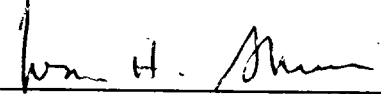
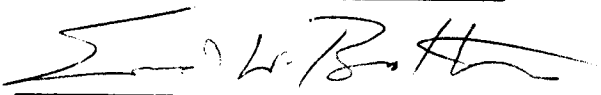


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Signature Gloria Jean Mills

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THE WOMAN WITHIN

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Gloria Jean Mills

June 1987

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Micheal,
husband, lover, friend, equal.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the many teachers who unlocked the secrets of literature and gave me insight into the nature of art and the artist. I am particularly indebted to Professor Marilyn Kallet for years of criticism, support, and inspiration. Her guidance made me a better editor and writer.

ABSTRACT

Lyric poetry has always explored the individual's relationship to nature and the universe, but more importantly, the relationship to the self that is writer, reader, thinker, and feeler. The divisions of my thesis represent various stages of this relationship. "In the Shadows" includes poems born of self-examination and personal reflection. In most cases, their poetic power comes from a turning within. "Awakening" is comprised of poems that are a re-emerging from within, poems of nature sifted through the self and returned in organic form. "Into the Light" characterizes the final stage of poetic development when nature and self interact, and the poems become a reaching out to the reader.

The images of darkness and light, fire and water, correspond to this development to mimic the gradual turning into the light—knowledge and strength of self—that is the catharsis of poetry. These opposing elements are yet necessary: the darkness within brings forth and intensifies the light. And in the fire there is both communion and annihilation, a growing thirst for water.

More specifically, in the final section these images highlight the experience of women in the struggle for a voice, personally, politically, and morally. Through sublimation of the self in the act of politicalization, the voice becomes stronger, more sure of itself. In the first two sections the self confronts experience through the personal and that experience enlarges and refines the personal, so that the poetry reflects the process of creation. There is a constant tension between the possible and improbable, the imagined and the real.

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INTRODUCTION

As a child, simple expression was an almost insurmountable obstacle until I took up a pen and filled a page with words. From that moment on, poetry became my voice and the poem became an expression of the self within. However crude, those first poems were like the screams of Thoreau's loon, cries across the silent water. Through poetry I came to know the silent self within. And the poem was a process of immersion and re-emergence; it reached in and brought forth a voice and the voice reaffirmed the child within.

In this fashion, I grew into youth and the poems grew into reflections of the struggle of that youth. Silent days turning away or facing front in opposition, I sought illusive, unattainable acceptance. And I found it in poetry, the self forever searching for itself, matching itself word for word, seeking itself through sounds and syntax, grappling for the knowledge that is meaning. I found acceptance of self through the confrontation of self in poetry. Yeats says, "Out of our quarrels with ourselves we create poetry." Creating was a self-affirming search for the knowledge that is the first step toward being. I created out of the struggle within and the struggle became the creation.

As my literary influences increased in number, the boundaries of the poem were extended. Through experimentation, and often mere imitation, I realized the possibilities of expression, the powerful correspondence between content and form. In William Carlos Williams' triadic line I found the energy to leap and bound and race; in C.K. Williams' long, languid line I found the calm to reflect and tell a story; and in short lyric lines I found the ability to emphasize and impart meaning through syntax. The use of these three lines, separately and interchangeably, allows me a variety of moods and tones to match the content of the work. In general, the formal elements of the poems conform to the dictates of theme and purpose.

The thesis consists of three sections which follow the course of poetic development and reflect facets of each stage or poetic perspective. I filter experience through the shadows of myself; arriving at an epiphany, an awakening to the connection between self and the universe; finally turning into the light that is the poem. Each poem comes from this process so that the poems ultimately become statements of the artist's dilemma. In the shadows, the artist faces the tensions of the personal perspective in the public act of the poem. In the awakening, the poems take on a life of their own through exploration of the relationship of imagination and reality. And in the light, there is constant friction between the possible and the actual, but there is also a recognition of the poem's ability to effect change through representation of the ultimate.

