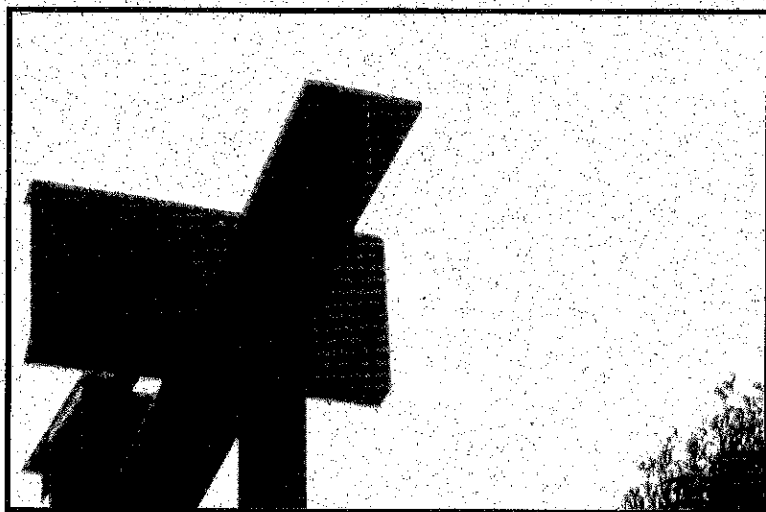


PULSE



Volume LII

Spring 2004

Pulse

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Of Lamar University — Beaumont**

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Spring 2004

Dept. of English and Modern Languages

Lamar University

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- Rowe Poetry Award** for best graduate poetry
Randy Sampson, "On Visiting the Annual Spring
Barbecue Festival in Vidor, Texas"
- Pulse Poetry Award** chosen by *Pulse* staff
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- Pulse Essay Award**
Kelly H. Tibbetts, "A Lunch Tray, a Sticker, and a
Kite that Never Flew"
- Rowe Critical Paper Award**
Amanda Smith, "Reality, Responsibility, and
Reinvention in 'Woman Hollering Creek'"

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KELLY H. TIBBETTS

Rachael Falls Asleep

Rachael falls asleep
Inside the lavender and lilac
While planets on the ceiling fan
Spin round and round the room
Scorned lovers on the radio
Sing mournful songs to Rachael
Who sleeps in the lilac
With her store-bought plastic dreams.

Above the Harbor

Red the gods have painted
Morning skies above the harbor
The wise will heed the warning
And the fools be swept away.

December

Frost on the frail bedroom windows
And gray winter clouds outside
No beautiful birds out to speak of
Nor sweet scent of flowers in bloom
For the sun has slept in and is resting
In the folds of the blanketing sky
And all are asleep and are dreaming
Until spring comes to open our eyes.

Fated Flowers

The baby slumbers in the warmth
And safety of the womb
The flower sleeps within the field
Though some day shall it bloom
Each has a life ahead of it
Each lent a bit of time
Each given to a world
Where all that live
Must also die.

Of Dreams

I do not recall the details of my dreams,
but I know I have them.
And maybe that is all I ever need know of dreams
or life and love.

Vast Unwritten

If life was lived in retrospect
How different it would be
To know the end before the act
Might render us carefree
But life is like a novel
Being read from front to back
And follies are expected
In its vast unwritten acts.

A Lunch Tray, a Sticker, and a Kite that Never Flew

Childhood passes quickly, in my case, far too quickly. For in my early years, until about the time I turned eight, I believe I lived in a world of pure wonder and amazement, of innocence and magic, a world which I know little of now. In those days of my youth there were such things as tooth fairies, jolly old men with red suits and fluffy white beards, and even the occasional man-eating monster lurking just beneath the bed. Anything was possible, anything at all, and nothing was questioned. Though in the blur that was my childhood there were moments that occurred that now stand out in my mind as moments that shaped my life. These are the moments that I believe make me unique as an individual. The details of these memories are what make them truly mine. Certain moments spark memories that act to separate the many stages of development in my life. This is one such memory.

I began my schooling at Tyrrell Elementary. It was a majestic, red-brick building only a few short minutes walk away from my house. The school cafeteria still remains in my mind as the single most fascinating room of the building. Famous characters and scenes from such prominent movies as Star Wars, Alice in Wonderland, and The Wizard of Oz were painted with brilliant colors along the walls of the cafeteria; I felt as if I were in the presence of heroic gods each time I entered the room. I must have eaten lunch in that cafeteria hundreds of times, but only one of these instances do I look back on with such fondness and affection.

I had not yet made it to the first grade, and baby fat still clung heavily to my cheeks. My mother still laid out my clothes for me each morning and kissed me goodbye without any feelings of embarrassment on my part. I had not yet learned to be cooler or wiser than she, and hugs

and kisses were still very much a part of the daily routine.

It was just another day at school until lunch that afternoon. I had had a full morning of playing with Play-Doh and teasing the one girl whose attention I begged until it was time for the class to march our way to the lunch room. We walked single file in awkward, off beat steps parading our way down the halls.

After we made it to the cafeteria and managed to survive the rush of children cutting their way up through the line, we were able to pick a spot at our class table and enjoy our dollar and twenty-five cent meals. Like the others, I was possibly halfway through eating when the Principal of the school barged through the double-door entrance of the cafeteria. All incoherent chattering and muffled smacking ceased instantaneously. There was something, though we did not know what, that we all had been trained to fear about this man. Children watched open-mouthed as he made his way into the center of the room. All heads turned in sync to watch. Seeing this man was a rare occasion indeed, unexpected to say the least. We all knew that something was, in fact, about to happen.

The Principal stopped in the center of the large room; all eyes fixed intently on him. He did not even have to call for our attention because the moment that he came into the room he instantly gained control of it. Immediately he began to address us: "We have something special planned for you today, children." We all simply stared at him in a confused fixation. The only word that seemed to register in my mind was the word *surprise*. We all knew what that word meant. He continued to speak: "Among you there is one lucky student. Under one of the lunch trays we have placed a small sticker and one of you children has this special sticker under your tray." We began to survey each other's faces. The significance of the Principal's visit had been revealed!

Finally, the stone-faced principal concluded;

"Whoever finds this sticker under their tray may come to me and claim their prize." This caused an immediate end to the silence. Frantically, everyone scrambled to raise the brightly colored food trays above their heads. Shouts of excitement and amusement rang throughout the crowded room. It was a moment of pure adrenaline for us all.

I remember examining the sea of faces around me. Looks of disappointment and frustration appeared with each tray that went into the air. I sat quietly surveying my classmates for a short length of time when it dawned on me that I had not yet peered under my tray. It was small and light blue in color. Was this the special tray? The thought left my mind as quickly as it had entered into it. But as I lifted the light blue tray above my head and looked underneath I spied something that I knew was foreign to the underside of any lunch tray. It was a sticker; *the* sticker, no bigger than the size of a penny and dull yellow in color. Slowly, I lowered my tray back down to the table in an inconceivable amazement.

I remained quiet and expressionless until a few seconds had passed. I felt my lips begin to move and my voice squeak out, "I've got it." My delicately spoken words were not picked up by a single soul. I repeated myself again in the same emotionless tone and, like before, nobody took any notice. This was unacceptable by any means. I could not allow this opportunity to pass me by.

The next thing I knew I found myself screaming out, "I've got it! I've got the sticker!" Never before and never again since have I gained the attention of any amount of people the way I gained the immediate attention of every living soul in that room. The blank stares of my schoolmates focused on me, their mouths gaping in absolute shock. I sat staring back at them in the same type of bubbling amazement.

I was, in the next moment, surrounded by what seemed to be hundreds of grabbing hands and curious

faces, all swarming around me to verify if I, indeed, had this monumentally special tray. Of course, much to the disappointment of the others, I certainly did.

My teacher, Mrs. Smith, came quickly to my aid. She was a young woman, possibly just out of college. Her familiar face stood out to me among the frenzy of grabbing hands and wiggling bodies and gave me comfort. She lifted the underside of my tray to her eyes and, after viewing the sticker underneath, took my hand and led me to the center of the room where the Principal stood silent and still, unnerved by the situation. The whole experience was new to me. I never before had an entire room full of people crowded around me trying their best to get a glimpse of me. All I knew was that something special was happening, and I liked the feeling it gave me. I had, in essence, become a celebrity.

I approached the Principal with shyness in my step, not knowing how to present myself to this higher being. I found myself staring up at him as a child gazes up toward the peak of a mountain. He seemed gigantic in stature. Then, suddenly, a different mood appeared to come across his stern, sharply cut face: a look of kindness and possibly even joy. I grinned back in amusement.

I was directed by my Principal into a small corridor that led to the dessert room. I learned that this was where I was to receive my prize. I was then met by one of the lunch line ladies. She appeared angelic in her clean, white uniform and seemed to glow as she smiled and told me I was a lucky, little fellow. No audible words came to my mouth; it was all I could do to nod my head in agreement. My head continued to spin from the excitement and anticipation of receiving this mysterious prize.

Finally, the woman reached below the counter where I could not see and pulled out what appeared to be two long sticks wrapped with a flimsy white paper. I did not have the faintest idea of what it was. I did not even think to ask

her because it honestly did not matter. It could have been a million dollars or a sack full of dust bunnies. I would not have cared either way. It was a prize, and I had won it.

For the rest of the day I carried my special prize close to me, never once letting it out of my sight. The other children talked about the event for weeks after it had occurred. It was an event to remember indeed, for not only had I been the one lucky student in school that day to win any such prize, but I had finally received the attention of the girl whom I had desperately teased for so long. I remember gaining many new friends in school after that day. It was nothing short of a glorious Roman triumph.

And as for the prize, the source of all the excitement, my mother later informed me that same evening that the sticks wrapped with the flimsy white paper was actually a kite. Just before bed that night I placed the kite inside the corner of my bedroom closet. As time would have it, I never took it back out. The kite was never put together and never flew. But it was mine. I had won it. I find it ironic, looking back, to think that one of the greatest memories I have is of a lunch tray, a sticker, and a kite that never flew.

