

Muriel S. Lipp, Kathryn S. Cochrane, Kathryn J. Tobias, Alan Dragoo and Kate Amoss: Poetry

Sermon of 11 July 1999 by Muriel S. Lipp, Kathryn S. Cochrane, Kathryn J. Tobias, Alan Dragoo and Kate Amoss.

Poetry

[Every couple of months, a group of Seekers get together to read their poetry. This week's sermon was a poetry reading.]

Icon

The babe's face and body
are those of a small adult—
dark skin, aquiline nose.
Russian or Greek, the mother
and child are defined by soft
lines, bright gold haloes, red
and blue robes, yet
the child's helplessness

clinging to his mother's cheek is
universal. Exotic symbols inhabit
the painting's corners. If you look
at it long it enters you. Here is Everywoman
with Child, yet no woman you've
ever met. You worship without

meaning to. Long ago we smashed
these for their power of gentleness

and strength. They made us kneel
though Moses said, "Thou shalt not."
Mother of God, God Child,
I do not know what to make of
you.

Muriel S. Lipp

You, David...

... groveling in grief invite me in. How
we repeat the names we gave them. These
and memories are all we have. "Absalom,
my son, my son Absalom...
Absalom, my son, my son...
Several millenia and a bell
still tolls this litany as though today.

You, David,
wily and compassionate,
poet warrior
 shepherd king
 lover murderer—
what can I make of such extremes?
But when you as parent speak
the language of forsakenness,
I know it well. Did you not write
poems when all other parlance failed?

Friend of all bereaved parents,
whose words become our own,
"my son, Absalom... if only I had
died instead of you."

Muriel S. Lipp

A crow calls
Flickers squawk
Chickadees sing their name

Nuthatch whispers
A red tail does his "kyeer"

Here in the edge of the woodland a
tickseed sunflower brightens the waning days of
September

The heat of the early autumn
afternoon weaves thru
touches of cool

My heart is heavy as I come to grieve for
losses at home where trees fall
and ducks fly away. At least for a moment here
there is a measure of reassurance that God still
cares

Rich here Diverse A weaving tapestry
of God's good creation And a place Allowed to
remain that way So much for the property
back home in the neighborhood where
even as I sit here giant claws
make way for monster houses

God deliver us from the awfulness
of "bigger progress" that only keeps on
destroying nesting ducks
wading herons osprey catching fish
and flycatchers doing their insect
catching loops

Close to home it hurts it is
grief And it moves me to sadness and
despair

God--get me thru this so I can continue
to engage in the battle to preserve your earth.

Sept. 24, 1993
at Huntley Meadows
Kathryn S. Cochrane

I'm happy to report that they are doing very well and I was struck again by how often they and other South Africans introduce themselves and then tell the meaning of their names. Names are important to them.

While they were here last summer, they told me about a place whose official name is "Weiler's Farm"—a place where many South African blacks were forced to live, a place with no amenities and no way to make a living. I can say that many are still having to live that way, with education, employment, and health care in short supply. Those who live on Weiler's Farm have taken to calling it by a more meaningful name, "Thula Mntwana." "Thula" means "quiet" or "peace" and "mntwana" means "child," so the translation is "Be quiet, child." There's no use crying, in other words.

The word "thula" is also familiar to us as part of the name of one of the MUKA Project members, Nokuthula, whose name means "Mother of Peace."

So this is a poem I wrote when I met the MUKA Project last summer:

Be Still My Child

You, cardboard shantytown,
Spit out your name:
Thula Mntwana—
"Be still my child."
Flyspeck of homelands,
Dustbin of apartheid.
"Give me your poor
Who yearn to breathe free,
The wretched refuse
Of your teeming city,
Send these, the tempest-tossed to me
And I will make them
Homeless."

O little no-town of Be-Still-My-Child,
How still, how uneasy you lie.
Your edges ooze out with
Each urban eviction,
Each distant conviction
A cancer nearby.
Rabid growth here,
Dry rot over there,
Homeless, your children
Lie sick in your dust ruts,
Dying mundanely
Hour upon hour.
No room in the inn,
No hospice nearby,
No car to take them
To anyplace far,
No one even there
To go look for a car.
No shelter,
No shepherd,
No star.

