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## Votary

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Votary

A thesis

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

Masters of Fine Arts in  
Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts  
Creative Writing: Poetry

by

Mary Bamburg

B.A. Louisiana State University, 2009

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## Preface

Poetry's very name connects it to an act of creation. The word "poetry" comes from the Greek root "poiesis," which means "to make." Language in many religions is the fundamental act of creation – the Word that spoke the world into existence. To speak, or to write, is to create. Language is, in many ways, what makes us human rather than simply animals, what takes us from countless disparate points of existence and binds us together, interdependent. And language distilled and refined, language at its purest, is poetry. LSU professor Robin Roberts once told me that poetry is the "neutron star of literature," that it compresses meaning and image into the smallest space possible. Every written genre contains great writers. Poetry is the genre to which I've committed myself because I find it the most beautiful, shining like a neutron star, every word in precisely the right place to convey as much meaning as possible with nothing extraneous allowed.

The poems in this collection draw inspiration from my lifelong love affair with Greek mythology which I began reading in my elementary school library before I was ten. I have been able to tell the myths to my sisters and friends, have heard thunder and thought of Zeus, seen sunsets and thought of Apollo's chariot and poor stupid Phaeton, since I was about eight years old. These myths, the stories and the characters in them, have worn tracks in my mind and language, shaped my worldview and my writing. I read the stories as stories, with good guys and bad guys. I also memorized them, drew family trees, tried to connect all the pieces.

I think Greek mythology's place in my heart was cemented when I realized that reading was what I loved most in the world. Western literature is absolutely full of allusions to Greek mythology; once I began reading beyond the "early readers" section of my elementary school's library, I ran into the myths I loved everywhere. The more I read, the more I saw the myths unfold. By the time I was in middle school, allusions to these myths or deities filled me with warm familiarity, like encountering an old friend or hearing someone speak a private language. Vacations to the beach left me in awe of Poseidon's power; studying for tests had me murmuring Athena's name. Greek mythology permeated the world around me the same way that, for instance, colors do.

Given my lifelong interest in Greek mythology, it's probably no surprise that I read and

researched Greek poetry, as well. What I've found over the years is that poetry was a divine experience in ancient Greece (as in other cultures, but I'll limit my discussion here to Greece); it was a bridge between mortals and gods. USC classics professor William Thalmann, in *Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Epic Poetry*, describes the Greek conception of poetry as requiring both a human component and a divine: human beings could and did learn the craft of poetry, but the Muses provided them with the knowledge and inspiration required to bridge mortal understanding and the gods' motives. Of course, form and content are not independent, but the insight provided by the Muses was unattainable without their direct intervention. Framing and presenting that insight, though, was the responsibility of the poet, who was expected to be well-versed in the conventions of his or her art. As Thalmann phrases it, "Gods, after all, would hardly favor with their gifts mortals who were not by nature worthy of them and able to receive them." Thus, the content of ancient Greek poetry – the myths that return, again and again, in my poems – is not independent of the forms and conventions of Greek poetry. It matters that these myths were told in verse. For the ancient Greeks, there was no other way to tell them. I like to think that my writing follows the spirit of this tradition.

Greek mythology verges on pantheism, as it imbues much (but not all) of nature and life with sacred significance. A river might be a nymph's home; intellectual pursuits are not only curiosity but are Athena's province. Greek poetry is inherently tied to the divine – through the Muses' inspiration if nothing else – and through Greek mythology, everything in my life acquired a similar tinge of the sacred.

The sense of weight imparted to everything is critical to my sense of poetry. The wonder and inspiration that impels my poetry comes from precisely this sense of significance: that every given piece of my life – the weather, a book, a flower, a mother, a lover, a song, a particular shade of purple – *matters*. I hesitate to say that I write about the everyday, even in a sense of "I find the magic in the everyday," because to me, nothing I write about is "everyday." Nothing is typical, nothing can be taken for granted. I don't think that my knowledge of Greek mythology is the only reason for my sensitivity, but I think it is what initially gave me the awareness of the world around me that led to the sensitivity and attention that a poet must have.

I read Greek mythology and Greek literature for research as much as pure pleasure; the line between enjoyable research and leisure reading blurs. I read Norse and Egyptian and Native

American mythology as well, and I draw on those sources far less often for direct research, so I tend to think of them as pleasure reading. I read Carl Jung, Robert Graves, James Frazer, and Joseph Campbell because academic writing can be just as inspiring as poetry – especially when the poetry in question reflects the same archetypes explored in the scholarly writing. Mythology led me in particular to Frazer’s *Golden Bough* (dubious though much of the scholarship is), Jung’s archetypes, and Campbell’s hero’s journey. Cross-cultural studies like these intrigue me, as they take the myths with which I grew up and expand the scope to so much more than a collection of stories from one ancient nation. Learning to read the myths as archetypes, as patterns of human experience, made it possible for me to see my own life in them. I don’t think I could have written these poems without that perspective, without seeing the whole of human experience as expressible through Greek mythology – and, in turn, seeing Greek mythology as an accounting of human experience, relevant and vital today as it was centuries ago. Classical studies and Greek history are also valuable resources because these myths were not told in a cultural vacuum. Understanding the tropes and context that gave rise to these stories is vital to me, as I need to understand a particular myth or goddess before I start reinterpreting it or her.

I turned to mythology for subject matter because I wanted to get out of my own head. I was tired of writing the same first-person poetry about my ordinary life that I had written for years; I wasn’t writing poems that I particularly wanted to read. Greek mythology was familiar enough to me that I could write about it as easily as I wrote about my own life, but it came with fantastic stories and conflicts and questions of psychology, motive, and affection. It came with a heightened sense of drama that my quotidian life didn’t have. At the same time, even with the drama and supernatural elements, the characters in the myths were real people – they didn’t seem foreign or distant to me. Their motivations and affections were understandable, something to which I could relate. For me, mythology became the way to move beyond myself and into the shared experiences of the human condition, a bridge from the individual to the collective.

