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ECLIPSED BY CULTURE

by

Andrea Diamond

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

English

Approved:

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Logan, Utah

2020

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ABSTRACT

Eclipsed by Culture

by

Andrea Diamond, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2020

Major Professor: Michael Sowder, Ph.D.

Department: English

The purpose of this thesis is to explore through poetry my conflicted relationship with an abusive, narcissistic father, a father who passed down to me the after-effects of generations of inherited trauma and traditions of patriarchy. In a narrative arc unfolding through domestic scenes and deepened with metaphor, I offer readers the story of my struggle to accept the personal and psychological damage I experienced as a child, to forgive, and to achieve a measure of healing so that my experience might benefit others. Using poetry enabled me to distill elements of my circumstances that, in my lived experience, were overwhelming and blinding, and control them with poetic devices in a way that the complexities I encountered could be clearly examined and sculpted as provocative art.

My poetry thesis is accompanied by a critical introduction that offers background to the generational dysfunction and inherited trauma of my father's family, based upon research, family records, and poets writing about similar kinds of trauma. Inviting the

reader into my poetic narrative in this way, through story, scene and metaphor, an imaginative, embodied experience can result, and healing solutions can become discernible. In exploring my relationship with my father, a man saturated by the traditions of Polish patriarchy and domestic cycles of abuse, I confront that abuse, define the ways I survived, thrived, and healed. I do not wish to scorn my father, but rather to map the path of my attempt to survive, find support, and claim my own identity and reality.

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I especially would like to thank my husband, Ben, for his undying patience and support, not only in listening to many drafts, but also for being willing to sit with me as I revisited my trauma, to laugh in disbelief of the absurdities and extremes, and to cry about the reality; my children, who, although (happily) lack personal experience of my trauma, were loving and supportive beyond measure; and my writing group, which included my mother, Sandra Whitaker, who courageously reexamined memories with me and became a stronger source of validation and healing, and my “Unca” John, whose unconditional love for me I treasure.

Andrea Diamond

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Critical Introduction

Eclipsed by Culture

Thesis Topic and Purpose

The second hand on the clock grew loud and sliced the air as the silence pressed on. My husband and I held our breaths as we waited for my brother, Dan's, reply. *Well, do you?* My husband insisted, *Do you even love your sister?* His words hovered, suspended. After two minutes or more, my brother burst out, *How could I love her after all dad has said about her?*

My dad had admitted himself to the veteran's hospital in Denver, and it wasn't the first time, but this time he had suffered a mild stroke. Before Dan arrived in Denver for a visit, I had been the one visiting my dad. I sensed that he was tired of his life. Dan had been ordered by my dad to fly to Colorado and come to my house on a mission to recruit me to manage my dad's recovery. Sitting in our sunshine yellow basement, the walls sickened as he dictated, *An, I need you to drive to dad's house every morning and evening, every day, and check to see if he has taken his meds.* The baby grand in the corner rang as if in obedience. Disbelief rippled my mind. I tried to navigate past how my brother had become like my dad, someone my brother swore he never wanted to be. Having accepted my father's funds for his college tuition years before, obligation had caught up with him; the terms: he would be Dad's power of attorney and executor of the estate, an honor. What he couldn't foresee was that he would also be expected to fulfill dad's wishes, even against reason.

When my brother and I were young we were best friends. My love for him was uninhibited. In elementary school I defended him on the playground, sang, “He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother!” in the lunchroom. In middle school, more outgoing than Dan, I included him in my social circles, while my dad continued his gendered favoritism. When Dad sent Dan to military school, his stories of me began the work of swaying Dan’s loyalties. Even though my brother and I had some heart-to-heart talks when he returned through his high school years, they tapered off. By the time we were adults, Dad had him.

