

Northern Michigan University

**NMU Commons**

---

All NMU Master's Theses

Student Works

---

2007

## **Pocketful of pebbles**

Molly Anne Maier

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.nmu.edu/theses>

---

POCKETFUL OF PEBBLES

By

Molly Anne Maier

THESIS

Submitted to  
Northern Michigan University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

Graduate Studies Office

2007

UMI Number: 1449688



---

UMI Microform 1449688

Copyright 2008 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.  
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

---

ProQuest Information and Learning Company  
300 North Zeeb Road  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

## SIGNATURE APPROVAL FORM

This thesis by Molly Anne Maier is recommended for approval by the student's Thesis Committee and Department Head in the Department of English and by the Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies.

---

Committee Chair: Dr. Beverly Matherne Date

---

First Reader: Dr. Diane Sautter Date

---

Department Head: Dr. James Schiffer Date

---

Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies: Date  
Dr. Cynthia Prosen

**OLSEN LIBRARY  
NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY**

**THESIS DATA FORM**

In order to catalog your thesis properly and enter a record in the OCLC international bibliographic data base, Olson Library must have the following requested information to distinguish you from others with the same or similar names and to provide appropriate subject access for other researchers.

NAME: Maier, Molly Anne

DATE OF BIRTH: November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1981

## ABSTRACT

### POCKETFUL OF PEBBLES

By

Molly Anne Maier

In my thesis I hope to illustrate topics that may be common but can be made beautiful through poetry. I have written poems about my background as a working class girl in the northern Midwest. Many of my poems are written in free verse because it gives them a conversational tone that conveys the lifestyle of working hard and enjoying life. I write about the difficulties of being working class or below the poverty line and how that affects children.

My thesis also includes poems written in metrical form and a few prose poems. My formal poems tend to be more whimsical than my free verse. I have a section of love poems in this thesis. About the little things in relationships that shows the uniqueness of love. I write poems about places and people that I love in the hopes that my affections for them comes through on the page.

Copyrighted by  
Molly Anne Maier  
2007

## DEDICATION

My thesis is dedicated to my fiancée, Anthony Guerriero, and to my family and my friend Brandi George.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my thesis director Dr. Beverly Matherne, for her support and helpful suggestions; Dr. Diane Sautter, for her support; and Dr. Austin Hummell, for his pointers on metrics. Without their help my thesis would not be complete.

My thesis follows MLA format and the guidelines set by the Department of English.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
A Lake Pebble.....	6
Man and Materials.....	7
When He Is Old, He Will Grow Vegetables.....	8
Road Trip.....	9
My Love.....	10
Child.....	11
In the Pumpkin Patch.....	12
Story.....	13
August 1990.....	14
Laundress's Lament.....	15
You Know I'm No Good.....	16
High Life.....	17
In the All-Night Diner on 5 <sup>th</sup> Street.....	18
Mayo, Nuts, Double Boiler.....	19
Gregory Peck.....	20
Smith's Land.....	21
Rosie the Riveter.....	22
Recipe for Cranberry Sauce.....	23
R.E.M. State.....	24
6am Last Tuesday.....	25
Ariadne on Naxos.....	26
A Toast to Losing.....	27
Office Goddess.....	28
Oh, Cody.....	29
Travel Gospel.....	30
Stale Bread.....	31
Works Cited.....	32

## **Introduction**

With my creative thesis, Pocketful of Pebbles, I hope to illustrate the life of the working class by including poems about working minimum wage jobs and the frustrations and joys that are an integral part of that lifestyle. I also have included several love poems in my thesis. The title Pocketful of Pebbles represents having very little or nothing, but at the same time having something of substance. The title is a play on the idea of empty pockets and the paradox of the American Dream. I have included several poems about poverty in America and how it affects children, including the subject of malnutrition.

My love poems relate back to the title because love can be represented by pebbles; little things add and have importance in relationships. The nature images in my poems fit well with the title because I can picture someone walking along a beach picking up pebbles and filling her pockets just as I did as a young girl.

My thesis consists of twenty-six poems about love, money and the working class. Though I work best with free verse I also include several formal poems. I started out writing in free verse: however, I write with more focus on words and sounds in my sonnets or villanelles. My free verse poems are more conversational. The conversational aspect of my poetry makes it believable as a voice of the working class.