Many of the poems in this collection are formal or contain formal elements, as I need that discipline to keep myself focused on one myth, character, or idea at a time. Because many of the myths overlap in terms of plots or characters, I find it difficult to limit myself in any given piece to one particular story or character. If I don’t limit myself in some way, I write rambling,



unfocused poems. I employ inherited forms to keep that from happening. Forms help me to narrow what I want to say and open gates out of the well-worn ruts in my mind. They force me to isolate particular threads of the stories, because they force me to slow down and to work at the most detailed level of structure in order to fit the form. It's also easier for me to work with a form when I already have the subject matter defined; using Greek mythology provides me with subject matter that I can then cast and recast in different forms. Formal poetry challenges me; I don't have a natural ear for meter or rhyme. Writing formal poetry thus means slower, more meticulous work than writing my usual free verse, which in turn makes it easier to limit a poem to one particular image, character, or incident.

A second theme of this collection arises from my lifelong issues with religion. I think it vital for adherents of a religion to be able to recognize themselves in the divine; this is a source of considerable validation and reassurance, in my opinion. I could not find that validation and reassurance in Christianity but *could* find in Greek mythology. Instead of a single female figure who is a meek, obedient wife/mother, Greek goddesses encompass a huge range of female power (or lack thereof), sexuality (or lack thereof), intelligence (or lack... you get the point), creativity, etc. In Greek mythology, femininity is not limited to one particular portrayal but rather includes countless options of behavior, personality traits, and power. A woman could be a reflection of the divine, could be *good*, without needing to be a reflection of the silent virgin. Of course, Greek goddesses were never a reflection of the genuine life of Greek women. Scholars such as Sarah Pomeroy and Mary Lefkowitz have written extensively about the lives of ancient Greek women and the cultural differences between worship of a goddess and acceptable standards of behavior for a mortal woman. As Pomeroy says in *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, "The goddesses are archetypal images of human females, as envisioned by males [...] Myths represent goddesses as hostile to women, or show them pursuing many activities foreign to the experience of mortal women." While I feel it necessary to understand the cultural context of the mythology I love, I don't feel limited by it. An Athenian woman's experience of Artemis will not and cannot be my experience of the same mythical figure.

Several relationships in my life have also contributed vitally to these poems. My two younger sisters, Teresa and Rachel, appear in several poems. My sisters are a gift; the three of us have always been close, and we share many interests, including mythology. Many of these

poems have their roots in conversations with Teresa and Rachel. My best friend Samantha Jo has inspired me with her presence and her own poetry for as long as I've known her. I cannot begin to map out Sami's influence on my writing, phrasing, or imagery – suffice it to say, she has had a pervasive and considerable effect on my poetry as a whole. More specifically, the third section of this collection (the Jewel Songs) grew out of my friendship with Sami and is the product of our years of writing (and revising) together.

The poems in this collection are divided into three sections based loosely on topic. The first section, "Mythos," contains my poems set within Greek mythology. Some of them are in the voices of various mythological figures. "Artemis Parthenia" and "Glaukopis," for instance, develop the characters of Artemis and Athena respectively. These poems are not narratives and do not center on a specific story, although mention is made of various myths in which these two goddesses are involved. Other poems in this section, such as "Arachne," "Hyacinthus' Death," and "Endymion," are third-person explorations of particular myths. In these poems, the story is paramount, rather than a character being central.

The second section, "Gnosis," explores the influence of mythology on a modern speaker. The poems in this section feature contemporary settings and voices; mythology appears as references, dreams, or cultural inheritance – mythical gods and goddesses, not a feature of life-as-it-is. In these poems, the goddesses and myths become representatives, archetypes, symbols of certain roles of life. They retain their evocative power whether or not they are seen as literally true. Several poems in this section concern my younger sisters, Teresa and Rachel, whom I associate with Iris and Persephone respectively. Some poems in this section, for instance, "Orphic" and "Stellis Maris," barely reference Greek mythology explicitly. Instead, these poems reflect the mindset of a modern speaker steeped in the images and atmosphere of the myths examined in the previous section.

The third section, "The Jewel Songs," is a sequence that features a contemporary female narrator chronicling the relationship between herself and an unnamed female friend whom she loves. I shouldn't need to say that poetry is not autobiography or that I have taken liberties, sometimes considerable liberties, with the facts of my friendship with Sami, but I will say so anyway.

The myths in my poems – in all of Greek mythology, for that matter – are archetypal;

they reflect ideas hardwired into human (at least Western) consciousness, splintering those ideas and figures into an array of narratives and characters, like light through a prism. Immersed in archetypes, I found that when I reached for words to describe the people closest to me, myths are what I grasped. It's not enough to say that Sami is creative; in my life, she's more than that – she plays a role in my life archetypal in its intensity. Goddesses and myths are also something like symbolic shorthand; they are tight clusters of images and associations, compact and evocative. Persephone is loss, growing up, desire, darkness, torches, pomegranates, and all the riches in the depths of the earth. I could write about how my sister Rachel is a teenager on the edge of adulthood, and how the darkness of her type 1 diabetes terrifies me. Or I could write about a girl kidnapped away from gathering flowers to become queen of the dead, given sovereign power at last but exiled from the world in which she grew up. I prefer to associate myth with reality and let the symbols imply parallels. I'd rather tell stories that all of Western civilization holds in common inheritance and let those stories comment on my own life, than write about my own life directly. That could change, in the future; I wouldn't presume to swear I'll always find mythology more inspiring than my own life. For now, though, Greek mythology works as a treasure trove of source material which I then filter through the lens of my own experience.

Section I:

Mythos

## Pegasus

White hooves strike up through the bloody fountain;  
white wings hang bedraggled and dripping.  
His hide twitches; he quivers, testing the firmness of rock  
beneath still-new, spindly legs.  
He plummets, kicking wildly at empty air, before instinct,  
a panicked shiver, sets damp pinions flapping.  
How many times do his wings beat before  
the singing Muses drape garlands around his neck,  
their songs hanging mist-tinged in the blue air,  
as he shifts his weight, scratches restlessly at stone?  
A strike, a silver chime, a spring bubbling clear –  
clear enough to wash the last gory streaks of afterbirth  
from his white coat.

## Called Out of Darkness

Touching my tongue to honeysuckle stamens –  
the bland, burning flower,  
pale spots of gold,  
sweet as a strummed lyre.

See, in that honeyed note,  
her outstretched hand receding,  
a white trumpet flower in a night  
sweat-drenched and sticky with smog,

and he returning to sunlight,  
the memory of the queen's tears  
like chalcedony, like all the magic  
in the world in his song.

What happens to our myths if we've  
been told the wrong side all along?  
What if Orpheus meant to turn?

