



UnMythed

chris wind

UNMYTHED

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Magenta

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Thus Saith Eve
Deare Sister
Soliloquies: The Lady Doth Indeed Protest
Snow White Gets Her Say
*Satellites Out of Orbit**
Particivision and other stories
Paintings and Sculptures
Excerpts
dreaming of kaleidoscopes

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* *Satellites Out of Orbit* contains the four books listed above it as well as this book.

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Gaia

for centuries
I scraped the Sistine Chapel
where God reaches out,
 touches,
 transfers,
and Adam is born.

flake by flake,
layer by layer,
(one has to be careful
to leave the original intact)
the work was slow,
 tedious,
painful.

 but eventually
through ages of oil and acrylic
I uncovered the truth:

a tiny head crowning
 between warm soft thighs.

•

*Gaia is the Greek goddess, Mother Earth, believed to
be the Creator.*

~~~

## Narcissus

she unwraps the traditional gifts:  
first, the brush-comb-and-mirror set,  
pale pink marbling  
with gilded edges—  
they lie heavy in her hand;  
then the jewelry box,  
gold and cream  
lined with velvet—  
it plays “Fascination”

the new thirteen-year-old  
hands them back to her mother and says  
“Narcissus was a man.”

•

*Narcissus was a man who fell in love with his own  
appearance—he spent all of his time gazing at his  
reflection in a pool of water.*

~ ~ ~

## Pandora

everyone thinks yours is just another Eve story  
the first woman  
punished for desiring knowledge  
and for disobedience  
but people forget you were created by the gods  
as a gift of revenge for men,  
all beauty and mischief—  
no, not 'and'  
but 'therefore':

it's boring to be bait:  
after a minimal amount of effort and imagination  
to maximize god-given qualities  
(the male sexual response being far from complex,  
this was far from challenging)  
what is there?  
it's not easy to be satisfied with attracting men  
as a *raison d'être*—

so that's why.

•

*As a punishment for the possession of fire, Zeus ordered that a beautiful woman be made and given to mankind—she was named Pandora, 'the gift of all'. Each of the gods had given her some quality that would prove ruinous to man. In one version, these 'gifts' were her incredible beauty, her goodness, and her youthful, shy, demeanour, which alone destroyed man for their power to distract and delight. In another version, the gods put the 'gifts' in a box and forbid her to open it.*

~~~

Daphne

—had to keep running—he was right behind me—
I tore through the forest,
bounding over rocks and roots,
his breathing pounded heavy in my ears,
but I was strong and fast,
I imagined him—pressing himself onto me—
forcing himself into me—
anger surged through my muscles,
stronger, faster,
one more uphill, I caught sight of the river,
felt his step still one stride behind,
I knew I'd made it—

suddenly her legs felt numb wooden
her knees locked she staggered on
her arms stiffened
confused clumsy
she stumbled
tripped

he grabbed at her tunic
and a leaf came away in his hands.

who? whose ego did this?
Zeus? was it too much for a half-mortal
to escape from a god? no, then
Peneus? it was bad enough not having a son,
was it too much to bear
your only daughter choosing celibacy
denying you a chance for, at least, a grandson?

or Apollo, symbol of youthful manhood,
was it too much to handle
my not wanting you?
or is defeat to a woman
too much for your image?

he thrust both hands toward her
and grabbed a handful of leaves
delighted, he laughed,
and plucked from her, leaf by leaf
—while she stood rooted bound unable to move—
until she was naked.

lazily he wove them into a wreath
and set it upon his head;
it caught on and soon
all the men of achievement
sporting a laurel wreath:
her humiliation was their honour

—it became tradition.

•

Daphne was an independent woods-lover who was not at all interested in men—mortal or otherwise. This distressed her father, Peneus the river god, who very much wanted a grandson. One day Apollo saw her, wanted her, and pursued her through the forest. Just before she reached her father's river and safety, she was turned into a laurel tree. Apollo declared then 'at least you shall be my tree—with your leaves my victors shall wreath their brows'.

~ ~ ~

Daedalus

I thought you would've learned—
all of you at Los Alamos,
and the rest of you
all over the world.

why was my story saved?
why is it told and retold
if not for that?

do you see in it
just a lesson in ingenuity?

were you as blind to the deaths
of those 14 Athenians
year after year
as you were to the 140,000 Japanese
years
after year—

of course I tried to destroy it
but I couldn't get close enough!
they had taken away my security clearance
and it was too well-guarded!

then I tried to amend
(to amend— how could i?)
I saved Theseus and the others
one year
(one year!)

DOES IT MEAN NOTHING TO YOU?
the same government I helped, then—
I was of no further use, then—
I was a threat then—

so when they come to you
with money, for research and a lab
with anthems
with arguments, about the lesser of two evils
with threats
please—
say to them
no
it cannot be done.

