

Women's Rooms



By Kathy Warnes

Helen

Sip your coffee
The tablecloth is linen,
Smooth like honey
Sliding over the tongues
Swollen with hate and lies.
Put on your dark glasses.
Protect your eyes from the waiter's cufflinks,
Glaring in the merciless sunshine.
Sip your coffee
Study the plate of croissants.
The waiter moves.
See the numbers
Tattooed across his wrist
Like boulders!
Nibble the edges of the croissant
Like a rabbit nibbling grass.
Stroll down the dusty road to home,
Under the merciless sunshine.
Watch the dust whirlwind
Birthed by jack boots
Roll toward you.
Hide! Hide in the cool green grass
Dancing in the whirlwind.
Huddle next to the rabbits,
Let the wind ripple your skin.
Long, fat soldier shadow
Stretches across the grass,
Sunshine glints on gun barrel,
The wind blows cool, forgiving grass shade
Over merciless sunshine.

Valarie

The page feels like burlap
Hooked on splintered firewood
The book is thin
Like reconstructed hope
But the world
Between its pages
Expands with each turn.
I, lost in the pages
Ignore the rough sheets
Ridged by distorted hate features
Until the flames
Seize the rough pages
And dance them into a whirlwind.
Later I clasp the charred book
To my soul
Throw it into the whirlwind.

Faith

I buried him
In a soft blue blanket
Trailing my fingers across it
As I crumbled earth and sifted it across his face.
My son, my beloved son!
I was well pleased with him,
But he died
And so did I that night
Burying him by the light of the lantern moon.
In my bed I buried myself
Under the blankets
Deeper than the blue blanket.
I dug my fingers into its softness
I felt his pulse – swift and alive.
They waited for me by the fire,
Mama, with false cheer handed me tea,
The blue cup burned my fingers.
He, her false husband, looked at the empty cradle and smiled,
My fingers arched into claws,
I wanted to rake the smile from his lips,
I cuddled my hatred like I cuddled my lifeless baby, waiting.
The others came at suppertime
Another cup of tea cooled in my fingers.
This time I smiled.
There had been a whisper of a rumor
A touch of truth they said was enough to bring them to us.
I led them to the bundle in the soft blue blanket.
I touched the moonlight,
Hot, pulsating moonlight
I heard him cry
Caressed his cold face
Willing it to warmth,
Comfort, health.
He, the false husband, touched it,
Warm blood outlined his finger marks
Like a circle of beads,
Then they knew and took him away.
I felt the rough ridges of rope around his neck
I touched the blue blanket and cold cheek
Of my son.
I crumbled the earth between my fingers
Rocked him gently in my arms
Scooped the warm tears from my face
And put them on his.

Caroline

Wretched water bucket!
Wooden of heart
Lolling empty at the door
Filling the room with voices,
“Water, Mama, water!”
Outside the shadows merge
Into solid tomahawks.
Grabbing the bucket,
Grabbing the gun,
Unbolting the door
Running to the creek
Empty mind...
Thinking slows the feet!
Running up the path,
Water splashing legs
Firing musket
Slamming door.
Drink your water, children,
Grow your lives with long, deep swallows!

Pocahontas

I stood ankle deep
In the tidal inlet
Water swirling, gulls mewing
Putting oysters in my woven basket.
I saw a strange bird
Floating across the water
On white wings.
The child of the bird
Flew over to me,
Fluttering bright plumage
Strutting on tiny black feet.
It sang to me
In notes shrill and deep
Like a reed in the wind.
I gave the bird corn, pumpkins
Many days it returned for my bounty.
Soon I understood its song
Soon its songs shaped my soul
I taught it to fly,
It returned to me with a dirge.
I write the dirge
In the tongue they taught me.

Amanda

Wind,
Sweeping through the valley,
Shaking itself out in the tree tops
Ripples corn from brown field squares
Where the farmer and his horse
Weave with a plow.

Wind,
Snatches his hat
Tosses it like a glance
Whips the horse's mane.

Wind,
Atop the hill
Snakes through the grass,
Sways trees
Fingers the body of an Indian
Watching from his horse.

Wind,
Snatches a feather
From the Indian's long black hair,
Elopes to the hat of the farmer
Weds them in a shot gun ceremony.

Phillis

The full moon shone on the drums
And the silhouettes of my people
Beating the drums
Calling the green gods
So the crop would be good.
Then a thunder over the drum beat
The chief flapped like a dying scarecrow.
The men put iron claws on us
And marched us to the sea.
They put us into the belly
Of a white bird.
Days rolled into darkness
My stomach and legs rolled
Until finally we stopped.
They pulled us out in the rain.
I stood with the iron claws
Around my ankles.
Someone said we were in Boston Harbor
And the year was 1761.
Others stood around me- black, comforting faces.
Then some white men and women came aboard.
I was afraid of them.
One of the white women came to me,
She said something in a strange tongue.
I went with her and her husband.
"I will call you Phillis," she told me.
I was eight, but I got my white name baptism that day,
-Phillis Wheatley-
And I turned it into a black anthem.

Abigail

I wrote in one of my letters-
"Americans have only two choices, Liberty or death!"
I said the same words to John,
He forgot them.
I didn't.
Then a man from Virginia
Said the same thing
Everybody remembers his name
And the words he didn't originate.

Amelia

Gender, my body, were earth-binders
But I wouldn't settle
For patterned reality
Instead, I followed
The truth of clouds
Piled against vistas
Of black and blue sky.
I pursued airborne dreams
With a machine weaker
Than my will
Limited by my imagination.
But someday
It will catch up
With me.

Nancy

Tom brought me back to Kentucky; I sighed
Then I laughed and I hugged them and I cried,
And tidied the cabin cozy and neat
Got Tom to put shoes on his children's feet.
And the boy, that long and rail-thin boy,
I gave him a book and he laughed with joy
He stretched out on the hearth every night
Reading every page by firelight,
And soon I could see his mind grow as tall,
As his shadow stretching across the wall,
The same shadow paced the White House at night,
Worrying over the Gettysburg fight.
When last I saw him the train whistled by,
Leaving a smoke trail across the sky
The prints of many feet trampled the grass
My sobs hung in the air; the train rushed past.

Edith

I faced the firing squad
Before the blindfold came
My gaze held theirs
Scrutinizing my offense.
The rooms in my Belgian hospital
Hid English airmen from the Germans
Guided by my nod of assent
That last night they led me away,
Shrouded in my nurse's white
I descended the stairs
In the flickering candlelight
Marched to the steel in German eyes
Shouldered their guns..

Ella

My children are hungry
You don't care
Their tears don't flow
Down your neck,
Their faces aren't buried
In your shoulder,
Hiding from the claws and teeth
Of the world.
My children are hungry
There are promise words
Hibernating in murky caves
The world stalks my children.
I rush at its throat
With my fangs bared.