Our Polish family culture obligated me to “sacrifice all” for our patriarch, but I worked hard to avoid being beholden to him. I had been living in Colorado for the last nine years, a kind of heaven or hell depending on which bell was ringing, my young family’s or my father’s summons. In good traffic, my dad’s new penthouse apartment in south Denver was forty-five minutes away. In bad traffic, it was two and a half hours. I had five children to get off to school. It was November. I ran a piano studio in the afternoons with over thirty students, and there was *no way* my father was going to pay me to compensate me for what I would lose if I gave up teaching to care for him. History dictated this.

This poetry thesis explores my conflicted relationship with an abusive, narcissistic father, a father who passed down to me the after-effects of generations of inherited trauma. The first-born son of Polish immigrants, my father was given a privileged education so that he might save the family from poverty. Instead, he completed his education and then distanced himself from his family. As a dentist, he created his own private world of privilege and affluence, loved by the public, but a tyrant and abuser at

home, who hated women, including my mother and me. Or maybe he loved me. That was the problem.

My father had high expectations for me, as long as I remained under his control. On the one hand, he needed me to succeed to satisfy his sense of family pride, but when I readily accepted, for example, his proposal that I attend prep school, I learned he hadn't offered it to invest in me, but rather to threaten me as a means of control. He funded my brothers' prep school and college educations - one way the Polish honored men - while I paid my own way - because I was a woman. Debt was disgraceful. Not a word was ever said about my brothers' consumer debt which my father also paid. In my case, however, my father counseled me to take loans out for school, promising he had money set aside as part of his divorce from my mother for my education. But he spent the money, if it ever did exist. I had chosen motherhood over dental school, a laughing point my father had with my brothers, but I owed nothing to anyone. I wasn't affording luxuries, but I had freedom. Dan couldn't comprehend this. He had fallen for dad's shenanigans and now he was deep in our father's grasp. He couldn't see that our generation was being infected with a toxic Polish inheritance through him.

I learned about "the Polish way," our family's methods of interacting, when we visited Burnham, Illinois, where my dad grew up. When he was a child, all the adults spoke Polish. The children were required to speak English. This was the parent's way of helping the children integrate into American society. Not speaking with a Polish accent would give them a better chance to succeed, something they had originally come to America to do only to find that success was not handed out, and education was out of reach. I saw the older generation, laborers and housewives, gather around the kitchen

table with coffee, wine, vodka. They engaged in heated discussions daily, on money, politics, family, family politics, what someone was or wasn't doing, or fights, shouting matches and yelling orders at each other, their children. All the accents mixed in Polish and English words. Laughter ranged from mocking to sinister, occasionally genuine. I learned to stay under the radar, out of the way, to try to dodge their scrutiny.

With the promise of employment from the steel industry, my Polish progenitors were some of the estimated 12 million immigrants that came through Ellis Island between 1890 and 1952, arriving around the turn of the century. They experienced extreme power differentials because they were laborers, and because of their ethnicity. They worked hard for the capitalist lords and felt trapped. They had little energy to do anything more than demand the children help them survive emotionally and financially.

Still, they were better off than the relatives that stayed behind in Poland. In a letter written by Joseph Bajdowicz in Poland to his "beloved sister" in America before Christmas 1965, not only were struggles of health and lack of care, cold living conditions, and lack of money revealed that my great uncle and his wife, Fela, suffered, but also a peephole was opened that showed family dynamics among a generation of siblings all around the age of seventy to eighty years old. Joseph speaks to Anna, his sister, of their younger brother, Bolek, who traveled to America with a (reportedly offensive) Polish girlfriend. He lamented Bolek's crimes, how he badmouthed Joseph and Fela and kept money and gifts for himself that were sent over with him. Joseph would not take the issue up with him due to Bolek's history of irresponsible and caustic responses. Instead, he asked his sister to do his bidding for him, and so triangulation cycled. This

snapshot of inherited trauma validated how embedded it became in our family's Polish way.

