

## Imagination Verses

JENNIFER MOXLEY was born in 1964 and grew up in San Diego, California. As an adult she has lived in Seattle, San Francisco, Providence and Paris. From 1992–1995 she edited *The Impercipient*, a stapled & photocopied magazine dedicated to publishing the work of her contemporaries. Following this venture she co-edited, with her long-time partner Steve Evans, *The Impercipient Lecture Series*, a monthly poetics pamphlet. She has also served as the poetry editor for *The Baffler* magazine since 1997. In addition to her US, Canadian, and British publications, her poetry has been translated into Norwegian, Czech, Swedish and French. Presently she lives in Orono, Maine where she works as an Assistant Professor at the University of Maine.

also by Jennifer Moxley

**Books**

*The Sense Record* (Edge Books)

*Évidence des Lumières* (Créaphis)

**Other publications**

*The First Division of Labour* (Rosetta Chapbook)

*Wrong Life* (Equipage Chapbooks)

*Enlightenment Evidence* (Rem • Press)

**Works of translation**

*The Translation Begins* by Jacqueline Risset (Burning Deck)

# Imagination Verses

JENNIFER MOXLEY



PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING  
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham PDO, Cambridge CB1 5JX United Kingdom  
PO Box 202, Applecross, Western Australia 6153

All rights reserved

© Jennifer Moxley, 2003

The right of Jennifer Moxley to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Salt Publishing.

First published 2003

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Lightning Source

Typeset in Swift 9.5 / 13

*This book is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.*

ISBN 1 876857 93 5 paperback

SP

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

*To my Contemporaries*



## Contents

<i>Preface</i>	xi
Home World	3
From a Distance I Can See	5
I am Depressed without Your Pencil too	6
Night Train to Domestic Living Arrangements	7
Not on My Seashore	8
Ode on the End	10
Bi-coastal Fleshings	13
Fin de Siècle Go-betweens	14
The Wingèd Words	15
Ode on the Son	19
Ten Still Petals	21
Underlying Assumptions	31
After First Figure	33
Studio Life	36
Club Life	37
Helena & the Regional Boys	38
Into the Bedroom	39
The Removal of Enlightenment Safeguards	40
During this Revolution	45
Ode to Protest	47
The Ballad of Her rePossession	49
Firstly	49
Secondly	50
Thirdly	52
Fourthly	54
Finally	55

Ode to the Man in the Mire of Babylon	57
When in Rome	60
Cell #103	61
The Right to Counsel	62
The Right to Remain Silent	63
Life Policy	64
The Nuptial Life	65
Kalypso Facto	66
Muse Couplings	67
Neither Fish nor Foul	69
Dear J	71
Cast of Shadows	72
Duet #1    Wordsworth	73
Duet #2    Keats	74
The Bad Choices Spy on Us Girls	75
Wake	78
The Waver in the Orbit of Uranus Becomes Unexplainable	80
Ode on the Particle	81
Three Graces	84
Anthony	84
Paul	84
Steve	85
<i>Today my mind became an elegy . . .</i>	86
Lucky So and So	87
Though Crowded	90
Once Over	91
Line of Descent	93
Ode to Grief	95
Ten Prolegomena to Heartbreak	97
Wreath of a Similar Year	101

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the editors of the magazines in which some poems in this collection first appeared:

*Arras*, Brian Kim Stefans

*The Baffler*, Damon Krukowski

*Black Bread*, Sianne Ngai & Jessica Lowenthal

*Chain*, Juliana Spahr & Jena Osman

*Dark Ages Clasp the Daisy Root*, Ben Freidlander

*Exact Change Yearbook #1*, Peter Gizzi

*Letterbox*, Scott Bentley

*Lingo*, Michael Gizzi

*Mirage#4/Period(ical)*, Kevin Killian & Dodie Bellamy

*Object*, Rob Fitterman

*o.blek*, Peter Gizzi & Connell McGrath

*Phoebe*, Jean Donnelly

*13th Moon*, Katie Yates

*Troubled Surfer*, Lisa Jarnot

*The World*, Lewis Warsh

“The Ballad of Her rePossession” was published as a section of *re:Chapbook #1*, reference: press 1995, edited by Beth Anderson.

“Helena & the Regional Boys” was a Tender Broadside, *Tender Buttons* 1993.



