

Poetry Series

**Joan Woodbridge**  
**- poems -**

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## Joan Woodbridge(May 9,1933)

Iteration I: Blessed by the Great Mother, I was dropped into this life, a member of the several generations destined to negotiate the erotic boundaries between cultural prohibition, the whipped up frenzy of rock and roll, and mind expanding drugs- a short but intense period that lay magically between the availability of birth control pills and antibiotics, and the fateful appearance of AIDS.

Iteration II: I come from a long line of barbarians, land thieves, and genocidal murderers. My English forbearers arrived in America on the Mayflower. I have been taught to be proud of my ancestors. And, indeed, I am proud that my Puritan ancestors would not abide the oppression of anyone-not themselves, not others. I am proud that they took a stand against slavery. On my mother's side I come from French Canadian and barely acknowledged Native American roots- the hunter and the hunted are alive in my genetic code.

# After Shikujo's Pillow Book

Things one does when one's lover is away:

- stand in the freezing wind waiting for a bus
- speak with one's therapist
- wander Ninth Avenue seeking small tokens of one's love
- find only two
- wonder about the worth of such tokens
- wonder about one's own worth
- wonder about how one correctly tells another of one's love
- wonder which says more - words or actions  
(are not words themselves actions?)
- decide to take a hint from Shikujo

How many ways are there to speak the ineffable?  
That's a trick question.

Joan Woodbridge

# An Easy Winter

Winter is working us now  
the subtle air holds  
a hint of snow  
and we are captured  
by an irresistible gravity  
that demands  
sleep and disengagement

Bear  
torn between hunger and sleep  
feels it too  
heaviness moves her slowly  
toward a somnolence  
that encloses  
and holds for us  
the promise of another Spring

there is an easy winter in your ways  
that is cool  
and sometimes removed  
a careful smile  
that holds in it  
a hint of hidden movement  
stirring in the languid earth

□

Joan Woodbridge

# An Uneasy Measure

Time  
the uneasy measure  
we lay upon unfettered infinity

forgetting  
we run innocently  
through lily beds and grape arbors  
to the ashes of the ruined mill  
across the millstream  
to the bending grasses of the untamed orchard

forgetting  
that Time is measured  
not so much by dark and light  
as by the relentless beat of Shiva's drum:  
the unaccountable and uncounted beating of our hearts

and Time too  
forced to exist  
forgets  
runs heedlessly beside us  
hiding in plain sight

remembering  
poses the bewildering question  
Who owns Time?

If it is so  
and I believe it is so  
that we remain responsible  
for what we create  
what, then, is our obligation toward Time?

remembering  
locates us in two worlds  
How may we stand sturdily in both? □Joan Woodbridge 12.13.2013 edited  
5.25.16

Joan Woodbridge

# Beyond Ascription

how it began is unclear  
innocence and earnestness  
the impossible 'Why? '

what meaning can be ascribed to such an outlier?  
(anything said post hoc must be an easy fabrication)

it meant only what it meant  
which is not to say it meant nothing-

an Icarus penchant for flight  
the concomitant terror of falling  
crashing...  
and in the end  
hahava\*  
the cold hell of my frozen voice.

to say too little demeans  
to say too much dishonors  
yet I mean to honor it still

even the sense of ending  
mysteriously implicit  
in its astonishing beginning

\*One of the cold hells of Tibetan Buddhism, 'where the mouth is frozen and one can only groan; ...'

Joan Woodbridge

# Dark Fields

labyrinthine confusion  
intuition runs about three days ahead of feeling  
and for us  
there is little love to gentle the edges of this land

but  
I am seeding these dark fields  
and in time they will yield  
and I too will yield

but  
I will never forgive  
that  
awkward ill-timed head-up your ass lecture  
downward delivered  
upon my outraged silence

I've been walking around these days without my skin

Joan Woodbridge

# Diatribes On The Unfinished Woman: A Litany In Progress

I

She who waits  
She who is asleep to the present and lives in the future  
She who waits to be awakened, defined, completed, validated  
She who delivers her femininity into the hands of the Other  
and then feels diminished  
She who lives in longing  
and confuses longing with openness and readiness  
She who lives in *mauvaise foi*  
She who waits

II

She who steals her own power  
and gives it as a dubious gift to the Other  
and then feels diminished  
and then becomes angry and frightened  
and then feels controlled by the Other  
She who confuses hurt with harm  
She who steals from herself

III

She who cannot separate  
She who finds separation wrong, cruel and malicious  
She who denies her own need to separate  
She who passively allows the Other to separate for her  
She who separates through woundedness and rage  
and then denies her piece of that separation  
She who feels abused by another's truth  
She who imputes thoughts, feelings and motives  
thinking that she knows  
She who cannot separate

