



Rock 'n' Roll Women

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ROCK 'N' ROLL BROKE INTO MY LIFE when a teenage girl older than I blasted Bo Diddley on her record player. She was a dishwasher with curly hair. I heard the music come out of her bedroom window and could not get it out of my head. Later, at school at lunch hour in the gym when guys danced with girls, I heard Carl Perkins and I haven't been the same person since. I had grown up on folk music and on rhythm and blues—I played Leadbelly records everyday for a year—and rock 'n' roll sounded in my ears as though it had come out of black bars, the black ghetto, and the juke joints of the South. Soon after the British Invasion of the 1960s, when rock 'n' roll bands such as the Beatles and the Stones, came to the States, I went to England and lived with an American who played the guitar and sang the blues in British pubs. When I came back home and started teaching literature, I attended rock concerts on campus with tens of thousands of students and heard The Beach Boys, the Jefferson Airplane, and other bands. Mostly, I listened to rock 'n' roll with others, rarely by myself, and often in the company of women, many of whom show up in these poems and to whom I mean to remember and to pay homage. Moreover, I wrote these poems explicitly for the purpose of performing them in public and so I have paid particular attention to the sounds of the words on the page. Hopefully you'll hear music in the background even when you read this work quietly at home. About thirty women show up in Rock 'n' Roll Women plus one man. I didn't want to leave men out completely; some might say that the one man I have included isn't a very good example of American manhood. To that I would say, I am not trying to provide good examples of anything. Rather, I aim to capture a specific person, place, and time from the 1950s to the present day when I'm still likely to listen to rock 'n' roll on CD or on radio stations such as KWMR that broadcasts from Point Reyes Station in Marin and that must know that I'm listening and that there are others out here beside me who want to hear rock 'n' roll, too.

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