Lindy's Sorrow and Other Poems

by

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ID 499

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INTRODUCTION

The following poems are essentially excerpts from a journal I kept Spring Quarter, 1981. These selected poems have been revised with the help of Dr. Thomas Koontz and are a sample of the poetry I have written this quarter. The poems are in chronological order. I chose to keep them in this order to illustrate my growth and progression as a poet.

With Dr. Koontz's cooperation, I have come to a greater understanding and appreciation of poetry and I feel this is illustrated in my work. I can see myself writing, what I call, "superficial" poetry and then gradually descending into a more emotional, in-depth, unconscious level of expression. Instead of carefully crafting the poem, choosing the language that I feel sounds "poetic," and consciously trying to capture an idea or thought, I have begun to respect my inner emotions and allow them to "write" my poetry. I have begun to write from within myself. I feel this is partially due to the fact that I have read the works of many established poets this quarter, such as Robert Bly, Adrienne Rich, Ezra Pound and William Stafford. In attempting to understand their poetry, I have come in contact with my own inner feelings, desires, fears, and motivations. My poetry has finally begun to take the "dive" into my own psyche and, I feel it will continue to do so as long as I keep struggling to understand and integrate those inner feelings with myself.

This project has been extremely beneficial in terms of the knowledge and insight writing my own poetry and reading other's poetry has offered me. Keeping a poetic journal has enabled me to become more aware of my inner self and this awareness has allowed me to begin to write meaningful poetry. At the beginning of Spring Quarter, I felt like an English major who wrote poetry. Now, I feel like a poet.

Stephanie Jernigan
Images

1. Lustful eyes glaze upon the glittering Stone
Clenching her finger.
Her frigid heart is satisfied.

2. Soft eyes and tawny hair,
He slows to greet me;
A gentle lion.

3. Outside my thick-paned window
Coated with geometrically-patterned ice,
A sugar-frosted world.

4. The long, lanky student spurts and sputters
A jerky Niagara of words.
Air bubbles in a waterline.
Scandal

Scandal, whispers Mama.
White whore married a nigger.
Damn near killed her folks.
Weren't nothin' they wouldn't do for that girl.

Whore's already carryin checkerboard
Seed inside her.
Whoo-ee! squeals Uncle.
Them nigger-boys sure is potent.

Hey Daughter, chuckles Papa,
How would you like some of that black lovin?

Daughter smiles,
Legs Clenched,
Remembering.
Spring First

Spring first: chilled winds blow
Icing bones.
People, arms folded tight over their jackets
Shivering wishful thinking, scurry
Over piebald earth: gray snow on
Mud-hard ground,
Grass tufts sparse yellow, reedy.
Watercolor sky washed white above.
Shriveled brown leaf buds cling
desperately to trees frozen,
murdered.
All survivors wait for the Messiah.
while I sit gazing out the window,

A jet writes white lines
across the water-color
washed sky.

Below, the windy trees
bend back and forwards
whipping premature buds,
aborted

To the green-yellow grass,
crushed by the weight of
bared bodies, shades of
cream and bronze.

Tinted sky, sun-dyed,
heated by the warm-cold
fickle spring breeze.

A bird darts upward
towards the clouds
flying higher and higher,
a black speck in the sky.

All this and more,
while I sit gazing out the window.
Between Us

It is the dreadful lack of voices
In our future
That frightens me.
All of the unspoken thoughts
That fester and swell.
Hearts bursting with thickened pus.
It invades our systems and is
Silently absorbed.
The suppressed disease lies dormant
Between us.
Like Adam, you think you have grown wise
To women.
My mother waits up on
Her husband each night.
Stumbling drunkenly,
He curses and beats her.
With each blow
They are aware
They are alive.
There is no exchange of life
Between us.
Our hours are loud with silence.
The noise here is deafening.
This is not what I expected.
Sister, Sister

I watched you grow
Unprotected from the tornadoes and
Storms and fires
You whimpered about as a child.
Lying in your youth bed, alone,
Your four-year old mind
Dreamed constantly of disasters.
Even then, you were afraid of the skeletons
Among the clothes in the dark closet.
I told you of the witches in the bathroom,
New dreaming you would
Always believe me.
You are fourteen.
Your body has developed a thickly-insulated
Layer of defense
Against those external predators.
The wise men in white coats
Tell you of your hostile brain.
Your defenses are not strong enough
To fight them.
Lying awake at night, you
Cry and beg and plead for help.
I, in the other bed,
Scream at you for peace.
We are crying for the same thing.
You lived five years,
Helpless.
The neon sign above your head
Gaily blinked terminology at different phases of your
Insanity.
You have been manic-depressive Electra and
Schizophrenic Oedipus-
Such a full life you have led!
At nineteen, they discovered,
(To their immense relief)
The source of your madness.
"it is only your soul," they said.
Simple, just rip it out and call it
"Hysterectomy."
You are like a child.
Fear is branded upon your forehead forever.
Now I am aware you are weak.
Now I am aware you needed my help
To grow strong and fearless.
Now, I can only watch you bleed
Silently, open to the world.
The Crazy Lady

She paces and smokes,
Smokes and paces
And drinks a jar of instant tea
Every three days.
She is the crazy lady and
She's come to live at my house.

