then eat way at us, or spoil until they eventually either are broken down by the “heavy load” placed on us or, as the metaphor that ends the poems says, “explode.” Either way is disastrous to the dream and the dreamer, although that horror is never stated by the poet but left for us to discover. I appreciate what Hughes does here to show the cost social, racial, sexual, or any other kind of oppression can take on a life.

I spent much time immersed in my own dream-world as a child. I do not mean daydreaming but actively contemplating what my future held and what I would do to affect change in the world. Many of these ideas came from books, and my extensive reading naturally progressed into my writing on my own. I also wrote to escape from stress brought on by taunting from peers, as well as the fact that I loved arranging words in various ways, loved playing with sounds, line lengths, word order, anything that would test my verbal acuity. I think these are the reasons why, although I played with short stories and even made a sad attempt to write a play or two, poetry became the form I used most often for self-expression. At first I kept my poems completely private, embarrassed to show anyone, as they felt too personal. Their subject matter consisted of such things as being upset with my parents, not fitting in with peers, dreams of the future, the love I felt for my family and pets, typical juvenile topics that acted as a way to deal with emotions.

But as I aged, I began to show a few select people my work. Among those whom I shared my poems with were my mother, a cherished teacher, and an occasional friend who I thought might appreciate or understand. But still I did not feel any great desire to share my work as it was for me. I felt that this act might kill my ability to create. However, somewhere around my mid-teens something shifted and the personal became more socio-political. My writing began evolving into something less about me and more on broader subjects. I became interested in “the other,” quickly noticing that that my work became more expansive, therefore less easy to categorize. This shift coincided with my growing interest in politics.

I can remember the first political poem that grabbed my attention: Adrienne Rich’s “For a Sister.” I was seventeen and writing a poem analysis for a high school English class. This poem on my teacher’s list moved me deeply, as it had no romance, no ethereal dream state (although I will argue that Rich creates her own dark dream by envisioning what Gorbanevskaya endured), no nature, just cold reality and loss; I loved it. It seemed more human than most poems I had read (and enjoyed) over the years. Here was a woman, poet Natalya Gorbanevskaya, ripped from her home and incarcerated simply for existing in the wrong place at the wrong time: “They searched you for contraband, they made their notations./ A look of intelligence could get you twenty years./ Better to trace nonexistent circles with your finger,/ try to imitate the smile of the permanently dulled.” The Gorbanevskaya in Rich’s poem learned how to read her captors and won her freedom not with further dissent but by pretending to dull down to a controllable level. She gave them what they wanted at that moment of imprisonment in exchange for her freedom later. She does not simply dream of freedom but covertly pursues it, succeeding in the end. Unlike the unnamed dream in Hughes’s poem and the crushed dreams in my poem, “Dear Mr.

President,” there is not such a dark conclusion to Gorbanevskaya’s story, not matter how grim it seems at the start.

After Rich, I was introduced to Anna Akmatova, Osip Mandelstam, W.B. Yeats, Randall Jarrell, Allen Ginsberg and the Beat poets. Later I found more current influences such as Sherman Alexie, one of my favorite poets, living or dead; Janice Mirikitani, the Japanese-American poet and activist and Palestinian poet, activist and professor, Nidda Khoury to whom the poem “Dear Nidaa” is written. Although separated by time, culture, and life experience each of these poets speaks to me at a visceral level. I believe it is because they are all blunt, honest writers who speak the truth about the world they exist in while desperately attempting to maintain a bit of wonder and hope.

One of the first poems in my collection also speaks of a poet being incarcerated because of his politics, but for him it does not end well. “Dear Federico” pays homage to the early twentieth century poet, Federico García Lorca, who was incarcerated and executed by Franco’s regime for his outspoken political views and homosexual lifestyle. Beside my own words, I insert Lorca’s poetry: “Caballito negro./ Dónde llevas tu jinte muerto?” (“Little black horse./ Where are you taking your dead rider?”). Using foreign words and/or phrases not only adds a second tone to the poem but in this case brings Lorca into the work with his own words, which were often about death and betrayal; eerily fitting considering his end. With this poem of my own, inspired by Lorca’s, I hope to make the reader remember what happened to this gentle soul because of his beliefs, words and politics, and if by chance he or she is hearing his name for the first time, I want to inspire the reader to go out to discover the words and life of this bright light extinguished too soon, and too violently.

