

WESTWOOD, KIA, M.F.A. *Lanterns Too Red for Hotels*. (2007)
Directed by Prof. Jennifer Grotz. 35 pp.

The following is a collection of poems which explore domestic life, love and its complications, and motherhood. These poems were composed over a two year course of study in the Creative Writing Program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

LANTERNS TOO RED FOR HOTELS

by
Kia Westwood

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
2007

Approved by

Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Cardiac | 1 |
| Written Under a Red Lantern..... | 2 |
| Tonight in Bed | 3 |
| A Corpse Wishes to Be Found..... | 4 |
| The Winter I Imagine Our Relationship Differently..... | 5 |
| An Insomnia Interlude | 6 |
| Chesapeake Bay | 7 |
| For the Ex I Keep Around..... | 8 |
| All Saints Day | 9 |
| Grove Street Jazz | 10 |
| Deciding Not To Dig up the Drum | 11 |
| Last Poem in a Fire | 12 |
| Elegy for a First Love | 13 |
| The Other Woman..... | 14 |
| What It Means When My Reflection Won't Look Me In the Eye..... | 15 |
| Domesticated..... | 16 |
| Picnicking | 17 |
| Summer Night Transcripts | 18 |
| Close | 19 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Proverb for When I Imagine You at Union Station | 20 |
| Souvenir | 21 |
| You make Me Dinner and I Dump You..... | 22 |
| Monologue on an Airplane | 23 |
| What You Won't See | 24 |
| Muse..... | 25 |
| Separation | 26 |
| Collection..... | 27 |
| Queen of Cups..... | 28 |
| In the Morning Light..... | 29 |
| Things I Wish I'd Told My Mother | 30 |
| Hysterectomy | 31 |
| Perfecting the Forgetting Sequence | 32 |
| Mourning the Valentine at Adam and Eve's..... | 33 |
| Results..... | 34 |
| Ultrasound..... | 35 |

Cardiac

Tell the darkness your name and mine,
shout it so everything rattles around you.
And I will tell them, too: we love beyond
our belt buckles & pocket change, treasure
the taste of metal always in our mouths.
Here we are another couple pushing *Up*,
hurrying to a crisp room, ready for the sign
to hang on a knob, where we will hurtle
our bodies into one another. The velvet
on the walls shines with wear from shoulders
and palms and something behind them beats
in time with our own hearts, slamming
in our chests until we pound against one
another to relieve it and feel the ebb as we
lay together, lingering after the others
because we know what it means to want this
again and again and only with one another.

Written Under a Red Lantern

Pull me down between drops of rain and bed sheets
and press hard for the kiss so I feel it when there is this sinking—
those thick-stemmed daisies you sent are only a sign of distance.
Listen to me when I say “I’m grinding despair to the ground,”
and remember how you held me in that room in Belize,
how we heard the trumpets bursting in the streets. That night
we followed the right hands of believers who trekked the mountain,
watched them, snaking the land, from that balcony.

Tonight in Bed

She faces him under the covers, watching
his mouth and nose, the place where
his eyes should be under the rice coldpack.
He doesn't twitch. Instead, "The cold
won't reach this pain behind my eyes."
And he reaches for her hands, his fingers
on her fingers, rubbing the temples.

Then, his hands press hers into the sockets,
moving and tracing the orbital bones.
"The curve of your fingertips fits my eyes."
And he continues pressing in the dark.

Some shaman in Senegal is crushing mushrooms
for the injured village warrior or perhaps
a circle of women is praying for a barren wife.

She wonders if her hands give him similar medicine
and savors his tender skin under her fingers.

A Corpse Wishes to Be Found

It's easy to be me once I've cleaned my wounds,
powdered over the gaps in my flesh, and
rearranged myself again in yesterday's clothes.

I manage this ritual because I know the gray of the soil
and why it never rains here. I stay in this place
I've outgrown, a place where the porch steps

are rotting. Those who have almost found me
only come close enough to see the shrunken bodies
of wild roses. What they might notice behind

the faded lattice, tucked under the front porch,
is the pale skin of my legs and my one right shoe.
What I'd tell them is to beware my upper lip and nose,

not to drag me by the hair or ankles for fear I might
lose something, come undone. I keep myself still
but fix what's left of me at night—the fraying hem

of my skirt, the shoulder the raccoons have been eyeing.
I leave my broken chain in the leaves because
someone will know it means foul play, and maybe

they'll find the man who followed me from the bus stop
and hid me here. I hope he sees my flesh again,
relives that night knowing how long I waited.

