

## **We Are Summoned**

(Poem #1 from The Monument Series)

At the National Mall's Washington Monument,  
September 11, 2014

No horse greets our eyes,  
no charge mounts the sky;  
only this marble obelisk:  
general, rebel, slave owner.

We stand denizens at dawn  
in this loud city where tongues  
lash, bodies slashed, prance  
like plutocrats across the Mall.

Here in this city on a knoll,  
dissent is filed in triplicate,  
electronically stamped  
*read* and officially dissed:

computers then correlate  
word choice to sentiment,  
act to intent, sweat equity  
to rank and reciprocity.

We salute not the State—  
too many corpses have hung  
from the trees, too many  
babies still rot in the breeze,

too many patriots, soapbox  
orators, agitators with steel  
tipped wounds, demagogues—  
drenched this land in gore.

The towers have crumbled;  
ash-clouds keep swirling,  
tornado-like and bomb-dead:  
we inhale a national disgrace.

South is Jefferson, beneath  
his manicured green, a slave  
lies toxic as treason. West  
is Lincoln and war, war, war.

East, under the dome of bicker  
and bluster, Congress. North,  
the White House—it's there,  
always there, too everywhere!

Our ancient prayer, urgent  
as the nightmare we wake in,  
resounds, but voices turn riot.  
We have no vision of how

this bluestone can save us:  
this capitol shifts each time  
a tweet tickles a breeze  
and the channels change—

so many hands tear the cloth,  
so many fingers claw the skin  
raw! so many shouts skewer  
the mouth; we raise our fists:

Speak stone, speak in granite,  
however garbled or obscene!  
Speak in fury, then howl  
like the tumult we've become!

Flags slap the sun's great disk  
as jets scream across the blue.  
We are scorched by the fumes.  
The stones shake. Our ears ache.

As people gather in shorts  
and black Capri's, in Nike  
gear and a dozen crew cuts,  
we wait, we await ourselves.

## Animal Choir

*And the jellyfish sang:*

My ocean playground  
saltwater Milky Way  
I'm holy as a shrine  
a majestic Son of Sea

I never hide, hold nothing  
in, my hood a mouth  
it dangles lappets  
toward a darkened deep

I am bred on a wave  
I let sunlight stream  
through my jelly night  
to a moonless blue

\* \* \*

My chorus of color  
no one hears, only  
feels when blisters  
rise on flesh, like  
a memory of teeth.

*And the mosquito sang:*

I know what no  
bare-bellied baby  
burping in her crib  
knows,  
what no weeping boy  
in a bed of snakes  
knows,  
what no man seething  
till the end of light  
knows,  
what no goddess  
donning scarlet robes  
and basking by the door,  
knows,  
as I buzz about the ear  
I sense your warmth,

smell your carbon,  
dive.

\* \* \*

Blood knows blood—  
the sweeter the better:  
Blood of my brood.  
Brood of my blood.

*And the dog sang:*

My master thinks the meat she places at my feet,  
the fur she tickles from paw to maw, the walk  
she takes me on when I bark, and howl, and pout  
proves she is my master—what a fool she grins!

This human chat about Ra and the Fall,  
the Halls of Congress, the Baa of Black Sheep—  
yet, my food dish fills with ants; the flea-bitten  
mutt that I've become growls at her first born.

\* \* \*

Master—I'll eat you if this goes on much longer.

*And the gorilla sang:*

This woman of the big leaf  
picked my nits, grunted,  
however crudely, responses  
to my discourse on bamboo;

she mirrored my reverie  
on oneness—my banana  
siren song that bears  
this jungle's silent name;

she even pretended, oddly,  
that she was a gorilla too,  
when the other humans came  
with fire sticks and nets.

We love our foreign sister,  
though her brothers cage

our most precious queens,  
our future kings and outcasts,

these brothers too like her  
to be hated, too different  
to be but leery of, these  
brothers under the skin.

*And the human sang:*

I, Alpha and Omega, the fierce divine,  
the exceptional exception, the one, the only,  
the portrait Majestic, the biped who through  
force of will constructed the Acropolis,  
the Pyramid, Hagia Sophia, Disney Land,  
the Great Wall, the Internet Highway—

\* \* \*

In my dreams soft in morning, a breast  
plump with honey, feeds my children  
while I lie with lips gently tugging,  
arms like vines around my torso,  
fingers falling petals down my spine,  
and legs entwined in iron-colored clay.

I am open to all who come my way.  
I am an ancient god whose head swims  
among the condors, my retinas burnt  
with the glow of future conquests,  
of universes impossible to grasp,  
of demon tongues like fists of gold,  
and hearts fierce as prowling lions.

