

The Descent of Inanna

In Gratitude

For the audience who makes a story. For those who came to the performance of the play made from these poems more than one—who told me they would do so until they had their favorite words memorized. For Catherine who never feared to go anywhere into feeling, who asked for the voice of Ereshkigal. And then had the spirit and force to gather us all into this amazing theater production. For Jeff who introduced me to Catherine “just to see what would happen”. For all the amazing actors and actresses whose gestures became my words.

There is no greater gift for a poet than to see her words embodied by such a brilliant group of men and women as Eugene Chamber Theater.

Our whole community suffered the untimely death of Catherine Vandertuin, its founder and director. Catherine, we miss you. But you are still present to us in the work you elicited from us—you are still present in these words.

The Story Behind the Play

The inspiration for these pieces came from working with the actors and director of Eugene Chamber Theater. They improvised the story of the *Descent of Inanna*, and then provided encouragement, insight, and feedback for the words that I wrote after being inspired by their work. I owe an immense debt to [Catherine Vandertuin](#), Eugene Chamber Theater’s late producer and director (see “Slant” article that follows). She was the archetypal woman gatherer in her role in both this theater piece and this group as she undertook the daunting task of producing a theater piece out of the poetry that came to me in our collaboration. I have been deeply touched by the spirit, talent, perception, and dedication of DJ Adams as Old Woman, as Nancy Hopps as Inanna (who has taken [new directions with her talent](#)), Richard Leebrick as Dumuzi, Katina Poxino as Ereshkigal, [Barratt Walton](#) (also a talented director and playwright) as Ninsubah, Corey Woods as an early Dumuzi, and Tim Guetterman and Jason Hines as Inanna’s sons. I know of no greater gift than to work with such brilliant performers and whole-spirited human beings. I would not have written these words but for their generosity, courage, imagination, and intelligence.

Extraordinary thanks are also owing [Jeff Defty](#), who not only wrote an exquisite musical score for the Eugene Chamber Theater production to accompany my words-- but who originally introduced me to Catherine Vandertuin with the prospect of our collaboration.

You, the reader, are one more element to community in these poems: in the old traditions, the listening of the audience makes a story. In Eugene Chamber Theater’s 22 productions of the *Descent of Inanna*, audience presence, sharing, and feedback provided further inspiration for all of our work. It is because of so many audience requests for these words that I am publishing them here—as small recompense for the great gift that this whole process has been to me.

I have included here the pieces that audience members requested most often. The following poems were used in the Eugene Chamber theater’s first year production of *Descent of Inanna*: "Old Woman Dreams of the Wind"(I and II), "Inanna Burns Dumuzi Through Four Lifetimes",

"The Call of Ereshkigal", "Inanna's Farewell", "The Old Woman at the Gate", "The Descent of Inanna", "Woman on the Cross", and "Chorus". "The Voices of the Angels of Darkness" was added in the second season of production. I owe Richard Leebrick special thanks for helping me to arrange the drafts of "Dumuzi Speaks to the Silence Inanna Leaves Behind" into the piece here—which he also powerfully acted in the second season of production.

The story of the collaboration process of Eugene Chamber Theater's production of the *Descent of Inanna* is detailed in Tim Guetterman's video documentary, *The Descent of Inanna: the Tale and the Telling*, which he produced and directed with help from Katina Poxino. This documentary project aired on the Oregon affiliate of PBS and won the "Best of Oregon" award at the Da Vinci Film Festival.

The Myth

In the beginning, two sisters embody the Tree of Life. The elder sister, Ereshkigal, is dark and sensual as the fertile earth; she is the womb and root of life. The younger sister, Inanna, is vivid with the brilliance of fertility, imagination, and creativity; she represents the branches on the tree of life. Together the sisters represent the whole heart of the world, in which male and female, human society and nature, light and dark, life and death, are interwoven. But this wholeness is not to last. The citizens of the city of Uruk take Inanna for their queen and outcast Ereshkigal to a hideous Underworld. As its queen, Inanna brings mathematics, agriculture and irrigation, mathematics, law, and astronomy to Uruk. When she chooses the shepherd Dumuzi to be her consort, he is made king, and Inanna bears and raises two sons with him.

