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This thesis consists of poems written and/or revised between September, 1969 and March, 1971, while the author was enrolled in the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

The poems are divided into two sections intended to be mirror images of each other. Groups of poems have also been arranged to reflect upon each other thematically and structurally.

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THE ANGRY WOMAN POEMS

by
Mary Feeney

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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THE ANGRY WOMAN POEMS

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Song for the Young's Day

Old years are the first to feel
The rage of winter. They shake
The empty walls of memory and
Will shake out of heavy
Sleeves, despite their

I. THE ANGRY WOMAN POEMS

like age-old burdens, far heavier
than the stiff-necked girl
who in her old woman
period is so often.

The thoroughbred
I once saw while
their trainer passed them
and quickly lost
as they
the brilliant voices
color of diamonds
and
that she is the goddess.

My hand was at
the side of I
watched them dance
fly through the air

Song for the Year's End

Old women are the first to feel
the twinge of winter. They shake
the musty smell of mothballs and
pine sachets out of heavy
coats, swaddle their
sagging necks in smooth fur
collars--those wraps they wear,
like age-old burdens, for countless
seasons. The stiff-kneed gait
common in spry old women
reminds me of horses.
The thoroughbreds
I once saw while
their trainer paced them
had spindly legs
to hold up
the brilliant bodies
color of cinnamon
or bay
that shone in the paddock.
My blood ran hot
and cold as I
watched them almost
fly through steeple-

chases I hardly
 cared how my
 wagers went or
 that the summer
 sun faded,
 settled like
 dust

determined
 to see the world
 for a potter's wheel
 to spin
 yourself a face
 as hard
 and flexible as vellum.
 Your work was done
 at 25.
 The director cried
 "That water-
 fall of a laugh cut clean
 off!"
 He's cost
 your death back
 in another tale.
 the same cost
 a touch
 square.

Ode to Francoise Dorleac

"You prepare to be 40
at 20,"
you wrote,
and took two ice-
cold showers every day,
determined
to use the world
for a potter's wheel,
to spin
yourself a face
as hard
and flexible as celluloid.
Your work was done
at 25.
The director cried
"That water-
fall of a laugh cut clean
off!"
He's cast
your death mask
in another role,
the same one:
a woman
squats,

about to give birth,
 in an earthen jar
 buried beneath
 the earth in bloom beneath
 the rain.

for as I go
 sure, I know
 that all the eyes within
 my reach
 will want to touch me
 as children
 gaze
 a wooden Indian,
 asking what magic
 stole his breath, stayed
 his heart bound
 by glass and asphalt.

But give me back my tongue,
 Park
 in my own country
 the wind breaking,
 I go as the wind go,
 tapping a broken
 stone, touching
 the warm, dumb earth.

Rush Chant

Hemmed in by these machines,
their busy whispers,
I am no longer young
nor am I so
sure
that all who come within
my reach
will want to touch me
as children
poke
a wooden Indian,
asking what magic
stole his breath, staked
him there bound
by glass and asphalt.

But give me back my tongue!

Back

in my own country
the wind breaks.
I go as the blind go,
tapping a broken
music, touching
the warm, dumb earth.

Silver

I come to you
an heirloom
slightly tarnished, but none
the worse for wear.

Set me on your table,
use me daily,
soon I'll glow.
I'll have a saintly aura
in your eyes
when you touch me.
Someday I'll bite you back.

Temperance

The book says:
the best white wine
grows bitter, left
too long in the bottle.

If you want me,
come busting
in with a hatchet,
smash the glasses,
smash the bar,
deface the florid nude
above the mirror,
smash the mirror.

You Stew

Watch out.
When I get burned,
I blaze. So get too
near and I'll throw you
in my oil, I'll
boil you till the meat
falls off your bones.

My Vacuum Cleaner Directive of Inner Space

Happy as a lamprey, my vacuum cleaner

always saw We were a litter

into the left to sleep

middle, in the bottom drawer

It was of the brain. Now

wish I could put my mouth

to the end we're far

with an too old to live

the great like kittens, in a

refuge, clump,

of a bomb breaking into

off the disconnected fingers

when the lights

I have go on.

movie and books a slow

and beautiful language we had's best yet.

I take a breath and sing along

until it shows my white

My Vacuum Cleaner Speaks of Inner Space

Happy as a lamprey, my vacuum cleaner
clamps down on the dirt and sucks it
into the empty space in its
middle.

