

CREATION STORIES



poems by amy wray irish

Creation Stories



Amy Wray Irish



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Two Sides of a Door



Shed

My skin itches from the inside
Out. At the bend
Behind my knees the flesh
Is raw and itching.

My waist from hips to ribs
Is red and tender.
My back, where I cannot
Reach, torments.

Nails searching and straining
For purchase, for
Relief. I scratch and rub and twitch,
Whispering my plea: *stop, please stop.*

But my skin is pulled taut,
Hot from friction. I itch
From the inside out,
A living scab across the wound.

I am wearing my old skin,
My old body, still,
And it chafes. Burlap
And wool, coarse and rough

And wrong. I am beneath all that,
Still sewn up tight. Still
Itching. Inside me
Something itching to get out,

Ripping and twitching
To get out. Two sets
Of nails scratching
At two sides of a door.

Flesh burning and itching,
The skin of this world
Still closed. But
Soon now, soon

I shed.

Lady of the Moths

A winged blanket
Carpets her path
Like rose petals.

He sweeps away dust-dry
Bodies they leave
As offerings.

A monsoon of dark,
Breathy wings
Pour against the glass.

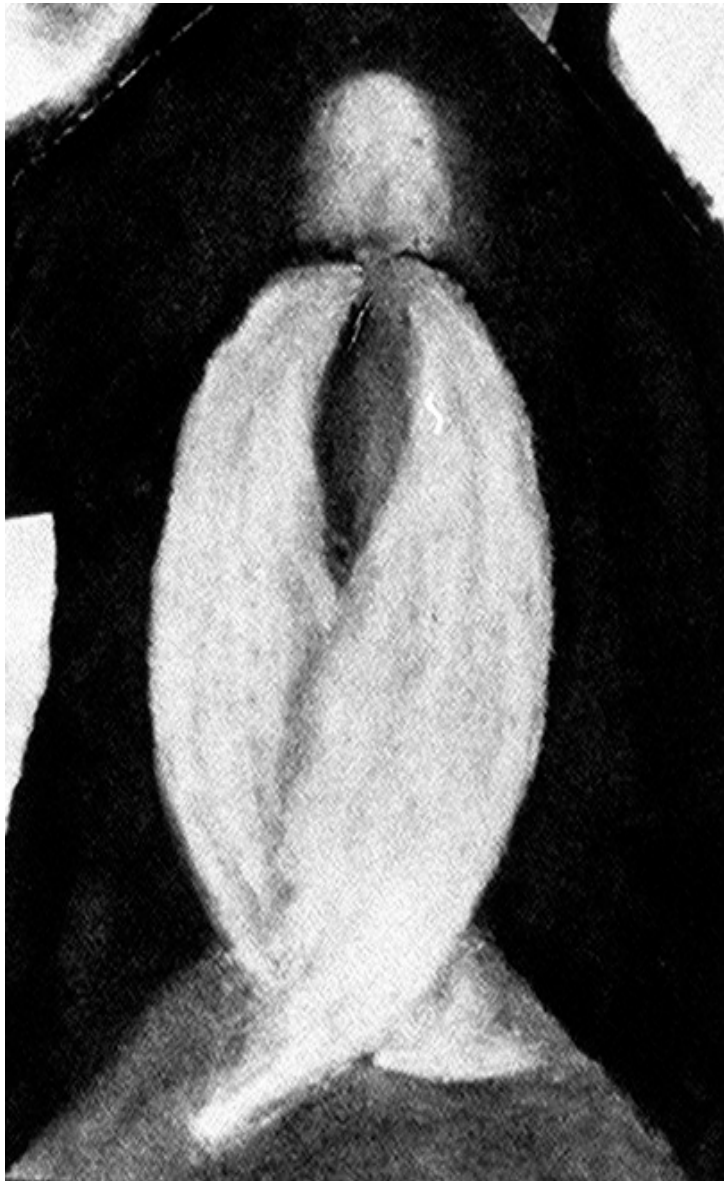
He blackens windows
Snuffs light
Forbids turning moons.

