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February 16, 1971



pencil drawing/Lance Rutledge

poetry/carolyn forché

These poems are six of Carolyn Forché, most from a volume "barshchina" (an old Russian word meaning "payment in labor"). They speak with the voice of a woman, through the vision and feel of a girl grounded in people: those who have lived, have known that to know life is to know disappointment, have known and deepened the ability to hate and love, known the intimate rhythms of earth and others, known also the finish, having paid in labor, the beginnings clumsy and stiffened, those who have lived too much and are too much ready to die.

Detroit born/step of time and mind with an earthen Russian grandmother/grew up and out on the road at 16/Chicago 1968/mellow to listen between extensions of people/hours at the potter's wheel/and writing.

Of a closeness with things, of the earth for themselves. Years behind / beyond, the instant of last year's word, the depth instant, now darkens — a woman's love of her own knowledge, unwilling it will happen, a Russian child of 10 on knees knowing God.

Carolyn's poetry speaks of hope resurrected from despair — the despair of the aged, of the old civil rights movement, of existence itself and its temptation to finish. Language and image speak from the fields where frustration patterns loneliness and extinction. But often from this grows the hope of a grandchild understanding, a people surviving, the quiet knowing which renews itself, the cycle of generation.

Walking with Carolyn Saturday. Hard wind, sound of water under rotting ice, word textures of snow, bark leaves of trees' thin extension, thin snow, the winter sibilant. Words follow winter as cold makes the mouth pucker. Ice designs its own rhythms. The poetry of each branch is discovered in its wind twist and glaze of ice. Winter echos speech, forcing Spring through each branch and gesture in its own meter. What is poetry? The art of collecting. Show me.

— Dennis Pace

a body of broken
sticks, skin of mixed
nuts and a ball of
mail pouch thrown into
the side of his
left cheek. he knew the
worm tracks of the moles
went down for water, put the roof
on and kept his loose
teeth in spits of tar until
his mouth was gone and the
ranch sold in slices.

the preserved forest
rocked in the wind on old hinges.
november is an
old woman holding her
doll watching winter
from a small window
the ground sounds snapped
by frost can't be
remembered along with
most names and a few of
the faces of relatives and
friends.

her footsteps bloodied
the snow. heavy hiped,
she would have given.
worn and answerless taken
by train. rocking applause
against the tracks the cattlecar
gave cold.
sleep was a slender death to them.
i descended from her somewhere
in detroit. pictures show the resemblance.
and now react to the same land
brittle fields of fake wheat poplar
groves of shaking dollar.
and now i burn the tomato worms and
string the useless gord.
she had apple drawn skin
tightly bent feet. pulled babushkas
and rosary beads on which she
paid for all of us.
she knew
how much grease
how deep to seed. that cukes were
crawlers. four hours a night she would
sleep without moving.
i knew all of her from where i began.
where she kept her teeth
and the christ child. heavy
sweatered winter woman
buried the october
before i was grown.

in memory of anna sidlosky holda



photography by Dennis Pace



they stand in the weather
wet music around their words and
struggling candles down their
hands in ignored pain
elections have been held in their
swollen legs. we have been
digressing again,
gentlemen. we have lost to them.
smooth tongues spitting pabulum
the blood slips between their teeth and we
slip between them photographing
in their eyes, our reel burn
in their basements they dig
our graves in glass bottles
the patron
saints of the overthrown watch
fasten eyed from the cells
from the street where we have
nailed them to asphalt and showed
their blood to the drains
but it runs as warm
as the wax.

I
her blood is wired to
undersides where tubes
have been grown in
a pattern she is pink
and she swells
beneath him their stomach
skins adhering wet
his mouth moves
along her until the
nap is standing.

II
she lay dying in
america her mouth
fingering an austrian
rosary bead and her
bowels slipping through
rest home drainage
systems slowly slipping she
circulated and stared.
voiding on the bed asleep
on plastic pads she
mentioned her german
in concentration camps they
snapped her bones, the
broken pencils.

III
she cast her streaked eyes
on the needle and out over
the lake to catch
and knit you into
her interest, her long
white back and thrust.
she ships you to settle
in her shrunken siberia
and you taste between
her legs while she starves
you the leash is measured
between her kitchen and
your child.

sun falls on bathroom
tiles and porcelain
rusted drains the
curtains part
flushed by fondle air

the old man
on his toilet tries
listening to the
street

every morning at five
he walks bent
brown spit hanging
to sweater sleeves
on knot knees
clutching steady things
and remembering the clinkelbing
of tossed jacks on concrete
(no one throws them anymore
we used to have black palms from that)





what animal,
what pet,
should I have
in my office?



