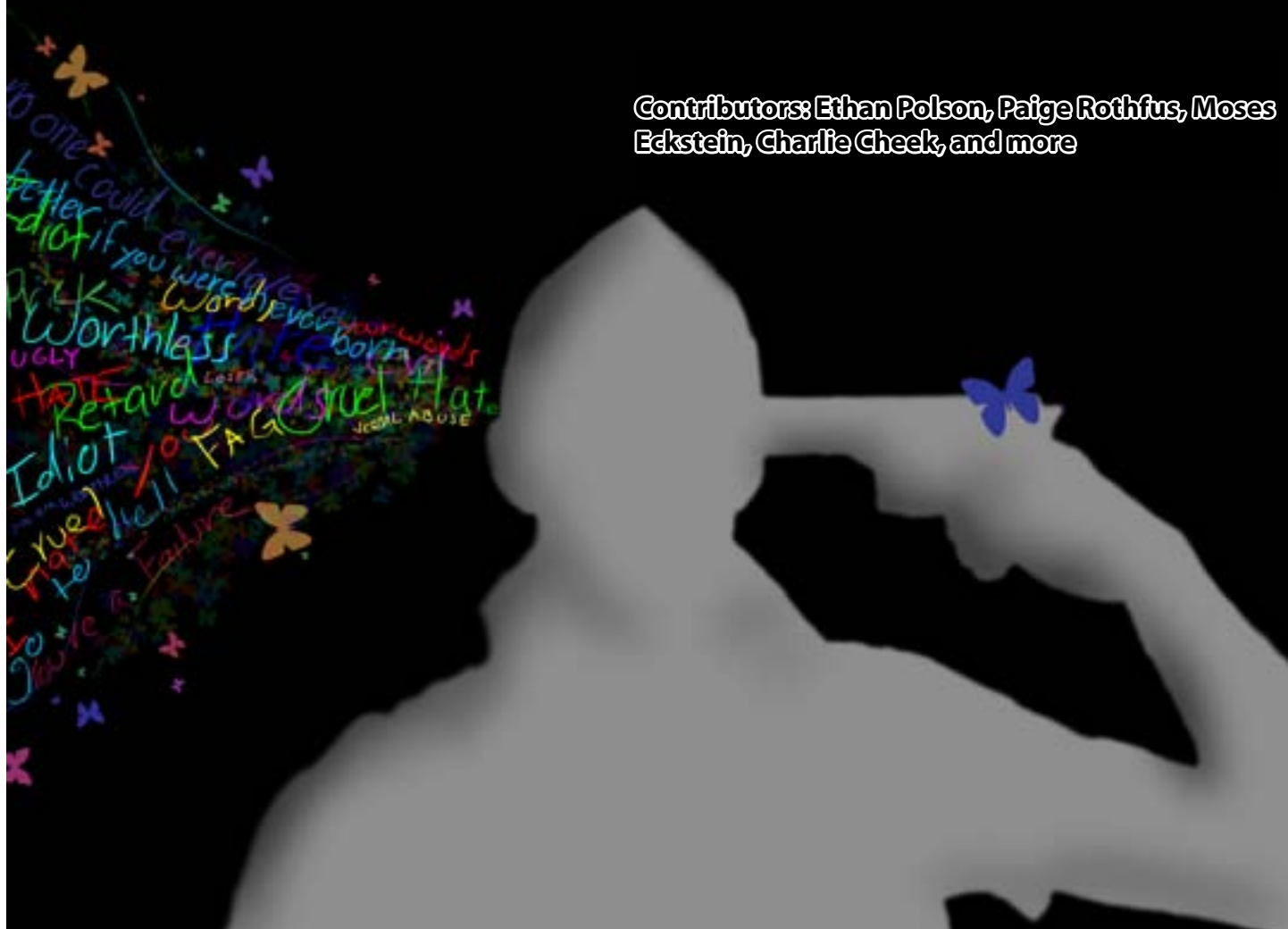


June 2012

GOTHIC BLACKBIRD

Your Words are a Gun to My Head
and other works by talented artists

Contributors: Ethan Polson, Paige Rothfus, Moses
Eckstein, Charlie Check, and more





Gothic Blackbird is a monthly magazine, the brainchild of Paige R. Rothfus, who wanted to create a magazine that showcased the genre of art and writing with a gothic feel. Originating from DMACC (Des Moines Area Community College) in Ankeny, Gothic Blackbird is produced and partially funded by the Creative Writing Guild.