A desire to speak out about social issues, coupled with an intense interest in stretching my imagination to create different perspectives on my thoughts helps to define my current writing. When I began considering how to organize the poems presented here, I noticed that while some fell into natural sections others were quite diverse in subject and tone and this presented a challenge as to how to reconcile them as a complete body of work under one title. In the end, I chose to call this collection *Eclectica* as it is a compilation of statements and thoughts which attempt to bring awareness to the reader. I write poems about a myriad of subjects, ideas, fantasies, beliefs and people that resonate personally with who I am and what I think. I have many ideas about subjects whom I would like to address beyond the ones included here. I am currently working on a poem to be called “Dear Leonard,” concerned with and dedicated to the American Indian activist, poet and political prisoner, Leonard Peltier who has been incarcerated for 37 years, based on shaky evidence concerning illegal law practices and false witness testimony. Also, I am writing a poem written from her point-of-view of Jane Fonda’s mother, Frances, and centered around her brutal suicide. I have picked these subjects because their tragic stories -- while well-known but somewhat removed and marginalized, one for bureaucratic reasons, the other for very personal ones -- make me want to devise my own interpretation of their narratives.

Besides famous or infamous persons, I enjoy writing about those who are ordinary, because while there is much penned about the powerful or notorious, no one, except maybe a few close friends or family members, remembers the ordinary even if they were in some ways extraordinary. So for instance, I write about a long-buried Mexican girl in “Ignacia,” and my friend, Ilene, is the subject of a poem here aptly entitled, “Ilene,” where I ask the question: “Who would have thought such a good Jewish girl/ would end up on her knees in the mud?” Poems

about regular people in irregular situations captivate me, and I want in an artful, even lovely way to pay homage to those who are forgotten or overlooked. I believe that recognizing the unrecognized provides opportunities to take a fresh, unconventional look at subjects.

I like making statements about relationships, situations and behaviors that I observe in society and hope that the ideas expressed make a reader stop and question her or his own beliefs and feelings. I do not want to force my own opinions nor insist that my view is the right one, but I do hope to inspire those who read my work to look at things from a different perspective. Bellow's contention that "poets have to dream" resonates with me as it applies to my own dreams, unfulfilled and realized. In many cases, it seems as if nepotism has replaced conviction and talent in our modern world. And dreaming in the twenty-first century has been made difficult by the cynicism and apathy found all around us almost daily. I hope to provide a counterbalance by provoking critical thinking with my poems.

In terms of form, I primarily write poems in free-verse as I feel it best allows me to express my eclectic thoughts without constraint. There are no poems composed in strictly formal verse or meter here. However, I do play with sound, syllabics and rhyme in many of the poems and feel that experimenting with more structured forms is certainly something I would like to pursue with future writing. I have a natural ability to recognize sound patterns and rhythm in language that comes out in my writing and I feel that working to harness this aptitude would enhance and strengthen my verse.

One thing that stays consistent with my writing is that I frequently employ dark humor subtly so that one might not be certain if I am trying to be funny or a deeper social message lies beneath the surface. I am actually quite purposefully doing both so that the humor will assuage the bite from what I am trying to say. I am a firm believer that laughter can defuse many

situations, so my using humor, albeit sometimes dark humor, is a way to make a statement without simply being harsh or aggressive. I suppose in the tradition of Horace's "Ars Poetica" I like to entertain as well as educate.

My hope for this collection is that it delivers laughter, provokes thought and causes the reader to pause for reflection on society and what it is to be human. I may not have become an award winning dramatic actress but I have tried my best to craft poetry that is genuine and grounded in reality, as I want readers to be able to connect to my work and be inspired to consider what their own dreams are. I will end with the simple yet profound words of the fiction writer, Jess Walters, from his novel *The Financial Lives of the Poets*: "Hell, we don't need bailouts, rescue packages and public works. We need more poets." I concur; we definitely need more poets.

One

A letter does not blush.

Marcus Tullius Cicero

It does me good to write a letter which is not a response to a demand, a gratuitous letter, so to speak, which has accumulated in me like the waters of a reservoir.

Henry Miller

Lonely days are gone, I'm coming home.
My baby wrote me a letter.

The Box Tops

Dear Mr. President

Crimson dashes paint the camel-sand,
bake in the silent oven.
This is your freedom.

A young boy shrieks as mortars claim his mother,
her face blooming into a frantic flower.
This is your freedom.

A young girl, sold for a carton of Camels,
cowers in a dark corner.
The stench of whiskey and cigarette smoke
hangs heavy in the air.
Thirteen, thrown away.
This is your freedom.