Sandra

Later on that evening we went to a burned out ship
As if the Arizona at the other end of our mooring line
Wasn't burned out enough.
The U.S.S. Solace, our ship's name.
But what Solace is there in a burned away face?
No legs, a buddy blown to bits?
The commander said we must search for life
Amidst all of this death.
I searched and found
Bits and pieces of cloth, a few buttons
All that was left of lives.
The tears hit my eyes torpedo force
If only I could spray them over the burning water
To extinguish the flames.
I knelt down
Listening for life below deck,
Then I found it:
A small cross
Dented, covered with oil.
I wiped it off on my skirt.
It gleamed in the light of the fires,
A chaplain's shoulder cross
Reflecting the fires of a man-made hell
And the calm, steady eyes of a nurse.

Rachel

Out of the land it outlines itself
Our sod house
Plastered, white-washed,
A speck on the Kansas prairie,
Natural as grasshoppers.
Thank God for Suky our cow.
She gives us cow chips
For our stove fuel.
She is a natural part of this place.
Everything is natural but me.
These plains being wood poor,
I gather cow chips
In my wooden cart.
First, I picked them up with sticks,
Next, a rag
Wrinkling my nose
It was not natural to me.
Then I used my apron corner.
Finally, came the day
When it seemed to me
As natural as the chips
To leave my bread-kneading
Pick them up
Throw them in the stove
And go back to kneading again,
Without even a dust of the hands!

Yumiki

Slanted eyes
Straight black hair
Dirty Jap
Remember Pearl Harbor!
Fifth grader
White ankle socks and plaid coat,
Hand over heart
“I pledge allegiance” in perfect English
Adoring the flag
With slanted eyes
Dirty Jap
Remember Pearl Harbor!
Fifth grader and other traitors
Packed in the back of a cattle truck
Jouncing to stable homes behind barbed wire
Born in America,
Dirty Jap
Remember Pearl Harbor!

Nancy

We're alone together at the station
You, our baby and me.
Never mind the milling crowds
Noisy trains
Heartbreak humming the air.
You hold our baby in your arms
Her soft pink blanket
Leaves a fuzz trail across my uniform sleeve
She smiles
Inviting inspection.
I inspect our baby
Memorizing her
Against absence.
You caress her ruffled bonnet
I meet your anxious fingers with mine
For a moment we pretend
That soldiers can be solitary.

Eleanor

There are certain compensations
In complex human relations
My husband broke our wedding vow
I know exactly when and how,
His mother was another factor too,
In deciding what I would do.
Of course, the children, four of them,
How would they feel torn from him?
What about his royal career?
He needed me to help him steer,
So I decided to stand at his side,
But I never gave him my pride!

Annette

“Young maids to make wives”
 That’s what they called us,
 At least in England
 Where the notices appeared
 In the marketplace.
 I decided to go to Jamestown in Virginia,
 Wouldn’t listen to Mama’s pleading.
 Weren’t James and Rebecca engaged?
 And I, loving him since I was fourteen,
 I didn’t mind facing a wilderness
 Indians, colonists, a new husband,
 Anything would be better than
 Seeing the two of them together.
 My mind blurred the ocean voyage
 Convinced me the salt water
 Wasn’t really washing over the deck
 The rocking and churning of the boat
 Didn’t really make my stomach roll and pitch,
 Finally, I stepped on shore,
 A shore with wild trees and brush,
 And a few wooden houses
 With a fence around them.
 They stood there
 Waiting for us.
 Some were well dressed,
 Others in earth-stained clothes
 They studied us like prize cattle or horses
 I tossed my head
 Played the spirited mare.
 I caught the eye of Thomas Fain
 One of the richest men
 He paid 120 pounds of tobacco for me,
 Took me to his well furnished house.
 I, keeping my part of the bargain,
 Cooked, baked, brewed, preserved and pickled
 Made soap and candles,
 Sewed, mended, quilted and embroidered,
 And when our children-three of them- came,
 I cared for them, taught them their letters
 Read to them, loved them.
 Thomas and I made a bargain,
 Who is James? Where is England?

Lizzie

He took me
Before I even knew
There was a me.
My child wanted
To live in his approval
He tore my body
He twisted my soul
Is it any wonder
That I murdered him
When the adult me
Realized what he had done to my child?

Louise

I traveled with him,
Charles, my husband,
Beside him on the seat
Of our Conestoga wagon,
Behind me my rocker
A cedar chest packed with dishes
Some bedding and a Bible.
The Bible was my Mama's you see.
Our baby I held
Safe, under my heart,
We swayed, jounced over the hills
Trough the mud of the eastern lands
Until we rolled into Dakota Territory.
Beneath a gentle rise
Covered by tall rustling grass
Twined through with yellow prairie roses
He turned the virgin sod
Not for the first crop
As we had planned
But to dig a grave
For me and our son.

Melanie

They weight my wrists
My soul and heart
Confine my thoughts
And never part
For an expanse of unfettered sky,
We're shackled together, my slave and I.

Lizzie

The fog
Winds a damp scarf around my neck
Smothers my words
And the lantern pin prick
In front of the boat.
A splinter from the wooden oar
Burrows into my finger
Rowing drives it deep into my skin,
I row deeper into the river
Slash through the folds of night
Tear the bloody splinter from my finger
The fog spreads its blanket
On the beach
Smothering sand castles.
I wrestle the boat to shore
I aim my lantern at the fog curtain
Gently blow until the flame
Burns strong and steady.

Dorcas

When he grows up and my hair is white
I'll tell him about that day at Pilan's Store
When I helped a woman deliver a baby boy
On her kitchen table.
Instead of cigars his father went to the cupboard
Gave everyone a bottle of his homebrewed beer
He traded me his recipe
When I gave him my bill.
When he grows up and my hair is white,
I will try to explain why
Me and my medicine were younger than the beer
And none of us could stretch his mother's life
Beyond his first five minutes.

Lize

Me and Josh wanted a homestead in the west,
Working the land means nobody owns you,
The steel mill owned him most of every day,
But we tempered our nights and weekends
We ran our hands over the smooth clapboards
Of our house
And forget about the west homestead.
In this city called Homestead.
We forged the schools and churches and a hospital
With our backs and will
We elected our mayor
With a true ballot.
Josh went on strike for our jobs and wages
Then marched the warriors of Carnegie and Pinkerton
Red blood ran over red brick
And the soldiers pulverized the Union
Into brick dust that lay thick on
The streets of despair.

Pierre as told to Josette

I paddle my own canoe
Not the canoe of Hudson Bay
Alone I face the River fogs
Trap and trade the beaver skins,
The fox and squirrel
And even the down of swans.
I paddle my own canoe,
Then the depths of two eyes,
Deep green like the River
Spin me into a whirlpool
We stand as two to marry,

Susan B.

A breeze stirs my flag
As I march to the ballot box
The same breeze ruffles his hair
Like I used to do with my fingers.
We wave white flags
Before we speak
Hoist battle banners
To cover the day.
We are at half-mast
The wind swells the victory flag
Across the ballot box.

Lily

We all are actors in the play
Clothes and makeup paving the way
Lines rehearsed, perfect, recited,
The curtain comes unrequited.
We greet it with our stage graces,
We applaud in the right places,
"Oh what performance, what style."
"It's done. We won't walk the aisle
Find the exit with truth power,
We stay in our seats and glower
Awaiting more intermission,
We don't applaud abrupt transition.