### **Personal Aesthetic**

My aesthetic is built around writing poems that are accessible to the reader and whose meaning is clear. My poems are often very personal, especially my love poems. Love can mean many different things to different people. I try to employ twists and

unexpected language to illustrate the differences. I find beauty in struggle, and I try to get that beauty across in my poetry. I also find humor in working situations, and I try to put that into my poems as well. In my poem, Poverty, I discuss hunger and practical solutions to the problem with a stanza about what people eat when they have little else:

No meat, and barely enough potatoes,  
so your mother scrambles in an egg.  
She adds stale bread from the outlet store,  
cooks it all in grease, for flavor.

My poem, Man-Made Materials, is an example of what I attempt to do with love poems. I use unexpected images such as a “shoe in the oven” but still emphasize the bittersweet nature of love, and the fear of losing it:

I leave threads of myself in his apartment,  
bookmark his pillow, thumbprint the corner  
of his bathroom mirror, lipstick his radio.  
He does not appreciate my mini-tornados,  
he says he smells me on his old t-shirt,  
and envisions me as he types and works.  
He cleans around a leaf on the floor of his shower  
but removes the shirt knotted around his lamp.  
He tells me I have maple-syrup eyes,  
tangos with me in his living room.  
I make him peanut butter cookies  
and leave my shoe in the oven.

My poem, Laundress’s Lament, is an example of one of my working class poems. It is based on an actual job that I worked few summers ago. I try to give a humorous yet accurate account of working in a Laundromat, capturing the smells, the sounds and the ill manners of some of the customers as illustrated in these first three stanzas:

Haze hangs over the front counter.  
Customers drop off their soiled goods  
in sacks smelling of musty cabin corners  
and wet dirt.

I lift bag after bag of cotton, canvas, mesh.  
Weigh them,  
spill their innards on the  
worn linoleum floor.  
Sort stained hotel linens, sun-baked underwear,  
sweaty khakis, mud-caked socks.

I scrub lipstick from dress shirts,  
toss them into laundry soup.  
Add a quarter cup of dry bleach,  
just like granny taught me.

Overall, I try to make my poems appeal to as many people as possible. My poems all have the same basic theme: struggle and hope.

### **Writing Influences**

I have been influenced by many writers since I started writing poetry. The first poets that influenced my style were Sharon Olds and Margaret Atwood. By reading poets like Atwood and Olds, I have challenged myself to write with ease about frank issues of sexuality.

I have also been influenced by Ilya Kaminsky. Kaminsky writes about money and the lack of it in such a beautiful way. I am influenced by Kaminsky's love poems to use unexpected terms and ideas. This unexpected aspect makes the poems more accessible to readers and more exciting, because love is felt in different ways by different people. One of Kaminsky most influential poems, Natalia, deals with both love and money as shown strongly in the last two stanzas:

How magical it is to live! it rained at the market,  
with my fingers, she tapped out her iambs

on the back of our largest casserole  
and we sang, *Sweet dollars,*  
*why aren't you in my pockets?*  
(Kaminsky 35)

I admire Kaminsky's use of sound in this poem. His word choice takes simple words and makes them into a poignant song. The way that he does this is by introducing the idea of iambic rhythm, setting the reader up to expect a song. However, the song is more trochaic than iambic so it twists on the reader's expectations and draws attention to the last line. This twist is something that I strive to include in my poems.

Another influence is Tony Hoagland; I admire the ease with which he writes about popular culture. I think of Hoagland's poems when I am writing about work and the working class. His understanding of American culture is best illustrated in these lines from America:

Then one of the students with blue hair and tongue stud  
Says that America for him is a maximum-security prison

Whose walls are made of RadioShacks and Burger Kings, and MTV episodes  
Where you can't tell the show from the commercials,

And as I consider how to express how full of shit I think he is,  
He says that even when he's driving to the mall in his Isuzu

Troopers with a gang of his friends, letting rap music pour over them  
Like a boiling Jacuzzi full of ballpeen hammers, even then he feels

Buried alive, captured and suffocated in the folds  
Of the thick satin quilt of America

And I wonder if this is a legitimate category of pain,  
Or whether he is just spin doctoring a better grade,  
(Hoagland 7).