A young soldier chases his American Dream.
For him it was a game, green plastic army men
marching across the kitchen floor,
always able to be set right again.

This is no game and his leg cannot be set right,
nor even found, for it is now
part of the camel-sand, the silent oven.

This is your freedom.

Dear Federico

By the time I write this
you will be gone.

You departed at dawn
after digging all night
your own grave
in an olive grove,
for the crimes
of having a mind
and loving men.

Caballito negro.
Dónde llevas tu jinete muerto?

Did your death free you
from the bigotry,
the anti-Andalusian?
Has Whitman let you stroke
his beard of butterflies?
To hear your “mourning
orange tree voice”
once again, did Neruda weep?

“Gypsy-loving maricon!” they raged.
“Maricon gitano amante!”

Your execution,
an unpardonable crime
of Franco, of fascism.

You, the poet, a pawn
in your father’s politics.

Dear John (Keats),

I want to start by saying,
“It’s not you; it’s me.”
I love you, especially
“Ode on a Grecian Urn”,
and “On Sitting Down to Read
King Lear Once Again”
always makes me yearn.
Which brings me to the problem: Shakespeare.

As much as I revere your verse,
am enchanted by your posh pentameter,
I still can’t get the Bard out of my head.
In fairness, had it not been for tb
and the unfortunate lack of antibiotics
you would have likely lived
well beyond twenty-six.

You’ll go on, John...no, really...
canonized. Immortalized.
Well, so has he, but no matter.
After hearing about your first folio
complete with marginal notes,
I think we understand each other.

You’ll always have a special place in my head
along with Will, Charles, Edgar,
Federico, Pablo, Sherman...

Most affectionately,

M.

Dear Blago

I just wanted to see how things are going with you.
Sorry you'll miss Comic-Con this year, or
for the next fourteen years, to be exact, but with time off
for good behavior, maybe seven, eight, nine? Sorry.
"Con" is probably the last word you want to hear.

When they sentenced you on federal corruption charges
you quoted Kipling: "If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
and treat those two imposters just the same."
Which do you think has made you the better man?
Triumph or disaster?

Charged with 23 counts, an eclectic potpourri of crimes;
conspiracy to commit mail fraud,
attempted extortion,
soliciting bribes,
conspiracy to commit wire fraud,
corruption, corruption, corruption,
redemption? redemption ? redemption?

You reported to prison on 3/15 to the town
with Columbine's ghost still haunting it.
The Ides of March never had such meaning
and Caesar's 23 wounds never felt so personal.

Is it pleasant in your Colorado country club prison?
Or are you bored with only that big, arrogant brain of yours
in the company of all those blasé businessmen?
Are you already imagining your reinvention?

Maybe another reality show?

Blago Lets Go?

Blago Disbarred?

After all, now living behind bars
you've been barred from holding office
in Illinois and disbarred by the same state.

Or maybe you'll simply take Patti's tired hand
and disappear.

Dear Ladies of the Wild Orchid

Writhing, gyrating, sighing,
always rating the men
with the money,
the boys with the bills,
the dudes with sweet honey
who will pay for the thrills
of your firm ass
making a double pass in their faces.

But elsewhere
you're the quiet girl
who sits in science
or shows prospective clients
new homes for which they can't
secure a loan.
So you supplement your needs
and in some cases greed
with a little bump and grind. This is fine,

as long as you don't mind
that you're no Gypsy Rose Lee,
and shouldn't hope to be
for the days of burlesque
we've already seen.
Regardless of Cher or Christina
the reality is much, much meaner.

You'll pay for the privilege
of showing your tits.
No matter how you spin it,
it ends up the pits.
Wicked heels, dirty bills,
some awful men, society says
it's a horrible sin.

Tawdry clothes, fishnet hose,
smoke, sweat, bad black light.
Well, good luck, my dears,
and I bid you good night.

Dear Lindsay

Let me start by getting this
off my chest. I pity you.
Sad as a clubbed seal cub.

Lindsay. La Lohan. Lins. Li Lo.
Whatever you're calling yourself
this week, I suppose, so not to face
what they have made you.
With so many of you,
who could find the time?

Marilyn Monroe? *Please.*
Why do sad girls like you always think they're her?
She is still mesmerizing (shining in HD);
You're a Disney disaster.
She, a lush size 14, all hills and valleys,
holding her must have been like embracing spring.
You, a skeletal size 0, all ruts and clear cuts,
as inviting to hug as a hanger.
She, box office divinity; you, box office poison.

