

EARTH LISTENING



Becky Dennison Sakellariou

The Hobblebush Granite State Poetry Series, Volume II

HOBBLEBUSH BOOKS

Brookline, New Hampshire

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*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I will meet you there.*

—RUMI

*Remember how the naked soul
comes to language and at once knows
loss and distance and believing.*

—W. S. MERWIN, "NOTE"

THE WORDS IN MY MOUTH

*If you don't write [the sadness],
it will implode in you.*

—JIM HARRISON

The words in my mouth
are the tides and sands
of the Ionian Sea,
the feathers of gulls
turning east along the tidal flats,
the slight wind puffing
the soft gray down of their heads.
My tongue traces sounds
to a time of no measure
where women were buried
in narrow earthen tombs
filled with bits of woven cloth, ash
and pomegranate seeds,
some small bones
tucked around their bodies.

The women of my tribes,
Abigail, Ruth, Patience,
carried their dowries westward
in small leather suitcases,
their names stitched
in thin gold and indigo threads
so someone would not forget.
Panayiota, Dimitra, Fani,
walking the decks of the ship,
the buttons of their heavy robes
loosened, the hopeful names

of their betrothed written
on tiny folds of brown paper
tucked into their camisoles.
Sahai, Bahar, Damba, Kaea,
crammed in the hold
of the boat, bones askew,
holding their skin taut
for Allah, hope
a small slice of black sea.

I want to return to the fields
when the apricots are ripe,
when I can step, barefoot,
out onto the cool tile terrace
and reach up, *pluck*
a perfect flesh-pink fruit,
warm it in my hand,
circle its roundness
with my thumb, take it to my mouth
in silent feast with the earth.

I read today that
magnetic north is
on the move,
heading out of Canadian territory
into the Arctic Ocean
at about 10 miles per year.
I cannot think this one through.
Wrapped in latitudes, I lose
my way, my skull shipwrecked
against the compass.

No one wants these words.
No one will collect
the lineaments of our names.
How will the planes land?

THE CONVERGENCE OF MATTER AND POPPIES

At the moment of convergence
of radiation and matter,
yellow poured into scarlet,
flooding the whole universe,
planets, sky, stars, light.
No darkness, no love
nor sound of love.

When the universe curved
into a transparent river of blue,
the dark place became love, became
Sophia pushing her nose into daisies,
serious about this smelling business,
unaware of Christ's Resurrection
and why we eat lamb.

Love is the dark place
when the Judas tree showers the earth
with pink pea-shaped clusters
catching the sudden sound
of insistent bees,
offering the heart solace.
When did the old sloping field
thick with poppies and daisies
southeast of Thebes
become a field of onions?

Kryssanthi tells stories
of picking poppies as a child,
cutting out the black stamens

and boiling them down into ink
so she could write her lessons.

On the island of Nissyros,
Yiorgos spots a crimson poppy
crowned with spidery yellow filaments,
poison that mimics sulfur smoke
still leaking from the cracks
deep under the Stephanos crater.

Love sits in the dark place
besieged by every cadence of white.

EARTH LISTENING

A woman stands still as ice,
hearing the skin
of a man
who listens to the earth
as he lets it go.

The man, stopped
at the edge of a stone,
kneels to listen
to his child, to the sound
of a thousand rivers.

The woman, searching
for a man's heat,
leans against his back
imagining whales
beneath the lost prairie.

He pauses in her song
of bright darkness,
opening his throat
to all the lights that ever were,
her incandescent rain.

The woman hears herself crying
through the dreams
of her sons lying
beneath the red sand
of the riverbed.

The stone will become the river,
will become the child,
will become all memory wrapped
in the fierce cloak of God.