REVISION

Megan Stucki

Senior Honors English Thesis
10 April 2003
# Table of Contents

## Introduction
- Introduction _____________________________ 1

## Hunger
- Longing _____________________________ 4
- Pasiphae _____________________________ 5
- Lunacy _____________________________ 6
- Moon Woman _____________________________ 7
- Aubade _____________________________ 8
- Apollo Descends _____________________________ 9
- Lady Godgifu _____________________________ 10
- Naked Coyote _____________________________ 12

## Torment
- Coyote Fire-Stealer _____________________________ 14
- A Spell To Banish Heart Failure _____________________________ 15
- Mount Superstition _____________________________ 16
- Adam Goldberg _____________________________ 17
- Pele _____________________________ 18
- Volcan Masaya _____________________________ 19
- August _____________________________ 21

## Notes
- Notes _____________________________ 22

## Works Cited
- Works Cited _____________________________ 24
INTRODUCTION

“Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history, it is an act of survival.”

--Adrienne Rich

“When a woman writer encounters…mythologies, she must reinvent, revise, transform them to fit her own female body, her female identity, her unique female experiences.”

-- Dianne Sadoff

This collection of poems is about revision. Viewing myths from different angles and then re-telling the myth from that perspective, as well as recreating my previous works. I view poetry as a never-ending process; there is no point at which a poet is “done” with a poem. Granted there are times when a poet has exhausted the poem, but even then the poet can later revisit that poem and find new visions, new truths within that piece.

In a similar manner, I believe that all works—stories, myths, folktales, fairy tales—can be entered by a writer and undergo revision. It is crucial that the writer enters the text: vicariously experience the characters’ actions, witness the situation unfold, engage in sensual perception, and emphasize with the characters’ struggle and final resolution. After such interaction, the writer is then able to find a location from which to revision the story, be it a character’s perspective, a new setting, or subtly twisting the plot to depict what the poet experienced within the text. It is through this methodology of entering and interacting with text that I created this manuscript.

Many of the myths included in this collection are about women and are often told from a point of view that is not their own. These women are abused, or elated, or somewhere in between, but we cannot hear their pleas, their song. As I evaluated these stories, I felt compelled to discover the female voice and rewrite the myth to free her story. This project has become my way of reclaiming the mythology of men to reveal the poetry of women. Through this reclamation, I acknowledge and assert my feminist roots in social and literary criticism.

1 Green 1.
2 Sadoff 249.
This collection is divided into two sections: Hunger and Torment. These titles aptly describe the metaphysical spaces in which these poems inhabit. Those in the Hunger section are about desire and motivation for unattainable things. Sometimes the situation is reconciled, the desire satisfied; other times the things desired remain a remote dream. The Torment section is about strife and suffering. Desire is often found in these poems, but it is a state of not wanting, of rejection. This rejection frequently causes the conflict within the poem, then the suffering. In a few poems, the torment is a result of peace disturbed, an abhorrent intrusion. I find it a pleasant coincidence that the imagery within each section corresponds to the section’s theme. The moon, a historical symbol of wanting, figures prominently in the first section; whereas, fire, symbolic of destruction, reoccurs in the second section.

In the writing of this manuscript, I was inspired by the many revisionist myth poems gathered in anthologies, by Native American and other indigenous peoples’ poetry, and by Adrienne Rich’s definition of revision. Anne Sexton’s Transformations and Margaret Atwood’s Bluebeard’s Egg and Other Stories, which are poetic and fictive retellings of classic fairytales and folklore, also influenced me. I wish to acknowledge the wonderfully insightful criticism and unfailing support of Maureen Fry, without whom this collection would be underdeveloped. I owe a debt of gratitude to Jody Rambo, who encouraged me to begin this project, and supported me throughout the process. This piece is dedicated to all women, mythic and otherwise.
Hunger
~~
LONGING

I
Gray fur bristles against the wind
exposing the dark hair underneath.

Loping through the red rock canyons
the wolf climbs the crumbling edges
  pebbles trickling.

He peers over the edge at evaporating dusk.
The sagebrush and asters are haunted shadows.

On his haunches
  he beckons the stark moon.

She is listening.

II
There are no bruises
  purple flowers blooming on her arms.

She enjoys her tidy family
  in their complacent home.
Sometimes she decorates with the feathers
  of red birds.

But when the whole moon rises
she slips away
from her husband’s heavy sighs
past the rounded humps of her children
  into the cool dry night.
PASIPHAE

I am not withering.
I have no legions of satisfaction.
Instead at night
I listen to the crashing waves
lie under the unbearable
lead-weight of the moon
and strike my deal with
Poseidon.

He knows all oceans.
He shares my restlessness,
tosses upon sand-packed
shores while silk whips around
my dreamless body.
He cannot sleep knowing
a discontented sea.