Why don't you see yourself as Dana Plato,
also burned out too soon
and closer to your age, dear Lindsay?
Why not Dana?
Not as romantic?
Lacking loveliness?
Tragic without the "tragedy"?
Too sordid, too porno,
for the fantasy self you've selected?

Well, dead is dead, honey,
nothing beautiful about it.

Dear Betsey Johnson Dress

When I first laid eyes
on you, you shone with
the color of warm plums.
Silvery velvet perfection,
your glass beads dazzling
in amethyst rows, teasing
my calves. And yet even then
you belonged to another.

She didn't deserve you,
didn't love you as I did.
Once I found you tossed
on the wet, dusty bathroom floor,
another time I rescued you
from a watery death
in the washer. You,
with your "Dry Clean Only"
warning, me mourning
you might end up like
the white Versace pants
she went mud bogging in
last Monday, when 6
Lemon Drops helped her hit
the ground outside Riley's
in the rain. I tried
to liberate you, offered
hard cash, other beloved clothes,
my Chanel top,
but she refused to part
with you, a guilt gift
from a crazy ex.

Two years later,
when we cleaned out
her mother's garage,
the cats scattered, wild
and hissing, the smell
of ammonia heavy
in their wake. Six feral
felines living there,
living with you, Dear Betsey.

After hours of binging
on boxes of tops,

flip-flops, skirts, shirts,
mismatched shoes, old
bottles of booze, I opened
the flaps of a urine-soaked box
to find you, your plum velvetiness
turned a diluted yellow-grey,
splotched and rusted
like an old truck abandoned
in a field, disintegrating,
foul and befouled,
the scent of cat flourishing
in your alluring folds.

Sadly, for you, no
salvation. No
New Year's Eve soiree,
no "Dry Clean Only" solution
but the bottom of a tall
kitchen trash bag, a few words,
a few tears, then this memory
of you, your color of warm plums.

Two

The secret to Humor is surprise.

Aristotle

Humor is a serious thing. I like to think of it as one of our greatest earliest natural resources, which must be preserved at all cost.

James Thurber

Write a Poem about Me

I want someone to write
a poem about me,
one where I'm a beautiful tree.

I want someone to write
a poem about me,
in any form of verse they please.

If you write a villanelle:
just address it to Mel.
If you compose an English sonnet,
please make sure my name is on it.

And when you pen a pantoum,
just remember to leave room
for my memorable name.
No, I'm really not insane,

I just positively, absolutely, certainly,
yearningly, want someone to write
a poem about me.

Circling to Land

Your son is turning twelve,
so doesn't still require
for you to comb his hair
or hold his hand in choir.

I promise he won't run away,
escape or disappear.
Leave him, since, as you know,
he doesn't want you there,

correcting his homework,
or straightening his clothes,
screaming "My God, you're ill!"
each time he wipes his nose.

Copters belong in the Corps,
so, please let's leave them there.
You *really* need to get a life,
go volunteer for CARE.

I Like My Verse Terse

I like my verse terse,
I like my men smart,
I like my coffee black,
I'm not fond of modern art.

I like my humor dark,
I like my winter white,
I like my wine red,
I'm not fond of a fight.

I like my steak rare,
I like my dogs tiny,
I like my friends funny,
I like my apples shiny.

To A (Buick) Skylark

after Percy Shelley's "To a Skylark"

Frail are you, sad spirit!
Car you never were.
By exit eight or near it,
Out poured all your oil
In prolific puddles,
As I rammed a Dodge Dart.
Fire! Oh help, fire,
From the car did pour,
The conditions dire;
The deep blue you were
Is not blue anymore,
As all around you sirens sing.

The gold fire's frightening.
From it now we all run,
The flames look like lightening,
As bright as the sun;
Expiring Skylark---your time is ever done.

The Ballad of the Drunk Lady

A FRAGMENT

after Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Ballad of the Dark Ladie"

Beneath the trees of Bidwell Park,
Where cigarette smoke fills the air,
The garbage scattered 'cross the lot
With homeless living there!

Slumped sideways on the bench she leans,
The drunk lady in ceaseless pain;
The heaving bile in her throat,
Rises, swells, falls again.

Three times she sends her best friend Paige
To find the car so she might rest,
But as she lies back in a haze
A stranger grabs her breast.

She opens up one drunken eye,
And prays this spinning goes away,
Trying to count how many beers
Put her in this bad way?