It makes me
wish I could put my mouth
to the earth around me
with an energy
the exact
reverse
of a bomb that could clean
off the face of the earth.

I move my vacuum cleaner as it
moves and speaks a slow
and mournful language we don't know yet.
I take a breath and sing along
until it drowns my voice.

Projection

Silence!

The rushes of our days together
writhe on the floor
to that old music
snakes know.

If they filmed me alone,
they'd cast me
as a starlet of the silent
screen, doomed
by a false-pitched voice.

They'd show me broken
like a bad contract, going
gray in glorious technicolor,

my body
much as it is in life--
unreal without you,
all its adorable nooks and crannies
going to fat.

Convention

So this one ends
like the rest. I'd like
to laugh, but guess I missed
the punch line, and I've
missed my ride and I'm
stranded here, strangling
in crepe paper.

I lean
like the late-night maid
who talks to her mop:
in all this mess
not one thing I can salvage.

I'll take home my free
picture of you
leaving, you practical
joker, you,
spilling pails of freezing
water on me.

You made the hairs
on my arms stand up
in a legion,
you led them
in an official farewell.

My sodden fingers wore
their funny hats, and practiced
secret handshakes, but
they couldn't stand
to wave a brave
goodbye. Oh, hell,

I'll take them home,
undress them,
and leave them there, untouched,
until the next time.

Pas de Deux

A puzzle you can put together
more than a million ways:
it looks so simple,
like a ballet that makes you
believe you could easily lift me
lightly as you'd pluck a flower or stone.

Our minds and fingers strain
to fit the pieces
together, working like muscles
we've trained and let go
slack.
When we finish our laughter
clinks together
like glasses holding the last drink
on a long night of celebration.
We move apart gracefully
as drunks who think they glide.

Writing Back

I found my answer
in the sleep that follows
a raging drunk, white
sleep bleached to blazing
white. In the bright silence
that stretched for months
I was the girl you re-
member, delighted, clean
sheets, clean hair, light
touch. If there were
dreams, they were dark
spaces. I won't tell what
moved there. I will not
let you see the lines, the
wrinkles spreading when
I shut my eyes.

Waste

Sometimes I think it must be
Purgatory, this line of cars waiting
to be washed, as long as Friday
seems from Monday, and as well
worth the wait. I wish
we were highschool kids in Daddy's
bomb, his brand new model. Then
when we pulled in place,
doors locked, windows rolled tight,
and the man walled us in with thick
white clouds of soap, we'd slip
down the front seat into our own
world, couple with quick precision,
fast as fish. We'd come out clean
and quiet. I wish we could.
Instead we stand outside and watch
white suds that spill along
the ground but won't dissolve,
perverse as rainbows. We drive
the highway home, silent, among the
clustered buildings and the spreading smoke.

The Military-Industrial Complex Meets Tonight

All the food here is government surplus. The waiters are black, dressed to the teeth in black tie. There is a great deal of bacon: bacon and eggs, liver and bacon, bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwiches which are usually soggy. Tonight it was in the soup. The brass was there to inspect it. They came disguised as spittoons and a band playing Sousa marches. Shrill trumpets rang their dead brothers back to life, full blown from beneath the tables. From their eyes the proverbial coins fell. They joined in the dance, turning the walls to a xylophone they walked on. There was only one thing to do. We started at them, stripping their stars and cursing. One of them screamed "Fall out!" They fell out in a silver spiral. Their stars burst in a golden nova. Their stripes took off in a trail of playful satellites. They never came back, or at least they never bothered us again.

Poem

I knew my mind, so I
thought that what was
written there could be crossed
out, folded like an old letter
mother shouldn't read, and
shredded like guilty snow
into the trash. Then

I found that thickness
where my fingers pushed or
pulled, but couldn't tear.
The last monk felt that
way when saffron welded
with flame. Fragile
as rice paper, he
turned into newsprint
in another life.

Poem

I watched the moon and thought
I knew two men as well as the moon
at midmonth. One dark, one light,
my lover and my friend. Everything
simple as a child's portrait of the sky
at night. Black square, white circle.
Stars spattered here and there. Yes.
Stars, those pinpricks, spoiling it
all. Like the old tugging in the
gut at the month's end. I saw
I knew no more than the dumb moon
knows of how it got there or why it
stays. No more than the first men
on earth knew when forming rings
to dance to the full moon. No more
than the two men who walked on the
dead gray darling and brought back
rocks to be parcelled off as prizes
or paperweights for great mens' chambers.
I knew even less what to do, what
to make of two men and the moon.