I also am influenced by how he writes in free verse but uses couplets. I attempt to use a style that mixes free verse with aspects of more formal poetry. I also try to work with more formal poems. The reason I work with form is just as much to bend it as to follow it. As Paul Fussell states: “Poetic forms are like that: they tend to say things even if the words are not at the moment fitted to their patterns. As Louis MacNeice has said, ‘In any poet’s poem the shape is half the meaning,’” (Fussell 126). My poems in my creative thesis work explore the use of different forms and try to connect my memories and experiences to the reader.

## A Lake Pebble

Shaped like a heart,  
all its edges rounded  
from plummeting  
over and over  
in the wake of waves,  
the circular  
motion of undertow  
common to any large body  
of water, makes  
a simple piece of rose quartz  
magical,  
silky to my touch.  
Or placed idly on the tip  
of my tongue,  
tasting of iron  
and moss,  
it is a round moist spot,  
revealing  
a tea-rose blush  
over cream,  
a blessing  
I keep in my pocket.



## Man and Materials

I leave threads of myself in his apartment,  
bookmark his pillow, thumbprint the corner  
of his bathroom mirror, lipstick his radio.  
He does not appreciate my mini-tornados,  
he says he smells me on his old t-shirt,  
and envisions me as he types and works.  
He cleans around a leaf on the floor of his shower,  
but removes the shirt knotted around his lamp.  
He tells me I have maple-syrup eyes,  
tangos with me in his living room.  
I make him peanut butter cookies  
and leave my shoe in the oven.

## When He Is Old, He Will Grow Vegetables

He sits on an over-turned bucket.  
Sings to his vines and stalks  
an old country song, about a woman  
who left without saying goodbye,

His silver hair shining like peppers.  
Six different kinds, red and green,  
Christmas in August.

He runs his fingertips over  
a ripe cherry tomato,  
twists it free of its vine  
and pops it into his mouth, sun warm.

Heat beats down on his shoulders.  
He adjusts his baseball cap,  
its bill covering his neck,  
rubs his beard,  
and thinks about the bread of life.

Squash, like sunning turtles, sit  
at his feet and he pats them.  
His hands smell of garlic and olive oil.

He plucks green beans,  
drops them into a silver bowl.  
They ping, something of substance.

## Road Trip

We wander on highways,  
past maples and pines.  
I comb my hair in the side mirror,  
where objects appear closer than they are.  
We buy baskets of pears, and apples.  
Sometimes, they are hard to find here,  
just north of the orchards.  
We snack on the fruit  
to stay awake, our tires sticking  
to wet pavement.  
Miles click on the odometer.  
We sing about love and tractors  
along with the man on the radio.

## My Love

In winter, he makes me noodles.  
They whistle when I blow to cool them,  
olive oil and garlic lingering on my lips.

## Child

You walk, dance, run  
like embers of violets and greens.

You are tiny in our rooms, a pea  
nestled in a coconut shell.

Each season brings you visitors,  
postcards from our picture window.

You peer at mist that curls gray like cattails,  
plump raindrops or sleet.

Flutter at flights of geese in fall,  
snow owls in winter, loons in spring.

You laugh at wisps of wood smoke  
drifting from the neighbor's stove.

In summer, you try to swim under waves  
like a trout or duck.

You help me water plants each day.  
Leaves of lilies watch you play.

## In the Pumpkin Patch

Cold seeps in at the knees of your khakis.  
You stay with your Linus fantasy,  
till your sister, in the absence of your mother,  
drags you inside. She wraps you in a blue blanket  
and plugs in your favorite nightlight,  
the one shaped like a peanut.

You smash a squash  
because you are afraid of pumpkins  
and their knowledge of flight.

You learn that gourds  
fly from the hands of boys  
schooled in the art of toilet-paper streaming.  
You study with them half-heartedly,  
go home, sleep with a beer bellyache,  
dream of when pumpkins flew,  
with goodwill, not anger.

## Story Time

When mother read me stories,  
in books with golden binding,  
I made her change the name.  
I became each character.  
I would tongue teeth marks on the spines;  
their flavor on my palate, sharp,  
marvel at turtles in suits,  
bury my head in her arms.

August 1990

A girl sits in a swing,  
bites tinkerbell polish  
from her thumbnail.  
The sprinkler whirls on.  
She leaps laughing,  
twirls on her tiptoes,  
as her mother watches  
from the kitchen,  
nose pressed against the window.



## Laundress's Lament

Haze hangs over the front counter.  
Customers drop off their soiled goods  
in sacks smelling of musty cabin corners  
and wet dirt.