Daedalus was a great inventor, asked by King Minos to build a labyrinth in which the Minotaur would live—and in which seven young men and seven young women from Athens would be left to die each year, unable to find their way out. One year Daedalus helped the youths escape; for this he was punished by the King, who left him and his son in the labyrinth of his own making. They escaped, using wings Daedalus created, but Icarus (his son) flew too near the sun, the wax of the wings melted, and he fell to his death.

The reference to the Japanese is a reference to Hiroshima: it is estimated that initially 70,000 were killed and 70,000 injured; subsequently (and consequently) another 140,000 have died.

~ ~ ~

Ismene

the first REAL woman:
we are women, you said, we must obey,
our position depends on it, besides
we have no strength to defy the state
—and so you didn't

then seeing your sister, Antigone,
succeed in an act of civil disobedience
in an act of justice, honour, strength, love—
you regretted and tried to retract
to change your position
to come forward with her
—but it was too late

and *you* were never mentioned again.

•

When her sister, Antigone, sought her assistance to bury their brother (an act forbidden by law because he had fought against the city), Ismene refused. So Antigone did it herself, risking a death sentence. When Antigone was caught, Ismene regretted her earlier refusal and tried to stand with her sister. But Antigone declared that she alone was responsible; she was led to a heroic death and Ismene disappeared from further mythological accounts.

~~~

## Poseidon

yes, I lost the election,  
no, I did *not* flood the land  
the sea was a bit turbulent for a while,  
but that's all—I was angry!  
to lose because of incompetence is one thing  
but to lose just because I'm a man—  
well that's so stupid!  
who wouldn't be angry?

•

*In an election for ruler of Athens, all of the women  
voted for Athena and all of the men for Poseidon, but  
since there was one more woman than there were  
men, Athena won. Poseidon then flooded the land  
and the men took the vote away from the women.*

~ ~ ~

## Athena and Orestes

In the Supreme Court today  
a precedent was set  
that will change the world.

The unusual case of Orestes was presented  
and recorded by the court  
as the first in which  
the accused suffered from guilt  
and sought purification.

Judge Athena, presiding,  
responded to the particulars of the case  
by instituting a new law  
of mercy and forgiveness.

As a result  
the Office of the Furies,  
until now merciless avengers  
zealous for justice, fair and square,  
became the Office of the Eumenides,  
benign powers  
capable of compassion.

•

*Orestes avenged his father's death (Agamemnon) by killing his murderer (Clytemnestra, Orestes' mother), then spent years in guilt and suffering seeking atonement and absolution. Eventually he came before Athena for judgement. Contrary to custom, which demanded justice by his death, she decided he was to be forgiven. She persuaded the Furies (who were pursuing him to enact this justice), and they became instead the Eumenides (The Kindly Ones).*

~~~

Circe

typical:
the woman is blamed
for the man's behaviour
as if he has no control
over himself.

maybe it all stems from his dick:
one thing beyond his control,
and unhappily for him
(and stupidly, I might add)
the one thing he has vested
his entire manhood in;

so no wonder he develops this complex:
he compensates with this ridiculously
no, dangerously
distorted need to control
and becomes, as an entire sex,
dominating and domineering
always seeking, taking, seizing control—
while at the same time
denying control
and charging the woman
(who tempted, who provoked)
with full responsibility
for what happens

they say you turned them all into swine:
but we know better—
when a group of men
comes upon a woman alone,
we know what they act like.

•

*Circe lived alone on an island, and turned every man
who approached her into a beast; notorious was the
band of men sent by Odysseus—they were turned into
pigs.*

~~~

## The Muses

We are the nine forgotten muses:  
Selemon, muse of sculpture and ceramic,  
Amacles, muse of songs of love,  
Dextrete, muse of gymnastic and artful athletic,  
Prytes, muse of painting,  
Caleus, muse of numbers and their meaning,  
Florus, muse of botany and all of nature's beauty,  
Arachles, muse of tapestry and weaving,  
Ataeus, muse of physic,  
and Hestor, muse of alchemy  
that most magic art and science.

We too can delight and inspire  
like the Nine who are the gods' gift to men  
we are their gift to women.

•

*The Nine Muses (daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne) have been popularized as sources of inspiration to artists. Thalia is the muse of comedy, Melpomene of tragedy, Clio of history, Urania of astronomy, Terpsichore of dance, Calliope of epic poetry, Erato of love poetry, Polyhymnia of songs to the gods, and Euterpe of lyric poetry.*

~~~

Omphale

you were my slave and my stud
and when I didn't want you
I didn't want you around.
you were stupid, insensitive, boring, immature
so I kept sending you away—
you thought it great fun
to get blood and shit all over your hands
each joe job an adventure, a challenge,
and since someone had to do it
who was I to tell you different—

to tell you that what you did
was no more Herculean than
working on an assembly line
in a slaughter-house plant,
or trudging with toilet brush and scrub rag
after carefree vacationers
in a 26-storey five-star hotel—
jobs also done by no-names
who are also being fucked by their employers.