No one was exempt. "Children are to be seen, not heard," my father often echoed as if he were overjoyed that it was his turn to dismiss children, us, and preserve energy for his more important job, providing. This is what he had seen his family do, a story he often rehearsed to us. When my father became educated and affluent, he took on an even more potent position. One of his mantras was, "If you have money, you can break the rules," believing that education led to money, and money was the ultimate call to respect, even beyond reason. This is something I never understood, but I often encountered as a child. It made me wonder why my father's life and needs were more important than anyone else's, especially mine.

My dad was the oldest son. The resources of the family were directed toward his education. The idea was that one well-educated child might lift them all out of poverty. Dad's sisters, my aunts, and their younger brother would have to fend for themselves. He would be their savior. This financial investment was supported by what my father's father first called, "blessings," beatings inflicted when the snake around his father's waist was woken by disobedience or shame. My Dad surpassed the education of his people and moved away from the family trauma: alluring aunts, bootleggers and tax evaders, the family farmhouse burning down when evidence of drugs growing in the field was lit, his father's deadly fists, the shock of a dead uncle.

He married in college. Dan and I were born during his graduate studies in orthodontia. After completing his degree and passing his boards, he enlisted in the Air Force. This was the early 1970's, and young men were being drafted to fight in Vietnam.

The Air Force required a two-year tour, and he would work as an officer on military bases in the Philippines. We moved there when I was two. My younger brother arrived during the second year of our stay.

Our father spent the last months of his tour debriefing returning POW's and identifying the corpses of American soldiers by their teeth.

Some of my earliest interactions with my Dad terrified me. While in the Philippines, I wasn't quite four. Yet, at a dinner party, I remember looking for my mother among the guests, but my father blocked me when I tried to pass him to get to her. My next memory of him was after the war, when my father moved us to Colorado Springs, the grandest place he could imagine. He opened three orthodontic practices. At work I saw him win the affections of his patients and their children with his generosity, but at home he reserved generosity for my brothers. At church I shiveled from him as I peered at people we met. A church member might say, *Nice to meet you, Brother* - and he would interrupt and correct them - "*Doctor.*" Nodding their heads, their eyes would bounce as they studied him.

It wasn't until my mid-thirties that my uncle told me of my father's drug and alcohol habit, which plagued my parents' marriage and yet, strangely, probably made it tolerable at the same time. My father carried on the tradition his dad had, living above the law as he drank and smoked marijuana. A doctor with access to pharmaceuticals, he was "living his dream." But, his childhood abuse narratives about his father's unjust beatings, his devious control games and strategies to gain the advantage over children and peers alike morphed into prophecies. Mother rhythmically knocked her head against the wall. Father groped for control of my brothers and me, issuing threats when we couldn't guess

what he expected us to do. He began to hit us, on our cheeks and bodies, followed by stripes from the “snake,” unwrapped from around his waist; something he once said he “would never do.”

And yet, when Dad was nice, he was elated, and we wished it would last forever. When things went his way at the office, he would celebrate, often by taking us out to eat. The Japanese Kitchen was his favorite place. He would cheer the chef and teach us about the food, leaving a tip to be remembered for the culinary show, and we had forgotten our reality for a while. Breckenridge was his favorite place to ski. After shouting at us all through our packing and loading of the equipment, he would grin all the way to the slopes, buying us breakfast at the Waffle House along the way. Yet, we learned not to expect these good moods to last.

I knew from a very young age that I, too, had to learn to survive within a tradition of inherited trauma, an inheritance that included murder, suicide, drugs, promiscuity, and addiction, as well as gender discrimination, physical and psychological abuse, divisiveness, and other forms of trauma. Ultimately, after decades of healing, I came to know that, like the sun rising on a foggy day, forgiveness would free me from the cycle and empower me to think for myself, to live a different reality; not just to survive, but to get out from under an eclipsing of my identity by a culture frozen over my family for generations. I not only now work to undo the cycle, but to capitalize on the lessons learned.