He sends me a salt-white bull.
But Minos accepts the gift
I coveted the moment
he arose from the foamy tide
stamping glorious muscled legs
bellowing deep from within
his supple smooth belly.

Purloined by my husband,
my bull lover moans at night
raging against his restraints.
My body jolts with each vibration.

I slip away to stroke
his moon-white flanks.
His eyes reflect
the ocean within me.
LUNACY

Tooth-white moon sings, calling me by name. I sweep down the hill into the hollow. Soft grass tickles my bare feet. He curls his thick lips narrows his eyes pounds his fists. I tilt back and star-spin. Balmy wind carries the river. His hands are sandpaper. I spin like cotton candy. Catching whizzing stars, my eyes burn. Exploding, imploding.
I laugh and roll into the rising moon.
MOON WOMAN

My hands are like moths,
   papery and fragile.
   They tremble and flutter away
   from the tree bark and mallet.
The tapa cloth is stiff, uneven.
My husband no longer wears it--
   weary
   of me, he looks beyond my shoulders
and sleeps in a narrow bed.

I stare into the gourd
full of nightwater
I dip my fingertip
   to taste the moon
   rippling
   away.

A mist-faint rainbow
descends.
My eyes arise
the stars allure
the fluid darkness whispers
   solace.
My ascent home
   to the cool barren moon
   begins.

My children gaze at me
when they fall in love.
AUBADE

When the sun cleaves the sky open
and light rakes our eyes wide,
he graphs
with slight kisses
the map of my ribs.

His plane hands transverse
the axis of my legs.
He outlines the graceful latitude
of my arms, the river
bend of my elbow.

Slowly I revolve
as he plots my back,
tracing every plateau
and glen, measuring
each intricate element..

Mapping my body
to remember it.
Apollo descends
for his birthday,
sitting like a guru
on the green shag carpet
reading the palms
of earth-bound girls.

He carelessly brushes
angel hair away from his eyes,
to peer closer at her hand.
His fingers skim down
her arm and curve
her bare shoulders.

His living room
holds a harem.
They curl around him,
harpies vying for his touch.

Finding himself warm
despite the snow,
he slides out of
his turquoise tunic.
He moves feline,
twisting his
slim hips.

The women stare,
longing to climb
his corded chest,
and stop to rest
between his ribs.

He chooses one
to dance and
guides her yielding
body around him.
He does not look at her.

His eyes hunt
through the dim room
for the one who is
watching him.
They found her face in Coventry.
Borne in a glass disc
removed from the earth--
    brown earth threads still clinging to it.

Leofric wanted the sleepy village to boom like thunder
grow big like the trees that shaded the Abby
    facing the dawn-sun.

She wanted
singers    dancers    painters
          to adorn her like jewels.

At the place-they-never-speak-of,
where-they-came-from
a retinue of artists followed her
    by the footfall.
She was once painted surrounded by peacock eyes.

But wandering through the fields of drying stalks,
    she watched the bone-thin bodies of peasants
sweating through itchy burlap clothes.

‘If they had art, then they could live’

Grand designs swirled in her mind
public paintings, garden sculptures, evening dramas
she described to her maid
    who was hands-and-knees scrubbing the chamber room.

Meandering, caught again in thought through the faded fields
the Lady stepped in some matter.
Quickly she was halted
    ‘Don’t waste that on your feet,’
    ‘Your husband taxes us on it.’

Later in their cold stone house
‘Leofric, dear husband,’ she began,
    ‘you must reduce your taxes, the peasants are dying.’

Laughter rang in her ears for days.
His hands closed around her throat
while she combed her barley hair.
‘your nudity is your greatest art’
‘ride nude through the full marketplace when the sun is center’d
and the taxes will be lowered’

She turned from him, fearful
he would see the peonies
blooming on her cheeks.
She chose the horse that matched the moon.

Always the dream of wind-ghosts racing across her body.
NAKED COYOTE

Trembling in a tree on the river edge, he moans. The branches bow deep with weight-- wide leaves grazing the murky river.

The man measuring acres of shell-money told him Klamath Falls catches gold and holds it tight beneath the thunder.

For two dry seasons, he pawed the pebbles nosing through moonstone and rain rock even licking the fish to taste out gold.

Today he finds the thunderwater exploding into the narrow river. His scorched eyes catch a glimpse of shine.

He claws off his clothes biting stubborn strings and stiff patches until a pile of threads tumble to the dust.

Then leaps with a yelp into the cold water rushing over rocks worn so smooth they reflect the sun.
Torment
~~
COYOTE FIRE-STEALER

Drunk and dizzy, Coyote stumbles into the river rolling with mud and pebbles. His blood-streaked eyes blur, his sweaty skin itches. Mites burrow thickly, scratching their burning backs against coarse sparse hairs.

Fire. His mother told him, burn them out. With a matchstick red and sulfurous.