She stands in a cloud of nicotine:
Uncombed and unwashed
Hair clings to her sunken cheeks-
Except for ragged cowlicks.
She is the crazy lady and
She's come to live at my house.

They say she used to fix her hair
And wear new, stylish clothes,
And write children's stories about elephants,
And listen to my first-grade reading,
And I called her "Aunt,"
And I would sit on the couch listening expectantly for
The sound of her car tires crunching gravel,
But,
Now she's the crazy lady and
She's come to live at my house.
On a Weekday in Tampa, Florida

The people crawl slowly over the scorched pavement of the city. Black and white and yellow, Squashed by the heat of the sun. Lazy ants with nowhere to go and No job to do. No air-conditioned homes and the restaurants are filled with dopey flies and people. The air is hot and sweaty. A beggar woman wrapped in a brown, nubby sweater fans herself with an old newspaper. Her mottled tin cup tries to catch the sun on its surface. A midwestern girl hurries by, running from the heat. A polyester filled jacket is flung over her shoulder, concealing the purse clutched to her sticky wet sweater. A small Oriental man wants to show her the way to spiritual happiness—Only $10.00. It is daylight everywhere. The bus station seems miles away.
To a Lost Friend

There was a time when your hair was Butched and your sex Undetermined.
I loved you then and thought you Beautiful.
We sang old songs and Cried into our faded Florida shirts and Ran shrieking, our tennis shoes Crunching gravel, rolled up blue jeans Tight upon our bodies.

I met a girl this year with Makeup on, her hair Feathered expensively around her Paint-by-number face.
She wore a perfect ensemble: Cream-colored, three piece suit with Matching jewelry and heels.
Her fingers looked like fat matchsticks—Red-tipped.

I searched everywhere for you, Lonely in my dirty tennis shoes.
If, by chance, you feel the need to Run shrieking into the Munchie rain, Please come to me.
I long to sing old songs with you Again.
Lindy's Sorrow

You search in every room
For something,
Whimpering and crying,
Shoulders raised, asking
"Why?"
For over an hour you wonder,
It is the day after the funeral
And you cannot find it anywhere.
Your two-year old legs grow weary.
Soon, you fall asleep on the big bed
With the multi-colored spread
Thrown over it.
Bottle-sucking, you are soothed by an
Elusive, almost remembered scent.

I watch you sleep
Butt-up in a mock fetal position,
Your arms thrown loosely
by your sides.
The bottle slips from your mouth.
Your lips make grasping motions
Sucking on air.
I can hear you breathe
And dream...

A woman with knotted hands and
Cracked fingernails shoves a chocolate
Onto your teeth.
The taste is sweet and good.
You are crushed against a pink towel
Jacket, strong arms support the weight
Of your hot, sweaty body.
The moment your back hits the bed,
You wail.
Immediately, you are snatched up
Into the air and pressed against a
Sagging chest, dried up, yet soft
For you.
Immediately, you are snatched up
Into the air and pressed against a
Sagging chest, dried up, yet soft
For you.
She leans toward you excitedly,
Arms reaching and
You run as she topples from her
Chair, writhing on the ground.
It is a funny game and you cry
"Cam, cam, gam" and laugh and clap.
You touch the soft pink silk around
Her hair.
A yellow rose is placed in the cold hand
Especially from you.
You know that she is feigning sleep,
So, you, too, play "possum."
With one eye cracked, you wait for her
To shout "peek-a-boo, Lindy!"
No sound comes.
When you open your eyes,
She is gone.

I watch you moan and cry in your sleep
As your visions grow blurry.
Your hands rub fiercely at your eyes,
Then rest calmly.
I wait until I can hear you
Breathing again before I leave you
To your child's dream
Of lolly-dolls, and Teddy bears, and
Forbidden sweets.
A Legacy for our Future

This is the legacy left us
By our ancestors:

They crossed the barren desert
Together.
A man, a woman,
Bound by the promise of a future
Rich with fertile fields,
Teeming with acres of wavering wheat,
Tilled by the power of four strong boys.
Standing tall and proud,
Their shoulders
Bulge broadly beneath
Their faded cotton shirts.
Four gingham-frocked girls
Bring them lunch:
lucked fat chickens, new from the skillet.
Still sweating from the heat of the kitchen,
Their fresh, young cheeks glow red in the sun.
Four pairs of modest blue eyes
Clance down, seemingly unaware of the
Love-lust gaze from
Four pairs of hungry brown eyes.
it is a self-perpetuating game.
The sun is hot and smoldering.
The ground sends distorting waves of heat
Up to greet it.
Somewhere, a cow dissents,
It's "moooo" muffled by the sound
Of the approaching train.

We are born
To a world of high-velocity transportation
And scorched pavement.
We plow and till our
Rain-starved brains,
Sucked dry by a century of light.
Miles of emptiness between us-
The gap is widened every year,
Every day.
Our children lie in the middle,
Their faces burnt and cracked and
Scared by the sun.
We know of no salve to heal them.
Their body fluids drain and
Evaporate on the concrete earth.
Soon, they will disintegrate into
The fever of our knowledge,
Into the ever-growing heat
Of a thousand generations.