\* \* \*

I am Alpha and Omega.  
If the sun at rise is God, then God is the sun at rise.  
If the cow moos in defiance of the king, then the king must die.  
And if upon redemption, the Christ cries out forsaken,  
then the world must perish in a fall of flame.

## White Wall

West, there's a White Wall,  
marbled like a World Wonder,  
without windows, without  
wind or wet.

There is no need to scale  
that Wall; its cope of shards  
grows higher with each  
ladder rung.

There is no need to dig  
beneath its footing; its root  
reaches down into the heart  
and chokes.

There is no need to gaze  
at what gallops beyond that  
white as a blinding  
blizzard.

There is no need to hope  
that this Western Wall thick  
as a bunker will ever come  
crashing

Down on you, on her or him,  
on the mother and daughter,  
father and grandfather  
bowed down

To kiss the ground, for  
no matter how red with rage,  
or righteous as a lover's plea  
we pray

Before what's West, rising  
like a Wall over our shadow,  
hot as climate change, white  
as a glacier.

# LOST SONS

"I heard the dead cry"

"The Lost Son" by Theodore Roethke

What's going down Ohio,  
has your Rock & Roll museum left the state?  
And Canyonland, have you been swept of sand?  
And Missouri, does your Gateway Arch  
no longer glint of gold?

What about you, Oklahoma?  
Do your cowboys still wear chaps?  
And Carolina, has Myrtle Beach  
with its castles of grit washed to sea forever?

What?  
We don't have enough bodies already,  
those cops have to join in the mayhem  
on a shoot-first-ask-questions-later,  
psychosis-of-the-first-order,  
licensed-to-kill, freaked and fried?

This isn't the Dakotas anymore!  
No Cherokee has claimed your streets  
before glittery rocks were found.  
No one-eyed pirate with hook and patch  
has threatened your hegemony.  
No occupation declared your homes  
free to maul with pre-dawn battering rams.  
No virus has gone viral in your fluid  
to stream these sons in perpetual sequester.

So, what's happening?  
Has climate change affected your internal organs?  
Have Facebook and Twitter blown the caps off your bigotry?  
Or has the sight of muzzle-love and hardcore penetrators  
so invaded your metabolism that we need the NRA as chaperone?

Now, I can accept that a gun-toting lunatic  
with a Messiah complex, might nail a tree at the first flinch.  
Or a junior scout too looped for cop school,  
might throw a dart at a dirty scowl.

Or even a neighborhood watch commando,  
with hero-issues, might smack a bull at the first  
hooded foreigner to smell his gated cuisine;  
but well-trained public servants don't rapid fire remote,  
no matter how big the target is, or dark the skin they see.

And I know cops have a tough job:  
I was born on a prison plantation, for God's sake!  
As a no-neck kid, I stared a murderer in the face  
and called him Mr. Bill. My father had shivs shoved at his ass  
as he slept with half-an-eye open on bleak horizons.

So, I know what *mean* is and Bedlam can do  
and rats in small chambers and dogs kicked and smacked  
and rubbing alcohol chugged to sudden sightlessness;

but that man sprawled on a Walmart floor,  
who chatted up his girl, the BB gun he planned to buy,  
cradled in his arms, could have been my son  
before death by jerk-off stormed those aisles;

and that teenage six-foot-four football playing  
cigar smoker out for a cruise down the middle of the street,  
he's my friend who went to 'Nam to ride the Tiger White;

and that homeless drunk with a schizophrenic smile,  
his dad a Sherriff's Deputy—yea, he had an attitude, but he  
swore compliance long before the 51st blow buried him in comas;

and that hard-working family man who slipped out of  
his hand-me-down car, he's my next-door neighbor shot six times  
for getting back in to retrieve the wallet your cop had asked for.

So, none of these blue smack-downs had to bruise your brand,  
as prosecutors with revolvers tucked in breast pockets, blame  
these homicides on the dead, as if Jesus Christ crucified himself.

Those folks bubbling in their own blood were not Messiahs;  
they hadn't challenged the Empire with Eternal Love;  
their once moving corpses hadn't disturbed the order of Kings and Pharisees;



not even that kid with a toy samurai sword strapped  
to his superhero back threatened the State, yet the State went  
ballistic on his possibilities; now those sons go ballistic on yours.

We've got to stand up even if that blue knight  
wail-away-on-the-next-neighbor-you-see mentality  
turns us into enemy number-one;

because when twilight screams like midnight,  
it's not Zombies in a horror film who become a mob,  
but the Man who's out to lunch with the Judge  
who has partied with the Governor on a shortlist  
to be Senator that's shaking hands with the President.

It's standup now or die deep down forever.