Becoming a Mother: Pregnancy and Transformation in English Poems Written by Contemporary Mother Poets

By

Pussadee Kaewpunya Nghia

A Research Project

Funded by the Faculty of Humanities

Chiang Mai University

2018

ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary research study employs Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner's sociological conception of liminality (or the rite of passage), as a tool through which to study mothering experiences as represented in selected American English poems about pregnancy, birthing and nursing written by contemporary white mothers. The research also follows the argument of Jean Shinoda Bolen, in arguing that becoming a mother is a sacred journey, and by way of this consideration, explaining the spiritual transformation of the various mother personas in the selected poems. The research attempts to testify that mothering experiences, despite some prevailing tension and hindrances, *paradoxically* enable women to delve further into their individuated consciousness of womanhood, uncovering the autonomous power already present within and enabling them to grow spiritually. It aims to honor the precious bond between mothers and their children, promote mothering as a source of female empowerment and also foster public recognition of the incipient potentiality of women's creative power as mothers.

Key Words: Pregnancy, Transformation, Rite of passage, Liminality, Spirituality, Contemporary English Poetry, Contemporary mother poets

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research project was funded by the Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University. I would like to thank Assistant Professor Sarawanee Sukhumvada, Dr. Pasoot Lasuka and Assistant Professor Dr. Wayne Deakin, for their dedicated editing and insightful comments.

Pussadee Kaewpunya Nghia

2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One

Introduction

I. Statement of the Problem and Research Arguments

Pregnancy is one of the most important biological, spiritual and socially transformative life events for all women in their transition from womanhood to motherhood. Similar to birth, coming of age, graduation, marriage and death, a pregnancy is a rite of passage in which both the pregnant woman and her child are on the verges of life and death during the pregnancy process, as well as during labor. Throughout history, pregnancy is celebrated in diverse cultures. There are numerous religious and cultural ceremonies to honor women during their pregnancies.

The rite of passage framework (or the concept of liminality), was originally presented in the work of Arnold van Gennep, a French ethnologist and folklorist, and was also developed and used in anthropological discourse by Victor Turner in the 1960s and 1970s. This particular model has been successfully used to analyze changes in the behaviors of mothers in areas as diverse as nursing, psychology, anthropology and sociology. However, there have not been much attempts made to use the 'liminality framework' to study poems about this same liminal space in the works of contemporary mother-poets who have written about their personal experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and nursing.

Influenced by the second-wave feminist tradition and the genre of *confessional poetry*, contemporary woman poets have been writing more honestly and authentically about the bodily, psychological and spiritual changes brought about by their real-life events. This phenomenon has led to a wealth of realistic depictions of pregnancy, labor and nursing in the varied first-person narratives of mother poets.

Second Wave feminism emerged at the end of 1963 and extended into the 1980s. First Wave feminism addressed employment, marriage laws, education and later led to the voting rights movement. Second Wave feminists focused on issues of equality of the sexes in the workplace, a woman's right to choose, feminine sexuality, and a political action to make the public aware of women's issues in a patriarchal society. Second Wave feminism was triggered by a 1963 report from the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW), which was initiated by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. The committee fought for gender equalities in the workplace, fair hiring and pay, maternity leave for mothers, and affordable child care. As a result, the Equal Pay Act was passed by Congress on June 10, 1963, making it illegal to pay women less for doing the same jobs as men. However the women's movement was rather quiet then. Most women were expected to fulfil traditional roles of wife, mother, nurse, teacher, secretary, and other "feminine" activities without the possibility to fulfil their real potential as free individuals. In 1963, Betty Friedan, a journalist and mother, wrote *The Feminine Mystique* which fuelled the need for freedom to control one's destiny among many more women. Friedan wrote about her own life and the frustrations and resentment that many other women were feeling about patriarchal attitudes regarding gender roles. She challenged the underlying ideology behind the happy housewife myth and its results in rigid gender roles. Friedan argued that in reality, these white, middle-class, suburban women were alienated and disempowered. She compared American women with the inmates of Nazi concentration camps. The book became a best seller, and the battle for equality of the sexes was reignited, leading to the second-wave feminism movement. The feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir also wrote in *The Second Sex* (1949) that women had been treated as the oppressed Other of man in many ways and thus been subjected to psychological and social domination.

Another important factor that has influenced the writing of the mother poets in this research is the confessional poetry tradition. Confessional poetry is the poetry of the personal or "I." It began in the late 1950s and early 1960s and is associated with poets such as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and W. D. Snodgrass. Lowell's book *Life Studies*, which was autobiographical, had a significant impact on American poetry. Plath and Sexton were both students of Lowell and their writing was very much influenced by his work. The confessional poetry dealt with subject matter that had not been openly discussed in American poetry such as private experiences with and feelings about death, trauma, depression and relationships. The tradition of confessional poetry has been a major influence on generations of writers.

This interdisciplinary research study uses Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner's sociological conception of liminality (or the rite of passage), to study mothering experiences as represented in selected English poems about pregnancy, birthing and nursing written by contemporary white mothers. The research also follows the argument of Jean Shinoda Bolen, in arguing that becoming a mother is a sacred journey, and by way of this, explaining the spiritual transformation of the various mother personas in the selected poems.

II. Research Objectives and Scope

This research examines the changes of the liminal self of the would-be mothers during the three stages of separation/pregnancy, limen/transition/labor/delivery and reincorporation/ postpartum—as portrayed or represented in the selected poems written by contemporary white middle-class mother poets. In so doing, the research analyzes the poems to see how the selected mother poets transform their maternal experiences into art or poetry. The research is based on the thesis that mothering can empower these mothers to achieve their spiritual growth as they bond with their child. The research attempts to testify that mothering

experiences, despite some prevailing tension and hindrances, paradoxically enable women to delve further into their individuated consciousness of womanhood, uncovering the autonomous power already present within and enabling them to grow spiritually. It aims to honor the precious bond between mothers and their children, promote mothering as a source of female empowerment and foster public recognition of the incipient potentiality of women's creative power as mothers.

This research studies only the first-person-narrative poems of contemporary white mother-poets on the subjects of pregnancy, labor and nursing. One reason is that these highly-trained intellectual female poets not only acknowledged but were also actively engaged in the feminist movements of the Twentieth Century; during which time they were pregnant and became actual mothers. They have won several prestigious awards and scholarships for their poetic writing, and most of them have become editors and university professors in renowned institutions. Another reason is that their economic and social status has allowed them to fully contemplate and write about their transitional self during the rite of passage from maidenhood to motherhood, thus resulting in a wide selection of poems to be used for this analysis. This particular group has been chosen for homogeneity—and not at the exclusion of poets from other social backgrounds, who may have different reflections on motherhood. The author acknowledges that different readings of the poems under current consideration could well be given if one were to utilize, for example, a Marxist, New-Historicist or Queer Theory methodological perspectives in explicating these works.

The following poems are classified according to the different stages in the mothering transition.

1. pregnancy

"Poems for the New" by Kathleen Fraser born 1937

(published in 1966)

"Pregnancy" by Sandra McPherson b. 1943

(published in 1970)

"The Stethoscope" by Anne Winters b. 1939

(published in 1986)

"Letter in July" by Elizabeth Spires b. 1952

(published in 1992)

"Pregnant Poets Swim Lake Tarleton, New Hampshire"

by Barbara Ras b. 1949

(published in 1987)

2. labor/birthing and nursing

"Notes from the Delivery Room" by Linda Pastan b. 1932

(published in 1982)

"Sounding" by Carol Muske b. 1945

(published in 1984)

"The Cambridge Afternoon Was Grey" by Alicia Ostriker b. 1937

(published in 1989)

"Infant" by Diana O'Hehir b. 1929

(published in 1988)

"Night Feed" by Eavan Boland b. 1944

(published in 1990)

"The Chair by the Window" by Anne Winters b. 1939

(published in 1986)

"Night-Pieces: For a Child" by Adrienne Rich 1929-2012

(published in 1978)

"Night Light" by Anne Winters b. 1939

(published in 1986)		
“Eating Babies”	by Chana Bloch	1940-2017
(published in 1992)		
“Seizure”	by Jeanne Murray Walker	b. 1944
(published in 1986)		
“The Language of the Brag”	by Sharon Olds	b. 1942
(published in 1980)		

III. Review of Related Literature

The rite of passage framework extrapolated from the anthropological works of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner has been widely used not only in sociology and anthropology but also in nursing and health science. In “Pregnancy as a Rite of Passage: Liminality, Rituals and Communitas” (2009), the writers propose that pregnancy can be viewed as liminal, or a space between social structures. They state that it is inadequate to think of pregnancy as merely a physiological state. Case studies are presented to show how clinicians and medical scholars can apply this framework to understand normative and non-normative pregnancy experiences. In an article entitled “Birth: A Rite of Passage” (2013), Jacinto and Buckey confirm that childbirth is much more significant than the mere traditional understanding of physical and physiological changes. Thus, they divide their work into three maternal stages, which are: pregnancy, birth and the postpartum period; in accordance with *the three ritual stages* of the rite of passage model. They also provide a comprehensive guideline for birth educators and caregivers to better assist expectant mothers in their journey through this developmental rite of passage.

The idea that pregnancy and mothering can be a source of self-empowerment and spiritual potentiality for mothers is supported by scholarly works in various fields. Reviews

of research into spirituality during pregnancy confirm that child-bearing women are able to establish powerful spiritual relationships with their unborn children (Hall, 2006; Hall & Taylor, 2004). Thomas writes in her article "Becoming a Mother: Matrescence as Spiritual Formation" (2001) that through motherhood, women experience spiritual awakening, union and embodiment, as well as a phenomenon called 'survival love' and also other ethical changes. In "Motherhood as Opportunity to Learn Spiritual Values: Experiences and Insights of New Mothers" (2013), clinical psychiatrists Aurelie M. Athan and Lisa Miller indicate that their research participants, who are new mothers, admit to having improved themselves in six overlapping and interrelated aspects: "unconditional love and interdependence; transcending ego or self-centeredness; compassion and empathy; mindfulness and heightened awareness; meaning and purpose in life; and faith in a higher power" (p. 220).

Medical research into maternal hormonal changes during pregnancy and subsequent to birthing, is also valuable to provide an insight into the relationship between a new mother and her child. Maternal hormones are crucial to the survival of all animal species. Hrdy (2000) says, "right after conception, as soon as implantation of embryos occurs, the placenta starts to manufacture extra estrogen and progesterone to sustain the pregnancy and also, rather like a love portion, to put the mother in a nurturing mood" (p. 153). In *A Woman's Book of Life: The Biology, Psychology, and Spirituality of the Feminine Life Cycle* (1998), Joan Borysenko, a clinical psychologist and a leading expert on stress, spirituality, and the mind/body connection, explains that the presence of the fetus stimulates the placenta to release human placental lactogen (HPL) and at birth, the pituitary gland will start to secrete the hormone prolactin. Both HPL and prolactin cause the hypothalamus to stimulate various forms of maternal behaviour in the new mother, such as risking her life to protect her newborn. At birth, oxytocin, which is another hormone created in the hypothalamus, helps the new mother in her birthing and nursing. Oxytocin is known as a love hormone which

helps us feel calm, lowers blood pressure and promotes our happiness and friendliness. “The very sight, sound and smell of the child help releasing oxytocin, which creates feelings of warmth, contentment and arousal. Biology has created infatuation to make sure that we will dote on our babies,” reports Borysenko (pp. 95-96). The more oxytocin the mother has, the more maternal and affectionate she becomes. The amount of oxytocin decreases when the nursing mother weans her baby. This causes the mother to feel less and less infatuated with her child. As in other forms of relationships, the emotionally healthy mother will be able to develop an attachment and eventually a true love for her child.

IV. Theoretical Frameworks Used in the Study

The main research methodology is the textual analysis method, which includes a close-reading of the selected contemporary poems in terms of subject matter and poetic techniques. The main theoretical approach employed to analyze the transitional experiences of maternity in the mother personas is the sociological concept of liminality or the rite of passage framework, which was expanded upon by Victor Turner. The research will further employ its application using the model of Bolen’s concept of liminality as a sacred or spiritual journey for women—a discourse in turn grounded in Jungian archetypal psychology, which provides a locus for examination of the idea of the Great Goddess.

1. The Rites of Passage or the Liminality Framework

Rites of passage, in the present scholarly context, were introduced by Arnold van Gennep (1960) and redefined by Victor Turner (1969). They describe three stages of what an individual person experiences in stages as follows. The first stage is called separation, which begins when the ritual objects move into the rite and detach themselves from their former

social and cultural state of being. The second stage is margin, limen or "threshold" in Latin, or a liminal period. During this stage, the ritual subjects' identity is "ambiguous" for they are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony" (p. 95). In other words, they are between varying points in a social structure. They are no longer who they once were but have not yet assumed a new role in society. The last stage in the rite of passage is reaggregation or reincorporation, where subjects are able to construct their new identities and assume their new social roles (p. 95). Turner stresses that rituals or ceremonies are often held after this societal role transition. Jacinto and Buckey (2013) point out that in the separation stage, the woman becomes pregnant and is informed of her new status. In the liminal stage, the pregnant woman is in the transition from a woman to a mother. She experiences her baby's growth stages inside her body as well as her feelings of uncertainty and anticipation. This is the trial period, during which the mother undergoes a difficult physical, emotional, and psychological test, especially during labor. Finally, in the re-aggregation stage or postpartum, the mother is recognized by society in her new role (pp. 11-12). Through navigation of these stages, the mother is "able to integrate her religious or spiritual views in order to understand her experience of pregnancy and birth" (Schneider, 2012, p. 218).[1] Using the concept of liminality, this research will analyze how the would-be mother's liminal self is presented in the selected poems by mainly looking at how these mother-poets perceive and act on their physical and spiritual changes.

2. Jean Shinoda Bolen's Concept of Women's Spiritual Journey

The belief in the spiritual growth or potentiality of the liminal self of the mother-to-be is supported by Jean Shinoda Bolen, a famous Jungian psychoanalyst, who used the concept

[1] cited in Jacinto, G. A., & Buckey, J. W. (2013). Birth: A Rite of Passage. *International Journal of Childbirth Education,* 28.1: 11-14.

of liminality to describe her spiritual journey of self-discovery and renewal in her book *Crossing to Avalon* (1995). Her reflections on the female life cycle touch on various aspects of women's life, including pregnancy, labor and nursing. She describes pregnancy as a liminal space, which can be taken as a sacred journey in which a maiden physically and spiritually transforms into a mother. She writes, "pregnancy was an initiatory experience that changed my body, shifted my consciousness, taught me surrender, and was the beginning of the dawning awareness of the physical, psychological, and spiritual demands and gifts that would come through being a mother" (p. 53). She also argues against a conviction that pregnancy and mothering hinder the would-be mother's creative faculty. "Pregnancy is like the creativity that comes from making a descent into one's own depth, in which the person is changed in the process of bringing forth the work–creative work that comes out of the soul and is the child of it," (pp. 63-64). Bolen also develops her idea on female archetypes from Carl Gustav Jung's concept of archetypes, which illustrates fundamental psychic patterns in the human collective unconscious, or a set of memories and ideas shared by people throughout history and in all cultures. An archetype is the role or model image of a character or personality. Several familiar archetypes are mother, father, wise old man and clown or joker. In *Goddess in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women* (1984), Bolen comments that Jung's archetypal masculine and feminine polarities of gods and goddesses limit men and women to be either masculine or feminine, thus inhabiting them from realizing their potentiality or wholeness. Therefore, she integrates feminist ideas with Jungian archetypal psychology by describing an image of a "woman-in-between" who is influenced by her powerful inner forces, or archetypes, as well as the outer forces, or stereotypes, which compel her to conform to society's expectations. "Once a woman becomes aware of forces that influence her, she gains the power that knowledge provides. "The "goddesses" are powerful, invisible forces that shape behavior and influence emotions. Knowledge about the "goddess"

within women is new territory for consciousness-raising," says Bolen (pp. 4-5). She believes that different archetypal goddesses who already exist within women are evoked in different circumstances in their life. She points out that the prehistoric Great Goddess and Demeter, the Greek Goddess of fertility, are mainly present in mothers.

