

Rejection

There are elements to consider.
There are transactions, mostly bearable losses,
and drafts of sympathy. But what of the space
you worked to create, with implicit welcome,
where no one came?

And consider the outer barrens, other homes
where you don't survive, or have been erased,
even stalinized out of mind, as if traced
with a scalpel along your outline, then lifted
out of the frame. You may have deserved
a virtual death, much easier done in absentia,
where oblivion is prepared for you, and ordered
without your knowledge.

What disappearances have *I* engineered,
not wishing to appear opposite?

I have been ghosted, and ghosted others in turn.
I've cut off, wished dead, and wondered that
I still felt sorry. There's friends to be done,
the names struck through.
I've wondered if I broke the plane and entered,
or merely ran, like a kid off a backporch, touching
the knob, not meaning to turn or matter at all,
but not to leave undisturbed.

Stark rejection is rare, and needs a star,
for such steel-jacketed nerve. How many stand
and shred the love and professions of faith,
or endure the shredding? *Tell me
what's happened, or what I've done.*

Alone means encircled, blocked from the light,
no shadow opposite.

Forrest/Lee

I. IN RICHMOND

The continuities of a confederate statue have been two-dimensional, succeeding to three, and rising exponentially. Lee, like La Gioconda (pencil-whipped in reproduction), was defaced with intent to clarify: Lee past dead at a hundred and fifty, with marble and weight of history, is under a slab, an effigy that wants reckoning, and truth a stonier facing.

He is no more marble than bronze.

His reputation is paper-thin and newsprint-flat, and needs nothing.

But Mona Lisa, General Lee: bottom-pinch with a naughty little pun, or matted and sprayed like a boxcar?

Ceci n'est pas une pipe—it took some frankish years at school for things to not matter.

But the statue in Richmond beautified and changed as it signified, grew strident, and occasioned a family reunion, or a picnic at a drive-in. It was festival in trespass, placarded by Frederick Douglass, whose scowl and admonition against the pedestal Glory was thrown onto spray-painted surface, while the overriding question strode in equanimity, in the middle of the air: who lords over horse and rider, and who makes splendid in desecration but the sensibilities that matter?

I loved the statue the more for its color, for its projection out of the dim dark tenth and twentieth onto its new development, the mess upon the monument shaped by its offended majesty.

II. IN MEMPHIS

The Wizard of the Saddle was raised from the ground out of Elmwood, was transferred and replanted under a pall of Beaux-Arts aesthetics at the corner of Union and Manassas. A square block was named Forrest Park, in reverence for his narrow genius.

He was called “the most man that ever lived,” he intuited death and tactics, and joyed at the knowledge, and all the midnight riders in his eyes.

Despite our cares and consternation, the statue played host to none at the last but a party of hardhats and cranes, and left under shroud in dead of night. Few were appalled.

As coarse as Lee was fine, infamous for no one reason alone, his remains are here, in one of iniquity's hard-to-reach places.

Null and void the unhorseable man.

In the Basement

Its long silences are rarely observed.
In its confines, the one way divides.
The basement of this building
at night is quieter than all outdoors.
More stillness, less beauty, is what
it offers, though it supplies what we
would set aside as a nation:
no beauty without a wilderness.
The country, the people—both
can be slighted and served. We
work in this building. What works
in this building is wondrous slow.
But because it operates in memory,
because it excites the people,
it works its will. The building is apt.
The lights in the hum of generators
are all sleepless, inextinguishable.
And the cherubim are here, the staff
on all floors like lymph, circulating,
collecting, returning later to dump
their reports. And the people of all hell
are here—the clinically damned, ghosts
of our old techniques, our monsters
in self-repair. They wonder as shouldn't
wonder, and find their old ways blocked.
They find in their allowances a nest
of penalties, in spite and delay of death
a living wage. Solicitous and beggarly,
disinfected, colonized, we keep our-
selves in range, at half the distance
to stated goals. The building bubbles
at ten and two, our frothing like lungs
in spontaneity, alive with the one day's
business. And here, where the building
is voided, the emptiness measures out.
We are apt in good faith to inquire
where the good is consigned. The waste
of all time in time we attach to this
building, where works are underground,
and faith, born blind, learns its passages.