



bell hooks

Appalachian Elegy

Poetry and Place

## Praise for *Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place*

“‘I will guide you,’ bell hooks promises, and delivers, in her remarkable collection, *Appalachian Elegy*. In meditations intimate and clear, with ‘radical grace,’ she negotiates ‘beauty and danger,’ the animal and human worlds, the pain of history, the dead and the living. With wisdom and courage, she moves through lamentation to resurrection, and the worlds she unearths are an ‘avalanche of splendor.’”

—Paula Bohinc, author of *The Children and Incident at the Edge of Bayonet Woods*

“Hush arbors were safe places in the deep woods where slaves could commune with each other to lift their choral voices to the heavens as they tarried for freedom. bell hooks comes from a people who deeply connected with this country’s ‘backwoods’ and hills in Kentucky and decided to stand in these spaces. Tending and tilling the land that afforded them independence and the freedom to unmask in isolation. They were ‘renegades and rebels’ who didn’t seek to civilize Kentucky’s wilds, instead developing a besidedness with the land that informs bell hooks’s sense of self and belonging. This collection of poems is a departure for the important polemicist, a place where she is able to roam her boundless imagination using her emotional intelligence as her primary compass. Praise songs for her ancestors sit beside her meditations on turtles. Here is a rare glance into the soul of our beloved, prolific, yet private bell hooks, who took her mother’s surname as her nom de plume. Here she returns to her mother’s woods, to the ‘wilderness within.’”

—dream hampton, journalist and filmmaker

“The collection reflects aesthetic and linguistic choices based on the thinking and feeling of someone who has made important contributions to contemporary thought and who thinks and feels deeply about what Kentucky—as ‘here’ and home—means to her.”

—Edwina Pendarvis, Professor Emeritus at Marshall University  
and author of *Like the Mountains of China*

## **Praise for *Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place*, continued**

“bell hooks has crafted a lyrical, sweeping panorama, deftly conjuring the tangled root and insistent steam of Appalachia. In these lean, melodic poems, she holds the land close; it’s achingly apparent how essential these memories are to the raw, unleashed spirit that typifies her body of work. These communiqués, from an elsewhere the mind visits too rarely, reside in that constantly shifting space between melancholy and celebration. No one but bell hooks could have taken us there.”

—Patricia Smith, four-time National Poetry Slam  
individual champion

## Appalachian Elegy



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UNIVERSITY PRESS OF KENTUCKY

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Published by the University Press of Kentucky  
Scholarly publisher for the Commonwealth,  
serving Bellarmine University, Berea College, Centre  
College of Kentucky, Eastern Kentucky University,  
The Filson Historical Society, Georgetown College,  
Kentucky Historical Society, Kentucky State University,  
Morehead State University, Murray State University,  
Northern Kentucky University, Transylvania University,  
University of Kentucky, University of Louisville,  
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*Editorial and Sales Offices:* The University Press of Kentucky  
663 South Limestone Street, Lexington, Kentucky 40508-4008  
[www.kentuckypress.com](http://www.kentuckypress.com)

16 15 14 13 12      5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

hooks, bell.

Appalachian elegy : poetry and place / bell hooks.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-8131-3669-1 (pbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-8131-3670-7 (pdf) —  
ISBN 978-0-8131-4076-6 (epub)

1. hooks, bell—Childhood and youth—Poetry. 2. Appalachian Region—  
Poetry. 3. Kentucky—Poetry. I. Title.

PS3608.O594A84 2012

811'.6—dc23

2012018046

This book is printed on acid-free paper meeting  
the requirements of the American National Standard  
for Permanence in Paper for Printed Library Materials.



Manufactured in the United States of America.



Member of the Association of  
American University Presses

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# Introduction

## On Reflection and Lamentation

Sublime silence surrounds me. I have walked to the top of the hill, plopped myself down to watch the world around me. I have no fear here, in this world of trees, weeds, and growing things. This is the world I was born into: a world of wild things. In it the wildness in me speaks. I am wild. I hear my elders caution mama, telling her that she is making a mistake, letting me “run wild,” letting me run with my brother as though no gender separates us. We are making our childhood together in the Kentucky hills, experiencing the freedom that comes from living away from civilization. Even as a child I knew that to be raised in the country, to come from the backwoods, left one without meaning or presence. Growing up we did not use terms like “hillbilly.” Country folk lived on isolated farms away from the city; backwoods folks lived in remote areas, in the hills and hollers.