Meanwhile, castaway Ereshkigal suffers terrible loneliness in the Underworld—made bearable only by her mate, the magnificent Bull of Heaven, who expresses the unbridled power of nature. But in their drive to empire—and to extend their domain over nature, the people of Uruk imprison and slaughter the Bull of Heaven. At this, Ereshkigal calls out to Inanna, recounting all they have lost in their separation. Inanna hears her sister's eerie, compelling voice and withdraws from public life, determined to make the journey to the Underworld to rejoin her. Before she goes, she leaves an inheritance to her sons, and asks her lifelong friend, Ninshubah, to send help for her if she does not return.

Inanna goes through the seven gates to the Underworld, divesting herself of something at each gate, until she gives up her life itself in order to enter the inner chambers of Ereshkigal. There the outcast Ereshkigal is consumed with rage and grief from her years of rejection at the sight of Inanna. She strips Inanna to the bone, keeping her impaled and lifeless before her.

When Inanna does not return, Ninshubah solicits help for her: small beings created from the soil under the fingernails of Enki (God of compassion). These creatures slip under the gates of the Underworld to go to Ereshkigal's side. There they perform the redeeming service of compassion, empathizing with Ereshkigal in her pain. Touched, Ereshkigal offers them their boon of restoring Inanna to life. She releases Inanna to be re-born, but by the laws of the Underworld, another must return to take Inanna's place. Ereshkigal's creatures, the Gala (the messengers of Ereshkigal in the first poem here), attach themselves to Inanna to ensure fulfillment of this bond.

When Inanna returns to her life, she comes to her sons and to Ninshubah, who are mourning for her, and instructs the Gala to leave these righteous persons alone. But when Inanna finds Dumuzi, he is in the midst of an orgiastic celebration. The Gala take him, and Dumuzi loses all his kingly trappings as he falls to earth to grovel in his own Underworld.

There are a number of versions of the tale—and one broken Sumerian tablet that leads to speculation—about what happens next. In some versions Dumuzi dies: in some he is freed from the Underworld during half of the year because his own sister offers to take his place. Here Dumuzi

represents the dying of the green world during winter that is reborn each spring. In our version, he makes an alliance with ancient feminine spiritual power represented by the serpent he calls to for help just before the break in the ancient Sumerian tablet passed down to us. He interweaves this serpent with his own authority (reflecting the Sumerian symbol of the caudus still used in medicine today)-- and his full humanity, like Inanna's own, is restored.

To this traditional narrative, I have added an Old Woman-storyteller. I envision her to be something like the priestesses who kept the rituals and myths of Inanna for generations. Like so many grandmothers, storytellers, and women healers I have been privileged to know, Old Woman embodies "all the courage love takes when it opens our eyes."

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The Voices of the Angels of Darkness (The Messengers of Ereshkigal)

Before you were born
Your name was a dream
In the heart of the world,
Saying *return*.

We remember this for you.

Before you were born
The clay whispered its urge
To make something
And you became skin:

The tongue of the water
Asked for some salt
And you became blood.
The eyes of the sky
Saw a cloud waiting,
And you rained down to life.

We remember this for you.

We are the messengers
Of what you are made of.

We remember the way the soil,
The sea, the sky,
Dreamt you-- the way
They are dreaming you
Still.

We remember
The way things are.

Why do you fear us?
We keep the memory
You keep in your own skin.

Why do you tremble still?
Are you not yet ready
To become the world?

Old Woman Dreams of the Wind I

All breath begins in red.
The temple veil of a woman's body
Is red and so it is
The wind's first hands are red,
Red as the blood of my mother
That ran from her
Into her dreams of me,
Bringing me through
On the lullaby of her body.
Whatever gentleness there is in me
I owe to that first wind
With its red fingers.
It was her breath that taught me
How words and magic

Are the same thing:
How to say, "bird"
Is to inhabit a body of wings,
To be lifted up
On the chair of the sky.
It was the red-handed wind
That first taught me
To rise between worlds,
To drink from
The twin breasts of the Earth
That anchors us all.