•

*Omphale was the queen of Lydia—she chose Hercules as her slave and sex object. Between sexual sessions, she sent him out on what became known as 'the twelve labours' (which included killing the lion of Nemea, killing the nine-headed Hydra, cleaning out the Augean stables, and picking up the droppings of the Stymphalian birds) (from Elizabeth Gould Davis, *The First Sex*).*

Regarding the reference to 'no-names', 'Hercules' (a version of 'Heracles') is as anonymous as 'Mrs. Bailey': son of Hera, like wife of Bailey.

~~~

## Hyacinth

it was a legal tackle—  
it's not as if football is a dangerous sport,  
sure you have your injuries,  
but it's not like boxing  
where the guys walk around brain-damaged,  
or look at hockey,  
they have more fights than goals,  
I mean even in skiing  
a non-contact sport  
you fall, you get hurt,  
or your knees don't last past thirty

it was a legal tackle—  
Boomer was running with the ball  
it was twelve-seven  
we really needed this game  
and I knew I could take him  
we played in college together

it was just a quirk  
a freak accident  
that his neck snapped like that—  
it wasn't my fault  
it wasn't because of how or where

I hit him

•

*Apollo and his best friend, Hyacinth, were engaged  
in a friendly contest to see who could throw the  
discus farther. Apollo's throw hit Hyacinth in the  
forehead and killed him.*

~ ~ ~

## Philomel

did ya hear the one about  
Philomel?  
this guy raped her  
then cut out her tongue  
(he was some vip, see)  
and then the gods  
*being so very merciful*  
(are ya ready for this)  
the gods, in their mercy,  
turned *her* into a *bird*.

•

*Tereus, a son of Ares, raped Philomel. When she threatened to expose his crime, he cut out her tongue. She eventually told her story to her sister (who was his wife) by weaving a tapestry. They both escaped from his household, but he pursued them, and just as he was about to kill them, Philomel was turned into a swallow, and her sister into a nightingale.*

~~~

Clytie

I can see you sitting there
looking up to your love
watching his every move
through the sky

like the girl who waited
every day at the corner
so to follow him to school
I knew his timetable
where he sat for lunch
and which afterschools he had practice

gradually your life changes
from human to plant
till you are finally immobilized
by your adulation
and unrequited love

if only you'd known
he wasn't a god at all
but just some bunch of hot air

•

*Clytie was a young woman in love with the Sun god.
She would sit outside all day and watch him.
Eventually she turned into a sunflower.*

~~~

## Eurydice

I heard your plea  
to the gods of the underworld—  
'the bud was plucked  
before the flower bloomed'—  
What is this shit?  
I was a grown woman  
had been 'in full bloom' for years!  
Then I noticed a phrase here and there—  
'all born of a woman'  
'the rape of Proserpine'  
—so I know why you came back.

what I don't know is  
why you asked for a year  
when nine months would've done.

•

*A few hours after Orpheus and Eurydice were  
married, she died (while she was walking through a  
meadow with her bridesmaids, a viper stung her).  
Heartbroken, Orpheus went to the Underworld to ask  
if he could have her back for a year.*

~~~

The Danaids

there are so many of them
in the kitchen doing the dishes
in the bathroom cleaning the toilet
in the laundryroom washing his clothes
in the livingroom dusting the furniture
in the kitchen preparing his dinner
in the bathroom scouring the tub
in the laundryroom ironing his shirts
in the livingroom vacuuming the rug
in the kitchen doing the dishes
in the bathroom cleaning the toilet
in the laundryroom washing his
who did not want
to marry
to become a wife

•

The Danaids were fifty sisters who were to be married to their fifty cousins. The women opposed the marriages but were forced into them. On their wedding night, each of them (except one) killed her husband, for which they were doomed in Hades to fetch water from a river using sieves—an endless (and impossible) task.

~ ~ ~

Amphion

perhaps you're right about my beard—
it's funny, I guess facial hair
well, hair of almost any kind
is a measure of masculinity
and academics and artists
have always felt a little like eunuchs
(real men use their bodies)

it's an interesting insight
(and surprising from you)
but it falls a little short—
what I wonder is this:
do I have a beard
to look more like a man
or less like a woman?