The creators of the magazine are Moses Eckstein and Paige R. Rothfus and the magazine features not only student writers and artists from DMACC but also from around the community, other states and even one from prison so Blackbird is both local and national, and naturally its contents are quite eclectic.

Gothic Blackbird's primary aim is to gather and share the work of budding writers, artists and designers from around the community with others while at the same time creating an opportunity for them to have their work published.

Gothic Blackbird intends to continue improving, expanding and changing and is excited about the future ahead.

Cover art by
Ethan Polson

Authors featured in this issue:

Kat Taylor
Moses Eckstein
Charlie Cheek
Paige Rothfus
Ethan Polson
Benjamin Spick
Teshia Robinson

To Check out their profiles and personal portfolios, go to www.gothicblackbird.com

Untitled by Ben Spick

“Out was Ask upon a Day
And Embla did the washing
Out hung linens fresh and sweet
Yet her children needed washing.

“Out was Odin on the Day
And through the forest riding
And with him Hoenir and Lodur
Upon that Day a riding.

“Fast they came to Embla's
house
And went they to her knocking
Inside did Embla wash her babes
When her lords they came a
knocking.

“Pleased she was upon that day
For half her babes were drying
But shamed was she upon that
day
For half her brood was filthy.

“Beneath the floor she hid her
brood
The ones still needing washing
And came back Embla to her
door
To answer them a knocking.

“In came they as she bided
them
And they began a talking
Of earthen songs and goings on
And babes in cradles rocking.

“Wholesome kin you have my
dear
Said Odin while a talking
Yes, my lone said Embla dear
Whilst they four were talking.

“But Odin knew this false to be
For he was one All-Seeing
And spied he more of Embla's

brood
Down below unseeing.

“There they are and there they stay!
Said the three lords shouting
To us you lied our Embla dear
Upon your husband's outing.

“So from the babes below did
Hoenir take their feeling
And Lodur paled their rosy cheeks
And Odin hushed their breathing.

“So man-folk here above belong
In the daylight shining
And elf-folk Embla left for shame
In shadows dark and pining.”

The words are my own, but the inspiration has two sources. The first is a Scandinavian folktale in which God punishes Eve for hiding her unwashed children by turning them into the first elves. In this rendition though, I've blended it with Norse mythology: instead of Eve is Embla, the first woman, and she is visited by Odin (who gave her a soul), Hoenir (who gave her feeling), and Lodur (who gave her warmth and vitality).

-Spick



Earthen Woman by Kat Taylor

Lives What you Make of it,
 You Make What in your
 Life, Who you disrespect,
 And Who you love, you make
 Where your Future Starts and
 ends, Be that someone for that
 Ambush, don't play games, don't
 Cheat, and breed others for it,
 Live your own life, there isn't
 any frustration for your ahead,
 and always Just an excuse.

Fairytale Girls by Moses Eckstein

Live in fairytale stories
 Where they dwell in manors
 Deep in the woods far and away
 Sleeping in ashen beds
 Dreaming of princes riding
 White stallions who will take
 Them away to their castles
 High on mountaintops

Fairytale girls obey stepmothers
 Who dress them in rags
 Force them to draw water
 Set tables day and night
 Sleep by the fireplace with dogs
 Knit scarves from straw
 Spin wool into pearls
 Bake bread from clay

Fairytale girls sing songs of love
 Sing songs of despair
 Sing songs of lost dreams
 While tears flow from eyes
 Eyes like sapphires and diamonds
 Eyes like emeralds and rubies
 Eyes that shine like stars
 While tears bead on cheeks