To be from the backwoods was to be part of the wild. Where we lived, black folks were as much a part of the wild, living in a natural way on the earth, as white folks. All backwoods folks were poor by material standards; they knew how to make do. They were not wanting to tame the wildness, in themselves or nature. Living in the Kentucky hills was where I first learned the importance of being wild.

Later, attending college on the West Coast, I would come to associate the passion for freedom and the wildness I had experienced as a child with anarchy, with the belief in the power of the individual to be self-determining. Writing about the connection between environments, nature, and creativity in the introduction to *A Place in Space*, Gary Snyder states: "Ethics and aesthetics are deeply intertwined. Art, beauty, and craft have always drawn on the self-organizing 'wild' side of language and mind. Human ideas of place and space, our contemporary focus on watersheds, become both models and metaphors. Our hope would be to see the interacting realms, learn where we are, and thereby move towards a style of planetary and ecological cosmopolitanism." Snyder calls this approach the "practice of the wild," urging us to live "in the self-disciplined elegance of 'wild' mind." By their own practice of living in harmony with nature, with simple abundance, Kentucky black folks who lived in the backwoods were deeply engaged with an ecological cosmopolitanism. They fished; hunted; raised chickens; planted what we would now call organic gardens; made homemade spirits, wine, and whiskey; and grew flowers. Their religion was interior and private. Mama's mama, Baba, refused to attend church after someone made fun of the clothes she was wearing. She reminded us that God could be worshipped everyday, anywhere. No matter that they lived according to Appalachian values, they did not talk about themselves as coming from Appalachia. They did not divide Kentucky into East and West. They saw themselves as renegades and rebels, folks who did not want to be hemmed in by rules and laws, folks that wanted to remain independent. Even when circumstances forced them out of the country into the city, they were still wanting to live free.

As there were individual black folks who explored the regions of this nation before slavery, the first black Appalachians being fully engaged with the Cherokee, the lives of most early black Kentuck-

ians were shaped by a mixture of free sensibility and slave mentality. When slavery ended in Kentucky, life was hard for the vast majority of black people as white supremacy and racist domination did not end. But those folks who managed to own land, especially land in isolated country sites or hills (sometimes inherited from white folks for whom they had worked for generations, or sometimes purchased), were content to be self-defining and self-determining even if it meant living with less. No distinctions were made between those of us who dwelled in the hills of eastern or western Kentucky. Our relatives from eastern Kentucky did not talk about themselves as Appalachians, and in western Kentucky we did not use the term; even if one lived in the hills where the close neighbors were white and hillbilly, black people did not see themselves as united with these folk, even though our habits of being and ways of thinking were more like these strangers than those of other black folks who lived in the city—especially black folks who had money and urban ways. In small cities and towns, the life of a black coal miner in western Kentucky was more similar to the life of an Eastern counterpart than different. Just as the lives of hillbilly black folks were the same whether they lived in the hills of eastern or western Kentucky.

In the Kentucky black subcultures, folks were united with our extended kin, and our identities were more defined by labels like “country” and “backwoods.” It was not until I went away to college that I was questioned about Appalachia, about hillbilly culture, and it was always assumed by these faraway outsiders that only poor white people lived in the backwoods and in the hills. No wonder then that black folks who cherish our past, the independence that characterized our backwoods ancestors, seek to recover and restore their history, their legacy. Early on in my life I learned from those Kentucky backwoods elders, the folks whom we might now label “Appalachian,” a set of values rooted in the belief that above all else

one must be self-determining. It is the foundation that is the root of my radical critical consciousness. Folks from the backwoods were certain about two things: that every human soul needed to be free and that the responsibility of being free required one to be a person of integrity, a person who lived in such a way that there would always be congruency between what one thinks, says, and does.

These ancestors had no interest in conforming to social norms and manners that made lying and cheating acceptable. More often than not, they believed themselves to be above the law whenever the rules of so-called civilized culture made no sense. They farmed, fished, hunted, and made their way in the world. Sentimental nostalgia does not call me to remember the worlds they invented. It is just a simple fact that without their early continued support for dissident thinking and living, I would not have been able to hold my own in college and beyond when conformity promised to provide me with a sense of safety and greater regard. Their “Appalachian values,” imprinted on my consciousness as core truths I must live by, provided and continue to provide me with the tools I needed and need to survive whole in a postmodern world.

Living by those values, living with integrity, I am able to return to my native place, to an Appalachia that is no longer silent about its diversity or about the broad sweep of its influence. While I do not claim an identity as Appalachian, I do claim a solidarity, a sense of belonging, that makes me one with the Appalachian past of my ancestors: black, Native American, white, all “people of one blood” who made homeplace in isolated landscapes where they could invent themselves, where they could savor a taste of freedom.