IV

She who denies her ambivalence  
She who projects her conflicts onto the Other  
so that the Other becomes her embodied shadow  
and then hates herself in it

She who runs when her love is met  
She who denies her ambivalence

V

She who is obsessed  
and hates the obsession  
She who is enslaved  
and cannot see her enslavement  
She who transforms her outer life to deny that enslavement  
She who divorces, travels, has her own profession  
and proves that she is independent  
She who is obsessed

VI

She who will not ask  
She who will not need  
She who is at the mercy of the Other  
She who sees the failure of the Other's psychic abilities  
as a failure of love  
She who will not surrender  
She who will not ask

VII

She who fears true visibility  
She who is a shapeshifter  
She who changes her shape to match her fantasy  
of what the Other desires  
She who fears vulnerability  
She who confuses vulnerability with openness to hurt  
She who refuses to become visible

VIII

She who lives in the old-brain terror of tribal woman  
dependent on pure testosterone for survival

She who waits for the Other to deliver her from her father-wounds

1993□

Joan Woodbridge

# Firebrand

She stood alone  
isolated  
in jaw-set  
non-compliance  
cornered  
in her own  
righteous angle of perception

lawmaker  
lawbreaker  
unmoved  
even by the angelic trumpets

ex-cepting her own easy slippage  
from which she abdicates  
unsuccessfully  
all responsibility  
holding separate that which she said  
she could not control

ex-cepting her own easy slippage  
while remonstrating  
the easy slippage of others  
unashamed  
rigorously righteously remorseless

but that was all before  
the inglorious onset of critical thinking

Joan Woodbridge

# Hubris

The heavy veil of righteous dignity  
is off the face of government,  
though the last to hold high office bore it with grace

Now the lowest and the darkest shine:

the piggish  
priggish  
juvenile  
p\*\*\*Y-grabbing  
grade-school tweets  
in the early day

the spoiled child,  
in high tantrum,  
prepares to rule the world

Joan Woodbridge

# Invocation

wind  
me  
down  
easy

lay  
me  
down  
wide  
upon the land  
the edges of my being  
touching earth and sky

sister  
me  
free  
to rock and tree  
the transigent flower  
and clouds of unborn rain

make  
me  
eased  
and whole again

Joan Woodbridge

# Kiswar Q'inti\*

Kiswar Q'Inti\*, The Royal Hummingbird of the North has entered this body  
penetrating at the solar center  
insinuating herself into each cell.

She brings with her the sweetness of all the flowers of the world.  
How can I be angry for even one second?

She brings with her the Ancestors  
grandmothers and grandfathers  
who have walked before us  
Now I will never be alone  
How can I ever be insincere again?

The vigilant Falcon who lived here before is confused.  
Now the Hummingbird and the Falcon must make their peace.  
May it be so.

This is my victory:

You are not the first longing thought as I wake to the morning  
You are not the last night-thought as I fall into dreaming

This is my task:

To hold the tension between the miraculous and the tragic.

\*Quechua name for the Royal  
Hummingbird

Joan Woodbridge

# Living The Living Wheel\*

Living the Living Wheel\*

The First Level of Engagement

An instruction to myself

The South - Dependence

The Place of the Healer

First

Place this luminous cartogram

Closely on the landscape of your days and nights

Spanning the three worlds

And with reverence for Serpent who dances here

Bless the new green of the new green grass,

Stripping, as you are stripped,

Not so much of defenses

As of defensiveness

Yes

This is the spring of newborn buds

And the layered dogwood's keen contrast

A time of near-perfection

(Not for you a useful model, as it predicts only failure)

Open and strong you strongly open to the

Dumbing tone of this elemental level:

Deprivation grief and rage

A depth of sadness born of lack

And the incisive memory of more violent intrusions

This is the pain of early life:

A first lesson in the truth of imperfection

Leave this direction only when you see plainly that

This pain does not define you

It simply defines the work of your life

The West - Rebellion

The Place of the Warrior

Electrostatic desert sand

here the atmosphere is sharp  
delineated and dry  
demands attention  
alertness

□

strengthened by your encounter with Serpent  
and the forces of new growth  
standing as Jaguar stands  
in single-pointed focus  
intentional and fierce  
illuminating for you the meaning of  
courage, calculation before action  
and impeccability

