COVER SONGS

*“I am revising a received text, improvising on a standard, telling the story from the vantage of my own time and attempting to reveal something both old and new through the magic of poetics.” -*Gale P. Jackson Author’s forward to MeDea

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# For They Were But Pagans, And Therefore Ignorant

A carnelian carved with care,

rendered into a winged she-wolf

in a bramble crown

riding a red lion

*baring her teeth,*

*trampling a flag.*

The word talisman is a talisman:

an aegis, a shelter, a rite:

an umbrella of salvation:

a bulwark of divine protection:

*scrap of matted fur enclosing*

*fierce claw.*

What rope is the conduit to fasten close

 the assurance and deflect the danger of sickening?

I affix *you* my pendant, suspend *you*:

necklace, ring, and blessed shirt.

*I carry* you*: a pouch, a portable blessing,*

*folded letter.*

Your wardship, my shield,

safeguard, defense, and sanctuary.

I install you within my fear.

Amulet, fulfill the role of helper!

*You sentinel for love, fertility, and fields:*

*you fat lamb bleating.*

I, falling snarling angel,

Thorned, helmed, and hooved,

horned in the truth of my will,

here for my purpose.

*Keep harm at bay*

*so that I may gather berries*

This prayer guides snakes and scorpions elsewhere,

fostering sleeping grandmother, pretty goat, and healthy babe.

Do you, safeguarding stonewall, beaded bonnet,

 hear my protest?

*I ask only for enough, so stand guard. Give me scissors and needles.*

*Give me barley. Sugar beets! Water. Give me dreams of millet rain.*

Allow me the basket that captures what runs afoul,

and fends away the stingers of wasps, bathes me now in honeyed grace,

speaks sternly to uncertainty, opening the gate to sanctuary, refuge, and immunity.

*How may we dwell and hear the bell chime?*

*Show me the camouflage.*

In acknowledgment of the unknown

place me, moth, against tree bark: hidden in the harbor of plain view

the hedge of the possibility

of a favorable outcome.

# Proem

…what innocence

I had!

Flowers, for the bedside table…

# Propio Canto

## I

*Empty stage:*

Here I throw the first stone.

The jay’s sharp whistle

has the cutting effect

of an empty sky

upon a reserve of water;

the open blue flame,

of a newborn eye;

grief, entering dawn.

*When patience goes*

*unrewarded,*

*patience is held patiently.*

## II

Being has no need of a name.

Everything holds hundreds of years

in freshness.

The sound of what is not known,

the inside and outside,

sung by one, heard by all.

Small happiness contains

sweetening green sugarcane,

and the mouthful of fiber.

You do not need a poet;

better an anonymous bird, a stone.

Folklore has woven this vitality unsigned.

## ^

I propitiate

The sky

light.

# Pink

In bales of newspapers,

mice are found lying

and warm,

a muted

mass of baby

feelings.

A poem appears

with contracted

skin,

like a cool testicle.

# Our Trough

Dear golden animal,

I am

but a child.

In our village, we were told

 there is a god,

and you are the one.

We gave all we had.

Our smallest scraps

 of gold melted together,

 formed into you.

A sturdy, four-footed creature

you are.

We wove a wreath

around your neck

and here, tied ribbons, too.

One of them was mine,

I am sure I see

 it adorning you.

Not the longest of the red

ribbons, but the brightest

one that hides from the light,

then shows itself

somewhere

under your throat.

You, golden, golden one,

placed on a stone

altar.

Other villages worship

other gods,

but here, we honor you.

We, in this dusty place,

god-fearers,

leafed ones and animals alike,

praise rain;

need a cup, a pitcher,

a trough,

a vessel

to hold

water.

# Octagram For Now

Light illuminates sterling strands

of spider silk cast from one cluster

of chaparral

to another.

Many spiders engage in doings

across this not empty *here*.

Silent gods whose religion

is geometry.

# A Thousand Breasts

Shepherd? Chaperone?