**Inanna Burns Dumuzi through Four Lifetimes:
The First Time**

Ah, the first time!
Do you remember the first time
The daughter of the sun
Every burned for you?
How eagerly you traveled
The sparkling labyrinth of my skin,
Rode my bull of pleasure
To its swinging gate?
You were my shepherd
And I your queen.
You smelled of earth and wine,
And I took off everything
Except my scent for you.
We lapped one another like mead,
Swallowing flame and fermentation.
I made you my king,
Trading you rod for rod,
Your scepter was so sweet to me,
Commanding the whole
Kingdom of my vulva.

I was Queen of the Light,
But it was your torch
That made a city of daylight
Out of my body.
Do you remember
How you softened me
Under the sway of your staff
Until the whole earth exploded,
Rising up green and moist
And frothing with fruit?

Do you remember
How we dove together
Into the hurricane,
How the tornado talked to us
And the lava melted us
To a single mountain of flesh,
Monument to the eternal rock
Of our desire?
Do you remember
How you kept me awake
All night, burning,
Burning?

My beloved Dumuzi,
I have always
Burned for you.

The Call of Ereshkigal

You have stolen
The thunder and the lightning,
The rain
That speaks for itself.

You keep the temple.
I keep the sanctuary
Of the womb.

You keep your lapis:
I keep the blue stone of time.
You keep the crown,
I keep that
Which buries the crown.
You keep your thousand torches,
I keep the mystery of bones.
Only in entering my body
Will you find it.

Inanna!
I am your twin!
What they have stolen
From me they have
Stolen from you.

You keep the height of heaven.

I keep everything
You must step on
To get there.
You keep
The tree of heaven,
I keep the roots
That hold her upright.

You keep your jewels,
I keep the treasure.
You keep the codes;
I keep the law.

Every king you have ascended
To the throne will tumble
In the wind of my voice
If you have not
What I have.

Inanna!
I am your secret
And you are my song!

You are the morning
And the evening star,
But I am the horizon.
You are the rising
And the setting-
But I am forever.

I am the voice of the lion
You keep by your side;
I am what you wear
Under your robes
Even if you clothe yourself
In the entire heaven.

Inanna, I am your twin!
What they have stolen from me,
They have stolen from you.

Inanna!
I am your secret
And you are my song!

Inanna, I am waiting.

And I am forever.

**Inanna Burns Dumuzi through Four Lifetimes:
The Second Time**

My beloved Dumuzi,
I have always
Burned for you.
When did you cease
To revel in my flame?
Have I grown so harsh
In the heat of my years
That I blister you with my fire,
And you name me dangerous names?

You, my beloved!
Without whom my body
Is but an empty vessel,
A jug carrying loneliness
In place of cream.

You look away!
Did you not once court
The fire in my eyes
You now call enemy?
If my Dumuzi places a hood
Over my eyes,
Who will look
Upon my light?

Where is your skin
That loves my skin?

Inanna turns from Dumuzi,
Her hands going forward ahead of her,
Her breath like smoke,
The memory of his body imprinted
Like ash upon her body,
Her flesh still calling out to him with its fire.

*Inanna turns from Dumuzi
And begins to descend,*

*Leaving the imprint of steam in her steps.
Even as she goes, she whispers,
On her twisted helpless breath of smoke,
"Dumuzi, I love you."*

*Dumuzi has already hooded his face
Against the terror his love has become to him,
And he does not hear her.*

*And where Inanna goes now,
She can hear neither his familiar voice
Nor her own. She can hear only
The voice of her dark and angry twin
Who remembers everything.*

Inanna's Farewell

Inanna stands before her son,
Shara, the youngest.
She is still here.
The Queen of Light
Still presses her foot
On the same earth
As ourselves.