In the Crowd

His fingers slide across the saxophone,
and from the stage the shadows start to dance.
"Just melt with me," the music seems to moan.
The smoky ghosts, they sweep by in a trance.
A pair of pale blue eyes peek from behind
the glaze and grin of one too many drinks.
He takes a deep breath, begins to unwind,
puffing his cheeks, letting the anchor sink.
The cymbals ring, to call out to the night.
Vibrations spread, like sin, upon the floor.
The bodies melt beneath the yellow lights,
they move like worms, wanting, calling for more.
It moves each shadow, cuts away at strife.
The beat, a broken heart, brought back to life.

Dorian

Oh, I will never wither like Blake's sick rose,
nor shed like fallen leaves from life's great tree.
Here in this hollow church we now occupy,
a host of mournful angels flies overhead.
Listen, my friend, as I relate to you
a vile memoir told by an unclean soul.
The fountain of hubris poured forth,
the first dark drops of crimson wickedness.
From vanity's lips dripped debauchery,
the babbling of madness, hints of cruelty.
I watched a picture bear the burden of
my wanton passion, my damnable sin.
As savage blood then thickened on my hands,
the portrait gleamed a blight upon my mind.
As you can see it now, my own fair visage,
remaining youthful for eternity.
Could you resist temptation's supple fruit?
Or, coil like a deadly asp around
corruption and her wretched progeny.
I often look to lay the blame aside.
It was not Basil, God, The Morningstar,
or any power above me or below.
I am the lord of my own fate, betwixt
two paths: self-ruin or immortality.
For I cannot be at peace when I am just
a loathsome shell, a face without a heart.

CLAIRE SMITH

Cullin

I wondered about you
when you started talking to the Wal-Mart
clerk last night. The door mat

said "Wipe Your Paws" and you asked
her if she thought our dogs
could read it. She looked at you

and then at me but our faces
stayed straight as you continued on
to say our shepherds knew their ABCs

pawing them out at your request.
She looked confused and she looked
at me to see if she should take

you seriously. You talked on and on
about teaching our dogs to bark,
in Spanish, so the Hispanic

men who mowed our lawn
could understand them
and then I lost it. I laughed

out loud and you smiled
at her, then me and she pulled free
from the chain you yanked.

With a smile, she took the check I wrote
and the tale that you spoke to share
with the others after closing hours.

The Bird's Eye View

Hotels, shops and restaurants
Between the two floors the tourist flock.
For every day life exists in two stories
On the San Antonio river walk.

Starbucks Café in big block letters
Beckoned above the door.
The bird's eye view was taken in
While sitting on the second floor.

In black cane chairs round tables green
The visitors made their nest.
And sipping steam from cups wide mouth
The people looked down upon the rest.

The owners sat with their heads half cocked
While perched upon the rail.
The coffee shop welcomed in those who walked
And shut the door against those who sailed.

Upon the air their voices jingled
Like coins upon the counter.
Their world was free above land and me
Escaped their airborne banter.

Watching birds, who were watching me,
I wondered who was who.
I thought I had an audience
From my self-centered point of view.

But with the coffee gone, the time had flown
And to another world I belonged.
The audience was I – I then realized
What the birds had known all along.

Falling Drops, Bitter Thoughts

Like a thousand feet
pounding the concrete in a marathon,
the raindrops
slap the sidewalk
outside my open window.
Getting up to shut the window,
the pummeling abates into a false distance
measured
by will and
not space.

The rain grays the day,
pooling into a muddy reservoir
of jagged,
cold sediments,
and robs the sun of its shine.
Inside, the pale incandescent
glow of a single light bulb stands alone to keep
the masquerading
intruder
at bay.

Jeopardy

An essential element of a person
In essence like a whisper
A momentary stirring of the air
A seeming permanence with an expiration
A temporary animation

A journey to a sacred place
A desire for moral purpose
A length of time to survive
As a continued being that wants to last
A longing for endurance

To exist in actuality
To occupy a specific place
To remain in a certain state
Yet to take place and come and go
A specified significance

A personal record of occurrences
A register of course and distance
Published daily for one's review
An account of passed events
A sketch of facts as presented

A continuous strand spun and twisted
A passing through like a thread
A distance traveled
The time required
The act of traveling from here to there

Subject to weakness, imperfections and fragility
A species of nature and of character
A distinguished mode or state
In regard to external influences
An emotional constitution

A series of choices with benefits or consequences
A defining perspective dependent on horizon
The ability to act to produce an effect
The controlling of one's own actions
By the will over mind, soul, and emotion.

What is

RANDY SAMPSON

**On Visiting the Annual Spring Barbecue Festival
in Vidor, Texas**

*The smoke of the incense, mixed with the prayers
of the saints, ascended up to God...*

—Revelations 8:4 (NLT)

That fellow over there, the hungry one
who's been midway grazing, now wanders off
nudging his tongue between his nervous teeth—
he's struggling to dislodge the last half-eaten
kernel of corn eluding him—
while deftly balancing
pork on a stick in one hand,
fresh lemonade in the other
(which set him back about eight bucks).
He's searching for a place to rest because
he also wants some funnel cake.

Three bucks & close to half an hour later,
our fellow looks around at what he reckons
to be roughly a million dazzling lights.
& so we watch him watch them:
Stuffed on a bench near a dart booth,
he eases back a bit, aloof
(you see: he's lost his kids in the spinning shuffle
& he's trying hard to look inconspicuous).
He doesn't. "Satisfaction" blares from somewhere
as he watches one of two jam-packed contraptions
finally capsize its loopy payload,
carving a sparkling arc out of the dark.

The midway's always eye-candy-ripe

it seems, & tonight is no exception.
Look: Now he's checking out a blue-jeaned babe
sucking the juice from a glistening candy apple—
the red hot sticky glaze kindles her lips
—a racket from the kiddie tracks distracts him:
it seems two tikes are in a tangle for
front seat, where the sweeter one has snagged
the scratching one's hair & won't let go,
despite much mild protesting.
The parents want to chew their children
out, but, being in public, plead
for grace instead—
while carnies everywhere pause, counting dough.
Everyone wants everyone else's bread.

& over there: An oversized squirrel cage,
chock-full of nuts, winds up, spins, slows, & stops,
then spits them all one-by-wobbly-one out.
& now some chubby kid, ditching his buddies,
scurries behind the booth our fellow's watching—
behind the darts, balloons & stuffed animals—
& here the poor kid stoops & blows chunks
near a tent pole, steps back, side-glances then wipes
his chops off on the striped canvas.

Meanwhile, back at the bench, bemused, our fellow
if he's never had a prayer might have one now:

*Lord if I had a drink or cool wet towel
or a few aspirins I would offer them—
but what, good God, am I supposed to do?*

—neither bush nor booth before him burn.

Well, gradually fleeing that unfortunate scene,
our faithful fellow once more takes off wandering.

This time, he turns his back on the ticket-takers,
vendors & moneychangers
until he finds, tucked in a grove
of southern pines, the festival's contestants:
Cool fellow rivals in the Annual Cook-Off—
each clan slow smoking several racks
of ribs, briskets, fresh boudin,
sausage links & whatnot on cast iron
altars dripping with secret seasoning
while holy smoke ascends
into the dark carnivorous night.

Joy

*You never enjoy the world aright,
till the Sea itself floweth in your veins,
till you are clothed with the heavens,
and crowned with the stars:
and perceive yourself to be
the sole heir of the whole world...*

—Thomas Traherne
from *Centuries of Meditation I*

*For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that in them is...*

—Exodus 20:11

For my son Aaron.

1

Come check this out! Once chaotic elements
of dark matter: but now—see how they shine!
Encircling each other—like playful brothers,
little tikes—wrestling over a leather ball,
forming elastic and eternal bonds,
molecular worlds, worlds without end, that spin
and spin in infinity! Can't you see?
—a world compact with tiny whirling worlds!

2

Along the Western coast take Highway One,
head North or South, it doesn't matter much,
just look and listen as you go—be still
and feel the breaking waters splay the surf.
I can still hear them calling out my name:
I want to dive in you, O ocean,
I want a slow rebirth beneath your waves;
I want to go under the shining sea,

I want to be the sea and melt the salt
and soak the sand; I want to welcome shark,
squid, blowfish, tortoise, sea-lion and whale—
humpback, blue, sperm—sleek gray glistening dolphin
(I understand their tongue) and all their friends:
lobster, clam, prickly fish, crab and worm...
and hold and call them one and each by name.

Up from the sea look eastward towards the land
(the land is where the breaking waters end).
The mountains moved to make room for the sea,
the sea divided into smaller parts
and shared their liquid wealth upon the land:
the lakes and small streams, great rivers and ponds
are some, not all, of the gifts the sea has shared.

The earth above the sea is also yours,
and more than you can feel: I dug my hand
in dirt and felt earth move between my fingers.
You should have seen my sparkling face!
I took off all my clothes and rolled around
until that dry, cool crusty earth engulfed me,
and just when I exclaimed, "I am the Dirtman!"—
it started to rain. I was told to get inside.
(Mom always cried, "Get out of the rain, son!")
All this happened very long ago.

3

You shouldn't look straight at it for too long.
"It'll hurt your eyes," my mother used to say.
So I looked at the sun one day so long
that everything I looked at looked like sun,
or had the sun in it, or sun upon it.
I ran inside to tell my mom, who turned
to look at me, and I, speechless, now looked

at her: an angel standing in the sun.

The moon, it's not quite so bright as the sun.
Trust me: you can look at it all night long.
I tried this once and never tired or thirsted:
I lay on my back in the backyard one evening,
the sky held out the stars like lemon-drops
until the moon slowly came swimming out.
And then, I no longer saw a single star—
the moon and I, we slurped up little lights
from East to West across the Milky Way.
Since then, I've never missed a single one—
I keep them all, all of them inside me.

