

Tempe Poetry in April 2006

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Moderator: Catherine Hammond

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Cordelia Chávez Candelaria

SU CASA, MI CASA

Giving Thanks Day in Albuquerque

Your holiday house so warm and dear
Gave a glow to November's cold.
Each day we reminisced with hearty laughter,
Sometimes tears, and endless thoughts of old.

Seasoned hearts and minds collided often,
For family ties like bramble grows,
Entwined and thick o'er childhood's coffin:
Together—wherever—is home—love flows.

Cordelia Chávez Candelaria 2

TA'I CHI SANTA FE

"The spine can be a string of pearls"
—Words of Ta'i chi instructor

Southwest horizon orchid:
everything surrounding smells like lilacs
even the coyotes are lavender,
and also dirt gray and brown.
Stretching and bending at sunrise
my slow-packed adobe thoughts
feel purpler than a cow skull at rest
in the shadows of the Sangre de Cristos.

Softly, teacher calls for Daughters of the Mountain
movements: arching tall and swaying slow on tiptoe.
My spine of pearls suddenly strings a feeling
to *mis hermanitas preciosas* playing tetherball
in the evening cool of San Andres,
flinging the very sun around a maypole of glee,
their leggy acrobatics tickles a happy tune across the
years
on the piano keys of a Santa Fe memory.

From *Arroyos to the Heart* by Cordelia Chávez Candelaria, published by SMC Press, 1993, and used with permission. ©1993 by Cordelia Chávez Candelaria.

Cordelia Chávez Candelaria 3

IN LINE

I thought this lifetime
i could write a poem.

To my surprise
while at the checkout counter
clerk went seeking change

so i just wait.

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Cordelia Chávez Candelaria 4

ESPERANZA

Mi atreví en esta vida escribir
Solo un poema

Pero que sorpresa aquí en Cuzco:
Cuando mi metí en la cola de salida

La cajera fue en búsqueda de cambio ---
Aún aquí espero

Translation of "In Line" from *Cursing Fujimori and Other Andean Reflections* by Cordelia Chávez Candelaria and used with permission. © 2003 by Cordelia Chávez Candelaria.

AFTER SURGERY, A STRAY LEAF

Besides white walls and other perpendicularities,
besides the crimson passion of endless bougainvillea,
besides the palm trees tracing a higher grace
 beyond the peeling tiles, swamp coolers, and
 soiled chimneys of neighboring rooftops,
today eternity speaks in plain insistent needs.
In barking dogs, screendoors slamming, urgent car
 motors,
children crying, or laughing--all
 share the royal blue of healing skies to me,
 rinsing everything clear this week,
 erasing the ache of stainless steel, numbing gas,
 and blinding ER lights.

A stray leaf
 (or is it a piece of trash?)

whirls up abruptly, floats serenely in the morning breeze
out the window,
finds a perch on the oleander hedge, and pauses to rest.

From *Cursing Fujimori and Other Andean Reflections* by Cordelia Chávez Candelaria
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BALLON MERVEILLEUX

Nothing's more absurd, the sitting pelican:
his plastic feet cover the wharf pole's top,
his gray-brown neck pulled in, securing his
center of gravity, and all that stuff packed in just
behind his beak, all the loose and leathery
sack of it shaken out and snapped
back with a flip of his head and a miracle
of wrinkles. It's waiting, that beak's just waiting,
like a businessman's valise before it goes to work.

Ninety pelicans in an undulating line,
wings on the upbeat bounce an adagio
syncopation on whisking air. At thirty,
forty feet up, they all assess: dark eyes
more sensitive than scanners. They follow
in this red evening's line the last
drifting fish, risking
so much just to eat in the small
tight
breaking
waves.

A sudden lowering:
no down draft, but decision, eight maybe
ten inches above the flattened, fingering
dark wave. They, darker still, become
a flying intelligence that knows only fish
and target and sequencing seas.

Roberta Burnett 7

Sky bombers, I know your grace, your
gracelessness.
I know how you, without God, search
each wave-shift and shimmer for your feathered
survival, and how you—*all of you, forever*—
maneuver wind, effortless, like leaving
one wayward thought: effortless,
like Barishnikov's backward-turning *grand jeté*
magnificent suspension
magical belief.

In this landscape
without blooms, you know Spring.

But oh, yes: the indelicacy of waiting, the satisfaction.

Puerto Penasco, Sonora, Mexico

Roberta Burnett 8

ROCHAMBAUX: A LOVE SONG

Cool evening sun, the aloe
coral blossoms, a felt line
only an April choice.

She's been pruning
trees, is gritty.
They shower
separately.

Each is slung
high off the ground. See,
no stems
like fireworks stopped.

La Flute Indienne, Peruvian, 12"LP,
dog eared. Debussy, as if
notes ever
hung in air.

Suspended somewhere, a child's magnet
moves on an enameled
metal village. Plan
your life any way you want.

They're there to move through
Nothing's considered really
in such expanse, only potential
and turnings.

