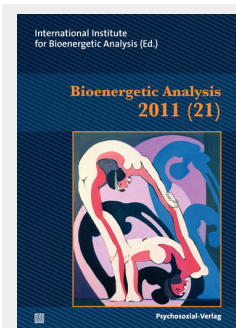


Linda Neal

Poems



Bioenergetic Analysis

11. Volume, No. 1, 2011, Page 107–113

Psychozoal-Verlag

DOI: 10.30820/0743-4804-2011-21-107



Bibliographic information of Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (The German Library)
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

2011 Psychosozial-Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Gießen, Germany
info@psychosozial-verlag.de
www.psychosozial-verlag.de



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Cover image: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: *Pair of Acrobats*, Sculpture , 1932–33, Oil on canvas, 85,5 x 72 cm

Cover design & layout based on drafts by Hanspeter Ludwig, Wetzlar

<https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2011-21>

ISBN (PDF-E-Book) 978-3-8379-6889-7

ISBN (Print) 978-3-8379-2107-6

ISSN (Online) 2747-8882 · ISSN (Print) 0743-4804

POEMS

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A THUNDER OF SWANS

Forget about masks. Forget about cracked eggs
on your mother's kitchen floor. Forget about fear.
Live in the wild elements, no matter how hostile they seem.

Be the woman who cries out in the open field
the man who carries his losses on his lips.
Be a crack of thunder. Re-member yourself.

Become both expert and novice,
speaking the eloquent language
of body, full as a summer-red grape
fleshing into the sky, because
you are riding this horse of your life
all the way to the end.

Forget about appearance and disappearance. Forget everything
you ever learned about being small
because the ride offers inevitable gifts. Fighting against the end,
even against the earth's melting at its poles,
is a grand waste of time. So flow toward unknown dimensions
toward an immense energy field of loss and abundance

Where there are no questions and no answers
only weeping and laughter, laughter and weeping
the sole anodynes in the end. So fly
like a thunder of swans. Shake and shimmer
in the excruciating joy
of your exquisitely bearable, temporary life.

CLOUD LIFE

I am here
on a temporary assignment
that I keep trying
to make permanent
while clouds

float
in a blue sky
changing their shape
forming
and reforming.
I never expected
to be like a cloud
myself

skinny
then full
then
gone

MARY OLIVER

She walks with a stick
not for support, but to point
toward the poems
that live in trees and dunes
along the Cape Cod Shore.

She wends her way
down the post office steps
and along the narrow streets
of Provincetown
weaving magic with her pen.

While Summer visits
other lands
of palms and geckos
where painters paint
and the rain is soft.

This new pied piper
of the faded jeans
and Patagonia pullover
can lead you and your child
straight to the center
of Spring.

A soft breeze and a strong wind
she's pointing her wand
at Winter's dappled light
the grey sky
and the mythological bear
that lives in the woods nearby.

MOTHER TO A MAN

As he curls into the couch
lounging, listening
to loud music
I don't understand
he becomes a lump
deep inside of me
stone cold
because
I am incapable
of knowing him, I mean
understanding
 the young hairs on his chest
 or the brown of his eyes
 that hang over him
 like a trench coat.

I wonder if he senses
my desire to get close
rub him with rose petals and talcum
wash orange-scented shampoo into his hair
like I used to
when he dodges past me
naked on his way to the shower

The distance between us mounts
even as he stands
in my kitchen
or goes far away, gazing at coals
in the fireplace
even further in his bedroom
sleeping
 between flannel sheets
 dreaming of the hands
 of another woman
 future mother of his son.

TOWARD WATER

On this cold November morning
I sit at the window, with my hot coffee
looking out at the nearby pine,
its branches spread out against the sky
its cones hanging on by the hundreds.
One thuds to the damp morning ground.
A squirrel cracks another in her jaw
but our destinies do not intertwine
even though when I was eight I shinnied
up bark in old jeans. The season didn't matter.

Truth about myself or time
came down to
the classroom of my childhood
where a Mason jar stood on an oak table
in the corner
and inside an embryo
floated
delivered into water
dead

and the contraction
in the pit of my stomach
when my mother walked into a room
then my expansion in rain
sloshing through puddles
alongside bones and coins
in my red rubber boots.

Trees and water
were my hedges against
my parents' dark weather
the muddy confluence of family strife,
so at night in the dark

the merging of the one with the many
the small with the large.
Some nights I became so small
I could hide inside a drop of water
and becoming water
be the whole ocean,
be everywhere at once
see my grandmother's grandmother
washing her black hair in a lake
and myself, safe and small
inside my mother,
before I entered the plains
of daughterhood and danger.

Safe in salty water,
alone and becoming, unseen unborn,
I could thrum a string
for the one who was to learn
no safety, not even, especially not
in the net of family.
Fished out of my warm and private sea
thrown up on dry land
I have looked for water
wherever I go, and exposed
to darker energies of close kin
I trek down
to damp sand, swim in the sea
search for wet valleys
sit at the mouths of caves
and the edges of waterfalls
exploring the flooded wilderness
of my life
absorbing the pulse of water
to learn life not as a maze but a labyrinth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Linda Neal has been a marriage, family therapist for twenty-five years. She lives, works, writes, gardens, walks on the beach, leads support groups at the Cancer Support Community and teaches meditation in Redondo Beach, CA. She completed the bioenergetic training program in 2004.

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