4

Keep going North (or South) until you reach
Big Sur. (My word! I can hardly say the name
without catching my breath.) Take off your shoes:
the grass beneath your feet is a living canvas—
just wiggle your feet and toes and with them brush
the quivering St. Augustine, Bermuda,
dichondra and bluegrass. Paint endless fields
of poppies, lilies, sage, flax and sunflower
with the fragrant seeds of your imagination.
Then lay your body down, be still, and breathe...

Big Sur is not so big as beautiful,
though big is also sometimes beautiful—
I recall standing in a tree, not like
you do when climbing trees, reaching for branches,
twisting, pulling your body up like that,
not like that at all: I stood inside a tree,
its thick rough bark quickly enveloped me,
my feet took root with the tree's roots, and whoosh!
My limbs were limbs, my trunk a trunk,

my fingers leaves—and I a redwood tree.
I stood strong and swayed with my friend the wind.
Lovers carved their names in hearts on me,
and my own heart moved when people embraced me.
I felt majestic, crowned with the sun and sky,
exhaling the heavens and the atmosphere,
covering the whole wide world with leaves of love.

5

We move now into an Elysian wood.
(Go softly here, for little things will run
and hide where footsteps rudely fall.)
Beyond your sight lie creatures great and small:
a tiny ant weaves his wobbly way home;
his queen, hungry still, devours another one.
Not far from here a spider spies a wasp
snagged in its snare, a gluttonous feast for sure
(the wasp is no one's friend). Above this kingdom
you will likely find more winged flying things:
the hawk, sandpiper, finch, and yellow throat;
the woodpecker, kingfisher, robin and owl
(the owl who always asks who, never why).

A blue jay dropped out of the sky one day
and landed right in front of me. Surprised,
I thought she had forgotten how to fly,
until I watched her, perched on my open palm
—her wingtips gently touching my gentle tips—
as if to say: I'll fly if you fly too.

Somewhere between the realms of bird and bug
there lies a middle kingdom, full of life
(and a few things larger than life): the grizzly bear
and mountain lion, the grinning bobcat,
the blacktail deer, raccoon and sly gray fox;
and with some luck we find the horny toad,

lizard and salamander (keep your eye
on him, he likes to blend in), the pink rattle
snake, cottonmouth (look out! he stinks), and viper—
all these things in a world that never ends.

My God! It's glorious and beautiful!

6

By now you've drifted back to sleep again.
Ah, but the world, it is too much with us.
We've had enough of it and so we slumber,
intoxicated with our own dreamstuff—

Have you forgotten this?

Some time ago,
you got, somehow, into your mother's drawer
and you painted make-up all over yourself.
Grinning, you proudly gaped at your success:
you hadn't failed to miss a single spot.
But I, I spied you from behind the door,
and you, you instantly knew,—your eyes fell
first, followed by your sheepish head, and then
your crimson hands rose, covering your flush face.

I called to you, but you wouldn't respond,
and so I knelt and took you in my arms:
keeping you close, I held your quivering hands,
the back sides—you were still hiding from me—
and told you that everything would be all right
(though things were bound, in time, to get much worse).

You whispered in my ear: "I love you Dad."
After the bubble bath (I sang—you laughed),
I dried and sprinkled you with balmy caresses,
then covered you in flannel underwear,
softly calling you by your sacred name.

Cubi-

Over thin walls: Kim's filing fingernails
—emery board boredom strikes at three o'clock.
The pink grain forms a groove two inches long.
She's meeting Roberto out front at five.

Bob's sipping his afternoon cup, & coughing.
His cell phone rings. Softly, he tells "Melissa,
please pick up my Viagra before dark."
Their daughter is now dating a pipe fitter.

cles

A keyboard's clicking quickly in its cube.
Eric's at it again—an on-line affair
to liven up the afternoon. A heavy
occasional breath breaks the corporate stress.

Meanwhile, our fellow stares at spreadsheets in windows.
Directly overhead fluorescents flicker
(maintenance still has a two-day backlog)—
Wet fragrance drifts slowly into his space.

The Forbidden

Sweet maiden, let me offer you this fruit
picked ripely from this tree you so admire.
You say your master warned you not to eat
—or touch—the fruit I offer, or face death.
Not so, for see, a leaf just now has brushed
your lovely cheeks, and still you stand. The truth
I tell you now: your master, God, doth know
that she who eats this fruit becomes a goddess,
undying and adored. Heed thou my words:
Whate'er you want is thine, forbidden naught.
The best of earth falls ripe into your palm.
All this God made for thee, not him, but thee!
Thou jewel of earth, and queen of all creation.
What more cans't want, but rule eternally?
As for myself—hast guessed correct at once.
I am a god indeed, as thou could be,
God's equal, seeking for a mate to share
my throne, a wonder caught in flesh to grace
my sight each morn. Come take the fruit I give,
and be the goddess that I see in you.

Dew

*This was once a rose,
That cradled down the dew
This was once my bosom
That held my son anew.*

Together she holds her petals
To hold it safe from pain.
She shuns the battering zephyrs
Lest it fall down again.

Because it lowered itself to her,
From heaven so immense,
She is defined by what she holds,
Her breath held in suspense.

Her blessedness compels her to
Hold still—don't move—be still!
Unique of all the roses,
Most marvelously fulfilled

*This was once a rose,
That cradled down the dew.
This was once my bosom
That held my son so new.*

Gabriella Mistral

Roció

*Esta era una rosa
qua abaja el rocío:
esta era mi pecho
con el hijo mío.*

Junta sus hojitas
para sostenerio
y esquiva los vientos
por no desprenderio.

Porque él ha bajado
desde el cielo inmenso
será que ella tiene
su aliento suspenso.

Da dicha se queda
callada, callada:
no hay rosa entre rosas
tan maravillada.

*Esta era una rosa
qua abaja el rocío:
esta era mi pecho
con el hijo mío.*

Gabriella Mistral

Reflections on Easter

There is no sun this morn.
Those who had waited hopefully now
Sink down despairing under the gray shroud.

The cowed hunter has missed
The young minks, fur brushed to a shine
For the dead sun. They hunt for warren holes.

The wolf goes for the lamb.
His mate suckles in the wild roses
Remembering the vengeful sheppard's staff

The Son vacate his tomb
A mangled hand draws round him his shroud.
While from fresh wounds red blossoms touch the ground.

Grand Canyon

The clattering of my ancient Mercedes 240 accompanies my retreat from California. I pray for the engine to keep turning. I hope also for few stops. The diesel accelerates so slowly that every traffic light extends the trip unbearably. Every extra hour raises the specter that some part will break, some neglected item will fail and leave Gayla and me stranded in the Arizona desert. I wonder why I didn't think to put on jeans. I picture myself trying to change a flat in a skirt or changing clothes alongside the road.

I kick myself for the chain of events that has led to this stupid and dangerous trip in a rattletrap car. Somehow, this seems to be the only thing left to do, to go back to my mother with my tail between my legs like a scalded dog.

I only hope I can get back on with the airline. I run over every meager marker and every feeble favor someone in hiring might owe me. I wonder what sabotage and character assassination Jack, my ex-husband, may have done. With our divorce my golden boy pilot-husband turned nasty. He got the Jag, but he hated having to sell the house in Malibu for the community property settlement. I wonder sullenly if Jack blacklisted me with every airline on the planet.

I wouldn't be driven by such desperation if my last boyfriend hadn't put most of my remaining belongings up his nose. My daughter Gayla Marie tells me I'm relationship-challenged. I'm glad it's dark so she's asleep. I am glad she's not reading to me from out of her books, which surround her in the backseat like leather-bound ramparts,

further walls between us. It is hard being lectured by a ten-year-old.

I yawn, and when my eyes open again I see the deer. It looms up so suddenly that I lock the brakes, bringing the car to a screeching halt. The eyes of the doe do not twitch but stare at me through my windshield. I yelp, swallowing my heart. I see a dead fawn at her feet and feel wounded myself.

The engine strains, and the car lurches because I have stupidly forgotten to clutch. The vehicle jerks a couple of times then dies before I can react.

"God, Mother," Gayla complains from the backseat.

I stare at the deer and remember another trip.

I am six years old and stuck in the back of our '56 Chevy heading for Arizona. I want to see the Grand Canyon, and both parents are tired of hearing "When will we get there?" I think they're plain sick of me, especially Daddy.

I open up my copy of *Our World Encyclopedia*, volume five, that has the picture of a stewardess leaving a silver four engine airliner. In her trim uniform and high heels she looks like a smiling princess. I am studying to be a stewardess so when I grow up I can fly away from Daddy and be the closest thing to a princess an American girl is allowed to be.

"Quit reading that thing," Daddy growls, looking over his shoulder. "You'll ruin your eyes."

I ignore him and start reading, even though the words begin to swim around and make me dizzy. My stomach begins to roll, and I barely make it out the window before I vomit. Great big chunks of the hot dog I had for lunch fall to the graveled pavement, which races by below me. I see speeding lines which make me even dizzier and sicker.

"Dammit, Doreen," Daddy shouts. "Tend to your daughter."

Momma turns around and pulls me in after I stop. As she wipes my face with a damp towel, I feel like I have been turned inside out. I wonder what Daddy will say when he sees the streak of puke down the side of the two-toned Chevy. The wind spreads the pink stain over the white and turquoise metal like an uncontrolled fire.

"I'm sorry you're sick, Sugar," Momma says. "I guess it's to be expected when your Daddy is too cheap to buy a car with an air conditioner in it."

I think Momma lets her drawl get worse when she's making fun of Daddy, just as he talks faster when he's mad at her.

"It's soooo hot," I agree, panting. The wind coming through the window seems like the exhaust from a blast furnace.

"Now we're all going to burn up in the Arizona desert," she says, wringing the towel out the window.

I think of a trio of skeletons sprawled alongside a rusty Chevy, like pioneers that have missed the last water hole.