Les Adventures de Spheroide Agneau

By John McIntyre

Framerique was in turmoil. Years of unrest and discontent had boiled over into outright rebellion and terrorism. The old king had been sent to the guillotine despite his protest: "Vous n'avez qu'un roi!"¹ Collapse of the nation seemed inevitable, when suddenly from the west there appeared a great champion of order and right, the gallant Chevalier Richard Milmaison, Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, or, in the native tongue, Chevalier Richard des Grandes B.A. Joes.² Chevalier had been smitten in battle and left for dead, but he returned to make good his vow: "You'll rue the day Milmaison returns!" ("Vous n'aurez plus Milmaison de ruer!")³

Alas, the gallant Milmaison was without a squire and felt the lack sorely. "What a state I'm in!" he grieved. ("L'etat c'est moi!")⁴ He advertised.

As the heralds proclaimed his need throughout the land, many considered the glory of the position, but deemed it wiser to remain close to hearth and family. A simple peasant named Spheroide Agneau⁵ vowed to seek the position, despite the scorn of the natives of Mediocrityopolis, who called him a village idiot. The opposition of these envious envoys of enmity did not deter him as he sought Chevalier Richard.

Chevalier Richard said that if Spheroide was to become his squire, he must answer a riddle: "What animal, what pet, should I have in my office?" ("Quel animal parle avec le pied dans l'orifice?")⁶ Spheroide had one week to discover the answer.

The humble peasant immediately set out to discover the solution to this perplexing problem. He traveled through the country of Strom und Drang, where he encountered a wizard, George de Muras. ⁷ George de Muras, upon hearing of his errand, waxed wondrous wroth, thundering great oaths against Chevalier Richard, accusing him of

plagiarism of prophecies and visions. He attacked one of Chevalier Richard's counselors, Jean, Duc de la Ruse Meridionale, ⁸ as a villainous vendor of venom and a right unruly knave.

Spheroide fended off the harsh assault with his shield, the shield bearing the motto of his family, "Toujours gauche, jamais Gauche."⁹ During his flight, he came upon the good Knight of Oreau.¹⁰ He and the knight soon became fast friends, the knight vowing, "I will defend you to the last extremity from the vices of the libertines who oppose you." ("L'extremisme en defense de la liberte n'est aucun vice.")¹¹ Unfortunately, he was unable to assist Spheroide in finding the solution to the riddle.

Spheroide passed through many hardships in the course of his quest. He forded the treacherous river at Detroit, avoiding the musky traps of his enemies. He made his way through mazes of teeming slums. He ran the gauntlet of placard-wielding, bloodthirsty savages (the tribe of Pacifistes). He braved the shouts of the multitudes; "gros Greque"¹² they called him.¹³

On the sixth night Spheroide wept as he fell asleep, for he had no answer to give to Chevalier Richard on the following day. As he slept, a vision of an angel appeared unto him. And the angel spake.

At noon on the seventh day, Spheroide, staggering from lack of sleep (for he and the angel had long rehearsed the answer), appeared before Chevalier Richard. Chevalier Richard asked, "Quel animal parle avec le pied dans l'orifice?"¹⁴ Spheroide mustered all his courage, all his strength, all his concentration, and gave a mighty shout: "C'est moi!" A great roar rose from the throats of the multitudes as they saw Chevalier Richard embrace his new squire.

They were ready to begin the fight for Framerique.

NOTES

for those whose French is as feeble as the author's

1 Freely, "I'm the only king you've got."

2 Milmaison = Mil - house. Bachelor of arts in journalism (B.A. jour.) = Grandes Bajoues (Great Jowls).

3 "You won't have Milmaison to kick around any more."

4 "I am the state."

5. Literally, Spheroid Lamb. Chosen for visual effect. Those who wish to interpret it as "muttonhead" do so on their own responsibility.

6. "What animal speaks with its foot in its mouth?"

7 Muras = mur (wall) as (ace). The latter also translates as "crack," for what that is worth.

8 John, Duke of the Southern Strategy

9 "Always awkward, never Radical"

10 Or = gold; eau = water.

11 Need I explain everything?

12 "Fat Greek"

13 Choose one: This paragraph was (a) boring (b) tedious (c) monotonous. The above question is (a) repetitious (b) redundant (c) tautological.

14 Remember?