V. Overview of Research Chapters

This research attempts to testify that pregnancy and mothering can empower women who mother to realize their spiritual strength. The first chapter centers on a statement of the problem and research arguments, research objectives and scope and a review of related literature. This chapter also presents the theoretical frameworks used in the study, which are the rites of passage or the liminality framework redefined by Victor Turner and concept of women's spiritual journey described by Jean Shinoda Bolen.

In Chapter Two, the selected mother poets' resistance to patriarchy will be fully illustrated. Chapter Two focuses on the context of radical feminism in the United States in the 1960's and 1970's and the development of spiritual feminist belief in the Great Goddess or the Great Mother as a means for all women to rediscover the powerful creative and nurturing power within themselves. This chapter further examines the metaphor of mother as nature, which can be seen as a controversial dichotomy. It argues that the link between women and nature through the mothering experience paradoxically gives women both the psychical and biological power. Next, the patriarchal idealization of women and mothers as the "angel in the house" will be explored, together with feminist activists' argument against it.

Chapter Three discusses the physical and spiritual journey women embark on from pregnancy to birthing and nursing their newborn baby. The three main stages of the liminality developed by Victor Turner will be explored: 1) separation, which begins when a woman learns about her pregnancy, moves into the rite of passage and detaches herself from her

previous social and cultural state of being a maiden; 2) margin, or a liminal period, in which the pregnant woman's identity is "ambiguous" as she is neither a maiden nor a mother; and 3) reaggregation or reincorporation, where she finally manages to construct her new identity and assume her new social role as a mother. Along with the discussion of these three stages of the liminality framework, the research will explain how the ritual object or the mother-to-be rediscover and develop her spiritual power by using Jean Shinoda Bolen's concept of women's spiritual journey. Five poems by Kathleen Fraser, Sandra McPherson, Anne Winters, Elizabeth Spires and Barbara Ras will be analyzed to represent women's physical, emotional and spiritual experiences of pregnancy. Then, a poem by Linda Pastan will be studied to reflect the physical and emotional stresses that women experience in labor. The next ten poems by Carol Muske, Alicia Ostriker, Diana O'Hehir, Eavan Boland, Anne Winters, Adrienne Rich, Chana Bloch, Jeanne Murray Walker and Sharon Olds will be used to study how new mothers cope with the physical and emotional stresses right after birthing and how they finally realize their potentiality and are able to utilize mothering as a site for women's power and resistance against patriarchy. In the final chapter, the research conclusion will be presented.

Appendix I displays all the poems used in the research. Appendix II presents brief biographies of the mother poets whose works are used in the analysis. It gives the contextualization of the individual poets and their experiences as women, mothers and writers which stimulated their personal resistance against patriarchy and illustrated their attempts to use poetry as the particular vehicle for expressing their personal and socio-political concerns.

Chapter Two

The Selected Mother Poets' Resistance to Patriarchy

The background of radical feminism in the United States in the 1960's and 1970's can help explain the political and social context in which the selected mother poets had their mothering experiences. These female poets were educated in colleges and were conscious of various forms of inequality in society. Joining their male colleagues, many women at that time were actively involved in the American Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1950s to late 1960s, the anti-war movement, the New Left—and other movements—which fought for peace and equality. Ironically, they suffered verbal and non-verbal forms of female oppression, brought about by their male associates and eventually separated themselves to continue their fight for women's individual rights. Radical feminists encouraged women to come together and share their personal experiences in the forum of consciousness-raising groups. This allowed them to discuss their problems and led to *female bonding or sisterhood*.

The phrase *"the personal is political"* was coined during this period of societal change, to connect women's bodily, sexual and psychological experiences with the fight for gender equality. Relating to the political slogan "*The personal is political",* also called *"the private is political*", American feminist Carol Hanisch argued in her essay in 1970 that many personal or private experiences (particularly those of women) can be traced to one's location within a system of power relationships. Hanisch's essay focused on men's power and women's oppression. For example, if a particular woman is being abused by a male partner, then societal oppression of women is an important factor in explaining this abuse. Hanisch commented that women's personal problems were political problems, in as much as they were caused by women's inequality; women themselves were not to blame. The slogan "the personal is political" reflects a common belief among feminists that the personal experiences

of women are rooted in their political situation and gender inequality. The problems could not be solved by personal solutions but only by social change. As a result, the female body and all its connected experiences, which had earlier been considered as inferior in terms of patriarchal discourse, became a source of female writing. And this area (and other related) was explored by both Anglo-American Gynocritics such as Elaine Showalter, as well as by Continental feminists such as Luce Irigary, Julia Kristeva and most prominently, Helenè Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976). Moreover, Kathleen Fraser, one of the mother poets in this study, wrote in "The Tradition of Marginality" (1989, p. 24) that "there were political needs — raw, bottled-up feelings wanting out — and a call for the immediately accessible language of personal experience as a binding voice of women's strength. Many women focused on the poem as a place for self-expression, for giving a true account, for venting rage…"

This intellectual movement of women extended to *spiritual feminism* in the 1970's, as some of these consciousness-raising groups continued their search for an expanded female consciousness, which was not subject to patriarchal, religious and cultural presuppositions. Some spiritual feminists studied Old Europe's worshipping of the Great Goddess, dating back over 5,000 years before the rise of male-oriented religions. Connected to nature and fertility, the Great Goddess was responsible for both creating and destroying life (Gimbutas, 1982, pp. 22-31). Spiritual feminists believe that the Great Goddess, or the Great Mother, is the powerful life-giving force within all women, which is contrary to the authoritative and violently hierarchical "power over" of the patriarchal binary logic. Furthermore, women can realize their own channel for the creative and nurturing power of the Great Goddess through the various experiences of their own bodies. The Great Goddess has become the symbol of a new political movement for women to resist patriarchy, a way to honor female body and an inspiration for artists. Instances of these attempts to view women's bodies as both spiritual

and political can be found in the works of many female writers and intellectuals of our time, including the selected poems studied in this particular research.

The trope of mother as nature, however, can be problematic. In "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism" (1990), K. J. Warren argued against the dichotomy between men/humans and women/nature by saying that such conceptual connections are based on the logic of patriarchal domination. In this oppressive framework, women are identified with nature and the realm of the physical, while men are identified with the human and the realm of the mental, thus, making men superior to women and justifying their power to control and exploit women. She added that the domination of women is conceptually and historically connected to the domination of nature (pp. 125-144). As cited in Plumwood (1993, p. 19), women's connections to the world of nature have long become a tool to oppress them as is evident in several sources:

> 'A woman is but an animal and an animal not of the highest order' (Burke 1989:187); 'Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life; the work of civilization has become more and more men's business' (Freud 1989:80); 'Women are certainly capable of learning, but they are not made for the higher forms of science, such as philosophy and certain types of creative activity; these require a universal ingredient' (Hegel 1989;62); 'A necessary object, woman, who is needed to preserve the species or to provide food and drink' (Aquinas 1989:183).

This oppressive tradition of men as being metonymically associated with reason and women as nature has stabilized masculine power for generations. Although this research is based on the mother poets' perception of themselves as archetypically connected to nature, which can be contextualized as replicating these patriarchal conceptual connections, it actually investigates the real power and autonomy of the biological configuration of women and

nature, which cannot be exploited, within the parameters of masculine discourse. The thesis presented here contests that the connectedness between women and nature through the experience of mothering paradoxically presents women as autonomous beings, within their own psychical and biological space.

In "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking" (1982), Alicia Ostriker, another mother poet studied in this research, states:

> [C]ontemporary women poets employ traditional images for the female body — flower, water, earth — retaining the gender identification of these images but transforming their attributes so that flower means force instead of frailty, water means safety instead of death, and earth means creative imagination instead of passive generativeness. I want to look at larger poetic structures and suggest the idea that revisionist mythmaking in women's poetry may offer us one significant means of redefining ourselves and consequently our culture. (p. 71)

The use of nature imagery in women's writing then does not necessarily need to be read as conforming to the patriarchal logic of women/nature. Reclaiming the sacredness in nature and women's bodies is politically necessary for recreating gender equality in our society. In addition, feminine spirituality is not just for women. "Goddess religion was earth-centered …body-affirming not body-denying, holistic not dualistic. The Goddess was immanent, within every human being, not transcendent, and humanity was viewed as part of nature, death as a part of life," indicated Gadon (1989, p. xii). Therefore, men can also benefit from discovering the qualities of the Great Goddess within them.

Another form of female oppression that the selected mother poets are fighting against is the idealization of women and mothers. Throughout history, women have been stereotypically represented under patriarchal influences. According to Gilbert and Gubar

(1996, pp. 288-291), in the middle of the eighteenth century, Jean Jacques Rousseau, the French philosopher who fought for human liberty and political reforms, ironically articulated some restrictions upon women, which later became the nineteenth century's ideology of femininity or the Victorian cult of the "angel in the house". He wrote in *Émile* (1762):

> The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honoured by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, and to make life sweet and agreeable to them---these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught them from their infancy. (as cited in Gilbert, & Gubar, 1996, p. 289)

His vision of the ideal woman as "pure, submissive, decorous and even angelic" was one representative of a standard used to measure every woman's conduct. Such an ideal was elaborated by most male and female writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In a famous poem about femininity entitled *The Angel in the House* (1854), Coventry Patmore characterized the feminine ideal as a self-sacrificing or selfless angel. Also, painters in the nineteenth century usually portrayed angels as female. In the combined views of both British and American ideologies of femininity, the model woman was delicate, frail and ethereal. She had to look and act like a fragile person in order to certify her spirituality and refinement. The ideology of femininity also perpetuated conflicting stereotypical images of women as both angel and monster. To be an acceptable wife and mother, a woman needed to submerge her own interests in those of her husband and her children. Those women who refused to be passive were considered unwomanly. This Victorian ideology of femininity, also known as the American cult of true womanhood, continued to be influential in the twentieth century leading to both supports and angry responses.

Feminist activists, including the mother poets studied in this research, have argued against this patriarchal ideology of femininity. American feminist, mother, poet and theorist Adrienne Rich wrote in her book *Of Woman Born,* first published in 1976, that there is a clear distinction between "two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (p. 13). Rich attacked motherhood as defined under patriarchy, rather than mothers or mothering as a practice. Rich's reference to the nurturing power of the Great Goddess is clear when she defines maternal power as "not power over others, but transforming power, (was) the truly significant and essential power, and this, in pre-patriarchal society, women knew for their own" (p. 99). In her talk "Motherhood: The Contemporary Emergency and the Quantum Leap" (1978) collected in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*, Rich stated:

> Woman mothering her child was a being with dignity in the world, who respected her body, who had as much power as any other individual person to act upon and shape her society, and who possessed the wherewithal to meet her own needs and those of her children, whether she chose to live with a man, with a woman, with other parents and children, or in a separate household with her children. These are minimal conditions; but implied in them are enormous social and political changes. (p. 272)

Rich emphasized that such mothering love and care is most honored and a woman can best perform her motherly role when she is free from the domination of patriarchy. Andrea O'Reilly, however, observes in her book *From Motherhood to Mothering* (2004) that although Rich's *Of Woman Born* does not fully discuss or theorize mothering and how its

potentiality can be realized, it paves the way for later feminist scholars on mothering to utilize it as a site for women's power and resistance (pp. 9-10).

This paper will argue that this patriarchal ideology of femininity paradoxically offers women independence through the experience of motherhood itself. In the rite of passage, a woman assumes a new social role as a mother, right after giving birth to her child. This is the time when she will experience the stress between nursing or taking care of her newborn and being "a good mother" as socially and traditionally prescribed. This research will partly explore whether or not the mother personas in the selected poems experience this tension. It will do this by analysis using the framework of the following questions: How do these feminist writers view themselves in relation to their newborn? How do they respond to its needs? And do these conflicting moments of maternal love and obligations help foster their spiritual growth?

Chapter Three

Pregnancy and Transformation

I. Crossing the Threshold into Liminality

Pregnancy is a powerful life-changing experience for women. Once a woman decides to respond to the call to motherhood, she allows herself to enter a rite of passage which will change her life forever. Drawing from Jung's concept of synchronicity, Bolen (1994) describes the moment the woman learns about her pregnancy as the synchronicity of time and opportunity to embark on her journey toward motherhood—if she decides to respond to it (pp. 8-9). As explained by Victor Turner's the rite of passage (1969, pp. 94-95), in the first phase of separation, the woman realizes that her social status and identity as a maiden is no longer valid. With her decision to become a mother, she leaves her former identity, crosses the threshold into the rite and assumes a liminal self during her transitory passage to motherhood. In the second phase of transition, her social identity becomes ambiguous and indeterminate, which can lead to a feeling of vulnerability and the loss of selfhood. The pregnant woman becomes the liminal personae or threshold person who is "betwixt and between" social positions.

Based on their personal experiences, the mother poets are able to vividly describe their physical and emotional changes in the liminal state. Their accounts are both realistic and political because they include both positive and negative experiences, thus making their maternity dissimilar to the one idealized in the patriarchal framework. The expectant mother-persona in "Pregnancy" by Sandra McPherson addresses her confusion and loss of control over herself while going through the liminal passage. She candidly describes her negative emotional experiences, as being "highly explosive" (l. 17) and "stone-mad" (l. 29) for a

lengthy period before labour. She cannot be as angelic as the ideal woman. Like most expectant women, she is easily irritated due to stresses and anxieties. She is “reckless” (l. 21) and “bouncing odd ways/ [l]ike a football” (l. 21-22). The odd movements of the round-shaped football clearly signify her incapability to assert definite control on her life. She also feels “trapped” (l. 29) in the process and lacks the power to decide and do things as she usually would, when she mentions that, “[t]he queen’s only a figurehead” (l. 25). Instead of having the supreme authority, the queen has little real power and is reduced to a synecdochic wooden model, placed at the front of a sailing ship. During its nine months sea voyage, or the woman’s gestation, the ship drifts in the “amnion sea” (l. 28) under the power of nine planets and the moon showing the pregnant woman’s vulnerability during this liminal stage. Nevertheless, she is able to recognize her relatedness to the universe and allows its power to guide her. Feeling lost and ambiguous about her identity, the four-month pregnant persona in “Letter in July” by Elizabeth Spires says that she is “neither here nor there” (l. 39). It shows that she has detached herself from her former state and way of life and is now partaking in the liminal journey towards her new position. She compares her four-month pregnancy to an unmown summer field, with signs of wreckage all over. This image reflects that she finds her liminal state uncertain and threatening, although she knows that it is also the best time in her life as suggested by the image of summer which symbolically relates to the golden time of one’s life. She further says that “all is expectancy” (l. 7) to signify that the liminal self she is experiencing is not really her true self and is actually in a transitional stage.

However, with its fluid state, liminality can be a site of potentiality and can be perceived as sacred or holy because it provides experiences of unprecedented power, according to Turner. He gives examples of prophets and artists who are also liminal or marginal people or “edgemen” who try to rid themselves of clichés and relate with other men through fact or imagination. Consequently, they are able to write about human potential in

"an expression of evolutionary life-force" which has not yet been fixed in structure (p. 128). Turner also indicates that in most cultures the powers that shape the ritual subject in the liminal stage are believed to be the protective powers of the divine—or more than human powers (pp. 105-106). These ideas are supported by Bolen as she views pregnancy as a sacred spiritual journey, which enhances the woman's potentiality and reconnects her with the Great Goddess and other women. During the liminal passage, the pregnant woman undergoes tremendous physical, emotional, and spiritual changes, previously unknown to her. These experiences can bring about not only insecurity and irritation but also the possibility for new growth. This also echoes the spiritual feminist idea, which values maternity as a site of liberation and empowerment for all women. The pregnant speaker in "Pregnancy" by Sandra McPherson, states that pregnancy is a unique experience that should always be cherished. In her dairy imagery, the enlarged belly is portrayed by a simile as "like a yoghurt" (l. 3) suggesting the wonder and the benefit of pregnancy. As yoghurt is made from milk and bacterial culture and is best known for its nutritious value, her pregnant body is transforming into something that can nourish life. The image of the big belly as an "[u]nbelievable flower" (l. 4) relates her body to nature, flowers and natural fecundity. It is a celebration of the female form and a trope that portrays the baby as a seed grown out of the flower or her beautiful blossoming body. She continues by saying that "[a] queen is always pregnant with her country" (l. 5); illustrating women's perpetual role as life-givers and nurturers of mankind—a possible allusion to the worship of the prehistoric Great Mother. Neumann (1955) points out that the Great Earth Mother is the mother of all vegetation and her central symbol is the fruit-bearing tree, with its power to bear, transform and nourish (pp. 48-49). She is also represented by mythopoeia, as the pregnant goddess of fertility and is worshipped as the goddess of pregnancy and childbearing (p. 96). Bolen (1994) also describes women's mystical awareness as being derived from the Great Goddess or Gaia, since they too can

bring life to earth (p. 55). Maternity then becomes divine—as mothers are synonymous with the Great Mother. This mythopoetic troping of women, in the form of confessional poetics, whilst seeming to confirm to gendered constructions of femininity, paradoxically constructs a space for women, into which the male persona cannot enter.

