

The Peculiar Necessity of Imagining

SONJA GRECKOL

Cette suite de poèmes traite du maternage des nourissons et des filles devenues adultes et enseigne à protéger quelqu'un.

1. Pandemonium

Scenes of pillage hand combat, flight
played on my night windows:

I imagined we'd choke bleed burn
violated.

Huddled, I counted your breaths.

The flying soldiers' faces etch dark bay
over your bassinette my bone-melt fear
unrelieved.

Why the persistence of hormones for desperation
not for joy?

Sun-haunted peace marches, high
in the backpack, you relished
the pandemonium, the crowd, drums, chants,
whirligigs

but panicked at the clowns; Ronald Reagan puppets
left you rigid.

I could not ease fears.

2. Gravity and Flight

We chuckle about the dates on your doorframe,
seems you shrank from time to time.

I got the angle wrong
You squirmed
or, perhaps you did shrink

on occasion leaving traces on my body—
this metre stick of cells.

Our cleave lengthened from my shoulder;
and the body that lifted you
retains your touch,
palms and knees printed on the scrim,
where my mother's grip flickers—her strong arm
here on my young thigh, faint arms on my back—

and here at my breast the dent of your small head and
my mother's slight grasp:
a map of gravity and flight.

A week before you left,
we bought pillows on Spadina Ave:
you plumped and squeezed and giggling
lay your head down and buoyed your courage and
my urge

to be the feathers that could hold you; smoothed my
frayed edges,
and I found my young feathers impd.

An earlier version appeared in Atlantis, 2001.

3. The peculiar necessity of imagining ... 1

Latticed, twenty years occupied
I forget you for whole minutes now.
By force and complicit, we pluck our weave
Surprised, which threads slack, tense, reel—
the tax on a tied heart
is steep.

That your appetites are large, I see

is redundant among my wishes. Your arc
is larger than the scripts I |un|furled.

I turn to probe my own dormancy,
shatter the insulators, scale the electrified fences.

We stake
our spaces and like kolatch or braided challah,
leven in uneven heat

need only be consumed.

4. Obedience

Regarding Stanley Milgram, 1933-1984

We know who fired the shot and we know now
On whose command, in whose vernacular
Dudley George was condemned.

And for what? What flames on the Catherine Wheel?
Where does it settle?

In Stanley's mirror, we did as we were told;
Undaunted by lab coats and ivy, only a few refused
And the scientists quarreled.

When the daisy chains wilted on the guns
And our careers trussed us tight to the scaffolds;
We forgot Stanley.

Now he offers the mirror from photographs,
Smudged, dog-collared, electric death-spined
To genitals, eyeballs, tongues.

Witness, we trace the waste of teen-ager,
Shidane Arone, death by dragging—the elite Airborne,
In Mogadishu.

And Corporal Sandra Perron, in Bosnia,
Shoeless snowbody, tied and pistol-whipped,
toughening,
claimed her Commander.

Who is watching, after Stanley?

5. She Studies Genocide

The state counts the teeth of its friends
Stanley Kunitz, *The Mound Builders*

Aunts toppled, splayed, the lucky ones riven
once; the pregnant gutted, moulder in the scrying sun
blood wraith ravels amidst machetes, wraps soldiers'
legs

womanchild left to carry her mother's murderers'
child.

Stop short: pace your gaze

Tonic of arms and alms and hate spills through the
valleys;
kin slaughter neighbour and kin; boy soldiers nursed

on retribution take their little deaths in girl blood;
rend there
incomprehensible from here. Intoning

Yes, once again

6. The peculiar necessity of imagining ... 2

Twined in pride, dread, fearing
the portent of each thought

I need to know what she knows.

Season of Blood: A Rwandan Journey (1995),
Heavily, I haul them around in my bags,
split and shuffle them under the couches in twos or
threes,

rip stain jackets;
*A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's
Genocide (2000),*
Ejo: Poems, Rwanda, 1991-1994 (2000)

I need them in numbers
sentinels or... talismanic, perhaps.
*Justice on the Grass: Trial for War Crimes and a
Nation's Quest for Redemption (2005)*

Her father and I can only offer each other passages,
razor pages footnotes photos, pry behind, under,
inside.

pull push brute turn coupled

An Afternoon at the Pool in Kigali, (2000)
No comfort, no light; remains inert in print.

Out of the inchoate, glean

/French arms agreement/Egyptian arms
dealer/Chinese machetes/Belgian troops/

stack like hot coals doused with the alphabullet-broth

MRND/UNAMIR/RPF
National Republican Movement for Develop-

that dissolves

blood-letting/ethnic hatred/tribal warfare

We learn quickly—the dark is propelled in the spoor
of debt not blood.

**7. We Wish To Inform You That Tomorrow We Will
Be Killed With Our Families (Gourevitch, 1998)**

The live-lace of buzzards and griffons
trace

the map of killing
grave masses
decompose,

poison water land.

Can I wrench myself into the throngs with ma-
chetes—
generate a belief that my life,
my children's lives are at stake,
Agree that they are not human, they must die, *inyenzi*,
cockroaches

That my neighbour has designs on my house, garden,
will kill me if I do not kill her,
watch my sons rape her girl child.