II. CLOSE TO HOME

How by the sea you still wander,

The waves reach you,

And they care

Whispering to you

The message that is forgotten

And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

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And you know it all too well

And you know it all too well

Equilibrium

Here by the sea you still wonder.
The stars annoy you.
And that dark
mountain peak is
the massive nose of a forgotten
god resting on his back. Your mind
works like the waves, building
and breaking with a crash.

Then take your nerves and let them
stretch as far as they'll go.
They will make a hammock
shaped to your body. Let
your body go, swing in yourself
until you know

you're riding high in the sky
on a fragile crescent.
You look on the earth and know
you know everything.
You are the man in the moon
before there were men there.

The Wake

A rich man's plaything, this
fast boat, making
unwanted waves in the lake,
then skimming
over them.

And yet there's pure
pleasure in the
thrust,
the touch of spray,
the sight
of twin waterfalls
cut in the wake.

Later the rich man's son
will tell me
he's given it all up,
he tells me stories
of lakes so placid
reflected
mountains fill them,
he talks
of making
love on an island
carved by two mountain

streams.

If only I could make

a break that clean,

leave the brittle bones

of my mind,

the bones of my body

in separate heaps

behind me,

I'd turn

and pick up my thighbones,

cross them,

mutter an unknown

blessing, go

in search of deep water.

The Immortals

We leave but nothing
leaves us
nothing is ever
over.

Tlaloc the rain god
his unearthly grin all teeth
spoke only too much
of the earth
which sustains us
swallows us
at last.

Beautiful Mexico
where I was happy
even when the weather hit me.
A country troubled by the lack
of rain.
Dried mud on the feet of beggars.

It will take months
for this feeling to leave me.
I am a dog wagging his whole

body after a bath
in a cool lake
after hard rain.

I land in my country full of
disinfected hallways
and I want to go
back or better still
go on forever
immortal as Walt Disney.

He goes on in this country
of harvests and windshield wipers
dispensing wisdom in
holy tablets
of saccharine

I dissolve in tears.

Three Poems with a Bridge in Them

On the gray bridge
leading to the gray
house
where I live
I am walking
lightly
above my life.

At dusk
I walk like lilac
in the sky
around the sun.

I am outside
my life.

In the island city
lies intertwine
their slim metal
work with beams
and bolts reflecting
the slant of afternoon
sun on water:

that is the truth,

metalwork above water

suspended in the air.

There is no ground.

The gray bridge

brings me close to home.

I climb to the gray watch-

tower, my knees go crazy

with fright

and joy.

I am as alive

as the flies on the floor

dancing on their backs.

Paysage

The cows have made pockets
in the long grass
for the taut bulk
of their bellies. Black
and white cows own
this slow and scrubby
country. Roan cows take
their sweet breath
to the barn at evening.

These days I wince
as houses dent the hills.
At dawn, one by one,
the cows lumber through long
grass, the sunrise
rimmed in their liquid eyes.

Weather Lessons

1.

This fungus skin folds
back into itself.
Like a miniature brain,
it ponders
the sluggish creek
and the leaves floating
face down.

2.

Through the winter, stubborn
tufts of wild chives
bristle on the lawn
as if it were a boar's face.

3.

Forget-me-nots
bloom for two days,
then die.
There are so many flowers!
Trying to learn
their names,
I lose my own.

4.

For the first time,
 sweat makes a glistening
 ring around my eyes,
 like a mask
 for an invisible raccoon.

The Drive

The moon hangs low,
too ripe for summer.
The miles turn
over: we've gone too far.

We leave our metal hemisphere:
the words fall,
a hundred shooting stars
in a moving blanket.

And we see
the car made a trail
all the time
of our silence,
our wasted breath:
mixed in with the exhaust,
they floated
down on the grasses,
the fragrant and delicate
grasses, alive and awake.

I Can Walk with My Eyes Closed

By the side of the road
bees grow in neat stacks of boxes.
The wind
is busy with the smell of flowers.
Invisible bees
are taking orders from some
secret tower, flying low
and steady through the night.
This is disgusting.
I can walk with my eyes closed,
it is that sweet.

There's no escape from nights
like this, an order
older than I am.
I stand in the wind like a single
stalk of wheat
in a wide field
by the side of the road.
Standing here,

I think I could learn
to mind my own business,
the slow

business of learning.