She catches
The glimmer of longing
In his eyes,
Mirror to him
As she has always been.

The years have placed
The web of life on her face:
He looks there
And recognizes his mother.

She steps forward
And hands him a jewel
From the kingdom of the sun.
He does not want it.
He opens his palm
To give it back to her,
But she closes
His fist over it,
For she is the warrior,
And he the one left at home,

Marking the time of return.

There is a fig tree in his eyes.
She gives him that, too,
And he gives her tears in return,
She can not help it.
She is still here,
But even now she has begun
To dream herself
Another way.

Inanna stands before her son,
Lulal, the eldest.
He has always held
His father's scepter
In his hand.
They meet eye to eye.
Neither of them can dissolve
The meaning of this.

"Wait for me",
Inanna says,
"Wherever I go,
I shall always
Be your mother."

The Old Woman at the Gate

This is dangerous work,
This thing we women do,
Feeling everything, passing
Through the gate that way.
This is our play with the spirits:
We gain what we risk.
So it is with Inanna;
What she would gain
And therefore what she must risk
Is life itself.

Inanna hears Ereshkigal crying,
So she has to go.

She has to go:
After all, isn't Inanna
A woman?

We stand on the crack
Between the worlds
In our women's bodies.
We look both ways
On the horns of life,
Forward,
To see our children through,
Backward,
To remember.
That's why our love
Takes so much courage.

Inanna comes through here,
Asking me the way.
I know her symptoms--
Haven't I seen them
A hundred times before?
I would have cried for her
If she hadn't so many tears
For herself already.

*I am Daughter of the Sun,
Inanna says,
But I am so wet,
I am so wet,
I am rain
Without a river
To collect me,
I am a flood
With no banks
To embrace me,
And still
I cannot stop crying.
Old Woman, what can I do
With all my water?*

"You have the water
Of life itself in you",
I tell her,
"It is your responsibility
To cry it home."

How Inanna cries!
She cries as if
She has already
Become the wind:

*It's not enough,
She says, The way
I've made myself up,
It's not enough;
My crown and my kingdom,
It's not enough,
All my light--
Not enough,
My stores of wealth--
Not enough,
The soldiers
Who would trade away everything
For one night with me--
Not enough,
My sweet companion Ninshubah,
Who has stepped her path
From childhood to womanhood
Alongside my own--
Not enough,
Even Dumuzi, my king,
Flesh of my flesh,
Not enough--
My own beloved sons--
Who are to me as life itself,
Not enough.*

There are some kinds of tears
That cannot be wiped away.
Like prayers, they announce us.

*My body! Inanna cries,
This hopeless beauty of mine
Is like the skull of a melon.
I don't know
Who has eaten my insides.
This candle of flesh I carry
Only illuminates everything
Yellow as bones of sand.*

I know what Inanna is saying
When she asks me
How to get through that gate,
When she asks me how to dream.

*Old Woman, Inanna says,
Teach me how to dream.*

"Don't ask me that!"
I tell her,
"We all know how to dream.
Just some of us
Listen our dreams.
So you just listen
To whatever it is stampeding
Inside you, pulling you over.
You just ride it where it takes you.
Aren't you yourself
The morning and the evening star?
There's no woman
Can't walk through walls,
Navigating her dreams.
There's no woman can't
Walk through time--
Don't you have
Two sons to prove it?"

Can't I give her something more,
Inanna wants to know,
Something to make it safe-
But all I can give her
Are the words I keep
As the witness at the gate:
"Ereshkigal is your own sister,
And all the scribes in Sumer
Haven't any more power
Than what's written
In the mother's milk you shared:
That's the ink
That draws us into this world.
And what draws us in
Draws us out again,
Both directions."

I didn't tell her the rest.
What good would it do?
What must be, must be.
But even the underworld
Rewards the courage of love.