I found healing each time I put boundaries down for my dad, boundaries a daughter should not ever have to draw. No boundary I laid down was quite like the one I drew that blocked his number and removed my brothers from my life. I wished it was

different, but I could see I was powerless and left to choose misery with them or the pain of loss without them. Out of compassion for the men who would not help themselves from perpetuating their inherited tradition, and survival, perhaps healing, I stopped calling. The phone line was never enlivened from their dial pad, either.

These poems explore my relationship with my father, a man saturated by the traditions of Polish patriarchy and domestic cycles of abuse. They expose that abuse, chart the ways I survived, and thrived, and healed. My intent is never malicious. I do not wish to scorn my father, but rather to chart the path of my attempt to survive, find support, and claim my own identity and reality.

Influences

My family visited Burnham when I was eight and I met my grandfather again. I began to gain personal insights to our inherited trauma as I spoke with cousins and stood in my grandpa's living room. I thought it curious that my father carried on traditions when clearly the family ways were horrendous. "Grandpa, Bear-Fist Fighter" captures the horror that a hardened man portrays to outsiders, especially a child.

Above his shoulder, a caged bird
chirps. *Shush, Skipper,*
it's just a girl. Dust swirls with his moist breath,
glinting as Chippendale arms and a wingback spread
like an emblem.
The family Bible rests
on his footstool, names listed like sorrows
snuffed under the leather cover. I hear them now.
Now I know muteness. I didn't
know rage when I was four.

My father's presence dominated my mother's in my life. After feeling I had to fend for myself at grandpa's house, I soon learned I was doing the same at home.

It took years into adulthood to build trust with my mother, and when we did, she began to speak. I learned that my father had never scrutinized his family ways. Rather, he expected my mother to accept him and how he had learned to do things, introducing her to a lover on their honeymoon. My poem, "Eclipsed: Umbra," illustrates how my father continued in his family's Polish way when he married. He intends to abandon my mother, brother and me, a newborn, for his first love, Mary, whom he had known since before he met my mother. My father left my mother for her but came back because Mary had gained weight.

Mary now plump,
Daddy came back.
Mom should have known
when she let him in again,
tail tucked.
She pacified me
with my Nuk,
her mother fumed
in the back room
while dad dangled
golden promises
through his
Cheshire grin.

Years later, when my mother gained the courage to divorce him, he was still in the practice of talking, talking, talking to convince her otherwise. And crying, crying, crying. His drama kept them up all night. In a hotel room when they took my brother Dan into college, she told him she was leaving, and she left.

When I discovered Sylvia Plath's poetry, I was intrigued and repulsed. Her words felt so familiar. It was like stepping back in time. Her work was an eerily accurate view of my childhood through my mother's eyes. Even more eerie, I asked my mother to lend me her favorite poetry books; *Ariel* was included. I needed Plath as a guide and began to

read her differently. I gained insights from Plath's expressions of her father in her poem, "Daddy."

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white,
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo. (Plath 56)

The Polish traditions that my father perpetuated made him the patriarch who dictated when it was "time to" be happy, "time to" pay attention, "time to" work. Plath's simple diction is childlike yet truthful and direct in stark metaphorical references of her black subject and white self, living in his oppression. By experiencing Plath's trauma through her poetry I gained confidence in my own person, in my ability to acknowledge trauma and not minimize it as I was required to as a child; to see myself even though my life felt eclipsed by my father. Somehow, Plath's short life and great work has moved me to a place stronger than the effects of my father's presence, even as he still lives.

When I was a teen, my father forced me to go to a "shrink." As we walked into the old mansion under towering trees on Nevada Ave in Colorado Springs, he said, "Fix her!" and stomped out of the room. When the door slammed, she turned to me and said, "I understand how you feel about your father's money. Now, you can either waste it or put it to work for you. I can teach you how to emotionally divorce your father." I needed Plath's courage, which was written in one line in the same poem, "Daddy, I had to kill you" (Plath 56). While I worked to create distance between myself and my father my whole life, this simple, potent line emboldened me to finally take control.