To reflect the power of the Great Mother and elevate women's role as creators, the pregnant body is compared to a healthy, happy, and well-nourished tree in several of the poems. Based on an affectionate relationship with her husband, the would-be-mother persona in "Poems for the New" by Kathleen Fraser, for instance, views her pregnant body as "[v]oluptuous" (l. 16) and vital to him as his bones, bark and root with his growing child inside. These images clearly allude to the Great Mother and help put the mother persona in a respected position. In addition, fat is related to the reproductive capability because it nourishes the unborn child and eventually becomes one component in the milk production for breastfeeding. The 25,000-year-old statue of the Great Mother called the "Grimaldi Venus" is a proof of the connection between fat and fertility (Hrdy, 2000, p. 125). The pregnant persona's enlarged body is alluring and highly celebrated as it attains the highest potential of life creation, thus empowering other pregnant women who find their changing body abominable and a cause of low self-esteem. The baby is repeatedly called, "new thing new thing" (l. 22) to suggest mutual parental love and excitement. Its presence is honored and celebrated by a larger-than-life image of the lion, symbolically regarded as the king of the forest, prowling the sky and shaking his tail to welcome the baby. This imagery illustrates that the baby is a new and miraculous being inside his mother's dignified body. Moreover, in "The Stethoscope" by Anne Winters, the expectant mother describes her womb as a tree which provides comfort and refuge to the unborn child as he connects his root to it in order to gain nourishment from the nearby lake of capillaries or tiny blood vessels. Her baby is related to her through the "breathing bonds" (l. 13). With an allusion to the Great Mother, the tree

imagery makes pregnancy both an organic and a sacred experience, as well as a source of empowerment for women.

Furthermore, the symbolism of the belly-vessel carries significant weight in the belief about the Great Mother as a container, or the Great Round with "the creative aspect of the uterus and the potentiality of transformation," and the belly is usually compared to a jar and a kettle, an oven and a retort (Neumann, 1955, p. 46). The belly-vessel symbolism suggests the power of the womb in creating and nurturing life. In "Sounding" by Carol Muske, for example, the mother's womb is compared to a forge. The forge is used by blacksmiths to make metal goods and equipment by heating metal and shaping them. The process requires a great deal of strength and perseverance in order to create something meaningful and valuable. This is compared to the creation of a child, as the mother persona says, "the soul rung forward into image,/as metal is stunned into coin" (l. 28-29). The mother is willing to undergo all hardships in order to give birth to her child and in so doing, she experiences her inner power which transform herself into a better person, hence making pregnancy a spiritual and transformative experience. Moreover, women can gain inner peace and happiness through pregnancy. In "Letter in July" by Elizabeth Spires, the expectant mother persona describes her liminal self as being asleep and curling like a leaf in a rowboat that floats and is gently touched by the water in a still pond. Her pregnant body is bathed with the sunlight and is being shaped "into something languid and new" (l. 14) by "a wand, an enchantment" (l. 13). This imagery shows that the expectant mother is herself very much like an unborn child inside the womb. She is in the transitory state towards becoming a mother. The peaceful atmosphere suggests that pregnancy can enrich a woman's life with joy and contentment and provide an opportunity for quiet contemplation of her autonomous inner self.

Last but not least, pregnancy is a shared experience that helps create and empower an unflinching bond among women—thus reflecting the feminist idea about female bonding or

sisterhood. The poem “Pregnant Poets Swim Lake Tarleton, New Hampshire” by Barbara Ras, starts with a description of two eight-month-pregnant mothers enjoying themselves swimming across the lake from one side to the other, fighting the water currents and giving each other support. Along the way, the speaker, who is one of the swimmers, describes the changes in their body, behaviour and mind, using the pronouns “we” and “our,” thereby suggesting the universal female transformation that pregnancy brings about in women. She tropes being pregnant as a pasture in summer to illustrate that it is the best moment in a woman’s lifetime, since a pasture is the most fertile locus for feeding life in the summer. She adds the lines “pregnancy like a state of mind so full/ nothing else can be” (l. 11-12) and compares it to a tomato which can retain its freshness after several days of being kept inside a pocket. The poem then ends with a cheerful and empowering note to all women to cherish their magnificent role in life-creation; the pregnant speaker says, “[w]e are the gardens. We are the toads./ The season of wetness is upon us” (l. 25-26). According to Walker (1988), toads are symbolically connected to magical rebirth. The Aztecs related them to the underworld womb of regeneration; and the wife of the sun in North American Indian belief is a Toad Goddess (p. 391). Both the gardens and the toads allude to the archetypal Mother Goddess, whose power to bestow fertility upon mankind is invested in women.

II. Labor: An Ultimate Test for the Liminal Mother

Labour is a crucial liminal time for both mothers and their child. It is their ultimate test because they have to encounter death in order to transform into life. This fearful process brings about not only the birth of a child but also the birth of the maiden’s new identity as a mother. Bolen (1994) asserts that through the experience of labour and delivery, she has “a mystical sense of oneness with all women through time….I was everywoman, anywoman,

Woman" (p. 61). This resonates with the feminist idea of sisterhood or female bonding because birthing is the most powerful collective experience for all women who have been through it. It is another channel for female empowerment. However, due to a lack of understanding and sensitivity, the public fail to facilitate new mothers in both childbirth and nursing, which are significant moments in their transitory state. Based on her own experience and those of many other women, Adrienne Rich (1986) defines birthing in the Twentieth Century American hospitals as "alienated labour": "The loneliness, the sense of abandonment, of being imprisoned, powerless, and depersonalized is the chief collective memory of women who have given birth in American hospitals" (p. 176). In "The Mother/Child Papers" (1978), Ostriker recalled how her male obstetrician reacted to her request to make her own decision about a spinal block. She wrote, "He smiled tolerantly to the ceiling. I remarked that childbirth gave a woman an opportunity for supreme pleasure, and heroism, in her own body. He smiled. They teach them, in medical school, that pregnancy and birth are diseases" (p. 85).

A vivid description of a woman in the midst of labour is given in "Notes from the Delivery Room" by Linda Pastan, another poet who is well-known for taking "ordinary events in the life of a woman and mined those for the powerful themes that dwelled beneath the surface" (Olivetti, 2015, p. 104). The mother persona informs us that she is "strapped down" (l. 1) like a "victim in an old comic book" (l. 2), while the male doctor commands her to "[b]ear down" (l. 7). She is in such a terrible pain that she wishes for babies to be grown in fields as beet or turnips instead. She uses the word "the audience" (l. 20) to refer to the nurses and adds that they are now becoming "restive" (l. 21) or impatient. She even compares herself to an apprentice magician, who is unable to get a rabbit out of her "swollen hat" (l. 23), hence boring the audience. The poem clearly illustrates that organized and mechanized childbirth in hospitals rids the women of their natural, organic and powerful maternal power.

The doctor-patient relationship turns out to be a foreman-labourer one. The nurses become the audience and the mother an actress. Instead of being compassionate, the doctor and the nurses are unkind to the new mother. They are just performing their roles—without any emotional engagement. However, at the end of the poem, the mother speaker welcomes her newborn child by emphasizing the fact that they are both barefoot, suggesting that they are equal in their relationship and that they have survived the life-and-death trial of the liminality passage, and achieved their birthing in the purest and most innocently natural terms. Despite all the almost unbearable physical and psychological pains in the delivery room, the mother discovers the strength in her inner self and feels empowered.

III. Adjusting to the New Mothering Role and Discovering Her Power

In the third phase of the rite of passage, or incorporation, the ritual subject constructs his or her new identity and is expected to follow societal norms and standards (Turner, pp. 94-95). After birthing, the liminal woman is recognized by society as a new mother and has to adjust herself to social expectations. This is one of the most difficult periods, as she is torn between the needs of her individual self and the needs to relate to her baby and other people. It is the time for new mothers to develop strengths and qualities within themselves, the qualities necessary for their own survival and growth. Right after giving birth, the new mother's first and foremost maternal duty is breastfeeding—regardless of her exhausting physical condition. Nursing the newborn is essential to the survival of all mammalian species. As for humanity, breastfeeding was highly regarded in all ancient cultures. According to Neumann (1955), the transformation mysteries of the woman are primarily blood-transformation mysteries, which allow her to grasp the experience of her own creativity. The first blood-transformation mystery in woman is menstruation, and the second is pregnancy,

since the embryo is created from the blood. The third blood mystery takes place after birthing as her blood transforms into milk, which provides the foundation for the mysteries of food transformation (pp. 31-32). Therefore, nursing can be a site of power and resistance for women because lactation is related to the powerful life-nurturing forces within the Great Mother and all women; moreover, they hold the key to the survival of the human species.

However, breastfeeding has become less honoured in modern society. According to "Breastfeeding in the Course of History" (2015), since the Industrial Revolution at the end of the Eighteenth Century and the rise of capitalism in the Nineteenth Century, women who have nursed their child have been forced to work out of home to contribute to the family income—resulting in the replacement of breastfeeding with artificial feeding of various forms. During the 1950s and 1960s, when some of the selected mother poets nursed their babies, breast-feeding steadily decreased, and by the early 1970s, only about 25% of infants were breast-fed at the age of one week. Another factor was that mothers felt ashamed of breastfeeding in public, as the breast is related to female sexuality (p. 7). In the poem "The Cambridge Afternoon Was Grey" by Alicia Ostriker, the mother persona recalls how her newborn is brought to her by a nurse's aide in a grey uniform sometime after the delivery, which suggests the mother-child separation right after birth. She also stresses that the hospital is "full of Sisters of Mercy starched/ [t]o a religious ecstasy/ [o]f tidiness" (l. 3-5). These Roman Catholic women commit their lives to God and charity. The mother and her child are being greeted by a group of Sisters of Mercy, while she feels a natural urge to breastfeed her baby. She says, "[m]y hot breast/ [w]as delighted, and ran up to you like a dog/ [t]o a younger dog it wants to make friends with" (l. 16-18). The aide is "scandalized" (l. 19) or shocked and offended by the mother's exposure of her breast as well as the actual act of breastfeeding. She steps out and closes the curtains to leave the mother and the baby alone. This clearly shows that breastfeeding, which is natural and instinctive, is devalued and stigmatized as

disgraceful. There is a dichotomy presented here between the mechanical-industrial and natural-organic; the organic is the figurative (and literal) space where the woman not only bonds with her progeny but also finds a separate space—her space presented by the imagery of a secret space between herself and the child—a space untraversed by the mechanical, "starched" patriarchal world of the nurses, doctors and of medicine.

Taking care of a newborn is not an easy task. During the postpartum, new mothers have to encounter countless physical and emotional stresses, while attempting to meet the conflicting needs both of themselves, as well as those of their child. Some women suffer from postpartum depression, making it impossible for their full motherhood identity to be developed. New mothers' frustrations over their maternal responsibilities and relative adjustments are realistically presented in the selected poems in contrast to the idealized Victorian angel in the house. In Adrienne Rich's "Night-Pieces: For a Child" a love-hate relationship between new mothers and their children is examined. In the first section of the poem "The Crib", the baby wakes up from a nightmare to find its mother even more frightening. The mother persona says, "Mother I no more am,/ but woman, and nightmare." (l. 13-14). She wonders if she has become "death's head, sphinx, medusa" (l. 9) to the child. In Greek mythology, a sphinx is a monster with the body of a lion, wings, and the breasts and face of a woman. The most famous sphinx is the powerful and intelligent one that beset Thebes and asked a riddle to all whom she met. She devoured everyone who failed to solve the riddle. The regent of Thebes, King Creon, offered the throne to the one who would destroy her. After Oedipus answered the riddle correctly, the sphinx killed herself. Another mythical character mentioned in the poem is medusa. Medusa was one of the three Gorgons. She was the only one who was mortal, and she was a young beautiful maiden. Unfortunately, she was raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple. In rage, Athena punished her by turning her hair into snakes. Her appearance was so horrifying that everyone who looked upon her was

petrified or turned to stone. Both the sphinx and Medusa represent powerful, fearful and harmful women whose character contradicts the idealized patriarchal image of mothers who are kind, gentle, selfless and virtuous. In the second section of the poem "Her Waking", the mother persona also tells us about her nightmares, with fearful references to "knives" (l. 21) and "murderous hider and seeker" (l. 22). She abruptly wakes up in the dark feeling as "hourless as Hiroshima" (l. 17). On August 6, 1945, during World War II (1939-45), the world's first atomic bomb was dropped over the Japanese city of Hiroshima by an American bomber. The explosion immediately killed over 80,000 people and destroyed 90 percent of the city. Many more people later died of radiation exposure. Three days later, another atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, killing an estimated 40,000 people. Japan's Emperor Hirohito announced his country's surrender in World War II on August 15. The devastating effects of the bombs are everyone's nightmare. The reference to Hiroshima implies that the mother persona in Rich's poem also goes through nightmarish experiences during her waking hours. Taking care of her child can be both a stressful and fearful obligation, in that it leaves her with nightmares. As cited in Green (2015, p. 201), British pediatrician and child psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott introduced the theory of "the good enough mother" in 1953 saying that:

> The good-enough mother…starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant's needs, and as time proceeds she gradually adapts less and less completely, according to the infant's growing ability to deal with her failure. [In fact, it is] the mother's failure to adapt to every need of the child [that] helps the child adapt to external realities.

Green commented that like Winnicott, Rich bravely admitted that mothers are not always as perfect as the feminine ideal. The "good enough mother" experiences love, hate and

resentment toward her child and does not "give herself completely to her child, nor to the role of parenting" (p. 201).

Diana O'Hehir also clearly depicts the new mother's alienation and detachment from her newborn in the poem "Infant". Unable to relate herself to the baby, the new mother persona calls her baby a "cuckoo [c]hild" (l. 7-8, which insinuates the idea that her child is a usurper or in some way lacks fidelity to the mother. Her guilt is demonstrated in her recurring dreams about forgetting to feed it. She even admits that she "would/never/[b]e used to this" (l. 17-19). While holding the baby, she perceives it as "a sullen bean bag" (l. 22), which objectifies the child, rather than identifying it as a baby with a soul born from her own flesh and blood. The reference to the "heavy weight" (l. 21) of the bean bag "between [her] arm and [her] body" (l. 21) signifies her notion that the baby poses an immense responsibility to her. She also perceives herself as a failed mother as the beanbag (or the baby) is bad-tempered and displeased with her. The poem ends with the mother unable to desert her baby but rather "pulled … into it" (l. 24), suggesting the irresistible power of the baby in attracting, charming and inviting the mother to fulfill her natural maternal role.

Another poem which addresses the new mother's sense of responsibility towards her newborn is "Night Feed" by Eavan Boland. The sleep-deprived mother-speaker describes herself as an early bird that has become a "keeper" (l. 14) for her baby. To be a keeper, in this case, is to guard and take care of the baby. Struggling with her feeling of inadequacy or self-blame, she regrettably says, "[t]his is the best I can be,/ [h]ousewife/ [t]o this nursery" (l. 17-19). Instead of viewing herself as the baby's mother, she feels that she is a housewife, which implies her physical and emotional submission and exhaustion. The poem ends with the mother speaker tucking her baby in, which illustrates her tender affection for her child, which in turn enables her to sacrifice her daily happiness for it.