•

*Amphion was scorned by his brother, Zethus (a man
who had great physical prowess), because he
dedicated his life to art rather than to athletics.*

~~~

## Galatea

you don't know me by name,  
though you've heard of my husband, of course—Pygmalion.  
the myth ends with our marriage.  
then the real story begins.  
(no, the real story begins a year later,  
with our divorce.)

it shouldn't surprise you—  
I mean, look at the courtship:  
it really didn't involve me:  
he spent months romancing his own private image  
of the perfect woman,  
not me.  
(that happens a lot.)

then, as you know, he visited Venus,  
she was impressed with his passion,  
and made his sculpture  
(his archetype of the life-sized inflatable doll)  
come alive:  
he proposed immediately,  
and, I accepted.  
(why, you might wonder.  
well, it's not uncommon for a disproportionate attachment  
to develop toward the agent of,  
no, the first encounter after,  
one's sexual awakening.  
in my case, since the awakening included  
my entire physicality,  
I think my initial infatuation, and hence, consent  
is understandable.)

however, over the next little while,  
I found out what everyone knew:  
that he had spent years creating  
this beautiful statue,  
that when it was done he started dressing it,  
talking to it, bringing it gifts.  
that he caressed it, kissed it—

(I also found out what few people knew:  
that he had left a hollow space in the right spot,  
and lined it with moss  
—he was fucking it too.)

so let's face it, the man has problems:  
womb envy  
delusions of grandeur  
displaced narcissism  
misogyny

stone fetishism  
inability to cope with reality

so when he brought home this huge block of marble one day

I left.

•

*Pygmalion was a sculptor who detested 'the faults beyond measure which nature had given to women' and therefore resolved never to marry. In spite of, or because of, his attitude, he sculpted a statue of 'the perfect woman'. He grew to love it and began to kiss and caress it, dress it, bring it gifts, and put it to bed at night. Impressed with the strength of his love, Venus made the beautiful statue come alive; he named it Galatea.*

~~~

Gorgons

it's not *our* glance
that turns you to stone
but your own—

as soon as you see us
 you become cold
 insensitive
unable to respond

to ugly women

•

The Gorgons were three sisters (Medusa was one of them) who were monsters with 'snaky hair, most horrible'; whoever looked at them turned instantly to stone.

~ ~ ~

Dido

Founder and Ruler of Carthage,
First at the bar, and Chair of the Law Association
President of the Business Alliance
Premier of the Year eight years running
Seventeen times on the cover of *Newsweek*
Lifetime member of Rotary and Big Sisters

(too bad what's-his-name came into your life)

•

*Dido was the founder and ruler of Carthage. Aeneas
got shipwrecked on her land, and they became lovers.
Eventually Aeneas left to found his own city. Dido
then committed suicide.*

~~~

## Menelaus

to tell you the truth  
I don't know if she  
went willingly  
or was taken—  
Helen had a mind of her own  
and was rather enraged  
she wasn't allowed to use it  
to choose her own husband

when I got home  
she was gone  
and really it was more for show  
than anything else  
that I—  
I was expected to try to get her back  
I was expected to be angry  
truth is  
I didn't know  
if I was jealous or worried

I never intended it to last  
nine years  
I never intended Troy to fall as it did  
all those people, dead  
over one woman  
one beautiful woman—  
(well, really, over one man  
—one very stupid man)

but one thing led to another  
and soon it was too late  
I mean soon there was too much loss  
to say this is stupid, let's forget it—  
which one of us could face  
the surviving family  
and say  
we're quitting, so  
your husband, or your father, or your son  
died for nothing—  
so we had to keep going—  
because it just got harder and harder  
to stop

•

*Helen, reputed to be the fairest woman in the world,  
had many suitors from rich and powerful families.  
Her father (Tyndareus, King of Greece) eventually  
chose Menelaus to be her husband. While Paris  
(Prince of Troy) was a guest in their home, Menelaus  
returned one day to find both him and Helen gone.  
Thus began the great Trojan War. (Thanks to  
Gwynne Dyer, author of War, for the idea in the last  
stanza.)*

~~~

Psyche

'love cannot live
when there is no trust'
you flung the accusation at me
and then walked out

yet you had been testing me
again and again
every single night—

—it wasn't me who was faithless.

