Banshees: Poems

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Banshees
Banshees
By Eileen P. Kennedy

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First Edition
Manufactured in the United States of America


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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is grateful to the editors of the following publications, in which these poems, often in earlier versions, previously appeared:


DEDICATION

I wish to thank Pioneer Valley Cohousing Writers Group, Poetry Forge, the Writing Room at the Forbes Library and my son, Michael, the other writer in the family.
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Here and Now

Abundant afternoon light
the heat of your shoulder
the secret of heliconia
the feel of your grace on my cheek
the mangoes rounded to the here and now.

We dance to Ella Fitzgerald
you: lost in the trance
of her discordant strain
me: in your arms
totally here, now.

Let’s tango into older age
grounded by earth and limb.
Our bodies ram shackled,
still able to toddle across the floor,
clumsy, out of step.

Let’s be insatiable you and I.
Not gently, but raging forward
bowin’, swayin’,
dippin’, cavortin’, and struttin’
into the here and now.
Lost Ship

Hallucinating snow shower
cold and ultraviolet light
maxilla sharp with sudden bleached puffs,
an aching back a mortality reminder.
Next weighted in bed
the contour of you bulking,
throated sounds aural memory.
You call out in your sleep
to someone who is not me.

Alone I rise to the window.
Living room African figures
read constellations
between Andromeda and Scorpio,
portending my unasked tears.
Life in me slowly
sinking seeking solace.
I lean forward fluctuating
on a tributary of flotsam and jetsam.

Hallucinating snow shower
cold and ultraviolet light
maxilla sharp with sudden bleached puffs,
an aching back a mortality reminder.
Day evaporates night,
rippling wind water on ice
wave tilts toward emptiness.
A stunned brig in a squall,
I rudder back to your ghost-ship bed.
Breakfast

September, your door ajar- 
welcoming my mislaid soul, 
a cup of coffee in hand, 
in this many-windowed house 
with the Steinway that holds the promise 
of corresponding notes. 
Your well-worn fingers on keys, 
music midflight in your rose of Sharon garden- 
a minuet balancing the words on my keyboard. 
This air still in our morning meeting 
as if the world of care outside had stopped 
to acknowledge our friendship. 
How easily our union is fashioned 
over scrambled eggs and hot-buttered toast. 
I form an unseen poem around you 
to seal our bond.
Summer Reunion

Remember the reservoir? A surface stretching from island to brown stone shore.

Strands of algae and water lilies. Our paddles dipping and slicing streams of water and reed pulls.

A sly white egret flies indifferent to our chatter without caw or concern.

Soft swims in clear water to allay sweat on arms and legs.

Aching abs bathing in the sun pulling to the next beach, our prows high on the sand.

Late afternoon we rest, sitting close on shore, quiet now from our labors.

How many summers of paddling hold our aging alliance together? Waters rise from the dam’s release.
Medicated

Tethered to a catheter
my despondent compadre
takes so many pills
that they could not
possibly know where
to go in his deflated body.
Confused,
the chemicals trek on
like sled dogs in summer
strapped to a luge
nowhere to go
bewildered
thinking
they would never
come home.

I offer coffee
and sympatico
and receive in kind
an incredulous smile.
Psalm of the Writer

Blessed be the scribe
hollow of bone
feather limbed
soaring the ether
giving flight to words
considering the meditation
remembering dreams
a voice in the morning air
directing supplications upward
from the mausoleum of the throat
screaming from the page.
Lord make the ancient tongue more joyful
from the line of the far horizon
across closed lids.
What can be said of language?
The swirl of the phoneme in the air.
The death of the lover in the third act
by the knife that has been on the stage
since the first.
Swimming with River Fluids

(after Mary Oliver)

The spirit of Yeats
liked to dress up
and come
in a vision alone.

At night he séanced
communing with Lily
in the dark divisions,
before golden dawn.

In the green branches
belonging to the earth
he would surround himself
with George, Iseult and Maud.

Ezra asked why he spent
so much time with the ghosts.
“They tread softly on my dreams,”
he said, eyeing the shadows.

His craving for the spirits
never sated he swam
with river fluids
next to the tower in Coole

with Thomas, the Frustrators
and the Shape Changers.
He lost himself
to heaven before death.
Aperture: *Rockets and Blue Lights*

“If I could find anything blacker than black, I would use it.”

--J.M.W. Turner

Impassable distance to the poem –
your colors live anew
as I write my verses
and try to follow
the path you opened in your canvas
tyrrannical brushwork words.

Two steamboats
flares of smoke in the harbor
swirling yellow white blue
through fog warn of shoal water.
Panicked men on the shore,
portend my own dread of the page.

I spread my leaves on the floor
eyeing them from far.
I wait for them to spring
like *Rockets and Blue Lights.*
But instead of fire and spark
my lines of type take on life
and trail up-page from the floor,
choking me in hues
of black until I cannot
breathe. I hear ancient laughter
between the lines.
Muerte

Gone sudden and swift
I recall now head askew
eyes expectant fierce.
counting

1 mississippi
3 blind mice
5 de mayo
6 degrees of separation
7 wonders of the world
10 little indians
12 days of christmas
23 skidoo
50 ways to leave your lover
76 trombones
99 bottles of beer on the wall
250 megabytes
1001 arabian nights
1003 suicide bombers
501,627 dead in iraq
Elegy for the Poet

I think maybe it wasn’t
a horrific way to go-
A saline drip gone awry,
no angst, no lingering pain.

Assured by the doctors
you would teach, your love,
the following weekend -
falling asleep looking forward.

I never thought
you would die in the night-
just leave without an adieu.
I expect to see you

at your typewriter
reading your latest poem
or ruminating your memoir
or railing against the 6’clock news.