In “The Chair by the Window” by Ann Winters, the mother persona compares herself to a cow and her baby a “frowning farmer” (l. 10) to imply the demanding nature of childcare in the life of new mothers. She, nevertheless, can experience a maternal love and joy while breastfeeding her infant, when she says, “we/ are two who sit and smile into each other’s eyes” (l. 8-9). The mother-child connection is established and strengthened when given enough time and intimacy. Bolen (1994) points out that breastfeeding, despite its demanding nature, can be a sacred communion, which helps deepen the experience of the mother. It is “an extraordinary experience of oneness and stillness and communion and symbiosis” (p. 64).

A steady bond between new mothers and their infants is also developed during the postpartum, enabling the mother to actualize her spiritual potentiality. Their infatuation with the child, which is initially stimulated by maternal hormones, is superseded by their attachment to it after a long period of childrearing. The new mothers feel an intense love for their child and abhor any physical separation from it. While quietly gazing at her sleeping child, the new mother speaker in “Night Light” by Anne Winters, is overwhelmed with joy and tenderness. She feels that her heart gradually opens to the baby’s “tiny flame” (l. 8). This suggests that the happiness that she has gained from her bonding with her child is so powerful that it warms her heart and chases away all obscurity, doubts and weariness of mothering. She compares herself and the child to two planets revolving around each other. Despite the space or the distance between them, they exist symbiotically, together: “One planet loves the other,” (l. 14). This beautiful image shows that the mother recognizes, accepts and respects a space between them and is delighted in giving her child the best protection and love. In “Eating Babies” by Chana Bloch, the baby becomes its mother’s source of infinite happiness and fulfilment. In both affectionate and humorous tones, the poem portrays an image of a mother who cannot stop tasting, licking, nibbling, touching, watching, and biting her baby all the time. She says, “it’s your own/ life you lean over, greedy/ going back for more” (l. 43-

45). This sensual pleasure ultimately helps establish an enduring bond between the mother and her child.

Becoming a mother is obviously seen here as being about more than giving birth and care to the baby. It is a sacred journey in which mothers discover the best in them and eventually feel empowered. As in other kinds of relationships, negative emotions are present and have to be dealt with before positive ones can be realized. The poem "Seizure" by Jeanne Murray Walker portrays an honest depiction of maternal frustration and resentment. At the beginning of the poem, the mother persona bitterly complains about all the sacrifices she has made for her baby, such as giving it her flesh and blood and confronting death during delivery. She repeatedly announces that this is "the last time" (l. 6,7,9) that she will make such sacrifices. However, when witnessing her 15-month-old baby having a seizure, she is shocked and desperate. In her wild attempts to save her baby's life, she discovers her true love for it. She is willing to exchange all her blood, meaning her life, for her baby's life and will not consider that the baby owes her anything. Her immense maternal love has transformed her into a selfless mother—a person with new spiritual heights.

The poem "The Language of the Brag" by Sharon Olds, challenges the traditional American idea of greatness by boldly declaring that becoming a mother is more celebrated and honoured than any heroic deeds ever performed by men. The poem starts with the female persona's recollections of actions which, as society as a whole, she once believed to be the most admirable. It has always been her dream to be at the center of attention and to be able to use her "excellent body" (l. 8) and her "extraordinary self" (l. 10) to excel in fierce, violent, athletic quests such as knife-throwing and crossing fire and waterfalls. But all she is allowed to do is "[standing] by the sandlot/ and [watching] the boys play" (l. 11-12) as all those activities are reserved for men only. The repetition of the verb-phrase "I have wanted" throughout the first three stanzas suggests her strong desire for an equal chance for women to

be accepted and admired by society. The persona then describes how her female body undergoes tremendous physical changes during pregnancy and is finally put at the center of attention in the delivery room. Like heroes in legends and real life, she has lost blood and sweat in order to give life to "the new person" (l. 26-28): a new member of humanity. She finally realizes women's bravery and their power of nurture and creativity, which is totally different from men's. She states that her baby is born and covered with the "language of blood like praise all over the body" (l. 29). Her blood works as a figure of metonymy and alludes to the blood-transformation mysteries of women, which honour women's blood as sacred, due to its connection to the female life-giving force in the Mother Goddess and in all women. Therefore, her baby is blessed with this holy blood to grow physically and spiritually healthy. The poem ends with the celebration of women's bodies:

> I have done what you wanted to do, Walt Whitman,
> Allen Ginsberg, I have done this thing,
> I and the other women this exceptional
> act with the exceptional heroic body,
> this giving birth, this glistening verb,
> and I am putting my proud American boast
> right here with the others. (l. 30-36)

References to Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg, who were highly regarded modern American poets, carry the implication that all of the positive changes that these two poets wished to bring about in society, have already been fostered for a long time by women, throughout history. She asserts her right, together with other women, to be proud of the female body and to be confident enough to boast about it.

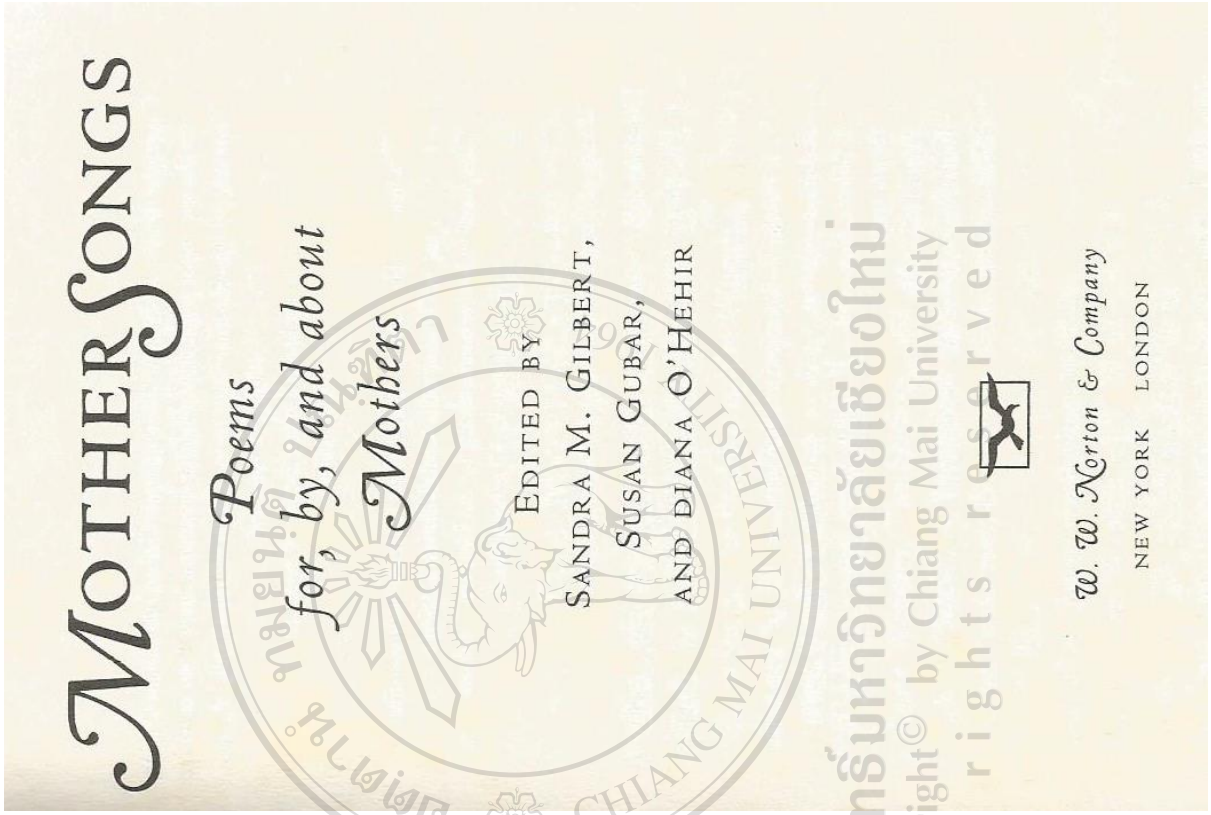
Chapter Four

Conclusion

This research concludes that mothering is a powerful and spiritually transformative experience in the overall rite of passage for women to becoming more self-aware of their inner strength. Although motherhood has been represented as a construction, upon these readings these apparently gendered expectations and stereotypes actually aid in paradoxically providing women with a space (or wild zone) in which to develop their own identity as difference from the inherent springes of patriarchy. It enables them to become conscious of the life-nurturing forces of the Great Mother archetype, and all the other women within them. It brings out and develops higher qualities in the mothers, as well as connecting and empowering them. This paper celebrates the precious and enduring bond between mother and child. A mother is, in most cases, the child's first love and the first person to establish a relationship with it in life; or in terms of psychology, the mother is the first person to imprint on her child. This study has adumbrated, partly through a close examination of the mythopoetic frameworks of various female poets, the things women have to experience in their liminal journey towards becoming mothers. The researcher hopes to enhance the public's recognition of the crucial role mothers play in the life of their children and of society as a whole. This will enable men to better understand and honour women in their life and it will hopefully foster social changes in future relationships between men and women.

Appendix I

Poems Used in the Analysis



First Edition

The text of this book is composed in Centaur with the display set in Centaur with Caslon Swash Capitals
Composition and manufacturing by the Haddon Craftsmen Inc.
Book design by Charlotte Staub

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mothersongs : poems for, by, and about mothers / edited by Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Diana O'Hehir.
p. cm.
Includes index.
1. Mothers—Poetry. 2. Motherhood—Poetry. 3. Mother and child—Poetry. 4. American poetry. 5. English poetry. I. Gilbert, Sandra M. II. Gubar, Susan, 1944– . III. O'Hehir, Diana, 1929– .
PS595.M64M697 1995
811.008'03520431—dc20 94-42757
ISBN 0-393-03771-1

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
500 Fifth Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10110
W. W. Norton & Company Ltd.
10 Coptic Street,
London WC1A 1PU

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Poems for the New

1.

we're connecting,
  foot under my rib.
I'm sore with life!
At night,

  your toes grow. Inches of the new!
The lion prowls the sky
and shakes his tail for you.
Pieces of moon
    fly by my kitchen window.
And your father comes
riding the lions back
    in the dark,
to hold me,
    you,
      in the perfect circle of him.

2.

Voluptuous against him, I am
nothing superfluous,
but all—
bones, bark of him, root of him take.
I am round
with his sprouting,
new thing new thing!

He wraps me.
The sheets are white.
My belly has tracks on it—
          hands and feet
are moving
under this taut skin.
In snow, in light,
we are about to become!

KATHLEEN FRASER

The Buddha in the Womb

Bobbing in the waters of the womb,
little godhead, ten toes, ten fingers
& infinite hope,
sails upside down through the world.

My bones, I know, are only a cage
for death.
Meditating, I can see my skull,
a death's head,
lit from within
by candles
which are possibly the suns
of other galaxies.

I know that death
is a movement toward light,
a happy dream
from which you are loath to awaken,
a lover left
in a country
to which you have no visa,
& I know that the horses of the spirit
are galloping, galloping, galloping
out of time
& into the moment called NOW.

Why then do I care
for this upside-down Buddha
bobbling through the world,
his toes, his fingers
alive with blood
that will only sing & die?

There is a light in my skull
& a light in his.
We meditate on our bones only
to let them blow away
with fewer regrets.

Flesh is merely a lesson.
We learn it
& pass on.

ERICA JONG

Pregnancy

It is the best thing.
I should always like to be pregnant,

Tummy thickening like a yoghurt,
Unbelievable flower.

A queen is always pregnant with her country.
Sheba of questions

Or briny siren
At her difficult passage,

One is the mountain that moves
Toward the earliest gods.

Who started this?
An axis, a quake, a perimeter,

I have no decisions to master
That could change my frame

Or honor.
Immaculate. Or if it was not, perfect.

Pregnant, I'm highly explosive—
You can feel it, long before

Your seed will run back to hug you—
Squaring and cubing

Into reckless bones, bouncing odd ways
Like a football.

The heart sloshes through the microphone
Like falls in a box canyon.

The queen's only a figurehead.
Nine months pulled by nine

Planets, the moon sloping
Through its amnion sea,

Trapped, stone-mad . . . and three
Beings' lives gel in my womb.

SANDRA MCPHERSON

You're

Clownlike, happiest on your hands,
Feet to the stars, and moon-skulled,
Gilled like a fish. A common-sense
Thumbs-down on the dodo's mode.
Wrapped up in yourself like a spool,
Trawling your dark as owls do.
Mute as a turnip from the Fourth
Of July to All Fools' Day,
O high-riser, my little loaf.

Vague as fog and looked for like mail.
Farther off than Australia.
Bent-backed Atlas, our traveled prawn.

Snug as a bud and at home
Like a sprat in a pickle jug.
A creel of eels, all ripples.
Jumpy as a Mexican bean.
Right, like a well-done sum.
A clean slate, with your own face on.

SYLVIA PLATH

Enceinte

Mossy rock, tree limb, foot of a rabbit, large edible root, serpent lashing from side to side, a cushion, veiled lamp, some-kind-of moveable-parts-doll-deity, sponge, rising loaf, butterfly, trapped bird, wax, mold, flame, a small man writing, small woman eating & lifting elbow, a bat, succulent plant, something in the oven, a potato doll, a doll of seashells, sandbag, large fish swimming in circles, a clock, something silent, a silent toy car, a memory, coiled & striking, fish hidden behind rock, every color & no color, a telephone receiver, submarine, rubber expanding, held together with rubber bands, labial, fingers playing an instrument, inflatable doll, a school of dolphins, tidal wave, unease, planet with circling rings, not made in a lab, a thunder storm, lashing out, a chest of toys, sedentary monkey, jack-in-a-box, icebox, lamps going on, a solar system, a tiny city ruled by a cobra, a city of clam inhabitants, an excursion, a

place with hats on, an owl, a bear in a cave, drifting raft,
boat on the waves, electricity, dancing flame's shadow on
your face, bulging package, a rushed person gesturing
excitedly as in hailing a speeding taxi cab, quicksilver.

ANNE WALDMAN

The Stethoscope

Like Halley's comet, bending on its tail,
you curl beneath the black cup on my skin:
I guess at limbs in half-eclipse, obscure
and fluent as a distant telegram.
Unworldly, small, sealed orders, darkroom heat,
soon among the signals pulsed, the static whoosh,
    arrives
in distant thuds your rapider than human
heartbeat—sex unknowable—bud eyes—

Yet of our world you only know the tree
you lie beneath, its root your belly, fronds
and villi falling in the sunken lake
of capillaries, bubbles, breathing bonds . . .
I sigh. And somewhere you incline your vast
night-sighted brow—your jointed, swimming hands—

ANNE WINTERS

A Timepiece

Of a pendulum's mildness, with her feet up
My sister lay expecting her third child.
Over the hammock's crescent spilled
Her flushed face, grazing clover and buttercup.

Her legs were troubling her, a vein had burst.
Even so, among partial fullnesses she lay
Of pecked damson, of daughters at play
Who in the shadow of the house rehearsed

Her gait, her gesture, unnatural to them,
But they would master it soon enough, grown tall
Trusting that out of themselves came all
That full grace, while she out of whom these came

Shall have thrust fullness from her, like a death.
Already, seeing the little girls listless
She righted herself in a new awkwardness.
It was not *her* life she was heavy with.

Let us each have some milk, my sister smiled
Meaning to muffle with the taste
Of unbuilt bone a striking in her breast,
For soon by what it tells the clock is stilled.

JAMES MERRILL

I wait for her to cry,
then go into the kitchen.
I fix a Scotch and sit down at the table.
In six months, it is coming, in six months,
and I have no weapon against it.

AI

Weathering Out

She liked mornings the best—Thomas gone
to look for work, her coffee flushed with milk,

outside autumn trees blowsy and dripping.
Past the seventh month she couldn't see her feet

so she floated from room to room, houseshoes flapping,
navigating corners in wonder. When she leaned

against a door jamb to yawn, she disappeared entirely.

Last week they had taken a bus at dawn
to the new airdock. The hangar slid open in segments

and the zeppelin nosed forward in its silver envelope.
The men walked it out gingerly, like a poodle,

then tied it to a mast and went back inside.
Beulah felt just that large and placid, a lake;

she glistened from cocoa butter smoothed in
when Thomas returned every evening nearly

in tears. He'd lean an ear on her belly
and say: *Little fellow's really talking,*

though to her it was more the *pok-pok-pok*
of a fingernail tapping a thick cream lampshade.