Plath's experience also validated my mother's reactions. I rejected my mother as a role model. I detested her dramatic victim reactions. She rejected me, slumping in

pathetic tears like a stubborn child. She chose to be consumed by suffering. After the first few years of marriage, she didn't have energy to do more than survive. In "Ariel," Plath's violent metaphors gave voice to my rage.

And now I
Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.
The child's cry

Melts in the wall.
And I
Am the arrow,

The dew that flies
Suicidal, at one with the drive
Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning. (Plath 29)

My mother never responded to any infraction with dignity, much less with triumph. Rather, she resorted to hand-biting, flailing her arms, shutting herself behind a slammed door and wailing. Plath's poems echoed her suicidal laments and pointless responses.

In my poem, "Consequence to Paradise," I record some of the only words I ever heard that painted her in any position of power. During our stay in the Philippines, my mother's job was to work with military housing agents to secure housing suitable for an officer to live in and for children to be raised in. Once, while viewing a second house, bat dung dripping down the walls like the first,

Mother demanded a house without bat dung crowning the walls.
Base agents complied. My father weaved
among chairs of officer's children bearing their teeth; Mother left
the maid to sweep, as she pottered, trundled, was tutored by officers' wives.

It must have been difficult for my mother to find a role model in the 1970's, a time when America was steeped in a post-war rebound again, while revolutionizing women's rights. I saw my mother caught between a template of womanhood championing virtue and the

happy homemaker where infidelity was devastating, and an age that amplified women's voices with greater truth than ever before while a sexual revolution exploded. At best, these were turbulent times. My father bore an emblazoned torch of chauvinism, turning a blind eye to any tender feelings that did not serve him and his agenda.

Perhaps the evolution of my father's family is captured in Wislawa Szymborska's description of Poland's post-war recovery. The poetry of this iconic Polish poet has inspired me. She has ridden much of the same terrain as I have. While she survived literal wars, I survived domestic wars, of alcoholism, abuse, cruelty, patriarchy and more. She writes in "The End and the Beginning:"

From out of the bushes
sometimes someone still unearths
rusted-out arguments
and carries them to the garbage pile.

Those who knew
what was going on here
must make way for
those who know little.
And less than little.
And finally as little as nothing. ("The End")

I wish to change the course of the ending of this poem in which one is "stretched-out" staring at the sky with a blade of grass in their mouth. I want an ending full of peaceful knowing. Like Szymborska herself, I want to come up smiling, having erased bitterness with wisdom.

Without family mentors or healthy models, it took years to temper me out of the hot pain of cruelty that I experienced, to a place where I could encounter kindness and believe in it. Mary Oliver describes something of my feelings in her poem, "The Soul at Last," where she writes, "The Lord's terrifying kindness has come to me" (Oliver 68).

Not only did I scrutinize others who were kind to me, either as poor ignoramuses who failed to see how diabolic I was, or conniving meddlers with ulterior motives, I also couldn't believe, if there was a God, that he could be kind. Into my adult years I feared kindness. It meant someone was priming me for a take-down. Happiness never lasted. In my poem, "Lessons in Entomology," I describe a moment in our garden when I realized the gratuitousness of my dad's cruelty. Nathan had walked up to my dad and bent over to observe a caterpillar.

Dad's verdict for his wonder,
 the intolerant thrust
 of his elbow. My brother lay
 toppled, crying
 as he watched Dad

grab the gas can, douse
 a pregnant
 black widow,
 toss a match and laugh
 as he muttered
 something about
 Saddam Hussein.

I like to play alone.

I feel particularly inspired by the late Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz. We share the same heritage and passion. As I watched my life unfold, I made a habit of taking mental notes. I noted my father's unjustified whims and begin thinking of ways to get away from him.

From as early as I can remember, I have written creatively, enthralled with the freedom writing fiction provided. This power did not prove to be enough. I craved the ability to speak truth, grew into the reality that Milosz highlighted in his famous words, "When a writer is born into a family, the family is finished" (Milosz "Quotes").