•

Psyche was so beautiful no man wanted to marry her. Distraught, her father sought advice from the gods, and was told she must be abandoned on a hill and her destined husband would come to her. So, instructions were followed. She was transported from the hill to a beautiful mansion where she amused herself during the day; and every night her husband came, only to disappear by morning. He had told her she must never try to see him, but one night she decided to look—a drop of wax from her candle fell onto his shoulder, he woke, was indignant at her lack of trust, and left.

~~~

## Hylas

It was a great arrangement—  
to be his armour-bearer  
to have a legitimate reason  
to be close to him  
day and night, always, forever  
close  
to him  
strong, powerful, fearless  
—all the boys envied you  
(well, the few that knew)

But then finally everyone knew.  
When you went under, Hercules went crazy  
and as he exhausted himself diving down,  
then bursting up for air, diving down again,  
and again, and again, and again,  
as he passed up the greatest quest ever  
for the hopeless chance of saving you,  
as he slowly killed himself  
rather than be without you,  
everyone knew.

•

*Hylas was Hercules' young armour-bearer; they were very close. At the beginning of the Argonauts' voyage, Hylas disappeared, drawn under water by a nymph. Hercules dove in, desperately trying to find and rescue him. He refused to give up, and did not return to the ship—which eventually had to sail on without him.*

~ ~ ~

## Atalanta

wandering through the mines of myth  
I choose Atalanta as my next subject.

shall I write a simple hymn of praise  
for a woman who could outrun, outwrestle,  
and outshoot  
all of her male contemporaries?

or focus on her probable adventures  
as one of the famed Argonauts,  
perhaps her talks with the crones of Lemnos  
while all the younger ones were off  
with the rest of the crew  
repopulating, now that  
the women's revolution was over  
and all of their men dead,  
or her experience as the only woman  
on an all-male quest,  
her part in the debate  
to stop and fight the Amazons  
or go on because the wind was good.

or shall I write about the race—  
she had said she would marry the man  
who could run against her and win,  
so Hippomenes tossed those golden apples,  
and since she paused to gather them,  
she lost.

I call my dog to go for a walk  
taking with me, I grin, an apple.

trundling through the autumn bush  
I reconsider the race  
trying to understand her challenge  
as well as her defeat.  
and I begin to feel parallels:  
as a child, I assumed I would marry  
a man more intelligent and more competent than me,  
as an adolescent, I had great difficulty  
finding such a man,  
and as an adult I realized I didn't want to marry  
at all  
—but didn't have to trump up some ridiculous pledge  
to appease the status quo;  
so, her challenge was a red herring  
and *not* an I-can-only-love-a-man-who's-superior-to-me at all:  
since no one *could* outrun her,  
it was really just a way of saying  
I don't intend to marry—

but then why did she lose?  
were they really just golden apples  
or was she choosing thus to have  
beauty, or wealth, or knowledge, or power—

I take a bite  
and suddenly it comes to me:  
given the choice between this absolutely delicious fruit  
and beating a man  
who thinks that (only) if he conquers me,  
will I love him—

(and mine was an ordinary red one.)

•

*Atalanta was abandoned at birth on a mountainside and raised by a bear. She took part in the famous Calydonian boar hunt: many of the men resented her presence, and they were positively enraged when she won the prize. She wanted to sail with the Argonauts, but it's not certain that she was indeed part of that quest. She did not want to marry, and as a way of declining the many proposals, she said she would marry only the man who could beat her in a footrace; one suitor started his race with golden apples which he tossed along the way—she stopped to pick them up and thus lost the race.*

~ ~ ~

## Penelope

she rises from the reunion table  
and slowly leaves the hall  
Odysseus joins in one last toast  
bids his dearest son goodnight  
then follows  
to find her in her chamber  
weaving  
    But I am back  
    you need never play that charade again—  
this shroud is not for Laertes  
it is for my husband, Odysseus  
    But I am alive  
    I am Odysseus—  
twenty years ago my husband feigned madness  
desperately praying for exemption from the army  
so loath he was to kill.  
you have just murdered  
slaughtered  
thirty-eight defenceless men.  
    But I—  
this shroud is for my husband  
the Odysseus I know has died.

•

*Penelope was the wife of Odysseus, a man who took twenty years to return from the Trojan War. (He was drafted after a failed attempt to 'plead' insanity—his son was tossed into the path of his plough, he quickly averted, thus proving soundness of mind.) Since his absence was so lengthy, and since she was very beautiful, very rich, and very powerful, Penelope had many suitors. Still deeply in love with Odysseus, she stalled them by saying she would not remarry until she had finished weaving a funeral shroud for her aged father-in-law, Laertes. Every day she would weave and every night she would unravel the day's work. Eventually Odysseus returned. Enraged at the insistent suitors, he prepared a banquet for them, locked them inside the hall without their weapons, then one by one he killed them.*

~ ~ ~

## Macha

this one I'll tell straight:

you were forced to race against a team of horses  
you were pregnant at the time  
you won  
then you died, giving birth

but with that last great exhalation  
you cast a curse  
upon the warriors of Ulster:  
for nine generations  
whenever they attempted to fight  
they were incapacitated  
with childbirth pains.

•

*According to Celtic legend (Ireland), Macha was forced to race against a team of horses despite being pregnant; she won, then died giving birth to twins. At her death, she imposed a curse on the warriors of Ulster that incapacitated them for nine generations: whenever they attempted to fight, they were stricken with childbirth pains.*