Luminescence beckons
From beneath
Her pale-white skin.

He sleeps shadow-side
Dreaming dark
As an eclipse.

Feather-light they find
Her crescent ear,
Thrum their message.

Moth-dust outline
Of her cocoon body—
He wakes alone.



The Dark Mother

i. Discoveries

Mother's favorite fruit
Cold and smooth
Warms against the heat of my palm
Becomes familiar
Skin of my own skin

Mother's faded wedding photos
Where father has the smooth, featureless
Face of the dead
And mother has the same familiar eyes
Already fallen, already gone.

ii. Domesticity

Wake from a dream of six arms,
Of a man pistol whipped
By the cold, hard end
Of a telephone receiver.

Mother, tell me this is not my voice,
This air raid siren
Bringing him to his knees;
Not my anger

This fist of formed plastic
Bringing him down.

iii. Reading the Omens

It was still dark when she awoke.
She killed a brown moth in the kitchen before breakfast.
She did not kiss her mother goodbye,

The man beside her on the train smelled of smoke.
From her window she watched a building burn.
No-one met her at the station.

At lunch she was given two spoons, no knife, no fork.
She dated the check August 6, 1945.
She signed the receipt in her mother's name.

iv. Creation

in the beginning
 liquid stirring, churning
 Kali's ocean of blood
the earth was without form

in the beginning
 mother of the abyss
 Tiamat, Eternity, Night
darkness was upon the deep

in the beginning
 womb-slit opening in the dark
 Fiat Lux of creation's spark
let there be light

in the beginning
 swallower of worlds
 Jaganmata, Dark Mother
Eve gives birth to this again

v. The Final Equation

The knife pierces the mango
At the base of the neck,
Sliding upwards at a shallow depth
To the temple.

Vessels constrict, the sweet juice
Pressing against the sensitive nerve endings
That cradle the heart of the fruit.
The knife goes deeper.

The taste of mango in the mouth,
In the back of the throat.
The cool juice
And nothing else.

Hunger

i.

Bodies sense each other: proximity
Growing, desire for response.

Relaying nerve messages: skin
Charging skin, electrical pulse.

Wanting to study, to sample: taste of
Fear salted-sour; forbidden bitter; unrepentant sweet.

ii.

But the mind wants something (safety) more
Than just satisfaction. Desire equals hunger

Divided by fear. Factor in reaction to this (kiss)
Possibility, plus-minus the risk of pain. Deduce

Pleasure. Then subtract post-fantasy drop
In self/other (rejection) estimation. Compute.

iii.

Remember when the crabs at the aquarium went missing?
Disappearing. They said the staff was stealing.

No evidence left behind. They set up cameras;
They saw. Arm by arm along the ceiling, pipe by pipe,

The octopus came. Tentacle twined to pull, then swing,
Then grasp. Repeat. Repeat. Did they say how far?

One-half a city block from tank to tank, I think. Then
Sinking down below the surface of the water.

It swam. It caught the crabs. Consumed them,
Whole. So determined are our bodies,

So determined are our empty
Shells. So how do we know when we

Are simply hunger in the belly—how do we know
When we are something more?

The Birth of Venus

"Zeus cut his father's limbs with flint and cast the sex into the surging sea...In it a maiden formed. Gods and men call her Aphrodite." —Hesiod

The water shudders, waves swelling
White-hot in immortal rhythm—
The pink lips of the inner
Shell, glistening sweet, open—

Until, at last, you crest upon the sea.

Gods and men claim you, naming you
The afterglow. The urge. The id.
Primal. Carnal. Animal.
Rising on the ridge of heat unleashed.

They mistake you for your signs.

Sheathed in the energy of desire,
Draping passion like a mantle
Cross your skin—when you shed
These shields, wash clean

In the ebb of your own blood-red sea—

You become more; you are *truly*
Born. Venus, taste of yourself,
Of your briny ocean
Mother. Aphrodite, become goddess

Of your own love.