□

the Awakened Warrior  
stands as Protector of the Pachamama  
and all her creatures  
there is no last enemy until  
Earth is free of Injustice:  
inequality, prejudice and racism □  
sexism, homophobia, and trans\*phobia  
until she is free of hunger and starvation  
physical and emotional violence

and war  
until reverence for the Pachamama is fully restored  
and we cease poisoning  
her soil, her waters, and her air

Your challenge here is  
to gaze directly into the eyes of Death  
with equanimity

The North—Individuation  
The Place of the Sage

Trans-temporal mountain air  
an air of elevation  
an invitation to untethered freedom—

the contrast is apparent—

South and West demand disciplined  
engagement  
confrontation even  
here an attitude of receptivity is vital

you stand, not at attention, but attentive  
standing as the self-contained Mountain Iris  
bends to the mountain breeze

Hummingbird enters from a low-hanging cloud  
shepherding the Ancestors  
who walked here before us  
the keepers of the wisdom traditions

the Ancestors sit in patient expectation  
awaiting your manifesto

abashed, you realize that  
this is the moment of separation  
the moment of grief and fear  
fear of letting go of  
deference  
and dependence on your teachers  
not a renouncing of your teachers  
but a relinquishing of the role of 'student'  
claiming the authority of your new status

you may leave this direction when the  
Ancestors approve of your manifesto and  
when you are free  
to stand shoulder to shoulder  
and eye to eye with your teachers

The East-Constancy  
The Place of the Visionary

Silence  
a lone Condor sweeps a dark swath  
across the winter whiteness  
Condor's vision remains

open  
yet  
focused  
you stand  
fearlessly facing the future  
grounded  
yet ready for flight

if you are fortunate you will fly with Condor  
if you are even more fortunate  
you will become Condo  
and see as condor see  
in this way, you are empowered  
to vision your destiny

you may leave this direction only when,  
eschewing all hierarchical models  
you stand in right relationship to Power

Joan Woodbridge, August 2015

\*Based on the medicine wheel teachings of the Q'ero people of Peru

Joan Woodbridge

# Morning Display

The Great Lord of Energy  
rises to his morning display  
on oily waves of smoke  
raising his magnanimous arms  
he blesses all

The Great Lord of Energy  
hunches to grotesquery  
shrieking anathema  
raising his haughty head  
he curses the land

Tuesday, January 17,2017

Joan Woodbridge

# Orca Speaks

arching magnificently into air  
I swim my being  
between bliss and necessity  
calling  
whistling  
clicking  
spouting  
through sea-foam corridors...  
even as I disappear

our wordless dialect  
orients informs and connects

enter the silence now  
and listen

this is what we know:

water and breath are the media of ecstasy  
salt water is the permissive plasma on which all feeling flows

our calls echo your love cries

Joan Woodbridge

# Owning

What you Own:

these small cells complete of life

strands of hair to their very tips emanating holy fire

all the space that surrounds this body

this body

damp fields

and all the precincts of my soul

limbs that stiffen and ease

curl and unwind

the uppermost moment of each inner thigh

the skin that folds against these eyes

these eyes

the point of surrender at the back of my neck

each imperfection

and everything I hate about myself

this breath

this entire continent

What I Own:

some golden light

one dark line that moves raggedly down

from navel to momentous edge

one head thrust well back

several kinds of eyes

hands

hands made to worship

a certain spiraling groundless free-fall

lost words whispered into places beyond my hearing

words

words that drive deep

centuries deep

Joan Woodbridge

# Reconciliation

Only now may it be spoken  
that the Divine had placed her numinous imprint  
upon the earth of those several young summers

Beyond The Law that poured from the mouth of her mother  
Beyond The Law that lived uncertainly in the heart of her father  
she discovered a city of refuge  
separate generous nameless without discord.  
and this mere steps from the  
plate-shattering  
word-hurling  
din of the house of war

Thus was the conflict-laden foundation born/borne:  
concealment duplicity shame; joy beauty peace  
one guilty foot in each world

How then does one reconcile the hellish and the holy?

Earnest earth constant earth  
your spun sun draws blood  
disclosing the tiny seeds and delicate veins  
implicit in the globed translucent fruit  
chthonic green spears  
bursting into the astonished grass-  
your arbors sweet with purple grapes

to whom can this child turn?  
not to the Church  
not to Moloch  
and not to The Law

where now is the original song that  
set free melts iron bars and demolishes false borders?

Is it she, then?  
Is it the diapason of her own primal voice  
that will reconcile  
finally

these immense contradictions?