## She Who Shines in the Dark

What flavors did the deep dark have for you,  
Eurydice, lost under the earth? What textures,  
so far from the sun's heat like a plush robe  
around your fair shoulders? Did you  
taste the sharp juice, the tiny pits –  
the queen's vivid red seeds  
beneath your tongue?

The path back up was so rough,  
and of course the dead go unshod.  
The rocks scraped your heels,  
dug into your dainty arches.  
The memory of his song – his plea,  
laced with the marriage hymn, the funeral wail –  
trembled in your mind,  
but with each step it grew fainter.  
The light grew brighter.  
He, obedient, did not turn.

The queen's fingers are long and pale.  
The queen's hair is silken midnight.  
The queen's eyes shimmer like dark water.  
The queen's lips taste of pomegranates.

Did you catch your foot on purpose,  
knock loose that one small rock to startle him  
into a reflexive turn? Was it an accident,

or was it the queen's dark glory set against  
all the memories of mortal, fatal love?

## Endymion

The shepherd plies his crooked staff,  
questions his flock, woolly and white;  
when down the hills a rushing draft  
sighs from the depth of the cool night,  
resolving in a rush of stars and light.

Her hair is moon-gleam pale and long.  
Any command, he would obey.  
When pleased, her voice is silver song.  
His eyes fall closed, reminded he should pray  
before the goddess – he, mortal – a brush of pain.

Her hand is cool against his cheek,  
his hair pressed flat beneath her lips.  
“Tomorrow night, I swear to seek  
your company again; your life won’t slip  
away or end.” His fingers brush her hips.

At night, his soul ascends with ease  
to where his lady sings for him above.  
Her kisses warm him; otherwise he’d freeze,  
shudder, quake in Selene’s chill moonlit grove.  
His life is sleep, his dream is her love.

Her argent kisses his narcotic joy,  
his lingering youth her perpetual gift.  
Though many doubt it love, think it a ploy,  
labels are less clear between gods and men:  
he calls the moon his love in every dream.



## Hyacinthus' Death

*a study after Yeats's "Leda and the Swan"*

A sudden blow: the discus spinning still  
across the cringing grass, the wind aroused  
by its passage, the young man's shocking blood  
a stain against his pale, soft-petal skin.

How can the noble, golden sun compete  
with Zephyrus' jealous, blustering rage?  
How could a youth, offered Apollo's light,  
fail to adore the glory of the day?

A lover's choice inevitably wounds  
the one unloved, the seeker turned away.  
And this is what remains: pale skin and tears.  
Two gods grieving, a boy reborn a flower.  
Mourning alike his loss, would the gods flinch  
if their eyes met, alight with love again?

## Vernal Equinox: Persephone Returns

### I. Midnight

The stars burn down.  
In the fields, the sap turns.  
Green life quickens.  
Mother wipes away dried tears  
and blinks salt-crust ed lashes.

### II. Sunrise

Clouds shimmer rose and cream  
as the sky brightens to blue,  
reflected in dew-sparks.  
A path up to the light,  
hidden and avoided, comes clear.

### III. Morning

The flowers sing choral rounds  
to the heady sun. I shake the wrinkles  
from my pink gown and brush  
my hair. He compares it to beaten bronze;  
I touch the lines that bracket his mouth.

### IV. Noon

Green slippers embroidered with vines  
and roses embrace my feet. I wait  
beside the stone path, one hand  
on the rough wall. His lips brush  
my forehead, soft as a raven's feather.

### V. Afternoon

Mother knows, as the light ripens  
from goldenrod to blood orange,  
that my feet pick their way over the rocks,  
though she does not know how  
the slippers pinch my callused toes.

## VI. Sunset

Mother serves me a thousand dainties  
on bronze dishes, engraved with crocuses  
and daffodils. Each bite burns  
through me, intense as the sun's light,  
pepper and salt and saffron.

## VII. Evening

I prop my chin in my hand  
and my elbow on my knees  
and watch the dark path vanish.  
Six months until the way opens  
and I descend again. Six sunny months.

## VIII. Night

She loves me, and she rejoices  
every day I spend in her palace,  
aboveground. I owe it to the mortals  
to give them this cheerful growing time.  
But at the foot of a rough trail, he loves me, too.

## Artemis Parthenia

The black sea, reflecting the night sky, swallows the stars.  
On a cliff above the waves, her eyes follow the stars.

She polishes and restrings a bow curved like the moon.  
Her maidens run beside her in the woods below the stars.

At dawn and dusk, she and her brother embrace:  
blue sky ripens to black, or dawn blows out the stars.

The greatest hunter in the world was once her companion.  
A deadly quarrel left him static, a-glow in the stars.

Before “moon” or “maiden,” her name meant “bear,”  
like the one pacing an eternal path, slow through the stars.

## Arachne

I hadn't thought that she could truly weave.  
I'm not so quick to credit mortals' skills  
and thus expected something rather plain:  
a careful pattern, simple rustic scene.

Instead she wove my owls, their silent wings,  
remiges stark against the softer down,  
a sky the stolen blue of the bright sea:  
a marvel somehow crafted from her threads.

I would have honored her, her crafty hands,  
had she but let her work speak for itself.  
But no, she strutted through my city's streets  
demanding what she called her due, and I

called trespassing upon my people's praise  
to which I, patron, lay the only claim.  
No one but I has the right to require  
the admiration of Athenians.

When she invoked my name to challenge me,  
I willingly appeared to her. She smirked  
and tossed her hair and claimed that she, mortal,  
commanded greater skill than I, a god.

The story's end, I think, is not unknown –  
no woman can defy Olympian skill.  
She wove her pride, and I ... I wove her fate.  
Her gift's preserved in all her hands – now eight.

Sworn to Artemis:  
Iphigenia's Vassalage

I curl my fingers like a wildcat's claws,  
dig my nails into the elusive coolness  
where wind runs through my fingers  
like Artemis's hair.  
We run together in the forest,  
our feet and heads bare.  
What need for a circlet  
when her crescent gleams in the night air?

Bowing to no man,  
sovereign of her own demesne,  
only the Lady rules there.  
She makes leaps I tremble to see –  
we're such a pair:  
both moondrop pale,  
dark eyes, dark hair.  
She stretches and her back curves  
like a river, the flare  
of her hips like spreading trees.  
I stare.