Fairytale girls run away
 Far and away into forests
 Where they sing along rivers
 Roving in fields of wheat
 Coming into cottages at night
 Made of chocolate and cheese
 All alight with candlesticks
 Burning on gilded plates

Fairytale girls speak to
 Old widows with teacups
 Tea spiced with black lotus
 Poisoned with spider venom
 Sip it while it's boiling hot
 While the old widows uncover

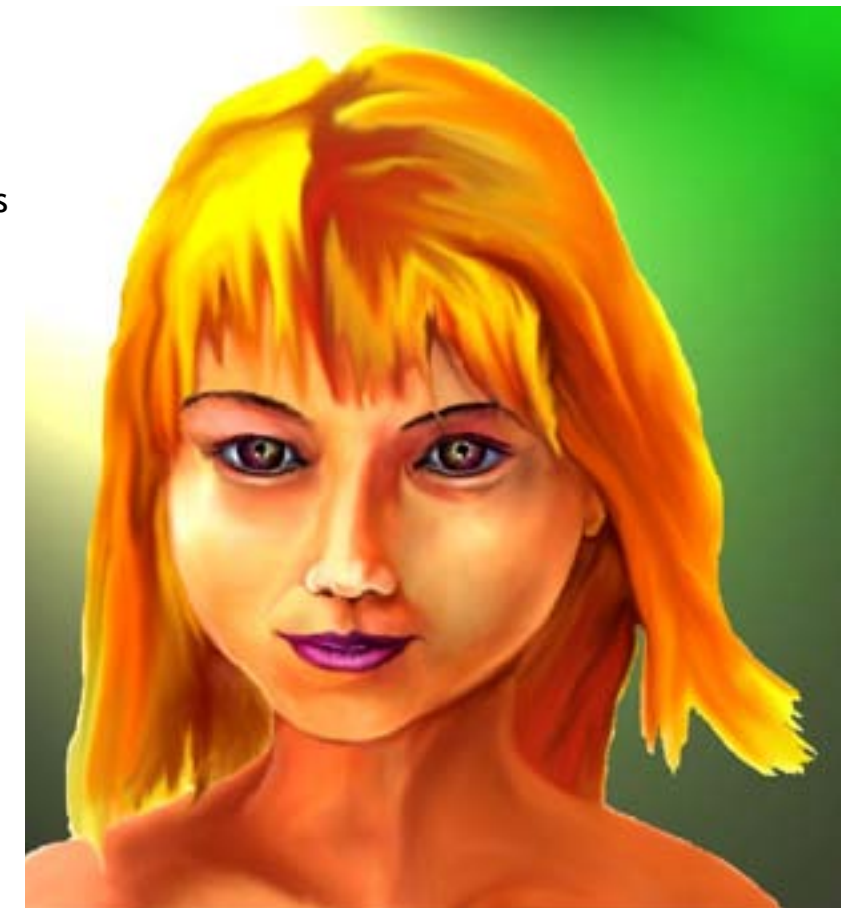
Their black rags and reveal
 Themselves as the stepmothers

Fairytale girls lie in glass coffins
 Hair curled around their cheeks
 Eyelids covered in dew
 Dreaming of kisses from men
 Dreaming of waking up to ride
 Off with them to their castles
 Beyond the scarlet horizon
 Where they will be free

Only their princes never come
 Nor do his lips seek hers--never
 Fairytale girls lie alone
 Dreaming dreams forever and ever