The Winter I Imagine Our Relationship Differently

I left you in a house with the windows opened from the top
so you wouldn't forget to look at the mountains.
I'm not sure I had a reason for leaving.
It's true you always let the avocados go bad
and never used your own towel, but those aren't
reasons enough. It's snowing where I am now
and I've taken to sticking my arms out of the windows
to watch the flakes melt on my skin.
I hope you get snow where you are.

An Insomnia Interlude

You've been gone long enough for the dog
to sleep on your pillow. It's the empty bed
that's caused this behavior.

Now, I look for stars out of the windows
before dawn, and I remember how your eyes
went bloodshot in the hospital, how you fell asleep
so fast, even in that gown, how I shook
the vending machine for that shiny Musketeers
that never came after the last of my quarters.
That should have been my sign to leave.

This morning, I left my rings next to the bathroom sink,
the bowl full of cold water ripples trying to glisten
before I cupped my hands to splash my face with water.

When we look up at the stars, we are looking at the past.

Chesapeake Bay

The last time we would kiss, some fool shouting
in the streets about God, things so big and
the two of us in a hurry for each other,
the sun had conceded the Atlantic and the dunes
on Back Bay where we watched meteor showers,
the footprints made in the wet sand, the silver
streaking the sky above the lonely reed grass—
that's what I'll keep. You take the sand
in the creased flannel lining of that sleeping bag
and the truck we parked along the beach,
the bed padded with our old camping gear.

For the Ex I Keep Around

In the season of our breakup, I sorted you out into separate shoeboxes along with mixed tapes and old nail polish. I've stored you in the space under the stairs and I think of you when umbrellas are called for and fall rain comes. You've probably noticed the leaves tracked in, their dried skeleton veins sticking to the floor after the squeak of wet shoes, the dripping rain coats.

I remember how you liked the dark, ignored my hand in the movie theater when I brushed yours gently with mine. You kissed me after, always with the mouth half-closed, not yet ready for everything I had. I prefer your place here, eavesdropping, collecting every noise in the house.

All Saints Day

Petticoats and bed sheets, pirate hooks
and tiaras lay around the room
the morning after Halloween.
Today, our faces still smeared
with grease paint and glitter,
we will feast on pancakes
and swallow the Advil
for our hangovers. We will
remember the known and unknown
of last night, the missionary
who brought the wine, the Jesus
with the plastic fish and bread loaf.
You think there was a hooker, too,
in a red dress and black wig.
When we pick up the empty bottles
and trays of dried cheese, drain
the water from the cooler, put all things
back right, we will hold our heads,
trace the water rings on the coffee table.

Grove Street Jazz

Tonight, my neighbor is playing the trumpet, probably on his porch. How else would I hear the notes, loud and strange, except when a car passes or he takes a breath? He has stopped now. A break. I am on my couch waiting to hear the trumpet again so I can be in the French Quarter watching the patrons out on their summer balconies, leaning over wrought-iron banisters, looking out on people walking the darkening street.

Deciding Not To Dig Up the Drum
for Linda

I am in the backyard on my knees,
evening dew soaking my jeans, feeling
the ground shake. I smell the grass,
the bitter onion and dirt, remember bees,
my mother's azaleas, crunching
broken bottle glass under the train trestle
where dead vines rooted in cement.

The tracks quake—it's horse hooves
underground, a drum that I might dig up.
Head down, I listen.

Beneath me, the dull pounding
quiets my thoughts, finds
the same rhythm as my blood-pumping heart.

This is what you taught me:
The drum is what leads us
to the sweat of a man,
the friction of rubbing sticks,
the dead—anything beautiful.

Best to leave it buried here.
I will wake tomorrow to listen to the earth again.

Last Poem in a Fire

Everything is in flames but this copy of *The Communist Manifesto* on which I write these words. In this light, the words are like webs, staining ink after the batik wax is removed.

The faces in the photos are melting away. I want to be in that bar again, where no one was looking at the camera. I want you here. I want a different wall to lean against.

We are a set of spoons. I'll never feel the hair on your arms beneath your rolled sleeves. We can't go back to summer

when the juice of those pears ran down our chins,
when we read the newspaper everyday for a week,
when we lived on foreign films.

