

The Great Physician

Medicinal Poetry for the Anthropocene

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Stephanie Mines, PhD



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Book and cover design by Richard Stodart

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Kindred World
P.O. Box 3653
Williamsburg, Virginia 23187

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www.kindredworld.org

ISBN: 978-1-7366517-1-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023941649

Printed in the USA

To the children of the future.

The art of medicine has its roots in the heart.

— PARACELSUS



We have to melt the ice in the heart of humanity.

— UNCLE ANGAANGAQ ANGAKKORSUAQ



How to Write a Poem in a Time of War

*Someone has to make it out alive, sang a grandfather to his grandson,
His granddaughter, as he blew his most powerful song into the hearts of the children,
There it would be hidden from the soldiers,
Who would take them miles, rivers, mountains from the navel cord place
Of their origin story.
He knew one day, far day, the grandchildren would return, generations later
Over slick highways constructed over old trails,
Through walls of laws meant to hamper or destroy, over the libraries of
The ancestors in the winds, born in stones.
His song brings us to his home place in these smoky hills.
Begin here.*

— JOY HARJO

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Introduction

The invitation I received from Lisa Reagan at Kindred World Publishing House to assemble a collection of my poems as a chronicle of these times stopped me in my tracks. It led me to an internal retrospective of my life in which I saw that I was born to be a poet as well as a healing artist. Though I had inhabited the world of the writer fully, whole-heartedly, and with great passion when I lived in San Francisco during the 1970's and 1980's, I nevertheless was drawn out of it. Forces I would never have predicted magnetized me into the realms of healing and healthcare and then to climate activism. These pulls seemed to be products of the times that I surely chose to inhabit. Or did they choose me? It is difficult to discern.

Making art is liberating, and, in the liberation, there is always joy. Yet, my poems are drenched with grief. There is no escaping it. Grief is everywhere, and increasingly so, as we seem bent on self-destruction, annihilating species, and violence against children.

I should be accustomed to it. My life has been marked by irrevocable losses. This is underscored by the crushing impact of the Anthropocene. The loss that is the most brutal, the most devastating, is the loss of our children's future. I am speaking of the children of the world, born and unborn, as well as my own children and grandchildren.

I speak as a woman who lost her childhood to abuse and violence. I am someone who experienced the absence of an anchoring, stable adult to mitigate the horror around her. Aside from the occasional presence of my grandfather, who died before I reached adolescence, I was abandoned by the adults in my world. My father returned from war forever broken, and my mother could not withstand nor offset his attacks. I cannot separate the abuse of the earth from the abuse and violence inflicted on me and increasingly on children and youth

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today. My own formative experiences of not being accompanied, not being honored and respected, not being seen or heard, feels like it bonds me to our living earth.

By failing to protect, regenerate, treasure, and honor the natural world as our most precious gift and sanctuary, we have abandoned our children.

What is a poet to do in the face of this aberration? In the aching of my grief, I offer these articulations as a form of action from my heart. As someone who trained to be a therapist, I know that healing often happens through mirroring. If these poems are mirrors for your felt experience and are therefore healing, I will have fulfilled one aspect of my destiny.