She looks over her shoulder,  
her eyes on mine,  
dark and fair.  
My lady, my dream  
and nightmare.  
She saved me on a whim,  
not because of my prayers,  
and one rescue, more than rare,  
promises nothing.  
Her skin laid bare  
in a deep pool,  
her hand like a dove  
flinging silver droplets  
through the air,  
I should fear her but I can't  
quite  
care

Glaukopis  
*concerning Poseidon*

He was not like his brother, forcing his  
way into mortals' affections in an  
irresistible blaze of glory. He  
was not a swan, ant, or tumble of gold;  
we weren't lovers swept away by passion.  
We were not lovers,

not even friends. Rivals for a city,  
he bet a brackish fountain against my  
olive tree. He, at least, saw me as a  
challenge, more than just a source of ideas.  
I wove tapestries of charging horses  
weeks after I won.

He told me, in a temple now fallen  
to ruin, that in the hour before dawn,  
his seas are the same color as my eyes.  
The words fell heavy from his lips like rocks  
into deep water. I turned away, shrugged  
off his calm silence.

I saw in his eyes sunken treasures he  
sought to drape around my neck. Centuries  
later, I race stormclouds up the smooth beach,  
bare feet thumping on wet sand. My hair slinks  
along my shoulders; snakes of cool water  
slither down my legs.

I whisper his name, a surging rhythm.  
He is close here; it is easy to say,  
*the waves curl like the white manes of his herd  
atop the bluffs.* I do not wear jewelry;  
I weave my own gowns. Dark olives ripen  
overlooking surf.

## Couples' Counseling: Aphrodite and Hephaestus

### I. Hermes

Now look, Cu, you know I can't give you details  
about their sessions. Confidentiality, privileged, etc.  
You're just as qualified as I am; you know the rules.  
Yes, you've mentioned that you worry. Have you considered  
just asking them yourself? "Hi, Mom and Dad,  
how's the marriage counseling coming?" No, I *know*  
you call him that, no matter how biologically inaccurate.  
Don't be pedantic when you're trying to solicit information.  
It utterly ruins your chances.

### II. Cupid

You've known them since our second year at college –  
you're practically family. Isn't it weird for you? I bet  
she sashays in, all dolled up with her Versace sunglasses  
and red pedicure and rings on two toes and three fingers,  
but not a diamond, nothing that says 'taken.'  
I bet he holds the door for her and his shoulders slump  
when she sits on the other end of the sofa, not touching.

He welded her a mechanical dancing doll the week he proposed:  
six different metals, her features etched in miniature.  
Practically every week he brings her some new bauble,  
bracelets of gold mesh like delicate nets,  
a pendant of a fox curled around a nesting dove;  
he crafts her ornaments so that they are unique, so that  
no one else in the world has her jewelry.

And he's always taken care of me. He made  
my first bow, the chased silver quiver, practice arrows.  
Hermes, I look nothing like him –  
being strong and slow-tempered doesn't mean he's stupid.  
He has to know. He loved me anyway.  
Loves me. He asks me to visit when I'm in town.

### III. Hermes

He's a good man, always has been.  
But it's been years; does he still need constant confirmation?  
I know he caught her



at least once, and if he was going to leave, he would have already. But he won't take down the home security system, even now. Even knowing.

## Making Your Escape

### I. Autumn

When the dark horses appear, drawing  
the dark chariot, run.  
Cry out protests so that the land carries  
your voice to your mother, leagues away.

Make friends with a helpful spirit. Follow her  
to a winding path that she calls  
“Orpheus' Despair.”

When he gives you gemstone bouquets,  
tuck them away until you have a double handful  
of riches. Buy your own home, somewhere on a beach.

Leave a note on your pillow:  
*Not your silent queen. Not  
leverage or a prize.*

### II. Spring

She has boarded shut the windows  
“for your own protection,”  
but with your attendants you are still allowed  
out into the meadow. When his chariot appears,  
take it for a sign.

Look at the stairs leading back up  
to sunlight-drenched green things.  
Turn around. Face the five rivers.  
Refuse.

Gather up the diaphanous robes  
like butterfly wings smeared with colors,  
and pack them into a small suitcase.  
Sneak out the back way.

Leave a note on your pillow:  
*This house is stifling and I can't breathe.  
At least the underworld has space.*

### III. Escape

Demand your mother accompany you  
back down one autumn. Have her shake hands  
with Hades, strike a new bargain.

Take your bag and cell phone and tell them both  
you'll call when you feel like it. Sleep where you will,  
day or night, summer or winter. Let the flowers  
care for themselves.

Sirensong

*inspired by Margaret Atwood's "Siren Song"*

I will tell the truth, the truth, the truth;  
I will tell the truth only to you,  
only the truth to only you.  
The air shines.  
Each flute-pure note, a cosmic chime, shivers.  
Come and hear the truth,  
the true story, the story  
of the truth to set you free,  
the one song everyone wants to hear.

How many ships would my songs sink  
if I had an iridescent tail or downy wings?  
Would I care that I splintered planks,  
sank cargoes, drowned men?  
Would they be accidents? Would I relish the cries  
of the besotted, the dying? How decadent,  
delicious, would I find that power?  
Would I lie on my stomach,  
chin propped on my fists, elbows on the rocks,  
and stare wistfully at the ships?  
Would I sing?

## Section II:

### Gnosis

“When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes”

Some nights, eyes dry, vision blurred, I quit.  
I set down the notebook and pen, lie on my  
beige carpet, and stare at my ceiling.  
An obsession from my childhood glows there  
when the lights are off: three hundred  
tiny star stickers, constellations in miniature.  
I trace their bright shapes and tell myself their stories:  
the Ram that rescued Helle and Phrixus,  
Arion's dolphin ride, Amalthea  
nursing infant Zeus, Orpheus's Lyre,  
the Eagle and poor beautiful Ganymede.  
After a time, the stories unfurl like silk or  
gauzy smoke and soften the edges of  
my exhaustion. I sit up and reach for  
the words again, placing them in careful  
patterns, gems of light against the darkness.

## Paper Dolls

I was seven when Teacher gave us paper dolls  
of the Greek gods to color. I gave Hera  
purple robes. I knew her hair was auburn;  
I knew she wore peacock feathers.  
I gave her my mother's eyes.

The divine mother, Demeter, I never cared for;  
I colored her in earth tones but drew no background.  
Her daughter of the torch and pomegranates,  
I liked more, saw myself in her rich red gown,  
in her darkness.