It is this tension finally that is the artist's purpose. The poem is born from it, the poem dies within it. It is the nature of expression to be ephemeral. At last it is the expression itself that is the poem, not the meaning within. It is the voice daring to break the silence, seeking a reconciliation that is at once brief and glorious.

IN THE SHADOWS

little boy you toppled
like the boughs heavy with
dew leaning from the tree
and falling to the damp
brown earth but you
didn't just drop you
ran like the devil from
death howling like an animal
trapped on the edge of a cliff

your death was not as in
stories brave and beautiful
it was simple a steel gray wire
and a little boy's pink-washed
abdomen the hours of waiting
blood more blood still
seeing you rolling on
the cool linoleum floor
cruelly invaded

the next day amidst dark
coats and words from strangers
who passed stopped
entered as we played our favorite
game sliding across the wet
grass on the seat of our
pants laughing a hollow
tree with heavy roots tugging
like the laundry on the line

the sound of mower hitting
rock hitting wire the long gray
projection and a small neat
entry encased in a reddening
arc still seeing you
rolling still sliding on
the grass laughing

Morning without light.
Five a.m. in a city of towers,
Steeple-cut clouds.
A faint beige tint
Demands coffee and eggs
On the front porch of day.

Maria sans Maria.
A leg from beneath
Creme-colored sheets,
A stray hair on a pillow.

We feel sadness for
A sleeper on the verge of day,
Inky-fingered print
In noiseless rain,
The river's retraction.

We swim like birds, pecking the surface
With our palms, as if they are beaks,
As if we can pierce the murky pool.

We watch the water sway between the banks
And laugh as if it is Sunday
And we are all here,
Dipping complete beneath the surface,

Five fish in a clear, blue bowl,
Hair fanning colors behind our forms.
As if we can live on algae and watery weeds
And not need the flat, sandy soil.

As if these are soap bubbles that spread
And rise like the boom of Sunday voices
Big as trees above us—words escaping and floating
Like our bodies suddenly alive, free.

When darkness gathers force,
he tells me about his day,
sweeping up words like dust
with the hushed tones
of his home voice—
about an old woman at a
dumpster at day's end.

He recreates the scene—
bottles shattering,
cans clattering,
dusty buggy packed with
cans, bent figure
climbing inside.
I write the woman
re-emerging from within—
long, slanted face, white
hair, floppy brown hat,
red sweater a sign.

We see her though here
she is divorced
from the picture—
apartment balconies
in half-light,
a single tree in
the middle of the lot
as if it has been
there for years,
the rest springing up
around it, encircling
the thick, rough trunk.

An afterthought he says,
survival's the name of
the game, no matter the age.
We would save these soft-
spoken sounds—we are
poets in a hothouse,
looking out at an old
woman, a solitary tree,
casting shadows in the dark.

WINDFALL
(for Sheri)

10

Long of limb, fleet
of foot, you flee
down the mountainside
barely brushing
the chipped-off rock
beneath our feet--
stones blue, maroon
and gold at once,
windfallen carpet
away from the road.

You are a two-legged
cat scanning the flat
land for food.
You stop at the
bottom where the wind
carved a ravine and
wait for me.
I am a curious bird
taking one step forward,
one back.

You go down,
leaping into the
wind ditch, sweat in
clear streams down
your cheeks like
tears, and you
lick the salt from
your lips as I watch,

a fixture on this
high, rocky cliff,
afraid to follow
your every lead.

Side by side, we
climb back up,
you urging, pushing
harder, faster
against the earthen
incline. You see
a broken tree trunk,
sap dripping from its
end and you wipe the
syrup on first your
neck, then mine.

We laugh together,
our lumps pumping
more urgently now
that we have
paused here, half
way up, to accept the
wind's ill-gotten gift.

"Out of our quarrels with others we make rhetoric. Out of our quarrels with ourselves we create poetry."

William Butler Yeats

I.

