



Unborn Poem

It was not unexpected, but the SCOTUS decision to overturn 50 years of precedent in the Dobbs decision June 24, 2022 relegated women's rights to just below those of embryos. Fetuses are important, or at least that's what some on the forced-birth side would have you believe they think. But they are! & at least two major USAmerican poets agree judged by their poems written to unborn children. #1 Diane di Prima:

Song for Baby-O, Unborn

Sweetheart
when you break thru
you'll find
a poet here
not quite what one would choose.

I won't promise
you'll never go hungry
or that you won't be sad
on this gutted
breaking
globe

but I can show you
baby
enough to love
to break your heart
forever

Pieces of a Song: Selected Poems (City Lights Books, 1990)



and #2 Brenda Hillman:

Poem Describing Time to the Unborn

Today the half-moon presses an obvious
ear to the sky; some clouds
cover the alarming part. It's going
to be a hopeful day. You,
listening from the other side, have
not experienced sequences or fear. A
worm, crossing the battlefield, its mouth
filled with silt, will slowly become
a blue moth while grasses spring
upward, escaping the doomed canopies. So
the future grows at different rates.

We think of you, inching along,

making matter, bone & blood, before
meaning sets in. Meaning is made
of time; oh ; winged history advances,
the shoe is invented, the hand-held
phone. . . . Your ancestors wove a fine
gray cloth for strangers; your parents
have woven a name full of
vowels to be opened when you
appear. Most minutes aren't clear. Some
will seem tangled when they are
lacing your shoe, but minutes will
be better when you are here

In A Few Minutes Before Later



(Wesleyan University Press, 2022)

While both epistles (sort of) di Prima's is directly to the human inside her and Hillman is operating with her standard "permission to be strange" bringing in a comparison that the average fetus, when they do become a thinking/reading human, is unlikely to appreciate, moth larva. (This could be seen as a very Buddhist approach to sentient life! I give Brenda the benefit of the doubt.) Notice Hillman's blending of original abstractions (*the future grows at different rates*) with luminous details (the worm, the battlefield it crosses, the silt in the worm's mouth,) & predictions:

your parents
have woven a name full of
vowels to be opened when you
appear.

Maybe there is a baby on the way inside you. Maybe your fetal experience was not as you would have had it and have some late advice. Maybe you can write to the fetus of a female Supreme Court Justice who would vote to overturn a decision like *Roe v Wade*. Maybe you would try to explain a concept like time to a fetus, who is probably more conscious than you think. The Tibetan tradition says life begins at conception, after all. Maybe the unborn should know about how to execute a power play in hockey, or how to properly compost, or understand how to best build a soul in this lifetime with the latest information you can muster. Write an unborn poem, that is, a poem to someone not yet born and coming in to this highly-charged, anthropocene moment.



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