I lift bag after bag of cotton, canvas, mesh.  
Weigh them,  
spill their innards on the  
worn linoleum floor.  
Sort stained hotel linens, sun-baked underwear,  
sweaty khakis, mud-caked socks.

I scrub lipstick from dress shirts,  
toss them into laundry soup.  
Add a quarter cup of dry bleach,  
just like granny taught me.

A bloated toad of a woman  
fires questions machine-gun style.  
I nod and muddle. As she leaves I ask her car,  
"Do I look like a photo booth in Walgreens?  
Wash your own clothes if you want them in an hour."

Bob Dylan whines over tambourines.  
I fold bras, thongs, underroos,  
towels, sheets, shorts, shirts, jackets.  
Sleeves meet neatly in the back.  
Sheet corners meld like puzzle pieces.

At ten to eight, and eight is close,  
I mop at the feet of a punk couple.  
They watch DVD's on their player.  
I scrape the bucket. They glare.

## You Know I'm No Good

When you look at me, do you see  
white trash chugging a can of beer?  
Chipped nails, torn cuticles?  
Do you see how my hair clings  
to the wool of my second-hand coat?  
Do you hear my country-music slang?  
The scrape of my country-line dancin' jeans?  
Whoosh of match against Camel Lights?  
Do you smell my dreams,  
see my too-small tank, breasts spilling,  
boots polished with hot breath?

.

## High Life

When rain falls,  
I will hear it from ladders  
from rooftops, from gutters.  
It will rush and fall.  
I will long to drum,  
but beats of mine  
go against music.

Tiny spiders will die in my lights,  
their legs trail like lashes.

Unnoticed,  
I will live the high life  
of classic luminosity,  
ignite your woven way home.  
Your trails will intertwine  
my own electric gold,  
belied by my crusty overalls.

In the All-Night-Diner on 5<sup>th</sup> Street

Julie's laughter jangles like a broken phone. She counts her pills, numbers slipping like phantoms. She glances around, muttering. Her eyes catch a red flannel shirt. He looks like he has wood. She needs a screw, a timber jack, a lumber fuck.

The skinny waitress, Tiffany, her name tag says, wants Julie to leave, to take her habit elsewhere. Bitch, she doesn't know. These pills are citizens of the booth. Julie wipes the table with her arm, she grinds her thumb into a blue. She scatters red and blue capsules, crushes planets, implodes stars, destroys universes.

Julie scrapes the dust into her hand, blows tiny particles into the iris of the waitress, now a blue eclipse.

Mayo, Nuts, Double Boiler

Lucy doesn't dance if she isn't drunk.  
She tacks naked men to her walls,  
paints swirls, yellow and red, around them.  
She cuts out eyes from photos, writes  
found poems from grocery lists.

She runs in the rain,  
hops from puddle to gutter to sidewalk,  
her toes wet but hair dry at the nape her neck.  
Raindrops shine in her eyelashes  
as she pokes ferns with her umbrella.

Gregory Peck

His French daughter cuts his hair.  
It slips from her fingers to the patio,  
peppered salt his dog sniffs at and sneezes.

On a mood-lit night, the father and his wife  
dance under pear trees, Audrey Hepburn style.  
All black cropped-pants and quick stillness.

The father lies on sheets, moonlight blue,  
runs a hand across his newly shorn head.  
He thinks about his first Italian suit and Cadillac.

In a red robe, he walks to the window,  
the morning star has risen,  
a peach, he could pluck and savor.

## Smith's Land

Smith dreamt of spring, but winter  
and coughs claim old men  
as birch and pines leap at night.

Smith's shack is nearly gone,  
ivy climbs it, brick by stone.  
The trail in the pines is lost.  
Take seven steps by flight of crow  
to berries and nuts and glut of 'munks,  
to a pond, green with algae,  
and the dock, rotted by autumn  
and time.

Rosie the Riveter

You wore bread bags for boots,  
ate grease sandwiches,  
taught my mother to blanch beans.

You stewed apples to make your own sauce,  
canned lima beans and corn for winter.  
To you, burnt meant flavored.

You told the little ones to wash their patties  
before meals. Saved buttons and yards of cloth  
they burned after you had gone.

You never talked of how you welded  
plane wings during that war,  
or what it was like to be a minister's wife.

Your white curls were beautiful to me,  
even your eyes lit with morphine.