Nearly two decades later I find them,  
careful crayon colors faded.  
I don't know how I knew then  
that Iris was blonde like my baby sister,  
that Hestia had dimples  
like the friend I would meet in high school.

Who can say what's real? Tell me  
I imagined it, dreamed up the features  
of people I hadn't met yet and painted them  
onto goddesses no one worships.  
Show me the line – solid black, a picture in a coloring book,  
or the perforated edge of a paper doll –  
between imagination and knowledge.

## Wanderer

Never before have I turned  
to Artemis, the Silver Lady, for comfort.  
Who would ask the queen of night,  
jealous of her privacy and her freedom,  
for a bedtime story or sympathetic touch?  
But now, different earth beneath my feet,  
the Yangtze River beside me  
instead of the Mississippi,  
I look to the night sky.  
She has laid aside her bow;  
her hand is cool on my cheek.  
Her grave eyes remind me:  
she knows all about wandering  
and, it must follow,  
all about going home.



## My Own Pantheon

I dream, many nights, of meticulous columns (*Doric, Ionic, Corinthian*, legacy of art history class), of arches carved with grapevines and olive leaves.

A slender woman in a gray robe looks up from her loom, ash-brown owl contour feathers plaited into her hair. When she rises from her stool to flex her fingers and work cramps from her hands, she makes shorthand notes on a large map showing the positions of two armies. Her sister polishes a bow and whistles to her hounds, beckoning them as she tilts her face to the moon. Her hair is braided into a tight crown; silver stars glint at her earlobes. To my left, a girl cloaked in shadows brings pomegranate seeds to her lips, one at a time, and her dilated pupils gleam. Her irises disappear in a wash of blackness. She wears an ornate crown she looks too young to bear; the muscles in her neck are tight, but her gaze is steady. In a flurry of shredded sunlight, a woman settles, folding her golden wings. Her blue eyes shine like summer, and as she walks, she spills a pale wash of color, opalescent and luminous.

Awake, traces of the myths surround me, blurry and tenuous like underwater images. I eat Ceres' name in cereal every morning and see Artemis's bow in the crescent moon. Taste Persephone's kiss in pomegranate liqueur.

Foam-born

The first time I ate ecstasy,  
colors broke over me like waves,  
palpable and overwhelming. With every breath,  
electric blue and pink fluoresced  
inside my lungs. At the party, people danced,  
entranced with the blacklights and glowsticks.  
I ducked out into the predawn haze,  
gray skies slowly warming to pastels.  
Misty periwinkle kindled to fiery brass,  
outlining every leaf and grass blade  
in bright gold. As the sun broke into view,  
the ground moved, or seemed to,  
as if it were the rhythmic breathing sea.  
I was unsteady.

Scent of roses, a white dove  
nestling into a crape myrtle tree.  
I felt two-dimensional, a Botticelli background figure,  
watching the Cyprian goddess  
step up onto her scallop shell,  
skin of blushing cream,  
hair all aflame with the dazzle of the sun.

## Stellis Maris

Her morning ritual: she slides one arched foot  
beneath the rippling glassy surface.  
Her skin flushes upward from the ankle.  
Steam blossoms across the mirror. She sinks  
inch by inch into rosy sandalwood heat.

She has sensitive fingertips.  
She is perhaps too enamored of feathers.  
No one finds peacocks so exciting.  
The interwoven green and blue and bronze,  
Argus' hundred eyes flaunted on a fanned tail.  
No one else drowns in sleek, purple dusk seashells,

but she has a craving for colors –  
rich amethyst Chanel hats,  
sleek sequined turquoise stilettos,  
tangerine and saffron beveled glass lamps,  
glorious sweeping black skirts. She  
buys vodka in cerulean glass bottles,  
tastes cool silver at the edges of night.

She has a goddess complex.  
She has a porcelain mask edged in stark  
swan plumage, a small fountain burbling  
across tumbled quartz, a room draped in silk,  
jewel tones, warm in the winter, bright.

## Storytelling

I told stories to my sisters  
when we were younger.  
People might say now, "You were  
a chronic liar." I wasn't. Many of the best  
stories are not *true*; that's not my fault.

Teresa, writing about Yeats's "Leda and the Swan,"  
calls me. We talk about feminism,  
but it is the myth she wants to hear again.  
"I remember the swan, the eggs.  
Weren't there two brothers?"

I tell her the story again, three hundred miles away.  
Castor and Pollux are twins in every version,  
though other details change.  
They hatched from the same egg, or not,  
shared a father, or not. They always refused

to be separated, even in death.  
She asks for other poems to read,  
an echo in her voice of "Tell me another.  
It's not bedtime yet." I promise  
her a list of short poems and send it that afternoon.

Three sisters, and I am the only one  
who moved away. Pollux gave up  
half his immortality and lived in the realm  
of shades and death for six months each year  
in order to not leave his brother.

I call Teresa Iris, gold-winged rainbow,  
and Rachel Persephone. Pomegranates  
and roses. I do not know if they call  
me a goddess's name, or if "big sister"  
is its own veneration.

## Orphic

I trace your cheekbones at night,  
curving like a wave's crest.

Your eyelashes clump in star points;  
your eyes are ivy after rain, rich and bright.

Music drowns in your pupils, pulses  
in your veins and hands,

gleams in your blood: thick aloe,  
a shimmer of healing green.

I touch your soft hair, black as a purple daisy's eye,  
as the dark sea forgetting the dense bones of the desert.

Salt and sage, the burning smell  
when rain spatters parched earth.

A glimpse of an oasis or temple,  
heat-hazed, glassy, cool mint on my tongue.

## Constellations

Artemis practices her archery at night, chasing the constellations across the sky. Selene has overturned her jewelry box, and her earrings glint against the blackness. The lights are immortality, the best reward for which a hero can hope. What a dream – to stare nightly at the afterlife, pacing season by season across the canopy. Every night, hundreds of stories repeat themselves; hundreds of figures reenact their moments of brightest glory.

The human brain naturally looks for patterns; we're hardwired to turn assorted facts into narratives, into stories. This is why, thousands of years later, the stories invented for the night sky are still told. Stars are, physically, perpetually combusting balls of plasma and gas. This is why we say 'story' and not 'fact.'

Modern astronomy divides the sky among eighty-eight constellations, a keyboard correspondence to harmonize dead heroes, slain monsters, and innocent victims. The stars in any constellation are widely varying distances from Earth, sparks of light in a fathomless wash of space. They look close to each other but they aren't.