I could walk with my eyes closed.

as soon as we'll
every man of this world

is saying some
of shops called
Grace's, Fred's

after people

and that we see

the sun

hang

its yellowed wash

in washing all

after the night

all that's happened

lies

between us

lust's thick tongue

laps up the house,

the world

Neighborhood

as much as we'll
ever know of this world
is saying names
of shops called
Grace's, Fred's

after people

and that we see
the sun
hang
its yellowed wash
in morning air

after the night
all that's unspoken
lies
between us
lust's thick tongue
laps up the house,
the world

call it desire
after you and me

Four Days Mattress Poems

I've slept with Frost for months, falling asleep with
 my back wide. The new room's windows wear three-
 quarter sleeves of curtains, red,
 white, blue, saluting us. The bare
 slats of window seem portholes.
 We use the sheets for sails.

The wonder is we're full
 of secrets for each other,
 our bodies stuffed with secrets
 like money in mattresses
 abandoned to the weeds.

Four Days with You and Marcel Proust

I've slept with Proust for months, falling asleep with my hand wedged between the pages of his thick novel like an agate axe in a cork tree. Yes, Proust lived in a cork-lined room, afraid of the air, and now I imagine him turning over in his damp grave at the thought of sleeping with me, caught in the feminine knots of my hair as I move with my dreams. What do I dream when I sleep with you? When I say I sleep with you, I do not mean I sleep, and you aren't sleeping either. In our minds we are any woman, any man, in the ancient motions. The sea is our oldest symbol. More than that it is real, turning back into itself no matter how hard it tries to wash up on land and walk. I dream how we look in our sleep; we look like lovers walking slowly down a darkened street. We are not quite ourselves. The people who watch us can't tell which way we face. Proust would say sleeping on our backs we look like marble sculptures on a tomb, that death is like sleep after love when it comes in peace. But death is motionless, and we are moving. When I wake I watch you, looking like any man and beautiful as any lover in a book. In sleep, all of us carry our waking with us; you and I, like the sea, carry all our sleeping with us while we walk in the world, walking like lost, charmed creatures under water, our eyes wide open.

Indian Poem

I rest
 my head in my hands
 and feel warm,
 Killing all around us,
 but inside me
 there was a warm place,
 a funnel
 built of stretched skins
 with a fire inside it.

There

I rest
my head in my hands
and feel where,
months ago,
your 5:00 shadow
grazed. My face

was a valley
marked
with infinitesimal
scars
in rows, like
an army of scarecrows,
like flowers on
graves. My skin

is healed now, love
grows
under it
like winter wheat,

but the war
goes on, it
grows deeper, into

all secret places.

I hide

my face in my hands.

There

is no rest from it.

"Anna Blossom Has Wheels"

For you, I imagine a genealogy, beginning with your great-grandmother Anna Blume, called Blossom. Nothing is known before her. Baby Anna was abandoned at the door of a Rhineland castle. The kindly gatekeeper, Heinrich Blume, a transplanted Swiss Jew interested in clocks, took her in. Heinrich loved Anna and raised her as a son. He taught her the Torah, secrets of the tourist trade, and how to tell time. But he passed on at 2:41 p.m. during the Great Liebfraumilch Famine. Poor Anna was forced to leave the kindly castle she loved so dearly. She was only 14. She went to work on the cuckoo assembly line in Bavaria. Then came the Catholic Invasion. They threatened Anna with the St. Catherine's Wheel they'd bought for a song at the Spanish Inquisition. Poor Anna. This time she went to America. In America, the streets were paved with gold and everyone had cars. Even in 1881, if you can imagine that. I can't. I can barely imagine my own great-grandmother, Kate Cullen, a fat illiterate woman who died in the house she was born in. Once I went to Ireland in search of my past. I met a Cullen cousin, bog-bred, dirt-poor, too shy or dumb to speak. I knew then that all my life I'd been wrapped in plastic glad rags. But back to you. You have a car, I have a car, everyone has cars. Back to Anna. Poor Anna, she landed in New York. She pawned the watch Heinrich had given her on

his deathbed. She bought a pushcart and sold flowers. Everyone loved her, but she still had to struggle. For many years she made clocks on the side, waiting for your great-grandfather. Perhaps she thought of the seeds she carried. One day, my love, when you know I am your love, we will go to Germany in search of your past. We'll ride in open coaches and carry pinwheels. We'll look at windmills and fireworks. We'll look for Anna with manuals and pliers. I will never know more of you than this.

