

Poetry Series

Susan Marie Watkins
- poems -

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Susan Marie Watkins(September 23,1959)

A writer since a very young age, I've worked for the last 30 years as a dresser at Disneyland, a school teacher (elementary-college) , and a counselor. I've recently relocated from crowded, smoggy Southern California to the beautiful wide-open spaces of Wyoming. I've chucked my 'real' jobs once and for all, and am now going to pursue my true love, writing, full-time and with all the gusto I have.

After

After

In the bitter void
An ugly raw shadow
Like a hot red dream
Floods my blood with
Bare, black poison.
I cry, I ache, I pant,
I desire death
In this sweating iron garden
Beneath eternity.

Susan Marie Watkins

Astral Heartbeats

I'm light as a hollow-boned bird
Floating
Over misty forests & mossy glades
Where innocent brooks murmur
Like dragonfly wings.

Soaring
Higher through the tenuous clouds,
To where the air is thin,
I flame through the atmosphere,
Bursting into mute space,
Purified & refined.

Then drifting higher still,
Through a nimbus of stardust
Glittering across the universe on a cosmic wind,
Past countless galaxies that
Bloom in plumes
& spirals of expanding light,
Until I reach the end,
Where time is measured by the
Beat of angel wings.

Susan Marie Watkins

Breathe

I breathe deeply
Inhaling prana
Expanding my lungs
Filling them with life force
With the energy
That created the universe
In an exploding gaseous exhalation
Of everlasting expansion
I smell the perfume of
Orange blossoms and gardenias
Heavy & cloying as damp earth
The dead wet petals scattered across the lawn
Crushed & bruised
Creamy white turning black around the edges
& In my hands
Red roses
Dripping over my casket
Pressing down
Suffocating me

Susan Marie Watkins

Cibola

Cibola

The California sun
Streams from above
Beatifying us
In that old black & white snap

She reckless & rash
I timid,
Guarded
But full of yearning
Sucked into the middle
Of her every cyclone
Into her swift, swirling life

In our homemade cotton shifts
The immortal sun
Lay tender on our skins,
And the unexplored world
Spread glittering before us,
A city of gold

But then she was gone,
Never in my arms again

And now that city,
Long abandoned,
Lies in ruins
The winds of change
Savaging its battered windows
& Broken doors

Susan Marie Watkins

Deus Sol Invictus

He comes from the East,
Exhaling energy,
Belching bolts of lightning,
Shooting solar flares from his eyes.
Wearing his rayed crown,
He slays dark dragons
While golden sheets of electricity
Ripple over his body
In crackling waves
Endlessly.

Emerging from the primordial egg
At the dawn of time,
Wrapped in his faithful serpent,
He bound Prometheus &
Left him throbbing & blinking
In his blinding, savage energy.

Then the priest unsheathed his dagger,
& Slayed the bull.
Splashing blood on the alter
In the candlelit underground grotto
To honor 'the light of the world, '
Born on the winter solstice,
The day of Sol Invictus,
December 25th.
In hoc signo vinces,
Said Constantine,
'The struggle for deathlessness
Must be free.'

And still we wait for him,
The lion-headed
Sustainer & giver of life,
The worker of miracles
Who stubbornly stays in heaven,
Nimbate, immense & imperishable.

Earth

Butterflies & robins on a day of laughter & picnics,
New grass & the smell of freshly-turned earth
In the garden
Where memory, that hollow-eyed skull,
Hides behind her black veil,
Reeking of new grass & damp earth
Among the lilies.

Susan Marie Watkins

Gauguin's Cat

gauguin's cat lived in neglect
amid the teeming emerald jungles of tahiti
she'd sleep alone on a broken chair in the corner
then jump down and stagger to the door
where she'd sit bleary-eyed
dreaming of hummingbirds & butterflies
as the waves slapped the beach
outside gaugin's little grass shack

Susan Marie Watkins

Hawk

I'm light and free as a hollow-boned hawk
Gliding on the thermals
Above the vast, gray-brown prairie.
I'm a sharp-eyed bird of prey,
Soaring unencumbered through the crystalline air.
I flex my sharp talons & open my hooked beak,
Screeching with pure invigoration
As I swoop towards the earth,
Alighting gracefully on a worn, crooked fencepost.

Alone, I sit and soak in the silence of this infinite, barren place
Where time is measured by the beat of angel wings.
The sun warms my sleek feathers,
But doesn't reach my skin
As I patiently watch.
I'm on a quest for something.
Something I've been faithfully awaiting
Since before I was born.
If I'm quiet and alert, I know I will find it someday.