Sometimes during the night she woke and found him
asleep there and the child sleeping, too.

The coffee was good but too little. Outside
everything shivered in tinfoil—only the clover

between the cobblestones hung stubbornly on,
green as an afterthought. . . .

RITA DOVE

Letter in July

My life slows and deepens.
I am thirty-eight, neither here nor there.
It is a morning in July, hot and clear.
Out in the field, a bird repeats its quaternary call,
four notes insisting, *I'm here, I'm here.*
The field is unmowed, summer's wreckage everywhere.
Even this early, all is expectancy.

It is as if I float on a still pond,
drowsing in the bottom of a rowboat,
curled like a leaf into myself.

The water laps at its old wooden sides
as the sun beats down on my body,
a wand, an enchantment, shaping it
into something languid and new.

A year ago, two, I dreamed I held
a mirror to your unborn face and saw you,
in that warped, watery glass, not as a child
but as you will be twenty years from now.
I woke, a light breeze lifting the curtain,
as if touched by a ghost's thin hand,
light filling the room, coming from nowhere.

I know the time, the place of our meeting.
It will be January, the coldest night
of the year. You will be carrying a lantern
as you enter the world crying,
and I cry to hear you cry.
A moment that, even now,
I carry in my body.

ELIZABETH SPIRES

Pregnant Poets Swim Lake Tarleton, New Hampshire

For Emily Wheeler

You dive in, head for the other side, sure
that to swim a lake means to cross it,

whole. I am slow to follow,
repelled by edgewater rife with growth, the darker
suck of the deep. You lead,
letting go so surely you possess. I surrender.
Midlake we rest, breathless, let up our feet.
Our bellies are eight-month fruits
fabulous with weightlessness.
We have entered summer like a state of pasture,
pregnancy like a state of mind so full
nothing else can be.
Sharing this is simple: the surprise of a tomato
still perfect after days in a pocket.
Brown lines began in pubic hair, arced
up abdomens to our navels.
Here is the circle made flesh.
How much water does it take to make blood?
Where do Tibetans get the conches
they blow to release the trapped sound of the sea?
Our talk slows to the lengthening loop of the blood,
pauses for tiny hands, tiny feet to beat their sayso.
"Marianne" lasts as long as a complete sentence
before the next utterance floats up, "Moore."
We are the gardens. We are the toads.
The season of wetness is upon us.
Leap. Leap for all the kingdoms
and all the waters,
the water that breaks,
the rain, the juice, the tide,
the dark water that draws light down to life.

BARBARA RAS

Notes from the Delivery Room

Strapped down,
victim in an old comic book,
I have been here before,
this place where pain winces
off the walls
like too bright light.
Bear down a doctor says,
foreman to sweating laborer,
but this work, this forcing
of one life from another
is something that I signed for
at a moment when I would have signed anything.
Babies should grow in fields;
common as beets or turnips
they should be picked and held
root end up, soil spilling
from between their toes—
and how much easier it would be later,
returning them to earth.
Bear up . . . bear down . . . the audience
grows restive, and I'm a new magician
who can't produce the rabbit
from my swollen hat.
She's crowning, someone says,
but there is no one royal here,
just me, quite barefoot,
greeting my barefoot child.

LINDA PASTAN

Sounding

Annie Cameron

Four months in the womb
you were photographed
with sound. We stared

at the pulsing surface
of your skull, your fingers
lifting, as if to stave off

a sudden wind in that
sealed room where for
so long only our two

hearts echoed each other.
Screened, your heart glowed
at the joint of the caliper.

Months later, after
they had bathed you
and brought you to me,

I washed you again—
in privacy, opened
one by one the clenched

fingers seen too soon,
brushed the thin skin
of the skull where

the brain's leaping blood
bulged against it.
For months, I'd heard it

in dreams: the underwater gong
then the regular shock waves—
an assault as barbaric as conception,

the soul rung forward into image,
as metal is stunned into coin,
as the hammer sounds against its resistance:

the gold unblinking eye of the forge.

CAROL MUSKE

Loba in Childbed

She lay in bed, screaming, the boat
carried her to the heart of the mandala
sweat stuck
hair to her forehead, she
lay back, panting, remembering
it was what she *should* do. Skull boat
carried her to the heart of her womb, red
pulsing eye of her spirit. She saw
soul shine shoaled on rocks, flint edges
of rocky pelvic cage, caught, swirls
of bland liquid eddying round
curls of bright
red-gold hair, she
screamed, for him, for herself, she
tried to open, to widen tunnel, the rock
inside her tried to crack, to chip away

I thought your mother might powder my knuckles
gript at one point, with wild eyes on my tie
"Don't move!" and then the screams began,
they wheeled her off, and we are all in business.

I wish I knew what business (son) we're in
I can't wait seven weeks to see her grin
I'm not myself, we are all changing here
direction *and* velocity, to accommodate you, dear.

JOHN BERRYMAN

From *A Birthday Suite*

For Eve

The Cambridge Afternoon Was Grey

When you were born, the nurse's aide
Wore a grey uniform, and the Evelyn Nursing Home
Was full of Sisters of Mercy starched

To a religious ecstasy
Of tidiness. They brought you, struggling feebly
Inside your cotton blanket, only your eyes

Were looking as if you already knew
What thinking would be like—
Some pinch of thought was making your eyes brim

With diabolic relish, like a child
Who has been hiding crouched down in a closet
Among the woolen overcoats and stacked

Shoeboxes, while the anxious parents
Call *Where are you?* And suddenly the child
Bounces into the room

Pretending innocence. . . . My hot breast
Was delighted, and ran up to you like a dog
To a younger dog it wants to make friends with,

So the scandalized aide had to pull the grey
Curtains around our bed, making a sound
Of hissing virtue, curtainrings on rod,

While your eyes were saying *Where am I? I'm here!*

ALICIA OSTRIKER

Infant Sorrow

My mother groand! my father wept.
Into the dangerous world I leapt:
Helpless, naked, piping loud:
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my father's hands:
Striving against my swadling bands:

Bound and weary I thought best
To sulk upon my mother's breast.

WILLIAM BLAKE

Infant

The head tilts back, like a heavy leaf, the eyes sew shut
With a row of grains, the hand wavers under the chin,
    fingers
Splayed; this is
Exactly the way I remember it;
No syllable different; navy-blue
Boiled eyes, and cuckoo-mouth, cuckoo
Child; all of us always have known,
Recognition printed on the cells
Of the primitive body chart.

Every night that month I dreamed the baby was born,
It was fragile, creased like an overseas envelope; it was
    mislaid;
I had forgotten to feed it.
I woke up, moved my awkward belly into the
    bathroom,
Stood gasping at the edge of the washbasin. I would
    never
Be used to this.

And when I picked up the real baby it settled its
    heavy weight between my arm and my body.
Like a sullen beanbag,
Turned its face against me,
Pulled me into it.

DIANA O'HEHIR

From *The Two-Part Prelude*

Blessed the infant babe—
For my best conjectures I would trace
The progress of our being—blest the babe
Nursed in his mother's arms, the babe who sleeps
Upon his mother's breast, who, when his soul
Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,
Doth gather passion from his mother's eye.
Such feelings pass into his torpid life
Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind,
Even in the first trial of its powers,
Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine
In one appearance all the elements
And parts of the same object, else detached
And loth to coalesce. Thus day by day
Subjected to the discipline of love,
His organs and recipient faculties
Are quickened, are more vigorous; his mind spreads,

Night Light

Only your plastic night light dusts its pink
on the backs and undersides of things; your mother,
head resting on the nightside of one arm,
floats a hand above your cradle
to feel the humid tendril of your breathing.
Outside, the night rocks, murmurs . . . Crouched
in this eggshell light, I feel my heart
slowing, opened to your tiny flame

as if your blue irises mirrored me
as if your smile breathed and warmed
and curled in your face which is only asleep.
There is space between me, I know,
and you. I hang above you like a planet—
you're a planet, too. One planet loves the other.

ANNE WINTERS

The Chair by the Window

Your rhythmic nursing slows. I feel
your smile before I see it: nipple pinched
in corner of mouth, your brimming, short, tuck-
cornered
smile. I shake my head, my *no* vibrates

to you through ribs and arms. Your tapered ears
quiver, work faintly and still pinker, my
nipple spins right out and we
are two who sit and smile into each other's eyes.

Again, you frowning farmer, me your cow:
you flap one steadying palm against my breast,
thump down the other, chuckle, snort, and then
you're suddenly under, mouth moving steadily, eyes
drifting past mine abstracted, your familiar
blue remote and window-paned with light.

ANNE WINTERS

Elizabeth Near and Far

You are awake, held in arms, chin
balanced on my shoulder, small globe turning back
while mine much larger faces straight ahead.
It sounds as if you'd found your thumb—you thrum
inward, but audible: *frrum, frrum,* you're talking.
I sense your eyes go past me and around
your thumb to where some floating speck of light
hovers, microscopic, in your glistening gaze.

Or mornings when you lie awake, your first
faint vowels floating up (the nursery door ajar).

my head of dreams deeper than night and sleep.
Voices of all black animals crying to drink,
cries of all birth arise, simple as we,
found in the leaves, in clouds and dark, in dream,
deep as this hour, ready again to sleep.

MURIEL RUKEYSER

Night Feed

This is dawn.
Believe me
This is your season, little daughter.
The moment daisies open,
The hour mercurial rainwater
Makes a mirror for sparrows.
It's time we drowned our sorrows.

I tiptoe in.
I lift you up
Wriggling
In your rosy, zipped sleeper.
Yes, this is the hour
For the early bird and me
When finder is keeper.

I crook the bottle.
How you suckle!

This is the best I can be,
Housewife
To this nursery
Where you hold on,
Dear Life.

A silt of milk.
The last suck.
And now your eyes are open,
Birth-colored and offended.
Earth wakes.
You go back to sleep.
The feed is ended.

Worms turn.
Stars go in.
Even the moon is losing face.
Poplars stilt for dawn
And we begin
The long fall from grace.
I tuck you in.

EAVAN BOLAND

Eating Babies

1

Fat
Is the soul of this flesh.
Eat with your hands, slow, you will understand
breasts, why everyone
adores them—Rubens' great custard nudes—why
we can't help sleeping with
pillows.

The old woman in the park pointed,
Is it yours?
Her gold eye-teeth gleamed.

I bend down, taste the fluted
nipples, the elbows, the pads
of the feet. Nibble earlobes, dip
my tongue in the salt fold
of shoulder and throat.

Even now he is changing,
as if I were
licking him thin.

2

He squeezes his eyes tight
to hide
and blink! he's still here.
It's always a surprise.

Safety-fat,
angel-fat,

steal it in mouthfuls,
store it away
where you save

the face that you touched
for the last time
over and over,
your eyes closed

so it wouldn't go away.

3

Watch him sleeping. Touch
the pulse where
the bones haven't locked
in his damp hair:
the navel of dreams.
His eyes open for a moment, underwater.

His arms drift in the dark
as your breath
washes over him.

Bite one cheek. Again.
it's your own
life you lean over, greedy,
going back for more.

CHANA BLOCH

Upon Her Soothing Breast

Upon her soothing breast
She lulled her little child;
A winter sunset in the west,
A dreary glory smiled.

EMILY BRONTË

Child

Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.
I want to fill it with color and ducks,
The zoo of the new

Whose names you meditate—
April snowdrop, Indian pipe,
Little

Stalk without wrinkle,
Pool in which images
Should be grand and classical

Not this troublous
Wringing of hands, this dark
Ceiling without a star.

SYLVIA PLATH

Night-Pieces: For a Child

The Crib

You sleeping I bend to cover.
Your eyelids work. I see
your dream, cloudy as a negative,
swimming underneath.
You blurt a cry. Your eyes

spring open, still filmed in dream.
Wider, they fix me—
—death's head, sphinx, medusa?
You scream.
Tears lick my cheeks, my knees
droop at your fear.
Mother I no more am,
but woman, and nightmare.

Her Waking

Tonight I jerk astart in a dark
hourless as Hiroshima,
almost hearing you breathe
in a cot three doors away.

You still breathe, yes—
and my dream with its gift of knives,
its murderous hider and seeker,
ebbs away, recoils

back into the egg of dreams,
the vanishing point of mind.
All gone.

ADRIENNE RICH

To the Mother-linnet's note
Moduling her slender throat,
Chirping forth thy petty joys,
Wanton in the change of toys,
Like the linnet green, in *May*,
Flitting to each bloomy spray,
Wearied then, and glad of rest,
Like the linlet in the nest.
This thy present happy lot,
This, in time, will be forgot:
Other pleasures, other cares,
Ever-busy Time prepares.
And thou shalt in thy daughter see,
This picture, once, resembled thee.

AMBROSE PHILIPS

Seizure

I gave you what I could when you were born,
salt water to rock you,
your half of nine month's meat,
miles of finished veins,
and all the blood I had to spare.

And then I said, this is the last time
I divide myself in half, the last time
I lie down in danger and rise bereft,
the last time I give up half my blood.

Fifteen months later, when I walked into your room
your mobile of the sun, moon,
and stars was tilting
while your lips twisted,
while you arched your back.

Your fingers groped for something in the air.
Your arms and legs flailed like broken wings.
Your breath was a load too heavy
for your throat to heave into your lungs.
You beat yourself into a daze against your crib.

We slapped your feet,
we flared the lights,
we doused you in a tub of lukewarm water.
But your black eyes rolled.
You had gone somewhere
and left behind a shape of bluish skin,
a counterfeit of you.
It was then,
before the red wail of the police car,
before the IV's, before the medicine
dropped into you like angels, before you woke
to a clear brow, to your own funny rising voice,

it was then that I would have struck the bargain,
all my blood
for your small shaking.
I would have called us even.

JEANNE MURRAY WALKER

to the pea-sized, irreducible minim,
may we carry our mothers forth in our bellies.
May we, borne onward by our daughters, ride
in the Envelope of Almost-Infinity,
that chain letter good for the next twenty-five
thousand days of their lives.

MAXINE KUMIN

The Language of the Brag

I have wanted excellence in the knife-throw,
I have wanted to use my exceptionally strong and
accurate arms
and my straight posture and quick electric muscles
to achieve something at the center of a crowd,
the blade piercing the bark deep,
the haft slowly and heavily vibrating like the cock.

I have wanted some epic use for my excellent body,
some heroism, some American achievement
beyond the ordinary for my extraordinary self,
magnetic and tensile, I have stood by the sandlot
and watched the boys play.

I have wanted courage, I have thought about fire
and the crossing of waterfalls, I have dragged around

my belly big with cowardice and safety,
my stool black with iron pills,
my huge breasts oozing mucus,
my legs swelling, my hands swelling,
my face swelling and darkening, my hair
falling out, my inner sex
stabbed again and again with terrible pain like a knife.
I have lain down.

I have lain down and sweated and shaken
and passed blood and feces and water and
slowly alone in the center of a circle I have
passed the new person out
and they have lifted the new person free of the act
and wiped the new person free of that
language of blood like praise all over the body.

I have done what you wanted to do, Walt Whitman,
Allen Ginsberg, I have done this thing,
I and the other women this exceptional
act with the exceptional heroic body,
this giving birth, this glistening verb,
and I am putting my proud American boast
right here with the others.

SHARON OLDS

Appendix II

Brief Biographies of the Mother Poets

In order to comprehend and value the struggle of women against patriarchal conception, it is important to get to know the lives and works of the fourteen mother poets represented in this research. The biographies of the mother poets are presented in the order in which their poems appear in the research analysis.

1. Kathleen Fraser

Born in 1937,Kathleen Fraser is a poet and author who grew up in Oklahoma, Colorado, and California. She graduated from Occidental College (California) with a degree in English literature in 1959, and then worked in New York City for *Mademoiselle* magazine before pursuing her poetic studies. Fraser has been influenced by Black Mountain, New York School, and Objectivist poets, including Frank O'Hara, Barbara Guest, and George Oppen. She has published more than 15 books, including mixed-genre collections, a chapbook of collaged wall pieces, and an essay collection.