I should be there to say *the leaves burning at dusk only smell sweet with you.*

Elegy for a First Love

Head on and *partially ejected* couldn't make me cry,
though I got close once when they quoted your mother,
then I remembered how she cried when she was happy,
like when she told me you were going to be a dad,
your girlfriend Chrissy was pregnant. I told her I was
getting married. Neither of us expected the other's news.

If only you'd be in my rearview, following me in your white pickup
like you did two months after it ended. You knew I hated it.
You wanted everything fast, even at night
speeding home from that country bar outside the city limits.

Here's what gets me: You cried. I remember that, but I can't
remember words I said, the time of day I left, all of the reasons
I thought you weren't good enough for me.

The Other Woman

I was twenty when I became the other woman, choosing a married man to fill my bed, to end some loneliness. He had a way about him, bright blue eyes and muscular shoulders, and we both had the desire to cheat ideal love. I stayed even though his wife was pregnant and pretty and young like me. We might have been friends in another life. I know I stayed too long. Weeks after it ended, when there were no more calls to his pager, I read he'd been shot by rifle in the woods behind his house. I think about his brother the most, a teenager, the one who heard the shot, found him first. I hope his wife never knew my name and that fewer things continue to remind me of him.

What It Means When My Reflection Won't Look Me In the Eye

She's brushed the spiders from her hair
and waits for me to do the same.

We used to make hand gestures at birds
but there are no winged things
to occupy her now—the trees whisper
rotten secrets, keep the living across the interstate.

She's torched the neighbor's grass again,
no thought for the cats or returning the gas can to the garage.

I watch her stack bars of soap
along the wall, read the marginalia
of her spine. Always this angle.

Tonight the mirror has refused her latest offer.

Domesticated

I am tame now after chewing my lips till they bled,
the red blooming along my chin. I only stopped
to wipe my face because in the dark what difference
would it make. I have replaced the veins I pulled
from my forearms like smuggled silver necklaces
so you might see what's going on here: I am dictating
the universe, beginning with the body, my body.
Touch me; trace the sutures carefully and see
that I have been inside myself. When I say
Watch me let the dandelions loose, you'll know
it's safe. The iron-scented air has retreated.

Picnicking

The red of that cardinal's
feathers is the red of the skirt
you loved me in once when life
was lunch under sweet gum trees,
flicking the ants off our legs.

Summer Night Transcripts

You make the spaghetti the same way,
say you feel the same boredom.

I'd like to be Barbie—just pop off
my plastic leg if I got something
stuck in my foot, like glass.
Vicodin would be meaningless.

A steam whistle marks the shift change
at the factory. Cars crank for home.

I need a road trip, marked by the beat
of a drummer I'd give my right arm to fuck.

The white of the neighbor's bread
on the grass, green after last night's rain—
the dog wants to feast on the near-half slices,
meant for ducks or birds that never
appeared, a missed rendezvous.
You wipe the dew from your feet.

Try not to suffer in public.

Small finches pecked the courthouse lawn
this morning, forty of them—a net of browns
and blacks and beaks. Mothers collecting for the young.
The crow hidden in the weeds of the adjoining lot
waits near the remains of a stone fireplace.

Without you, the dogwoods no longer
sway outside the living room windows.

Close

Remember how our skin smelled
with heat and the days of those white
crape myrtles, how all the robins
stopped to watch us, everything new
with sweat, barefoot in the grass, laughing.
I wanted to tell you something
there, to make you mine, a thing
those robins must have known:
nothing is as good as the light
on the shoulders of your cotton shirt,
my face *there* near yours.

Proverb for When I Imagine You at Union Station

The trees have blanched while you've been away,
gone pale and fruitless with rain. I heard once
a smitten heart drieth the bone. No storm. Only
drops clinging to still small leaves. Bring the sun
back with you. The train leaves every twenty minutes.

Souvenir

Your postcard reads *I'm staying where the light is,*
that you sit on four-hundred-year-old walls at dusk
and toss empty bottles of wine into the worn Etruscan hills.
When you send me those sunsets, I tell you Hurry home
and hope for a token of blue glass. Something to remind me
of the sea, the earth's crust sunk below. Something that shines.

