

Mother/Land

Abenaki poet, CHERYL SAVAGEAU has been awarded Fellowships in Poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Massachusetts Artists Foundation, and three residencies at the MacDowell Colony. Her second book of poetry, *Dirt Road Home*, was a finalist for the Paterson Poetry Prize. She was awarded Mentor of the Year by Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers, as well as Writer of the Year for her children's book, *Muskrat Will Be Swimming*. Savageau also works as a textile artist. Her quilts have recently been exhibited at the University of New Hampshire in Durham.

Mother/Land

CHERYL SAVAGEAU



CAMBRIDGE

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To Bill

it's good where we've been and where we're going

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Mother/Land

The First Diamond

this
is the place
where time
slows down, where
light is collected and flashes
in all the colors of love it is
the eternal place where she meets him
in the heat of desire and the pressure
of clasped bodies here they turn
the opaque dark
into radiant
seed

Amber Necklace

inspired by ants
I tasted the sap
that oozed in great drops
from the bark of the pine
it tasted like its needles smelled
like winter like mountains or early morning
too strong for more than just a taste too sticky
to roll into the ball I wanted to carry in my hands like
a golden marble. I worried for the tree
was it hurt? I asked *no just leaking* my father told me
it's made so much extra food
he told me how even in deepest winter
you will not starve in a pine grove
how there is always food within
how the sweet globules turned over millions of years
hard as stone how the insects were caught inside
preserved forever
it is not the insects I want but the sweetness they signify
I am caught in the sweet amber
of my mother's hair
nourished
by the light and dark of her
yes and the sticky
the too hard to manage
the I can't get it
off my hands
I want it now
those moments
of petrified love
where we first find ourselves
caught
before we know
what will preserve us

Turtle

this little emerald is dark and shy
does not proclaim itself
with bright lights but swims through
far away stars twinkling near dawn
you may not see it at first think
only darkness but its heart is green

The Moon's Other Face

these are the shadow
footsteps the mysterious
path where flowers grow
in shades of lavender
and lilac deep rose and
indigo their edges limned
in ghostlight this
is the place of secrets the place
women go where men
can't follow the soft
darkness the safe
night

these luminous leaves
come from the moon's garden
I know she has walked there
more than once, her skin
pale her face round
and radiant
in the morning
she dipped the edges
in sunlight watched the ribs
fill with gold
when she
wears them now
they flutter in moonlight
no one can take
their eyes
from her face

First Woman

It is because
she feels like this

sun on morning dew
a drop of water on her heel

white butter
gritty

against the teeth
like corn in august

roasted in sea salt
and sand

Opals

how I loved this ring
the pink fire in the blue
this ring my mother chose
in celebration of her first pregnancy
from a box presented to her at dinner
by my father's boss

choose whatever you want
he said, and she chose
my father's birthstone
the stone that shone like
fire in a blue sky

five round opals, the largest in the center
set in a row in gold, the setting like lips, like
an open mouth, like a woman giving
birth to the child, and the dreams

Game Bag

... for Joe Bruchac

Grandmother Woodchuck

This grandson of mine always has a better idea. Why not capture all the animals in one huge bag, he thinks to himself. Why not tie up the eagle who creates the wind? And no sooner does he think it, than he does it. Still, that is the way he learns. Someday he will grow up. People will speak well of him. Doesn't he always listen to his grandmother in the end?

Gifts

Grandmother Woodchuck pulls the hair from her belly, from the tender place. Each pull stings. But she will do this for the grandson who will bring tobacco back for her in her old age. She weaves the hair into a game bag, one that will stretch big enough to hold all the animals in the world. It is a woman's strength that will hold them, and a woman's strength that will set them free.

Inside

We are a million eyes open in the dark. We are chipmunk and mole, rabbit and squirrel. We are musk and fur and claw and feathers. We are fox, raccoon, mink, and fisher. We are chickadees, blue jays, owls, and turkeys. We are hooves and hide, deer and elk, moose and caribou. Lynx and bear, cougar and wolf. We are all listening in the dark for the sound of the world ending.

The Conversation

— Why are you always doing things like this?

— It seemed like a good idea at the time.

The World Is Restored

When he finally let us out, I thought there'd be nothing left. But here it is, just as before, only more beautiful. Trees, air, water, and the sound of all of us breathing in the dark woods.

Ant Tree

This is the tree that's inhabited. I like all the little doorways, the tunneled world they live in. I travel with them into the dark heart of the tree, through the living wood, tasting the smells, hearing all the tiny feet walking steadily in. When I put a stalk of grass into the hole, ants climb out on the bridge and onto my hand. I put the stalk of grass next to them, along the side of my arm, and they obligingly climb back off. I slip the grass back into a hole in the tree so they can find their way home. Inside somewhere, I know there is a queen, fat with eggs, who smells so good these ants will not go far. I know that feeling, the good smell of my mother, my Memere, the kitchen smells of home.

Emerald

here is the woman of the woods
the green woman
who makes things grow
she is not as easy as you think
she has her rules
break them at your peril
make her angry
and she will make a world
more barren than ice
let her be and she will
cover you with green