But now I must hunt.
Spreading my wings,
I jump into the air,
Ascending effortlessly.
Turning slow, thoughtful circles,
My eyes scan the ground for signs of movement.
A furtive flash.
I pin my wings to my sides and plunge to the earth,
The wind screaming in my ears.
My talons flash orange as I grab my prey and rise upwards,
Looking for a place to eat.
Dropping onto a warm, flat rock,
I tear bits of flesh from my catch.
Bolting them down,
I continue my watching,
Flinging quick, sharp looks in all directions.

I must be ready when it comes.

Hawk (Version II)

She spreads her wings,
Jumps into the air,
Ascending effortlessly.
In slow, thoughtful circles,
Scans the ground for
A furtive flash.

Light and free, and hollow-boned
Gliding on thermals
Above the vast, gray-brown prairie,
A sharp-eyed bird of prey,
Soaring unencumbered through the crystalline air.

She flexes sharp talons & her hooked beak,
Screeches with pure invigoration
Swoops towards the earth,
To grace a worn, crooked fencepost
In the silence of that infinite, barren place
Where time is measured by the beat of angel wings.

Susan Marie Watkins

Into The Valley Of Death

Once,
In my youth,
Giddy with wine
I had a secret rendezvous.

My lover
Pulled me close
Caressed me with
Velvet hands.

Flushed and exhilarated,
That vibrant connection
Filled me with
Sweet excitement.

We capered on the grass,
We mocked death,
Whose bony fingers
Could not reach us.

But now I cower
As his skeletal claw beckons,
As his sulfurous stench
Envelops me

You are no longer here
To banish my fear.
I've been abandoned,
Your deep-sworn vow forgotten,

Susan Marie Watkins

Is There An Angel In This Place?

Of the black abyss &
Hair-shirt gall, sulfur
Smoke & blood?

In the silence
At the back of the bus
The Black Shirts' howl of
"Hail, Fuehrer! " blossoms in my disappointment
Like a gunshot wound,
Like an open sore,
Embracing my heart
In a vine of icy razor wire

What hands reach out?
What voices in tongues
Call me to communion,
To sup, to wine, to dine?

In a sweating iron garden
Under eternity
I crawl backwards
Through a vague & savage darkness,
Into an uncivilized place
Where freedom is impossible

And Shiva, blue-skinned creator, destroyer
Sits in eternal padmasana &
A leopardskin loincloth,
Eyes half-lidded,
Contemplating the ages:
An untamed void deeper than time

Susan Marie Watkins

Love Is...

Love Is...

...a soaring pink void
Raw, black poison,
Hot red rocks,
Bare legs.

Lust & sweat
Incubating.
Delirious
Bittersweet skin,
Moaning together,
Screaming desire.

Destroying my delicate dreams
For eternity.

Susan Marie Watkins

Monet's Cat

monet's cat, marcel proust,
used to nap in the kitchen window
then jump down just like that
And tiptoe out to the garden,
lilac- and lavender-scented,
to catch fat goldfish from the lily pond
afterwards he'd sit in the shade of a weeping willow
Licking his paws
smoothing them swiftly over his face and whiskers

Susan Marie Watkins

Mountains

but mountains yes
mountains are like god
rippling in ancient jagged
saw-toothed pinnacles
and
mysterious purple spirals

but mountains yes
mountains are like god
unchanging
yet
shape-shifting
sometimes sapphire or plum
crimson or green
covered with waving grass
sometimes bitter brown
or stubbly tan
sometimes even
snow-covered white
or wrapped in wispy clouds
like a hermit's beard

but mountains yes
mountains are like god
all-seeing
all-knowing
living sentinels
silent witnesses
to the lives of men

but mountains yes
mountains are like god
remote
impassive
disinterested

but mountains yes
mountains are like god

Rodin's Cat

rodin's cat sleeps contentely
amid the singing hammer blows
and dusty rubble of the atelier
but at night he awakens
his topaz eyes gleaming in the gloom &
creeps outside to prowl
among the grotesqueries that
writhe in endless agony
beneath the pale blue moonlight
there in rodin's night-haunted garden

Susan Marie Watkins

She Wanders

The Thames, milky jade under a gray sky;
As Big Ben chimes &
Tennyson & Browning molder
Beneath their poet's slabs in Westminster
Grass & daffodils push up green shoots
In the Tower's waterless moat &
Seven ebony ravens keep mute vigil
Over the Chapel of St. Peter Ad Vincula.

In Trafalgar Square where
Lord Nelson's column stands haughtily erect,
There are pigeons everywhere,
On my head, my hands, my outstretched arms.

In last year's yellow, too-short Easter dress,
I seek Paul in Abbey Road.
Then eat crêpes, alone
At a little café in Petticoat Lane,
Wishing I were in love
With someone...

In Stratford, I walk a narrow path
Past whimpering daffodils
Trembling in a glacial wind
That penetrates my yellow dress.
'Stupid Californian, ' Whitney laughs,
Guiding us on
Through moss-encrusted headstones
To Trinity Chapel
Where Shakespeare's bones lay moldering in the chancel.