"If we had one of those Dodge Texans...." Momma starts, but Daddy snorts, silencing her. It's a warning signal, like a bull about to charge.

Momma takes the encyclopedia from me and slides it under the seat before I can even pout.

"Just color, Lee Ann," Momma says turning around and leaning over the seat. She hands me a paper sack full of Crayons and a Dale Evans coloring book. The little crinkles at the edges of her eyes twitch, and the corners of her pretty mouth are drawn tight.

"I'm tired of coloring," I groan. I have already filled up my Davy Crockett coloring book. I hold my breath and ball out my cheeks. Sometimes this actually works.

Momma sighs, "Lee Ann, Sugar, Daddy's got to concentrate."

I blow out my breath and try to make my face as tight as a roadside skeleton. Momma raises her eyebrows then sighs again.

I can tell she's in one of her "watch Daddy" moods. I stick out my lip to pout, but she pays no mind. She turns back around, the wind whipping at the red silk scarf tied around her blonde hair.

Momma is beautiful. She could be a movie star, Daddy says, if she would just take care of herself. She doesn't wear any makeup except for lipstick. She wears Hazel Bishop, the kind that doesn't kiss off.

Sometimes, when she's in a teasing mood, Momma will try and "kiss test" her lipstick on me. I will run and scream and giggle and tell her to stop, but really I like it because it means that she's in a good mood.

Now she is drawn up tight and quiet, just like she is a little girl herself, trying to curl up in a little ball, making no sound, taking up no room. Daddy holds the steering wheel with one hand and chain smokes with his other, lighting one Camel after another. Every once in a while, he exhales like a horse snorting, blowing through his nose. He begins to dial the radio through every station he can find, apparently trying to avoid hearing Elvis Presley sing "Blue Suede Shoes" one more time on this trip.

I color listlessly, trying to keep my Crayola inside the lines, while Daddy lets the Chevy wander all over the road. Like Momma, I am mad at Daddy, so I color Roy Rogers's face purple and Pat Brady's green, thinking that this somehow makes things even for Mom and me.

"Nathan," Momma shrieks, "look out."

I look over the front seat to see that the Chevy is in the middle of the yellow stripe and a truck is barreling straight toward us.

"Shut up, Doreen," Daddy growls, pulling the car back over to our side of the road. The truck driver blasts his horn as he roars past. Daddy is already fiddling with the radio again.

"Nathan, you're going to kill us all," Momma says.

"Shut up, Doreen," Daddy repeats.

He stops turning the knob on a news broadcast. The announcer says something about East Berlin.

Daddy lights yet another cigarette while his last still smolders in the ashtray.

Later that afternoon, Daddy has me sit in the front so Momma can stretch out in the back. He has found a music station that plays nothing but soft, soothing music. There are no words, just violins and pianos and some boring announcer.

Daddy's mood improves with Momma stretched out asleep. I talk him into playing games. He laughs and smokes and stares over the turquoise hood of the Chevy. He stares at the swept wing silver jet hood ornament that perches at the end of the hood, like it's flying down the highway.

"What do you do in the F.B.I.?" I ask Daddy.

"I'm not in the F.B.I.," Daddy says, "I'm in the F.D.I.C., and I examine banks."

"You don't chase A-Bomb spies or Reds?" I ask, suddenly disappointed. When Momma had taken me to the big building where Daddy worked in Houston one night, there had been a man with a gun guarding the door. I had assumed that Daddy worked in a secret and dangerous job. I had already warned all the kids in my kindergarten class that if they bothered me J. Edgar Hoover would arrest their parents because my Daddy worked for him. Now, I wondered what lie I would have to tell when we got back to Houston. I might say that my Daddy got an

even better job, one that let me and Momma go with him, not like the stingy, old F.B.I.

I finally see a roadside sign with a "P" on it and have to sound out the long word in my mind before saying it.

"Prescott," I say, pointing at the name on the sign that flies past because Arizona will let you drive faster on their highways. Daddy drives faster still because the roadway is so flat and straight.

"How can such a little girl read so well?" Daddy asks, then winks at me. My heart flutters just as it does when he introduces Mom and me in public as "his girls."

"Momma has been teaching me since I was five," I beam.

"Momma's a good teacher?"

"Oh, yes," I say, "Now you have to look for a 'T.'"

"I thought I had to look for a 'Q.'"

"No, that's the other game. In this game you have to do the last letter of the word that was just said," I say, knowing that Daddy will cheat if I don't watch him. I offer him Ritz crackers from out of the box, but he shakes his head. The crackers make my mouth dry, so I drink water from the big jar Momma keeps on the floor in front. The water is warm and tepid, like Momma says, the ice long since melted, but at least it's wet.

We begin to pull alongside a passing westbound freight train, running on tracks parallel to the highway. I scan the signs on the red-brown boxcars and the yellow refrigerated cars that Daddy says carry Grandpa's Texas tomatoes all over the world.

"Topeka," Daddy says triumphantly.

"Ack-i...." I sound out loud a really weird word.

"Atchison," Daddy corrects.

We play our way down the road. Daddy tells me that sometimes when the glare hits the hood just so he thinks he is sitting in the cockpit of his plane heading east

instead of west. He gets quiet and talks to me like I am not there, or like I was a boy instead of a girl. I am happy that he is paying attention to me, yet I am upset, too.

Later that day, when the cherry-colored sun sinks low on the horizon, we pull over, and Momma climbs out of the back and stretches. Daddy hugs her, and she pecks him on the lips.

"Momma's kissing Daddy. Momma's kissing Daddy," I tease her from the car, bouncing up and down in the front seat.

Momma turns and smiles bashfully at me. In the reddish evening I can't tell if she's blushing or not. Her fingers play with the back of Daddy's neck. They cling together for just a second.

Soon, Daddy is snoring in the back seat; Momma and I sit in the front. We drive into the growing dusk. We're starting to get into piney woodlands. Along the side of the road, I see a deer grazing peacefully.

"Momma, stop the car," I cry. "A deer."

She makes a skeptical sigh but pulls the car over and slowly backs up.

Partly hidden in the brush with its head erect, white patch showing, stands an antler-less deer.

"It's a mule deer," Momma says, "See the big ears?"

"Doreen, what are we stopping for?" Daddy grumps, rising from a sound sleep.

"A deer, Daddy," I whisper.

"Mule deer, a doe," Daddy says, lying back down. "You'll see lots of them. We must be inside the park. They get so used to people they're almost tame."

We watch the deer, and the deer watches us with big dark eyes. Finally, Momma pulls the car back onto the highway. The sun dips below the horizon, and the moon comes up. I ask Momma how the moon can come up in the daytime, but she can't explain it so she reaches over and wiggles my nose with her thumb and forefinger.

"It comes out special just for you," Momma says.

It is full dark when Momma stops at a motel that looks like a big log cabin with the corners of the building looking like interwoven fingers. Momma is just fixing to slide from behind the wheel and go inside when Daddy wakes up again.

"What are we stopping for?" Daddy demands.

"Lee Ann wants to see the Grand Canyon," Momma says. Her voice is weak as a dishrag, a nervous tremor to it. She gets out of the car though. Her sandals make a jittery slapping sound on the asphalt as she steps out of the car. The car door hangs open like an unanswered question.

Daddy leaps out of the car.

"I promised her, Nathan," Momma whines.

"Dammit, Doreen, I told you we can't afford it," Daddy says. He grabs her hard, his big fingers pressing red spots in her bare arm.

"It's okay," I shriek, "I don't want to see any old Grand Canyon."

"Don't touch me," Momma growls, and she tries to jerk away from Daddy, but he grabs her with both fists and stuffs her in the back seat, slamming the door. He jumps behind the wheel, and the car squeals away from the motel car port.

I am crying now, wailing, making big gasping sounds. I feel like I can't get enough air. My throat is sore.

"It's okay, Baby," Momma says leaning over the seat, putting her arms around me. The red spots are still on her right arm, but everything in the car is blurry as Momma lifts me over the seat and cuddles with me in the back seat.

"Both of you shut up," Daddy growls and lights up another Camel.

"I'm sorry, Sugar," Momma whispers.

"I don't want to see any old canyon," I blubber. My

head is on her shoulder. I can smell the cottony softness and soap on her flimsy sun dress. My tears wet the skin of her neck.

"It'll be okay," Momma says as we speed away into the night.

Days later, we're in Kingman, and Momma has taken up smoking, stealing Daddy's cigarettes while he's off at the bank. They argue about it when he comes home. Every time Daddy comes back to the motel room, Momma sends me outside to collect rocks. I keep looking for gold, and once I find a big rock the size of Daddy's hand with flecks of gold in it. When I show it to the grey haired man at the front desk, he laughs and says it's fool's gold.

I frown. The man has wide red suspenders like a frontier miner, but now I am not sure he's an expert.

"Iron pyrite," the man smiles. "It's fooled more than just you, Sweetheart."

I want to tell him that only my momma can call me that. But I can't go back to the motel room 'cause they are arguing so loud you can hear them outside, yelling about Daddy's smelly old Camel cigarettes, and why hasn't Momma unpacked our bags, and why does Daddy have to be so cheap, and how Momma better shut her mouth if she knows what's good for her.

I want to go in and help her, but, instead, I stand outside, hiding behind the bushes in the flower bed, holding my foolish, useless rock 'til it finally gets quiet inside.

Next morning, Momma drives Daddy to work 'cause she tells him she wants to borrow the car to do some shopping. Daddy scowls but hands her some money. I am bouncing up and down in the back seat, even though it's early. I am thinking things are back to normal.

Daddy tries to make a joke, but Momma doesn't say anything.

Afterwards, Momma loads me and all our unpacked suitcases into the car. She is silent, smoking Daddy's cigarettes one after another 'til finally she crumples up the pack and heaves it out the window. I am a little scared of her. My head swivels all around taking in the sights, but my eyes keep stealing hidden glances at her, studying this woman that is suddenly so strange.

Finally, Momma says in her best Sunday picnic voice, "So you wanted to see the Grand Canyon?"

