

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

Killing Agamemnon

What else could a grieving mother do?
The deed he did enough to drive her mad.
Their sweet girl murdered so he and his crew
could sail off, kill more, come home glad
victors of an awful war. She had no say,
no power to stop him in his dumb desire
to please the unappeasable gods, no way
to save her own child's life.

They set fire
to Troy, headed back, thought their work done,
led by a foolish king who had no clue
of the dreadful cycle he'd begun
of blood for blood for blood. You'd
think he'd know, a man of violent passion,
that he'd be murdered in the same fashion.



My Mother's Music

The stereo was never silent night-
or daytime hours. Big & bright
chrome knobs, walnut cabinet,
its twin speakers pulsed and hummed
with life, played a couple hundred
songs a day while she worked,
cooked our dinner, stood and scrubbed
the stove, waltzed her way up
and down the cellar steps, basket
in hand, stopping only to smoke
a half cigarette, sip her coffee,
sing along with Hank or Johnny,
Dean or Al or Frank or Connie,
some sad song, love lost & found
over & over in our small house,
the tape played and then rewound,
the needle on the record gently set
and then reset. The Lady's blues
her anthem, Shirley Bassey's longing
big enough to make us all ache,
for what we didn't know yet,
but she did, somehow belonging
to a world more real than our fake
suburban streets of strangers.
Their songs sang her quiet anger,
a litany of all her wrongs,
the disappointment that she knew
but never named or spoke.
Having none of her own, she made do
with their words, tried & true
and felt along the muscle of her tongue.
Each day she played the same old songs.
I still know every one.



Handwriting Lesson

February, the hard month to write
when we learned cursive in the 3rd grade,
b the branching bridge between *r* and *e*,
took time and patience to get just right,
the two-pronged *r*'s, the swinging *F*,
it took swank and swagger, the surety
of adult hands, despite my pudgy
pencil with its thick load of lead.

Why did it have to be so tough
to get through, this month of cold and snow,
iron gray skies, my mother's death?
Even so young, how did I know
I would grieve for the rest of my days
as I traced its letters across the page?



The Married Body

belongs to someone else besides yourself.
My husband, we say. *My wife*.
Lies beside a second body that you own,
a posture that you'll keep all your life.
Traveling through time with two bodies
more demanding than living with just one.
Two bellies, two livers, two spleens, two hearts,
all of these need your attention
if you're to keep your second self alive
not to mention your first. It takes stealth
and sleight of hand. It's a fine art.
Survival become your daily hobby.
A circumstance you chose and didn't choose.
A game of chance you know you're going to lose.