Sometimes I shape the space between us into stories. You shine, you seem so close, in the dark.

Iridian

[Chrysopteron]

the sun glints on the fountain's crystalline spray  
a broken glass plume like a prism casting rainbows  
Teresa's blonde hair waves in the wind like Iris's wings

[Podênemos]

her paintings on the walls: irises in three dozen colors  
the first nickname I called her, *ayame*, a double joke  
because it contains *ame*, rain, my name, and means “iris”

[Aellopus]

my poems for her paintings – we trade and each carry  
a piece of the other, something storm-colored and rare  
as the rainbow sparks in her opal birthstone

[Thaumantias]

meaning “wondrous,” meaning “radiant,” my younger sister  
basks in color as if cerulean is a texture, as if celadon,  
ochre, aubergine can caress and nourish her – daughter of Iris

## Not an Elegy

The images run together when I blink, behind  
my eyelids, pinprick needles trailing tubing  
into her hand like bloated thread, like  
sewing her up, like stitching her here  
to this body.

Her dark hair on the white sheet – she is every goddess  
of the underworld – highlighted deep red and shining,  
jewel-tone pomegranate streaks on silk.  
Her eyes are closed but I can't close mine  
so close to loss.

I'd write her as my Persephone, bringing her back  
to candles that smell like summer and pillows  
the colors of tulips, but I am  
afraid of Eurydice's shadow.  
To try and fail

would be too much, even in a poem, superstitious  
to a fault, but I can't think of her thus, lost  
in the long dark, even for a line.  
I can't drape her in shadows, not when  
she is my light.

Hair and needle and bed three hundred twenty miles away,  
pomegranates and stark cave walls in my head.  
I can write of nothing else, can barely  
think of other words or how to shape  
them. She, sister,

*meimei*, treasure, beloved, hates to be fragile, hates  
to be thought of as sick; she hears 'sick' but thinks  
'condemned'. She's told me so. But dying  
one day is no excuse for dying  
today, not when

we, I, need her so. There will never be a day – it's  
pointless to argue. Persephone lived at  
Zeus' word, for a goddess's grief.  
What strength has a sister's plea, even  
mine, next to that?



## A Star Danced

She and I wove a magic circle  
on the amphitheater stage,  
imagining broken columns fallen around us –  
antique ruins, not just the flat stage –  
rose quartz, hematite, malachite on a black cloth,  
calling out Shakespeare's lines:  
"Nymph, in thy orisons—"   
She answered, "Beauty is a witch"

The hilltop, an altar to Artemis and Aphrodite;  
we were virgins and lovers,  
seeking between the moon and the rose  
for the Muses' voices or Pegasus's fountain,  
the source of inspiration,  
the Goddess nude behind her veil,  
glory in our tarot cards and rhymes.

We mixed Malibu with Arbor Mist,  
reeling tipsy, sugar-high,  
watched aubergine wine swallow  
the pearl-white rum,

and years later, I see her in my dreams  
swooning, eyes half-closed, in Dionysus's arms.  
He kisses her throat,  
licks her pulse point;  
she wears a garland of ivy  
like a crown.

I write and write,  
and every poem and every dream  
and every drink  
turns into her, rapturous  
in the arms of ecstasy.

Section III:  
The Jewel Songs

## Garnet Lament

I have learned to write without you.  
That's growing up, right? Learning  
to do the work even when it's difficult?  
We have to leave Never Never Land  
eventually, can't be little lost girls,  
fairies or pirates, forever.

I am writing these poems to prove to myself  
that I can. I am writing these poems  
because you – thunderstorms, saxophone notes  
wavering against brick like a heat haze,  
red bracelet braided around your wrist,  
your starfish pendant, gypsy earrings – you  
are not here, because I have this crazy idea  
that I can recreate in words  
what we created day by day for years.  
Red peony petals from the novel we read senior year,  
wild handfuls of glitter, peacock feathers,  
your predilection for willow trees. I fumble  
for the images – a twisted tree, summer fireworks,  
the thousand keepsake boxes you collect,  
a bewildering array of intricate carvings and colors –  
I can't bend language to refract, prism-like, our lives together:  
an altar to beauty, to the only truth worth knowing.

You will graduate and so will I,  
and the hundred miles between us will become more,  
might even involve state lines.  
And I will still write these poems  
because you run through my words like a weft thread,  
inextricable. Before that firmer leave-taking –  
I know the day is coming – we will see each other again.

I will hand you a stack of poems named after jewels,  
a treasure chest inlaid with what I hold most precious.  
I know this day will come; I've seen it  
in my dreams, which never lie. Let us sit together  
and pour some wine and read our poems, like we did  
in the years before this separation.  
Let it be a homecoming, and let us speak.

## Ruby Étude

The ruby ignites in salsa class:  
my gypsy skirt bright red, yours shorter, brown.  
I shake my head – too clumsy, two left feet –  
you haul me forward by the wrist and insist.

We both wear flip-flops – mine black, yours summer green;  
you count off beats and snap, moving your feet.  
I follow and mine slip; I spoil the pacing of our whole group.  
Instructor Camille scolds us, a frown pinched on her face.

And then, breathless from laughing at me, you pivot.  
Camille eyes the pristine line from your ankles along the back of your calves,  
the flaring curve of the hibiscus in your hair a crimson trumpet.  
Your hips roll – Demeter belly dancing, the Empress crowned.

I falter, give up, watch you radiate, incandesce;  
you raise desire from the ground in flowers the size of my clasped hands,  
the colors of the sunset. I taste honeysuckle sweetness,  
dark chocolate, biting rich, the highlights in your hair.

## Aquamarine Canticle

We take turns shuffling my Goddess Tarot –  
cerulean and sky blue rococo print,  
flickering *thwip thwip thwip* of shuffled cards –  
lay out geometric patterns,  
learn their names together:  
Tara the Fool, Arianrhod's Wheel, Inanna the Star.  
I tell you, for each card, the goddess's story.

We smile, as we would at old friends, as our favorite cards turn up:  
Death, Ukemochi, Transformation – you  
are a phoenix swirl of flame, rebirth and renewal.  
For me, Nyai Loro Kidul, Temptation,  
the Devil. I am hedonism and abandon,  
bourbon on the rocks and body glitter.  
We are shadows together.