Griselda

Be unashamed of the soul
It lives in a body room
Sitting in a rocker by the door
Waiting for a knock.
It sits patiently rocking
Watching living rush by
Holding life in its lap
Rocking and waiting.

Marie

Sit down to reason
Arrange the facts
Into an equation
Perfectly balanced
Mathematically inviolate.
Let emotion cancel it out.
Build another equation
But let humanity
Leave it unbalanced..

Naomi

Scissors swift I move
Fit patterns like a glove
I welcome the groove
Like an old-contoured love.
You, new shapes persuade
Different slant of day
My feelings betrayed
I fling the scissors away!

Sally

Here, I birthed him
Our first son
Alone in the cabin
Sh! Little one.
The rough homespun blanket
Scratching my cheek
I take a corner and wipe him,
Mam I feel so weak.
I watch Mam through the window
Picking tobacco in the field
Mam, here's the master's baby
He's part of the yield.
Here, I birthed him
He's still attached to me
Mam come in and help
I birthed the master's baby!
Mam keeps picking tobacco
I hoist myself off the bed
Cut his cord and wash him
He'd be better off dead.
Here, I birthed him
Whatever will he do?
No world will welcome him,
Master, where are you?

Sarah

I watch them run, headlong into life
Impatiently shoving aside,
Gentleness; They like strife
Pushing the hurts inside
The shell that youth and time grows.
My lips tell them to slow down,
But my head knows they don't hear,
My ears echo with the sound
Of days that soon will be a year.
Run ! Run to where your heart goes.

Tilda

The runner falters but perseveres
Down the crooked course of human years
Often she stumbled, often she fell
Battled enemies and friends as well.
Sometimes her course a crooked arrow
Diverted from the straight and narrow.
At moments she pauses in the shade
Marveling at the progress she made.
Other times she swelters in the sun
Despairing at the course yet unrun.
The finish line gleams - a Janus face
She falters, but then resumes the race

Mary

Death hums in the wires
Mind sparks, body jerks
Spasms with Frankenstein creation.
Lurches with thought and currents.
We electricians read the meter
Plot life blueprints
Calculate voltage.
Death hums in the wires
We sing to cover the hum
Hands duel with the off switch
Tighten and loosen,
Then someone
Pulls the plug.

-

Marcia

Tie your tears to a balloon
Drop by drop
Set them free to mingle
Into the clouds - silver and gray.
Then when recycled into rain,
Let them fall again
Drop by drop
For inspiration.

Tillie

Come into my life
I will cut you
Into a paper doll,
Paper patch the rips
Scissor-smooth the edges.
Next the clothes
Cut them ready wear.
Come into my dream
We paper doll people
Must enter dreams
For substance.

-

Pandora

She raised the lid,
Dark butterflies of human nature
Flew away to settle in souls.
She took the blame
Smiling,
Flinging out her hands
Throwing back in our faces
The nectar of ourselves
That eternally entices the butterflies
To the open box.

Wendy

I watch them burst into life
Impatiently shoving aside
Gentleness:
They like strife,
Pushing the hurts deep inside
The shell that youth and time grows.
My lips tell them to slow down,
But my head knows they don't hear.
My ears echo with the sound
Of days that soon turn to years
Run! Run to where your heart goes.

Janet

The clock ticks,
The clock races,
Hurry, hurry
Through our paces,
Deeds neutralize to moot,
Let us sit and play the flute.
Reset the clock
To race again,
Hurry, hurry
With second wind!
Before discontent can root,
Let us sit and play the flute.
The clock beeps,
The clock blinks,
It will resurrect we think.
But it is still, we follow suit,
Too late to sit and play the flute.

Phoebe Anne Oakley

The leaves crunch under my feet
As I hurry to keep up with Pa,
We're hunting a turkey for Thanksgiving,
The hours race, then they drag
And still no turkey.
Maybe there aren't any gobblers in Greenville, Ohio.
Thanksgiving 1867 might be without
A turkey for our family.
I ask Pa if I can learn to shoot a gun someday.
Pa laughs.
He tells me I'm only seven and no bigger
Than the turkey gobbler we're hunting.
He tells me the kick from a gun will knock me clean off my feet.
"I'll be a good shot," I promise him.
He grins at me. "Take my gun and see what you can hit."
He hands it to me.
I put the rifle butt against my shoulder and my eye to the sight.
Finally, I hear a squawk! It's a gobbler.
"Give me the gun!" Pa whispers.
I cling to the gun, peeking through the trees for a glimpse of the gobbler.
I see it!
It's a big, dark turkey in the bushes fifty yards away.
I aim and pull the trigger.
The gun roars and a puff of black smoke flies out of the rifle.
I reel backwards.
The smoke clears and I get my balance back.
Pa's running toward the fallen gobbler.
I shot the gobbler right through the head.
We took it home for Thanksgiving dinner.
Pa let me go hunting again.
I knew that
Guns would fire the future for me.

Patience

Patience is seed planted in clay laced with loam
Coaxings of water and sweet words
Fertilizer gathered from the kitchen of home
Supplemented by droppings of neighborhood birds.
After repeated applications of sun
And peeking at the plot several times a day
There is a seed, just one
It pokes up its head,
it's well on the way!
Patience is a struggling young vine
Sun ripe, wind whipped, nearly torn apart
By eager eyes and hope warm as wine
That refuses to leave and fills a heart.

Patsy

I tried to care for someone else,
Enough to marry, forget you,
But my heart continues to say
And my heart continues to do,
Opposite of what my mind decides.
My life will not fall into line,
My heart runs away from reason
Neither of them ever coincides.

Lilac

Night sights, a sleepy velvet gaze,
Blankets care contours with soft haze
Night beckons with star crested sky,
Moonlight outlines a bank to lie
Bask on the shores of silver streams,
Swim a river of golden dreams.
Day arrives, a fiery glance
Sunlight weaves a seductive dance,
But shadows lurk, cool and deep,
Night gazes a promise to keep.

Karen

Silken whisper of blue dress
Old arm chair you prearranged,
Covers turned down on your bed
It's just a bad dream - nothing has changed!
Your dishes wait in the pantry,
I arrange them - you taught me how,
I perch on the edge of the chair
You'll walk in any minute now.
The kitchen clock ticks out a dirge
Your spare dentures grin in their glass,
White flowers glare in center piece
Black words leap out: a life just passed.
Somewhere there is another house,
You have just finished moving there,
Somewhere you kitchen table sit,
Reach across worlds to touch my hair!

Joy

Joy sweeps the world
When the sun warms winter
Moonlight filters through velvet night
Winter throws a white comforter
Over a sleeping earth
A child dreams.
Joy howls
When love lives,
Death is bridged,
Hatred dies
Sadness breezes
Into joy.

Holly

I took life
And twisted it like my back
To a shape I desired.
Re-modeled Hull House in Chicago
From havoc to haven.
Smoothed twisted souls
From arrows to bows.