That night, crossing the river
To the Black Swan,
I play my new harmonica
& Drink too much honey-spiced wine
& sit on Whitney's lap.
& Then he kisses me
As the clock strikes midnight,
& So I go

Walking back to my hotel,
Alone in the sharp darkness
Playing a mournful riff.
I stop on the bridge & watch the Avon flow.
A stray swan like a white shadow
Floats on its inky surface &
Yellow daffodils,
Luminous in the moonlight,
Shiver on its banks.
& I tremble with them,
Filled with a glorious fear,
On the cusp of lust.

Susan Marie Watkins

Surrender

At sunset,
Before a linen-draped altar,
Save for your fear,
She'd have pledged her troth
With almond-shaped eyes,
While glittering, golden motes
Swirled through the air
Like stardust.

But now,
Like empty offerings
Before a barren altar,
A tear-stained note,
A tarnished ring of gold &
Crimson roses spilling
Over a black-shrouded casket.

Susan Marie Watkins

The Crying Would Never Stop

It was the 2 a.m. phone calls
The denial
The fierce anger
Turned inward
□
The suicidal depression
The "everything's fine" attitude
The implication that there was
Something wrong with ME

It was the pungent smell of
Jack Daniels
The shame
As I emptied the bottle
Down the kitchen sink
After he'd passed out at the table
Again

It was the broken promises
The broken dreams
The broken life
The hollow devastation
That I could share with no one

It was the embarrassment
The "What's the matter?
Are you ashamed of us? "
That kept me from bringing home friends

At school I was the outsider
The loner
The four-eyed brainiac
With the whiskey-soaked secret

I couldn't let anyone in
As much as I longed to
Or the crying would never stop

It was the slurring

Proclamations of love
The vows of
"Never again"
The empty promises
Made at 2 a.m.
After I'd stopped
Another ugly
Screaming
Knife-waving fight.

Once, in suicidal desperation
I went to tell the priest
Broke down in tears and fled
Before uttering a word.
I never heard from him again.
I could have killed myself
For all he knew.

Turns out
He was dad's best
Drinking buddy.

Susan Marie Watkins

The Head Of Ted Williams

The Head of Ted Williams

The head of Ted Williams
Sleeps in a can of liquid nitrogen
& Dreams of
Resurrection,
Of sunlit ball fields
Oiled leather
Green, green grass
The satisfying crack of
The sweet spot meeting the ball

Suspended in time,
It floats alone
In frozen darkness
Patient as the stars
That hang in space
& Waits,
Remembering
The Miramichi River
The wind
The water
The splash of silver salmon spawning
In furious flapping leaps

And so the head of Ted Williams
Slumbers on
Dreaming of
Easter morning
Claudia and John-Henry
Batting averages
Fighter missions
A tip of the hat
Stubbornly refused
While in the stillness of the lab
A silvery light
Limns the stainless steel canister
& Outstretched arms beckon
From its glow

Susan Marie Watkins

Thou Art That

In India

I would join the sacred cows wandering untethered
Garlands of flowers like ropes of yellow, orange & red
Draped around their necks

I would walk the deserted streets of Mohenjo-Daro in distant Sind
To hear the voices of long-departed sages
Whose spirits roam the abandoned city
& Whisper softly in the wind
Like the rustling leaves of Bodhgaya

I would drift along the reedy banks of the Ganges
In the algae-scented evening
Wearing a sari of poppy red &
A billowing orange veil of sheerest silk
I would be the center of the universe
Cloud-shrouded and mysterious
As the distant Himalayas

I would daub my forehead with sindoor
& Visit jungle-ensnared temples
To thrill beneath the swarming primal images
The teeming carvings dripping with concealed wisdom
Of things both sacred & profane

I would be an ancient, saffron-robed sadhu
One with the fecund smells that rise and settle with the breeze
While droning OM's roll over me and
Images, sacred and profane, draw me back
To the heavy, earthy smell of the cows
To their flower garlands
And to their deep rootedness in the now

Susan Marie Watkins

Van Gogh's Cat

At night
van gogh's cat hunts
beneath the swirling green flame
of a lone cypress
that casts flickering moonshadows
over a field of slouching sunflowers
until dawn explodes in psychedelic smears
of molten orange
& blood red
then leaping lightly through the window
he curls up on the crooked bed
that huddles against the wall
of vincent's narrow, blue room
in Arles

Susan Marie Watkins

Yellow

Yellow is
Sharp as lemons
Clear as canary song
Pure as daffodils
That magic time just before dusk
When the world is golden as Rapunzel's hair
A second-hand Easter dress
Too short in 1977 when I was 17
And yellow is
Glorious as the fear
of a girl on the cusp of lust

Susan Marie Watkins