I am still a little scared of her, but I'm thinking it's a trick. It's knowing *where the edge is*.

The deer's ear twitches, and she finally moves away, vanishing into the darkness. I watch it go, feeling a connection I have not felt for thirty years, an unused emotion I had tossed aside like a useless pyrite nugget.

Something snaps within me, and I reach and look at the road atlas and judge the distance, measuring the miles to the canyon's rim with my index finger.

Gayla has gone back to sleep and is softly snoring.

I will take her to the edge, just as my mother took me. We will stand close to the abyss and gingerly shove pebbles over the side with our toes. I imagine holding Gayla's hand tightly as we listen to stones tumbling down the canyon's side.

I will prove to my daughter that though danger shouldn't be courted, it can be measured and plumbed, appreciated without inviting disaster.

Mad Cows and Englishmen

My wife and I listen to the BBC,
and suddenly she asks with straight face,
"Do they have an asylum or something
for all those insane cows?--
I mean being English and all."

I laugh and pour scorn like boiling oil,
"They shoot them," I say, arching my eyebrows.
"But they'd have to knock on a thousand doors
to find some retired colonel—one who might
legally own a gun over there."

"They shoot them," I persisted.
"Pity," she says. "We couldn't do the same for you."
She reaches over as the dog whines, sensing
conflict.
She brushes the yellow fur.
"Are you a depressed doggie?" She coos.

Tracks

We called it walking the "tracks,"
though the rails were long gone,
ripped up to pound into swords or
some more useful martial material.
All that was left was roadbed and ballast.

My Lieutenant says to me,
"Where's An Ky 5?" and at first I ignore him,
for the question seems rhetorical,
there's nowhere in Vietnam I really want to be,
and he and Frank and Billy are staring at the map.

But he's a Texan, so I relent, the Marine Corps,
Nixon's SS,
lets so few of us wear bars, I take it for a sign to help this
guy, this butterbar mother who's more my enemy
than Ho Chi
Freaking Minh cause he's the SOB that's got me here.

"You see that wide paddy dike. That was a road,"
I say,
"and look there," and point to a concrete slit
along side the road bed.
"That's an old grease pit, and yonder's the stub of
a water tower for when they used to run steam trains."

He nods, and they all get excited, for it's like
Pentagon archeology, digging up what twenty years of
war
have done to the maps. And he looks and smiles
at me,
and I smile back as I pull my rifle over my lap.

Here's where we change trains, I think.
Here's where I find a side that don't have a flag.
And in my mind I'm going home,
and if there were a road to Texas, I'd be gone tonight.
Gone home to plant the corn.

AMANDA SMITH

**Reality, Responsibility, and Reinvention in
"Woman Hollering Creek"**

The Chicana, a Mexican-American female, is a marginalized being; on the one hand, she is neither completely Mexican and, on the other, not fully American. Sandra Cisneros is a Chicana author. In Understanding Contemporary Chicana Literature by Deborah Madsen, Sandra Cisneros is quoted as saying, "We're always straddling two countries, and we're always living in that kind of schizophrenia that I call being a Mexican woman living in American society, but not belonging to either culture" (108). Cisneros seeks to "negotiate a cross-cultural identity" through her work. The difficulty comes from the necessity to "challenge the deeply rooted patriarchal values of both Mexican and American cultures" (108). In the short story "Woman Hollering Creek," she challenges these patriarchal cultures in three very specific ways. First, she does this by examining the reality of Cleófilas's situation as a Mexican bride brought "to a town en el otro lado – on the other side" of the Rio Grande (43). Cleófilas has many fantasies of what life will be like on the northern side of the border, but these are dispelled shortly after her marriage. Through this story Cisneros also shows the reader that it is the liberated Chicana's responsibility to help her "sisters" out of the entrapment of these imprisoning patriarchies. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, one of the ways she has chosen to undermine these traditions is to reevaluate and redefine one of the three Mexican mythologies that most deeply impact female Mexican culture, that of La Llorona.

The protagonist, Cleófilas, is a young Mexican woman who has lived with her "six good-for-nothing brothers, and one old" man, her father, and has been waiting her entire life for "passion." "The kind books and songs and *telenovelas* describe when one finds, finally, the great love of one's life and does whatever one can, must do, at whatever the cost" (43-44). Before her marriage and uprooting, she also has grand imaginings of what life in Seguin, Texas will be like:

A nice sterling ring to it. The tinkle of money. She would get to wear outfits like the women on the *tele*, like Lucía Méndez. And would have a lovely house, and wouldn't Chela be jealous. [...] and then they'll drive off in his new pickup- did you see it?- to their new home in Seguin. Well, not exactly new, but they're going to repaint the house. You know newlyweds. New paint and new furniture. Why not? He can afford it. (45)

She marries Juan Pedro and is transported away from her family and friends--all she has known in her life--and taken to Seguin. This is not the heaven on earth she has constructed in her mind. Marital bliss is short-lived, and she soon finds herself a battered wife completely at the mercy of her unfaithful husband. The reality of the situation is that she must

remind herself why she loves him when she changes the baby's Pampers, or when she mops the bathroom floor, or tries to make the curtains for the doorways without doors, or whiten the linen. Or wonder a little when he kicks the refrigerator door and says he hates this shitty house and is going out where he won't be bothered with

the baby's howling and her suspicious questions. (49)

She has based all of her ideas of love on these *telenovelas* giving her the notion that "to suffer for love is good. The pain all sweet somehow. In the end" (45). This deeply held belief and the geography of a new land trap her in an abusive relationship: "Because the towns here are built so that you have to depend on husbands" (50-51). Jeff Thompson writes about this in "What is called Heaven? Identity in Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek*." He states "she is beaten by her husband and trapped in a suburban house between two women who are equally trapped" (420). These women are Cleófilas's only companions, Dolores and Soledad, aside from the creek which she believes calls to her in the voice of *La Llorona*. In the end, she decides, for the safety of her unborn child, that she must escape back to her father's home in Mexico. She does this with the aid of Felice, a Chicana woman who drives her from Seguin to the bus station in San Antonio. As the story is ending, the reader finds Cleófilas in Mexico explaining her escape and the strange woman who "when we crossed the *arroyo* she just started yelling like a crazy" (56). At this time Cleófilas notices that she has gained some of Felice's strength, her laughter, that comes "gurgling out of her own throat, a long ribbon of laughter, like water" (56).

In an article titled "On Not Being *La Malinche*: Border Negotiations of Gender in Sandra Cisneros's 'Never Marry a Mexican' and 'Woman Hollering Creek,'" Jean Wyatt explains that this "Chicana figure provides Cleófilas with a [...] positive role model" (257). In the context of this story, it is to the advantage of the Chicana woman that she is marginalized. "The Chicana, who stands astride Anglo and Mexican cultures, is not captive to the myths of either culture" (257-58). Instead

of having only way of interpreting the world, Felice, one of the story's Chicana figures, can choose to hear La Llorona's wailing or to yell out like Tarzan. She chooses the latter, and as they cross over the creek she lets "out a yell as loud as any mariachi" (55). Wyatt claims "Felice's grito may also be read as a call to arms, to the cause of female solidarity, which now rescues Cleófilas from domestic abuse" (258). She also is not confined to one language. She speaks "in a Spanish pocked with English" (55). Felice asks Cleófilas if she has noticed "how nothing around here is named after a woman? Really. Unless she's the Virgin. I guess you're only famous if you're a virgin" (55). Wyatt also explains that while this is true and quite annoying to Felice, the creek is a "woman" but has both Spanish and English names, allowing "Felice to define 'woman' for herself" (258). Because of Felice, Cleófilas is able to see a type of woman she never knew existed--the type of woman who is not married, who has her own truck that she makes her own payments on, and who is not afraid to express herself by screaming at the top of her lungs and laughing out loud. Cleófilas has just gained the knowledge that women can express themselves and that there is more than one way to live and more than one way to interpret the world around her.

Similarly there are multiple ways to examine Mexican and pre-colonial Mexican myths. According to an essay by Alexandra Fitts, the three that impact the Mexican female psyche most dramatically are the images of La Malinche, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and La Llorona. In "Woman Hollering Creek," Cisneros specifically focuses on the myth of La Llorona. Fitts states, "Part of this negotiation is the incorporation of key feminine archetypes from the Mexican tradition and the reconsideration of these figures in a way that will reflect

the realities of the modern Chicana experience (11). Cisneros reexamines the figure of La Llorona, who according to Octavio Paz describes in Fitts' essay, is children who died in childbirth. Originally the wailing woman in white [seeking] her an Aztec goddess who sacrificed babies and disappeared shrieking into lakes or rivers, La Llorona usually appears near a well, stream or washing place. The Hispanicized form has La Llorona murdering her own children born out of wedlock when her lover married a woman of his own station. (18)

Jacqueline Doyle examines this topic in her article "Haunting the Borderlands: La Llorona in Sandra Cisneros's 'Woman Hollering Creek.'" In this analysis, she quotes Norma Alarcón's argument "that these highly charged 'symbolic figures' have been used as 'reference point[s]' not only for controlling, interpreting, or visualizing women' in Mexican-American culture, 'but also to wage a domestic battle of stifling proportions'" (55). As Cleófilas's situation worsens she believes she hears La Llorona calling out to her:

La Llorona calling to her. She is sure of it. Cleófilas sets the baby's Donald Duck blanket on the grass. Listens. The day sky turning to night. The baby pulling up fistfuls of grass and laughing. La Llorona. Wonders if something as quiet as this drives a woman to the darkness under the trees. (51)

She is beginning to understand the kind of desperation that potentially leads a woman to perform such an act, but she resists following La Llorona's example. Fitts suggests that this occurs because Cleófilas has some

"resources that La Llorona must not have possessed, and it is through Cleófilas's resolution of her desperate situation that Cisneros rewrites the story of La Llorona" (19). The two resources that Cleófilas has are her father back in Mexico, who tells Cleófilas on her wedding day, "*I am your father, I will never abandon you,*" and the comadres she discovers at the doctor's office, Felice and Graciela (43). Thus, Cisneros has succeeded in her attempt

"to chart the interstices and in-betweens of the borderlands, to remap symbolic maternal landscapes, and to open a protean space where La Llorona's ghostly wail is replaced by 'a voice all [her] own,' a high, silver voice' that calls Cleófilas to a new spiritual birth" (55).

