



Earthworks Series

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Walking with Ghosts

QWO-LI DRISKILL

QWO-LI DRISKILL: *Walking with Ghosts*

HEID E. ERDRICH: *The Mother's Tongue*

DIANE GLANCY: *Rooms: New and Selected Poems*

LEANNE HOWE: *Evidence of Red: Poems and Prose*

DEBORAH A. MIRANDA: *The Zen of La Llorona*

CARTER REVARD: *How the Songs Come Down: New and Selected Poems*

LSI
SALT

2005

CAMBRIDGE

Map of the Americas

I wish when we touch
we could transcend history in
double helixes of dark and light
on wings we build ourselves

But this land grows volcanic
with the smoldering hum of bones
All that's left

of men who watched beloveds
torn apart by rifles
Grandmothers singing back
lost families

Children who didn't live
long enough to cradle a lover
arms around waist
lips gently skimming nape
legs twined together
like a river cane basket

Sometimes I look at you
and choke back sobs knowing
you are here
because so many of my people
are not

Look: my body curled and asleep
becomes a map of the Americas

My hair the pillow
 spread upon a landscape of ice My chest the plains
 and hills of this land My spine
 the continental divide
 my heart drums the
 rhythm of returning
 buffalo herds Do you
 notice the deserts
 and green
 mountains
 on my belly's
 topography
 or the
 way
 my
 hips
 rise
 like
 ancient pyramids
 My legs wrapped with the
 Amazon the Andes the Pampas
 the vast roads of the Incas
 here are rainforests
 highlands
 stolen breath
 trapped deep
 in mine
 shafts and
 my feet
 that reach
 to touch
 Antarctica

When your hands travel
 across my hemispheres
 know these lands
 have been invaded before
 and though I may quiver
 from your touch
 there is still a war

It is not without fear
 and memories awash in blood
 that I allow you to slip between
 my borders
 rest in the warm valleys
 of my sovereign body
 offer you feasts and songs
 dress you in a cloak of peacock
 feathers and stars
 These gifts could be misconstrued
 as worship
 Honor mistaken for surrender

When you taste my lips
 think of maize
 venison
 perfect wild strawberries

Notice the way my breath smells of cedar
 my sweat flows like slow Southern rivers
 and my flesh burns with history

 Honor this

I walk out of genocide to touch you

What You Must Do

First, call the words from your marrow.

Pull them from strands of muscle,
dark and warm.

You will bleed.

Form them into clay.

Breathe.

Then, offer them your flesh.

They will take nothing less.

Run with your words to the top of a cliff.

Let go.

Hurry.

They come for us in the morning.

For Marsha P. (Pay It No Mind!) Johnson

found floating in the Hudson River shortly after NYC Pride, 1992

You are the one whose spirit is present in the dappled stars.

JOY HARJO from "For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash . . ."

Each act of war
is whispered from
Queen to Queen
held like a lost child
then released into the water below.
Names float into rivers
gentle blooms of African Violets.

I will be the one that dangles
from the side but
does not let go.

The police insisted you leapt
into the Hudson

driftwood body
in sequin lace
rhinestone beads
that pull us to the bottom.
Just another dead Queen.

I am the one who sings Billie Holiday
as a prayer song to you, Marsha P.

We choke on splintered bones,
dismembered screams,
the knowledge that each
death is our own.

I pour libations of dove's blood,
leave offerings of yam and corn
to call back all of our lost spirits.

Marsha P, your face glitters with
Ashanti gold
as you sashay across the moonscape
in a ruby chariot ablaze.
Sister, you drag
us behind you.

When we gather on the bridge between
survival and despair,
I will be the one wearing gardenias
in my hair,
thinking about
how we all go back to water.
Thinking about
the night
you did not jump.

I will be the one
with the rattlesnake that binds
my left arm and
in my right hand I will carry
a wooden hatchet to
cut away at the
silence of your murder,
to bite down hard on the steel of despair.

Girl, I will put your photo
on my ancestral altar
to remember all of us
who never jumped.

Miss Johnson, your meanings
sparkle like stars dappled
across the piers of the
Hudson River.

Gathered on the bridge
we resist the water.

Letter to Tsi-ge'-yu

Tonight your tears
follow me home
Hover around my shoulders
like a *ske'na*
haunting as history
bright and wondrous as fireflies

Tsi-ge'-yu
160 years ago
they rounded us up with guns
filled rivers with our blood
stripped our lives to marrow and
beat us with the bones

We are still trying to escape soldiers
hide our babies
hold on to clods of earth
as they drag us away by our feet
screaming and bloodied

*Our families are supposed
to tell us these stories
you say
You're my family now*

Tsi-ge'-yu
Tonight I pluck
your tears from air
wrap them in deerskin
string them on spider silk

Look
I wear them
around my neck like cornbeads

setu corn
giga blood
sgilu:gi You are my sister
gvhwanosda whole

These are the words our bodies
were not meant to carry
but do

These survival songs
put us back together

In this city that
does not belong to us,
we sink our teeth deep into
words ripped from our mamas' mouths
tsuko:it bones
kanoges:sti history
sink our teeth deep and
repeat what we know is sacred

Cherokee Translations:

Tsi-ge'-yu: "Beloved." Literally, "I love her/him."
ske'na: human or animal ghost

Grandmother Spider's Lesson for an Urban Indian Queer

She clings to her web, four stories up, holds fast against the Seattle wind and rain. Her abdomen is a perfect black bead that catches light like a crystal. Her legs delicate as an infant's hands. She weaves a night threaded with moonbeams. Grandmother is alive, four stories up. "Grandmother," I say, "we never stop spinning from one death to another, from one impossible situation to the next. This is a city where homeless Indians have their noses broken by skinheads, where Queer kids sell their bodies to eat tomorrow. We have no reflections here. They think we should be ghosts."

Sugar, she laughs, just keep weaving. Don't let them tear you down. Look! I am alive, four stories up! They build sky scrapers on top of our homes, but we're still here.

Her body is silhouetted against the Seattle skyline, miracle spider alive four stories up.

Cling fast, she tells me. Keep weaving. Life will stick.

EPG 4TJ GWY

DELQVY
Dh-S@S 4@h
\$OAT UP

GVGEYU' HAIKU TSALAGI

Aquadan'togi
atsilvsga hawini
ganhgo'i sali

CHEROKEE LOVE HAIKU

My embodied heart
blooms, opens beneath
his persimmon tongue.