Harriet

I wrote a book and married a college professor.
They shaped my life
They shaped my afterlife
Figures crowd around me:
Eliza, Uncle Tom, Calvin and
Eliza, Calvin's first wife, my best friend.
What kind of relations
Will we have in heaven?
Will there be jealousy as I feel now?
I want to be married to Calvin
No matter what the terms.
I want to see Uncle Tom
In the flesh
Tell him I'm glad
My book worked.

Brenda

The whispers of thought I feel
The longings I can't reveal
To myself- rustle and press
Cling to my heart - a silken dress!
Moth shimmer in shades of night
Butterfly glow in candlelight.
I smooth its folds- glide to the mirror
Spin the cocoon so my heart won't appear.

Sister Monica

"Sister Monica" said in Norwegian
 I cannot translate,
 I don't know how they discovered my name
 But I know the sound of "help me."
 They need help, these Norwegian people
 From the ship Allegheny.
 They came across the ocean,
 Down the lakes called Great they came,
 Bringing with them wisps and vapors
 Humors and sickness, chills and fever.
 Typhus, cholera- the outcome the same for many: Death and burial in the lakeshore sand.
 The mayor of Milwaukee, he asked us to care for them
 We went down to the Milwaukee River
 Early every morning while the birds sang with sleep in their voices,
 All day we nursed the 260 sick people
 Until the sun sank into the lake
 Beyond the river.
 The souls of 200 people
 Continued their journey beyond the sky
 We nursed the 60 left.
 Weak, pale, tired they still breathed.
 One, a family with land outside the city, Greenfield- they pronounced the name
 Like the heaven they had so narrowly escaped.
 The father, tall, his beard coming off in patches,
 Pressed the hand of his dying wife, "Remember Greenfield," he said.
 A child - 7 or 8- clung to her mother's arm,
 Crying, "Mama don't leave us."
 The mother died, the word "Greenfield" on her lips.
 Chesley Blake,
 A captain from the steamer St. Louis,
 Arrived at our hospital.
 His eyes glazed with fever and dreams.
 "Since 1818 I been on the lakes," he said
 In accented English.
 No questions asked of him,
 We bathed and sponged him,
 Trying to melt away the fever.
 But it took hold stronger
 He told us about the girl waiting for him
 Pacing the widow's walk curled around a house In Fairport harbor.
 It faced the lake and so did she,
 Every waking moment
 Searching for his return.

Only when he eyes were clear
Did he tell me that she
Long since had married someone else.
The years crawl by when you wait for someone", he said.
Then his eyes heated up again,
And he spoke of whaling voyages
And pirates and the winds of Lake Superior,
The fierce storms of Lake Erie,
And the curling of Milwaukee harbor
Around Lake Michigan.
But this time it wasn't so safe for him.
I closed his eyes
Folded his hands on his chest and prayed for his soul.
The little girl came over
She looked at him and said,
"He's sailing with Mama, isn't he Sister?"
I nodded, brushing my hair from my eyes.
A cool wind was blowing in from the lake.
"Father, let this voyage be finished."

Elizabeth

The first story I heard when I was eleven.
Papa was Judge Cady.
I crouched in the corner of his chambers
Smelling musty law books,
Sliding on the leather-covered chairs.
The woman cried.
She told Papa that her husband had died
Willed their property to their son, Jacob.
"Most of the money left is money I earned as a washerwoman," she said.
"How could he give away my home and my belongings?" she asked Papa.
The women didn't believe the law would allow this to happen.
Papa could do nothing.
The law said married women couldn't own property and that everything they had belonged
to their husbands.
I vowed to change the law.
More stories unfolded with the years.
Women could not go to the same colleges as men.
Women could not be lawyers, doctors or politicians.
Women who did work as teachers or housekeepers
Didn't control their wages
Their fathers and husbands did.
Women did not have the right to vote.
When I married Henry in 1840
I did not promise to obey.
After several children arrived and were welcomed,
In 1848, I planned a convention at Seneca Falls.
I presented a Declaration of Sentiments,
Calling for women's rights.
Frederick Douglass agreed with me.
Most other people didn't.
But as word of the convention spread
People reshaped their attitudes.
In 1920, 72 years later
Women voted
Because I crouched in a corner of Papa's chambers.

Lana

Describe the winter:
What is there to say
Through a closed window
About the snowflake day?
I walk to the woods
Touch and admire
Snow crouching, draping,
The sun's liquid fire.
And I, like a bear
Startling creatures,
Stamp the still landscape
With strange human features.
Frosty breath hanging
Branches moved and bent
A white sea washing
Past silhouette footprints.
Stillness deep, soothing
A wave breaking shore,
Soul's voice opening
The daily, landlocked door.
I, lifting my face
Feel cold pure snow,
I follow the waves
Beyond this side of soul.

Cassandra

A strong mother am I
Pulling him from a salty sea
Into a world of question marks.
I navigated him through
Its reefs and shoals
To the harbor of youth.
Promised him his promise
Would not be submerged
In the tempests of life.
I saw to it
My promise was as real
As the firm embrace of land
After a long time with sea legs.
While I at the helm,
Trembled at the uncertainty
Of currents and waves.

Antonia

Birds

Teetering like silhouettes on ledges

Feathers wind ruffled

Precision peck seed

From grounded feeder.

Glide into tomorrow.

People

Flocking to calendars

Precision peck measures

Beat willow wisp wings

Snared by today.

Betty

I love him and the children, oh yes,
I love my comfortable life,(I guess)
Sometimes I peek out of my front door,
Isn't there something else, something more?
My outer world I manage and control,
I give happiness and I console
Everyone but my inert inner self,
Which I put high on a tomorrow shelf!
I'm doing what the church and duty,
Say is a woman's role and beauty
I'm performing my role perfectly,
But that self whispers, "What about me?"

Judith

There are Moses, Elijah, Christ
Above the mountain they glow
Below we fall together
To make angels in the snow
Then we continue our journey,
Putting footprints side by side
Until spring dissolves our tracks
Into a muddy ebb tide.
Summer blossoms to autumn blaze
Winter 's anticipation,
The snow doesn't cover death
It blankets transfiguration!

Elaine

I cope with the day's bruises and bumps,
I arrange cold wash clothes on their lumps,
But after they've gone to bed at night,
I gaze at them and shiver with fright,
Sprawled in sleep, their limbs still agile,
Oh, how can they be so fragile?????

Norma

Golden sand castles in my mind
Sea shells I take out and shine
Polish with my eager hands
Often caressed hour glass sands.
Time rolling in with steady waves
Washing the sea shells from my days,
I, advancing with the tide
Bury my seashells inside.

Bathsheba

They call me wicked, immoral,
Because I agreed when he sent
Uriah to the front lines.
Love is no excuse
But for me my life was his love.
And he said my love was his life.
Together we were passion
Apart empty.
And in hell, if I go there because of him,
I will seek him out,
If he goes there because of me,
I will comfort him.