Untitled Pieces by Charlie Cheek



Fairytale Girl by Moses Eckstein

Hymn for the Atom Bomb by Paige Rothfus
A song of despair

A dark plan conceived in my heart
 An unanswered question:
 How are whole worlds slaughtered by one hand?
 Many have no doubt made this demand.
 A list of ingredients for destruction to make
 Set the oven to 350, and check to see
 How long it would bake.
 I tried to buy the enriched uranium
 And found only enriched flour instead
 You can never make a bomb
 The right way these days.
 Mix it all together,
 And don't forget the cream of tartar.
 Gunpowder is outdated, only hatred will do.
 What exploded? I think it was my heart.
 The pain was sick and deadened my soul
 But I felt the stolen power rise within my blood
 Right before it poisoned it.
 A flash of highest joy
 And then the depths of darkest hell.
 I knew it was so by the scorching smell
 Of the ash that was desolation.
 Or were those the ashes of my body? Who can tell?
 Steak and mushrooms, anyone?
 The vibrant vibration of a thousand roars
 Like a sea of infuriated lions
 Ownerless screams lingered in the unquiet air
 That but a moment before had inhabited living
 throats.
 Tearing metal, shrieking stone
 The sear and crackle of the leaping flames
 Now burning alone
 Had burst unbidden
 To consume, fortress, wood, land and flesh.
 Hallelujah! Embrace the power of the atom!
 The peace of the atom
 Is the only true peace.
 All else is a lie.
 See the beauty in the storm's eye.
 Is this the beautiful pain of death?
 Buildings reared and threw themselves
 Down; all bodies were melted to dust in a moment.
 Crusted craters—bones of towers—

All nicely smoking.
 And I knew my recipe was a success
 Even though nobody was left to enjoy it.
 Oh yes, this is the beauty
 Of the power of the atom
 Whoever thought that such a little fellow
 Could make such a massive mess
 And such a glorious noise?
 What other marvel can make it so that
 You rejoice when you feel the poison in your
 body
 And laugh when the sickening pain takes you?
 History has damned me to eternal anguish
 But what they can't understand is this:
 Misery is joy, and loathing is love
 According to the gospel of the atom.



Cheshire Cat by Kat Taylor

Snort: Lines for a Horse by Paige Rothfus

I should not have known that he was there
 But for the Snort
 In the frosty air
 And the crunch of apples by the gate
 Which I heard when I sat snuggled in my cloak
 In reverie wrapped
 As it was growing late.
 I felt hot breath upon my back
 Sniffing for the sugar inside my hat
 A sugar that had been for me
 To sweeten the bitterness
 Of my afternoon tea.
 It was a tendency of mine
 To read poetry in the gloaming
 And drink tea and sit on the *hedge's spine.
 The snorts persisted; the sniffs would not cease
 A sucking at my hair tormented me
 Until my sugar I did release.
 When the din of the crunching
 Finally ended
 And from the noise
 My ears were mended
 I slipped down from upon the stile
 Gave the silky head a solid pat
 Trod down the lane whistling a while
 Resolving next time to put more sugar in my hat.



Vodka Gremlin by Kat Taylor

NOTES:

*Coinage for 'stile'

A Shadow in the Dark by Moses Eckstein

Shadows shift on the sidewalk
Stretching east as the sun sets
Last time it will leaving night
Forever enduring like the stars

Shadows walk on the walls
Crawling in corners like spiders
When I reach out to touch them
They fade into a greater shadow

Shadows spread over family albums
Photographs with missing faces
Where have they gone I wonder?
Leaving me one after another

Shadows under trees in the woods
Where the river floods its banks
I go there often to sit alone
Under the shadows of the moon

Shadows on my hand typing
Words to a poem I've forgotten
Covering scars from nights
Alone with no thought of morning

Shadows loop around my eyes
When I'm looking in the mirror
Wondering what shadows lurk
Inside the dark of my mind



Shadow in the Dark by Moses Eckstein

Bad Love by Moses Eckstein

You were my one true love, lovely lady
But before the sun rises over cornfields
My blood will stain the black clay ravine

Our child lies in his crib, tears crusted
Puddles of them dried to his cheeks
He takes more after you than after me
He's been awake all night in my arms
Sometimes when I look in his pale eyes
I see you looking back at me looking
Back at you, back at me, back at you