What you brought was the glass, hung from delicate
string and meant for the neck. When I take it from
the jewelry drawer, my thumb finds the rough underside,
the grooves of a glassmaker's fingerprint, left behind
from Volterra where days last longer, burn clearer,
where *red-edged mountains remind me of you.*

You Make Me Dinner and I Dump You

I've decided not to eat your Greek chicken, dear.
Admittedly, it's your best dish, but I've already
got thirty pounds of gold strapped to my back.

I'm like a pack mule carrying nuggets of wisdom.
But I've got no carrot to force me up your hill.
I guess you're about to tell me that you don't
love me anymore either. And that's about right.
But I've got no sympathy.

You should have filed your taxes instead of
breaking my heart. What hurts more
is indifference. I wish we were Japanese, too.
Then maybe we wouldn't have these problems with love.

But back to this gold: I've been stuck for hours,
thinking of all the I-told-you-so's about love.
Only my appetite grows fonder.

Basketcase is what they'll call you when I've gone
and left my ballgag in your mouth.
Fingerspell your way out of that one and
make sure you tell the next girl how much you hate to cook.

Monologue on an Airplane

The one who promises to stay longer next time is the one I've left behind,
the one who can play twelve games of Rummy with her father,
who eats letter J at the same Mexican restaurant each trip.

And which of us will I be when we land? The loving wife,
expectant mother? The one who hopes to be these things,
the one who hasn't learned unselfishness, who feels guilty
about buying that green dress. I am the one who
spends hours in the Museum of Modern Art.

Now, in the air between places called home, I am the one
who already misses dollar pool games at the bar,
who writes on the backs of receipts and in small notebooks.
I am the one who wishes her destination was just a layover to Paris.

What You Won't See

My desire to be spontaneous: getting my nose pierced before dinner.
The way my eyes hide behind my glasses.
The three ex-lovers I never mention, especially the married one.

How I always think the pair I've bought is the perfect pair of shoes.
The guilt I feel watching TV instead of calling my mom.
Songs that remind me of C: *Sunday Morning*, *Such Great Heights*, *Fly Me to the Moon*.

How I take my gin-and-tonics: extra lime.
The adrenaline that flooded me when I crashed that dirt bike.
After braces, my slimy teeth and my relentless tonguing of them.

The fish flopping in my head before I make big decisions.
My forgetfulness: the flavors of cake my husband dislikes, gone.
The lines I am writing.

Muse

When I am on the Metro, rushing through the clean
white gapped teeth of Arlington Cemetery,
I wish I smoked, a cigarette between deep red lips
and I'd have enough gin martinis to gracefully get loaded,
if I thought I could pull any of it off.

My muse is the rock star who changes guitar for piano,
who sings love songs in time with this sh-shushing train.
She's the one I swim in the Potomac with,
naked and holy and waiting for the cherry blossoms.

And she's the woman sitting in front of me
who smells of peanut butter and lavender soap,
who balances three body pillows on top of a stroller,
her eyes absently lingering over my folded hands.

Separation

The summer I lived in that denim skirt was the summer
the cedar trees were knee deep in magic, intertwined
with those red bud bushes along the highway.
That was the summer you decided to leave me,
so you could go and see the mountains.

Do you think of me now? Here, in North Carolina,
the carpenter bees still play tag near the rock we sat on
at the edge of the Mayo river, the one with American flag
graffiti proclaiming, "God rules." Here on that rock,
lovers' initials have faded and look as though they could be ours.

Collection

Remember the summer their bodies were pulled from the sea,
how her blue silk gown didn't fit quite right, how they might have
asked us to straighten things up, adjust the seams, which of course

we did. The sun stayed behind to watch us stirring the waves
with our broken tree branches and tennis rackets, searching.
I recall that night, the two of them limp and soaking,

their skin transparent, eyes and mouths half open as if to speak.
What they wanted to say was thank you, you'll tell me. I think they
would have shouted to put them back. Why else would their fingers

have pointed that direction? It felt like we took something from them
when we left, having felt the rips in their cummerbunds and pantyhose,
their empty faces and the whites of their eyes ignoring the awful moon.

Queen of Cups

The sky is nothing but blue and I am flat against it: the Queen of Cups, the gazer with my feet in a stream and pebbles around my throne. The gold of my crown is heavy and as I furrow my brow, you'll know I understand the nature of all reality, visible and invisible.