In my latest collection of essays, *Writing Beyond Race*, I meditate for page after page on the issue of where it is black folk may go to be free of the category of race. Ironically, the segregated world of my Kentucky childhood was the place where I lived beyond race. Living my early childhood in the isolated hills of Kentucky, I made

a place for myself in nature there—roaming the hills, walking the fields hidden in hollows where my sharecropper grandfather Daddy Gus planted neat rows of growing crops. Without evoking a naïve naturalism that would suggest a world of innocence, I deem it an act of counterhegemonic resistance for black folks to talk openly of our experiences growing up in a southern world where we felt ourselves living in harmony with the natural world.

To be raised in a world where crops grown by the hands of loved ones is to experience an intimacy with earth and home that is lost when everything is out there, somewhere away from home, waiting to be purchased. Since much sociological focus on black experience has centered on urban life—lives created in cities—little is shared about the agrarian lives of black folk. Until Isabel Wilkerson published her awesome book *The Warmth of Other Suns*, which documents the stories of black folks leaving agrarian lives to migrate to cities, there was little attention paid to the black experience of folks living on the land. Just as the work of the amazing naturalist George Washington Carver is often forgotten when lists are made of great black men. We forget our rural black folks, black farmers, folks who long ago made their homes in the hills of Appalachia.

All my people come from the hills, from the backwoods, even the ones who ran away from this heritage refusing to look back. No one wanted to talk about the black farmers who lost land to white supremacist violence. No one wanted to talk about the extent to which that racialized terrorism created a turning point in the lives of black folks wherein nature, once seen as a freeing place, became a fearful place. That silence has kept us from knowing the ecohistories of black folks. It has kept folk from claiming an identity and a heritage that is so often forgotten or erased.

It is no wonder, then, that when I returned to my native state of Kentucky after more than thirty years of living elsewhere, memo-

ries of life in the hills flooded my mind and heart. And I could see the link between the desecration of the land as it was lived on by red and black folk and the current exploitation and destruction of our environment. Coming home to Kentucky hills was, for me, a way to declare allegiance to environment struggles aimed at restoring proper stewardship to the land. It has allowed me to give public expression to the ecofeminism that has been an organic part of my social action on behalf of peace and justice.

In *Longing For Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*, theologian Ivone Gebara contends: "The ecofeminist movement does not look at the connection between the domination of women and of nature solely from the perspective of cultural ideology and social structures; it seeks to introduce new ways of thinking that are more at the service of ecojustice." In keeping with this intent, in the preface to *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, where I make a space for the ecofeminist within me to speak, I conclude with this statement: "I pay tribute to the past as a resource that can serve as a foundation for us to revision and renew our commitment to the present, to making a world where all people can live fully and well, where everyone, can belong."

The joyous sense of homecoming that I experience from living in Kentucky does not change the reality that it has been difficult for black rural Kentuckians to find voice, to speak our belonging. Most important, it has been difficult to speak about past exploitation and oppression of people and land, to give our sorrow words. Those of us who dare to talk about the pain inflicted on red and black folks in this country, connecting that historical reality to the pain inflicted on our natural world, are often no longer silenced; we are simply ignored. It is the recognition of that pain that causes a constant mourning.

My cries of lamentation faintly echo the cries of freedom fighter Sojourner Truth, who often journeyed deep into the forest to

loudly lament the pain of slavery, the pain of having no voice. Truth spoke to the trees, telling them, “when I cried out with a mother’s grief none but Jesus heard.” When I first walked on the hills belonging to me I felt an overwhelming sense of triumph. I felt that I could reclaim a place in this Kentucky landscape in the name of all the displaced Native Americans, African Americans, and all the black Indians (who cannot “prove” on paper that they are who they really are). Chanting with a diverse group of ecofeminist friends, we called forth the ancestors, urging them to celebrate return migration with us. We spread sage, planted trees, and dug holes for blossoming rose bushes in the name of our mother Rosa Bell. I wanted to give her a place to rest in these hills, a place where I can commune with her spirit.

The essays in *Belonging: A Culture of Place* give voice to the collective past of black folks in Kentucky. They include family values that cover the ethics of life in the backwoods and hills of Kentucky. If psychologists are right and there is a core identity imprinted on our souls in her childhood, my soul is a witness to this Kentucky; so it was when I was a child and so it is in my womanhood. My essays are almost always written in clear polemical prose, nothing abstract, nothing mysterious. When poetry stirs in my imagination it is almost always from an indirect place, where language is abstract, where the mood and energy is evocative of submerged emotional intelligence and experience.

