

A New National Anthem: the Morning Shower Version

David Waltner-Toews

I sing of myself in the shower
the water tumbling like an ad
for soapless soap and tropical fantasies.
I celebrate my armpits, the grassy gullies
of my upstretched arms, voices splashing
down my chest and belly. I sing
to the rabbit in my loins,
to your body next to mine, the hillocks
and the warren door.

I sing in tears of love
of my germanic heritage, four-part,
six-part multi-hearted harmony:
beethoven, bach, my grandparents,
adolf hitler, dietrich bonhoeffer and albert einstein,
the millions who were massacred,
and the millions who made us who we are
because they lived. I celebrate the mennonites
who would not kill and the anarchists who killed them.
We are a cornucopia of history's compostibles.
recycled rage, wisdom, control, chaos, a choir
of ayatollahs, borks, falwells, herzogs,
netanyahus, arafats, stalins, maos, john-pauls,
binladens, guevaras, mandelas, ghandis, mother theresas;

David Waltner-Toews is a veterinary epidemiologist who teaches at the University of Guelph. His most recent collections of poetry are The Impossible Uprooting (1995) and The Fat Lady Struck Dumb (2000).

I sing of roots, equality, peasants, pageantry,
leaves, earth, & never again
from generation to generation.

Ah, we are the witty ones, so scathing in our freedom,
so beautifully tired of being moral,
of caring, of castro, of kids, of anyone-not-us,
so smartly anti-correct, essayists and bums and
goldie movie stars with cigarettes we are,
cigars and no-cigar, and all that other junk and dazzle
that ties us to skeletal children
half a world away, so happy to give their meagre
beans or rice to grow tobacco and foreign exchange,
dying with pleasure just to know that we exist,
leaning so cool
against the coke machine.
We are the wonders
of the world.

I hug my arms around me in the shower
to bring you close, bring into me old
wrinkled men and blue-skinned girls,
the raped and the rapists,
the free traders and the prostitutes, those with sad
livers and despairing immune systems,
the starving mothers, the alcoholic glue sniffers
the bank presidents who make them possible.

Oh the delight of our efficiencies! I sing to
the weary oil workers of shell and exxon,
the otter-slickers who give us jobs,
and the sleek auto-makers who take us to them.

Praise to the nigerians and arabs we sacrifice
with firing squads. Praise to the desert storms
that swirled our skirts up to new self-
indulgent heights.

I waltz buck naked with clasping tree-huggers,
with lumbermen who cannot grasp the import
of all this, with tight-wad men in slick suits,
with honest-muscled tree-cutters
selling their children for another year
of labour lost.

I hum of the saws and the green chain,
my sleepless body, my aching back,
the teachers paid from this store
of fallen trees,
the students at the wooden desks,
the poets scribbling wisdom and garbage
on these sacrificial leaves,
the grandchildren who will inherit
our silt.

Praise to the righteous
who remind us with guns and crosses
of god within and without.
Praise to the preaching neo-Darwinists
who snort to us of non-God
from logical pulpits.
Death comes to us all,
and life, illogically.
Praise to the french for
underground nuclear tests to protest,
for wine to help us forget,

for arrogance to make us feel humble.
Praise to the nazis the stalinists the taliban the 700 Club
for making us seem like the good guys.
And oh the chinese japanese
japanese how can I thank you enough
for the wonders of your orchids your walls
your sand beaches your stereo sets your batik
the rain forests you have devastated
the gold and nickel and oil
that enrich and enrage us
the jaundiced jokes you have given us?

All that I am is thanks to you.

I shout white is fine and
black is beautiful.
I belt out the happy blues of the half breed,
the dilly-dallying sperm, the twisted tongue,
the sugar babies franglophones métis
flat germans mulattoes creoles.

Let us create a movement and call it
one-quarter chinese one-eighth black
some part indian-semitic-arab a pinch of aboriginal
some russian mongolian a bit of monkey
and a little white
is beautiful.

Let us wiggle our butts,
sing our faith and the delights of our impurity.
Let us dance our despair.
Let us love ourselves,
all of us, in the deluge,
in the shower.

Sing now, at last,
to the lambs we were,
what we lost sight
of, have become,
little tygers, burning bright
our might undone, down
on our knees

as we step out,
the sky a shivery blue clean,
in the next room the cracked sun,
sunny side up,
sizzling, watching, waiting Ra Ra
for another
good morning.