Abigail

I wrote in one of my letters-
"Americans have only two choices, Liberty or death!"
I said the same words to John,
He never forgot them.
Others did.
Then a man from Virginia
Said the same thing
Everybody remembers his name
And the words he didn't originate.

Lydia

Accept my devotion
Not promises and words
Ivy choking out truth
Beyond a romantic notion.
Accept my devotion
Wider than life and death
More solid than earth rock,
Day by day flighty emotion.
Accept my devotion
Even if you refuse
It will outlast mere stone
The rolling tides of the ocean.

Anna

Every morning I wonder
If today will be the day
When my sorrow reaches
The bottom of the abyss.
This sorrow is not merciful plummeting,
This sorrow is inch-by-inch dying
And sliding into the abyss
More profound than any
Pacific Ocean depth.
In the evening I know
That I have just skimmed sorrow's surface,
That I will continue to descend.
Yet, a path away
Lies the ascent toward the surface
Distant sunlight filters through the water
Cold sunlight, mutated by pain,
But acceptable sunlight.

Sharon

Gliding the stairs
Opens the door of the attic ward
Soldiers dying around me.
Sunlight bars stretch across the floor,
Prison bars split tortured screams.
I touch the trunk for solid truth
Of being home.
Attic cleaning promise
To a drill sergeant mother
Leads to trunk harboring papers
From a time of helicopter war,
Rice paddies, tent hospitals,
Yellow newspapers, faded lives
Solid as dust motes
Drilling in the sunlight.
Near as the medals in the trunk
Glinting their truth
Of untarnished war
Polished in the human spirit.
Cradling the medals I tiptoe downstairs
To the peace of the kitchen table
The healing of family
The building of life
From the attic up.

Debby

Both questions and answers snarl together
Tangle in a knot that skillful fingers can't untie.
They have to feel the entire shoe.
Must we separate them
Into individual laces?
Isn't it enough to have them tangled together
Every time we need
To put on our shoes?

Bonnie

Heron-
Great and blue,
Daisy stem legs,
Slender, wading
Rapier bill
Anticipating
Shiskabob fish, crab
Or other slice
Swiftly stab
Slow slide
Down tunnel throat.
Mirror image
Shimmering in the rain,
Poised to grab opportunity
Aren't we just the same?

Chloe

A shaft of sunlight from the Auschwitz barracks
Seeps through the window bars
Scatters the mists of years
Blinds new generations of eyes.
Narrows thoughts on its balanced beam
Warms the gray brick wall of closed minds,
Settles in the rocking chair of home comfort,
A shaft of sunlight from the Auschwitz barracks
Flows through time's open window.

Hilda

Some notes wander aimlessly among the trees
Searching for a forest
Some burrow trembling under the snow
Testing death and life.
Others penetrate the soul
Blending heaven and hell
Into a single crystalline cry.

Victoria

They tell me the object of my life
Is to rule my subjects and my land,
With dignity, a minimum of strife,
Use a determined chin and a firm hand.
But instead I fell in love with a prince,
He is indeed a prince among men,
We were married and from that day since,
I've never sighed for a might have been.
All I wanted was him from the start
I accomplished other things it is true,
But my love for him is a thing apart,
The reason for everything that I do.

Josie

My Mama died
 Bringing me into the world
 And I always felt responsible to Papa, for Papa.
 I never acted against Papa
 Until Richard.
 Captain Richard Whipple,
 Master of the ship Jackson,
 Sailed into the bay outside of Erie harbor
 My gaze fell upon him
 As he toiled up the hill
 Carrying a leather purse
 Full of papers.
 I didn't stop gazing,
 Until I met him at one of the seasonal balls.
 We danced until my heart
 Waltzed in time to the music of his heart.
 We decided to marry in 1838.
 Then someone - I know who-Told Papa stories about Richard.
 The night before we were to marry
 Papa told Richard never to see me again.
 Papa told me to marry Daniel Simmons,
 One of his business partners. Daniel Simmons - wrinkled and bearded,
 Rich and wanting a smooth young face.
 I refused Daniel and sent a message to Richard.
 I defied Papa and slipped into the coach
 Where Richard and my friend Anna waited.
 The driver hurried the horses down to the harbor
 To Richard's ship, The Jackson.
 We slipped on board.
 The Jackson wound up and down the water tunnels
 Out of the bay and into Lake Erie.
 Then heavy ice fields barred the way to New York
 And its no marriage license policy.
 So we sailed up Lake Erie
 Through mountains of floating ice.
 At daybreak we lay off Ashtabula, Ohio,
 Short of fuel
 The men tired.
 Richard talked to them and we decided to land at Ashtabula
 Take on a fresh supply of fuel
 And rest.
 Richard sent a boy to Jefferson, the county seat,
 To see about a marriage license.

Then he went to Ashtabula
To find out its marriage license practices.
As he returned to the harbor
He spotted another ship
On the horizon,
It was the Jackson's sister ship, The Overton,
A large steamer.
Colonel Seth Reed of Erie owned both the Jackson and the Overton.
I hurried ashore, bound for the hotel
Where Richard had reserved rooms for us.
But the people from the Overton -I no longer call them my friends
Followed me to the hotel.
They talked to me,
Poured words into my ears,
Until I put my hands over my ears
To drown them out.
But I couldn't.
I still saw Papa and my duty to him
Even though I closed my eyes and ears.
Finally I went back to the Overton
Came back to Erie.
Before us, Richard and the Jackson,
Had returned to Erie,
Captain Dobbins threatened to seize her for lack of papers.
Richard and I, back in the same place,
Couldn't talk to each other.
I nodded to Papa,
Tears in my eyes,
I held out my hand and Papa took it with an iron clasp.
They arrested Richard
Charged him with criminal abduction.
They put him in prison in Pittsburgh.
I sobbed in Erie while I married the man Papa chose.
On my first wedding anniversary
I heard that Richard had been acquitted
Of all charges and went to Chicago.
A year after that as I sat in my parlor rocking my baby
I heard that Richard married and was steadily growing wealthier.
Rocking my baby, tears in my eyes,
I smooth the hair from his forehead and whisper:
"My Mama died, bringing me into the world."

Ruth

I won't apologize
For my desperation
No, not for me.
The medical doors
Slammed shut
There was no other way-
Home knitting needles!
If you want to call me a murderess
Call ahead,
But consider
What my baby would have endured,
Had she and I lived.
Home knitting needles!

Rebecca

How could a woman
Even think of killing
A baby in her womb?
I'll wrest it from her
A moral Caesarian
Take it home
Heal it with my love!
I can't use my own womb,
For want of cooperation
Of an egg.

Diane

The years have gone but the closet is still there
So is the child huddled in despair
In the corner, staring at the door.
“Please don’t let them be there anymore!”
The closet is safe and calm and warm
The darkness she knows will do her no harm.
But the world lies crouched outside
Waiting to pounce on her self, her pride.
Parents they tell her are a child’s best friends
Hers require her to make constant amends
For being born, for continuing to be,
“Pay us back,” they demand, “exchange you for me!”
The years have gone
The closet is still there
But now the child
Stands on a chair
Opens the door a crack, peers outside
She will come out
She will not be denied!