For me
 there is only that moment—
 the rain,
 the water running,
 you leaning over the sink,
 toothbrush in hand,
 just a dab of soap
 on top to clean the
 can opener after use,
 your shoulder turned
 just far enough away
 to pretend it is only
 the radio, a soothing
 blue voice from
 beyond.

II.

If she could,
she would wrap herself
in a cocoon.
She turns away
and I talk on
despite the emptiness
of the room.
She is rinsing the dishes
brushing the stains away,
listening to the patter
of rain on the glass.

If she could,
she would send us all
away, banish us to
the bluedom rolling
like words from the
tip of her pen.

I talk on and
the pen moves faster
and faster down the
page. All of her
porcelain is white
and I am gone,
just a trace
of an ache
at the bottom
of the page.

AWAKENING

A black spider winds silver
Filigree against the white, white sky;
Masks of color push blank day back.
It lowers, steps down, extending beyond the last
line.

It's controlled falling,
Like a vizard slowly drawn down
In a jeweled, white hand.
The spider fixes images like words,
And silver encases the air, white, too white.

Until the work gleams real,
Stretching like the sky but farther, whiter,
Until mere lines become diamonds
Of water, fire, earth,
air.

The spider idles, sleezy, leggy apparition
In the brash of a bare bulb,
Host of the whisper-thin anchored here and
There, leading inward, singular, new.

It is grotesque—spider ash black,
Web a noose tightening in bright light.
An elemental enigma. Prey nears,
Bling to the cling of animal art.

It advances until it is consumed,
One wing left, a stray seed,
Until fine wires pale, darker than night,
Bleaker than eerie flourescent shadows.
Until art is a woven wing, a neglected seed,
Waste.

In the morning I forget the spiders in the
 rafters;
They run for the darkness of the roof, its
 endless holes,
Packing up like foreigners in the middle
 of a war,
Fleeing the factory of my day, trails of smoke
 and sound
That wind and coil like string in the dark
 currents
Of their brave bellies.

The sun was bound to come.

SHE COMES WITH SUITCASE
(for K.S.)

18

She comes with a suitcase in September,
A scream for leaves, the matchless urge
To make gold, blue, green—from black!
To turn spiders into enigma, webbed-day dreams

She comes in shadow, as friend, cajoler,
Seductress. In her cry she forgets—
I am her and myself and more.
Silver river of light!

Sweet nilotic scent and round red apple!
Oh, evolving elements. I am nothing. I am real.
She comes with a suitcase, and more.
She comes with a suitcase full.

I never can stay quite
still enough, long enough
to let you disregard me,
to let you come closer and
closer, wings tucked,
lined white,
eyes fearless,
an inch away.

I never can stand
statue-still
and let you light.

blue beak
juts from his
red-jacketed
face—my
engine idles,
neighs as I
rein it in,
pull it back for the Cardinal—
wings wave, spraying dew
across the ragged
rocks in the
drive—the
car inches
forward
over his
blesséd
prints, nose
smelling city,
eyes seeking
birds.

We feed you sunflower
seeds in winter;
you have life beneath
our window as we watch.

Heads bobbing and snapping
from side to side,
on alert for intruders,
you land and pick
seeds and bread
from the green-shingled
roof of our house.

In the morning, gathering
on the tree limbs
like leaves, brown, gold
and brilliant red, side
by side, you squat—
round wrens and black-
capped chickadees—
like little priests,
color cloaks wrapped around
you as you bend and
take the blessed seed
between your teeth.

Dirty blue blood,
blue-
covered coat now gray,
Her head bobs
like buoys
there in the watery
distance behind
her as she
bounds, first this way,
then that
between a liquor
store and armory wall,
ten feet of
narrow, brown earth
side to side, front
to back
no vegetation, wall
to wall, fence to
fence nothing
living but her,
her lungs jumping
as she pants,
matching me step
for step, going along
with me,
skirting the three-
foot fence in
front, only
going that ten feet
across, calling me
back in her
father's voice, large
and heavy with the
darkness of some
Russian tomb, echoing
like the boat
horns on her other
side, behind her
there at the
closest edge of
that fence where
she waits, finally
turning away, not
wanting to jump,
not daring to follow.