Fraser's work in poetry has received much recognition. Her honors and awards include the New School's Frank O'Hara Poetry Prize and the American Academy's Discovery Award, as well as a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Her published works include *What I Want* (1973), *New Shoes* (1978), *Each Next: narratives* (1980), *Notes Preceding Trust* (1987), *when new time folds up* (1993), *Wing* (1995), *il cuore : the heart—Selected Poems 1970–1995* (1997), and *Discrete Categories Forced into Coupling* (2004).

Fraser is the founder of the American Poetry Archives, which she created while she

was directing the Poetry Center and teaching at San Francisco State University from 1972 to 1992. She also wrote and narrated the hour-long video *Working Women in Literature.* From 1983 to 1991 she published and edited the journal *HOW(ever),* which focused on innovative writing by contemporary women.[2]

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Fraser increasingly noted the exclusion of most experimental women poets from anthologies and serious critical treatments. In 1983, seeking to create a place for women poets writing outside the dicta of both second wave feminist poetry and the inheritors of male-centered modernism, Fraser founded the groundbreaking journal *HOW(ever).* In its seven years of publication as a paper journal, *HOW(ever)* became an important forum for innovative women poets, critics and scholars interested in modernist/postmodernist directions in women's poetry in the twentieth century. Reclaiming an obscured tradition of women writers engaged in language experimentation (Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, H.D., Lorine Niedecker, Mina Loy, and Barbara Guest, among others), the women who published their work in *HOW(ever)* conducted an extensive investigation of the relationship of language to gendered experience. It was Fraser's objective that the theoretical interest in poststructuralist literary problems would carry over into the investigation of current poetic practice and its intentions.

Recognized in the last two decades as a writer whose poetic, critical, and editorial work has been central to the project of feminist experimental poetry in North America, Fraser reinvents inherited language structures, sometimes playfully, always attentively, listening for 'the mysteries of language to come forward and resonate more fully,' as she observes in 'The Tradition of Marginality.' Her poetic project might be characterized as 'writing over "the

[2] Kathleen Fraser. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 15, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/kathleen-fraser

erased,"' as she punningly puts it — both rewriting and writing over a partially erased text, as well as overwriting (as in an 'overwritten' text which, because of that quality of paying attention to its artifice, technically draws attention to itself). Engaged in a visual as well as feminist poetics, Fraser's work offers ways to think through how formal strategies interact with lived experience, encouraging us to consider the engagement with form not just as a method of representation in poetry, but also as a mode of experience.[3]

2. Sandra McPherson

Born in 1943, Sandra McPherson weaves vivid images culled from nature into what *Contemporary Women Poets* contributor David Young characterizes as "rich, complex, and deeply satisfying poems." In collections that include the National Book Award-nominated *The Year of Our Birth,* 1988's *At the Grave of Hazel Hall,* and 1996's *Edge Effect: Trails and Portrayals,* McPherson has increasingly honed her unsentimental, insightful verse, imbuing it with images reflective of diverse folk arts and refining her expressions of a cultural perspective that is uniquely American.

In 1973, McPherson published *Radiations,* a collection that "seemed to clear a space for itself among the books of the year," according to Trueblood, "and to sit in its own ring of light." There are two distinct kinds of poems in this collection, David Cavitch maintains in his review for the *New York Times Book Review.* The first, according to the critic, are poems that "express a sensitive young woman's decorous thoughts around the house," while in the others "McPherson connects her personal existence to large, contemporary metaphors, and her simple, homebody language acquires the overtones of fierce truth, coolly delivered."

[3] Hogue, C. (n.d.) Kathleen Fraser. Retrieved November 18, 2017, from http://jacketmagazine.com/bio/fraser-k.shtml

Throughout each of McPherson's subsequent collections, readers follow "details of the poet's life," according to Young: "marriage, motherhood, eventual divorce, mental illness in a daughter, remarriage, relations with adoptive parents, and a midlife reunion with birth parents" each figure within the poet's "visionary outlook that never loses its rooting in ordinary experience.

1996's *The Spaces between Birds: Mother/Daughter Poems, 1967-1995* encompasses the relationship between the poet and her daughter, Phoebe, who was born with a form of autism. The collection juxtaposes poems by McPherson with those of her daughter, creating an effect that *Poetry* reviewer Leslie Ullman notes creates "an implicit and thoroughly winning intimacy, a kind of duet," showing "the sympathetic connections between mother and daughter . . . [that] grounds itself in an energy that is powerfully feminine," and also expressing the poet's reaction to her daughter's erratic behavior: the "raw despair, the sense of entrapment, the shadow-side of intimacy made darkest in its moments of helplessness," in the words of Ullman. A *Publishers Weekly* critic, calling *The Spaces between Birds* "a flock of hard truths, joyfully told," praises McPherson as "a distinctive stylist and a compassionate voice whose work continues to enrich and reward readers."

The first of the two parts of *Edge Effect*, published the same year as *The Spaces between Birds*, returns the poet to the examinations of folk art forms that served as her focus in such volumes as *The God of Indeterminacy*. Here McPherson writes of the creative vision of those she dubs "outsider" artists, particularly the work of the impoverished and the dispossessed, as well as returning to her examination of quilt work. The poet's perspective, according to Ullman, is "not merely a celebration of the marginal, but the definition of a new aesthetic behind works done by those to whom the word 'aesthetic' would have little meaning." The second half of *Edge Effect* finds McPherson celebrating the landscape of the Pacific Northwest, relating to the natural beauty of the region's trails and shoreline using the

same aesthetic criteria with which she observed the folk art of "outsider" artists. "In this context," Ullman explains in another *Poetry* review, "nature is re-seen in its small eccentricities and larger harmonies, like a homemade object . . . given presence by being placed in good light." With both *The Spaces between Birds* and *Edge Effect,* concludes Young, McPherson's "sympathy with the unsung creators of her own culture has proved to be profound and revelatory . . . Her creative energies seem undiminished." McPherson has published over twenty collections of poetry, including, most recently, *Expectation Days* (2006), *Certain Uncollected Poems* (2012), *Outline Scribe* (2015), and *The Danger Is* (2018).[4]

3. Anne Winters

Born in 1939, Anne Winters is the author of *The Key to the City* (1986), a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, and *The Displaced of Capital* (2004), winner of the William Carlos Williams Award and the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize.

Her poems address issues of poverty, homelessness, social inequality, and the city of New York. Dan Chiasson described her poems as “Miltonic, Marxist, ornate, and indignant,” adding that “her real subject is finally how the loveliness of craft measures experience at its most brute and awful, and how experience ruptures even the loveliest of craft.” Concerning *The Displaced of Capital*, Ellen Nussbaum wrote that Winters “builds legacies to urban poverty that balance between lyricism and manifesto.”

Winters is fluent in French, and her translations include *Salamander: Selected Poems of Robert Marteau* (1979). She has traveled widely in Europe and was a Fellow at the

[4] Sandra McPherson. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 15, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sandra-mcpherson

Camargo Foundation in France. Her awards include grants from the Ingram Merrill Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, a Guggenheim fellowship, and an Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. She teaches at the University of Illinois at Chicago.[5]

4. Elizabeth Spires

Born in 1952, a critically acclaimed poet and children's book author, Elizabeth Spires lives and works in Baltimore, Maryland. In *Poetry*, John Taylor cited the author for her "subtle, crystal-clear poetry . . . that is constantly philosophically suggestive, while never becoming pretentious or belaboring." Spires won a 1996 Whiting Award for her volume *Worldling* and has been praised for her poems that use quotidian moments to ruminate upon universal themes such as happiness, mortality, travel, parent-child bonding, and life stages. "Elizabeth Spires is one of the most important young poets in America," declared William V. Davis in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. "The auspicious beginning represented by her first books suggests that she will find a secure place in the world of contemporary poetry." Davis further observed that the author "weaves words and images together into a kind of fugue of meaning and emotion." Taylor wrote: "[Spires's] perceptions of the unfathomable mysteries of being have been intensified by mothering. . . . Bearing and raising a child have likewise given Spires a more concrete, moving, understanding of what Saint Augustine termed 'the presence of things past and the presence of things future.'" The critic added: "This is important poetry because it grapples sincerely with the possibilities of being happy, inquiring how we might dwell profoundly in 'the everlasting present of our life.'"

[5] Anne Winters. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 15, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/anne-winters

Spires's children's books include *With One White Wing* and *Riddle Road: Puzzles in Poems and Pictures.* These companion picture books offer very young children a chance to guess at rhyming riddles, using the illustrations and the snatches of poetry as clues. A *Horn Book Magazine* reviewer noted: "The pictorial clues ensure that even children in the younger range of the book's intended audience will have a fair chance at solving some of them. . . . They all tweak the imagination." Likewise, a *Publishers Weekly* correspondent responded positively to the "verbal and visual puzzles," concluding: "The brainteasers here will intrigue and stimulate young minds."

The Mouse of Amherst is perhaps Spires's best known children's book. The brief but beguiling tale is narrated by Emmaline, a mouse who has taken up residence behind the wall in Emily Dickinson's room. Intrigued by Dickinson's labors at her desk, Emmaline finally discovers the poet's talents when a sheet of paper falls to the floor. The inspired mouse responds with her own poetry, and a friendship is struck. "While the idea of the author pairing Dickinson's poems with her own may sound like an exercise in hubris, Elizabeth Spires actually pulls it off," observed Julie Yates Walton in the *New York Times Book Review.* "Spires is an acclaimed poet herself, . . . but she lays aside her own lush style and mirrors Dickinson's to a startling degree."

A number of reviewers suggested that *The Mouse of Amherst* rewards readers by offering historical information about Emily Dickinson and an appreciation for her poems, which are liberally sprinkled throughout the book. In *Booklist,* for instance, Susan Dove Lempke wrote: "The simple story gives young readers a first taste of Dickinson's poetry as well as an idea of the relationship formed between a poet and a reader." Walton concluded that what youngsters will remember from the tale "is a sense of the nourishing power of words. . . . Through a mouse's view of a great poet, Elizabeth Spires makes a convincing argument for poetry's relevance to our lives."

Elizabeth Spires once told *Contemporary Authors:* "I think by the time I was twelve, I knew I would be a writer, though at the time I thought I would write short stories, not poetry (I was under the influence of Flannery O'Connor at the time).

"My book of poems, *Worldling* deals, in part, with motherhood and mortality. The first section of the book chronicles the birth of my daughter, Celia. . . . I think for many people the experience of having a child is a transformative experience, one in which you feel your mortality quite strongly; the poems in *Worldling* try to chronicle, directly or obliquely, how I have been changed by the ongoing experience of motherhood, how it has pushed me deeper into my life. Underlying these poems is the constant tension between the insistent movement of each person towards individuation and the equally strong claims of relatedness, the push/pull of the mother/daughter bond. Some of my new poems, written since *Worldling,* continue these explorations, although I envision that my next book will reach beyond mother/child concerns, and have a wider (though not deeper) scope. In particular, I feel preoccupied with my sense not only of rapid change in my own life, but in the world around me. This feeling that the world is shaping itself into something new and different will certainly enter into some of the poems I am hoping to write. In fact, it already has."

"My poetry has been influenced by my close reading, and love, of the poetry of John Donne, George Herbert, Robert Frost, John Berryman, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, Josephine Jacobsen, and A. R. Ammons. That's not an exhaustive list, just some of the high points. These are poets who, for me, are always fresh and alive on the page, and towards whom I feel a debt of gratitude."[6]

[6] Elizabeth Spires. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 15, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/elizabeth-spires

5. Barbara Ras

Barbara Ras was born in 1949 in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and has lived in Costa Rica, Colombia, California, and Texas. She is the author of *The Last Skin* (2010), winner of the best poetry award from the Texas Institute of Letters; *One Hidden Stuff* (2006); and *Bite Every Sorrow* (1998), which was selected by C.K. Williams for the Walt Whitman Award. Of *Bite Every Sorrow*, C.K. Williams wrote, "the book is a demonstration of what might be called a morality of inclusiveness, a Whitmanesque commitment to the wisdom of the individual case rather than the general type. And along with so much rich soul-work, there is a remarkable poetic skill. Ras structures poems with zaniness and an unpredictable cunning, and her verbal expertise and lucidity are as bright and surprising as her knowledge of the world is profound."

Ras is the recipient of numerous awards including the Kate Tufts Discovery Award and a Guggenheim fellowship. She has taught at the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers. Currently she directs the Trinity University Press in San Antonio, Texas.[7]

6. Linda Pastan

Born in 1932, Poet Linda Pastan was raised in New York City but has lived for most of her life in Potomac, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, DC. In her senior year at Radcliffe College, Pastan won the *Mademoiselle* poetry prize (Sylvia Plath was the runner-up). Immediately following graduation, however, she decided to give up writing poetry in order to concentrate on raising her family. After ten years at home, her husband urged her to return to poetry. Since the early 1970s, Pastan has produced quiet lyrics that focus on themes like

[7] Barbara Ras. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 15, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/barbara-ras

marriage, parenting, and grief. She is interested in the anxieties that exist under the surface of everyday life.

Pastan's many awards include the Dylan Thomas award, a Pushcart Prize, the Bess Hokin Prize from *Poetry*, the Poetry Society of America's Alice Fay di Castagnola Award, and the Ruth Lily Poetry Prize, in 2003. Pastan served as Poet Laureate of Maryland from 1991 to 1995 and was on the staff of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference for 20 years. She is the author of over twelve books of poetry and essays. Her *PM/AM: New and Selected Poems* (1982) and *Carnival Evening: New and Selected Poems 1968–1998* (1998) were finalists for the National Book Award; *The Imperfect Paradise* (1988) was a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. Her recent collections include *The Last Uncle* (2001), *Queen of a Rainy Country* (2006), *Traveling Light* (2011), and *Insomnia* (2015). Of the last book, Pastan told the *Paris Review* she had chosen the title *Insomnia* "because the word conjures for me a struggle with consciousness itself as well as a struggle with the looming dark, just outside the window." She lives in Potomac, Maryland.[8]

7. Carol Muske-Dukes

Carol Muske-Dukes was born in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1945. She earned a BA from Creighton University and an MA at San Francisco State University. Her collections of poetry include *Camouflage* (1975), *Applause* (1989), *An Octave Above Thunder: New and Selected Poems* (1997), *Sparrow* (2003), which was a National Book Award finalist, and *Twin Cities* (2011). In addition to poetry, Muske-Dukes has published two collections of essays, including *Married to the Ice Pick Killer: A Poet in Hollywood* (2002), which humorously and

[8] Linda Pastan. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 18, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/linda-pastan

insightfully describes her encounters with Hollywood following her marriage to the actor David Coleman Dukes. She has also written novels, including *Life after Death* (2001) and *Channeling Mark Twain* (2007). Known for her sharp portraiture and strong imagery, Muske-Dukes drew on her own experiences teaching in a women's prison for the bestselling *Channeling Mark Twain:* in 1972, she created Free Space, a creative writing program at the Women's House of Detention on Riker's Island. Since 1993 she has taught at the University of Southern California, where she founded the PhD in Creative Writing and Literature. In 2008 she was named California's State Poet Laureate by then-governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

A careful writer who balances rhetorical precision with a unique manner of relating personal experience, Muske-Dukes has discovered, in the words of one critic, how to "reach past anecdote." Writing in *Contemporary Women Poets,* essayist Duane Ackerson noted of Muske-Dukes' verse that, "while well-anchored in daily life, [it] moves far beyond to become a meditation on philosophical concerns like the nature of time and the value of life. This carefully achieved scope contributes much of what is powerful and persuasive in her work." Muske-Dukes published her first story at age eleven and began writing poetry at an even earlier age. "But I was fairly unconscious about the power of words and what it meant to have the power to use them until I came to New York in 1971," she explained to *Contemporary Authors.* After becoming involved in several writing workshops, including Free Space, she "began to hear the dialogue between craft and sentiment, form and feeling." Still she considers herself to be primarily a visual poet: "images come...easily to me, imagistic phrases litter my poems. I feel very close to painters, our processes are similar."