Dumuzi Speaks to the Silence Inanna Leaves Behind

(with thanks to Richard Leebrick)

Inanna dares go to Ereshkigal!
She makes our citizens
Forget they are Sumerian.
She has forgotten
I am Dumuzi
And I am her king!
I am Dumuzi,
The thunder of the soil,
Crown of his people!

I make a kingly decree:
Inanna's name will never
Be spoken in Uruk again!
Let Inanna live with Ereshkigal!
Let her stay in the Underworld
With all other rotting things!

There is no Inanna.
There never was
The shepherd boy, Dumuzi,
Who loved her.
A king is not rooted
In the nature
Of a boy that way.

A king does not curse himself
With his dreams—

Oh, sometimes I, too,
Have visions of Ereshkigal:
But it's not in my dreams
She comes to me.
I see her in the eyes
Of every woman who
Would spear the secrets
From a man's soul.

There are secrets in a man
That would split him open
Were he to show himself
Capable of bleeding.
There are words, like walls,
That surround a man
With their stones,

Keeping count,
Wanting something
From a man's life.

There are things
Even a king cannot name
Lest he curse himself
With his own dreams.

The Descent of Inanna

Inanna is bold
As she approaches
The gate of the underworld:
She is the leaf
Of the tree of life
On fire with autumn,

She is the Goddess Inanna
And she is lighting
Her own way
Down.

At the first gate
She meets the gatekeeper, Neti,

"I am Inanna",
She says.
"So you are",
Neti echoes,
"And I claim you
On behalf of the mighty Queen
Ereshkigal, as I claim
All who pass here."

"Who is it?"
Ereshkigal howls,
Who dares my gate?"

"Your sister, Ereshkigal,
Why, it is your sister, Inanna,
Queen of Heaven,
Come to you."

Inanna lifts her crown
From her head

And passes it to Neti,
Who flings it
Into the muck below.

That was the first gate.

Now Inanna steps forward
Into a tangle of thorns.
She tears off her bloody royal robe
And flings it away from her.

To pass the second gate.

She is Inanna,
Queen of Light;
But she does not know
Whose hands are on her,
"Who are you?"
She calls out.

"Hush, Inanna,"
Comes the reply,
"The ways of the underworld
Are perfect.
They may not
Be questioned."

The hands of the underworld
Ride Inanna's body.

"Dear Inanna, "they tell her,
"We had better
Show you the way."

Inanna throws away
The weight of her jewels
And crawls forward,
Carrying a mass of dissolving
Flesh along with her.

That was the third gate.

Now a figure in white
Stands before Inanna,
Gesturing to her breastplate.
Inanna pulls it away:

When her breasts fall free,
She passes the fourth gate.

All she has left
Is life itself.

"Who are you?" comes
An insistent voice
Out of the darkness.

"Why is this?"
Inanna calls back.

There is no answer.

Inanna slips so far
Backward into herself,
She hears her own voice
As another woman's, saying,
"I have sons."

The names of her sons
Carry her through the fifth gate.

Now she has reached the chambers
Of Ereshkigal herself

Ereshkigal walks up to Inanna, saying,
"You still wear your skin,
Do you know what that means?"

"Yes", says Inanna,
She stretches out her arms
To what must be.

Next comes the peeling
Of the flesh.
How many years this takes
From Inanna, we are not told.
The ways of the Underworld
Are perfect and secret.

But when they are finished
There is nothing left of Inanna
But bones.

That was the sixth gate.

"Hang her up", says Ereshkigal,
"Where we can look at each other".

That is the seventh gate.

Inanna is so naked
There is nothing left of her
But bones and her voice.
And even that voice
Has no mouth
But only a hunger
That has not yet died.
Ereshkigal allots her this,
For now they are equals,
Now they can sing together
On the winds of Sumer.

**Woman on the Cross
(The Voice of Ereshkigal)**

I: Anger

Can this be Inanna?
The one who rules by the light
As if the night
Is nothing at all?

Now the Queen of Light knows
What it is to be called
By the goddess Ereshkigal,
Before whom life and death
Hold hands.