### Recipe for Cranberry Sauce

I have culinary skills to jelly  
crimson pellets into sauce,  
but they might mush or scorch.

Why risk ruining Thanksgiving?

I can grip the opener, open a can  
slice through metal to ruby  
fruit, sweet and tart.

R.E.M. State

My dreams are the product of over-production.  
Mere friends confess undying love,  
and I pet hairless cats and poodles  
by the light of a fifteen-watt bulb.  
Outside a bathroom stall, I beg forgiveness  
from an overflowing toilet,  
my mouth pressed against the lock.  
I take a bath in a tub full of spiders.  
Strangers are my friends and my friends strangers.  
I sway to the music of an alien band and,  
on my batgirl bike, run over ants the size of dogs.  
Then I wake from falling.

6 am Last Tuesday

I gaze  
at my computer,  
its waves  
like copper,  
green,  
on the shore of Lake Superior.

Outside, the cedars glow orange  
and the whites of birches' eyes,  
are clear in the hushed forest  
at sunrise.

Ariadne on Naxos

I want to un-blush his lips.  
Leave him lost in the maze,  
drop the string before he can  
find his way into me.

The sun curves its way home,  
into the company of other stars.  
A boyish dancer leads drunken revelers,  
shadows around me now.

And the wine of this stranger,  
tart, refreshes my salt-cruled lips.  
The song of his flute  
steals my feet from the sands.  
I am levitating, spinning,  
I see the end of the cord, bloodstained,  
winking silver on the horizon.

## A Toast to Losing

Your lovely face turns against the sky  
as stars fall like comets in laps of maids.  
You pine for a new heart and spry  
limbs, that sway not snap in salty winds.  
You cannot be paid to flee hunger.  
You pine for meat and bone.  
Your motions are restless, a wren in nests of fleas,  
covered with curls of sand once stone.

Your womb is smashed. But your good leg  
is quick enough to kick the hog from lard.  
You swing a mug to drink the foam from kegs  
You are merry and sing like a bard.

In witty conversation you adore abstract art;  
as the party dwindles you wink and depart.

## Office Goddess

In the misty afternoon  
of my day dream,  
I pursue him through  
the hush of pine groves.  
A Diana in reverse,  
I catch him on the edge  
of a cliff.

My lips, still heavy from his,  
I wake from my computer daze.  
I chase him from coffee pot  
to cubical, think of him naked  
in my queen-sized bed,  
Cupid out of his element,  
tied so he cannot beat his wings.

## Oh, Cody

Cody sits in despair on his yacht. The party invitation in his fist calls for velour suit. His purple velour clashes with his yellow cowboy hat and boots. Overhead, the seagulls vie for mollusks. At nine o'clock Cody dresses grimly. He arms himself with a water bottle and thirteen glow in-the-dark condoms. He heads for the condos that hover over the best of the bay. His boat sputters, stops. He leaps into the bay, swims to shore. He stands dripping at the door bell, his suit hanging damply around him. In the dark, he is disgraceful. As the party's light shines on him, his suit takes on the luster of the interior of an abalone. Cody's hostess pulls him into a tango. He winks into the broken mirror behind the couch.

## Travel Gospel

In China, surly pandas munched  
on strips of bamboo.  
Tigers in India circled under the setting moon.

In your camp, the tin mist of monsoons,  
covered blue tarps and your hair.  
Near the azure lagoon, orchids  
held raindrops, jewels in their hearts.

The wind-twisted palm leaves  
revealed their woven veins.  
In the village, down the red road,  
broad hands cupped the udder of goats.

In Chicago, you tell me your word for pâté.  
Eggs run into toast points  
in my-cup-of-coffee-for-a-dime dream.



## Stale Bread

No meat, and barely enough potatoes,  
so your mother scrambles in an egg.  
She adds stale bread from the outlet store,  
cooks it all in grease, for flavor.

At school, you can be the rag  
doll queen with free lunch.  
Dressed in your cousin's hand-me-downs,  
you sit alone and read.

In ten years, you will want to mother  
friends and cry from nameless hunger.  
But as a child you don't know this  
and eat with grace the food before you.

## Works Cited

Fussell, Paul. Poetic Meter & Poetic Form. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979.

Hoagland, Tony. What Narcissism Means to Me. Saint Paul: Graywolf, 2003.

Kaminsky, Ilya. Dancing in Odessa. Dorset: Tupelo, 2004.