I need to know if my postpartum nightmare could
convulse
to a killing force—suspecting restraint limning guilt,
hearing steps that snap in the undergrowth

bone stacked on bone.
Now we have taught ourselves what our
daughter learned.

I grasp
/structural adjustment/coffee markets/foreign
currencies/planned genocide/
our complicity:

And she sets her radius to Kigali—declares her own

Never again

Earlier version in Contemporary Verse 2, Summer 2006

*Subject: D.R.C: Civilians Killed As Army Factions
Clash <skip>*

Subject: Exercise: Gender and Memory <transfer>

Subject: Sunil: Summer in Austria (photos)

Preeti and the babe with new teeth in the grandpar-
ents' garden

Re: Spoke with Mother

<Mum told her friend, John, about the doctors that
<give her injections so they can rape her in the night and
<about how she finds the ulcers the needles leave on her
<scalp in the morning and how she wishes that you would
<acknowledge your son—how she'd like to meet the boy
<though she's sure he approached her in the mall one day.
<John panicked, told others ... what now, sister?

Didn't enlist John in her search for hidden money – 6
on brainstorm scale – she's holding steady, how about
you?

*Subject: Botswana AIDS Orphans Hold Family Food
Basket <skip>*

Subject: Oxford Word of the Day <forward>

horripilation

=====

[hor-i-pi-LAY-sh'n] the standing up of hairs on the skin
as a result of cold, fear, or excitement. The word comes
from the Latin verb *horreere*, meaning “to stand on end;
to tremble or shudder.”

Re: Packed

Mama—no melt down the brown clogs with dark soles
would be great both the hurricane and I are heading to
havana love and hugs me

*Subject: After Health Scare, Menopause Treatment
Matures*

Birth Control Pills, Thalidomide, Valium, Episiotomy,
Hormone Replacement Therapy, SRIs – what now,
boys?

*Subject: I'm okay! Would have been at Liverpool Station
if still working*

Subject: Mugesera Won't Face Death Penalty

What might this look like to folks who barely feed
themselves,

After a million or was that 800,000 killed, yet...

*Subject: Feminist Perspectives on Genocide –Seminar
<forward>*

*Subject: A Place Where Women Rule: All-Female Village
in Kenya Is a Sign Of Burgeoning Feminism Across Africa*

Sebastian Lesinik, the chief of the male village, also
laughed, describing the clear division he saw between men
and women. “The man is the head,” he said. “The lady is
the neck. A man cannot take, let's call it advice, from
his neck.” ... snip ...

“She has been successful, it's true,” sighed Lesinik, who
said maybe he is a little bit jealous. He then shrugged and

said, "Maybe we can learn from our necks. Maybe just a little bit."

Re: Re: Spoke with Mother

John fixed it so they don't come to her anymore ... got by that one, this time, the nurse checked the ulcers, we're okay.

Sonja Greckol is sure she was taller once. Her mind wanders but her keyboard is tethered in Toronto where she lives, works, mentors, does local activism and research, drinks too much coffee and is generally under slept. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in Literary Review of Canada, The Fiddlehead, Poems from the Feminist Caucus (LCP 2007), Canadian Literature (Fall 2006), Contemporary Verse 2 (Summer 2006), The Dalhousie Review (2005)(2003), Matrix (2003) and Atlantis (2002). She is working on a manuscript: The Bead Eye Direct.

PATRICIA WATSON

Life Force

In her hospital bed
she lay weeping.
Unable to stop,
though she knew her tears were inappropriate.

One doesn't mourn one's own death.
Others do that.

She wanted time to stop.
To cuddle into the present
as into a warm cocoon.
After the operation
there might be no future.
Only a time in which to die.

She will tell the doctor
that if the growth is malignant,
not to revive her.

Then it occurs to her
that a runny nose might make breathing
under anaesthetic difficult.
So she reaches for a Kleenex,
and stops crying.

Patricia Watson is a prize-winning screenwriter and film director. Her credits include works for the NFB, CBC, and TVO as well as independent producers. She is also a successful artist, and the recently published author of My Husband's Wedding, a book of stories.

LINDA FRANK

Morning After

*If I loved a woman, the more I loved her, the more
I wanted to hurt her.*

—Diego Rivera

The morning after she finds them together
Frida stares out an open door
to the sun-daze of her garden
All flurry in the trees strangely absent
All bird song broken

A spider monkey freezes half way up
a banana tree. High the grass green
needles of a weeping pine, she sees
the impassive yellow gaze of a falcon
the gleam as it eyes a *tangara escarlata*
on the *cempasúchil*, the almost
imperceptible flinch before it launches
all talon, sharp beak, spreading wings

She watches the falcon snatch the tanager
from the flower of the dead, watches
the shock of the small bird caught
powerless in that one moment of pure clarity

The falcon plucks its pray alive, feather by
feather
Blood splatters on the patio stones
He stares her straight in the eye
as he tears the fresh meat from the small
bones

Linda Frank grew up in Montreal but has been living in Hamilton, Ontario since 1977. She teaches social science at Mohawk College. Her work has been widely published in journals and anthologies across Canada. Her first collection of poetry called Cobalt Moon Embrace was released in 2002 from BuschekBooks. These poems are from a manuscript seeking a published on Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, called Kahlo: The World Split Open.