Poetry is a useful place for lamentation. Not only the forest Sojourner found solace in, poems are a place where we can cry out. *Appalachian Elegy* is a collection of poems that extend the process of lamentation. Dirge-like at times, the poems repeat sorrow sounds, connecting the pain of a historical Kentucky landscape ravaged by war and all human conditions that are like war. Nowadays we can hear tell of black jockeys, the ones who became famous. But where are the stories of all enslaved black servants



who worked with horses, who wanted to mount and ride away from endless servitude? Those stories are silenced. Psychohistory and the power of ways of knowing beyond human will and human reason allow us to re-create, to reimagine. Poems of lamentation allow the melancholic loss that never truly disappears to be given voice. Like a slow solemn musical refrain played again and again, they call us to remember and mourn, to know again that as we work for change our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting.

## Appalachian Elegy



# 1.

hear them cry  
the long dead  
the long gone  
speak to us  
from beyond the grave  
guide us  
that we may learn  
all the ways  
to hold tender this land  
hard clay dirt  
rock upon rock  
charred earth  
in time  
strong green growth  
will rise here  
trees back to life  
native flowers  
pushing the fragrance of hope  
the promise of resurrection

## 2.

such then is beauty  
surrendered  
against all hope  
you are here again  
turning slowly  
nature as chameleon  
all life change  
and changing again  
awakening hearts  
steady moving from  
unnamed loss  
into fierce deep grief  
that can bear all burdens  
even the long passage  
into a shadowy dark  
where no light enters

### 3.

night moves  
through thick dark  
a heavy silence outside  
near the front window  
a black bear  
stamps down plants  
pushing back brush  
fleeing manmade  
confinement  
roaming unfettered  
confident  
any place can become home  
strutting down  
a steep hill  
as though freedom  
is all  
in the now  
no past  
no present

## 4.

earth works  
thick brown mud  
clinging pulling  
a body down  
hear wounded earth cry  
bequeath to me  
the hoe the hope  
ancestral rights  
to turn the ground over  
to shovel and sift  
until history  
rewritten resurrected  
returns to its rightful owners  
a past to claim  
yet another stone lifted to  
throw against the enemy  
making way for new endings  
random seeds  
spreading over the hillside  
wild roses  
come by fierce wind and hard rain  
unleashed furies  
here in this untouched wood  
a dirge a lamentation  
for earth to live again  
earth that is all at once a grave  
a resting place a bed of new beginnings  
avalanche of splendor

## 5.

small horses ride me  
carry my dreams  
of prairies and frontiers  
where once  
the first people roamed  
claimed union with the earth  
no right to own or possess  
no sense of territory  
all boundaries  
placed by unseen ones  
here I will give you thunder  
shatter your hearts with rain  
let snow soothe you  
make your healing water  
clear sweet  
a sacred spring  
where the thirsty  
may drink  
animals all



## 6.

listen little sister  
angels make their hope here  
in these hills  
follow me  
I will guide you  
careful now  
no trespass  
I will guide you  
word for word  
mouth for mouth  
all the holy ones  
embracing us  
all our kin  
making home here  
renegade marooned  
lawless fugitives  
grace these mountains  
we have earth to bind us  
the covenant  
between us  
can never be broken  
vows to live and let live

## 7.

again and again  
she calls me  
this wilderness within  
urging me onward  
be here  
make a path  
where the sound  
of ancestors speaks  
a language heard beyond the grave  
this earth I stand on  
belongs to the many dead  
treasure I find here  
is all gift  
tender solace  
holding back the future  
the dead that will not let us forget  
late ones  
and even further back  
the ancients  
dreaming achieving  
they will not let us forget  
time is aboriginal eternal  
they carry us back  
take us through the sacred portal  
that we may come again then again  
into the always present

## 8.

snow-covered earth  
such silence  
still divine presence  
echoes immortal migrants  
all life sustained  
darkness comes  
suffering touches us  
again and again  
there is pain  
there in the midst of  
such harsh barrenness  
a cardinal framed in the glass  
red light  
calling away despair  
eternal promise  
everything changes and ends

## 9.

autumn ending  
leaves like  
fallen soldiers  
manmade hard hearts  
fighting battles on this once sacred ground  
all killing done now  
dirt upon dirt  
covers all signs of death  
memory tamped down  
ways to not remember  
the disappeared  
dying faces  
longing to be seen  
one lone warrior lives  
comes home to the hills  
seeking refuge  
seeking a place to surrender  
the ground where hope remains  
and souls surrender