The difference between "seeing" and "hearing" her writing is one of the distinctions Muske-Dukes finds between her poetry and her prose. "The problem for me is 'hearing' what I write—that's why it was so refreshing for me to write [my first novel] I found a voice, I

trusted it, I let it speak. Beyond time and how time happens in a poem or a story, the relationship between eye and ear forms the difference for me between poetry and prose. In prose, the reader listens, the reader is being told a story, she hears, *then* sees—in poems, the reader *sees* aurally, the eye and ear become one." With the same precision that she composes her poetry, Muske-Dukes extracts real meaning from the images created by the words in each of her novels, and her wide variety of subjects demonstrate her broad learning and interests. "As many writers have said before me," she told *Contemporary Authors*, "I didn't choose my subjects, they chose me. I was 'given' a set of themes early in life and they've obsessed me and continue to do so."

Carol Muske-Dukes has won numerous awards for her work, including the Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award, an Ingram-Merrill grant, several Pushcart Prizes, and a Witter/Bynner Award from the Library of Congress. She has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation. She writes regularly for the *New York Times Book Review* and the *Los Angeles Times Book Review.* As an editor, she has helped edit the anthologies *Crossing State Lines: An American Renga* (2011) and *The Magical Poetry Blimp Pilot's Guide* (2011), a handbook designed to help students read, memorize, and love poetry, and one of Muske-Dukes's projects as laureate. She lives in Los Angeles.[9]

8. Alicia Ostriker

Poet, critic, and activist Alicia Ostriker was born in 1937 in New York City. She earned degrees from Brandeis and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Twice a finalist for

[9]Carol Muske Dukes. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 18, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/carol-muske-dukes

the National Book Award, Ostriker has published numerous volumes of poetry, including *The Old Woman, the Tulip, and the Dog* (2014), *The Book of Seventy* (2009), which received the Jewish National Book Award. Other books of poetry include *No Heaven* (2005); *The Volcano Sequence* (2002); *Little Space* (1998), a finalist for the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize; *The Crack in Everything* (1996), which won the Paterson Award and the San Francisco State Poetry Center Award; *The Imaginary Lover* (1986), winner of the William Carlos Williams Award; *A Woman Under the Surface* (1983), *Once More Out of Darkness* (1974), and *Songs* (1969). Known for her intelligence and passionate appraisal of women's place in literature, Ostriker's poetry and criticism investigates themes of family, social justice, Jewish identity, and personal growth. Ostriker's books of criticism include *For the Love of God: The Bible as an Open Book* (2009), *Dancing at the Devil's Party: Essays on Poetry, Politics, and the Erotic (2000), and Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America (1983).* Of her place in American letters, the writer Joyce Carol Oates noted: "Alicia Ostriker has become one of those brilliantly provocative and imaginatively gifted contemporaries whose iconoclastic expression, whether in prose or poetry, is essential to our understanding of our American selves."

Ostriker told *Contemporary Authors:* ""People who do not know my work ask me what I write about. I answer: love, sex, death, violence, family, politics, religion, friendship, painters and painting, the body in sickness and health. Joy and pain. I try not to write the same poem over and over. I try to stretch my own envelope, to write what I am afraid to write. Composing an essay, a review or a piece of literary criticism, I know more or less what I am doing and what I want to say. When I write a poem, I am crawling into the dark. Or else I am an aperture. Something needs to be put into language, and it chooses me. I invite such things. 'Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me,' as D.H. Lawrence says. I write as an American, a woman, a Jew, a mother, a wife, a lover of beauty and art, a teacher, an

idealist, a skeptic. Critics seem often to remark that I am 'intelligent'—but I see myself also as passionate. Actually, I am a combination of mind, body, and feelings, like everyone else, and I try to get them all into play.

"When I give poetry readings, my hope is to make people in my audience laugh and cry. They often do. The gamble is that my words will reach others, touch their inner lives. When I write literary criticism, I try to see and say clearly what is actually there in the work of other poets. Teaching is extremely important to me, my students are important, I try my best to awaken them to the delight of using their minds. Although clarity is unfashionable, I encourage it. When I teach midrash writing workshops—midrash is an ancient genre which involves elaborating on Biblical stories and characters—I want people to discover how powerfully the Bible speaks to the issues of our own time: gender roles, family dynamics, social class, freedom and slavery, war and peace, fear of the stranger, and the need to overcome that fear. These are my issues, too… All poets have their chosen ancestors and affinities. As an American poet I see myself in the line of Whitman, Williams, and Ginsberg, those great enablers of the inclusive democratic impulse, the corollary of which is formal openness. As a student I wrote in traditional closed forms, as did they—before they discovered the joy and meaning of open forms. To write in open forms is to improvise. Improvisatory verse is like doing a jazz solo: we know what we've just done, and the next line has to be connected to it, has to grow out of it somehow, but there is an essential *unpredictability.* This is an American invention because we act, in America, as if the future is partly shaped by the past, but is not determined by it. We are (a little bit) free."

Ostriker has received awards and fellowships from the NEA, the Guggenheim and Rockefeller foundations, the Poetry Society of America, and the San Francisco State Poetry Center, among others. Ostriker has taught in the low-residency Poetry MFA program of Drew

University and New England College. She lives in Princeton, NJ, is professor emerita of English at Rutgers University.[10]

9. Diana O'Hehir

Diana Farnham O'Hehir is a poet and writer of prose from northern California. She was born in Berkeley in 1929. She taught from 1961 to 1992 at Mills College in Oakland where she is Aurelia Henry Reinhardt Professor Emerita of American Literature. She lives in San Francisco with her husband, writer Mel Fiske.[11]

10. Eavan Boland

Eavan Boland was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1944. The daughter of a diplomat and a painter, Boland spent her girlhood in London and New York, returning to Ireland to attend secondary school in Killiney and later university at Trinity College in Dublin. Though still a student when she published her first collection, *23 Poems* (1962), Boland's early work is informed by her experiences as a young wife and mother, and her growing awareness of the troubled role of women in Irish history and culture. Over the course of her long career, Eavan Boland has emerged as one of the foremost female voices in Irish literature. Throughout her many collections of poetry, in her prose memoir *Object Lessons* (1995), and in her work as a noted anthologist and teacher, Boland has honed an appreciation for the ordinary in life. The poet and critic Ruth Padel described Boland's "commitment to lyric grace and feminism"

[10] Alicia Ostriker. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 20, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/alicia-ostriker

[11] Diana O'Hehir. (n.d.). In *Goodreads*. Retrieved November 20, 2017, from https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/320606.Diana_O_Hehir

even as her subjects tend to "the fabric of domestic life, myth, love, history, and Irish rural landscape." Keenly aware of the problematic associations and troubled place that women hold in Irish culture and history, Boland has always written out of an urge to make an honest account of female experience. In an interview with readers on the website *A Smartish Pace*, Boland herself described the "difficult situation" of her early years as a poet:

> I began to write in an Ireland where the word 'woman' and the word 'poet' seemed to be in some sort of magnetic opposition to each other. Ireland was a country with a compelling past, and the word 'woman' invoked all kinds of images of communality which were thought to be contrary to the life of anarchic individualism invoked by the word 'poet'…I wanted to put the life I lived into the poem I wrote. And the life I lived was a woman's life. And I couldn't accept the possibility that the life of the woman would not, or could not, be named in the poetry of my own nation.

Boland's poetry is known for subverting traditional constructions of womanhood, as well as offering fresh perspectives on Irish history and mythology. Her fifth book, *In Her Own Image* (1980), brought Boland international recognition and acclaim. Exploring topics such as domestic violence, anorexia, infanticide and cancer, the book also announced Boland's on-going concern with inaccurate and muffled portrayals of women in Irish literature and society. Her next books, including *Night Feed* (1982) and her first volume of selected poems *Outside History* (1990), continue to explore questions of female identity. Though Boland has been described as a feminist, her approach is not an overtly political one. Perhaps this is because she is not content, as a poet, to uphold one view of things to the exclusion of all others: hers is a voice, in the words of Melanie Rehak in the *New York Times Book Review*, "that is by now famous for its unwavering feminism as well as its devotion to both the joys of domesticity and her native Ireland." *In a Time of Violence* (1994), winner of

a Lannan award and shortlisted for the prestigious T.S. Eliot prize, contains poems that gesture towards private and political realities at once. In poems such as “That the Science of Cartography is Limited” and “Anna Liffey,” Boland constructs a world that is influenced by history, the present-day and mythology and yet remains intensely personal. It is a recipe that Boland has perfected in her work since.

Against Love Poetry (2001), published as *Code* in the UK, displays the scope of Boland’s knowledge and her awareness of tradition. “So much of European love poetry,” she told Alice Quinn of the *New Yorker* online, “is court poetry, coming out of the glamorous traditions of the court…There’s little about the ordinariness of love.” Seeking a poetry that would express the beauty of the plain things that make up most people’s existences, she found that she would have to create it for herself. It is “dailiness,” as Boland called it, that reviewers often find, and praise, in Boland’s poetry. By focusing on “dailiness,” Boland is also attempting to delineate the contours of a new vision of history. Reviewing *Code* for the *Times Literary Supplement*, Clare Wills noted that “Boland is a master at reading history in the configurations of landscape, at seeing space as the registration of time. If only we know how to look, there are means of deciphering the hidden, fragmentary messages from the past, of recovering lives from history’s enigmatic scramblings.” *Domestic Violence* (2007) weaves different and competing kinds of history—the national, the personal, the domestic—together in poems that also meditate on the legacy of Irish poetry itself. Reviewing the collection for *Poetry Review*, Jay Parini noted: “The literal site of these poems is often Ireland itself, with its heroic gestures, high rhetoric, and (sometimes pretentious) symbol-making held in abeyance, even fended off. Boland brilliantly attacks, and nullifies, this tradition.” Parini added that “Boland is, in her quiet way, as melodramatic as any of her forbears. This is always what I have liked about her, the clash of intention and manifestation.”

Boland's second volume of collected work, *New Collected Poems,* was published in 2008 to glowing reviews. Salvaging numerous poems from her first books, as well as a previously-unpublished verse play, the book demonstrates Boland's restless and incessant attempt to escape from, or at the very least complicate, the Irish lyric tradition she inherited. Anne Fogarty, in the *Irish Book Review* declared *New Collected Poems* "acts as a timely reminder of the significance and innovatory force of Boland's achievement as a poet and of the degree to which so many of her texts…have lastingly altered the contours of Irish writing. Modern Irish poetry would be unthinkable without her presence. *New Collected Poems* valuably updates the record of Eavan Boland's artistic output. More vitally, it underscores the vibrancy of her ongoing project as a poet who is doubtless one of the foremost writers in contemporary Ireland."[12]

11. Adrienne Rich (1929–2012)

Poet and essayist Adrienne Rich was one of America's foremost public intellectuals. Widely read and hugely influential, Rich's career spanned seven decades and has hewed closely to the story of post-war American poetry itself. Her earliest work, including *A Change of World* (1951) which won the prestigious Yale Younger Poets Award, was formally exact and decorous, while her work of the late 1960s and 70s became increasingly radical in both its free-verse form and feminist and political content. Rich's metamorphosis was noted by Carol Muske in the *New York Times Book Review*; Muske wrote that Rich began as a "polite copyist of Yeats and Auden, wife and mother. She has progressed in life (and in her poems …) from young widow and disenchanted formalist, to spiritual and rhetorical convalescent, to

[12] Eavan Boland. (2010). In *Poetry Foundation.* Retrieved November 15, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/eavan-boland

feminist leader...and *doyenne* of a newly-defined female literature."

Beginning with *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law: Poems 1954-1962* (1963), Rich's work has explored issues of identity, sexuality and politics; her formally ambitious poetics have reflected her continued search for social justice, her role in the anti-war movement, and her radical feminism. Utilizing speech cadences, enjambment and irregular line and stanza lengths, Rich's open forms have sought to include ostensibly "non-poetic" language into poetry. Best known for her politically-engaged verse from the tumultuous Vietnam-war period, Rich's collection *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972* (1973) won the National Book Award; Rich, however, accepted it with fellow-nominees Audre Lorde and Alice Walker on behalf of all women. A noted writer of prose, Rich's numerous essay collections, including *A Human Eye: Essays on Art in Society* (2009) also secured her place as one of America's preeminent feminist thinkers. In addition to the National Book Award, Rich received numerous awards and commendations for her work, including the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the Lannan Lifetime Achievement Award, the Bollingen Prize, the Academy of American Poets Fellowship, and a MacArthur "Genius" Award. She made headlines in 1997 when she refused the National Medal of Arts for political reasons. "I could not accept such an award from President Clinton or this White House," she wrote in a letter published in the *New York Times* "because the very meaning of art as I understand it is incompatible with the cynical politics of this administration."

Adrienne Rich was born in 1929 in Baltimore, Maryland. Her father was a renowned pathologist and professor at Johns Hopkins; her mother was a former concert pianist. Rich's upbringing was dominated by the intellectual ambitions her father had for her, and Rich excelled at academics, gaining her degree from Radcliffe University. In 1953 she married Alfred Conrad, an economics professor at Harvard. She had three children with him, but their relationship began to fray in the 1960s as Rich became politically aware—she later stated that

“the experience of motherhood was eventually to radicalize me.” Rich’s work of the 1960s and ‘70s begins to show the signs of that radicalization. Moving her family to New York in 1966, Rich’s collections from this period include *Necessities of Life* (1966), *Leaflets* (1969), and *The Will to Change* (1971), all of which feature looser lines and radical political content. David Zuger, in *Poet and Critic*, described the changes in Rich's work: "The twenty-year-old author of painstaking, decorous poems that are eager to 'maturely' accept the world they are given becomes a ... poet of prophetic intensity and 'visionary anger' bitterly unable to feel at home in a world 'that gives no room / to be what we dreamt of being.'"

Conrad died in 1970 and six years later Rich moved in with her long-term partner Michelle Cliff. That same year she published her controversial, influential collection of essays *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Institution and Experience* (1976). The volume, following on the heels of her masterpiece *Diving Into the Wreck*, ensured Rich’s place in the feminist pantheon. Rich was criticized by some for her harsh depictions of men; however, the work she produced during this period is often seen as her finest. In *Ms*. Erica Jong noted that "Rich is one of the few poets who can deal with political issues in her poems without letting them degenerate into social realism." Focusing on the title poem, Jong also denies that Rich is anti-male. A portion of the poem reads: "And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair / streams black, the merman in his armored body. / We circle silently / about the wreck. / We dive into the hold. / I am she: I am he." Jong commented, "This stranger-poet-survivor carries 'a book of myths' in which her/his 'names do not appear.' These are the old myths ... that perpetuate the battle between the sexes. Implicit in Rich's image of the androgyne is the idea that we must write new myths, create new definitions of humanity which will not glorify this angry chasm but heal it."

Rich's prose collections are widely-acclaimed for their erudite, lucid, and poetic treatment of politics, feminism, history, racism and many other topics. *On Lies, Secrets, and*

Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978 (1979), furthers her feminist aesthetic and contains one of Rich's most-noted essays, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," in which Rich clarifies the need for female self-definition. Publishing a new collection every few years, in 2009 Rich released *A Human Eye: Essays on Art in Society*. Rich again explored the intersection of poetry and the political in essays and reviews. *San Francisco Gate* contributor Michael Roth noted that in the book “Rich continues to refuse to separate the artistic from the political, and she articulates in powerful ways how a truly radical political agenda can draw upon an aesthetic vision.”

Rich’s poetry has maintained its overtly political, feminist edge throughout the decades since the Vietnam War and the social activism of the 1960s and 70s. In collections like *Your Native Land, Your Life* (1986), *Time's Power: Poems, 1985-1988* (1988), and *An Atlas of the Difficult World: Poems, 1988-1991* (1991), Rich begins to address the Jewish heritage that she was forced to hide during her early life. Throughout all three books, Rich uses personal experience, first-person narratives, and rich and varied language. Rich’s later poetry engages both the personal and political in ambitious ways. Though *Midnight Salvage, Poems, 1995-1998* (1999) is a quieter collection that focuses on “the quest for personal happiness,” according to Rafael Campo who reviewed the volume for the *Progressive*, it also circles “the problem of defining 'happiness'—in an American society that continues to exploit its most defenseless citizens, and in the face of a larger world where contempt for human rights leads to nightmare." Such an emphasis on the social conditions of private lives has been a mainstay in Rich’s later work, which often explores the influence of contemporary world events. *The School among the Ruins: Poems, 2000-2004* (2004), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award, attempts to capture the myriad events that have defined the beginning of the twenty-first century. The predominantly short prose poems in *The School among the Ruins* are free verse meditations on "the displacement of exiles, the encroachment

of modernity on human dignity, and the effects of America's war against terror on the stateside psyche," noted Meghan O'Rourke in *Artforum.* Although O'Rourke felt the collection veered too much into "rhetoric," other critics found the juxtaposition of cell-phone and television dialogue stunningly effective.