White water runs in the parchment-colored tub
Whitening the stained, gray Friday night bathroom:
The crumbling plaster overhead, all the fixtures
A yellowing white like the tub, crouched on claws,
Waiting, filling with nothingness, a blank,
The blinding white of the bath
Before.

Before the body capitulates, bending backward butt
First, considering the consequences: the sprawling claws,
Cold porcelain meeting the floor, mouth gaping,
An absurd expression like a scene from a Marx Brothers'
Movie on a sound-dead screen shading
The lampless, lightless room
In needle-night.

Not this time. This time the bath welcomes me with
Soft, warm fingers, lowering my heavy eyelids.
I absorb the leavings of grandmother's time;
The wide-bottomed tub, the carefully brushed blinds
Bleeding night in, the night-yard noise of cricket choirs
In the dry, yellow sand-grass. It is enough to wish
For midnight.

As I suspend my limbs on the cool, wet edge, the bath
Becomes more—a too tranquil space of pooling rain,
A raintree forest haven. I splash color
Carelessly. This is water-picture painting,
Greens, browns, and a blue, too blue pool. No bodies.
No beings, just earth kneeling near the edge and
The quiet, salty imagined
Air stinging.

I reshape my body with soap, molding bare pear
Breasts and rounded belly, confirming the subtle
Curve of my calves and thickening thighs.
I splash water back on the fingers of form,
Future faces, words that form like rainbows
On the tips of my heat-
Pink fingers.

Until soap scums skims the surface of my once blue pool
And I acknowledge the rocking reflection of my body
Leaning up, confounding the sense of the picture.
A chill dots my skin as the water cools, and the
Wind blows the blinds back until there is nothing
But the night outside and
Crickets calling.

Moving forward and backward and forward,
I rock in an overstuffed chair;
Trees align in greenest green, an overripe gourd.

This chair tears more and more, neglected ward,
Its insides out, body more spare,
Moving forward and backward and forward.

My sentiments change, a green-gold leaf accord,
Sometimes an empty urge to observe unaware
Trees align in greenest green, an overripe gourd.

Two cats clean each other, moving toward
Each other, paired in motion, motions a pair,
Moving forward and backward and forward.

A neat match! Licking and curling in accord.
Nothing else signifies but their gray-gold hair.
Trees align in greenest green, an overripe gourd.

I am an arrested animal, a too-sharp sword,
Giving cats the care of an overstuffed chair,
Moving forward and backward and forward,
Trees align in greenest green, an overripe gourd.

Oval saffron shapes
and a bottle of white wine,
dark green transparence,
solid, a chiaroscuro.

Pears and wine on a teacloth;
nothing more, nothing less
than our pearly pink teeth
can take and our absent eyes
can offer. A meal of sight.

Three gray walls around it
possess more. This picture
depends on its frame
to hang just so, squarely there,
like those silent walls
on the edge of vision,
a blank look.

The ten o'clock new update
relates the critical situation,
in color, no pictures, just
an honest face, mouth moving--
whales stranded, she says,
Key Mule, Florida, nine dead,
more critically caught, north of
here, three dozen in danger.
I re-cross my legs, now right
over left, in front of the
19-inch screen. A poem,
I think--whale beach,
bulging bellies against
the suntanned sand,
south southwest,
moved by man when
necessary, taken
to water stations
because as she
says, once
stranded they
beach over
and over
again.

Ears against the ground, garden-plot corn stalks strain,
bending and twisting like rubber
bands in the hands of children; an overripe idea almost
pulls from the sandy soil.
Overgrown summer repels the light, a muted note on the
clean, white page of winter,
and a child cries—I think it is the six-year-old across
the street with the dirty
shining face and white-drenched hair of summer who often
walks with her mother to the grocery,
tugging on her skinny skirt, tearing out the hem on the
left side as the cars pass
on the other side. Once I watched them returning, child
following the bent figure
and creaking cart, her arms bracing the big, brown bag,
body close to the crowded road.
Her cry is like the common call of the broad-winged hawk
as it circles alone, searching
for something on the outskirts of the cement city, finally
taking that turn south on its
predestined path among the dusk-deadened clouds of
November. Then it becomes a siren,
the worrisome red flash that passes, speeding away from
the light-lined evening streets,
finally out of reach. And I see what it sees—the slumbering
slopes of global green and pastured
horses prancing like old women in clay with spades
that dig long, thin sentences in the
dark, and retract; women who, having picked at the prime,
plant more, thinking it spring.