## 10.

here and there  
across and down  
treasure uncovered  
remnants of ancient ways  
not buried deep enough  
excavated they surface  
objects that say  
some part of me  
lived here before  
reincarnated ancestors  
give me breath  
urge me—live again  
return to familiar ground  
hear our lost people speak

## 11.

no crops grow  
when dense clay dirt  
packed solid  
defies  
all manmade  
intent to destroy  
let a blessing come here  
let earth  
heal and rejoice  
she has here  
mother of grace  
and constancy  
wild roses bloom  
scatter these hills  
with beauty  
that does not linger  
offering still the promise of healing  
and return

## 12.

mud sliding down  
wet can do this  
make danger  
fall upon us  
turn the pure in heart away  
no water for holy cleansing  
no water for drying thirst  
just black death  
smothering earth  
soot after fire

## 13.

wingspan wide  
death covers all  
prey and predator  
turkey buzzards overhead  
at the bottom of the hill  
no eternity beckons  
just ongoing decay  
a deep smothering emptiness  
profound prolonged lamentation  
birds cry high



14.

hard rain  
softens harder ground  
from solid rock  
to mud so thick  
feet go under  
making every step  
dirge and trial  
even as joy surfaces  
at last today  
we plant  
we hope

## 15.

pink and white oleander  
not native to Appalachian ground  
still here lies  
years and years of poison  
rebel flags  
heritage and hate  
in the war to fight hunger and  
ongoing loss  
there are no sides  
there is only  
the angry mind of hurt  
bringing death too soon  
destroying all our dreams  
of union

## 16.

go high up  
climb to the very top  
look out  
remnants of  
majesty remain  
here where soldiers stand  
watching their gods die  
what will be given  
in return for shelter  
an end to hunger  
sanctuary  
look from the mountaintops  
an army of broken promises  
land invaded then left  
as though there were no other way  
to claim belonging

17.

straight ahead  
the road curves  
signs signal  
no motorboats allowed  
this lake our water source  
let us drink  
clear and true  
there are swans  
resting here magical presence  
all reflecting peace

## 18.

when trees die  
all small hearts break  
little living creatures  
happy and safe  
uprooted  
now in need of finding  
new places  
when home  
cracks and breaks and falls  
all life becomes danger  
how to find  
another place  
where all is not  
yet barren

## 19.

all fields  
of tobacco  
growing here  
gone now  
man has made time  
take them  
surrendered  
this harsh crop  
to other lands  
countries where  
the spirit guides  
go the way  
of lush green  
leaving behind  
the scent of memory  
tobacco leaves  
green yellow brown  
plant of sacred power  
shining beauty  
return to Appalachia  
make your face known

## 20.

the glory in old barns  
surpassing time  
wood gray shadowed black  
faded colors  
places where painted signs  
tell of products  
no longer in use  
standing or falling down  
these structures  
carry the weight of history  
work done and undone  
memories of toil and torment  
there was bounty here  
tears for sowing  
lamentations for the dead  
all fragments that remain  
remind us  
give thanks  
gather praise

## 21.

turtle islands everywhere  
heads poking out  
bodies embraced in the world  
before the coming of the white man  
a sea of calm  
where turtles rest  
on lands breathing life  
outside water  
that turtles may play  
fat succulent slow  
enchancing us  
with strength to guard and protect  
a wall of hardness  
store dreams  
of a world without humans  
a wet world everlasting



## 22.

sometimes falling rain  
carries memories of betrayal  
there in the woods  
where she was not meant to be  
too young she believes  
in her right to be free  
in her body  
free from harm  
believing nature  
a wilderness she can enter  
be solaced  
believing the power  
that there be sacred place  
that there can be atonement now  
she returns with no fear  
facing the past  
ready to risk  
knowing these woods now  
hold beauty and danger

## 23.

bring Buddha  
to rest home  
in Kentucky hills  
that outside each window  
a light may shine  
not a guilt teaching tradition  
be balanced  
know loving kindness  
end suffering  
rejoice in the oneness of life  
then let go  
carry nothing on your back  
travel empty  
as you climb steep mountain paths

24.

clouds dressed in gray  
for mourning  
for grief held  
white for adoration  
dark for sorrow  
come soon  
an eternity simply hidden  
where all sun and glory reigns  
even so  
in this now  
there is just  
a promise  
of shadows  
relentless

25.

soil rich with lime  
grass beyond green  
turning toward blue  
hills of plenty  
all but gone  
bent under the weight  
all human greed  
we speak then  
tell of a god of miracles  
who moves mountains  
yet manmade steel  
ravishes this earth  
all for coal  
deep and black  
a destiny of burning heat  
covering flesh in ash