A noise disturbs her sleep. She looks.
Is it her Paige returning now?
"It's he! It's my betrothed Knight!
Lance Falkland, you're here now."

She jumps to grab him round the neck,
Reeking of nicotine and fear,
She swears that they will never part,
Then vomits in his beer.

The Garden

You poured poison
on the garden
and really fucked up
the Forget-Me-Nots.

Now the Bleeding Hearts
can't be cauterized
and the Impatients
have PTSD.

Three

He who has overcome his fears will be truly free.

Aristotle

Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.

Oscar Wilde

A Loss of Heart

She left her heart
at the pawn shop.

When she went
to reclaim it she
looked and looked
but couldn't find
the claim stub anywhere.

Fear

Swarms
of hornets
hover over
my self-doubt,

buzzing, biting
and stinging
my insecurities

until eventually
they retreat
yet wait in

the corner of
“You can’t do
anything
right!”and
“What if you tried?”

Dusk

Dark, debauched,
aspirating on ennui,
the common man
streaks across a maroon-gentled sky.

Sparse, unrequited,
whenever emptiness
floods my lilac soul
I suffocate on apathy.

I bellow.

Once You Were Poppies

Once you were poppies, lovely, orange, bright.
Now intravenous death sought by junkies in the night.

Lines on Lines

I

The parking meters are tri-colored lollipops
extending from a great gray mouth.

II

The tree limbs, brittle skeletons,
barren but for hairy tufts of yellow leaves,
are randomly strewn about.

III

Deep in November
the back of her head at mid-
night, a waterfall.

IV

Spindly and surprised,
The colt's legs leap like exclamation marks!

V

A great gray ocean, the sidewalk
sweeps us from the past
towards the future.

VI

The minute hand is quicksand
slowly pulling us under,
its barbed hook ripping our fragile throats.

Convictions of My Verse

Mesmerized by Christmas lights
brightening the dingy barroom,
smelling of stale sweat,
cheap cigarettes and sadness,
they suck down poison to purge
their emptiness and failures.

Rows of cumulus clouds
circle the empty glass,
a fading reminder
of ale and heartache.

“Why do you come here to write?”
asks Joyce who chose poverty
and preservation over her sentence
of twenty-five to life. No matter
how nice the jewelry was,
it didn’t cover his cruelty.

“Why?” Perhaps I’m inspired
by despair, fueled by futility.
Possibly her numbness
distills my fragmented
musings, allowing me
to preach to the page.
Also, no one bothers
me here so I am free
to wander through words,
to discover---

maples mamboing
and brazen birches
swaying to nature’s
eclectic orchestra---
crickets, leaves, streams
and the diaphanous wind.

An arsenic lobster
plummeting from the sky,
falling upon my head.
Possible? Ask Lorca.

A field filled with
enchanted flowers,

leaving visitors
wandering in agonizing
circles, trying to distinguish
their elusive and overwhelming
scent from that of star jasmine
and citrus fruit traveling on the brisk
wind from a grove nearby.

That the English novelist,
William Hale White,
in a piece of prose
dated from 1881,
stated that "God
was brought from
that heaven of the books
and dwelt on the downs
the far-away distances,
and in every cloud-shadow
which wandered across the valley.
Wordsworth did for me
what every religious reformer
has done---He recreated
my Supreme Divinity."

And that no piece of writing
will have the same impact
twice, as we are never
the same person again.

You Walked In

to a melting room,
music dying, peculiar
people animated
by dancing tattoos
on porcelain skin.

One voice,
one smile,
could have silenced
your suicide, your

urge to leave
this place
where you thought

the music would never end.

Four

For most of history, anonymous was a woman.

Virginia Woolf

Ladies who play with fire must remember that smoke gets in their eyes.

Mae West

A “living poem” had always been the words that came to mind when he tried to describe her to others.

Nicholas Sparks

Ignacia

By the time burial taxes,
not your screams,
returned you
to the surface
decades too late,
your white dress
had jaundiced, your heart
had turned to sandstone,
your parchment skin
the color of fouled butter.

When your heart
started pumping again
underground, locked in
your Holm Oak box,
did you howl
into the silence?

When you understood,
did you scream sacrilege,
denouncing a God so perverse?
Beg *Dios* for a way free of your fate?
Or did you scream for your mother?

Enterrado vivo in your
demure white cotton dress
with the embroidered collar,
your black hair in braids.

Face down, biting your own arm,
mouth full of blood, a second time
you succumbed, with none there
this time to sing your *canto muerte*,

none but the dirt.