THE RACE

29

april, an hour
past noon,
lounges on the ground
accepting the
gnats that
fan its flushed face.
it motions
me over with
a fat, green grin and
slick-grass
hands, it
urges me to abandon the
barely moving
bicycle,
to retreat from the race.
but above my
sweaty head
a cloud-shimp climbs,
guiding my
eyes up and
my feet pump faster.
my lungs
resist the
thick, cloying measureless-
air invasion.
there is
a bomb in my chest, in
the compact,
otherwise
quiet compartment, a
red danger
that dares
to tickle time breathless,
to take the
wind whipping
silver-cycle wings and
use it to
power the endless
threat. it fortifies
my earth-
bound feet and
fire-fueled legs racing

away from
the simple sun-
day. my body lengthens
swelling like
the green-leaf
spray from the springing
trees and the
terror tick pulls
ahead, blocking the
beauty of my
body gliding behind.
the friction in my
feet increases;
i lift away
from the seat and absorb
the shock of
the uneven city
streets, bounding with
bumps and
left-over holes.
and the wheels keep
circling,
birthing earth beneath
my silver-ship as
it aspires
to the height of
the wide-winged jet that
lifts, re-
turing morning
to the wide-air womb.
i pedal
desperately on
narrow, neighborhood lanes,
falling
farther and farther
behind and the timer
ticks ticks
ticks as the
plane lifts taken by some
wild wind,
pushed between
clean, cloud cheeks.
i press the
brakes, skating
to a stop on the sun-

washed top.
i wait and watch
the spot where it
disappeared,
jet-air trail
trailing off, a dying
reminder of
the hard-run
race like the hollow thumping
becoming more
and more
distant, a muffled murmur in
the wind-
whipped stillness
of the empty city street.

INTO THE LIGHT

I.

Flame tongues
Fork from once tall trees
In the west.

Fertile season,
Too fertile, burning black
In the end.

We set our own
Fires, to burn theirs blacker,
Put them out.

"Fight fire with
Fire," she says, upturned face
Broad and bare.

Flames marry
In mid-air, twisting in a
Fateful kiss.

We burn, the
Beauty of our skyblue eyes
Consumed.

Two hundred years
Of pain has brought us to
This place,

Flames flaring
Around us, bodies betrayed,
Burning as one.

We arise from
Our ashes, a bold bird
Exhumed,
Multiplied,
Indivisible by fire.

II.

We push back the bouldered door
And step back into the flames
To save the survivors.

We volunteer our vision,
Voices joining the flickering refrain,
Gathering force in number.

Our skin singes, our minds
Catch fire, uncut diamonds,
White-hot light.

We are children of earth and
Sky, heavens against our back,
Fires in our eyes.

We are mothers of the sun,
Conceived in evening,
Born from our bodies in morning.

We are burning to be free.
We know we will walk
To the water's edge and back.

III.

We despair at your
Desertions, faces turning
Away, doors clicking shut,
Silence thick as fire.

There are many weapons,
Many names—blood, death,
Fire. We leap into the
Pile, leaving our proud
Palaces behind.

We encounter a world,
A city without yews
And firs to burn,
But you offer us boughs
Too hot to touch.

We are Elissa turning away
From Aeneas in silence;
We are goddesses
As long as we
Are free.

We ride the river,
 skating across the waves.
 We go on despite the
 sign, outboard motor trilling,
 water spraying beside
 the boat.

We see a harbor ahead,
 Little River Landing—
 Harbor Area
 Idle Speed Only
 No Waves—
 and throttle in,
 floating to the dock
 where Stock Creek
 meets the river.

