

MALE INITIATION RITES

In fulfilling their obligations, men stand to lose—a hovering threat that separates them from women and boys. They stand to lose their reputations or their lives; yet their prescribed tasks must be done if the group is to survive and prosper. Because boys must steel themselves to enter into such struggles, they must be prepared by various sort of tempering and toughening. To be men, most of all, they must accept the fact that they are expendable.

—David Gilmore. *Manhood in the Making*. (1990)

darting eyes day and night reappear
hidden stealth growling step hissing leaves
poisoned fangs swiping claws gaping mouths
rivers flood fires storm winds erase

we'd fail against this all that strains
apart from how we'd been prepared
our work falls back upon itself
we step across a great abyss

enemies anytime everything
nothing gives of itself nature tests
hunger and thirst is to be alive
if you fall back in fear we will die

your world is still her little hut
because you're blind you cannot see
what waits to wrest you from her arms
beyond her bed and soft embrace

every male worth seeding must resist
running back into the arms of his
mother's hut feminine mysteries
ceased the night you awoke in your dew

if you refuse to stand and fight
or know what pain it is to live
before your burning eyes you'll see
your kin be swallowed whole and end

where will we be without testing you
women are born into women but
men are not born but are made into
men who must turn their face to the threat

we show a boy what life is like
to tear him out his mother's womb
to seize and strip him down by force
to face the task awaiting him

whip his legs lash his face tear his ears
sear his skin scar his back make him bleed
It is not we who test not at all
life is far harsher than warriors

FEMALE INITIATION RITES

"The goal of the initiation is not merely to make a better, stronger, or more knowledgeable person of the initiand, however much this may be desired, but to transform her utterly, make her totally different from what she had been, and radically separate her from her childhood existence."

—Bruce Lincoln. *Emerging from the Chrysalis*. (1981)

Widen my hips burgeon my breasts
Darken my groin—

I am the weal of descendants
Ancestors wheel about my nave

Cut their lines and circles
not on a tree stone or bone but me

I show by the iron in my blood
Running from eternal symbols etched in my flesh

That I am the earth speaking to you now



In our daughters stirring She dreams us

We are Her ways She taught
She is our ways we keep

In every daughter's bloom She dawns
From soil for crops to grow

Our hearts need only feel with their fingers
To know how She is here

▽

Rouse her who left us take her limp hands
Lift her to us from where she's come silence speaks

Join her to us sing songs to our brave traveler
Touch the future from where she's come time unties

Feel her with us gaze into the eyes of our young envoy
Receive her gifts from where she's come goodness floods

Embrace her to us meet this woman who left a girl
Behold her transformed from where she's come changes everything

LOST RITES

“The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another...”

So began van Gennep in 1909, from another
Time, an anthropologist analyzing the ritual life
Of cultures collapsing in colonial damage.
He found that in each, life for every individual
Was marked by what he was first to title *“rites of passage.”*
By these, people smoothly developed in their society

Through all stages of experience, so that *“society
Will suffer no discomfort or injury.”* Another
Look will show a pattern by which all made passage:
Separation, transition, and incorporation. By these, life
Holds unbroken, sacred meaning for individuals
In community, despite their social position or age.

Without initiation rituals, fewer come-of-age
To viable incorporation in our society,
Making more painful and uncertain *“an individual’s
[unconscious] transition from one status to another.”*
Ancestral memory of initiation is the life
Of our youth. The unborn are burgeoning for passageway

Out of their bodies. Without initiation, their passage
From the asexual to sexual world holds a blockage
That ceremonies wisely eased. Honoring the force of life
As the sacred base to which every thread of society
Ties, contrasts with threadbare postmodernity. Any other
View—exceptions being the rule—is for the individual,

Save a sacred metanarrative beyond duality.
Denied their sacred root, youth seek to unconsciously passage
Into self-initiations, preyed upon by another
Force that draws its own over a void. It is from their vantage,
That *“novices are outside society and society
Has no power over them,”* at the cost of their soul and life.

[Separation]

No wonder the youth of our societal mirror rage
Facing a lifetime of servitude to an unseen other—
Some elite “individualist”—without passage out.

[Transition]

Heirs of another kind of imperial society,
We're the ravaging cannibals of lives disadvantaged—
Indigenous individuals sentenced to text passage.

[Incorporation]

Any society that cuts cords from its sacral image
Leaves individuality adrift through another
Far harsher passage in eternally liminal life.

#MARCHFOROURLIVES

Awaking with a start, the President
Was troubled. By a dream his cabinet,
Nor any his soothsayers could interpret.
Save for youths in prison famed for
Dream interpretation, whom he summoned
To tell him what it meant—

I was in the Astrodome filled with
Thousands gathered. Intermittent power
Caused the lights to flicker. When
The lights went out, you couldn't see
A thing. Instead of football on the field,
Every one was armed and aiming
At the ceiling.

Where I stood was hard to see their
Target. When I looked below, I saw
Dozens open cages. Nothing else.
Then I understood that every person
There was shooting. For a prize at
Live birds high above the stands.

When the lights blinked on, crowds
Fired all at once. Rounds of shots
Erupted like an awful bomb had
Detonated. Pierced my eyes and ears.
There was no regard for ricochet
Striking, even killing others. Here
And there a few had turned to see
The person near them fall down
Dead. Fewer'd shout for help
That never came.

I saw other people no one noticed
Doing something strange. Just
Standing there with walking sticks.
They waited till the lights went out
And shooting stopped. It fell quiet
Enough to hear another speak.

In that darkness spoke the name
Of one nearby. Gently caught the ear
Of one just named. Natural that it drew
Their eye away to look out to their side.
Though they didn't know this other
Speaking, something opened. *Do*
I know you? They'd ask. The speaker

Said, *Of course you do! Remember*
When—? And so they'd talk like
Neighbors as the shooting all around
Resumed.

So engrossed were they in stories
Long forgotten the one who heard
Their name had set their gun down
At their side, unaware it turned
Into a walking stick. They talked
Face to face like two old farmers
Resting hands on tops of shovels.

As lights went on, they turned away
To face another near them. Waited
For the dark to speak another's name.
On this went, as one by one, responding
To their names, others paused to hear
Their name and talk until a rifle turned
Into a stick.

When lights returned, I finally glimpsed
The birds that flew above us. Rounds
Exploded everywhere as people fell
From ricochet. In and out the cloud
Of gunsmoke up against the dome
Appeared a convocation.

Fledgling eagles injured in their flight,
Crying out in panic. They all struggled
Rising in exhaustion against no where to go.
My heart dropped where I stood, so powerless
To help. Feathers snowed as shattered wings
Could no more lift the air. I witnessed
Many eagles fall to mauling crowds
That fought like savage dogs.
The lights blacked out in riot cries
That chill me still to tell.

What say you, youth,
the meaning of my dream?

PUTRESCENCE

All conceive in flight
All are heir to air

Few are parent butterflies
More are parent common flies

Few are eggs that hang up high
More are eggs that lay down low

Few are larvae born above
More are larvae born below

Few are fed by what still lives
More are fed by what has died

Few will molt and spread midair
Most will molt in search of sky

Few souls hatch from chrysalis
Most souls hatch from carcasses

If I had not nearly died,
bored my way out what is dead

an essence in putrescence—
this iridescent slick—chose

me to break out breathing
far beyond my body