Stephanie Mines, PhD

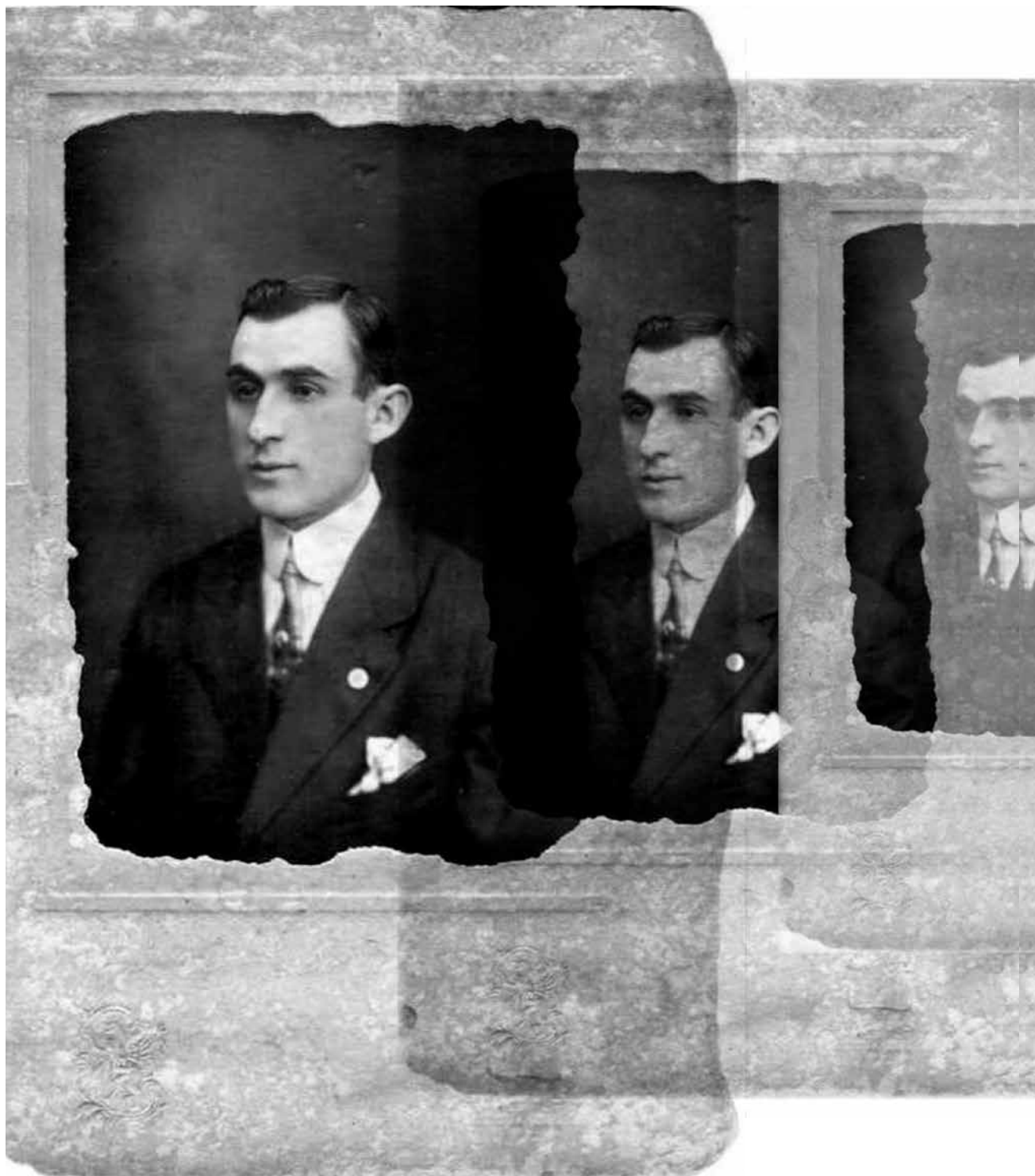
The Anthropocene

The word Anthropocene combines the root “anthropo,” meaning “human,” with the root “-cene,” which is the standard suffix for “epoch.”

The Anthropocene defines Earth’s most recent geologic time period as being human influenced or anthropogenic. This is based on overwhelming global evidence that atmospheric, geologic, hydrologic, biospheric and other earth system processes are now being altered by humans.

The Anthropocene is distinguished as a new period either after or within the Holocene, the current epoch, which began approximately 10,000 years ago (about 8000 BC), with the end of the last glacial period.

Source: *The Encyclopedia of the Earth*





ANCESTORS

It was not until I moved to the Pacific Northwest that I actually understood the language of the Mother Trees. Then, I began to think of my ancestors in a different light. Because my family dynamics were so strained, it has been a journey for me to find the resources that are in my lineage. The Mother Trees taught me how to do that.

I was a lone wolf in my family because I could never match the expectations of Jewish womanhood that were presented to me. My passions for writing, literature, poetry, jazz, and leftwing political activism, never resembled anything like the homemaking and marriage expected of me.

Add to that the violence, the raging, the sexual abuse, and near-criminal behavior of my family members, all of which were supposed to remain secret, and you have a very unseemly lineage, one no one wants to claim.

But in the rich old-growth forest of the Pacific Northwest I discovered the true meaning of ancestry in the entangled root systems under my feet. They were my pathway and my challenge, frequently tripping me up and landing me injured, scared and flat on my face. Have you ever tried walking on an ancient old-growth forest floor? Your eyes have to be glued to your feet as any wayward glance means your shoe will catch on one of the thousands of roots that has erupted upward. The Mother Trees are always trying to reach out to us.

Face planting on the forest floor can be a shamanic experience. Breasts smashed on moss, wrinkles etched in mud, the granular, wet, black earth making body-sculpture of you, you are met with the intimacy you have always longed to experience. The ceaseless parade of rain that is the Pacific Northwest merges with the sweat of your body and ego dissolves into the mess that you become. No drugs needed for shamanic awakening here.

The poems that follow mingle all my disparate ancestries. I come from

14 Eastern Europe, Belarus, and the constantly shifting borders of Russia, Poland, and Ukraine—places where war is raging right now as I compile these poems.

I come from the Bronx, New York, as well as Asia. I come from the Pacific Northwest, Eire, and other lands I would never have guessed were in my blood—lands like Mexico and Norway—places that did not seem related to me until I fell onto the body of our living earth. She is my ancestry.com.



Justice

My grandmother's voice was coated with the mucosa of grief.
She mired us in the soundscape of all that disappeared.
My grandfather cloaked himself in outsized silence,
The invisible witness cultivating awareness,
Until he was blown away like dust,
Taking with him the secret of his peace.
I call him forward now out of the mists of silent men
Who knew but could not speak,
Who watched and then retreated.
The time has come now for you, Grandpa,
The tailor who can mend the torn fabric of the tribe.
Say it now, and end the repetition,
Say it for all the children blinded by hopelessness,
Grandpa. Tell them of the redemption.
Tell them about our love for one another,
The secret you sent me with your eyes
As you drank tea by the old samovar,
The only remnant left, and gave me the sugar cube,
Steeped in the dark blend of
Our enduring vitality.





The Bridge

I have become more porous with these waves of awakening.
The shields are remaking themselves
In the interval between now and the birth of the new humanity.
I must act as a bridge, the Mother Trees tell me,
Whenever I can meet with them in solitude.
They comfort me by saying that this is not the only time.
“There is an endlessness in this earth,” they say,
“And you are part of the endlessness.”
They tell me that just as I feel the danger and the pain,
So can I know their eternity.
“You will always be a child,” they say to me,
“Though your skin has become lined as parchment,
And your hands roped by the purple blood of your family’s long-lost
Royalty.
You remain to us but a beginning spark of the embryonic intelligence
That ignites the flame of all life.”
They tell me that all the children that have been lost are returning now,
Reborn in the ocean of love.
They carry the redeeming spirit that will deliver the leaders we are.
“This world is aching for the return of original brilliance,” they say,
“The return of our sanity.”
“Speak,” they say to me, the Mother Trees,
Draped in robes of velvet moss, alight with the jewels of the sun.
“Speak from the place where you are one of us.”