Somewhere between playing cowboys and Indians, finding myself penniless, outcast, and

damaged, and becoming a wife and mother of five, emotions that make use of raw material in life have been refined. Writing, once my escape, became therapy, and, finally, perhaps triumphantly, moved a way of life. Along with journaling I wrote children's books, but poetry became the art that opened my heart and mind, invited truth and contextualized memories, connected emotions and experience in a tangible understanding between speaker and reader for me. My poems help to revise Milosz's sentiment to, "When a writer is born into a family, the family" must finish with hurtful traditions and ways of being, and rather learn thoughtfulness, kindness, and unity.

With Milosz's poem, "Account," I work to illustrate some of the mindsets and dynamics that are distinctive of the Polish way, that I knew from a young age were destructive and nothing less than stupid. While in some ways I regret exposing such mentalities, I also know it can serve as a guide to individuals who have experiences similar to the Polish way, who are seeking validation and courage to change their framework. Milosz defines some of these tendencies and helps his reader identify the error:

The history of my stupidity would fill many volumes.

Some would be devoted to acting against consciousness,
Like the flight of a moth which, had it known,
Would have tended nevertheless toward the candle's flame.

Others would deal with ways to silence anxiety,
The little whisper which, though it is a warning, is ignored.

I would deal separately with satisfaction and pride,
The time when I was among their adherents
Who strut victoriously, unsuspecting. ("Account")

Many times, even as a child, I found myself questioning in my thoughts, “What could possibly possess my father to treat anyone this way, especially in contrast to what he says Jesus taught?” Yet, my father’s behavior only worsened as he aged.

Anne Sexton’s lines in “The Black Art,” encourage me to embrace my identity as a writer. Her poem’s message help me align meaning as I process my learning and witness of my father’s hidden identity, the one the public never knew, as they were schmoozed by his smooth talk and money. I identified with the intensity of Sexton’s desire. As she put it, women wish to “warn the stars” (“Black Art”). This desire of mine, to reveal the trauma I suffered at my dad’s hand and warn the public of what he was capable of, was forced into silence in my father’s system, the Polish way. If I spoke of our home life, I would commit the crime of disgracing my patriarch. His reputation would be ruined. His reasoning was that his ability to provide “all he did” for us would be ruined.

Not only was this a skewed motivation, it proved a destructive practice. My poem, “Stalked,” is the account of how silencing me also removed the understanding that help was available to me and that I could ask for it. When kicked out of my house by my father, I was intercepted by a man three years older than me and much more worldly, thrown into a life-threatening, untenable situation that seemed to never end. At Christmas, over two decades after I escaped this man, he introduces himself when I am working at the mall.

Andrea? ...
Don't you recognize me?
 “No,” I think, shake my head,
 but shock rocks my ribs at his tone,
 blackens my emotions. *Dustin,*
 he says.

I lose my breath.
My eyes shoot up
at his and my mind reels
through time...

This culmination of inherited trauma proves the end of the line comes for tradition that victimizes its participants. My father's Polish way was so ingrained in me by the age of seventeen that I told no one when this man coaxed me into his world, salvaged drug deals, assaulted me, threatened my life, then stalked me, all for fear of being a disgrace to my family. It would never be forgotten. Thus hedged in, I felt the end of this tradition. I hoped for a new beginning.

The mental notes I held felt tightly coiled, as if they yearned to spring out and make meaning. Perhaps there was healing if others could see how unright the power of family and tradition within the Polish culture had turned. Perhaps the realization of how the Polish people, once delightsome, packaged destruction and degradation in "family," "gathering," "tradition," "the way it is," things could change. I felt much like Sexton did as she completed her poem, "A writer is essentially a spy." My brothers followed my father's program. I was that spy, holding a different power ("Black Art").