~~~

Jason I

so here I am
perfectly happy
studying, hunting, courting,
then one day dad tells me
that he's not my dad at all
that my real father was the King of Greece

Pelias? I ask

no, he's your cousin
he took the crown by force
you're the rightful heir
and now the time has come:
you must go back and reclaim the kingdom
restore the family line

but you're my family

no, you have a duty
you must avenge your father's death

*what's done is done
I don't want revenge
—and I don't want the kingdom*

my son, you will make a great king

*maybe I will—but so what—
I don't want to be*

Jason, it's your responsibility

*what, to fulfill my potential?
what about my choice?
(I have other potentials I want to pursue)*

•

A certain King of Greece had his kingdom taken away by his nephew, Pelias. So his son, Jason, was secretly sent to a place for safety, so that when he was grown, he could return and reclaim the kingdom that was rightfully his.

~~~

## Penthisilea

not identified by relationship to a male  
so not identified at all

•

*Penthisilea was queen of the Amazons—strong,  
independent, and seldom mentioned in books about  
myths.*

~~~

Persephone

I can't bear another spring—
another temporary suspension
instead of an end—

Mother don't you see it's possible?
Don't you know your power?
You are Demeter, Goddess of the Earth,
the whole Earth, Mother! You control—
Did you think it was sympathy for your grief
that caused Zeus to send for me that first time?
No! It was the threat of world-wide famine! Blackmail!
It worked for eight months,
it can work forever—
But no, you feel that's going too far,
asking too much—
You were confused by the pomegranate,
you thought it a compromise, in our favour,
that I was granted even that eight months—
Why should *we* compromise,
when it is *us* who have been wronged!
Do you forget? I was kidnapped!
Taken against my will!

let me tell you about the pomegranate:
he likes my lips smeared with red
it's a turn on
but that's not the seed
he forces me to swallow—
every night
every night I am brought before him
as he sits on his throne
I am forced to my knees
my arms are spread and bound tight
my face in his lap
my mouth—
What do you expect in a marriage
that began with rape—
MOTHER—PLEASE—UNDERSTAND—DO SOMETHING—

every year when I am released
I pray it will be winter—

•

Persephone was kidnapped by Hades, who then took her to live with him in the Underworld. Her mother,

Demeter (Goddess of the Corn), mourned greatly for her and the earth became barren. Appalled at the possibilities, Zeus sent Hermes to bring Persephone back. Before allowing her to leave, Hades made her eat a pomegranate seed—apparently that would make her return to him. When Demeter found out about the pomegranate, she realized she could not keep her daughter with her. Fearing again the possible consequences, Zeus sent a messenger to make a bargain: Persephone would have to return to the Underworld, but only for four months of every year.

~*~

Adonis

I'm a lover
not a hunter:
so what the hell am I doing here,
in the middle of the fucking forest,
gored and bleeding to death—
I should've never left her side.

but it serves me right:
trying to be two things
the great lover and the great hunter

no,
it's the same thing really—

I was trying to
be a man.

•

*Adonis was very favoured by the Greek women—
indeed Persephone and Aphrodite, both insistent in
their love for him, shared him. One day while
hunting, he wounded a boar—the boar gored him and
he bled to death.*

~ ~ ~

Ares

Hera, Camilla, the Amazons—
I am delighted
to see you cross the lines
that separate sex and create gender,
to see you burst out
of the passive and the meek;
but I am dismayed
to see the blood on your breast
after doing so
 or was it *to* do so—
 is it simple abuse of new power and freedom?
 an adolescent over-compensation?
 a belief that the superior *is* superior?
 —or is it an intermediate that *must* be,
 like the ugly maggot
 between newborn and airborne,
 the swing of a pendulum
 to the other extreme
 which is necessary, by all laws of motion,
 before achieving the centeredness
 of androgyny, bisexuality.
so dangling thus between delight and dismay
I have suspended my pen, and chosen others.

But Ares
also crossed some lines—
and this is one story I *must* tell:
when the spear aimed by Athena pierced him
that great god of war
went whining to Zeus,
and standing before him,
took his sucker out of his mouth
long enough to pout
“she hit me”

•

*Ares was the god of war, a ruthless, murderous god.
When he was injured during the Trojan War, he went
immediately to Zeus to complain of the violence.*

~ ~ ~

Siren

standing on a streetcorner
to make bail
for a friend who's in
with a john who's not

she screams, piercing the night—
don't keep faulting us
for your lack of resistance!