Marilyn

All my life I've been
The piece that didn't fit.
Tortured,
Twisted,
Hiding face down
In a dark corner of the box.
Then you walked over
Tossed me in
With the other pieces
And shook the box.
We refinished each other
Rough edges sanding,
Now I lie face up
Interlocking.

Hildy

Cotton fields
Stretching under the sun
White globes
Circling the horizon.
Bag on my shoulder
Cutting deep as the day
Harold went to the store
And never came back.
Long rhythm, quick motion
Long, slow, sack filling.
Empty day, empty sky
Wind rustling by.
Wind rustling my print dress
Stomach empty
As the sky.
Going home in the twilight chill
Bare feet raising clouds of dust
Cabin leaning to one side
Squatted against the hill.
There they are in the doorway,
Jeddy, with no shoes
Those pants wore out at the knees
His hair ragged around like grass.
The other five stair step copies of him,
And all of them crying for food.
What have I got to put in their hungry mouths
'Cept cotton?

Janet

Right here on Main Street
He kissed me,
I didn't even know him!
Oh, the sailor hat and uniform
Were familiar enough
But the name and face
I'd never seen before.
Today is the day
Three years, eight months and seven days
Since Pearl Harbor.
Our joy rationed and saved
Like our food and fate
Today we can savor
Coupon book joy.
I ran to meet him,
I kissed him first!

Betina

Wishing on the wish book
The catalogue from Sears,
I hold it in my lap and look
Around me are my dears,
Madelyn wants a doll, of course
Judy a pencil box,
Sadie wants a little horse,
Anne a comb for her locks.
And me, I want one thing
Nothing new for myself
I wish that Mr. Sears would bring
Money for an elf
So I could give each girl
The gift closest to her heart
I cover with a smile (an oyster, a pearl)
Why is wish and real so far apart?

Olivia

That day, I kissed him goodbye as usual,
Made sure that Jasmine
Gave him extra sugar in his oatmeal.
As I watched him go
I felt a strange ache
A premonition I wouldn't see him smile again.
I almost ran after him,
But he would have pushed me away with words,
Embarrassment would have pushed him away,
So I let him go without a word.
Later that afternoon
I heard Calvin on the telephone
He sounded excited,
Said something about ransom money.
As soon as he hung up
Staring at me with eyes that said everything,
The telephone rang again
It was a newspaper reporter
Our son was dead.
Calvin sobbed in my arms,
While I wondered what we had done wrong.
We are well-to-do,
Our house imposing
Our lawn manicured.
We have servants,
Stocks and bonds,
Social connections.
Our neighbors like us
We go to church.
Why has this thing happened to us?
He was only 14 years old.
Later, the police told us
Two sons of our neighbors
Picked up Bobby after school
In their touring car,
Drove him outside of the city
Crushed his skull
Put his body in a drainage pipe in a ditch.
Two sons of our neighbors!
Why does life
Turn so unfavorable
On the favored?

Edith

He was president
I didn't have the vote
But I captured his heart
Held it fast with my words
Chained him to my deeds.
Then he fell sick,
I forged ahead
With a mind surpassing his,
Both our chains slack.
The fools! They never suspected
That under the sweet smile,
The arm around his shoulders,
The wifely pat
Ruled an iron heart.

Dorothy

The dress hits my knees
I look below them
To my stockings and slippers
Ready for dancing.
Unpatterned steps
Steps into a freedom
I can't understand
Or recapture
After its gone.
A freedom I can't excuse
It just is.
I just pursue it.

Mary

What can a woman gently nurtured
Immersed in Southern delicacy
Do when the Yankees in their absurd
Ways pervert polite society?
Shake my head and click tongue between teeth
Tap skippered foot quite impatiently
And with marriage and children bequeath
A kinder, politer legacy.
Many whispered we were mismated
The lady and the barbarian,
You see, I was the one they hated
Called him the most unlucky of men
To be married to me, from the South
My brothers taking the Rebel side
I wasn't frightened; I set my mouth
Held my head high with family pride.
Then that day at Ford's ended it all,
All of the striving, all of the strife
That mad actor with a rifle ball
Ended my husband, ended my life.
All of them a sad dirge in my mind,
Abraham, Edward, Tod, and Willy,
My son Robert meant to be unkind
My last son Robert thought me silly,
He pierced my heart as sharp and deeply,
As my dear's head the assassins' gun,
Left me without a rag of comfort
No shred of consolation, not one!

Veronica

From Germany I came
 With Papa, sister and brothers,
 The waves tossed our steamship,
 Crowded with hundreds of others,
 Seeking peace, free thinking,
 A tillable acre of land
 A cow, maybe a pig,
 But later on a good farm hand.
 We settled on our farm
 I cared for the house and gardens,
 Helped Anna tend the ducks,
 Roosters, chickens, and guinea hens.
 I wanted more from life,
 Since I was only twenty four
 One day there was a knock
 And Ernst was standing at the door.
 Ernst came to see Papa,
 About business in the city,
 Watched me play the organ
 Told me I was very pretty
 Asked Papa for my hand,
 In the month of June we were wed,
 Moved to a city house,
 Oh my, how the days and months sped!
 The next year Johnny came
 The next year our Lewis arrived
 Karl came after that
 All three of my boys grew and thrived.
 Then the whooping cough struck
 That winter with weather mild
 When it at last moved on,
 I was left only one child.
 Johnny was thin and weak
 And Johnny slept often and long
 Finally he smiled
 And he whispered a German song.
 "Mama, have I been ill?
 Why does it hurt when I whisper?
 Where is Karl? Lewis?
 Mama, my throat has a blister."
 We went on, Ernst and I,
 And Johnny who good God returned
 Our business it grew more
 But my heart still sorrowed and yearned

For another child
A babe to lie in the cradle
Empty by the fire
My empty arms stretched and ached so.
I cried and cried all night,
“Ernst, to have another child
Would answer my prayers.”
Finally, I reconciled
Myself to guard my son
As my only child, my dear boy.
Then one bright day I knew
I shouted to Ernst my great joy,
“A child! Yes, one more!”
The good God had listened to me,
I knitted and I sewed
Fixed the cradle for all to see.
“Welcome, our new daughter,”
Quick, Ernst, come and gaze at her face,
See, look at how she smiles
She already likes her new place.
She watches both of us,
And follows Johnny with her eyes,
Ernst, we must wrap her up,
Show Papa our newest surprise.
On Sunday we must go
To visit Papa on the farm,
Smell fresh, sweet country air
The ride will do Meta no harm.
And me, I want to rest
And listen to the gentle breeze
I will wade in the creek
And when I’m well enough, climb tress.
“Ernst, why do you look sad?
And Doctor Braun why are you here?
I must go to the farm
It blossoms this time of the year.”

Goody Anderson

It should not come as a total surprise
That I was guilty in everyone's eyes,
When they led me to those stark wooden gallows,
I called on the spirits of All Hallows,
I commanded them to pluck me from death,
They didn't; I cursed them with my last breath.
My magic was not the least powerful,
Because I was just a woman mortal
I liked to pretend magical powers
It helped me wile away lonely hours
Goodman Allan died and so had the children,
Those living fled me again and again,
The tragedy of my life I perceived
Was living a lie that everyone believed!