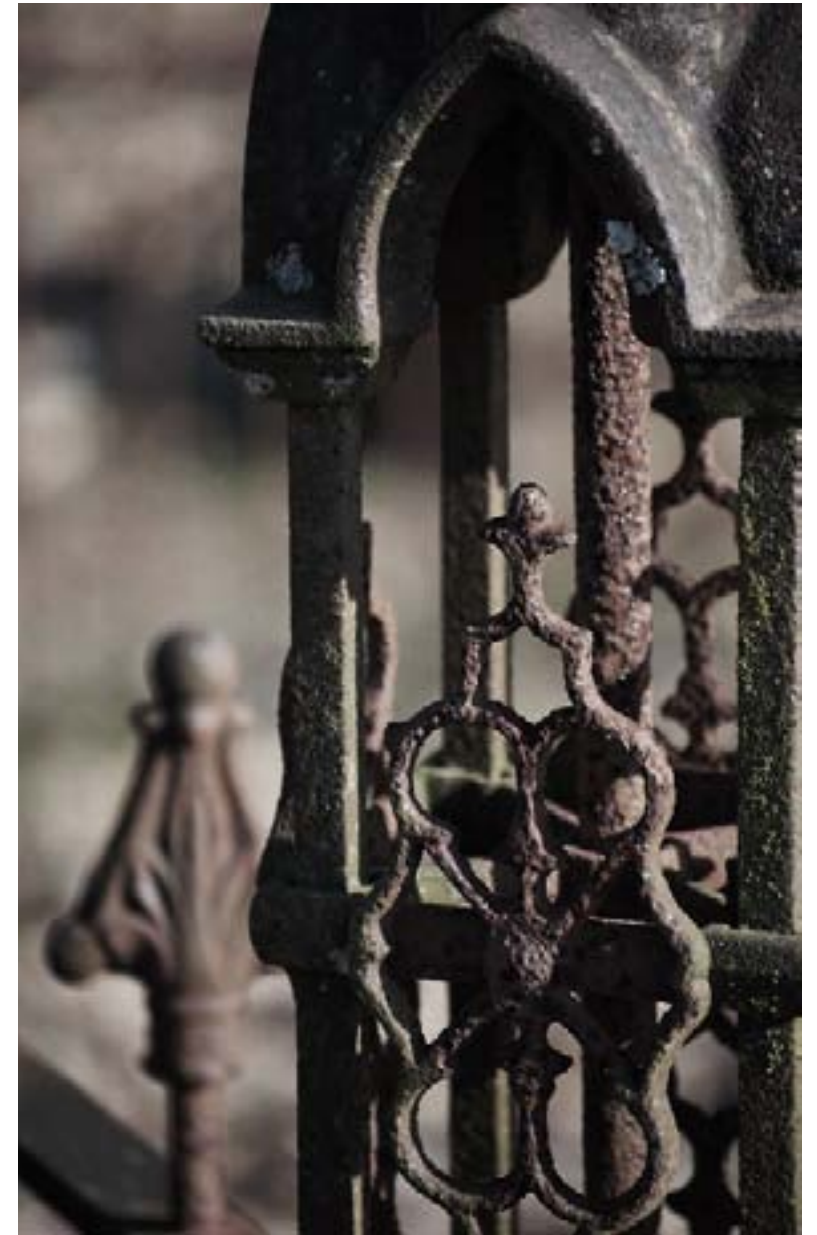
I tried to make it work, make you love
Me though you never could love anyone
Remember the horses we used to ride
There was a time we would ride all day
You were beside me, that's all I needed
Years changed you, made you colder
You moved out, though you visited

Sky is two years old today, we celebrated
Him and me in the bedroom you and
I shared while we lived in Boston
I never told you we moved back there
Its funny though after all these years
I can still smell you in the bed covers
Almost as if you never left us somehow

Your father's Winchester you never wanted
I kept it in the closet behind your brother's
Army fatigues you could never throw away
I Went shopping yesterday at the outdoor
place
Bought a case of forty but only needed one
Tonight I'll kiss Sky's forehead and whisper
Your name in his ear so he never forgets

You know the call you got last Christmas?
I know you were there and didn't answer
Always thought things would be easy

I never knew you'd take so much from me
I never knew your love could be bad



Cemetery Gate by Teshia Robinson

The close-up of the cemetery gatepost was taken the day of my granny's funeral at an old cemetery somewhere in the middle of nowhere in Arkansas.