Dream of Transformation

If begins as it always begins—fear
Sharp in her throat, spike
Of adrenaline, sudden
Awareness. A presence. An animal
Stench. Rank. A bitter taste

Burns her mouth: vinegar, acid,
Panic. She must run, she
Runs. Driven forward. It
Follows. Close. So near.
She feels hoof

Brush her heel. It steps
In her footsteps. Her feet
Impact on soil, muscle pull
Away, push away. Her heart
A piston, pumping, blood

In veins aflame. It closes.
Dank, wet. Matted
Fur. Breath, hot
On her neck. When It reaches
Her shoulder she—

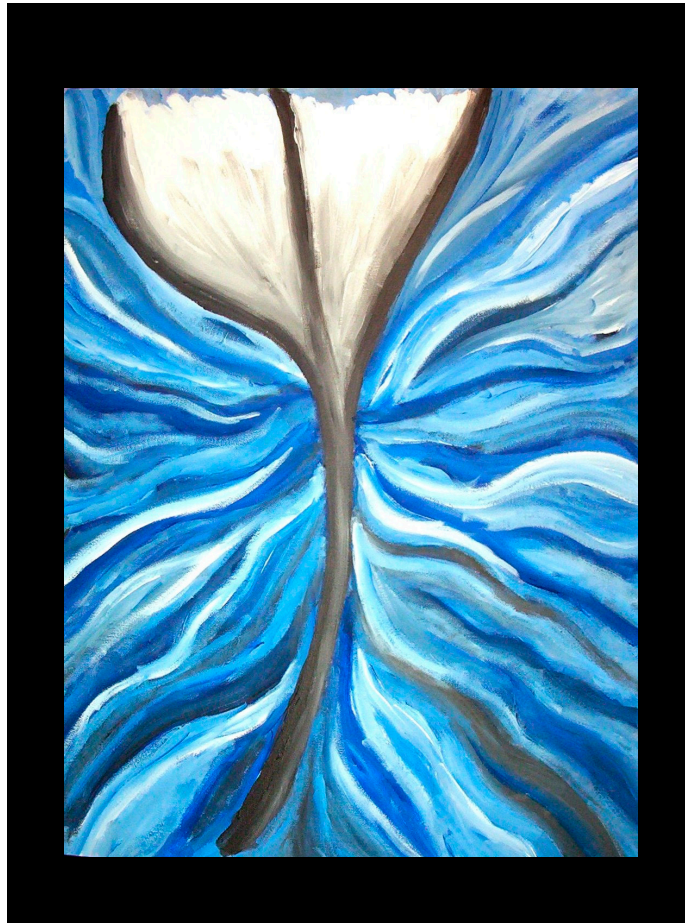
Does not wake. She does not
Wake. She is running. Inhale.
Muscles loosen, flex,
Become liquid. Exhale.
Breathe out fear.

She is running. The movement,
The motion. Legs rising,
Falling. She is running.
Fast, feverish, sure.
Her body fluid, melting.

She tosses her wild
Mane. She is running. Feet
Ripping the earth. She is running.
Teeth bared. She is running.
Heart beat a throb in her ears

She is running. Racing
Her own momentum. She is
Running. Legs and lungs pounding
Their rhythm. She is running.
Energy flowing. Letting

Go. Running.
Matter dispersing, dissolving.
Running. Hovering over her body. Then
Running. Flowing. Forward. Forever.
A beacon of breath-hot running light.



Ojos de Dios

"God's Eyes" were originally made by the indigenous people of South America and placed on an altar so that the gods could watch over those praying and protect them.

¿Puede verme? Can you see
My hands? They hold two fire-charred branches,
Two blunted swords, two bones drawn from the body of my past.

Venga, come to me.
My intention calls you to the center, bright diamond
Of intersection, bound, I fear, by nothing but belief

And luck. I wind the layers tight, cloth the colors
Of *sangre*, the grinding of stone,
And hope. The twist

Between *cada eje*, each axis, pulls me,
Causes the tension that holds us together,
Forges what we, together, become—

A turning spiral staircase,
Un corazón vivo, a heart alive in my chest,
An unwavering vision of god.