Rich's 2007 collection *Telephone Ringing in the Labyrinth* was her twenty-fourth; however, since the mid-50s, Rich has conceived of her poetry as a long process, rather than a series of separate books. *Telephone Ringing in the Labyrinth* continues to use open forms, including notebook-like fragments. The book as whole, noted Lee Sharkey in the *Beloit Poetry Journal,* is concerned with "dissolution and disappearance…The Rich persona who for half a century has been engaged in a continual process of undoing her own certainties owns up to how those certainties have blinded her." Layering images and utilizing a stripped-down line help contribute to "the new, still more difficult perspective she has achieved," Sharkey noted, though Rich "allows no point of resolution in the poem beyond juxtaposed images of cultural, environmental, and personal dissolution."

Through over sixty years of public introspection and examination of society and self, Adrienne Rich has chronicled her journey in poetry and prose. "I began as an American optimist," she commented in *Credo of a Passionate Skeptic*, "albeit a critical one, formed by our racial legacy and by the Vietnam War...I became an American Skeptic, not as to the long search for justice and dignity, which is part of all human history, but in the light of my nation's leading role in demoralizing and destabilizing that search, here at home and around the world. Perhaps just such a passionate skepticism, neither cynical nor nihilistic, is the ground for continuing."[13]

[13] Adrienne Rich. (2012). In *Poetry Foundation.* Retrieved November 20, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/adrienne-rich

12. Chana Bloch (1940–2017)

Chana Bloch was the author of four books of poems: *The Secrets of the Tribe, The Past Keeps Changing*, *Mrs. Dumpty*, and *Blood Honey.* She is co-translator of the biblical *Song of Songs* as well as contemporary Israeli poetry—most recently *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* and his *Open Closed Open,* and *Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch*. Her awards included the Poetry Society of America's Di Castagnola Award, the Felix Pollak Prize in Poetry, and the 2012 Meringoff Poetry Award.[14]

13. Jeanne Murray Walker

Born in 1944, Jeanne Murray Walker is a writer and teacher born in Parkers Prairie, a village of a thousand people in Minnesota. She frequently lectures, gives readings, and teaches workshops in places ranging from The Library of Congress and Oxford University to Whidbey Island, from a working fish camp in Alaska and Texas canyon country to Orvieto, Italy.

Jeanne has written eight volumes of award winning poetry, including her latest, *Helping the Morning: New and Selected Poems.* Her poetry and essays appear in leading journals, including *Poetry, The Atlantic Monthly, The Christian Century, The American Poetry Review, The Georgia Review, Image* and *Best American Poetry.* Her scripts, which have been performed in theaters across the United States and in London, are archived in North American Women's Drama, and are published by Dramatic Publishing Company. In *The Geography of Memory: A Pilgrimage through Alzheimer's*, Jeanne tells

---

[14] Chana Bloch. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation.* Retrieved November 20, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/chana-bloch

the hair-raising, often funny details of the decade she and her sister cared for their mother. With Darryl Tippens, Jeanne edited *Shadow and Light: Literature and the Life of Faith*, an historical anthology of literature which *Image* magazine called the current "stand-out, single-volume" on the subject of spiritual questing.

Jeanne taught at The University of Delaware for 40 years, where she headed the Creative Writing Concentration and organized Study-Abroad Programs that were among the first in the nation. She also serves as a Mentor in the Seattle Pacific University Master of Fine Arts Program.

An Atlantic Monthly Fellow at Bread Loaf School of English, Jeanne has been awarded many fellowships and prizes, among them, a Pew Fellowship in The Arts, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, eight Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowships, and The Glenna Luschei-Prairie Schooner Prize. She has appeared on PBS television and is frequently interviewed on the radio. Her work has been distributed across Pennsylvania on posters by The Center for the Book and has appeared on buses and trains. For 20 years she was Poetry Editor of *Christianity and Literature*. She currently serves on the Editorial Boards of *Image* and *Shenandoah* magazine.

Jeanne lives with her lawyer husband in a 104-year-old house outside Philadelphia. They are the parents of two children and the grandparents of 3 ardent soccer players.[15]

14. Sharon Olds

[15] Jeanne Murray Walker. (n.d.). Retrieved November 20, 2017, from http://www.jeannemurraywalker.com/about/

Born in 1942, Sharon Olds is one of contemporary poetry's leading voices. Winner of several prestigious awards, including the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award, Olds is known for writing intensely personal, emotionally scathing poetry which graphically depicts family life as well as global political events. "Sharon Olds is enormously self-aware," wrote David Leavitt in the *Voice Literary Supplement.* "Her poetry is remarkable for its candor, its eroticism, and its power to move." Olds' candor has led to both high praise and condemnation. Her work is often built out of intimate details concerning her children, her fraught relationship with her parents and, most controversially, her sex life. Critic Helen Vendler publically disparaged Olds' work as self-indulgent, sensationalist and even pornographic. However, Olds has just as many supporters who praise her poetry for its sensitive portrayal of emotional states, as well as its bold depiction of "unpoetic" life events. Discussing Olds in *Poetry,* Lisel Mueller noted: "By far the greater number of her poems are believable and touching, and their intensity does not interfere with craftsmanship. Listening to Olds, we hear a proud, urgent, human voice." And the poet Billy Collins has called her "a poet of sex and the psyche," adding that "Sharon Olds is infamous for her subject matter alone…but her closer readers know her as a poet of constant linguistic surprise."

Olds' poetry is known for its accessible and direct free verse style. Often first-person narratives, her poetic voice is known for both its precision and versatility. The colorful events of the poems are always rendered in sharply realized images that cut quickly from the gory to the beautiful and back again. Her books appeal to a wide audience, and almost all of her work has undergone multiple printings. Her National Book Critics Circle Award-winning volume *The Dead and the Living* (1984) alone has sold more than 50,000 copies, ranking it as one of contemporary poetry's best-selling volumes. Her work is viewed in the tradition of Walt Whitman as a celebration of the body, in all its pleasures and pains, and it particularly resonates with women readers. As Dwight Garner put it in a *Salon* piece, "Domesticity,

death, erotic love—the stark simplicity of Sharon Olds' subjects, and of her plain-spoken language, can sometimes make her seem like the brooding Earth Mother of American poetry."

Born in 1942 in San Francisco, Olds grew up in Berkeley, California where she was raised, she has said, as a "hellfire Calvinist." She attended Stanford University and earned her Ph.D. at Columbia in 1972. She was thirty-seven when she published her first book of poems, *Satan Says* (1980). Over several volumes, Olds has carved out a unique place in contemporary American poetry. Steve Kowit noted that Olds "has become a central presence in American poetry, her narrative and dramatic power as well as the sheer imagistic panache of her work having won her a large following among that small portion of the general public that still reads verse." Such popularity has not met with universal critical approval, however. Olds has been accused of narcissism and superficiality. "For a writer whose best poems evince strong powers of observation, Olds spends too much time taking her own emotional temperature," maintained Ken Tucker in the *New York Times Book Review.* "Everything must return to the poet—her needs, her wants, her disappointments with the world and the people around her." But other critics have been eager to champion Olds' work. In a *Seattle Times* review of *Blood, Tin, Straw* (1999), Richard Wakefield noted that Olds writes "poetry more faithful to the felt truth of reality than any prose could be." And *Poetry Flash* reviewer Richard Silberg commended Olds for "taking on subjects not written before, or not written in these ways…the best of these poems have a density of inspiration line by line."

Olds released a collection of selected poems, *Strike Sparks,* in 2002. Collecting poems from over two decades, the book received the National Book Critics Circle Award and was widely praised as a good introduction to Olds' major themes. David Kieley, in a review for the literary blog *Bookslut*, wrote that the book "is in many ways a poetic memoir in which we keep circling around the subjects of sex, motherhood, and Olds' troubled childhood and

parents in a Catch-22 kind of spiraling chronology... The poems circle a profound atheism in which the physical body is a document of being; physical experience is the primary mode of forming and physical contact the primary human relationship." Olds' next volume of new poetry, *One Secret Thing* (2009) continues to mine similar veins of autobiography, personal myth and dream. Reviewing the book for the *New York Times*, Joel Brouwer described Olds' method: "Olds selects intense moments from her family romance—usually ones involving violence or sexuality or both—and then stretches them in opposite directions, rendering them in such obsessive detail that they seem utterly unique to her personal experience, while at the same time using metaphor to insist on their universality."

Olds' next book, *Stag's Leap* (2012), included poems that explored details of her recent divorce, and the book won both the Pulitzer Prize and Britain's T.S. Eliot prize. In awarding the T.S. Eliot prize, Carol Ann Duffy, chair of the final judging panel, said: "This was the book of her career. There is a grace and chivalry in her grief that marks her out as being a world-class poet. I always say that poetry is the music of being human, and in this book she is really singing. Her journey from grief to healing is so beautifully executed." Her collection of poetry, *Odes* (2016), used the venerable poetic mode as means to address a wide range of topics including gender, age, and sexual politics.

In her *Salon* interview, Olds addressed the aims of her poetry. "I think that my work is easy to understand because I am not a thinker. I am not a… How can I put it? I write the way I perceive, I guess. It's not really simple, I don't think, but it's about ordinary things—feeling about things, about people. I'm not an intellectual. I'm not an abstract thinker. And I'm interested in ordinary life." She added that she is "not asking a poem to carry a lot of rocks in its pockets. Just being an ordinary observer and liver and feeler and letting the experience get through you onto the notebook with the pen, through the arm, out of the body, onto the page, without distortion."

Olds has won numerous awards for her work, including fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Widely anthologized, her work has also been published in a number of journals and magazines. She was New York State Poet from 1998 to 2000, and currently teaches in the graduate writing program at New York University.[16]

[16] Sharon Olds. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 23, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sharon-olds

References

Adrienne Rich. (2012). In *Poetry Foundation.* Retrieved November 20, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/adrienne-rich

Alicia Ostriker. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 20, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/alicia-ostriker

Anne Winters. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 15, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/anne-winters

Athan, A., & Miller, L. (2013). Motherhood as opportunity to learn spiritual values: Experiences and insights of new mothers. *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health*, *27*(4), 220-253.

Barbara Ras. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 15, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/barbara-ras

Bloch, C. (1995). Eating babies. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 68-70). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Boland, E. (1995). Night feed. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 66-67). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Bolen, J. S. (1984). *Goddesses in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women.* New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

Bolen, J. S. (1994). *Crossing to Avalon*. San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco.

Borysenko, J. (1998). *A Woman's Book of Life: The Biology, Psychology, and Spirituality of the Feminine Life Cycle*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

Carol Muske Dukes. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 18, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/carol-muske-dukes

Chana Bloch. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation.* Retrieved November 20, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/chana-bloch

Cixous, H. (1976). The laugh of the Medusa. *Signs, 1*(4), 875-893.

Côté-Arsenault, D., Brody, D., & Dombeck, M. (2009). Pregnancy as a rite of passage: Liminality, rituals & communitas. *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health, 24*(2), 69-87.

Diana O'Hehir. (n.d.). In *Goodreads*. Retrieved November 20, 2017, from https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/320606.Diana_O_Hehir

Eavan Boland. (2010). In *Poetry Foundation.* Retrieved November 15, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/eavan-boland

Elizabeth Spires. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 15, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/elizabeth-spires

Fraser, K. (1989). The tradition of marginality. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies, 10*(3), 22-27.

Fraser, K. (1995). Poems for the new. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 28-29). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Gadon, E. W. (1989). *The Once and Future Goddess.* San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco.

Gilbert, S. M., & Gubar, S. (Eds.) (1996). *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English.* New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Gimbutas, M. (1982). Women and culture in goddess-oriented old Europe. In C. Spretnak (Ed.), *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual power Within the Women's Movement* (pp. 22-31). New York, NY: Doubleday.

Green, F. J. (2015). Re-conceptualising motherhood: Reaching back to move forward. *Journal of Family Studies, 21*(3), 196-207.

Hall, J. (2006). Spirituality at the beginning of life. *Journal of Clinical Nursing 15*(7), 804-810.

Hall, J., & Taylor, M. (2004). Birth and spirituality. In S. Downes (Ed), *Normal Childbirth: Evidence and Debate* (pp.41-56). Edinburgh, England: Churchill Livingston.

Hogue, C. (n.d.) Kathleen Fraser. Retrieved November 18, 2017, from http://jacketmagazine.com/bio/fraser-k.shtml

Hrdy, S. B. (2000). *Mother Nature*. London, England: Random House.

Jacinto, G. A., & Buckey, J. W. (2013). Birth: A rite of passage. *International Journal of Childbirth Education, 28*(1), 11-14.

Jeanne Murray Walker. (n.d.). Retrieved November 20, 2017, from http://www.jeannemurraywalker.com/about/

Kathleen Fraser. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 15, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/kathleen-fraser

Linda Pastan. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 18, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/linda-pastan

McPherson, S. (1995). Pregnancy. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 31-32). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Muske, C. (1995). Sounding. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 46-47). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Neumann, E. (1955). *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype.* Translated by R. Manheim. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

O'Hehir, D. (1995). Infant. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 56-57). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Olds, S. (1995). The language of the brag. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 337-338). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Olivetti, K. (2015). The ordinary, metaphor, and depth. *Jung Journal, 9*(1), 104-115. doi: 10.1080/19342039.2015.988080

O' Reilly, A. (Ed.) (2004). *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born.* New York, NY: State University of New York.

Ostriker, A. (1978). The mother/child papers. *Feminist Studies, 4*(2), 84-90.

Ostriker, A. (1982). The thieves of language: Women poets and revisionist mythmaking. *Signs, 8*(1), 68-90.

Ostriker, A. (1995). The Cambridge afternoon was grey. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 54-55). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Papastavrou, M., Genitsaridi, S.M., Komodiki, E., Paliatsou, S., Midw, R., et al. (2015). Breastfeeding in the course of history. *Journal of Pediatrics and Neonatal Care, 2*(6), 00096. doi: 10.15406/jpnc.2015.02.00096.

Pastan, L. (1995). Notes from the delivery room. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (p. 45). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Plumwood, V. (1993). *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature.* London: Routledge.

Ras, B. (1995). Pregnant poets swim lake Tarleton, New Hampshire. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 40-41). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Rich, A. (1979). *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Rich, A. (1986). *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution.* New York, NY: Norton.

Rich, A. (1995). Night-pieces: For a child. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 83-84). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Sandra McPherson. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved November 15, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sandra-mcpherson

Sharon Olds. (n.d.). In *Poetry Foundation.* Retrieved November 23, 2017, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sharon-olds

Showalter, E. (1981). Feminist criticism in the wilderness. *Critical Inquiry, 8*(2), 179-205.

Spires, E. (1995). Letter in July. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 39-40). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Thomas, T. (2001). Becoming a mother: Matrescence as spiritual formation. *Religious Education, 96*(1), 88-105.

Turner, V. W. (1969). *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.* Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company.

Walker, B.G. (1988). *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects.* Edison, NJ: Castle Books.

Walker, J. M. (1995). Seizure. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 86-87). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Warren, K.J. (1990). The power and the promise of ecological feminism. *Environmental Ethic. 12*: 125-144.

Winters, A. (1995). Night light. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (p. 60). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Winters, A. (1995). The chair by the window. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (pp. 60-61). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Winters, A. (1995). The Stethoscope. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and about Mothers* (p. 34). New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Vita

Pussadee Kaewpunya Nghia

Profile

An assistant professor at English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University, Thailand.

Education

Master of Arts in English Literature 09/1995-06/1997

English Department

Wright State University, USA

Bachelor of Arts in English 06/1989-03/1993

English Department

Chiang Mai University, Thailand