-Robinson

Crowd by Paige Rothfus

Crowd: Sound like a million wordless whispers
 From the outside looking in
 I walk through the halls alone.
 Friends: Greeting here and there, laughing.
 The more I hear the more I hate them
 But inside I know it's just envy
 of what I can't be.
 Lonely: Wish I could join them but don't know how
 Things I want to say, smiles I want to share
 Things unshared, get torn up inside.
 Standing: Hiding behind the door or behind the book
 looking from the outside at the inside where I am not.
 Is this always where I'll be?

Horizons by Teshia Robinson

What's beyond this page?
 Behind a curtain, below a stage;
 After the credits, when the music stops?
 Deep in the silence a shadow drops...
 It's still there-the deep, dark unknown
 What shall I write now?
 It has all been said before somehow
 We eat and sleep; dance, laugh and cry
 Some get to live while others must die
 And all face the deep, dark unknown
 How shall I write it?
 We smile and sing and don't deny it;
 What we most know is left mostly unsaid,
 unheard and unfelt, unseen, unread
 That dreadful, deep, dark unknown
 Who knows what's there
 Lurking in that bleak black of somewhere?
 All must go in, and yet few will return

Some say we'll fly; some insist we'll burn
 In that still, deep, dark unknown
 What do they know?
 A few claim to see a distant glow
 Not all but some can observe a light
 So strongly yet gently gleaming bright
 Into the deep, dark unknown
 Who can explain love?
 All that's beautiful sent from above;
 Captured within and felt near from afar
 The beaming light of a Morningstar
 for my own deep, dark unknown

The poem is not meant to be black and white either. The "unknown" could refer to anything--someone's deepest darkest fear, or their questions about life, or the implied life after death. Really, it is about horizons--things we see off in the distance and are headed towards but cannot explain.

-Robinson



Tribal Children by Ethan Polson

On the Outside Looking In by Paige Rothfus

I

Distant voices
Cold bells
A choir of tones chants in the sanctuary
Like frozen leaves clinking together
Within an echoic forest hall
The stained glass windows need cleaning
The candles are all burned out
Ashes on the floor
I am here to find out what it's all about
On the outside looking in
Old sayings guide our lives
Words that once spoken never die nor fade
To the pure all things are pure
For impossible things I pine
They keep telling me I need a cure for this poison
When all I taste is sweet and fragrant wine.
Windows, frosty-paned
Strange faces at the casement,
Strains of ancient music
Like some fairy thing calling me
On the outside looking in
Darkness falls and still I see no sign of light
Silent is my pen
And then I know
That I have gone and lost myself again
Yonder through the garden gate
Old footprints left on the path
Somebody left the lettuce-bed untended
And the marrows are unruly.
Things I have never seen are the things I miss
And lost I remain until again I find myself
With sweet music or a kiss.
Untrimmed hedges
Old locked gates
A cold rill
The roots of trees invigorates.
Stones unturned cover silent secrets
And we will never know
Who had the first notion of music.
Perhaps it was whispered in the first ear
Drank in, deep in the darkness.

II

Some books are better left unopened
And knowledge is not always chaste
And some things are better
Learned in leisure than in haste.
What words your heart speaks
Will someday be your life
And who you want to become
Is who you will become in the end
Call this wisdom or folly, as you will
All this I discovered
From the outside looking in, and drank my fill.