Only Inanna came to Ereshkigal
Wearing the power of unholy things!
I have fixed this for Inanna!
Ereshkigal has cleaned Inanna
Of her passing daylight.

Oh, Sumer!
Behold your queen now!
You who threw Ereshkigal away,
Do you hear her speaking to you

From that eternal city
That lives under your own?

City of thieves!

I have stolen something of my own.
The Queen of Night
Has the Queen of Light
In her bond.

And the ways
Of my underworld are perfect:
They may not be questioned.

II: Grief

Oh, oh, my insides!
They have ripped me open!
My Bull of Heaven,
He who announced me
To the sky
On the thunder
And the lightning
Lies before me in a shroud--
And I, the Queen of Death
Can do nothing.
For the ways
Of the underworld
Are perfect-
They can be
Neither questioned
Nor changed.

Inanna!
The ways of the underworld
Are perfect,
And therefore
I cry for us both.

Oh, oh, my back!
Oh, you who once loved me.

I am a foreigner to myself,
A word spoken
By no one.

When I saw you glowing,
Inanna, do you know
How that hurt?
I, too, am a woman.
I, too, sometimes
Miss the sun!

Oh, Oh, my heart!
Oh, my Bull of Heaven!
Where have you gone
And left this poor corpse
In your place?
I have become
A journey
Without a traveler.

Oh, my belly!
What is there to feed
A woman such as I am?
I am a wall
Of hunger
No one can walk through,
A prisoner
Of my own vision.
I am struck numb
With my secret language.

Why must I suffer so?
Is there no one
To cry with me
To hold my hand
And wipe my brow?

Oh, heaven and earth
Who step on me,
You have named
Every one of my children
For someone else.

I am so weary
Of being your fear!
I am so weary
Of being that
From which nothing
Can escape.

Hear me, Oh, Sumer!
I am she who takes back
What belongs to the earth.

Oh, Sumer
Why have you scorned me so,
When I only steal
What must be stolen
To return it to life?

I have only
Taken everything
Back
To my own
Womb.

Ereshkigal's Gift to the Singer

Who are you with eyes so brave
As to cry with me?
Who give my words life
By your listening?
Speak now for yourself, you
Who have crossed the bridge
Between life and death
To stand in the underworld with me:
Name some gift you wish
To take back home with you.
For the ways of the underworld
Are perfect in what they grant
To the courage of love.

Inanna Burns Dumuzi through Four Lifetimes: The Third Time

Inanna arrives home from hell.
Dumuzi does not look at her.

She wears ghosts at her side,
Her husband will not
Look at her.

He makes her stand
Outside the gate
While other women
Satisfy him.

But the eye
Inanna fixes on him now
Is the eye
Of a woman who has been
To hell and back.

Dumuzi does not hear the sizzle
That comes toward him.
He does not see
The flame rise
Until it is too late
To flee.

Inanna has fixed
Her eyes on Dumuzi,
She looks on his palace
And it is reduced
To coals in the desert.
She looks on his treasury
And his coffers of grain
And his barrels of wine
And his gates and guards
And one by one,
They each go up
In flame.

Inanna reaches out
For Dumuzi once more.
She ignites the lightning
Over his head:
The angels of darkness
Dance and whisper in her flame
And Dumuzi falls to earth,
Himself whispering like a ghost.
Words fall out of him
Like the teeth
Of an old man,
And he begins to sing.

Just before his breath
Becomes smoke
Dumuzi the shepherd
Who once slept
With the animals,
Begins to sing.

Dumuzi sings,
And the snake comes to him.
Dumuzi sings
And the snake comes alive in him,
Dumuzi sings
And the snake's body
Becomes his own.
Dumuzi sings
And he forgets his hands and legs,
Slithering in the dance
That outdances the flame of time,
In its turning,
Dumuzi sings,
Slipping out of skin after skin,
Until the fire itself
Calls him brother.
Dumuzi sings,
Celebrating the snakeskin
Of the rainbow
That is the marriage
Of heaven and earth,
Man and woman.

