CIRCLES OF BONE

backbone
whitebone
fishbone
crossbone
you have your mother's backbone
slivered silvered
arc of bone
your mother's backbone
prominent ridged
beneath thin skin
you have no backbone
stand up straight
pierces your heart
that bone
trombone
with this bone I thee wed
bone to bone
bleached bones skull bones
throw the dog a bone
bone of contention
you have your mother's backbone
live close to bone
close to the bone
spare
lean
look
you have no lover
spare
throwing bones
you must believe
they tell bare truths
as dog strips bone
clean
you have your mother's backbone
all we need to know
of circles
is written in our bones
bones alone remain
we build our graves for bones
backbones
blackbones
we bear our mothers' backbones
Unfortunately, I sometimes record my dreams in an incomplete manner and this one has a minimum of detail. It occurred in a night of intense emotion and I recalled the dream in terms of "feeling" rather than in images and details. To make the creation of the poem clearer, though, I will provide both the dream and the circumstances which made the dream.

April 27, 1977 San Francisco: I was staying with a friend, Maria Epes. She is an artist and a fine printer. We share an intense relationship with a strong emphasis on communication and intellectual curiosity. We are very close and during this period of time our friendship was particularly nurturing and inspirational. On this evening Maria had spoken of her mother and said that she has her mother's backbone. It is a shared physical trait. She said that her mother is a survivor, that her backbone is that of a survivor, and that it is noticeable because it stands out clearly, prominently beneath the skin. Maria admires her mother immensely. I admire Maria. That night I dreamt the following:

Maria is in my dream. I am telling her my thoughts about how glad I am for our friendship. She is leaving her apartment, standing at the head of the staircase. I walk over, embrace her.

The next scene recalled occurs in her study where I sleep in a corner on the lounge. I awake several times. When I awake the last time and get up, I realize that a bone is protruding from the area between my left breast and armpit. It doesn't hurt, yet, but I don't understand how it happened. I place Maria's hand on my breast and ask her to feel the bone. Then I tell Ed (man with whom I live) about it but he is not sympathetic. He doesn't think it's serious and is not interested. I am unable to get anyone to understand what it is—something sticking out from my heart. I decide that the bone is actually a piece of my left rib which has slipped or pushed itself up so that it curves over my left shoulder. I cannot tell if it is broken. I awake with it this way. As time passes, it begins to hurt.

That is all there is to the dream. For several days I couldn't stop thinking about the dream, the image of me with that bone sticking out from my left side, and my fascination with what Maria had said about her mother's backbone. I wrote the poem for Maria.

I am reminded of a quote by Jung which has much significance for me:

We could therefore say that every mother contains her daughter in herself and every daughter her mother, and that every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter...a woman lives earlier as a mother, later as a daughter. (From Essays on a Science of Mythology, "The Psychological Aspects of the Kore," p. 162)