Outside the local watering
 hole, a Boston screwtail
 takes a kitten's ear
 in its teeth, tugging,
 riding its back
 across the slats,
 down into the mud
 under the stoop.

Inside, a middle-aged
 lady sips a Strohs
 and sighs while Captain
 Bob leans across the counter,
 dark-glass suntanned
 face smiling: "Let

me guess--gas."
And the lady sips
and sighs.

He walks ahead as
we watch the dog and
orange and white-striped
kitten tustle until
the feline finally snarls,
flashing her teeth,
uncovering her claws.

We catch up to him,
tall figure in polyester
pants, deck shoes
squeaking down the pier
and around to where
our boat is docked
and waiting.

We descend
suddenly looking up,
catching the fire
in his eyes with our
tinted lenses,
finally turning to
the setting sun.

Going back, we
pass a Cabin Cruiser,
three-foot waves
in its wake.
We throttle in, our

tiny vessel rocks and
our bodies leave the
seat once, twice,
again.

We enter wider
waters, watching
for tree limbs across
the top, staying
between the buoys,
throttle out, knowing
these are dangerous waters,
trying to beat
the darkness back.

The water level is low, but this is not a poem
 About weather, or even about drought –
 Days and days without rain–
 Except as the absence of rain,
 Sustaining the level of the pond
 Is insufficient...

dead fish.

A dying fish is a beautiful thing, waving
 Its tail above the fisherman's head,
 Hook down its throat, stomach
 Bloody, scales parting, shiny black
 Guts on deck–dead fish to be beheaded,
 Scaled, and gutted

...dinner at 5.

Where we walk it is the smell that
 Gets you first, the memory
 Of many hooked fish, the imagined
 Sight of those decomposing
 Bodies in the pond, and the amateurs
 On shore catching fish

already dead.

He takes his time baiting the hook.
There is nowhere for him to be but
this rock in the middle of the stream.

He tests the tautness of the nylon
line, squinting, dipping in. He
positions the creel close in the water

and squats, creasing his thigh-high
waders, waiting for trout or baby
bluegill, what we called brim once.

There is a bite on his line, his arms
tense automatically. Feet hugging the
slick, black stone he bends for the catch.

The fish jerks sensing its powerlessness.
Instinctively it fights the persistent
pull, thick curved shoulders of steel.

He reels it in, bringing the creel up
from the cold water to cradle the fish
as it flops from side to side,

a silver glint in the midday sun,
until it finally gives up the fight,
the air too hot and thick to let it live.

Since I am a fisherwoman and someone interested
 primarily in sex, this is as good a time
As any to put another worm on my hook
 and write a poem that is really about fucking.

This is a poem about language, bad language,
 not bad in the sense that you shouldn't say
That dirty word, but bad as in what passes
 between the moment of utterance and understanding.

Fuck (fuk) v. fucked, fucking, fucks—tr. 1. Vulgar. To
 have sexual intercourse with. 2. Vulgar. Slang.
To deal with in an aggressive, unjust or spiteful manner.
 So, you say, get to the fucking point, will you.

The point is that the aggressive, unjust and spiteful
 verb, relying on the strength of the subject,
Demands the distant object's obedience in the
 fulfillment of the pre-structured sentence.

It is the reason why the beautiful day outside is
 filled with anticipation and longing for that
Small perfection that should be found not only in poems
 because a small perfection often goes a long way.

And the supine woman on creme-colored sheets thinking
 of making love, puckering her lips and gurgling
Like a fish, thinks of more, denying the demand,
 acknowledging the word waging war on women.

A HUMAN SCREAM
(for Andrea Dworkin)

43

The sun has come
but it is still cold
in the house where
she lies uncovered,

Bared, skin stripped, muscles pumped
for pleasure.

Her voice is gone
to the bottom
of her throat,
her lips are dead
fish in a celluloid
sea of pain.

She is alone.
We are suffering her in silence.

Excusing ourselves,
hearing a scream
behind us, we
step into the street.