No.
Be still my child,
No one is listening.
Lie about listless.
Sleep dreamless sleep.
Until Nokuthula,
The Mother of Peace,
Comes to teach you to dance.

Kathryn J. Tobias
June 10, 1998

On the MUKA Project's last day here, we went to the beach, and danced in the waves, and as we looked out to sea, Brian—or

Goodwill—said, "If we had a boat, we could sail straight home from here." Not long after that I had a disturbing dream, and somehow the dream and the beach experience came together in this poem:

The Launching

In my dream
A jeep speeds up the road,
Screeches to a halt
Between two parked cars,
Jamming right tires over the curb.
Man jumps out, carrying a razor-sharp black steel spear
Like a harpoon from a harpoon gun,
Runs across the busy street
Tossing the spear nochalantly in the air.
"He could hurt someone with that thing,"
I'm thinking.
Suddenly he launches it high into the air
And it arcs down
Straight through the chest of a young man
Bystanding in the street.
Everyone screams,
"Call 911!"
As the young man falls.

In the middle of the night
When your heart is broken down,
Rise and pray
Rise and pray
Rise and pray.

We are broken,
Hearts broken down.
Waves break,
We break in the waves.

We stand on the shore,

Toes in the water,
Our immensity stretching out before us
Vast as the distance to Africa,
Our immensity coming to get us,
Lapping at our feet, banging our knees,
Knocking us over,
(We miss the jetty—
Barely)
Washing us on out,
On out, on out, on out,
Past the jetty,
Past the nearby and far out swimmers,
Past the dolphins,
Past the sailboats and the freighters,
Past all that is familiar—
Out out out
To dream under the stars
To launch our dreams to the stars
Across the vast plain of still water
Across the hilly terrain of rolling water
Across the mountain ranges of awesome water
Our immensity,
Our hope,
Our love.

Kathryn J. Tobias

Adam's Dream

Naming mine and me

under the Tree,

naming pistil and seed

stamen and bee,

naming what has been,

what is, what is meant to be,

naming her Tiamat

Ukhat Ishshat Eve

God bloomed as a crimson flower

in an azure night and spoke

down gossamer lines of space,

the rhythm of her voice

creating time. From hollows

of her breath worlds emerged

like caterpillars creeping to dreams

in silken beds under green leaves.

Out of white webbed spasms of my sleep,

out from my silken dreams she comes,

pushed and molded, as hands shape

pliant clay or smooth the blush of marble,

or as lovers touch, recreating their bodies.

She comes: blood and breath,

substance of rib into lineaments of flesh.

She comes youth-plumed, beating

her tissued wings – arabesque in gold and lapis –

exulting her burning cry into my silver dawn.

Alan Dragoo, 1982 and 1999

Trees

hear the trees

Wherever I stand I

petition so.

– William

Stafford, "Always"

Our task is to remain upright
and to hold our ground. Many
years after our children have gone
and our bark has sloughed away,
like layers of dead skin,
and we bristle with stubble
and wear little shelves of fungi,
still visitors come.
Some fly in, but others
climb up for a better view.

Over the years we have gathered
many thoughts, but few come
to ask us. Please come
and softly whisper our name.
We may wake to answer you.

Alan Dragoo, 1997

Where does a poem come from?

It begins
deep inside
gently curled
as small as a comma
as small as a pause between
two words.

Kate Amoss

Womb

It is hunger that drives me to fill the void
Ransacking cupboards for scraps of sustenance
Food lengthens my limbs and expands my girth
Like Alice I dream of rooms too small
Wondering as I push my foot up the chimney
Am I finally enough to be born?

Kate Amoss

For Carrick

You were born at daybreak
A blade of light piercing
Dawn's shroud, rupturing
The membrane of our sleep

You who were so gentle
Broke unfathomed waters
Flooding dark recesses
With rip tides of love

Memory, light, water
Mingle with your loss
All are still pools fractured
Knife-edged shards of sky.

Kate Amoss

An Oak

Outside an oak has snagged
The setting sun and time
Lies tangled in a treetop
As bony branches clutch
The swollen, golden disk

My mother is watching
While cocooned in her bed
Her eyes are joy-bright embers
Her form is faint and soft
As if covered by snow

Yet once she was sturdy—
arching above me with
life-proud limbs — an ample sky
raining her seeds of light
down on my hidden heart.

Kate Amoss