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### Banshees: Poems

Eileen P. Kennedy

*Kingsborough Community College*

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# Banshees

*Banshees*

By Eileen P. Kennedy

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*Avocet*, “Summer Reunion”; *Potomac Review*, “counting”, and  
*Pitchfork*, “Vespers.”

## 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 unmasked 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  
 tyrannical 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  
coital 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.

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