Roberta Burnett 9

Shifting light, late green afternoon.
Smell soil's animal
and mineral. Tamp this down,
secure the roots.

Yes, she feels oddly that
she's come so far,
so much still waits.

The doctor's wife next door,
on his death, uncaged all
his bright finches. Three years,
they're still in our branches.

He cannot see her at all, wipes
sweat from his black glasses, continues
his edging.

She sees his eyes avoiding
the bird on the wire.

So many
garden chores are left.
So much
has gone unlaundered. We must
forget this.

We waste our three wishes,
Choose scissors, paper,
rock without knowing.

Roberta Burnett 10

Carpenter bees channel through
redwood struts to
a penultimate
ending. What to see,
what not.

Decades later, he fidgets; his eyes,
not lighting on a bit of peace,
can't know the right answer.

Drift always west. Sculpt the air
in your garden. Stack the letters of love,
color their spaces. An edition
of a hundred and fifty million.

SITTING BESIDE YOU

Late nights, it's a wonder, the warm way my skin feels
in my bedroom with you so close, anyone listening
could hear you breathing. From the corner
of my eye, I can nearly see you reading in your chair
another text, the blue and black and white plaid
of your flannel robe, black leather slippers, white socks,
and the gold rims of your glasses, streaking
as your head moves when you pause to think

about your book. You are so close. It is only
the musty smell of tiredness makes me
turn my head, finally to affirm you, thinking to say
"Goodnight, dear heart," minutes early and drift away
till you'll turn out your light. Of course,
our ivory leather chair is draped
with my own white sweater tossed over the top,
my robin's blue napkin from dinner by the TV

dropped beside the chair, socks shed by the edge
of my bed, pink against the sky's carpet and waiting
for my morning toes.

Nothing's changed.

My heart's eye sighs and turns inward to confide
each moment of a presence dreamed
or imagined is something rare—
like the pink and peach and grey of dawn,
a gift of sky when the earth and the light kiss.

THE RECUMBENT BLUE HIPPO

dreams, rejoices in an ancient
memory of marsh mud
and reeds. She rests.
On shore, people
see her blue-black body
glisten in moonlight
and sigh to paint
her with white. They
do not know why
after generations
her marsh blood
rises up in her. Now
even in blue faience
her skin sucks
centuries of marshes
from her marrow.
Memories cover
her body.

Sally Ball 13

All poems published from *Annus Mirabilis* by Sally Ball. New York: Barrow Street Press, 2005, and used with permission. ©2005 by Sally Ball.

ANNUS MIRABILIS

I.

In retrospect there is no side to choose:
in math, Newton was earliest to make the formulas
 contort and yield
but never told a soul; and Leibniz, a little later,
did the same startling calculations somewhat differently,
and published them, as was his way:
wishing always to improve the world.

What they had in common:
dead fathers
bookishness
rigorous, enormous curiosity
sitting for hours at a stretch in one chair, thinking
not sleeping enough
never marrying
egotism
alchemy
the abandonment of alchemy
bureaucratic service, which made science and
 philosophy a hobby
coinage
dying out-to-pasture, genius-wise

Sally Ball 14

Isaac, though, was born three months after his father
died;

he did not have Leibniz's jolly family years,
no father teaching him to read history *both sacred &*
 profane.

Isaac arrived *small enough to fit in a quart pot.*

Everyone expected him to die.

His mother moved away when he was three:
remarried, gone until she was a widow
for the second time. A seven-year indoctrination
into solitude. At age nineteen, he made a tabulation of
 his sins

including, *threatening my father and mother Smith*
to burne them and the house over them.

Curiosity an oblivion to be embraced,
an opportunity for fearlessness, for vanishing.

Why publish? That makes a self instead of losing one.

II.

Insight must be joined to fervour.

III.

Fantasy is helped by good air, fasting, and moderate
wine.

Sally Ball 15

IV.

Curiosity a place to live, a battlement,
a universe. And they were not ashamed of it.

V.

Electric pace and heady certainty and
 otherworldliness—
a definition of pleasure:

Leibniz, who's always earnest, usually full of pomp,
it's hard to imagine him entranced. So well anchored to
 the world
that he could always get the fervent insight down and
 pass it on.

Then Newton, hungry, refreshed, a little tipsy:

what kind of fantasy? the undulant many-colored circles
 that roamed
before his eyes after staring at the sun.

So matter-of-fact, so self-contained.

VI.

There were two years, actually: anni:
Newton had fled the plague away from Cambridge,
to the farm at Woolsthorpe, *in the prime*
of my age for invention. Calculus, optics,

Sally Ball 16

machinery... on his own land,
the heir, the patriarch:
i.e. whole days to spend alone.

What is a self but an experiment—
one among many... but what it finds
may rise above the viscera

axiom

statue

sonata

the made propels, eradicates the maker.

