

Mary's Eyes, a new voice in the radical language experiments Gail Sher has been exploring since 1981, joins the ancient passion of devotion to the cutting-edge linguistic so characteristic of her work.

In addition to her poetry, Gail Sher is the author of *One Continuous Mistake: Four Noble Truths for Writers* (Penguin), the first of a widely-praised series of books on the craft of writing, informed, as is all her work, by the practice of Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism and Yoga. Her poetry is archived in the Poetry Collection of the University at Buffalo, library.buffalo.edu/collections/gail-sher. For more information and to read her poetry online, go to gailsher.com.

Gail Sher **MARY'S EYES**



Mary's Eyes

Also by Gail Sher

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though actually it is the same earth

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old dri's lament

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redwind daylong daylong

Once There Was Grass

RAGA

Look at That Dog All Dressed Out in Plum Blossoms

The Moon of The Swaying Buds

Marginalia

la

KUKLOS

Cops

Broke Aide

Rouge to Beak Having Me

(As) on things which (headpiece) touches the Moslem

From another point of view the woman seems to be resting

Mary's Eyes

Gail Sher



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For Brendan

CONTENTS

Mary's Eyes 1

Sing 13

Mary's Eyes

cold and snow. the sound of snow falling. the young
novice's eyes
it's (the) forgiveness that she notices
(an old noticing) she feels

thinks about Christ. will she marry him. she has already
married him (she feels)
asks if she is sure

[bells sound in the background]

figures appear. the clink of plates, spoons,
hush of nuns eating
the *rule* of the meal (omitting) the meal
the weight of the prioress's eyes

readings turn to time (the word *Mary* repeated)
verse empty of her suddenly

a tall girl and her girl (their “astrology” of brotherhood)
the eyes of one watching from a second-floor window
what the watching girl is thinking versus the couple—
walking, carrying books, talking
loneliness and time. more loneliness and time

“crippled time” she muses opening the sash for a better
view
as if time and her ribs—as if time *stopped* her ribs
“see” she presses placing a hand on one

a girl within the girl arrives behind the color orange
“break it” she is yelling, throwing food at birds
(she is always throwing food at birds)

“grandpa fed the birds” she explains
she says “the” as if the birds were *his* or always the same
(or something)
“the” (the article) making the thing “definite”
pinning it down like a thumbtack

orange and birds all curly like his hair
mishmash of thoughts underneath
grandpa's car, intelligence, newspapers, noise
the grinding of sound inside his head

[inside *her* the smear of his aloneness or what must have
been his aloneness]

maybe he felt the birds would understand—*if* they would
die or if *HE* would die
“my feelings belong to sky
they go up and are swallowed by sky” he would rail
(being a person inside out or that his gravitational pull was
wrong)

as if words were too tight for his body
or that he'd *say*, but instead of words there'd be sadness
“the infant Jesus screams
can't you hear him screaming” he'd cry
(actually I think I did hear)

lines & squares, the enchantment of their honesty
the certitude of straight untarnished by thought
carves one on her thigh like a symbol of something
important
then forgets the thing that was important

the *mark* (tattoo) is blue
stands for Christ's feet that eventually turned that color
the turning of one color into a second color
the *brown* of his feet *still* in Mary's eyes

the transmutation of space infected by what happens in it
or the imbuing of a form with the *means* of a previous
form
touches a line forcing it to speak
to *say* what she forgets (because she really *can't*
remember)

the violence of *gone* (actually *gone* is impossible)
what is its shape before it becomes its line
or if the line is an amulet holding (probably-irrational)
reverence
beauty *this* thorough

the image of his feet nailed to the sun
its ball of red rising

[here the landscape becomes an action that moves
aggressively toward her]

cups her ears so that it's paused

thinks of the letter F then E E and T
summoning them to her so that she is not alone
“with a letter I can *be* WHEREVER I want
when I hold one in my mind I forget everything else”

[the alchemy of WHERE versus the unawareness of a leg
(for example)
as if the leg were a mermaid's rubbery tail (i.e.) a memory
from the past trying to be from some other past]

“maybe words are stars *secretly*” (she is thinking)
turning one around (handling) it carefully
because lightly let go a word suffers
“words glitter and shine all by themselves in the middle
of the night (seemingly)
like a winter star all by itself (hanging by itself) seemingly”

INTERLUDE

alone in an open room
water and wind (their) hardness in time
wearing out time replaced she feels with time
the freshness of wet blows around her lightly

[her sense of the sea (awareness) of time (her presence in
the room) co-adjacent with time]

her dog too on the rug below
one eye opening then closing (seemingly) content
the sand covering its body and what the sand *says* about its
life
the dog's ear and what the dog is noticing (waiting) for
something to end

sees the waves of the sea melt into sea
its song vanishing to nothing
the rhythm of the vanishing repetitive (prayerful)
the earth (too) which the sea hears

listens to sea (the sound of the sea breathing) the
implacability of *sea* time
its power and its blueness circling her like a tiger
the tiger's immaculate stealth

blue late-April sky, sound of waves lashing
the girl's jaw remembering something ungraspable
the sea itself ungraspable

thin (soft) time which she dreads
the *coming* of harm, ripening and then, moonlit
coming to know (*coming* being its own naked color)