•

*The sirens were famous for their singing which was
so beautiful that no man could hear it and continue
his course; many a man was drawn to their island in
this way, forgetting all else and eventually dying.*

~~~

## Acrisius

I realize now  
what nemesis it was:

like most of the men I knew  
I wanted a son  
daughters weren't quite good enough  
it wasn't quite the same  
a man needed a son  
to be his rightful heir  
to carry on the family name

well I got one—  
(in a way—a grandson—)  
then lived the rest of my life  
in fear  
that he would usurp.

•

*This King of Argos had a daughter but no son. Very troubled by this, he travelled to Delphi to ask for a son; he was told he would never father a son, but his daughter would bear a male child who would kill him.*

~ ~ ~

## Iphigenia I

really, your case is no more horrible  
than the millions of us  
who are blown up on the way to market  
or while sitting at the third desk in the fourth row  
who are raped by a soldier  
after his invasion of our town  
or by a can't-be-soldier  
after the double shift in the munitions factory,  
who are handed a letter  
in return for nineteen years of nurturance  
or in place of an anniversary card—

all of us, like you,  
we are sacrifices in the name of war;  
we are the women men kill  
in order to kill each other.

•

*On the way to fight the Trojan War, Agamemnon and his ship ran into some strong opposing winds. He was told by a soothsayer that if he offered up his daughter, Iphigenia, the winds would cease. So he sent for her, with the lie that he had arranged a marriage for her with one of his greatest chieftains. She arrived and was carried to the altar not to be married but to be killed.*

~ ~ ~

## Thetis

I remember the sixties  
all those long-haired draft dodgers  
all those sons of Thetis  
knowing (however unconsciously)  
that a way to avoid killing  
a way to stop making war  
is to become women  
(however incompletely)

•

*Thetis, mother of Achilles, didn't want her son to be drafted, so she dressed him like a woman and sent him to the court of Lycomedes where he would mix with the maidens.*

~ ~ ~

## Chryseis and Briseis

it would seem  
that nothing is more important to a man  
than a woman:  
they go to war  
because of one  
and once there  
they fight and kill  
to get one:  
Agamemnon got Chryseis,  
then sulked when the gods said  
he had to give her back,  
and stole Briseis,  
the one Achilles had gotten,  
to have instead.

so this is my poem  
for you, Chryseis, and you, Briseis  
sitting in their tents  
trying to understand  
how you can be both prisoner and prize,  
how you can be sought like gold  
but treated like shit.

suddenly it comes to you:  
it's not womanhood that's being glorified  
but manhood—  
and proof of the latter is having one of the former

the problem understood  
the solution is clear:  
establish another proof of manhood.  
no, it's really not so much  
a matter of proof  
as a matter of definition—

in either case,  
it's out of your hands,  
as long as they're tied.

•

*Agamemnon and Achilles were both members of the Greek army that fought the Trojan War (a war begun over a woman, Helen). A quarrel began about Chryseis, who had been carried off by the Greeks and given to Agamemnon. Chryseis' father begged for her release but Agamemnon refused. Because this angered the gods (Chryseis' father was a priest of Apollo), the army chiefs, led by Achilles, persuaded Agamemnon to change his mind. He did so, saying 'But if I lose her who was my prize of honour, I will have another in her stead'. He then sent two of his men to Achilles' tent to get his prize, a woman named Briseis. Achilles allowed them to take her, but swore he would have revenge.*

~ ~ ~

## Jason II

so I'm flipping through the applications  
Hercules, Castor, Pollux, Orpheus,  
Peleus, Hylas, Atalanta.  
—Atalanta

well that must've taken some nerve  
everyone knew, this was understood,  
for men only  
well, we need nerve—

I scan her resume:  
Prizewinner of the Calydonian Boar Hunt,  
awards for shooting,  
and running,  
and wrestling;  
clearly equal to many of the men here  
and they had a headstart  
so that makes her superior—

she's in.

•

*When Jason came to reclaim the kingdom that was 'rightfully' his (it had been taken away by his father's nephew, Pelias), Pelias agreed to give it back only after Jason found and brought back the Golden Fleece, a task he believed no one could attempt and stay alive. Jason accepted the conditions, and got a magnificent crew together for the quest. Since they sailed on the ship Argo, they became known as the Argonauts. Atalanta requested permission to join the crew.*

~ ~ ~

## Chiron

what? you don't know my name?  
how can that have happened?  
yes, of course I was there  
with all the other heroes  
in that glorious Hall of Fame,  
I was at the end  
running the daycare center.

•

*Many gods and kings took their children to Chiron  
for safe and good upbringing.*

~~~

Artemis

I know what this chase is all about
because there are two of you
(though there could be more)
and that is enough:
one to do and one to watch—
that's the real reason for teams
the motive behind male bonding—
it doesn't matter if you score
when you're all alone,
and it's not really worth it
if she's the only one who knows,
it only counts
if the guys are witness