## 26.

equine whispering  
horses once roaming freely  
out in the open  
now live enclosed  
captured by boundaries of fence and wire  
manmade domestication  
horses grazing quietly  
four-legged buddhas  
standing in grace  
forgiving

27.

sublime shadows of midnight  
bronze brown  
in gray white  
dappled black beauty  
thunder  
man of war  
a dynasty of flesh  
roaming in the mind's eye  
pondering  
such power harnessed  
driven  
preyed upon by human  
will and desire

28.

morning dawn  
mist-covered day  
dreaming triumph and victory  
horses gather  
a herd at the top of the hill  
bonded  
whispering souls  
ready to run  
speaking a language only they can hear  
sounds beyond  
interpretation  
no heavy rider's move  
in this magic time  
no need to tame and mount  
all at once  
they race  
to reach the beyond

## 29.

softly treading black bear  
leaving a trace  
green crushed  
under innocence  
just for now  
breaking free  
leaving forest for  
hill and mountain  
fleeing coonskin caps  
memories of  
renegade red men running  
fleeing daniel boone  
white wrath  
all nature  
slaughtered in  
the colonizing wake  
animals abandoned  
alone untouched  
sheer good fortune  
guides one bear away  
a gift of time  
with no boundaries  
for soon  
hunters come  
soon comes dying  
soon we are captives



## 30.

burning pain  
has its own rhythm  
back and back  
shaking the foundation of  
trees once strong  
brought down  
by fire  
by fierce want  
uprooted  
all solid  
familiar ground  
naked now  
going once  
going twice  
leaving damaged  
and broken  
unending  
blackness

## 31.

returning to sacred places  
where all is one  
embraced belonging  
an intense field of possibility  
wondrous goodness  
fills the air  
grant us great spirits  
another chance  
to reclaim and nurture earth  
glorious sky  
divine water  
in everyday the blessing of weather  
offering change  
a constant passing  
of life into death  
and back again

32.

walking the long way home  
walking ever so slow  
talking to be  
wholly in this world of wonder  
standing still  
waiting  
standing in the center  
of a long and winding  
dirt road  
leading uphill  
to a small house  
surrounded by lilacs  
black-eyed susans  
roses and honeysuckle vines  
a bench at the bottom  
that bodies may rest  
before they climb

## 33.

tap dancing  
on tin roofs  
heavy rain falls  
wetness spreading  
all over borders  
refusing containment  
flash flood warning  
sirens call stay in  
be still  
guard your heart  
let rain be  
the only necessary movement

34.

fierce winter cold  
mind whispers  
a lost landscape  
telling stories  
of how it was then  
seated near fire  
drinking homemade spirits  
sake and brandy wine  
spirits bring contentment  
for a time  
carry us closer  
to the sacred  
moving through bitterness  
our yearning to hold on  
to moments of ecstasy  
where we imagine  
we hear clearly  
destiny calling

## 35.

winds of fate  
take the air  
push it past the known  
in this world of nature  
no one can undo  
mystery abounds  
harsh cold burns skin  
fire waits  
raging tempests  
sweep us  
carry us toward  
destiny recorded  
written down  
past present future  
change comes

## 36.

mammoth caves  
places alive  
before the invention of hours  
paleolithic hunters  
painting the caves  
of lascaux  
horses shot with arrows  
wild creatures  
no longer seen  
cave dwellers  
searching for sacred paths  
then sharing revelation  
on these walls  
connecting caves  
crossing boundaries  
of nation and time  
bold remains  
of untouched history

## 37.

stained black  
Kentucky oak  
plank fences  
mark boundaries  
ghost riders  
where the dead live  
on the edge of time  
slaves worked here  
long ago  
caressing horse flesh  
breathing shared dreams  
cared for them  
when witnessing  
the breaking of yet  
another animal spirit  
born to be wild and free  
a bond forged  
whisper to forgotten souls  
run run  
go as fast as you can  
run run  
seek an end to bondage



38.

toward light  
each bird flies  
higher then higher  
then swooping down  
as though to plummet  
as though air a net  
to catch and comfort  
who can fear  
earth  
who can fear  
sky  
when faced with  
an infinite possibility  
each moment given  
a chance to soar  
to enter beyond

## 39.

ritual places  
a set offering  
dead bird  
on wooden slats  
carry beauty still  
stretched and moaned  
as though  
bearing its own cross  
suffering those last moments  
there are altars  
in these hills  
organic monuments  
calling the sacred  
rock on which to stand  
and know divine presence  
witness and testify  
as birds of prey  
fly high  
opening wide wings  
reaching past death