“soon” she thinks but it's vague
the upshot of vague like a portion of a color

notices sky, a shadow of a tree, the mind of the tree
transferred to a form
what the form may imply and whether or not she
generalizes its significance
reads the clothes for clues

sees Jesus in his robes rising a little (bowing) toward her
(slightly)
sees herself seeing the vivid reality of his form
the body of Christ (touching) it with sight
(its) aperture and tone with regard to so much happening

the event—Jesus rising—and then again rising—
“toward her” *had been there* the first time (she is realizing)
as if his life took place
(in her mind a lion yawns)

[but it’s clapping. someone is bowing to an act seemingly
ended
the impossibility of blue (since it stands for itself) ending]

authority of blue (standing for itself) attentive (to) what we
call color
which may have taken place previous to time or even in
some other time
“what is my color before there was color”
ransacks blue as if it were light instead

she is what one is inside of
drawn to what is known
also sense of fallowness
even her hair as if once it was some other color

such that it's cheap
the slut factor of hips
seeing the *calling* flammulated then, covered with feathers
her name flying away

away = coherence (as in food afterwards)
the aura of a plate lingering there
but in her mind it's the girl's blue-feathered shoulders
"an owl at night, me the shrew"
her shrew has no snout however

Sing

a cow hangs toward the end of sky
its green moo dead
(a social cow) the archer thinks
splotches of blood recede into sky

his bow too recedes
holds *feelings* of cow
cordons off sky so that cow can rest

“wipe the blood off” someone says

the cutting of time as if time *comes* in the slow tones of a
woman

the subterfuge of *having* it
leans into seriousness (as if) time is a joke then “getting”
the joke
“what about eggs” someone says, pretending time is a
koan

“mind may eat without time
mind may eat with neither food nor time”
(as if food were time told by the throat making her have
some)

pleading YES as a motion
citing this or that as others pass unnoticeable in her mind's
eye
intends again, to eat (again)

[a fool eats in slow-motion footage, reel continuous
maybe something crawls out of tight dark space]

the *bag* of her (she feels) socks in a silly pile
burglars appear. what should she do
is someone there. *am I there*

police fence her yard barring her off, warning her
probably. hoarding occurs probably

+ images of climbing—there'd be rain—without
footholds, without grab-able bars

reflected in (slight) convexity of ovary area
(eating) off the knife, laughter off the knife
the pregnancy of knives, cans wrapped in paper or things
wrapped in whitish paper

a bluebird's song and then the sky afterwards
propelled through time as if they were together
blocked by shade, the shade carrying light anyway
(its *bullying* white getting in anyway)

its white versus ordinary white
white releasing white such that the white of white is freed
(white separate from "white") releasing significance non-
verbally
white without releasing significance

[having freed a color (separate from freeing)
refers to *alaya* of existing
like the black part of white such that snow exists for
black also]

scabs of snow on tree tip also
the way it bunches on a branch, a bird in the branch
if it moans (in the extreme heart of a woman)

“the sound of snow could be air weeping”
as if music were there but then it is over
“over” as an idea

turns into sky, the gray of mouths opening
sings sky forward into treetops
the *method* of sky, voice, snow in choral time

no sound but sky
the liturgy of sky (and before sky)
mimes the One in a row
silent canticles in a row

iii

moments of snow devolve into blue
asleep to itself as if its brain were blue also
slow (into the basket)
slow into her (as if) trees are following her

but the trees are narrowing *up* to her
she will be a bird (she is saying)
an *ultra* bird thought by one in pain

one bird walks from shadow into shade tipping the balance
slightly
one bird versus no bird or if the bird *doesn't sing* or fails to
sing
creates an absence of the bird

loops of birds fight
wears necklace of birds-in-a-row fighting
wears necklace of birds-in-a-row dead

an abstract bird clears in her mind
[GEORGIE but her voice is slack]
solemnly (solemnly) ice + the vague marrow of its bones

“*was* there time”
like a swan (leaves) its name in the air
feathers & bones mute

“lay dead, lay dead”
snips time touching its feathers
“poor Georgie” said (a bit bleak)
sings in wind (adds it to the bird)

[fades to black winter lake, swan (in it) swimming
the midriff of the lake (its) hollowness in space]

“look a crane” someone says taking out binoculars
she turns to see the crane but SHE is the crane
the hood of her head covered with snow

offers condolences to her but SHE is the one offering
condolences

“cranes are always offering condolences”
dancing in snow with their tracheas screeching
bony rings rattling

the emblem of her throat arched high in the full moon
escutcheon of moon with medallion of her throat
sings to moon which she feels is SO watching
(hopes to *hear* the moon)

the sound of a thumb presses back softly, the silence of a
thumb in the pit of her stomach
the sound moves to her throat
its thumb speaks in her throat like a second throat

aware of a thumb as a mouthpiece of pressure
sees with her mind it being in a grave
the lowering of the thumb (loaning color to earth)
frill of snow covering it up

[a drawing of the thumb:
graphite on paper 1963 is written near the bottom
the writing is cracked though]

Mary's Eyes

is set in Minion, a typeface designed by Robert Slimbach in the spirit of the humanist typefaces of fifteenth-century Venice. Minion was originally issued in digital form by Adobe Systems in 1989. In 1991, Slimbach received the Charles Peignot Award from the *Association Typographique Internationale* for excellence in type design.