My experience has inspired me to help others facing similar experiences. The monstrous forces that corrode our lives are real. Individuals can, and should, learn how to escape them and be strengthened by them. My ability to forgive has sprung from two main thoughts: I needed to accept what I was given, and believe I am capable of thriving despite, and maybe even because of, my reality. Mary Oliver writes in her poem, "Daisies," about being at peace with what we are born into, and live. Her closing line is especially knowing, employing a moving metaphor. "The suitability of the field for the daisies, and the daisies for the field" (Oliver 65). From a young age I recognized I needed

to be tough, and I worked to be equal to the task of surviving, and later thriving. On many levels I worked to accept what I was given while working also to forgive so I could navigate my way fueled by love and peace rather than fear and revenge.

Anne Sexton's poem "All My Pretty Ones" not only provides sentiments of her father, but includes lists of historical items providing the relativity of her struggle. "This is the yellow scrapbook that you began / the year I was born; as crackling now and wrinkly / as tobacco leaves" ("Pretty Ones"). These lines stirred the memory of my visit to my grandparents in Chicago a few years after moving to Colorado. It brings relics of the past into the context of today. When my family rode the train out, I experienced a classic entry into a memory-stained location where I clearly remember coming to the realization of how my dad's stories of his father could be true. We chugged into Chicago and the frigid air made me feel as though I stepped out onto a flattened, lifeless photo. The city was dirty and old. Grandpa's house was part of the bungalow belt, a flow of tracts of houses built for the laborers in Chicago working for the capitalists that lured immigrants into an American Dream. Grandpa sat so often in the bleak living room that the family referred to it as "his room." I wrote what I remembered, aiming for a different treatment of ancestors than Sexton's references to photos she had, but with a similar old-time sentiment as well.

...light slithers
 between blinds, their derelict trap; reveals

 a face carved with crevices, trickster fists gripping
 claws, a chair for the

 cornerman.

This experience served as a point of understanding for me as I matured, gaining a deeper meaning of the implications of grandpa's insensitivity to me as a young girl, his derisive laugh, and challenging nature. It was a reference point for me in my childhood home as well. Understanding my father's context helped me identify what my father created. This hindsight view continued to prove a reference point for what I would not allow going forward as I married and created a home and family of my own as I matured as well as created safety in contrast with the saturnine climate I endured.

Something stirred in me as I returned to poetry for the first time in over thirty years. Reading Plath and identifying with Szymborska and Milosz on a metaphorical level, I learned that Polish authors are particularly gifted with metaphor, and I was on fire. With a backstory rich in culture, struggle and traumatic events and characters, my poetry relies on metaphors, something I hardly realized I did. My metaphors needed harnessing, training. Reading Plath I was intrigued by the power her metaphors wield. Intrigued by her ability to refer to herself metaphorically over and over again as a pregnant woman in "Metaphor," and how she dealt with her parts separately in "Lady Lazarus," I ponder her craft. Her poem "Ariel" opened my mind through her "red eye," "the cauldron of morning," saying so much with so little about the sun (Plath). Her ardor that gave me new freedom in releasing my memories in a way that expressed them and gave them context and meaning.

A staple metaphor in the realm of trauma is the silver lining. Wislawa Szymborska's poem, *Consolation*, effectively employs it. Using Darwin's reference point for the many struggles he studied and theorized about in his career, she said,

...He'd earned the right to happy endings,
at least in fiction

with its diminutions.

Hence the indispensable
silver lining...(Szyborska)

In so few words, this reflection sums up what I came to feel throughout my life as I assessed and analyzed my resilience, my work to forgive, and the “lessons” I experienced in my home culture that I continue to glean from. Perhaps my genome itself provides the “silver lining” I needed both with my optimistic nature, as well as my body’s potential to be restored to wellness from inherited trauma by decisions I make. With forgiveness in my wake, I needed to ride out the end of the darkness as it passed with the last generation, create a safe environment for myself, and do things that sustained a peaceful and nurturing home within; a place where I could accomplish change for myself. A silver lining once barely etched my life. It was the point of hope that helped me endure the shadow of my culture until one day I could realize that its light, evidence of its brilliance, had always been available to me in full force, if I would but look, as others also may.

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