## 40.

on hallowed ground  
I cast the circle  
that there may be  
haven for the lost  
refuge and sanctuary  
turning to the hills  
I place feet on steady ground  
letting earth hold me  
in praise of air  
I lift my hands  
to the heavens  
call down grace for blessings  
for anointed being  
turning toward water  
I let go remembered sins  
cleanse and purify  
burning sage  
I bring fire to warm  
and illuminate  
all around this body  
light moves  
a communion of gathered  
spirits

41.

fierce unyielding winds  
pressing pushing  
against window glass  
trees swaying  
branches falling  
chaos warning  
of danger  
she does not want  
to cut them down  
she does not want  
to fear those mighty oaks  
standing guard  
for more years  
than can be counted  
strong roots sustaining life  
holding back  
the rush of time  
let earth testify  
they have the  
right to fall  
when life comes to an end  
to move  
in harmony with fate

42.

heavy heart  
as fallen snow  
bringing behind  
wet damp darkness  
small dreams  
coming true  
green coming  
from seeds  
planted long ago  
draw from this  
winter death  
courage to go on  
in the face of white cold  
see past this  
all-surrounding  
whiteness  
that beyond  
there is hope  
that sorrow ends

43.

when the dawn  
is still almost dark  
I rise restless  
watch the  
morning come  
sly slow  
movement into light  
from shadow play  
an unveiling  
inside this dark heart  
a yearning to live  
as nature lives  
surrendering all

44.

fly high  
dreaming bird  
higher and higher  
on the wire of time  
no road blocks  
no stopping  
to think through  
why wings flap  
what makes  
the worthy soar  
only this  
pure heaven  
right now  
sky high

45.

barren broken hill  
once a place of possibility  
now only remnants  
old glory gone  
heritage sullied with hate  
ancestors indigenous and dark  
held captive  
by soldiers and greed  
by bloody conquest  
battlefields where the dead live  
unclaimed not mourned  
histories buried forgotten  
lost to a world of cover-ups  
ghosts return to these hills  
to grieve  
cry out lamentations  
mourning the desecration  
of earthbound bodies  
ghosts gather here  
make promises  
of resurrection and return



46.

overlooking water  
I stand  
at the top of the hill  
looking out  
see swans on the lake  
grand plumage  
more elegant than peacocks  
their presence mysterious  
all secrecy  
how came they  
to choose Appalachia  
gracing us with their vision  
as we climb down  
to be close to such beauty  
that it may  
open our hearts  
show us such love  
as to offer  
no turning back

47.

red beard  
strut  
strut  
wild turkey  
congregate  
walk in peace  
deciduous woodland  
undercover  
walk to mate  
walk to feed  
strut  
strut  
iridescent plumage  
moving harem  
doing a slow dance  
strut  
strut

48.

sunken faces  
a collapsing gray  
shutting down  
still bodies  
standing in doorways  
sitting on  
falling-down front porches  
on crooked steps  
cold now  
bone upon bone  
outsiders come  
taking land  
taking life  
stripping removing destroying  
mountains ravished  
leaving in this corrupt wake  
souls grieving  
earth laments  
cries out loud  
that justice may come  
that it is never too late

49.

with water  
anoint the day  
all this season  
of drought kills  
quiet slaughter  
effortless  
no need to love war  
in this space  
ongoing silence  
absent wetness  
call for surrender  
for want and thirst  
we are brought low  
face to face  
with essential need  
a necessary yearning  
we long for rain  
for water  
to pour into our hearts  
an offering of radical grace

50.

all old souls  
chant  
be tender  
walk soft  
the bodies of our dead  
lie here  
wildflowers  
red yellow white  
adorn memory  
pink purple blue  
lost in a world of green  
all have been  
promised  
wedded to morning  
that will soon come  
tears fallen and gone  
only faint traces  
of grief remain  
sorrow lingers  
making soil soul deep  
our weeping ground

## 51.

in the gray blue wash of dawn  
sacred secrets no longer hidden  
make tapestries of repressed memories  
soldiers lamenting  
the tyranny of war unending  
let earth renew  
broken spirits  
find precious  
love once shared  
that will not be forgotten  
remembered confederates  
fugitive desire  
past wounds heal  
bind broken hearts  
give all to glory  
beyond country flag nation  
yearning for atonement  
they bring light  
come to early morning fresh

52.