The sun seems darker today. The hazy mountains were jealous in the night, they stole the Sun. Hero Coyote will reclaim the fire parching the mountains.

A blackened pole supports corrugated zinc sheets. A faded dress sways in the breeze. Children crawl around the ash pits, dark spit drools down their chins.

Where are your parents? They follow the fire and eat its dead.
Clever Coyote is already mixing indigo, ash and spit, he paints peacock wings and leopard spots on the children’s faces. Look in the well at your animal spirits.

He finds she-fire and follows her wide hips, mimicking her smooth sway. His yellow eyes hypnotize and he grabs her waist, leading her in a delicate tango. Pressing closer, she sputters and blinks.

She screams as he carries her down the mountain, trailing along on a slender fir limb.

Under a night cloud, his woman singes his pelt removing the mites with a finger flame.
A SPELL TO BANISH HEART FAILURE

He told me he loved me after a month or two of long-distance phone calls. I mostly listened and he always talked about things I no longer remember.

He drove from Chicago to visit that summer. Stoner Mike rode shotgun, hiding the pot between the seats when cops stopped them. I stroked his stiff hair while he gazed slightly cross-eyed. “Do you love me?” gasped out between his kissing lips and my tears. “Well, no.”

But in bed, the body answers differently.

Lustful and lonely, I flew to see him but he was late picking me up at the airport. “Traffic was bad. Kiss me beautiful.” We were starving. After four days of gorging, I was in love. Under the moon and high, we soared around Lake Superior and painted our bedroom the same bright color as water.

I lied to him in the fall when I replied “I love you too” the morning after my best friend kissed me. I can still taste him on my lips, feel his thick hair against my cheek.

So when he called ten minutes away, I felt gut-punched. The room swam. But I found a smile and squealed as we kissed and scrambled off clothes. Later that night, squeezed into his hot hairy arms I played possum and heard him whispering. “Please God, don’t ever take her away. Don’t ever take her away.”

In the rain-gray morning I avoided his eyes and sat down. “I don’t want this anymore. I don’t love you.” He was ocean-calm while my face streamed. “Why are you crying?” “Because I don’t want to hurt you.” He skimmed his finger around my waist and dipped down, tugging at my underwear.

I slapped him. Lightning across his smirk. His thunder followed. Banging his fist against my bed, down the hallway, and away to his car.
STONE CREST

Stone bodies crown the mountain crest. Snow melts into their cracked shoulders, ankles, their cheeks. Pale-faced Lightning burns in a small cave below the crumbling figures, sparking silver-white into the night.

She was a cloud wisp tracing through the fields. The chanters, the chief, the wives collected the stranger whose hair was noon sun her voice reed song.

She came from across-the-river, fleeing the wide belly chief who dreamed of her clean flesh.

Easing into the land, she grew herbs to ward off childdeath and heartache. Deliberate men made love to her and she bore pale, black-eyed children.

Below the thick sky, the enemy chief found his absent dream. Her voice rose to scream but caught in his mouth.

She reached beyond his girth, and shattered the water jar against the basin. Hissing lightning sparked rolling fire inhaled the tent.

Knees tucked below her chin, she surrendered into the damp cave mouth.
ADAM GOLDBERG

Pushing me, pulling my hair, calling me names.

He lived next to the castle house, with turrets and towers. Sometimes I peeked in the windows when no one was watching.

One day at recess, he ran around me, just outside my sight. I wasn’t paying attention. I was just twirling in my skirt, watching it flare out around me. It was cold and the sky dull gray. He started bouncing a ball, a rubbery smelly one. Purple. Then he pushed me. I fell and ripped my new blue tights. Blood gushed and my knee turned cold, icy from the fall. My face all snot and tears. His cheeks were always red and he knew he was wrong. My mother wrote his parents a letter. The next day Adam gave me five dollars for new tights.

After that I was left alone.
PELE

She singed the hem of his cape to make him stay and dangle his hooves over the edge of her volcano.

Kamapua’a fled. His legs pump fury against the black barren rockland. He crashed clouds together, shooting rain from the charged sky.

Relentless, she pursued. Lava oozed thick ribbons over the sizzling earth. Always these torrents, then the flood of rain.

He lured her, pulled by the hair to Puna. Lightning tore open the sky and water rushed his arms away from her. She wrenched free but a few things came undone.

Thin strands of her hair—volcano glass and her tears—jet black spheres of lava.
VOLCAN MASAYA

i.
POPOGATEPE

The mountain that burns
anger surging through their villages.
It rolls through the night
catching their homes in half-light.
Orange sunrise too soon.

They must appease
the god.
In tight huddles
cast in torchlight,
they tie children and virgins
to wood poles.
The village waits
on their knees
at the lip of fury.

ii.
LA BOCA DEL INFIERNO

In long black robes
carrying a thick wooden cross
they process to the mouth of hell.