Her goal of reinventing a classic Mexican myth has been achieved.

"Woman Hollering Creek" is more than a relatively short prose piece with simple language; it is a political and emotional statement about the plight of Mexican women in American society: specifically, "Another one of those brides from across the border" (54). Cisneros shows her readers the dreams of these women and their disappointment at the reality of the "American Dream." She shows her audience that Chicana women possess a responsibility, a kind of stewardship, which must be shown towards women less liberated and fortunate. But most importantly, she reinvents La Llorona through the character of Cleófilas, who instead of sacrificing her children and herself finds a way of escape and personal liberation.

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Digitizing the Coliseum

stepping in footprints
of Caesar
and Christ

we cover our lungs
with polyester sleeves

being wary
of ancient roman dust

we wash our hands
with gloves that protect

as we pose roses
on sacred mounds

and hide artifacts
in test tubes

for later study
in our capsulated
alien bus

The Oil Boom: Petrochemical Warmth

Shivering on the sixth floor
Somewhere near bibliographical
"Economy"

"Gerontology"

Urban Needs

Overlooking the connection
Between Marihuana
And The Literature of Terrorism
Two shelves down.

Six windows above a door
Leading to sub-zero temperature
-- Texan Scale --

Across pavement
Fiery electrical stars beam
Quilted nuclear clouds

Where Sky and Earth don't divide
when squinting just right.

Religion

after tipping
the oldest toilet
in barcelona
and scattering
remnants of lunchables
to statue birds
in empty fountains
i pray to the masses
and give to the gypsy
money to buy redemption
from a roman-spain'glish
vending machine

ANDY COUGHLAN

Grace

Black birds in a line as if brushed by ink
by unseen hands across an ashen sky
only the faint whirring of their wings
alerts the unsuspecting to their presence

The meandering line tumbles and rises on the currents
sometimes frantically swirling, sometimes gently curving
but always with the grace of a dancer
or the gentle movements of fabric
billowing on a balmy summer breeze
or the reflection of light playing on the ocean

The beautiful flowing gracefulness of the whole
belies the urgent energy of the individual

With no end or beginning visible to these eyes
the black birds, with a single purpose, dance on

The Line Is The Thing

The colors are good, they please the eye
Drawing the unsuspecting viewer close
See the pretty colors, aren't they nice
But the line is the thing
I long to shout at them
THE LINE IS THE THING!
It dances, swaying with the rhythms of the music
It sings, it shouts
It silently waits
But it is never still
Death will never come calling
Though the line may speak of it often
Pain and sadness speak through it
But the line never loses its smile
Demons and gods may fight over its soul
Love may try to steal it away
And cynics may try to corrupt it
But its innocence shines on regardless
Colors may be killed with time
Artists may fade with the years
But the line lives on
And with it, the message.

Losing Virginity

The pale virgin silently stares
While I pace the room nervously
The virgin is unmoving, waiting
For whatever I want, mine for the taking.

But I am weak and hesitant.
She is not the first, nor will she be the last.
It is the same each time.
But she is so pure, so white.

What if I am not good?
What if she is spoiled?
What if she is wasted, like so many before?
What if I am not worthy enough for her?

This same bloody ritual is played out every time.
I find other things to do
Make a cup of tea, a sandwich, let the dogs out.
Jazz, I need some Miles Davis or Coltrane.

Expressionless, she is neither inviting nor rejecting,
But I know she wants it, it is inevitable.
I must break the silence between us,
Commit that violence that will tear down the barrier.

With shaking hands I hold firm
The instrument of her deflowerment
The fine hairs tremble as I thrust
The brush into the ink and strike the paper

And she sighs.

Modigliani's Nude

She has called many to seduction
Sleek, smooth lines
Reclining naked
Sensuous, but also innocent
Aware of her sexuality
fair face blushed with color
Faraway eyes dreaming
Full lips
And the beauty of the line
That outlines her body
Snaking its way down
Her outstretched arm
Running past her ribs
Drifting sublimely down her thigh

Can there ever have been
A more perfect woman?

Modigliani's nude is all women.
It is all in the artist's eye.

JOSHUA DESLATTE

The Dance

Elyse with light of heaven-
And the grace of Terpsichore,
Glides across the floor-
She regards nothing but the music.

Fingers soft to the touch-
And eyes with a magic trance,
She'll hypnotize you with her majestic glance-
With gifts from the daughter of Mnemosyne.

A friend of rhythm and time,
She lives within the dance-
Herself becoming heavenly.

She and the dance become one outside of time,
The angels, they envy her medley-
Without reason, only with rhyme.

La Danse

Elyse avec lumière de cieux-
Et le grâce de Terpsichore,
Glisser à travers le plancher-
Elle regarde rien mais la musique.

Doigts tendre pour la toucher-
Et oeils avec une transe magique,
Elle hypnotise vous avec celle coup d'oeil majestueux-
Avec cadeaux dans la fille de Mnemesyne.

Une amie avec rythme et temp,
Elle vifs dedans la danse-
Elle-même convenable divin.

Elle et la danse covenir à une exterior de temp,
Les anges, ils envie celle mélange-
Sans raison, seulment avec rime.

Love, Hate

My room it is filled-
With buckets of beer,
And rivers of tears;
Beer for forgetting you.
Tears for remembrance of you.

Your memory, it just might kill-
Me, with these tears that I spill,
Living in complete fear;
Maybe you love me,
Maybe you hate me.

Maybe you hate me-
Maybe I hate you.

Maybe you love me-
Maybe I love you.

Adore, Deteste

Mon chamber est plein-
Avec les seus de bier,
Et les rivières des larmes;
Bier pour oublié vous,
Larmes dans en souvenir vous.

Votre mémoire, c'est rudement tuer-
Moi, avec ceux-ci larmes j'ai répandre,
Vivant en complet peur;
Peut-être vous adorez moi,
Peut-être vous detestez moi.

Peut-être vous detestez moi-
Peut-être je deteste vous.

Peut-être vous adorez moi-
Peut-être j'adore vous.

CARLOS HERDOCIA

Caupolican

Ruben Dario (1833)

It is something formidable that the old race saw:
Robust trunk of a tree on the shoulder of a champion
Savage and overworked, who's mass
Blanded Hercules arm, or the arm of Samson.

For helmets his hair, his chest for armor
This warrior, as the ruler of the region
Ruler of the forest, Nimrod that hunts all,
Disable a bull, or strangle a lion.

He walked, walked, walked, The light of day saw him,
The pale light of the sunset saw him, the cold night saw him,
And always the trunk of tree on shoulders of the titan.

"El Toqui, El Toqui!" claims the moved village men.
He went, went, went. The aurora said stop!
And firmly stood the forehead of the great Caupolican.

Caupolican

Ruben Dario (1988)

Es algo formidable que vio la vieja raza:
Robusto tronco de arbol al hombro de un campeon
Salvaje y aguerrido, cuya fornida maza
Blandiera el brazo de Hercules, o el brazo de Samson.

Por cascos sus cabellos, por pecho su coraza,
Pudiera tal guerrero, de Arauco en la region,
Lancero de los bosques, Nemrod que todo caza,
Desjarretar un toro, o estrangular un leon.

Anduvo, anduvo, anduvo. Le vio la luz del dia,
Le vio la tarde palida, le vio la noche fria,
Y siempre el tronco de arbol a cuevas del titan.

"El Toqui, el Toqui!" clama la conmovida casta.
Anduvo, Anduvo, Anduvo. La Aurora dijo Basta!
E irguiose la frente del gran Caupolican.

HOWARD L. KERN

Repo Man

Nothing personal
Vulture of bad investment
Reclaim for money

You Think You've Got Troubles

Here I am, drunk, pissed off, and hungry,
A stupid, regular navy bastard,
I got a hangover and damned flat broke,
Missed muster, no pass, no nookie, sick,
No friends, and fewer relatives,
I need a haircut, I'm homesick, tired,
And there has been no mail in three weeks.
I am seen as inefficient,
Given a poor character rating,
Overtime in grade,
My pay record is screwed up,
No clothes, laundry was rejected,
I missed chow,
Leave was disapproved
And the Chief wants to see me after muster.
I got a hard on, I may have VD,
I am about to crap my pants,
And the head is secured for inspection,
Then some wise-bastard says,
"Ship for six, look at all the advantages."

JESUS S. PEÑA

Blasphemy

All is well that ends well;
So forsaken are we.
In the blind spot of your God,
Souls of the stolen and cheap.
The crucible has been sacrificed
And the terror is bleak.
Will our sorrow not suffice?
Will You conquer Your feat?

The hand of Faith has made a fist,
And it will strike with dismay.
I'd spit at your torn God
For the entire plight he's portrayed.

Point and laugh at Your followers
And state the spectacle's gay.
Even though they are dying,
No, they never backslide in faith.

Yet, we've untied the blindfold-
Seen the light with our eyes.
It was nothing like You told-
Darkness consuming the skies.

Coaled Canary

Why do you cry, canary, and who has shaded your attire?
Why so down up high in your kingdom?

Lonesome canary, you flee your former kingdom, now?
The rusting iron bars are lifted and you sail, but not too far.
Cold and trembling, the sky is your oyster,
Yet, you do not venture to it.
Why?

Bewildered bird, why hide in the coal mines?
Your shine will not help you there.
It is only so long before your oyster blackens
And the many oblivious eyes look down on thee.
Delay not the inevitable.