Inheritance

My parents had a pin made
for me from my dead grandmother's
locket. I loved it. It was gold,
engraved with two of her
initials and a dent my mother
worked with her first front teeth.

I wore it as my badge among
slender girls with families old
as columns. I wore it for plumage:
like any shiny ornament,
it would draw young mens' glances.
But beneath, I knew, behind
it, close to my collarbone,

was a photograph of my grandmother
in a pompadour, much like my
mother about the mouth and forehead.
I thought of her, born in Ireland,
grown in Scotland; married, widowed,
wearied and buried in a new
country. Her half-smile
at my throat said blessings
or sayings as I drank or spoke.

One summer, right in the house,
I dropped the pin. Search
as we would, it was gone. Now
the other half of the locket lies
in my mother's drawer
with a faded lock of hair in it.
My sister might have a pin made.
She has my grandmother's
eyebrows. I have her eyes.

My Mother's Hands

Your love for me's still
pinned below my shoulder,
like a note to the first-grade
teacher, for all to see:
Please let my girl come home,
excuse her.

Fall from Grace

Father,
not once,
but many times.

Confiteor in Blue for My Brothers

1.

Seven identical wooden baskets
full of dead leaves sit on the edge
of the sidewalk, side by side.

I confess:
these perfect, cylindrical caskets, perfectly
composed, are
the most beautiful thing
in the world.

I am in love with order
I have always been drawn to lists
I write in black
I cross them out
in blue, I am drawn by hand-
writing unwinding like a spool of worms
in blank spaces.

And I have cards for everything.
I am a card-carrying member
of the human race, but
as a rule I won't admit it,
I confess.

2.

I must confess I still believe in travel:
all ways of getting there are masculine.
Boats built by men, named for
women cleft the sea,
trains are lost submarines plowing the depths
of night, cars are earthbound bees
that migrate, birdlike, by day.
I believe my journey:
white houses ride the humps of Blue Ridge Mountains,
white Bedouins dressed to kill as night assaults them.
Their lights go on
lights bead like sweat along the highway.
Every exit is a dream of death.
I know we will swerve, lose
ourselves in this swamp of cities.
I dream I am flying. Below me, car lights
crawl like luminescent blood in squid veins
the future's brilliant lifeline.
I believe in rockets! Needles
piercing the sky's blue haystack
stitching fire across the litany of stars!
I feel the universe
lift and let go
its quiet breathing.
I believe in the universe.

I believe in the earth!
 The sky they say Mary's blue mantle
 and Christ! The blue sea!
 The earth dressed in motely
 brown earth green sea
 costal rocks the jagged
 teeth of giant zippers
 the earth hungry
 and cold as metal
 I believe in it all
 I confess
 I believe that we are.

3.

My organization falls apart
 my stocks dive
 a flock of infected doves, falling
 like dead leaves from baskets
 kicked by malicious children.
 When it's over I'm dead by half.
 I depend on ritual.
 The wealth of plastic chips falls:
 Show me your card
 You're in
 I'm in
 Deal me in

You're out
more chips more money
spread like a stain on the table
I see you
I raise you
goddammit

I cover my face with my hands
and weep my red hair is my fortune
I take all your money
and curl it
I use it to curl my hair with
your fortune is in the cards

when it is over
stack the chips one by one
red white and blue in columns
it's over.

4.

When all is said
and done
there is only one order
an old photograph
the three of us
two years apart

neatly spaced on the sofa

three sets of matched blue eyes

shining with laughter

just to be sitting there,

three prized white ducks!

I will have copies made

of the picture

I'll have them coated in plastic

we'll carry them our manna through the desert

they will be our cards, admitting

us to everything.

5.

The youngest writes me:

"I'd have to die to forget you

and some sources say

not even then. I believe it.

The youngest, tall now,

taller than me for years.

Today I saw two dogs, white dogs

patched in black in different places.

I thought "These dogs are brothers

because in the womb their mother

wrote them a letter that marked and
sealed them. I believe
it is so with my brothers.

6.

You are my two tall pillars
with different capitals, I am
your podium as we stand
by the blue Aegean.
We are our distant ancestors
the Picts
with faces painted blue for battle
by the North Sea.
Sun turns the sea to fire,
the earth to a field of poppies,
the body to red-stained leather.
You two are my white face
and my blue eyes.

As fear runs through the streets at dusk
like blood through trenches,
blue ice runs through all our veins:
the only answer we believe as night falls.
Believe I love you.