Holy water sizzles on the crest
of the welling hole.
Bodies rise and fall
heave the cross—
“La Cruz de Bobadilla”
to keep the devil within.
iii.

EL ORO DE VOLCAN

They believe there is gold
in the viscous fire
flowing between their
raw and blackened toes.

The pallid men lay
prostrate. Trace through
the red dirt
with their fingers and
sift rock through
narrow screens,
in a grim patterns.

iv.

PIEDRA QUEMADA

The charred
sacrifices
the blackened
cross
the foolish
gold
They still drowned in the fury
and the rock continued to burn.
AUGUST

I.
arches curve to a spire
ridged with steel ribs
illuminated by colored glass

II.
glowing water sky
mist-blurred twilight
purpling the horizon

III.
wingbeats thunder overhead
a murder of crows in flight
piercing the sky with night
APOLLO DESCENDS comes from observing a friend. He reminded me of Apollo, the god of poetry, dance, light, and who always bore his bow and arrow. Apollo was known for his many amorous adventures, with goddesses and mortals. He is often depicted as a handsome young man.

COYOTE FIRE-STEALER is based upon “Coyote Steals Fire” told by Julia Staritt. Inspired by the idea of Coyote stealing fire from the mountains and his wily deceptions, I wanted to provide a motive for his theft. I also saw him as a flirtatious sort, one who would use his charms to tempt fire, and of course, fire had to be a woman.

LADY GODGIFU is the original spelling of Lady Godiva. I encountered several interesting versions of this legend on the Internet, and what intrigued me most was her motivation for lowering her husband’s taxes. She was not a champion for peasants’ rights; she merely wanted them to have more time to invest in the arts. In one version, it was reported that her husband laughed so hard at her proposition to lower taxes, he fell off his barstool. Such outright disrespect for Godgifu made me write her story, and uncover her secret pleasure. The opening to the poem was inspired by a BBC report, “Archeologists in Coventry have unearthed part of a 14th century stained glass window bearing the face of a beautiful woman. It is thought to be that of Lady Godiva.”

LONGING comes from the numerous legends about the women who run with wolves. There is no one source from which this poem is borne, rather it arose from my musings about wolves and the women who would be drawn to these lonesome hunters.

MOON WOMAN is a derivative of the “man in the moon” tales and this version is called “The Woman in the Moon.” The story comes from Hawaii and is about an old woman, Hina, who so desired peace and comfort that she wished upon the moon to be her refuge. It is written, “These days the people of Hawaii look up at the moon and see Hina there with her gourd of precious possessions at her side…her serenity and benevolence soothe all who take the time to look” (Barchers 314).

MOUNT SUPERSTITION is inspired by Robert San Souci’s version of the Pueblo tale, “Pale-Faced Lightning.” The heroine in this story is a European woman who has the power to conjure lightning. She uses this power to fend off the enemy Chief from claiming her. The tale does not delve into the specifics of this conquest, but I assumed a rape. Thus, she engages in the ultimate reclamation of her body through the violent use of her magic. Legend holds that she still burns in Mount Superstition, sending intermittent sparks into the night.
NAKED COYOTE is derived from another Coyote story told by Julia Staritt. The usually lucky trickster finds himself duped by his own selfishness. The tale is a bare-bones sketch, so I filled in the gaps with actions that I thought an individual driven by greed would take. Ironically, Coyote is believed to have some control over nature, but in this instance nature fools him.

PASIPHAE was married to King Minos, who unfortunately insulted Poseidon. He punished Minos’ by causing Pasiphae to desire a bull. But what if Pasiphae and Poseidon made a deal, and he sent her the bull to quell her desires? She would no longer be a helpless pawn to these god-men, rather she was empowered by her desires.

PELE is about the love-battle between Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of fire, and the demi-god, Kamapua’a. Pele is described as “She-Who-Shapes-The-Sacred-Land…passionate, volatile, and capricious.” Usually she effortlessly tempts and wins men, but Kamapua’a proved difficult. It became like a bittersweet romance by the end. The imagery of Pele’s tears and hair comes from actual volcano terminology.

VOLCAN MASAYA is a recount of the numerous legends that surround Volcano Masaya in Nicaragua. I recently visited this site and was struck by the starkness of the large cross against the hazy sky and miles of rock. Supposedly, it is the original cross that was placed there by the Spaniards.
Works Cited


Krause, Jerome C. “Lady Godiva (Godgifu, in the spelling of her time.)”  


Parque Nacional Volcan Masaya. Parque Nacional Volcan Masaya es Mas Que un Crater... Nindiri, Nicaragua.


http://www.volcanoes.usgs.gov/Products/Pglossary/PeleTears.html 
http://www.volcanoes.usgs.gov/Products/Pglossary/PeleHair.html (2 April 2003).