Coruscating choleric, taking time.

Sun returns. Returns.

Hearing sheerest blue,

hearing crackling fire:

Sun with ears.

Sun with ears! Does it stream, or does it sing?

Listening to tasseled corn,

hearing blowing desert sand,

daytime star, hearing witness.

One feather falls from a passing bird

before this sun that hears.

# Humming Gods I

The loudest thing in this desert morning

is a hummingbird, three hummingbirds,

who vibrate the world into attention.

A boasting triune god, a frisson of disquiet, not inhaling or exhaling,

coming or going,

not arriving in the middle of all of this something.

Everywhere is within

the where

here.

# Humming Gods II

Listen

to the broadcast

 boasting

over their triumvirate

territory,

a chorus

of, *“We are*

*sugar drunk!*

*Ours is the sweetness!”*

They move

 into new

formation,

claiming inebriated solos:

*“My feathered throat*

*is orange!”*

says a mirage blur.

*“This honeysuckle*

*over here!”*

proclaims another.

Says the third,

*“I am a moving*

*monk that does*

*this, then this,*

*now THIS.”*

And again,

they reconvene

and harmonize:

*“All of this,*

*we three,*

*present*

*as the milk*

*of the morning,*

*The waking gold*

*soaking*

*the terrabread.*

*On whose behalf*

*are we tasting?*

*We do*

*not*

*ask*

*this*

*question.”*

# The Power of Soft Metal

Tender bird chatter

drifts fine:

 gold dust

among tombs.

Hear

the

finest

article.

The chatter of small birds

drifts like a gold dust

among tombstones.

Here, the finest particle

evanesces to a winking,

then imperceptible.

# The Chorus That Would Not Be Described as a Grotto

Everyone, the fruit.

Every prayer, a prey.

*Who speaks to whom?*

Swarms to fields?

A murder to grains?

Hives to velvet pollen motes?

Schools to reefs?

The many blades of grass

to the cuds,

spit back, rechewed to

extract yet again?

# Legato

Fine-legged spider waits

inside a silent drum.

A spider,

below the drumhead,

half of her legs touch wood,

half-touch skin,

anticipating a future vibrating

being struck with many blows.

Spider enveloped within

treewood and drumhead.

unseparated.

Spider’s awareness exists,

so the world exists.

Spider says nothing under the skin,

within the frame of a drum.

She waits in the enclosure,

knowing in time,

she will be dislodged from her silence,

by tumult,

launched into open space.

She perceives falling.

# Ancestor

Horseshoe crabs gave rise

to cows,

it is clear.

Sumac is kin

to fire bearers and koala

bears.

# Stridulation Drone

Bloodless beings,

stones, black crickets, and musical notes

live without

red within.

Stone, cricket, and song

need no home,

utility, or futility,

declare no final resting place.

A field unmown, unplanted,

unfenced,

tall grasses here;

porous chorus,

particular sound,

rippling gesture.

In autumn

seed heads scatter.

Grain, notes, pebbles

without anticipation

falling, leaping, stemming

ensouled.

# Lava: The Singe of Its Passage Over Everything

crickets rub their legs together in furious night ecstatic

in a mass en masse interpreting replying attending

toad leaps to water cicada bird and windsong

stretch bend and whisper their notes.

bleat shrill thrill of sheep owl

and high keen of mosquito

and teeth chewing grass

cow throat lowing

low

dampening mist and fog tones down sound wets and cools

rabbit hindlegs beat ground prairie praise dances

ferns nod their fronds in time

leaf rustle

hoofbeat

rockslide

moth jaw

renders

wool

# The Neighbors of Our Neighbors’ Neighbors

This is the blanket.

This is the song.

These are the stitches and the notes.

The frogs sang at a distance

and feet performed

ground dances

on grass,

on dust,

rarely in shoes.

We made much and did much.

We feared our own stomachs.

We chopped wood.