Emily

We ate apples spotted and wormy
 Vegetables and a little meat
 But there was never enough
 To fill seven hungry stomachs.
 Papa was afraid
 They'd sell us all off
 At the paupers auction.
 So I went to Lynn
 To work in the mills.
 Every week my wages
 Went to the farm
 It swallowed them as greedily
 As it had our lives
 But I kept sending money.
 Lynn- a hotbed of machines
 With houses built around them.
 The other girls and me
 Lived in houses with long rooms
 A woman in each house
 Watched us carefully
 For signs of sin.
 We worked twelve hours every day but Sunday,
 Then we went to church
 And heard lectures after Sunday dinner.
 Despite the preaching and teaching
 Our foreman talked to me
 Fixed my bobbin
 Smiled at me.
 I noticed how he towered above me
 His smile sweet
 His hands gentle
 As they guided mine on the thread.
 His hands gentle as he led me up the stairs
 To a room in the loft
 Where nobody came.
 His hands till gentle
 As they touched me.
 His eyes hard
 As I told him about the child.
 I had no choice
 I sold the baby
 To a rich couple.
 Went back to the far.
 No one knew my secret

I worked in the fields
Helped Ma in the house
Watched my life crawl by.
When William asked me
To marry him and help on his farm,
I agreed
Looking for something in life
Save work.
We worked, had our son, Thomas.
After some years piled up
William went to town one day in the wagon
Never came back.
I struggled along with Thomas
We had to take the charity of the neighbors
Who felt none.
Finally, Thomas grew up
Went away just like his father.
I lived in a little wooden shack
By the pond.
Kept six chickens that I brought in
To sleep with me each night
So the critters wouldn't get them.
I picked berries in the woods,
Gathered greens in the meadow.
Once in awhile small baskets of food
Would appear on my doorstep
Small as the souls of the people who left them,
I let them sit.
Life is more than food and shelter.
"Or is it?" I wondered,
As I starved to death
In my wooden shack.

Hope and Charity

Indeed, it was in 1674
That I commissioned Alexander Talcott
To paint me and daughter Charity.
We sat in the parlor
Rich, black velvet hanging behind us
I, in my lace cap,
Lime-green dress with white lace apron over it,
Pearls encircled my neck and wrist.
Indeed, Charity I dressed
To look like me.
She, too, wore a lace cap
Yellow to match her dress,
And a white lace apron
Mimicking mine.
Her life will mimic mine,
As identically as her clothes.
Tell me, Mr. Talcott,
What is wrong with being well-to-do in Boston?
Why are you sniffing
Like those grim-visaged ministers
From Plymouth Colony?

Granny

That morning I tended the fire place
Straightened my cap, patted back its fine lace
I sat my bowl on the wooden table
Threw back the shutters so I was able
To gaze over the tobacco fields
Dream of English goods bought with their yields.
Then I saw a plume of smoke down the street
Heard the scurrying and patter of feet
I heard terrified screams and cries of pain
Then the morning birds sang sweetly again.
I looked at the window and there he stood,
With tomahawk drawn back against the wood
One of my oldest Red Indian friends
With painted face and false smile of amends.
By now I knew his purpose was askance
My life in his hands would not have a chance.
So I ran on swift, silent, slippered feet
Out of my small house and down the wide street.
I heard Indian war whoops and screeches
I saw some of my friends hacked to pieces.
There were houses burning on either side,
Desperately I sought a place to hide.
Try the refuse heap at the edge of town!
Where people from all the houses around
Discard their pottery and their bones,
Instead of keeping trash around their homes.
Puffing, panting, gasping, stumbling of feet,
I had almost reached the refuse heap
When the Indian jumped at me from a well,
He hit me over the head and I fell.
The feel of his tomahawk on my head
Made me leap up to my feet in dread.
And I ran away from that awful place,
Blood pouring in rivulets down my face.
I do not know how, but I found a pile
Of tobacco leaves beside a stile,
Not even breathing I burrowed quite deep,
Shivering and crying I fell asleep.
I covered the sounds right out of my ears,
The sounds of their screams and pleading and tears,
I did not hear the moccasins' soft tread,
Or the heavy breathing above my head.
They were all gone, my daily friends and foes,
The people who shared my life's joy and woes.

They were gone-John, Tabitha, and Franny,
I alone was left, I, frightened Granny.
We came to Virginia from England's shore,
We raised the stockade, built houses and more,
We planted and traded with the red men,
They fed us, and we convinced them of sin,
Some we allowed to church on each Sunday,
To journey with us on God's pilgrim way.
And this is what happened, not they returned
Our kindness to them, our Father they spurned!
They did not welcome God's people, oh no!
They cut us all down with one bloody blow.
I must think of life, life and its beauties,
Think of my house and my many duties,
I will rebuild my house that they fired,
But tomorrow, for now I am tired.
I never did rise from that garbage heap,
I lingered there in centuries of sleep.
Until one day the college students came,
Dug up my bones to everlasting fame,
They pieced together what happened to me,
At Martin's Hundred-back three centuries.

Rachel

I

I'll let you know straight out
 The scandal about me
 Is still whispered about
 It was like this, you see.
 I was just seventeen
 When I married Lewis
 Just sour apple green
 Saw not a thing amiss
 In his jealous rage.
 I humored him along
 Made our cabin my cage
 Sang my captive bird song
 Until one day I found
 That what made him behave
 With reasoning so unsound
 Was our mulatto slave.
 He had owned her before
 The time that we were wed,
 Now behind the closed door
 He returned her to his bed.
 I turned my face westward
 To where I longed to be,
 Prayerfully I sent word
 Back home to Tennessee.
 My brother brought me back
 To the green Cumberland
 The Indians attacked
 We fought them hand to hand.
 We lived in a stockade
 My family and I
 Our room and boarders paid
 For mother's apple pie.
 One day there came a knock
 Resounding at the door
 Above the ticking clock.
 I ran across the floor
 Over mother's carpet
 To admit a young man
 Whose flaming hair could set
 A fire in the sand.
 Jackson was his surname
 Andrew for his father
 His grin set his face aflame
 Smiling back I said, "Sir,

What can I do for you?"
It was a sunny day
The sky an indigo blue
The sun a golden ray.
And I without guile
Not a start of surprise
Looked past the wood pile
Into his bright blue eyes.
Lewis. I said I'd try
To live again with him
He said I lived a lie
Flirted with carnal sin.
Flirted? A little I'd say
At dances, parties and such
Laughed in a hearty way
Danced a little too much
But I wasn't guilty
Of the things that Lewis said
I suffered his jealousy
Heard his ranting with dread.
One day he headed down
The long Kentucky road
I swirled the dirt around
Poked a green speckled toad
Tried not to watch him go
Knew he wouldn't come back
I didn't really know
About my tears of their lack.
I savored the autumn leaves
And the crisp, smoky air,
Hams hanging from the eaves
Mist draping mountains like hair.
It happened before I knew
I listened to Andrew's tread,
Our smiles and glances grew
Into something felt-unsaid.
Then in spring came the news
That Lewis and his kin,
Were telling people their views
That I wanted to live with him
But my peoples said no,
Held me against my will,
He said that being so,
He would rescue me with skill.
I had to run away
As far as I could flee