Wretched foul, do you sharpen your beak on stone?
I know not who you have become.
Although, you resemble he who perches on the tombs,
And on the bust of Pallas above the chamber door;
He who wears the ominous black.
Nevermore.

Currency for Gods

Our faith is currency to biased "Gods,"
They look down to see Their post has moved up.
They rely on man; They rely on pods
To sacrifice and fill Their royal cup.
Shame to him who offers blood for His wine;
Shame to him who offers flesh for His bread.
Don't mind me, Messiah, Your Royal Swine,
I'm just a backslider whose faith is dead.
No Quezalcoatl, no Jesus, no Zeus,
No "Divine God" exists to be all fair.
They take our faith and lives for Their own use
So They'll become "Divine *and* Debonair."
Forsake Them like They have Their followers,
Without us, *They* are like prey-less prowlers.

Opus of Melancholy

Hey there, kitten, lonely in the dreary alley.
The city rain pours quarreling cats and dogs
From the arching street lamp above
And over your tragic soul.
Oh shame, your ivory coat has been far too dampened,
Transformed to a saddened gray.
Meowing your Opus of Melancholy,
Your trembling voice echoes through the dark,
Hoping vainly to captivate a caring ear.
Your sorrowful tune reaches the far edges of the night,
Only to return ashamed.

Hey there, kitten, lost and afraid,
Has your Master abandoned you, again?
Is that puddle you drown in of salt and sorrow?
Or is it your Mother weeping?
Worry not, troubled kitten,
The unmerciful world, soon,
Will no longer look down on you.
Soon, your reluctant audience will cease to throw
Hateful shoes in your direction.
Shortly, on the final meow of your lonely opus
The ocean of salt and sorrow
Will sweep you off the alley shore.

Shadow Dance

Discovered, they run from behind inanimate objects
Into a vast darkness at the ends of the corridor.
The miniscule flame on the central candle is deeply
aggravated,
Wanting to continuously jump and apprehend them.

The wick struggles to contain his lively counterpart,
Wasting away for his friend.
The waxed soul of the wick also decays.
Yet, the self-centered fire quarrels.

Left and right, brighter than ever,
He is constantly enraged by the brethren of darkness.
Right and left, larger than ever.

Tired and weary, both shadows and flare,
The wick and his soul are consumed.
They giveth him life, but he giveth them death,
And now he himself must burn out to rest.

Resolution

A child dealt these things
Shouted out, slammed against a door
I repeat myself again
Do these abuses make us men?

Someone once shed
A suit and life
What do you pursue?
Is what you live for true?

You do for me, I do for you
It's cold to me and warm to you
I can't remember what I thought yesterday,
What I felt the day before

Spitting on the image
Divided by rage
Some are made unseen
To themselves,
Some stuck in between

You do for me, I do for you
It's cold to me and warm to you
I can't remember what I thought yesterday,
What I felt the day before

You do for me, I do for you
It's cold to me and warm to you
But it's not what I remember
Or what I thought yesterday

It's what I feel today.

Lies of Society

Peace, Prosperity, and hunger will always linger
As does the beating heart of the wild hyena.
True love, Generosity, and the human spirit
Are what gets eaten up by global civilization.

Does not the mother bear love her cub
Like the maternal caretaker that she is?
Does not the husband care for his wife
Like her parents cared for her?

Colors of the rainbow paint us all
Whether we are black, white, brown or red
We will never all become gray.

Literature Is Not Just Reading

Literature is a conglomeration of thoughts, emotions, and experiences that project and reflect the innermost feelings of the writer. That is why literature should be written with the heart and not solely with the intellect. Literature is a spiritual experience because it speaks to the inner being of mankind. Whether, a person is writing or reading literature, it has a way of speaking to the soul and a cunning ability to speak in silence as well.

For a moment, visualize a pendulum swinging back and forth with the word literature written in the middle, entertainment on one side and education on the other side; and with either side there is a choice to be made because literature has a transforming effect in an individual's life. There is so much to absorb from reading any type of literature. Reality says broaden your horizons, educate yourself, and stimulate the mind, but preference dictates pleasure and enjoyment. The entertainment side of the pendulum, not only stimulates the mind but the heart and soul as well.

The task of a good writer is to captivate his readers. As a person begins to read a piece of literature, he must open himself to the setting of the written piece and begin to see as the author sees. Also, the reader has to understand and relate to what the writer is daring to portray in his work. Both missions have been accomplished, when the emotional and intellectual senses have been aroused to experience what the writer is expressing. The goal is to comprehend the material the way the writer has perceived it within himself. And when placed in his shoes, the literature begins to trigger the very soul of a

person causing focus and to link into the aura of what is being verbalized. Unbeknown, to a person, emotions begin to talk and the literature begins to speak things that can not be understood or even verbalized at times, thus, speaking aloud the innermost feeling of the reader.

Another thing to observe when reading literature is that it produces a soothing calmness that seems to bring relief from all outside influences. It releases an individual to become involved in the setting of what is read. But most of all, the thing that literature prompts is the desire to write and express oneself. Literature will birth writers and speakers. There is a hidden desire to express one's innermost feeling. Now, fate only knows to what degree and level a person will achieve in this venture; but literature is the doorway to the soul, and it will open up the mind, soul, and spirit, thus, excelling the limitations of the intellect. There is a place beyond this tangible realm that can be traveled. Literature is definitely one of the vehicles that will transport an individual to that place. Because of its ability to transform a person from one setting to another, literature is a spiritual experience.

Literature has an awesome power to minister to the hidden nature of mankind. Therefore, if it be for entertainment or educational purposes, enjoy the privilege of being able to read literature because it has a stimulating effect on the mind, soul, and spirit. Literature is a spiritual experience.

closed casket

Eight hours have crawled
since the alarm crowed,
but I remain mummified
in these soiled sheets
as merciless bedbugs feast
on my breathing corpse.
Is this a dark dorm room
or the blatant reality
of Lazarus's eerie tomb?
A demon with one eye
has been staring at me
while faint sunrays diminish.
His voice impersonations
cannot appease these tumults
encompassing my sobbing heart
as twilight ink begins to spill
through azure threads above.
I wish to fall into deep sleep
and never have to wake again,
yet I already sense the fact
that I was born deceased.
No one would miss me,
and neither would I
after being exhausted
from erecting Babel ambitions
and drowning in Titanic dreams
which cannot even venture
from the docks of my cranium
or at least be floating along
when they collide with icebergs
chipped off from a freezing society

where reverence waxes cold
on a "one of those days" basis.
Even failures can say
that they put up good fights
in aiming everyday
for constellation status.
If that is the case,
then I am lower by far,
taking up valuable space
and wasting precious hours
being the constant guest
of honor at pity parties.
Why am I even on this mattress,
much less on this lurid globe,
crying out for true serenity?
Can it be possible for a holy God
to pardon my proud warfare?
Such forgiveness does not exist
in the concourse of talk shows
or grim hip-hop anecdotes pumping
into my busted eardrums.
I cannot live another day
with the perpetual answer
absent from my morbid thoughts.
What, or Who, could be missing
from my heart which is overcrowded
with the plastic promises of this world?

coward

I was a clueless high school senior
pressing my Prufrock spine
against a barbeque-scented chair
and concentrating on every short skirt
or pair of tight jeans wiggling past me
through nicotine clouds in a nocturnal lounge.
My Casanova buddies were doing the Electric Slide
with tipsy ghetto queens, eventually luring them
into slow drags and flippantly promising
an exciting one-way Voyage to Atlantis.
I was neither a lover nor a fighter
but merely a watcher, which can sometimes
be the worst among those categories.

Some people claim that crazy things occur
after midnight, but we were already bewitched
since 10 p.m. Three hours later
made hardly any difference.

I was worrying about how my mom
was going to swoop down on me
with a leather-belt vengeance
for ignoring my curfew again.
I stepped outside to the pay phone,
rehearsing believable excuses,
when I heard intoxicated tones
stirring a few feet away from me.
I turned around just in time
to watch a torn woman yelling
at her belching boyfriend
who was spitting up slurred insults.

My seared conscience whispered,
"This is none of my business,"
as I crept towards the front door

like an intimidated Levite
passing on the other side
of a wounded traveler.
He suddenly barked, "Shut up,"
reduced her to the status
of a female mongrel
and laid the thunderclap
of his trembling hand
against her tear-stained cheek.
A part of me wanted to look
both ways like Moses and bury
this wannabe Ike Turner
in the Southeast Texas sand
while another part of me knew
that I could not shake off
the impact of bullets torpedoing
from a possibly concealed 9mm.

Looking back on this adolescent episode,
I wonder who was the bigger coward:
either the boyfriend drunk with grapes of wrath
or me for tiptoeing back into festive shadows
silhouetting mirages of wall-to-wall grins?

I hate it when people call me religious

The Pharisees sought
to murder the Messiah
while convicting crowds
with new pious traditions
leavened with Mosaic laws.

Ivory sepulchers
prove how we can dress the dead,
yet winds of doctrine
keep tossing dandelions
surrounding these whitewashed walls.

Dried bones are hidden
in molding closets like casks,
and trained Montresors
lead drunken Fortunatos
to waiting tombs with damp bricks.

When I consider
the devotees, crusaders
and proud disciples
hearing, "I never knew you,"
I see how human works fail.

Saul of Tarsus learned
that before the face of Truth,
religion crumbles
into the same dust he would
later shake from his sandals.

Righteous proselytes
would need no great Physician,
so when I scribble
passions on wide rules, I think,
"I do not deserve this pen."

Italian cream sodas (and the meaning of life)

During an energized Friday night,
I love to drown my writer's block
in whipped-creamed concoctions supplied
by pushers working for Bigg Joe Muggs.
Some of my most innovative eureka
proceed from this healthy procrastination.
It takes more than type-O, perspiration
and optical saltwater to challenge graduates
from bourgeois schools of thought
as well as upset self-righteous critics
like the sight of Kola Boof book covers
while breaking down the bare facts
about our unclean spirits covered
with fig leaves yet exposed
to omniscient eyes that we fear.