Walking songs and cutting songs;

songs given to us,

in the splashing of water.

No one knew how not to sing.

Not singing was reserved

for the unknown unborn,

and we knew no such beings.

All beings we held in our minds,

ancestors

and our childrens’

childrens’

children.

We lay in the straw, smelling sweet,

our faces tucked into crooks of arms.

Murmuring, twitching, all of us, in dreams.

Carried in infancy, by motherbelly, by basketboat,

Later by cart, by wind, by storm,

lastly, feet first, out from wood and clay houses.

# Who Are The Bells?

Have you heard

the sonorous

sound  come

from within

a large or smallholding

that gives over

to trembling and shivering;

the din djinn turns

to a hum that holds

long the thought

and keeps

thinking?

Grab the heavy chord.

You needn’t be

clever.

Hanging above you

like a sinner,

a calf pulled high

by hind hooves,

we cannot do else

but bleed color-rich; the splashes

abound. Celebration

of some sort?

Sombre bells are needed.

Elsewise, warning

strikes to a bright! high!

urgency! Phoenix

and flame, welter,

then ash.

And what the flutter

in the ember, no sound

of laughter,

glow asking

for another and another

faggot.

Which of you is ringing?

# Lineage

Children, scorpions, spiders, and snakes:

all formidable ones in their play clothes,

their snakeskins, their cola-colored armor

singing and humming, busy with themselves.

Stinging and moving to the sunniest places,

retreating to damp, undisturbed ones,

themselves disturbed, disturbing, under blankets,

of dust and soil and leaves and nap time.

Carrying apprehension and strategy, casting a spell,

weaving compulsion and instinct that pushes and pulls

 the wings off of flies, sinks fangs into what we must,

leaves a winding path in the sand.

And what of eels and lamprey?

Horror fish and nightmares electric even in water,

baked into savory pies

with lard crusts sent on crusades with banners waving.

Is it any wonder we become

poets and madmen,

caught between worlds?

There are always lice in our hair.

# Joan of the Arc

The bells, the bells, the plain:

yellow and orange are fruiting

The grass fell over, heavy with seed: the madness.

Your sickness, my sickness, the ecstatic

channel dilated always:

widest stride, this gallop.

The beginning of joy is neverending.

The reign of leaves and blades:

never naked, never cold.

A longwool sheep

wears a hand

forged bell.

# Lunation

Moth

landed

upon

the

woven

coverlet.

Moth

that

flutters

moons

and

 pollens.

Moth

 moths

with

 the

 other

bodies.

# The Last Cricket Around Here

Mortality launched into the arms of the universe:

there is one cricket left,

chirping in this daytime

left with a song to sing.

Cricket no longer remembers if it is night or day.

So cold last night

all of the other crickets went the way of first frost,

.

this one was tucked somewhere

and didn’t realize the world had ended.

Improvising on a bright stage, an extended solo.

still, an audience of pine needles,

ever green above, tawny, dry, below,

in deep bed, under the skirt of that tree, over there.

# Cassock

What did you weave

while dreaming?

Who folded and carried a cloth,

a woolen weight,

long greatcoat with many buttons?

# Kyrie

## I

Who creates the rites?

When is it time

to light

a torch?

The first sung

prayer

of a mass;

ordinary.

Two  unnamed

blind beings

call out…

“have mercy.

unite

our petitions

in full

faith.

## II

Who faces the stove

knows the weight

of the iron pot and

the heat of the heat,

brings the soup

to the table,

clear the dish

and wash it clean.

Hold an empty cup

forget the language

of an unknown

poison

It is getting cold.

 place

the sheepskin

here

now

before

the

fire

the ash,

dispersing

in all directions,

unfindable after but moments.

## III

a  small brass ring,

fed to a river

was never

a precious thing

and continues

not to be:

nothing empty,

nothing still

## IV

We, patch and weave,

 repurpose,

old

with new.

We recirculate.

 an old song,

harvest,

arcana.