I know what this chase is all about
because only uncertainties
need to be tested
need to be proved
and you've always been unsure
about your masculinity
and your power

the fact of the matter is
this chase is all about
two men pursuing me
with intent to rape

so when you split
to increase your chances of success,
I will lead you to a clearing,
and standing in the middle, in between,
I will wait,
till each of you hurls his spear
toward me,
then, a quick duck,
and your javelins will kill each other

(how else can I make you understand
that when you so seek to injure me
you also do injury to yourselves)

•

*Otus and Ephialtes, brothers and sons of Poseidon,
decided one day that each should seize the woman he
loved. So the two of them began to track down
Artemis, who was Ephialtes' choice. Eventually they
found her on the shore, and followed her across the*

sea, into a forest. She turned into a deer, and they decided to pursue it 'instead'; they split up to continue their chase, soon 'circling' her in a clearing. When they had both let loose their javelins, she leapt out of the way, and they ended up killing each other.

~ ~ ~

Bellerophon

it's frightening
I mean, it's just her word against mine—
and quite apart from the problem of simply lying
for revenge or reputation,
there can be real misunderstanding—

I mean it's not like we sit there and I say
do you want to have sex with me
and she says yes or no—
of course not—it's all body language
and you know how unclear that can be—

and a lot of women *do* mean yes when they say no
because they can't say yes
it's like they've been taught, told to say no—
if a woman *wants* sex,
let alone *admits* it,
says it out loud *to a man*,
well she's a slut, a whore—

so you can't even talk about consenting adults
as long as one of them
isn't really allowed to consent—

well *both* of them actually—
I mean, if she says yes, she's a whore
but if I say no, I'm gay—

so the way it's set up,
I'm supposed to say yes
and she's supposed to say no
—and that's rape.

and that's frightening.

•

*Bellerophon was unjustly accused of rape by Anetia,
whose husband, Proteus, sent him on a journey sure
to end in his death.*

~~~

## Iphigenia II

it was your job  
to get them ready for the execution

extract a signed confession  
as to their national origin or persuasion  
(in whatever way necessary)  
take them incommunicado  
from the interrogation room  
to the holding cell  
and make sure no food or drink was given  
then when there were enough  
to make it worthwhile  
lead them to the death yard  
and tie them to the posts

but one day  
you questioned your orders

and decided not to

refuel the gas chambers  
push the red button

you broke the chain  
disturbed the diffusion of responsibility  
that makes ugly deeds possible

and discovered your brother  
alive and in your arms

•

*Another version of this myth (see "Iphigenia—I" above) tells that at the last moment, Artemis substituted a deer and Iphigenia was carried off to Taurus, a country whose people sacrificed Greeks to the goddess. There she was made priestess of the temple and her duties were to consecrate and deliver any Greek found in Taurus to those who would conduct the sacrifice. It was a task she did not enjoy, and she wondered whether a goddess would command such sacrificial murder. One day she talked to two victims-to-be, planned their escape, and discovered that one was her brother, Orestes; all three of them managed to leave the country safely.*

~ ~ ~

## Prometheus

shivering in our black cave,  
one hand holding the infant  
who can no longer cling,  
the other gripping a spear or a stone  
just in case—

you saw us

then you came, and you gave—  
'from one woman to another'  
you smiled

when I see you now  
crucified to that rock  
I think 'of course':  
who but a woman is cursed with  
"forever shall the intolerable present grind you down"  
who but a woman endures while  
others pick, tear, and suck at her flesh

and I think back  
right from Katya Komisaruk and Margaret Sanger  
all the way back to you—  
who but a woman is the great rebel  
against injustice and the authority of power

still shivering, a bit,  
I call out to you—  
be strengthened with the knowledge  
that your flesh has sustained me.

•

*Prometheus (which means 'forethought'), son of Zeus, stole fire from the gods to give to mankind [sic]. As a punishment, Zeus chained Prometheus to a rock, and every day an eagle came to eat out his liver.*

~ ~ ~

## Sisyphus

I want to tell you, Sisyphus  
that I know of your deed  
as well as your doom,

that your suspicion was correct  
Aegina *was* raped,

that what you did  
stepping forward as a witness  
was only right—  
but in the given context  
to be a man against men against women  
becomes (a bit) heroic.

and I want to tell you  
that if enough of us  
men and women alike  
join with you,  
our hands will wear away the rock  
and end forever  
this relentless cycle.

•

*One day Sisyphus saw Zeus carry off a young woman. Shortly after, Asopus came to tell Sisyphus that his daughter, Aegina, had been kidnapped. Sisyphus told Asopus what he had seen. This of course angered Zeus, who punished Sisyphus by sending him to Hades, where he had to roll an enormous rock up a steep hill—as soon as he reached the top, the rock rolled back down and he had to start all over.*