

MARGO BERDESHEVSKY

As the Land Listens

Women are gathering on shore after shore after sharp rocked shore, bodies and their memories merged, bruise coloured storm clouds shifting with words and swords and naked breasts, and stories to tell. Women like me who never wanted to be warriors, who loved and still love silk and tenderness and a man who makes love with that song-made-famous “slow hand.” And the powerful males and wannabe powerful are wagging their power like dying gods. Old skins.

When it is over/ if it is over will women forget the bodies they did not want on top of them, the mouths they did not want to kiss or love, yet wailing, *whoppa, whoppa, whoppa!* the way one who told me I was his wife in the dark did, and I knew I was not but I so needed to be loved.... Wanted some girl-child costume of love, I let him pretend. Until a morning I looked at my black eye in a tiny hand-mirror above my bed.

And he had left my bed and my road and my body at dawn—and looking at my bruised eye, broken self and dimmed-eye sense of self, I remembered the kindergarten teacher who had told me, *now dear, you have to understand the little boy who beat you*—who’d beaten me—*because his daddy was in the war*. I had forgotten. I had buried that shame and that eye and that teacher and that boy like a dead cat. After all, thirty plus years had passed since I was taught to understand aggression and violence and to excuse it because a man may be forgiven, a boy must be understood, and forgiven. Because.

Women in the land of my birth are gathering. Angry ravens, gathering like wounded and “woke” warriors on shore after sharp rocked shore. “Never more.” Shouts into the skies and into one another’s eyes. And quiet as I am, my deep notes are rising. Silken as I am, my claws, lengthening. Matured body and arthritic hips and brave and not very brave and hopeful and hopeless soul as I am, hermit woman as I often am, love-hungry as I may be, still be—I am joining with the many.

I remember Jacob battling the angel in the Bible my father deemed I must learn. And I think of this sentence, “I will not let thee go unless thou bless me.” Hurts have healed and torn open and healed. But who must be blessed and who must bless, and in the French language, “*blessier*” means to wound. Is blessing a blessing, or a wound, then? Or when will the sound of hope and the silence of peace echo between cloud and rock and branch?

When I was a child I was hardly a child. Old soul, some called me. Actress learning to be a hundred different women, not only the one in my sheets and ballerina’s mirror. Hand stroking her own flesh, her own skull, there there darling. When you are a grown woman you will be a powerful one. There there actress. When you are a star the moon will hold you until the arms called love appear and surround you. None will harm you. None will degrade or demean you. Your words and your beauty will be both canopy and quilt, and you will sleep with blessing and be touched by angels.

When I was a child, I dreamt as a child. When I became a woman I carried childish things within my skin, sewn with invisible threads known only to my locked in heart. When I became an old woman—the woman I am now—I heard the others with bodies not so different than my own, breasts and cunts and hips and blondness, howls and yearning in my teeth. And I walked to shores to straighten my body, pull my shoulders back, open my mind—and stand with theirs.

Women are gathering on shore after shore after sharp rocked shore, bodies and their / our memories “blesh-ing” like bruise colored storm clouds with swords and naked breasts and stories to tell. Women like me who never wanted to be warriors, who loved and still love silk and tenderness and a man who makes love with that song-made-famous “slow hand.” And I walked to the edge of an old and used up world and hummed a tune of invention. I unpainted bruises and colored my eyes transparent. *Qui garde son ame d’enfant ne veillit jamais.* (Who keeps her soul of a child will never age.) That was written in invisible ink on the ground in front of me, and I spit on the ground and turned three times round, tiny ritual of magic. Magic? Why age? Why live forever with such a mantra? No answer. But a black bird fell out of my heart and she sang.

Margo Berdeshevsky, born in New York City, often writes and lives in Paris. Before The Drought is her newest collection (Glass Lyre Press, 2017). Berdeshevsky is also the author of Between Soul & Stone and But a Passage in Wilderness (Sheep Meadow Press). Her book of illustrated stories, Beautiful Soon Enough, received the first Ronald Sukenick Innovative Fiction Award for Fiction Collective Two (University of Alabama Press). Other honours include the Robert H. Winner Award from the Poetry Society of America, a portfolio of her poems in the Aeolian Harp Anthology #1 (Glass Lyre Press), the &Now Anthology of the Best of Innovative Writing, and numerous Pushcart Prize nominations. A multi-genre novel, Vagrant, and a hybrid of poems, Square Black Key, wait at the gate. She may be found reading from her books in London, Paris, New York City, or somewhere new in the world. Her Letters from Paris may be found in Poetry International, here: <http://pionline.wordpress.com/category/letters-from-paris>. For more info kindly see: <http://margoberdeshevsky.com>.

ABOUT THE GUEST EDITORS...

Angela Miles is a founding member of Toronto Women for a Just and Healthy Planet, Antigonish Women’s Association, Feminist Network for a Gift Economy and a member of the editorial board of Canadian Woman Studies. She teaches at the OISE/University of Toronto where, with Alda Facio, she co-founded the International Women’s Human Rights Education Institute. Her publications include, *Integrative Feminisms: Building Global Visions* and the edited collection *Women in a Globalizing World: Transforming Equality, Development, Diversity and Peace*.

Alda Facio is a human rights activist, jurist and writer, teaching human rights in many parts of the world. In 2004 she co-founded the Women’s Human Rights Institute with Angela Miles and has been teaching courses ever since. As one of the founders of the Women’s Caucus for Gender Justice in the International Criminal Court in 1996, she was its first Director. In 2005, she was appointed to the UN Secretary General’s Task Force on Violence against Women. Currently she is one of five expert members of the UN mandated Working Group on Discriminatory Laws and Practices (WGDAP).

In 1970, **Jeannette Corbiere Lavell** challenged the section of the *Indian Act* denying Indian status to women who married non-status men. Though her challenge failed at Supreme Court of Canada, it inspired later challenges, the success of which “permitted reinstatement of the First Nations women and children who had lost their status.” She is a founding member and past president of the Ontario Native Women’s Association and the Native Women’s Organization of Canada, founding member of Indian Rights for Indian Women, recipient of the Persons Award (2009) and Order of Canada (2018), and co-editor, with her daughter D. Memee Lavell-Harvard, of *Until Our Hearts Are on the Ground* (2006).

Patricia Nyaundi is a Kenyan Human Rights Lawyer. She has previously served as Chief Executive Officer of the Federation of Women Lawyers (Kenya), the Chief Executive Officer Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission and in the same position at the Kenya National Commission On Human Rights. She is currently the Nairobi Director for Crisis Action.