## Preface

OUR STATES, whether social or organic, are composed of effects both chosen (verses) and not (Imagination). When we hope for a future different from the present we uncover the injustice of our imagination. We find the scales of value during the slow climb towards maturity and knowledge, as we journey towards the completion of what Valéry called our “whole training in the *possible*.” The “possible” is by its very nature unequal. Though we may dream the dream of equality, we dream it on a scale much larger than ourselves. If we try to make a poem of this dream, it will be smaller than its origins. Being time-based beings, we cannot escape compromise, concealing history with each new life, born to begin the accumulation of knowledge from zero to one and so forth. Poetry is the frustration of such limits. As an art form, it is a bridge of half measures on the way to the possible, drawn from the viewpoint, time frame and landscape of a single life. The poem is unjust in its largesse, an axis point through which the creator and the community of a shared language pass. The poem offers a history of and a future for the mind’s prerogative to exist as more than a memory of its milieu. It is a small but necessary intervention, a crucial and critical disjuncture.

For all the violence sprung from the official versus the unofficial book, where literature is found has less to do with its force than who we are when we find it. Are we ready to receive it? Many have come to literature from strange paths and pieced it together to their own liking, ignoring all the established orders. Poetry is not for the passive. It is, as Mayakovsky knew, at its very root tendentious. Even the love poem agitates the beloved to fall in love with the poet.

These *Imagination Verses* were written over a five year period (1990–1995) while I lived in Providence. They were not written as a

book nor as a series but randomly in fits and starts, and are comprised of a variety of different free verse forms. They were written out of a desire to engage the universal lyric “I,” as well as the poetic line, with all of its specific formal artifice.

J.M.

## Imagination Verses

What blame to us if the heart live on.

—HART CRANE



## Home World

I will say what the register calls forth,  
the range of the heart  
a journey in the strap of speech,  
unrealized, failing to grapple  
with even the first word,  
or world where I saw humans  
in the shadows of buildings  
unable to speak at all.

Their dark needs  
had grown a weedy tent  
over the earth, laid bare.

They could not see  
the river for the bank  
yet still kept talking  
about the bridge.

I lived there too,  
saw innocence  
among the old  
grown willowy.

My illusion could not deflect the float  
or the filth upon it,  
and all that foliage  
what could it have meant

in the light of adornment?

When I remembered nature  
as an evil dream

that interrupted my house  
and destroyed my family,  
leaving me to covet.

I dreamt my sense could wend the fight away  
and carnage was my hollow nourishment.

I could have grown tall,  
but I awoke to no words and wonder left.

## From a Distance I Can See

You have a lovely and familiar gravity,  
and like in the apartment of my youthful reveries  
each time I walk into you my city-bound Greyhound  
rolls through the rain drenched streets,  
a lightscape full of traffic and wondrous people  
lies ahead, once you've caught view they shall demand  
the tapering of all your beautiful fingers,  
they shall tell your eyes to stop shooting such glances  
for they are blocking your lips from seeming  
red as they are, and what of gentle memory,  
it frames your face and returns home devastated  
to inform me of such boundaries shifting  
that in them, as in you, my dreams shall rest just dreams,  
the rain drenched city of adulthood, vanish in advances.

## I am Depressed without Your Pencil too

This house is one big search for meaning  
or a clean dish, but without my dreamed for  
vanity who can expect attention to order  
or for that matter eternal beauty. This  
house is a small space of rearrangements,  
a paint box for important revolutions.  
All orphaned overstuffs are welcomed here  
as are rickety woods. And on that note  
broken things may stay as long as they please,  
whether or not they maintain their origins.  
This house has given us objects to search for  
with the comfort that they do exist,  
though perhaps just as mementos  
of the places that we've left. You're busy  
searching for your special pencil  
that was last seen around the kitchen table,  
and if people would just quit calling  
I too could help you look, last seen I think  
about the bed when all our friends were out of town.

## Night Train to Domestic Living Arrangements

In my own mind you have put me  
beside compunction. Re-worked  
this mourning room where looking  
smacks of mother may I  
though to this day I'll falter  
when sleep holds sway.  
Throw me over your deep end  
with some faith next time,  
as if to lend some bother to the vex.  
I've always wanted to be grown up  
like a bureaucrat, a berth-rider  
ordering night caps over the Rockies.  
But you keep insisting on day planners,  
bodies flat out. Which means,  
for example, a random plea.  
Do some dishes and get back to me.  
I'm waiting at the ripping point  
breast in hand, a broken spine  
like any sign of care.

## Not on My Seashore

You drew me under yards  
of bad luck and backward lives,  
you bucked up yarns  
of past beguilers  
who tended to shift away  
from scripted misery.  
Your islands of personality  
give no good guidance  
when desire breaks up  
beauty's trance to leave me  
an Emptery waiting for visitors.  
It was not I who was enamored  
of the sky's insipid blue,  
the tilt of fisted history  
roped and kinky with the tide.  
You drew me like a family,  
some false hope factory  
from which to call in the new day!  
Cut it out and give me that rope,  
I will gladly beat my scared Crusoe  
with the possibility of life