We read with no spreads, cards at arbitrary angles.  
We trust our minds and hands. I see the High Priestess,  
Sarasvati on a lotus, rosy umber, dawn-tinged.  
You find the Moon, Diana armed in a forest.  
The Seven of Cups promises us all our dreams  
if we have the resolve to choose them.  
The Queen of Coins is the earth's muse.  
You touch the jasmine in her hair, like  
and unlike the carnation behind your ear.

You are crossed by the Nine of Swords, nightmares,  
trapped in a storm of insecurities about applications,  
scholarships, settling for second best.  
The cards say not to worry, to let go  
of what you cannot control. I am crossed by Love,  
Venus reclining on her couch: roses and myrrh, indulgence.  
I am newly single and recommitted to my first love,  
books. I have said my vows and meant them.

Your cards promise passion and inspiration,  
painting fiery Wands for your relationships.  
You laugh, low and delighted, mention the blonde  
boy in our biology class whose hair curls into ringlets,  
who passes you notes and has a wicked smile.  
My cards point to secrets behind owl eyes,  
the dark-haired Queen of Cups who sees visions in her chalice.

A few blurry words about my muse; your eyes soften.  
We don't discuss it, but you know I don't write  
when you are gone. You, not I, see the visions.

## Opal Medley

Everything was wind weeping pearls,  
a torch to melt sand into something clear and bright.  
The shoes, shiny as crystal lace frost,  
are for dancing, not running away.  
If this is a lesson to me, merry wanderer  
of the night, what is it I am supposed to be learning?

I have wings when you touch me,  
see the flowers in my eyes,  
hear the songs in my hands.  
You are in my blood. I can't help it.  
If you were a mermaid, you said,  
skirt flashing with tiny mirrors, hair braided  
with petals, rubies, fairy favors,  
If you were a mermaid, I was the sea.  
Miss Spring. When Primavera sang,  
an orchestra of flowers.

Such an insubstantial thing as a name.  
On the palm of my hand there's a disaster;  
this airy charm, this rough magic, the wild waters in this roar.

Peonies don't bloom in April, huge dark-red flowers  
shining and glossy like satin.  
I think I made you up inside my head.  
When you go mad you don't go any other place –  
a thousand Ariadne's clues: gold dust had fallen down out of the sky,  
eyes like blackberries, hummingbird amulets,  
a purple-black African-violet-dark butterfly and a white moth.  
The red satin petals dripping down the wall.  
I have a speech of fire that fain would blaze.  
It's important to tell your story.

We are what we remember:  
your pain like a big bunch of red roses,  
a beautiful thorn necklace.  
I saw you, pieces refracting the light.  
You were standing in this dark place,  
a bank where the wild thyme blows;  
you touched these dead flowers.  
They lit up – electric lilies. Rose of May.

Flowers are reincarnation.  
They come out of the earth of our ashes;  
up, out of the abyss; rise in perfect light.  
It's important to listen.

The thing that keeps you here can be your art.  
I have heard the stories you tell.  
You are the one who transforms, who creates.  
A drift of red and white cloth petals across the stones,  
windsongs about a tortured gleaming city,  
moonlight like flame melting our candle bodies,  
a star to every wandering barque.

I stand here waiting. To disappear or sing.



## Topaz Brindisi

A fire in the country, five friends and an ice chest  
and Greg's El Camino parked, doors open, speakers blaring.

I'd say raise a glass but we aren't bothering  
with glasses – bottles of Smirnoff Ice by our feet,  
a fifth of Southern Comfort passed hand to hand.

Echoes of the snap-pop bonfire, intoxication  
jangling our nerves, glinting in our veins electric-blue.

Music sizzles with the embers and our voices  
smear across the night like crimson shadows.  
Firefly sparks dance in your eyes.

That summer unspooled lazy and hot,  
like every Louisiana summer, a ribbon the warm amber  
of straight liquor. Bacchic, we called those nights,

but also amusing and musical – thought ourselves clever,  
making puns, writing poems about the drinks and night air.

Years later, in your apartment you and I play the same songs  
and toast nostalgia, pouring drinks into actual glasses this time.

Bourbon burns down my throat, stinging caramel,  
sticky and harsh. You shoot tequila, salt thick on the rim.  
Your tastes have changed but I know how you take

every drink, how to mix your margaritas and Pimm's cups,  
and what brand of cheap wine you buy as another summer  
blossoms indolent around us in a tipsy haze.

## Pearl Idyll

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments  
can overwhelm this scene (your dimples, hair  
curling in soft wisps). We stare at sculptures,  
paintings, glut ourselves on reality  
vividly unlike our books. You shiver,  
torn between the urge to touch the canvas  
(not that we can) or the quarried stone and  
the urge to race through the gallery. We  
are here only for a day: there is too  
much to see. I wait for you, history's  
glory around me, your profile at the  
edge of my vision. Art and awe. Your eyes.  
No one will know, because I will not say,  
which I watched more closely, all this day.

Peridot Aria

I, heartbroken; you, calling.  
I found you downstairs on the porch,  
watching your cigarette smoke curl  
calligraphic under the streetlight.  
We walked across campus,  
quiet in the dark, but not silent.  
Cool grass, night-damp, stenciled  
shadow patterns against the hems of my jeans.  
You kindled flame in your hand,  
handed me a cigarette, asked  
if I wanted to talk about it all.

His touch like cinnamon, something I wanted  
to roll on my tongue and savor even as it bit,  
redolent, piquant, a craving deeper than whiskey  
or nicotine. His skin sweat-slick under my lips;  
I dug my nails into him, closer, closer, until red crescents  
bloomed across his shoulders and back.  
Our first time like breaking a snowglobe – not the violence  
but the wash of crystal dust and a glittering haze,  
beauty spilled across everything, transforming it  
for a frozen moment, and nothing the same after.  
His silky curls and the way I called him  
Dionysus because I felt drunk on him, on the hollow  
of his throat and the jut of his hipbones. His pierced ear.  
His white shirt I wore around campus.  
The day his girlfriend's tolerance ran out.

We sat under the clock tower, bells  
silent for the night, and you said  
it would be all right. I heard you take a drag,  
could have found you in a dark room  
by that sound, from so many nights  
like this one, your losses or mine,  
and the aimless walk and the smoke.  
Telling the story smooths its sharp edges.  
I, confessing; you, absolving.

