

## Gahlia Phillips

### The Dust Mother

(a story of matricide, inspired by events in South African news, a poem in four parts)

#### i.

I am the dust mother, the  
lot that  
cradles the stilt-walker  
who was laid  
bassinet and still-warm  
near Strandfontein, where  
i felt them shovel her in.  
Oh to be gone!  
sounds such a ruined end without  
possible human resolve. the end  
without an ending  
proper,  
where termination  
is the only thing palpable!

all these months,  
missing ...  
whilst it was her daughter who  
enticed a hug to distract and  
there, there  
a mother  
this mother was murdered  
and planted inside me,  
where i hold the bones  
and the bones of  
children lost, engraved after or  
swallowed by my vastness -  
masses of vastness immeasurable.

i am the grandmother womb  
of all earthen soils  
composing of souls put to sleep  
in graves,  
upon graves upon graves.  
now she,  
the woman gone,  
calls from the envelope of beyond

to her daughter, the very same daughter  
that motioned her lover  
to rope her neck and pull,  
till the breaching-break.

**ii.**

*you took me to the field and  
now i am sown into the land.  
this ugly  
highway land, crying with the sound  
of tyres licking tar.  
your mother is gone  
i am done  
absorbed and grazed on  
by the constituting  
dust. i  
have become fodder.  
i remember you, child,  
in that strange purple costume  
you wore the last day i saw you  
licking peanut butter from a  
silver spoon.  
my mother gave me that spoon...  
i made you  
i could never believe that i  
made  
you.*

**iii.**

the dust mother responds:

you  
stilt-walker can now grace  
the skies with an immortal  
performance,  
beyond being hooded in soil  
and covered with my ashen rock  
laid like a child  
ready for an afternoon nap under the  
maroon sun.  
your daughter threw you defiantly,  
definitely away  
with little shame

and even worse -  
you are stuck in a blackness  
so binding,  
through which  
you can only smell the greyish paste  
you  
have  
become;  
where licking leaves suck your insides so they  
may keep from falling!  
you think of your daughter  
always,  
the one who dawned  
immature and  
unready.  
your dissolve does not allow the asking of  
*how could you(s) or*  
*why did you(s) ...*  
the future will call through nature's breath that  
blows through every inch of my weight and  
through moments  
between those ironed bars  
that encircle your daughter, while  
her palms clam  
for mother to hold.  
your bones inside me, like a useless artefact.

**iv.**

my my! how the fledglings have grown, making a  
moment of a mother -  
their worth matched by the place dug  
in me.  
does the daughter cry for her mother  
and think of her atrophied body  
cocooned in sediment - never rising  
to remind?  
the dust mother will.  
i will rise to caution the  
daughter amidst all those  
plentiful hours amongst immovable iron.  
she will remember that her mother is gone  
whilst cooler walls musk with age  
less graceful,  
as she remains.  
her own bones set to calcify and

make a final return  
to my womb;  
the dust Mother demands so -  
in an everlasting below.

**Gahlia Phillips** is an actor and a poet and has performed in theatre and television since a very young age. With a Masters Cum Laude in Creative Writing (University of the Western Cape), a Bachelor of Arts Theatre Performance majoring in English Literature (University of Cape Town) and an L.T.C.L Teachers (London Trinity College). As well as being a Professional Actor she teaches privately in Performance and Movement, and is a tutor at the University of the Western Cape in English Literature.

*Women have long mourned the silence of their afflictions and purpose, which gradually has changed and quite drastically over the last century. My concern in this collection is to take women's stories out of 'silence' and into the public domain.*

Gahlia's Eastern European blood brings a great source of inspiration to all her work, and she currently resides in Cape Town, South Africa.