

Shane Carreon \Rituals and Other Poems

Rituals

1. There are rituals for anger and mourning.
2. Your father, he makes effigies of wooden frames and paper maché.
3. My father, he showed me ducklings wearing red flotation rings. They were lurid yellow and one-eyed, the ducklings. It was Summer, and I was nine.
4. Whenever we burn effigies in our many political rallies, I wonder what they must mean to you.
5. We do not talk about your father. We do not to talk about mine. They are the garden of cacti, silent by our windows.
6. Now that I am telling you I am changing, I do not only mean what I mean: these breasts, this voice, this what I am not supposed to have.
7. I mean I am asking what it means to you seeing the effigies burning.

Body, 2

I learned from a book on color the women in your family
swallowed African soil before they crossed the Atlantic.
That was how much they did not want to forget
the stories stored deep in their bodies, we can see
nothing now from a distance, as from outside a house,
where curious children trespass by opening gates,
looking into veiled windows, where doors are closed.
In much the same way I look at you now

body of a violent history, at rest
on this shared twin-sized bed where the old springs
can be felt through the mattress and do not matter.
Your body lithe and called black, though much fairer
than my own brown one, your long free-spirit hair.
What stories told in books your body reveals
and keeps. Stories like tunnels their shadows seeped

dark into the skin borne by all women in your family
to become the body finally your own.

My own brown body is not without its own memory.
My own poor brute brown female body resisting
the betrayal of my own forgetting, denying.
How in too many ways I disown it, all the brown
women who beat their breasts, disquiet and unwritten
island histories.

Love, how then can I promise you beyond this tangle
of desire, the wild, the constant
faithfulness in this country of white men.

In the well-lighted places, you dark gods are kept

and you stare back at me from the clear glass where you are entombed.
Deities with hollowed out eyes and misshapen faces,
wood, rock, and clay,
your bald heads and broad foreheads, cheekbones, lips and teeth
bared and gone,
anthropomorphic bodies (like mine! like mine!) denuded, incised, labeled.
How can you not help
even yourselves? You shameless
sculptured mass, beneficiary of all the years of our painful worship.
Did we not beat the drums of lizard skin, sound the gongs
carved out from breadfruit trees, danced in gilded masks,
copper, iron, fur, cloth, human hair,
allowed ourselves be flogged in a struggle that made us drip with the seed
of a strange ivory-white god?

Here you all are, in a museum, in a proclaimed zoo for *objects*.
Do not dare look at me

with your mouths open in eternal bewildered scream; yes, the ceremonial
knives are here, the daggers of bone and cowrie shells, the ceramic bowls.
The muted echoes of chants and prayers roaring
by all your once dark faithful.
How you all have abandoned us, your people.

The ivory-white god has lovingly opened his arms. He has welcomed
our darkness in his bosom with contempt.
Now reduced to madness, I can now look at you, all of you, eye to eye.