renegades roam here  
fugitive longing  
darker than night  
glorious black bodies  
enslaved  
with no hope of  
belonging  
to land  
in this new world  
of white freedom and flight  
some live to die  
sleep with no dreams  
some find ways  
to unravel mysteries  
threads of power and domination  
a palimpsest of greed  
they hope  
and hope  
for change  
find homeplace inside  
letting anguish bleed out  
make way for new life

53.

blackbirds  
come rest home  
let your dreaming  
winged flying spirits pause  
meditate  
pause your deep soul be peace  
for you can rest here  
in this green  
enchanted place  
claim sanctuary  
in these hills  
made sacred  
by native trust  
small yet mighty  
find your belonging



## 54.

burning body of love  
no lead turning into gold  
flesh only  
turning into pain and ash  
the bodies and being of old men  
coal black skin  
soft to touch  
smooth as velvet  
as kid gloves  
they once danced  
dreamed themselves  
priests and poets all  
now they sleep  
under loam  
rich and generous  
as a full heart

55.

take the  
hand-me-downs  
make do  
no culture of poverty  
claiming lives here  
we a people of plenty  
back then  
work hard  
know no hunger  
grow food  
sew clothing  
build shelter  
moonshine still  
wine from grape  
we a marooned  
mountain people  
backwoods souls  
we know to live on little  
to make a simple life  
away from manmade  
laws and boundaries  
spirit guides teach us  
offer always  
the promise  
of an eternal now

## 56.

star of david  
tree of life  
double wedding band  
a nine patch  
such patterns  
once shaped our destiny  
pieces of cloth  
marking a woman's life  
sewn together scraps  
bits and pieces  
tell us life stories  
pieced by hand  
remnants of passion  
an unfulfilled desire  
sisters coming together  
making peace  
offering comfort  
ways to warm  
to open hearts

57.

fierce grief shadows me  
I hold to the memory  
of ongoing loss  
land stolen bodies shamed  
everywhere the stench of  
death and retribution  
all around me  
nature demands amends  
spirit guides me  
to take back the land  
make amends  
silence the cries of the lost  
the lamentations  
let them sleep forever sublime  
knowing that we  
have made a place  
that can sustain us  
a place of certainty  
and sanctuary

58.

earth spirit  
shout to raise  
the living dead  
each one  
hear ancestors cry  
mend the broken bones  
wild damaged ones  
earth spirit  
know our wandering  
our anguished offering  
through time  
earth spirit  
reclaim soil soul seed  
all the living green  
help us surrender  
that we may live again

59.

migrating birds  
come rest here  
teach us  
all life follows  
divine change  
find pattern in structure  
go true north  
follow organic spirit  
guided prophecy  
hidden among growing things  
that there may be hope  
in these hills that there be renewal  
that all living beings  
may rise up  
proclaiming pure delight  
beauty that restores  
beyond all manmade limitations  
be welcomed

60.

wilderness within  
wild woman  
aging crone  
wise hag  
she who holds  
mystery  
stir the cauldron  
tend the flames  
bring life to fire  
carry messages  
from the future  
a shroud of blackness  
will cover the earth  
sooted sorrow  
so deep ash will fall like rain  
heat rising  
from unseen  
burning

61.

lingering twilight  
all-enveloping mist  
that which is deep within us  
rising  
fugitive desire  
in these lonesome hills  
time loses meaning  
fragments of past lives  
hold hostage  
the will to nurture growth  
slaughter hope  
against all sentient green  
living beings  
offering no escape  
mountains dissolve  
as earth slides into ruin



62.

harsh winter wind  
again and again  
soul deep snowfall  
holding earth  
shades of black and gray  
among barren landscapes  
the mind may know  
a springtime of green coming  
still in the present  
the inescapable now  
bitter cold buries secrets  
put away  
all promises of resurrection

## 63.

stark stolen sky  
no birds in flight  
in sight  
no sign that lush  
verdant life  
lay abundant  
here  
war ravaged  
our hills and mountains  
burns flesh to ash  
turns our water  
against us  
slaughters thirst  
makes our  
longings kill  
all is black  
coal black greed  
no way to choose life  
when greed  
brings the constant  
sound of death  
calling away  
deliverance

64.

daybreak  
night falling  
into blue shadow  
gray streaks  
as the trickster  
chases memory  
repeat  
tell  
the same stories  
until the past  
is left behind

65.

my world is green  
wild green  
green with no limits  
big bold green  
growing changing  
celebrates the  
green in things  
all green goodness

66.

fire so hot  
death so dry  
just ready  
to let loose  
fierce heat  
miles and miles  
of flames  
climbing hills and mountains  
felling trees  
calling all hearts  
to burn and break  
hold in memory  
lifelines gone  
a show of hands

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