At least, that is what I am supposed to see: the fragmented and rippled future in the water. Caution. In the mirror, I'm a dreamer with little honor. I cannot be trusted. But I can tell you what anything must be in order to be at all.

What I understand is that a woman has needs and there's no one here to fill them, not the stone cherubs of this throne. I think they hide secrets in their cement crevices, with my same desires.

You'll pay the price if you cross me.
Tell the gods I'd rather be drinking.

In the Morning Light

I wake to the dawn coming
through the window. And you,
an insomniac, finally asleep,
stir to rake your nail-bitten hand
over my arm. A mumble.
Maybe "I love you." I want
to shake you awake, so you see
I am still clenching the pillow.
I can't tell you in the car, riding,
or when I get home from work.
It needs dark. Margaritas.
Girlfriends in a corner booth.
A favorite Mexican restaurant.
And even then the words might
not come. I hear your breathing,
heavy again, and reason ways
of telling you in my dream I was raped.

Things I Wish I'd Told My Mother

Living this life requires rain that leaves the pavement steaming
and doubled rows of books on each shelf.

I hadn't expected to need the memory of my first doll or
the size of my first scrape. But here I am with the ointment
trying to remember if her hair was made of yellow yarn.

Some days I stop making the bed halfway through. I like
to save the crumpled pillow cases so I can feel the creases at night.

Hysterectomy

Careful of bumps and potholes, I was driving
her home after the surgery the first time I realized
my mother was human. I couldn't make myself
go more than 50 miles per hour on the interstate.
And she couldn't look at me, just wince
and answer, "It's okay," when I raised my eyebrows
in her direction. I once read that Freud said hysteria
in women was caused by the womb getting loose
and traveling throughout the body. I wonder
if he'd visited many patients after excision
or amputation, seen the way they are mostly whole
but look as if what's most delicate was the thing
removed. In the driveway, I helped her,
like my grandmother, out of the car. I don't recall
bringing her things she asked for,
maybe a heating pad. I hope she didn't mind
how scared I was to talk to her then.

Perfecting the Forgetting Sequence

1.

When I set up the Aggravation game,
my grandmother doesn't know how
to play, though she was the one who
taught me.

When I was younger,
I went camping with my grandparents and
learned to play double-nine dominoes with
the wives of other campers, but I no longer
have the rules.

2.

I write things on the backs of my hands:
Call so-and-so, thaw chicken, mayonnaise.
I carry a notepad wherever I go, and even then
I lose lines when I don't write them down.

3.

I say, *Peaches and teriyaki*, sometimes
so you know I can recall the flavors
you do not like. I learned those
when I ordered the center layer
of our wedding cake in peach.

Mourning the Valentine at Adam and Eve's

In the sex shop, a sign says: "Cupids
are ripe for the plucking," but
there are none around to shoot patrons
with dulled arrows, no rosy cheeks.
No one to fall in love with here;
no one to write letters to from prison,
only red hearts adorned with fake roses
and hot-glued lace. This is a lust-filled
garden, where the red they sell is the red
used in dark bedrooms and the red of cheap
satin sheets. Black vinyl corsets and
thigh-high stockings: I wish it was for me.
I'll go back to my house full of pink
flowers, where my husband will kiss me
and I'll promise that next year we'll buy
the half-price chocolates, the day after,
despite the red of their boxes, wish for
the love letters we'll never write and
gorge ourselves on their sweetness together.

Results

Each day this week I've pressed fingers to belly,
trying to feel something. There is nothing
that makes your face crease up in a smile like this.

Even our wedding day was too hot, an Alabama summer
that made our teeth wet, smiles slick for all the photos.
The wild roses had never lasted so late in the season,
tucked in my hair and beginning to wilt on the bushes.

We read the directions, talk about her, Zoey, and things
we'll get: a house, anything pink. The three minutes
turn into a single line. You leave me to wash my hands,
throw the wrapper and test away. I linger with the soap
at the sink, listen for you in the other room. I check
for the other line, a change, some sound in the hall.

Ultrasound

for Luke

You are a small fossil imbedded in an ocean
or cave, just now discovered. The doctor
is an archaeologist, pointing out to me
the radius and ulna, the femur, all of the bones
in your spine. Your skull glows white, clean
and curving to your perfect nose and lips
and the tiny fist that spasms as you sleep.