BAM's dead poets section
becomes my first easy chair.
As if sitting at Gamaliel's feet,
I spend almost an hour
traveling a road not taken
past a goblin market
while daydreaming about
my phenomenal woman
somewhere praying for me.
Chewing on succulent stanzas
of Bradstreet's burning house
and Taylor's spinning wheel,
I wash them down with sips
of milky club soda mingled
with rich strawberry juice
(although some claim
the blacker the berry).

Ignoring the notes of nymphs
spouting new-age proverbs,
I nomad towards the monthly journals
promising everything from world peace
to financial security to better intercourse
with three weeks of sculptured muscle mass.
Seeking the Essence of Ebony thoughts
to feed the Source of my Heart & Soul,
I Jet from Sister 2 Sister, tempted to learn
the dimensions of Victoria's Secret.
I can now hear the crackle of my swigs,
telling me that my cup is not running over.
Will another mixed quick fix do the trick?
I am not full nor satisfied with my quests.

Why do most of us think that we can
buy Time and bypass Christianity Today?
Holy Spirit, lead me to a nearby oasis.
Renewed in strength, I journey
towards the timeless *logos* of inspiration,
nodding a meek "whassup" to gothic teens
who snicker at paraphrased versions
and published testimonies of ex-Satanists.
Yet, as I consult a copy from 1611,
I am convinced that the Shepherd's voice
sings to me on every page, even though
I may not always comprehend His lyrics.
Emmanuel's words ignite ripples
on the surface of my memory,
flooding out the cancerous echoes
of encountered secular humanists.
Nourished with manna in this wilderness,
I walk refreshed to the crowded parking lot,
thanking God that He supplied sixty-six scrolls
which outshine our chronicled, limited wisdom
on the racks and in the stockroom combined.

java house notes

After shadows flood the streets,
nothing seems to indicate
that streetlights will illuminate
auras over minds beneath.
Can I say at dusk of day,
"Soli Deo Gloria?"

Project pharmacists on call
sling prescription antidotes
keeping patients comatose,
slain by veins containing gall.
Should I say at dusk of day,
"Soli Deo Gloria?"

Doors to churches now are locked.
We possess no time to weep.
Flocks of starving seekers creep
down to cafes on the block,
where they say at dusk of day,
"Soli Deo Gloria."

Prodigal wordsmiths expound
trials and blessings plus daydreams,
melting shadows with sunbeams.
Christ's transfigured face abounds
while we pray at dusk of day,
"Soli Deo Gloria."

Are there answers to your pain
flowing from the microphone?
Do you know you're not alone
gaining loss and losing gain?
Heartstrings play at dusk of day,
"Soli Deo Gloria."

Search the reasons why you came
stumbling under daily weights.
People stop and congregate
to learn the fullness of His name
while we praise at dusk of day,
"Soli Deo Gloria."

Proverbs leave your soul with cures
straight from tongs to unclean lips
purged by coals Yeshua lifts.
Altar flames He once endured.
Jesus paid my Judgment Day.
Soli Deo Gloria!

Jazz renditions tickle ears.
Rhythms roll off ghetto tongues.
Full atonement from the Son
casts away gehenna's fear.
Christ be praised each passing day.
Soli Deo Gloria!

You are always welcome here.
Look with us into this glass,
dimly watching words which last.
Take a seat, and soothe your ears.
May your days echo always,
"Soli Deo Gloria!"

Soli Deo Gloria: Latin for "To God alone be the glory"

last of the romantics (serenading Calliope)

We fell asleep in the checkered field
outside of our cedar cottage last night.
Jehovah reanimates our bodies baptized with dew
as His merciful sunrays pull back our quilt
made of the pastoral fragments
that we gathered on our anniversary.
My wedded muse who submitted
on the morning of Christ's Nativity
yawns as my right arm eases her close.
Arising in slow motion, we bathe in the Alph river
and playfully push invigorating waves on each other.
She ascends to the bank and combs her wet locks
with a stray sylvan branch as they drape
over her sacred shoulders like black silk.

After the spring breeze dries our flesh,
we dress ourselves in lyrical ballads
and walk through the countryside while holding hands.
Larks chirp their aurora hymns as we duet verses
from "This Is My Father's World."
I mention themes from Ecclesiastes Two,
and she links the ruins of Ozymandias's kingdom
with the inevitable thanatopsis
ordained for princes and peasants.
Her spikenard perfume swirls like morning mist
around laurel reeds, teasing me to stop
and smell the rhythms beating in human hearts
seeking sense from their fallen surroundings.
I breathe her warm mocha skin
blessed with a splash of golden caramel.
She giggles as I stir her imagination
with a spoonful of sugar, frankincense and myrrh.

As we picnic on Cloud Nine and read

about Paul's visit to the third Heaven,
 dancing daffodils perform for us below.
 Showing our gratitude, we sprinkle breadcrumbs
 over the side into the river, not knowing
 where God's manna will finally reach.
 We will discover it after many days
 since His hand guides the current.
 Following our feast in the firmaments,
 we leave carefree footprints
 along the pathways of breezes
 traveling from Scotland to Ghana.
 I lean towards her Duval ear
 and whisper Baudelaire lines
 about how I want to be the bold lover
 suspended between the seconds
 before we kiss on a Grecian landscape
 teeming with melodies of revival.

Evening crowds at French cafes
 watch our focused rendezvous
 and notice the captured twinkle
 in my eye, revealing my intentions
 to father devotions and sermons with her.
 Arriving home, we dance cheek to cheek
 over cypress leaves decorating our porch.
 A camouflaged orchestra of crickets
 rub their skilled legs together
 like soothing cello strings translating
 seductive songs from moonbeams.

Jeremiah's flame generates my bosom
 like the fireplace casting matrimony shadows
 laying a red, red rose on each pillow.
 Expecting her bard to share his soul
 in private candlelit stanzas just as much
 as in public Areopagus recitals,

she loosens her fringed gentian robe
 selected from a cabinet of velvet villanelles
 and sapphire satin sonnets.
 She calls me her "mortal Apollo"
 who woos her with the Nicene Creed.
 I vow to study her into the night
 like Malcolm after "lights out."
 I want to love her with curious fingers,
 a Cyrano intellect and a sacrificial heart
 experiencing her complex rhythms and forms
 which floor me like a sledge
 or when a man loves a woman.
 Thank God that I can't keep
 my mind on anything else.

based on Maud Sulter's photograph "Calliope" (1989)
 from the *Zabat* series (see Richard J. Powell's book *Black Art: A Cultural History*)

on the subject of dying

Slaughtered lambs were burned on crude altars,
pointing me to moans on Golgotha.
Soldiers scourged the Rabbi lifted up,
bearing wooden beams and human woes.
Stripped before the scoffers haughty stares,
what enables Him to face the shame
permeating through the Father's wrath?
Spectacles revealed since Genesis
seem to taper under shadows here.
Watching Him suspend between the thieves,
could this meet the justice we deserve?
Stained with crimes from vipers loathing Him,
does this justice reach its purest form?
Now abandoned, wrenched by jaws of Hell,
crying out, "Lama sabachthani,"
dregs are pressed to seal a guileless mouth,
scorched with everlasting bitterness.
Never have I seen a lovesick Man
crushed beyond the nails and mocking crowds!
God in flesh alone would break His heart,
stretching arms for renegades like me.
Lord, will You remember me today
hanging next to perfect love defined?

smoky mountain

But as for Moses, who discerns his fate?
He disappeared through thick, exploding clouds
where lightning bolts collide with Horeb's peak.
Did Yahweh's voice consume his mortal ears,
or did he melt from burning countenance?
Did boulders fall and crush his trembling frame
to testify involving vengeful hands
which swept Egyptian corpses over shores?

The shaking campers cringe from thundered notes
exceeding vocals found in Brobdingnag
with trumpets blaring up to Paradise.
Destruction severs hands that touch this mount
and blackens eyes which dare attempt to gaze
upon His back when outside clefts of shade.
We all fall down as dead before Sinai
and know we fail to scale such stringent rocks.

A mediator stands amidst the gap
to intercede for priests who rise and play,
forsaking eagles' wings that carried them
beyond the plagues and fetters they adorned.
The Mediator climbed the covenant cliffs,
enduring every twisting, burning path.
Who can it be that meets prerequisites
among this leprous cast of humankind?

Jehovah breathed the truth where Moses stood,
foretelling figures carved on ancient plinths
as one schoolmaster heralds, "Yeshua:"
the Prophet greater than the shepherd called
recording statutes in the Pentateuch.
Personified Divinity alone
can build between these quaking furnace walls
and those who murmur standing far away.

Whose Truth?

A question of sex and dominion
In the forest alone a Virginian
If no woman is there
To hear him declare
Is he still wrong in his stated opinion?

Contributors

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Nativity Scene, A.D. 2250

A bit traditional, but still
A fine example of Monsignor Gregor's work.
You see, dear, there's everything:
Athena and her husband, Joseph,
Crouch around the manger looking
Like marble statues caught in the fresco.
The Christ-child holds His left hand
In the mudra of wisdom, which is
Expected of a Bodhisattva,
And with His right hand pulls the
Mistletoe-shaft from Balder's chest.
And oh! The Wise Men, my favorites!
Confucius, Lao-Zi, and Buddha
Looking on in benediction.
Ha ha, you can almost read the
Words the sheep and the
White Buffalo are singing to Him.
And look at the naiad coming
From the water-trough, dear,
Holding the pentacle of good luck.
And it's a little small, but I think
You can see Krishna herding
The sheep on the hill behind the stable.
My, my, he even has the gifts
Brought to the baby Iesu:
Baron Samedi's skull and the
Jade Emperor's peaches of immortality
—In modern versions these things
Are stolen by coyote and the Monkey King.
As I said, traditional, but
You must expect such things of the
Exclusionary past.

Kevin Poston, 1969-2004

deSchweinitz Poetry Award, Fall 1996



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