Death isn’t rest but empty space –
the world is less without you.
I prize what you wrote
and meet you in what I write.
Eulogy for the Costa Rican Ghosts

One was young, losing himself under a motorcycle. 
Another escaped by her own hand. 
Another held on to life through suffocating breath 
and piercing jabs in the chest. 
Another went unceremoniously in his sleep.

The artist ghosts linger beyond the throbbing beauty. 
They land in unforeseen places – 
by an empty table or bed stand at night 
as confused as the living about where they’ve gone and what they’ll do.

Knocking bamboo ushers in their moans. 
Neither missing nor white, 
they wonder who you are and what you are doing 
and why life has left them and spared you – imperfect as you are.

I feel their aching in the night air 
their souls shaking in the tropical trees. 
I remember their presence here 
and bear them closer as time goes by… my years stealing to inevitable death.

Their tenderness hovers through all the grandeur. 
Sanguine flowers evoke their blood. 
Vultures fly their memories in the clouded sky. 
Arid earth recalls the ash of their decomposed bodies. 
Inscribing a silent mantra, I honor who they were.
In Ciudad Colon

The symphony of insects explodes at night.
The cocinera chops the papaya she’s gathered.
The writer ghost hovers with sad memories.
The jardinero picks green and yellow limones by the bridge.
Red breasted birds sing throated concerts. By day, perfumed flores camouflage mariposa.

The cocinera chops the papaya she’s gathered.
Red breasted birds sing throated concerts alongside the trees by the bridge.
The writer ghost hovers in orange clay pots with sad memories, where by day perfumed flores camouflage mariposa.

The jardinero picks green and yellow limones, assembling them in baskets.
The cocinera chops the papaya she’s gathered.
With sad memories, the writer ghost hovers on trees by the bridge. In Ciudad Colon, the symphony of insects explodes.

At the bridge by the trees, the jardinero picks papayas. A sad poet writes ghost memories.
Red breasted birds explode green and yellow insects.
The cocinera chops limones she’s gathered.
The nocturnal symphony sings throated concerts.
By day, mariposa camouflage perfumed flores.
Vespers

Secrets of shrouded statues
chants of congregations
lullabies of conversations
descants of choirs
aromas of frankincense
perfection of saints
infallibilities of priests.

To stay within this heaven, one had to be
impossibly the bride of Christ – a virgin
before, during and after birth,
pure, impassive, submissive.

Secretly preferring the forbidden Eve,
temptress,
destroyer of paradise,
one with knowledge,
choice,
sexuality,
power.
Forgive me father,
for I have defined my own truth.
Father

My bones ache
   for your stick-like arms
   wanting to climb them.
My mind travels with the fumes of your
Camels. Later, I smoke too.

I didn’t understand then
   how I looked for you in that vapor, tar
   and stench of your tobacco.
At the last I turned away –
and you did not call my name.
On Michael’s Being 15 in England

I wanted to show my son England
an alternate way of being, seeing.
Like when he plays his viola, or bounds
two miles without stopping on his bike.
At 15, my father in a Black and Tan prison, not far, enduring
hunger, beatings and loneliness that haunted him till death.
So I showed Michael the ruins,
weeds trailing in the current of the Avon,
the fireplace’s heat after riding through the downpour,
cadence from the lutes and flutes
that made the dancers skip.
The sky eclipsed from the wall
of the ancient city.
The sheep lay down thinking it was night.
We cycled the Wiltshire countryside,
as if the circling of the wheels could make the world a better
place.
Portrait

Your profile is an outlier – quiet as a thief.
Night strikes eternal as the bitter snow falls.

* 
You lay mouth askew submissive deathlike gorgeous.

* 
Could you stay in this place where you are at one and separate too?

* 
Wishing you both here and not, you take away my liberty free my soul of distrust, holding me still in our dance.

* 
I race toward the day shoveling the walk in mind, alone. I work leaving you far behind.
Sonata

snow has been falling
for what seems like days
blank page mirrors the landscape
you come kindling in tow
gnarled of hand bent ochre in the sun

first movement adagio
piano tones
Beethoven moonlight

we hover in front of the fire
hands warming around cups of tea
your perspired shoulder cold from outside
mine with inside hotness
touch to balance

second movement allegretto
pulsing ivory keys
grinding rhythm

smells felt in the room
dry sizzling wood
rooibos chamomile incense
your one sweat redolence
spices to my isolated self

third movement agitato
memory of death sorrow
free flowing fantasia

arbor arches silent
over the stark meadow
clothes off hair matted
you ride high touching oil
honey garland making a creamy thaw
Banshees

Think of me
when you’re old
searching for a pill
or lost car key.
At least envision the shape
and breadth of me,
the way I remember
your green tart apples’
crunch with cheddar cheese.

I search in vain for those
cointal and post-coital harmonies
moving counter to you.
Reproachful looks belie
unspoken accusations.
You peer inside
empty closets
but refuse to see
past specters lurking.

Never mind,
I am maudlin,
keening our passing
with the light of night
shadows on the wall.
Winds wail at bloodstained
armor and amour
signaling love’s
primal anguish.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eileen P. Kennedy has been writing since she was eight years old. Her publications include nonfiction, fiction, children’s stories, poetry, and an academic book. Her poetry has appeared in more than 25 national and international journals, on-line publications and magazines.

She holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Missouri, a master’s degree from Brooklyn College and a doctorate from Fordham University. Her current faculty position is at the City University of New York/Kingsborough. She has been awarded residencies at the Hambridge Center for the Creative Arts and Sciences, the Byrdcliffe Arts Colony, and multiple times at the Julia and David White Artists’ Colony. She lives in Amherst, Massachusetts.

More about her and her publications at EileenPKennedy.com.