Joan Woodbridge

# Ryokan, I Bow To You

Inky art of the broad-browed night:

the moon has fallen  
in a puddle of water

urchin trees  
reach handless arms  
for its reflection  
in the sky

1964□

Joan Woodbridge

# She-Bear's Dream

I am She-Bear denned in sweet earth  
I dream snow-covered leaves and frozen fields  
I dream fish asleep in icy rivers  
I dream leafless trees and waning light  
I dream the wind that moves the leafless trees above me

for a time, I sleep  
dreamless

as I sleep warmth gathers in the den  
my breath  
heavy with winter begins the thaw  
I dream the return of the sun  
I dream flowers fragrant and bright pushing out of snow  
I dream small green leaves and blossoming trees

Without my dreaming, Spring would never come

Joan Woodbridge

# Stone's Slow Words

adamantine density  
inner halls so steeply narrow

how much substance must I shed  
to travel your bright circuits?

how much lightness and listening must I cultivate  
to finally hear your slow words?

Joan Woodbridge

# The Artist's Model Contemplates Negative Space

quite suddenly  
the leaves  
are  
gone

the trees  
like your abandoned room  
are simply there  
quiet  
bare  
unaware

Joan Woodbridge

# The Breath Is Everything

Breath

Πνευμα

□

Νυμεν

the invisible  
yet not imperceptible  
unending dialogue with the divine  
hallowed channel that carries  
emotion

Εκstasy

Οργasm

Air wants to fill everything  
to go all the way  
anywhere it can go  
as far as it can go  
and farther

Air wants to take you over  
to fill you  
to feed you  
to cleanse you  
to move you

Air wants you to get out of its way

□ Air tears itself apart for you

Air gives its life for you.

Joan Woodbridge

# Vacated Space

The deciduous year attenuates  
draws thin  
my insubstantial resolve.

What beyond a certain grief can I make of this?

Is not failure in the striving itself?

What marks the way  
between efforting and too easy acceptance?  
beyond the failed dialogue between recrimination and defense?

The year contracts

Ah! Vacated Space again  
at once  
a stark statement of emptiness  
and the quantum paradox of concurrent fullness

What remains?  
non-striving stillness  
awaiting  
'not so much information, but transformation'\*  
and silence

the silence born of  
profound listening.

Ingber

28,2010

Joan Woodbridge

\* Rabbi David

November

Thanksgiving  
Stockbridge, MA

# Why I Left The Roman Church

What is it that I ask of religion?

I ask  
that you serve  
the untamed geography  
of my errant imagination

that you serve  
as clavis aurea  
in the unlocking and  
languageing of this  
my personal theodyssey

that you serve  
as silent witness to this passage  
regarding  
without remark or remonstrance  
allowing thus that error itself  
remain my most potent teacher

that you serve  
to ignite the desire heat

that you serve  
this animal body  
that you both claim and revile  
with its appetites and refusals  
its ecstatic whirlings and hellish remorse

that you lower your gaze  
that you tear your egregious eyes from the heavens  
that you dare let them linger  
on the unassailable necessities  
of these, your semblant sheep

That you stand in awe  
or  
stand away  
□

the fiery tongues of Pentecost notwithstanding  
there are among us  
those who would remain unmolested  
by your inelegant arrogance  
those who enjoy an ancient and durable relationship  
with the Divine—  
not in the least less than yours

\*golden key, the means by which a text can be interpreted, used in 16th century  
theological texts

Joan

Woodbridge

9.26.1998-

3.2.2014

□

Joan Woodbridge

# Winter Solstice: The Return Of The Light And The Redemption Of Darkness

Light follows darkness as darkness light:

the stunned sun halts mid-dance

Shiva Nataraj

motionless

balancing lightly the luminous and tenebrous

exhorting us again to brave the redeeming depth of the shadow

Beyond the celebrated land of light

that seems so divinely uplifting

that dabbles in the windfall waters of virtue

and dallies in the garden of diversion...

we find

the locus of the Shadow

that disquieting darkness

the vision that threatens to char the sockets of the eyes

We know the shadow by our avoidance

the nimble step

the sideward glance

the drowsy daydream

the sidestepped fantasy

the impulse denied

or not

We know it by our accidents of speech

the slip of the tongue

the telltale blush

and the complaints of friends

We know it by our nightly dreams

that render such faithful and unswerving service

to the shadow.

Go then

taking as your virtue

both courage and impeccability

swords against fear and pride

That from which we turn away grows stronger

Joan Woodbridge

# Without Remorse

Is it anyway of moment  
that the lateral wind  
may never brush again  
in turn our sided faces?

that our fourfold footfall  
may never again  
scatter thin  
the city summer's  
leftover leaves?

that those  
dark inconstant rooms  
will give themselves again  
and again  
to other faces?

Joan Woodbridge