

GENESIS: SWORD, ANGEL, DEVIL

“Abide by whatever task is set before you as if it were a law, and as if you would be committing sacrilege if you went against it. But pay no attention to whatever anyone says about you, since that falls outside what is yours.”

Epictetus

he lifts his white-haired cap
to pull down face flap
reveal his jabbering gums

he wants to say he has seen
the mountaintop where he is King
this is why he goes skinless and sheds

i call my mother to say
whiteness scares me
mansplaining sucks spark

i had to watch *Real Housewives*
of Atlanta just to stop my mind
from quaking this body cold

she never answers
she has already answered
i stopped counting time

my lover comes home
wraps his arm around my chest
sits close to one our breath

we tell the horrors
this is a spell we cast
holy expulsion

what is for you is for you
what is for you is not for you
what is not you is for you

*for what is you is you for
what is you for
is you what for
what is you
you is what
what you
is at you or
f you what you is for
the*

BOOK OF THE PICAROON

"One does not give up a lover; you lose her."

James Baldwin to Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

there was a storm; it was trouble-hue that shakes death dice until smooth palms turn calloused and snake eyes bleed maggots through the black. that was how s√he loved, in slip-tongue forking through the ear to tease sense into dull passion-quake, and when sense pried itself back, s√he had a crowbar answer. oh, s√he liked to twist until nipples cracked pus that stuck to cloth: healing. s√he loved that way, too. the devil likes you to hallelujah-talk baby, or slick, or everything you'll never have. that's just the way justice be. when s√he loses you, it will be because s√he's sniffing another blood trail. that's all women are: blood to paint real, breathing. s√he's been jealous of wriggling babes for eons. s√he likes you to sigh-spring, baby, or slick, or everything you'll never have. when s√he loses your sweat on the tongue, your spent body slumped against glass, s√he was never there at all. you just imagined that spirit, clever blaze. blame the glory cannonade of thumping heart or the haunting of an empty house. blame possession and angels and demons and that one movie you watched that convinced you that shadows stalked. when s√he loses you, don't worry; s√he's still close. those thin ticking fingers know the tap of your hipbones by hurt; s√he plays other music, a grim percussion aria. and when another wo/man with inked fingers says, thank you for being such a wo/man about this, and you realize s√he means the shifter has shadowed those sheets, too, smile toothy clean. there was a storm, all hue and cry, bodies twisted in brutal dance to stamp their living on. you made your claim to pock, and still the moon sands shifted. s√he never bore a scar but you.

on changing my son

i am the one who sees olive fields plumping their pitted fruits in the green of
my son's eyes the mottled iris in radiant hickory a quorum of trees
split in their canopy song this skin here is the painter's patchwork
like a quilted fabric overlay a city map fashioned in sun flecks when
nude he splays himself unashamed his body learning through touch
joy he has never known shame my life was ever preparing to witness
freedom the squirm *be hummingbird be boy be bee be all the natural*
things look there at the minute conch imprint swirls on his thumb each
coil an inherited story and stories to come his body a city within cities of
bodies composite of cells in orchestrated mechanics the end unseeable
i never knew this would happen when i refused to play with dolls when i
ripped their heads off fastened them wild screeching beasts mounted on
my brother's remote control cars the new harpies all raw warrior defiant
this boy now whose first sound heard was his sweetness name of a guardian
angel for healing without fear i knew this always standing on the
threshold to cross a border whose key was not a fist i am changed he is
changed *abre la boca drink* there is not salt no arid dust *only milk*

BOOK OF WIPE CLEAN

*What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?*

Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning"

Reliquaries of distorted faces and slips
of name in waking dream, the mind
rules the tongue that belonged to many
through years and in the years to come
will be one's bounty. I would damn
the memory but for fear,
elder bewitchment,
amnesia of contemporary tenderness –
the daily ritual of morning tea with honey
of wing-light kisses
over the preening orchid –
and, instead, a long dead beard's musk
or a snoring song heard when young
with face smiling in plastered tolerance.
I once loved and loved and loved

again, knew the divine even
when disgusted by his raw flare
of cocaine-throbbing nostrils.
I soothed that heaving
when terror wracked him enflamed;
 they would no longer open for air,
 channels throbbing to remember ease.
The body remembers
what the mind would erase. I train
synapses to fire one rhythm:
*It's so easy. Now,
say it again.*

RAINA LEÓN

Raina J. León, PhD, CantoMundo fellow, Cave Canem graduate fellow (2006) and member of the Carolina African American Writers Collective, has been published in numerous journals as a writer of poetry, fiction and nonfiction. She is the author of three collections of poetry, *Canticle of Idols*, *Boogeyman Dawn*, *sombra: (dis)locate* (2016) and the chapbook, *profeta without refuge* (2016). She has received fellowships and residencies with Macondo, Cave Canem, CantoMundo, Montana Artists Refuge, the Macdowell Colony, Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, Vermont Studio Center, among others. She is a founding editor of *The Acentos Review*, an online quarterly, international journal devoted to the promotion and publication of Latinx arts. She is an associate professor of education at Saint Mary's College of California. She recently completed a teaching poet residency at the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco and will be the 2019 curator for the Community Voices summer program and Fall 2019 mentor for the Poet-in-residency program. She is currently curating a poetry series at The Berkeley Art Museum and Film Archive in celebration of the 10th anniversary of *The Acentos Review* and Latinx arts.