Gitana

After Federico Garcia Lorca

Verde te quiero verde.

Writhing wantonly while
caressing the curves
of the wind,
she wails in ecstasy,
willing nature
fused with flesh.

As shadows encircle
her waist, haughty night
harbors her
in her heavy bosom,
with a harlot's heart.
Night, her lover,
hails mahogany kisses,
husky sighs.

Beneath a gypsy moon
she sways to midnight
melodies, soothed
by the serenade
that plays
round and round,
entrapping her in rapture.

Verde te quiero verde.

How I long to feel
your lascivious limbs
winding round
my yielding skin,
as treacherously we tango
to the light of La Luna Gitana.

For Nidaa

She said her prayers in shadows
while her spirit swam in the shallows.

Ignited by insults and screams,
her anger climbed like vines through her veins.

She spoke words of freedom,
while her ghost circled the shore.

Beautiful Girl from Edinburgh

The world once knew you as Leda,
lovely Spartan dame.
Now you answer to Rachel,
but the song remains the same.

Deception, betrayal,
your words as well.
Seduced with hope,
drowned in thick liquor,
awaking in hell.

You cannot remember
brightness, only pain,
cannot recall the sun
but drown daily in the rain.

Circling the 10-Gallon

*Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming.
Finding Nemo*

Freak. Nerd. Geek. Weirdo. Dweeb.
Too skinny. Too loud. Too smart. Too spoiled.
The names of childhood, bleach-bright, beach-bright:
thanks to “clever” classmates, they never leave her

like the images she holds of them, common goldfish,
circling the 10-gallon, back and forth, back and forth,
swimming and eating in their own excrement, constantly
hungry for more, willing to eat themselves to death.
They have never left her but swim back and forth
as she struggles to keep from drowning.

As a grown woman she has circled the earth, scaled the world,
but from the frost of Finland to the heat of Gilbert, Arizona,
and even that short summer in Fishkill, she has always
kept her tanks brimming with goldfish.

Ilene

As a girl, she wished for a silent house,
no more punches, pulled-out hair.
Envyng Sleeping Beauty,
She too wanted to sleep her youth away.

Running from her violent mother,
her ghost of a father and herself,
in the summer of 1968 she hitchhiked
from the South Bronx to San Francisco

to pot, pills, too many men,
too many women, anonymous sweat,
Jimmy, Janis, too much noise,
yet the Bronx wouldn't leave her brain.

An 18-wheeler ride from Northern California
to Woodstock, New York in 1969:
Who'd have thought such a good Jewish girl
would end up on her knees in the mud?

London, 1971. Directions to the West End
began the end for Ilene. She met Peter.
So clever. So handsome. So married.
Silent nights waiting for his calls.

Lust filled evenings fogged
by strong weed, burning whiskey,
and numbing guilt. He went home
to his wife. She went home to San Francisco.

Venice, 1975. Leaving her Italian lover,
she called Peter after three years of silence.
He said, *Meet me in Bali, baby.*
She left the next day.

He brought himself, a backpack
and after a brief stop introduced Ilene
to "the love of her life," not another man,
but heroin, bringing a blush to her face.

As Peter plunged the needle
into her willing vein, she went numb.
No more pain. No more feeling.
Only poppy-induced pleasure.

San Francisco, 1975-1987. Track mark
scars hidden under long sleeves. Not one
day in a decade without metal in her veins,
not one day of feeling. The elation of the numb.

San Francisco, 1987. Stomach pains. Hair loss.
Insomnia. Hepatitis C. The anesthesia wears off,
the silence is suffocating. Methadone.

Grass Valley, 2009. Twenty-two years clean.
A velvet wearing sassy senior with two pugs
and a pretty cottage. Hepatitis C. Nowhere
to hide from the betrayal of her body.

San Francisco, 2012. Ninety pounds
of ravaged flesh. Abdomen extended
like a bullfrog's. Hair falling out.
Time ran out. Hepatitis C.

Vita

The author lives in Grass Valley, a small town located in the historic gold country of Northern California. She is a native Californian going back five generations on her father's side. She received her Bachelor's Degree in English from California State University, Chico, in 2001. She entered the MFA in Creative Writing at University of New Orleans in Spring of 2011. During the program she attended three study abroad summer programs in Edinburgh, Scotland, The Ezra Pound Center for Literature in Brunnenberg Castle (Merano, Italy), and Cork, Ireland.