Tying the final knot, you are complete.
One bright, unblinking, gateway eye,
Un ojo that makes real my path to you.

Es tiempo. Time that I look on you, unflinchingly.
Time to set you upon an altar
Of rebirth. Time to learn

That there's no such thing as luck,
And that the connection, the leap
Of faith, the *Ojos de Dios* made

From this splintered *vida rota*—sees nothing but beauty.

Answer from the Moon

Another 28 days has turned
Its gears, one cycle in a spinning
Infinity of circles, from spiraling galaxies
Down to the moon of all life inside one egg.

I am watching the orbiting moon rise,
Walking down these circle paths
Toward her: heavy, low and full
In the sky. With my question

I walk her winding path, stones
Rubbed red, stones wet from the womb
Of the earth where they grew. With my question
I tread these deep reds, ocher and rust

And pomegranate, dark body reds. *Is it now?*
Or will it be blood? I pass trees
Laden with fruit, heavy
With sweet ripe reds and flowering scent.

I continue on and the moon grows,
Impossibly large, blindingly bright.
And I see in the white hot light
Of this sky-filling moon –

That the moon is swollen, so full
And ready that she swells the night sky,
She touches the ground.
And here, where the moon

Meets the earth, I conceive.

Six Views of the Ocean

with thanks to Wallace Stevens

i.
Evening blinded her eyes
With talons of dark.
Outside, the ocean called to her,
Speaking soothingly
Of its blackest, most secret, depths.

ii.
She drifted through her life,
Her body broken wood upon the ocean.
Once, her thirst was slaked
When she traded
Blood for water.

iii.
The ocean, where it meets our shores,
Is of three minds:
Destroy. Heal. Begin again.

iv.
It was midnight the whole year.
But at dawn
The ocean binding her fled
And the waters churned
A cleansing tempest from her eyes.

v.
Where the ocean falls from the map
Marks the edge—
One end, and one beginning.

vi.
In the aftermath of her storm
The only movement of her body
Was the soft rise and fall
Of the sleeping ocean's belly
As it breathed.

Red and Ready



How to Paint

Begin with the color of bone—jaw
Cracked in two, marrow and paint
Spread thick on canvas. Then feel

The bone's sharp need—desire
You can run your tongue over, cutting
Deep grooves of taste and blood into the muscle.

Dip your brush in that red, stroke
The white surface, encase it in a body—
Vision enclosed in the curve of an egg.

Only now are you prepared—hungry
Teeth primed to bite into the sweet pink shell
And mouth bloodied, red and ready,

To swallow its stone.



Red and Pink Rocks and Teeth —Georgia O'Keeffe

Ripe

The sky bears ripe new fruit tonight;
Tonight I eat it, pit and all.

White and crisp like apple, skinned
Like plum, and honey sweet like a mango-pear.

Bite by bite, tonight I eat the moon,
And bit by bit the sky goes dark.

* * *

The pit in my belly begins to grow;
In the deep of my body the seed takes hold.

New growth curls along my throat, open
Leaves like palms open my mouth with song.

Long vines, twisting thin from fingers
Tip around skin, wound and woven, weaving in air.

And the thick dark root curls down and down, spins
Legs and bends knees as it circles toes.

I swallowed this seed, and what I consumed
Consumes me whole, belly and all.

* * *

The moon is hungry for me every night
And every night I answer when she calls.

Strong am I and supple, skinned
Like plum, honey sweet like a mango-pear.

Tonight moon eats me, bite by bite
And bit and bit, my mind goes dark.