Sally Ball 17

NIGHT DANCES

I thought I lived outside such music,
watching my beloved, yes, sure, gripped
or loosened, loosening and tightening his grip—

but there are darks into which
I find myself unloosed, pitched.
The chords thrumming in my chest a sick

careen from settled to unloosed.
It seems serene enough at first.
Fine to be wakeful and attentive, lost

at heart inside some song, aroused,
sentient in each swelling little vesicle—
then that knowledge goes all sour, soured

by anxiety and lust, anxiety not tamed by lust,
the self its own thick frame and limit,
and the soul at play against those walls, a ghost.

Sally Ball 18

HEART SWIMS AWAY AND IS LOST

Low moon the size of a dinner plate
sitting on the horizon to take your breath away
and dispose of you in a romantic seizure:
turns out it measures the same size
as the nickel at the top of the sky—

we see it so grand and huge because it's out of context,
touching the saguaro-tipped mountain,
or the gutters and electric lines at City Hospital, or
trailing
its wet gold trembling reflection across an eastern
ocean,
like a tongue headed deep inside you (you in particular).

Oh, moon: I have just the one
partner, whose love is a floor
on which to walk out my life.
You know how he, too, looks at you.
How dare you knock me down
and then not take me?

Sally Ball 19

ENTREATY TO THE AIR

The proof of beauty is in its making,
its recurrence: *we want it.*

Or in the heart's ability to lift
& plummet, simultaneously.
That much, beauty shares with nausea.

Any point can be one of intersection.

I want my father to move again without calculation,
I want my husband to laugh and sleep,
my tiny son's tiny heart not to murmur anymore.

I used to look for omens, was the target
of disappointment, as if I sought it....

Now I look into the air, asking,
Enter us. Become everything air
is always turning into—unfurling string of thought,
signature of a met gaze, athletic arch of the back....

Oh: we are petty, or we are goofing off. We argue,
or we touch each other briefly in passing, touch, say, a
bicep,
through the poplin sleeve, cupping it in a palm, grip of
the fingers
on the slightly flexing muscle.
*You are the air,
be this kind of matter.*

Cynthia Hogue 20

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HONESTY

Demands scarcity? It's true,
pointing to "honesty-scarcity"
makes *sound* sense. Can you hear that?
The lilt of dactyls like didactic notes?
Such a rarity, verity, that we hoard its
compounding sweetness like Swiss chocolate

dollars squirreled away by addicts, misers
saving for later we're not sure why.
When I ask, Do you count? you say,
one by one (in the republic of dreams
there are many *you's* but no lies), "No. No one counts.
Don't you dance?" I too suddenly a *you*,

lining up to skirt issues and shift feet,
prevarication's oldest two-step, *yes-no, yes-no*,
crooning the *citoyen* blues. We're in the shallows,
multitudes of us, anonymous as the dear deer
gamboling freely beneath the susurrant leaves.
Trees wildly waving sparklers. Sound hollows.

Cynthia Hogue 21

RADICAL OPTIMISM

I held the cup, which emptied.
Possibly I watched. I balanced
on a bench. The room chattered,

a party. I dashed notes:
*Can you be with not knowing,
living the separation, cult.*

of grief (culture or cultivation)?
A broken heart is a whole (I'd torn
it away). Grasped a filled cup.

Around me swirled laughter
as if the glimmering sprawl
of the Milky Way emerged

when wisps of clouds scuttled past
in the night's wind. I couldn't look
up. If outside, I'd not have

noticed. This lasted hours,
then morning came. The words
were clouds swept away

by laughter. I scribbled,
trying to preserve the invisible
ink of memory, and that breaking.

Cynthia Hogue 22

INTERIOR

In the not-quite, an almost-turn
of events you leaven, as unkind
with kind,

saying "something's in the air,"
meaning nothing
irrevocable has happened yet

you won't say it won't
or what *it* is, that
said, distilling intent.

A soft whir of wings beyond
remembrance tells
you beauty—the phone

(muffled as if behind closed doors,
mother no longer
home) rang and rang while in the attic

father bundled her clothes in silence,
and you had no memory for so long—
defies despair,

that expanse you soar above,
as a car zooms up a valley
road toward noon.

Cynthia Hogue 23

THOUGH WE CHANGE, ONE FLYING AFTER ANOTHER
after Virginia Woolf

In essence you embrace the real,
thinking to lift it to your face,
its fragrance like a moonflower
scenting the nights of no-moon.
A small object, detritus of a life
left behind, forgotten, of import
uncertain. What do you mean
when you say *I don't know?*

Dust rises after a storm,
trees tornadoed down, live wires
snaking through streets. Cities
track in census rolls
their growing miserales
who speak in dialect among themselves,
another country of expendable people:
not invisible enough; looked past.

Is life very solid or shifting?
This goes on forever, this moment
you stand on which is also
evanescent, diaphanous, flying.
It may be that though we change,
flying one after another, so quick,
so quick, we're somehow continuous we
human beings and show the light through.

Cynthia Hogue 24

What is the light? *Turn around*
a bird sings to you for no reason,
your hands splayed against a wall,
your face pushed against the wall.
You hear the echoing chambers within
the gun's rotating barrel, your life
a loaded gun. You have the power
to die. You are your neighbor's soul.