III

Hot tea and a warm fire
A good book to read
Is the deepest and truest desire
My creative mind to feed.
I like Earl Grey best—with cream
Like curling pipe-smoke is the steam
Professorish feelings come flowing to me then
Springing to life at the tip of my pen.
Seedcakes are best with the seeds
Nonsense rhymes seem silly to make sense
Houses are best with the deeds
And spiteful jests hold no amusement at my expense.
You can pen verses all day long like a fool
But they do no good unless they are
In proper English and they have meaning
Rhymes can be made without reason
Even nursery rhymes have a story
Library: A magical word;
It means dust and damp secrets hidden in pages
Leaves of books that were once skin of trees
Pressed flowers and furtive notes written long ago
Names scratched on covers and pages folded like a secret code
On the outside looking in
So this song is largely on writing, then,
And philosophy as well perhaps
Cramming for a test I am not at my best
Give me a hot drink and wait a while first
Creative thoughts come flowing late at night
When I am too tired to reach up and snatch them

IV

Once I walked in a sunlit field
Accompanied by someone dear
He picked flowers, sweetly scented
And arranged them in my hair.
Golden bees
Flowers you picked with your own hand
I liked those better than any grown in a hothouse,
Or even in a countryman's garden
The rain and the sun are the chiefest of gardeners
The language of flowers
Was made for those in love.
A strange joy comes with writing
A curious drug, that grows with the drinking of it
I cannot get enough
It fulfills me and tears me apart all in one
It is determined to ruin me
Unless I hold on and keep getting burned
My scars are great, and the wounds will never heal
Ink is my wine, and paper my meal
A strange and beautiful drug;
A poisonous addiction
My love goes deeper than the surface
There is no going back, and no breaking free
My writing is firmly tied to me

But I am a happy prisoner
And my hand is on the paper; heights of joy and sear of torture
Paper; my bones
The ink: my life-blood,
The words: the person of my secret heart.
A book being filled with words
Is a wise thing, indeed,
But only if you know how to use the contents
For your power and enlightenment.
And you can only read a book
From the outside looking in.
Not all is gold that glitters
And things are not always how they seem
Truth does not always shine in clear eyes
You must look deeper than the smile
To learn the secrets of the heart
Advice must be said,
Secrets written,
A song sung,
Fame is to be earned,
Judgment pronounced,
The day be busy.
Fate alone must unbind
The frost's fetters.
Winter shall depart,
Water come after,
Summer heated by the sun.
The unstill waves,
The deep paths of the dead
Will be secret longest.
Things that have once been said
Cannot be unsaid again
So choose your words like treasures
From a precious box; the heart.
Advertisements:
Lovely lies
Smiling salesmen
Of treacherous things
Crooning their wares
They forget to mention
That poison is the 3rd ingredient.
This I learnt on the outside looking in
Little lanes leading to comfortable places
The joy of tending a kitchen garden
And hunting for mushrooms in the woods
Is the same satisfaction
With eating hot bread that you made yourself
The coziest word I can think of is
Home

V

Small birds like messengers among the trees
Bearing notes that only leaves can understand
Those who have lived long enough in the forest
Have ears to hear and eyes to see
The beauty hidden just behind the moss
Water lapping at stones
As I stand on the brink
Trying to think

Of something beautiful to say to you
Coining words is a joy;
Someday I will have a dictionary
With my name on it.
Smoke rising;
A great burning over the fields
Farmers stumping about
Doing earthy deeds
Keys: Knower of secrets
And the power to peep through the keyhole
The cleverest and most curious eavesdropper
Tragedies can be turned
Into beautiful stories
With joyous weddings at the end
And feasts in plenteous supply
Those who buy gold are wise
For they have less money
To deal out to creditors later.

VI

Now sleep comes to my eyes at last
Falling softly from above
Lulled by lovely thoughts of you
Sleep comes like welcome shades of eve
I drift peacefully to scattered dreams,
And tender, half-thoughts of kissing you
That make me thrill even in this fading state.
Fading, I give in, remembering beautiful moments
And laughing looks we shared.
In the gloaming you look to me so beautiful
Together we watch the clouds scudding
Across the blue sky, and when I hear your laugh
My heart leaps up in joy.
Listening to our song
While lying here in bed
If we are strong, the things that should discourage us
Just spur us on, instead
Now a final note: May this missive be
Either a series of impartial proverbs
Or a whole; as you please,
It's all the same to me.