Creation Story

"in the beginning, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep." —Genesis

in the beginning
the mythic Madonna and child
were still one—inhabiting each other,
a Mobius strip, molecule to molecule

*emptiness mated to presence, life
to spilt blood, matter inherent in the dark*

until slowly they unzipped
the paired DNA of their selves
hovering over and around,
their boundaries still kissing

*unlocking the space between atoms,
between cells, between stars*

slowly they gathered momentum, force
from the furthest corners of being,
until particles spun with the energy
of *need* and *want* and *must have*

*heat of the neuron's pulse, shudders
and sparks, liquid stirring, splash of acid*

in the beginning
the universal essence quickened,
compressing desire within desire
within desire, until pure thought

let there be light

collided, shattered into fragments
and burned

Muse

"O for a muse of fire!" —Shakespeare

White-hot stellar angels—
Frenzied solar deities— wake you
From your cocoon bed as they
Go supernova. You are changing.

Chrysalis of fire. The knife
That marks in flesh the days, hours, minutes
Of your earthly confinement now tears
Through flame, the womb of your skin.

Scream light. Let it pour magma-fire
From your wounds, from the wide open O
Of your pupil—a mouth splitting
At the seams to let light through.

Devour light. Drink down molten earth
Like blood. Then, when the blaze
Shoots up your spinal cord, ignites nerves,
Burning flesh from the inside out—

When you feel heat sear from your fingertips,
The power to take hold, to explode—
When you are reborn, purified,
An archangel rising on wings of light—

Only then call me. Call me your mother,
Your lover, your twin. Matching flare
To fire, to flame. We will write
And set the world to blaze.



The Taste of My Language

A word enters my mouth
Unbidden, its throaty warmth
Lingering in my vocal chords:
Tongue.

Now I form the word silently,
Feeling the motion of it—
The opening jaw
The softness against the palate:

Tongue.
Suddenly aware of my own
Tongue, alive
And moving—tasting this creation

Of flesh and breath, the moist press
Of dark inner sweetness;
Suddenly aware of the textures
Intermingling, smooth

Muscle traveling the mouth's
Rough crests and curling
Delicately into smooth sound:
Tongue.

The full rich vibration carries
An urgency from my throat—
The need to press the willingness
Of this word into your ears; to open

Its sound like a door; to make you taste
Its creation as I taste it; to part
My lips and pass the message
From page to eye to mouth

Tongue to tongue.

Becoming Flesh

A Rorschach imprinted
Against the sandy skin of the beach

Betrays the press of weight
Down, the pressure
Of wanting carved open,

Etched into and onto the opening
Land. Shore spilled open by heat—
The sun's arms and hips and thighs and

A burning that pulled this open, pushed back
Into deep bright sand so hot

That beach and body melted and merged.
Indentation. Now cool
To the touch. Waiting

To be filled again. By a body
Returned. Like your own—
Reading the sand with your skin;

Dipping your head back
Into the mold; entering the flesh

Of the beach, the white sand and black
Blood of earth below—becoming
The flesh of the earth. Becoming its body.

Embarazo Doble

Investigating a second, separate, in utero kick
The ultrasound shows there are two in the womb—
Not twins, but a rare “double pregnancy.”

Embarazo doble, the doctor explains
As his fingers trip along la guitarra double time.
Mira: el huevo y el esperma vienen juntos...

Espera, wait! The birds and the bees aren't in question,
It's my uterus, my fertilidad magnífica. My fears
Multiply. How will I birth two children due

Two months apart? Have they agreed to take turns?
Señora, silencio, the doctor advises, *y escucha*
La música. So I hush my questioning mind,

Soothed by the double quick harmony of his guitar
Y el sonido de los corazones dobles—
The sound of the twin-beating hearts.

Dreaming of Water

In dreams forgotten languages
From childhood are remembered,

Words long unused rise to lips
That have longed to use them.

I must have spoken in this language, once:
Fluid, flowing against boundaries.

Here water finds me, floods my solid ground,
Engulfs me in a second, listening skin.

There is pressure against my form
Where the water speaks. Touching me

With words. Communication.
Drumming a message on my inner ear.

I hear it on the palms of my hands,
On the arc of my back where it holds me.

Language all around me. A sensation
Of safety, certainty, speech.

The water was its own invitation. And below—
All language, all light. Spilling together

Against the roof of the water's mouth,
My mouth, the edge where we met.