## Diamond Fugue

The news said hurricane, said evacuation  
Just four years After Katrina. More people listened this time.  
You and I, in Baton Rouge apartments, stayed.  
Driving home that first night from New Orleans,  
the air had gone still, clouds coalescing out of haze  
on the horizon. Halfway through the Sauza –  
all our friends gathered in your living room –  
thunder rippled through the sky.  
We waited. No rain. We passed out  
on couches or chairs or the plush rug  
and woke to the wind rising,  
howling and stumbling like it was the one  
who had killed almost a handle of tequila.  
Friends drove home fast to beat the storm.

You cooked. Who would cook  
with the sky flat silver and the clouds  
circling closer, pressed against the buildings  
like they were frightened, huddling with us  
against the wind? You made  
pita pockets with spinach and cheese  
served on small glass plates. The power  
went out just as you took the last one off the stove.  
Responsible you turned it off anyway.  
Perilous pearl-colored light pouring in your windows  
through the cumulus shroud –  
we gathered the candles on your coffee table  
like a shrine. Wind but no rain, at first,  
but the thunder built slowly  
and then the rain came down in curtains  
after the first crack, came down like shredded gauze.

We stood on your porch, second-story, smoking  
defiant cigarettes until the wind turned  
toward us and flung the rain horizontal.  
We were drenched in seconds,  
cigarettes utterly lost, shrieking laughter  
back into the storm, August heat gone crystalline and silky  
instead of the honeyed crush of a week before.  
We watched the school across our parking lot,  
how fast visibility decreased –  
so we saw it when the wind grew claws

and ripped off the roof  
like peeling back the top of a can.

Inside, the watery light through the windows,  
a storm-tossed fish tank.  
We listened to the wind's symphonic roar,  
read, played briefly on laptops.  
Curled up content in that diamond-edged primal energy,  
the furious exultation of wind and water in their ultimate union.  
Hours later, it died down abruptly,  
rain gentling to a mist, wind calming  
to a handful of errant breezes.

In the courtyard between our buildings,  
we walked to see the damage.  
The lights came up ten hours later, and everything  
was slick and gleaming from the rain.  
Reflections of the fuzzy halos around streetlights  
glowed in the wet concrete beneath them.  
Lights appeared in scattered windows  
like gleaming off the facets of a jewel.  
And your footsteps kept pace beside mine,  
your voice like cut crystal, like a polished mirror  
or a flawless diamond made of light,  
with a storm at its heart.

## Amethyst Nocturne

For our book of jewel poems,  
I wanted you to write the amethyst:  
the kisses Bacchus trails along your throat;  
the flush that rises in your cheeks  
at the first line of your favorite song:  
“Woke up this morning,  
with a wineglass in my hand.”

But now I have claimed this gem  
to send to you:  
I find myself craving  
the too-sweet Arbor Mist we drank  
out of real wineglasses, as though it mattered;  
I read Francesca Lia Block's *Ecstasia*  
aloud to my empty room,  
your favorite passages underlined  
in smeared purple ink.  
What visions do you see now,  
my Calliope? What songs  
do you sing, and with whom?

I miss our polished-glass evenings,  
cool to the touch and chime-clear,  
halfway to the brim with saturated red.

## Emerald Rhapsody

When I think  
of curled ivy, of viridian luster  
the color of life,  
I think of your not-green eyes.  
I think of your not-green kitchen.  
I think of your tiny handwriting  
and the meticulous notes on your calendar,  
of Hestia's veil, demure  
curve of her back silhouetted  
against the fire, limned in gold. Hearth,  
heart, the bright center of  
our life, the steady warmth  
in the plush depths of an emerald.  
My Queen of Cups and Coins,  
water and earth, Ophelia's  
willow song and swan plunge.  
You were the Empress, flowers  
springing up in the hollows  
of your footprints, Demeter queen  
of all things quick and growing,  
morning glories uncoiling languorously  
in the sunlight. You lit up each day  
like dawn splashing gold light  
across the undersides of clouds.  
With you, I made jewelry and crafted words;  
art came easily. At the same time,  
Persephone, Ophelia, twirling  
lightly down a midnight spiral path,  
singing back to me of jewels lit  
from within, shining in the dark  
like they'd swallowed stars.  
Sometimes I, flower, remembered  
pale sunrises on campus, barefoot  
summer heat, your Shakespeare shot-glasses.  
Other times I, anchor, reminded you  
of home, the sanctuary of our courtyard,  
while you spun through  
the whirling darkness, pinwheel  
champagne gyres. We traded,  
radiance and shadow, buoyantly lost  
and steady gateway. When I see you  
in my dreams, we extend

our hands toward each other  
and dance, green streamers  
in the space between us,  
spring and summer,  
grass and flower.



## Notes

“She Who Shines in the Dark”: The phrase “she who shines in the dark” is a speculative etymology of Persephone’s name. It is of extremely dubious accuracy, but I found it evocative enough to borrow.

“When in disgrace with Fortune and men’s eyes”: The title comes from Shakespeare’s Sonnet 29.

“A Star Danced”: The title and second quoted line come from *Much Ado About Nothing*. The first quoted line comes from *Hamlet*.

“Garnet Lament”: The final line comes from Seamus Heaney’s “Beacons at Bealtaine.”

“Aquamarine Canticle”: *The Goddess Tarot* was created by Krish Waldherr. All goddesses referenced in this poem are cards in the Major Arcana of this deck.

“Opal Medley”: This is a found poem composed entirely of lines from sources with personal significance to Sami and myself:

Francesca Lia Block’s novels *Ecstasia*, *Primavera*, *Dangerous Angels*, *Wasteland*, *Girl Goddess #9*, *Nymph*, *Violet and Claire*

*Alias Grace* by Margaret Atwood

“Mad Girl’s Love Song” by Sylvia Plath

“The Old Astronomer to His Pupil” by Sarah Williams

Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116 and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*

“Pearl Idyll”: The first line of this poem comes from Shakespeare’s Sonnet 55.

“Diamond Sonata”: This poem relates experiences during Hurricane Gustav on LSU’s campus in Baton Rouge, August 31 – September 1, 2008.

## Vita

The author was born in Shreveport, Louisiana. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Louisiana State University in May 2009, double-concentrating in literature and creative writing and minoring in religious studies. In August 2009, she enrolled in the University of New Orleans's Creative Writing Workshop to pursue an MFA in creative writing. She currently teaches at Delgado Community College in New Orleans.