Dumuzi speaks to god
In the body of a snake.
And when Dumuzi
Rises from the flames,
He has the symbol of the snake
Inscribed in his heart.
And the lightning
In Inanna's eyes
Is woven round his scepter—
That scepter that is now
The rule of healing.

**Inanna Burns Dumuzi through Four Lifetimes:
(The Fourth Time: Homecoming)**

Inanna and Dumuzi sit before the fire,
Talking together like the wind,
The cinders of time in their hair.
Dumuzi burns, flashing his spirit
As he once did his body.

Inanna burns, weaving her fire
Into the generations
In order to pass herself on.

Together Inanna and Dumuzi
Are the thunder and the lightning,
And wherever they strike,
Heaven and earth
Come together again.

Old Woman Dreams of the Wind II

Last night I dreamt of the wind:
I dream many dreams:
You yourselves
Are only one of them.
But we will never lose each other,
For the wind repeats everything.

And now that my years
Have become a bundle of magic,
I dream the black wind
Of possibility, that pitcher
Where dawn hide itself
Until it elopes into the morning.
I dream the black dark-handed wind,
Feeling for that point
In falling from the sky,
Where we begin to own the distance,
Soaring aloft like eagles,
Witnessing everything.

Last night I dreamt of the wind:
She has the voice of a woman
With a story to tell:
She is crossing a bridge,
And there are so many colors,
Swimming like fish below that bridge,
It takes more than one lifetime
To see them all.

The wind is an old woman,
And time does not apply to her.
Yesterday still blows on today's wind.
The wind herself has only one breath
Which we all share.

The wind herself
Is an old woman,
And when I am gone
Across her bridge,
Ask the wind
What became of Inanna and Ereshkigal,
Of shepherd and king, mother and lover,
And the singer who sings of them all.

The wind repeats everything,
Remembering it all--
Remembering you, too,
And the voice of your own
Question.

I am not afraid of dying.
I have crossed the bridge of dreaming
So many times--what is one more time?
I look forward to seeing
Some old friends again.
Besides, the ways of the underworld
Are perfect, as any storyteller knows.

But as for you,
Who have made me grandmother
By your listening--
I will miss you.

So listen for me
When the wind blows.
Listen for me--
And sing for yourselves.

Chorus

I am that which is not forgotten.

I am your first breath,
Made of water,
Become the great shaking sea again
Before your dreaming eyes.

I am the dark soil,
Midwife to glory and to ruin:

The inevitable cracking open
Of all things.

I am the star-driven
Water of life,
Crying its way home.

I am the dance
Of the visible
And the invisible:
I am the dreamer
And the dream.

I am the one who crawls
Low on the earth
And steps high
On the throne of heaven,
Never forgetting my eyes.

I am your shadow:
Panting behind you
With your greatest fear,
Laying out your longest image
Toward the sun.

I am your own feelings
Come to life before and after you
As far as the eye can see.

I am what tears have made.
I am what tears
Are made out of.

I am vision
Large enough to embrace
What I have made.

I am the ancient city
Of the body.

I am the one
Who does not turn away.

I am the one
Brought home again.

I am all the courage love takes,
When it opens our eyes.

Epilogue: Sisters

Between sisters there is
No such thing as distance.
Touch one of them now
And even on the far side of the earth
The other's skin leaps in recognition.

Since day has lain by night
There has been no darkness
Void of the coming dawn;
No bald, sun-ridden day
Without her stash
Of mystery.

Spinning thread,
Whorl of the universe,
What thing am I not?
I am the rock designing water,
The softened stone that falls
Through time,
Rescued by earth and moss.

I am the bull begun
In the faraway horn of Africa.
I am the owl and the seed,
The mare who roams the cliffs
Where even some shadows
Dare not lose themselves.

Against the desert
I am still the rain of blood;
Against the flood I am still
Drinking, believing.

Where one thing stands,
Another stands beside it:
With each questing spirit,
A large and small universe
Finds home again.