It didn't intend to swallow me;
It wanted to put its mouth

In my mouth, taste our names
Together, when we called.

Shell in the Desert

You are a riddle
In bone. Brittle vessel
Rolled along an ocean's
Open palm, porcelain-smoothed
By a millennium of wave.

Yet under my heel you would crush
As fine as any desert sand.

How you came to be here
Is no secret. But how you came
To be: web-work, delicate,
Soft tooth and half-moon nail
Of the violent sea. I seek what you know.

And you, most fragile of messengers, you
Answer with this: a question formed in crying.

Distant gull. Water's edge. Spiraled within,
A gray-white sky of shell, slate and clean
Where water's absence opens
You hollow. Cavern
Of your mourning. To know this calling out

I must leave behind the red textures
Of desert earth, remembrance;

Their stain like pollen on my fingers. To hear you
I must follow your maze, flowing
As the tides your low voice summons,
Waters once spoken within you. To understand
Your message, I must rise aloft

On the crest of your wave, a turning arc
That spins within form then out again.

Here, you show me what you are. Born
Of water, flesh to your bone. You will hold
Your mother's murmur in you
Always. Always calling.
And when she dies, dry upon the shores

You will no longer sound her name, but crumble
Shell to sand, to finest desert dust.



White Shell on Red—Georgia O'Keeffe

A Woman on Paper

Turning on stem of wrist,
Hand moves towards sun—luminous
White of canvas, nourishment
Of paper—where color blossoms,

Unfolds in the eye (the pupil's
Contraction towards light) into vision
Of visionary states that flower
Beyond imagination.

And what grows, what takes itself tangible
Into form, is in this reality
Intangible—the slippage of image
Known, the hybrid birth

Of memory through self, the still
Moving stillness of the mind's
Photography, which creates through
Recreation that which is more

Than true, more than object
Identified. The surface, the skin translucent
Pale petal backlit and sheer: the subject matter is
Not the matter at hand.

Buds open layer upon layer
Of meaning. Stamen and pistil, the reproduction
Is ideas. Word upon word, concept
Upon conception, the same form

Over and over until the body,
Translation of the senses
Ceases, goes past outward
Or inward, past existence into essence:

Rippled edges of red that deepen,
Alight on new shoots of yellow-
Orange, glow of growth
Tipping delicate into lavender

Its passion, its song. A throat
That vibrates the full burst, shaft
And flowering of its voice; and an ear
That blocks out all for the rustle and furl of

Leaves that question: *Do you feel
Like flowers sometimes?*



Red Canna—Georgia O'Keeffe

Motherhood, or Where Mythology Comes From

All week I felt it. The sensation
Of something about to break; of being
On the brink. I thought it was just
Chicken pox, the mumps, a case of poison ivy.

But the doctor finds the cause—
Opening me with her tongs, she cries out
Twins! and performs an emergency Caesarian.

She pulls two pencils from my womb
And I breathe a sigh of relief.
(At least they didn't spring
Full-born from my head.)

They are wrapped in swaddling clothes
And held by reverent nurses
Already creating myths.

And who is the father? I want to know.
Who impregnated me with this?
The doctor covers their wooden, new-born ears.
You are the creator. The mother

And father both. At this the nurses
Sigh, begin singing—
Holy holy and praise be.

About the Author:

Amy Wray Irish has an MFA in creative writing from the University of Notre Dame. Her work has been seen in *100 Words*, *Apocalypse*, *Ariel*, *The Bend* (formerly *Dánta*), *Neologisms*, the *Notre Dame Review*, *Poetry Motel*, *River King Poetry Supplement*, and *Wazee* (www.wazeejournal.org). She was featured poet in *Wazee's* Spring 2003 edition. Originally from the Chicago area, Amy now lives in Colorado with her husband, also a writer, and their son.

"I want to thank my mother for art; my father for music; my entire family for love and inspiration; my friends for helping me to keep at it; and my husband for time to write. A big thanks to Katherine West for her shared enthusiasm for poetry, art, music, and community. "

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