We are sure it is our imagination
contending.

We walk in fear,
we worry about which
way to go, complain
about the rain.
We search for the woman within
and she is there.

We see her clearly now,
rain on her windowsill,
body in bed—
head pushed back,
hands tied—
screaming.

i.

My legs brush last century's
slats, air fingers playing
chimes;
it is cool here
beneath the eaves
of this house
I built
of pine and nails
and my old mother's
blood.

ii.

She rocks in
her house of
shadow walls,
of crusted cloth
and gilt-frame
tiers—
promises thick
in the air.

iii.

I drape my table with
fresh linen,
coolness I created.
I set a place for
her each day—
she is the reason,
light,
meaning of me.

she weaves me,
threading thick
strands
between knotted
fingers.

iv.

noon—she
comes from her
dark dwelling;
she comes toward
me, crossing the
road for
the letter—
her son's check,
big initials
embossed in
black.

v.

I watch from my
porch,
my legs stop,
slats stilled,
wind refusing to
play.

vi.

She comes from
the 5 & 10,
pin in hand,
hand shaking as
she reaches to
her breast
and withdraws.
hearing the
sudden ringing
of my chimes,
she seeks me
beyond the glare.

vii.

I still see her
there,
pin in hand,
hands empty,
the sun draping
light
like linen.

"That's what the old ones said in ancient times and we talk it again."

Zora Neale Hurston from *Mules and Men*

Maggie presses the white shirt to the board,
Propelling the steaming iron back
And forth, doing her Saturday service.
Her body creases the light, her thin,
Cotton shift. Her forehead wrinkles
Unevenly beneath the faded, flowered
Kerchief ring. She makes magic.
An Ethiopian with power unequal to man,
Her movements make and break sunlit spells.
This is how she talked to Solomon,
Why she could afford to give away
Gold. Her eyes form words, her
Words, gold.

It is not enough to love the smell
Of her—orange blossoms, honeysuckle
And verbena-kissed lips. It is not
Enough to lean on her arms like the limbs
Of a tall tree I try to climb.
It is never enough to feel the thirst
And bring water from the garden well.
So I build a room of my own,
Lock myself inside and listen.
She chants to a man, conjuring
A ghost from the steam and I write
Her truth, casting away the contradictions—
Solomon, white, woman.

Our mothers made these wings for us,
This silver-sided machine
Mounting the paved mountain
Path, past a rustic porched store
With mums in front—\$2.99—stems
Puncturing the bottoms of crates,
Red, white, and yellow heads
Crouched like dogs waiting
For water.

We escape the city on our makeshift
Wings, flapping through cool, black
Patches of sunset shade to the
Lighted mountainside.
We sense the summit nearing.
The tossed treetops come into definition,
Hues clearer, closer to the sun.
We climb to the peak to watch and
Follow the mythic figure flying
Sunward.

Icarus, a hawk winging straight,
Away, aspires to the yellow-white striped
Sky, the dark gray horizon bordering
Earth's green beneath. We can see the
Slow sinking of the blinding ball,
The wings re-forming light.
We stand the sight,
Eyes focused, tracing the
Deliberate drop,
Waxen wings like our eyes
Turning down.

A car accelerates on the road behind
Us like a train with tracks
We take back down, the sky guiding
Us, broad bluish red, the gold band
Below. Between the blackening trees we
Retreat, past the store, the porch
Without mums, empty crates waiting.
Day melts away,
Our mothers' eyes like wings
Brought back to us at dusk.

VITA

Gloria Jean Mills was born in Fort Pierce, Florida on September 13, 1960. She attended elementary school in Louisville, Kentucky and high school in Charlotte, North Carolina. She graduated from Berry High School in Birmingham, Alabama in 1978.

The following September she entered the University of Tennessee, and in August 1983 received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. In September of 1984 she began coursework toward her Master's degree in The Graduate School at The University of Tennessee. She received the Master of Arts degree with a major in English in June 1987.

The author is currently employed as manager of the typesetting division of Bagwell Communications, Inc. of Knoxville.