I planned to go in May
To Natchez, Mississippi.
Colonel Stark meant to float
Down the rivers brown and green
Taking goods on his flatboat
To sell in New Orleans.
Andrew traveled with us
Practiced his rowing art
Despite the latter fuss,
We slept in beds far apart.
I stayed at the mansion
Of Colonel Thomas Green
Prosperous and handsome
From our Virginia scene.
I hadn't been there long
Missing Andrew each day
When over the bird song
I heard him shout, "hurrah!"
Lewis had divorced me
In his jealousy throes
"Rachel, don't you see?"
Tears strung my eyes and nose.
"Rachel, you must listen,"
Andrew shook my shoulders,
"You committed no sin,
Lewis' anger smolders
That is why, you see,
He charges with untruth,
We live in adultery
His lies are bare and uncouth."
Andrew and I married
Went home to Tennessee
Happy days came and tarried
Our crops grew and so did we.
We lived at Poplar Grove
And then at Hunter's Hill,
Then one spring day we drove
To a cabin dark and still.
The Log Hermitage
Is what our friends called it,
I plowed and planted the seeds
I had a lamb for a pet.
Andrew- he was away
Quite a bit of the year
Having his legal say
Testing political peers.

My life lay in the land
The greening of the fields
Gardens planted by my hand
Bins packed with my yields.
Friends sitting by my door,
Sharing their lives with me,
Tending the sick and poor
Birthing many a baby.
I never wanted to leave
My peaceful plantation
Andrew wanted to achieve
President of the nation.
I entertained his guests
I made them my friends too,
I convinced him to rest
Saw him through a duel.
The years brought us comfort
A Hermitage made of brick
Friends gave loving support
Talked of a hickory stick,
A New Orleans battle
Balmy Florida breeze
Presidential prattle
Old Hickory won with ease.
We nurtured many children
Brought them up in our home,
But I never lost the yen
For a child of our own.
We had our two Andrews
An Indian child too
They kept us both amused
Our lives exciting and new.
When they elected Andrew
To Washington City
Deep in my heart I knew
Not joy, but a great pity.
For what he must endure
Without me by his side
I suffered much from censure,
They said things mean and snide
About the way we wed
Sometimes I wanted to hide
But I held up my head.
I grew tired and poorly
And taken with a spell
Poor Andrew grieved sorely

When I didn't get well.
The last day I remember
He sat beside my bed
On a cold day in December.
"Speak to me, Rachel," he said.
"Speak to me, I implore."
But I was lost in light
I gazed at him once more
Then Andrew faded from sight.
But I was the one
Who steered history
Kept his ambition burning
I was the one who focused his way
I was his heart's chief yearning!

Lena

I stand at the railing
Beside Stefan,
Holding Katrinka in my arms.
I stare at the new world
Daring it to meet my gaze,
It will not conquer me.
Katrinka will bend it to her will
Like I twisted pretzels on baking day
In the old country.
Like I twisted my lips in determination
To come to this ship,
I wrestle with this country
And it strengthens its hold of hope on me.

Jessica

Gates clang
Like dungeon doors
His footsteps echo
Through question mark corridors.
Back proudly ramrod
Khaki uniform
Blending into the dim light
Creating tiger stripes.
He marches on the train
Then pivots for the final wave.
The gates cut my world in half
I stand, nose pressed against the fence,
Tears pressing my eyelids
Watching the empty tracks
Stretching across tomorrows.

Katie

Joseph- his brown beard was as soft
Soft as the light in his brown eyes
When he looked at me.
He hung his blue uniform
On a hook in his father's house.
I rejoiced in his wholeness
Others had not returned
From the war between brothers.
We married and for a time
Lived happily in a little house
Standing where the river
Meets the sea.
Then Joseph wanted to take
The light keeper's jobs
On Governor's Island
In the middle of New York Harbor.
I followed him,
Holding our son,
But when I saw the lighthouse
Perched on the rock
Meadows of water
Lapping the horizon
I clutched the baby and sobbed.
Joseph brought our possessions
Across in the boat
Put them at the top of the stairs.
I left them there for months
Walked around them every day
Doing my cooking and chores
Tending little Joseph.
But finally the house at the top of the stairs
Looked like home,
I hung checkered curtains at the windows
Set rag rugs on the floor.
I filled the rooms
With the smell of baking bread.
I helped Joseph tend the light
Keep the lamp trimmed and clean,
Life flowed and lapped
Like the waves in the meadows.
I unpacked our belongings
Not long after that
Amanda was born
Right here on the island

With Joseph helping.
When Joseph Jr. was eight,
Amanda six,
Joseph got sick.
None of my home remedies worked,
So I rowed every day to the mainland,
The doctor said Joseph had pneumonia
They put him in the hospital
In New York City.
He didn't get well.
I buried him in the sailor's cemetery
Rowed my children home.
We lived on the island
I kept the light
Sanctioned by the government.
I rowed the children back and forth
To school every day.
Joseph Jr. grew to look like his father
He left our island
Went to college, went West.
Amanda became a teacher
Moved to Cincinnati with her husband.
I stayed with the light
Until the government decided
I had to retire.
I moved to the city
But its walls hemmed me in.
I wouldn't unpack my belongings
But I left them inside
The door of my apartment.
Finally, the government
Allowed me to return to my island
I tended my light
Until one day I woke up
In the hospital where
I had taken Joseph.
Joseph, you are here
Standing by my bed
With a lantern in your hand.
I will unpack my bags!

Faith

She looks in the mirror without affection
To see who appears as her reflection
Her hopes evaporate into the air
As she looks in the mirror
She sees no one there.
The years have been cruel,
The years have been kind
She hasn't had a chance to look behind,
But there's a moment when impelled by fear
She looks in the mirror to see if she's here.
There are some feelings buried deep inside
She binds with copper chains of hurt and pride
But now is the time to break the chain
She knows she must do it in spite of the pain.
Because she knows, at last she understands,
That the meaning of her life is in her hands
It's not just outside a person must look
But rather like the pages of a book
She has to read the words and think with her heart
She has to re live even the smallest part.
After she's done this with her life's pages
After she 's finished the laughter and rages,
Then again she looks into the mirror
She sees shadows, light, hope and fear,
She looks into the mirror without protection,
There it is! A newborn reflection!

Caroline

George stands looking over our 100 acres
“Our Nebraska homestead,” he calls it.
I stand beside him,
My dress strong-sewed
By my work-hard hands
My heart and back
Iron-cased.
Only once did I cry
When Jacob left for California.
But now,
I am as unceasing as the prairie wind,
:”Our Nebraska back-breaker,” George calls me,
But my back isn’t broken!